1226

VIOLENCE AND HIV RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN: ESWATINI EXPERIENCE

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BACKGROUND

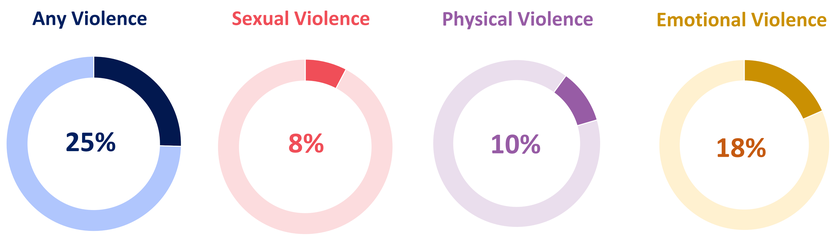
Experience of violence is commonly correlated with HIV risk sexual behaviour (RSB), but there are limited contemporaneous national-level assessments of the magnitude of violence and HIV RSB in high HIV prevalence settings. We measured the prevalence of sexual, physical and emotional violence, HIV and HIV RSB among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) 13-24 years in Eswatini.

METHODS

- The Eswatini Violence Against Children and Youth Survey (VACS) was a nationally representative household survey conducted in April-August 2022 using multi-stage cluster sampling design:
  - 353 enumeration areas (EAs) were randomly selected from a national sampling frame of 2,014 primary sampling units
  - 25-30 households were randomly selected from each EA
  - 1 eligible participant (male or female, 13-24 years) was randomly selected per household
- Participants completed a questionnaire that captured demographics, HIV/STI and sexual history, and whether they had ever experienced any physical, sexual or emotional violence. Household HIV testing was conducted for participants without documented HIV infection using the national rapid test algorithm.
- We generated weighted prevalence estimates accounting for the complex survey design of the VACS.
- Restricting analyses to AGYW 13-24 years, we used logistic regression to examine the association between ever experiencing violence and age, HIV status, self-reported HIV RSB in the past 12 months (STI diagnosis, transactional sex, inconsistent condom use and multiple (2+) sexual partners).

One in four AGYW had ever experienced sexual, physical or emotional violence.

Figure 1. Prevalence of physical, sexual, emotional, and any violence among AGYW in the 2022 Eswatini VACS



RESULTS

- Of the 6,315 AGYW in the survey, 25.5% (95% CI 23.3-27.7) had ever experienced violence (Figure 1) and 6.6% (95% CI 5.8-7.4) were living with HIV.
- AGYW with any lifetime violence had higher odds of experiencing transactional sex, having multiple sex partners (2+) and inconsistent condom use in the previous 12 months, and ever being diagnosed with an STI (Figure 2 and 3).

Figure 3: Multi variable analysis of ever experiencing any violence by age, HIV status, socio economic conditions and HIV Risk Sexual behaviour among AGYW in the 2022 Eswatini VACS

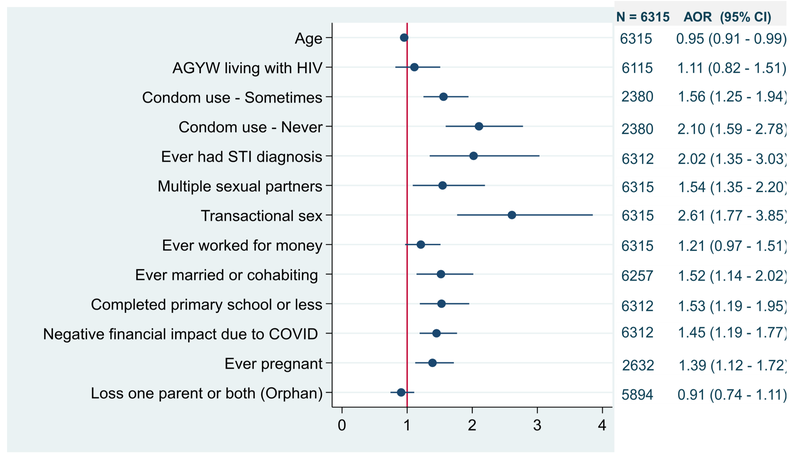
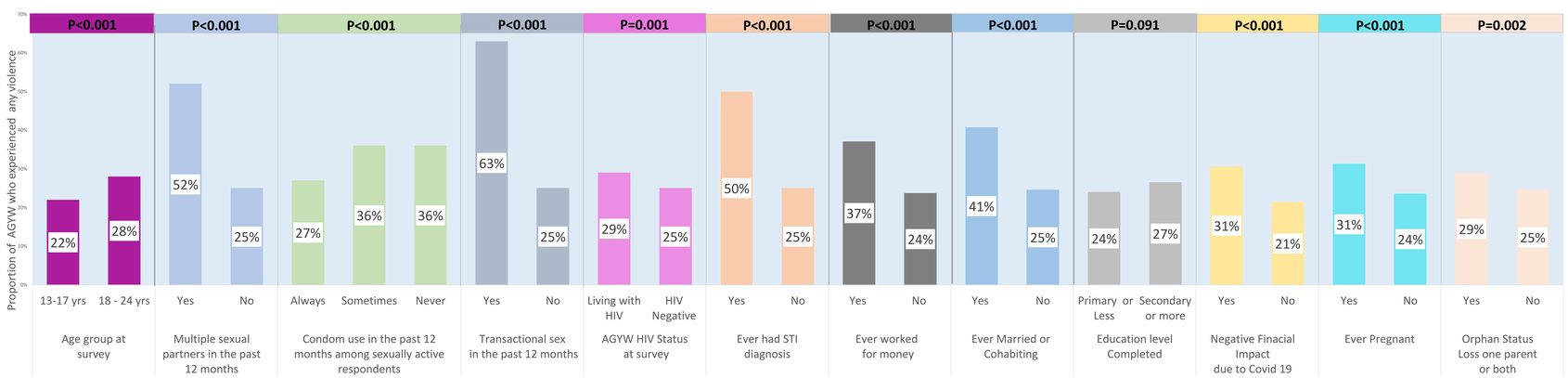


Figure 2. Proportion of AGYW in the 2022 Eswatini VACS who experienced any violence by age, HIV status, socioeconomic conditions and HIV RSB



CONCLUSIONS

Physical, sexual and emotional violence were common among AGYW. Continued implementation of targeted multi-pronged interventions to prevent violence, HIV and HIV RSB among AGYW is needed in Eswatini, with prioritization of economically disadvantaged AGYW who may be most vulnerable.

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