HIV RISK, BEHAVIOUR AND SERVICE UPTAKE IN ADOLESCENT GIRLS SELLING SEX IN ZIMBABWE

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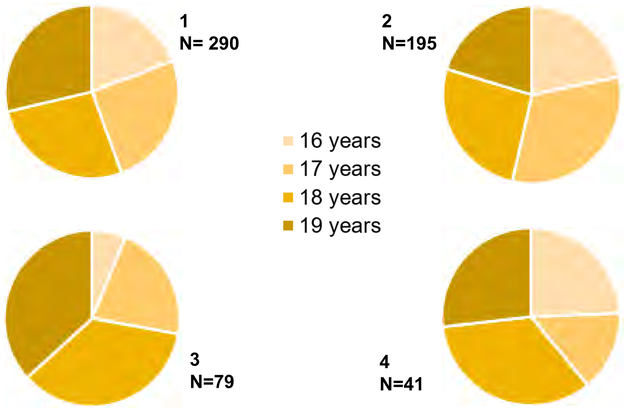
BACKGROUND

Adolescent girls who sell sex (AGSS) in sub-Saharan Africa are disproportionally affected by HIV, yet little is known about how their vulnerabilities intersect and the implications for programming. Using a representative sample of AGSS in Zimbabwe, we estimate HIV prevalence, describe their social environment, and explore engagement with HIV services.

Figure 1: *Age distribution by site*



METHODS

What? – A bio-behavioural survey administered by an interviewer and HIV testing.

Where & when? – Four sites cross Zimbabwe in 2017.

How? - Rapid ethnographic mapping of the spatial and social organization of AGSS (aged 16-19 years; figure 1) to select 6 seeds in two locations. Recruitment via respondent driven sampling (RDS) and a census method.

Analysis - Data were analysed and pooled across sites to run a logistic regression examining sociodemographic and sex work characteristics associated with being HIV-positive. RDS-II weighting was used when appropriate.

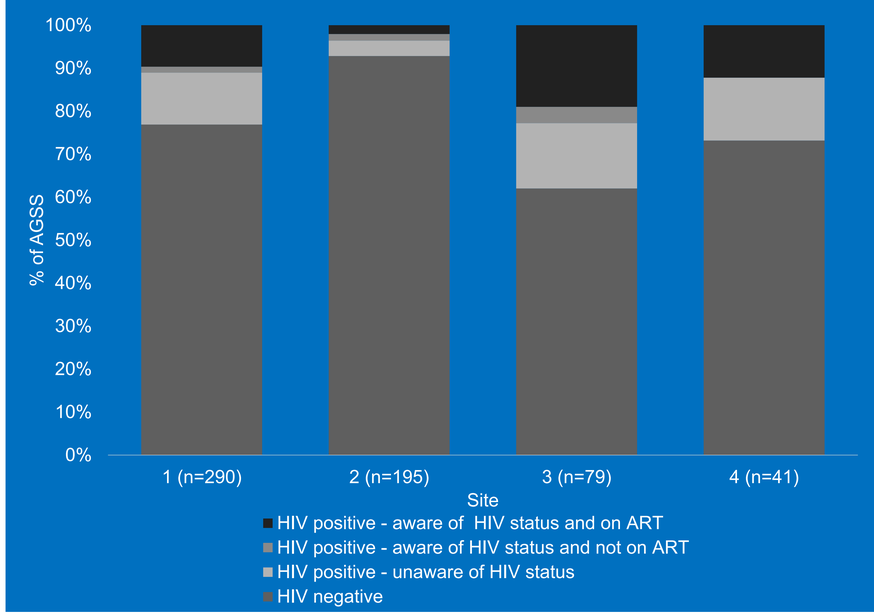
HIV prevalence rise between 16 to 19 year olds
2% to 27%

HIV prevalence range by site
7% to 38%

Proportion aware of HIV positive status by site
46% to 62%

Proportion of those aware taking ART by site
68% to 100%

Figure 2: *HIV positivity, status awareness and ART use by site*



RESULTS

- Among HIV negative women (n=483), rates of HIV testing in the preceding 6 months ranged between 62% and 71%. 73 HIV-negative women reported having never tested for HIV
- AGSS who were in school and had more years of education were less likely to be infected. AGSS with no or only primary education had 2.4 times the odds of being HIV positive compared to AGSS with secondary education (95%CI 1.55-3.57).
- 12% - 37% drank alcohol ≥4 times a week in the past year, with 12% having had at least 6 drinks ≥4 times a week.
- 17% - 32% reported having used drugs to get high in the past year.
- 29% - 58% reported physical violence in the last year. 17% - 30% reported sexual violence in the last year.

CONCLUSIONS

- HIV prevalence was high and increased sharply with age
- More than 50% of HIV+ AGSS knew their status and testing rates among HIV- women were high. This suggests acceptability of local HIV services.
- Alcohol and drug use was common, as were experiences with sexual and physical violence.

AGSS in Zimbabwe are vulnerable and at high risk of HIV infection. There appears to be a short window of opportunity to reach girls at a young age and early on in sex work with prevention efforts. To prevent girls from moving into sex work at times of crisis, establishing a safety net in communities for young girls might be important. Having specific, tailored interventions to keep young adolescents safe might be worthwhile.

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