The pull of soccer and the push of Xhosa boys in an HIV and drug abuse intervention in the Western Cape, South Africa, was selected for publication in SAHARA-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS

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INTRODUCTION

Young men living in townships are at high risk for substance use, unemployment and HIV, yet they have been mostly excluded from intervention programs. A gap remains in understanding how gender norms and power dynamics play out in male/male social relationships. The Champions League uses a culturally compelling strategy of soccer to engage young men in prosocial activities such as education, testing, behavior modeling, and vocational training. Masculinity and male gender norms contribute to men’s acts of violence, sexual, and other risky behaviors.

METHODS

- Literature review: theoretical, historical and social context
- Semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups: shifting, contradictory, and conflicting masculine roles
- Data analysis: inductive, grounded theory
- Theory: hegemonic masculinities and Bourdieu’s theory of practice

RESULTS

Changing risky, normative behaviors among young men is a negotiated process entailing men’s relationships with women and with other men. Main themes from data:

- Men vs. Boys
- Xhosa family roles
- Friendship bonds
- Hegemonic masculinity on the soccer field
- Circumcision as a ‘man’ identifier
- Coaches as positive and negative role models
- Gangs
- Gender-based violence

Men vs. Boys, Gangs

“In our Xhosa culture there is always a line between men and boys, and even before that there was a lot of disrespect between men and boys which led to a lot of fights between players as they also belong to different gangster groups.”

Xhosa family roles

“…what I realized is that some of the players needed guidance, some a father figure and some could recognize me since I play professional football and that paved the way for me… I played a father figure role especially with the Manchester United team and also a role of being an elder brother to other teams because they came to me seeking advice and I also interacted with them in a such a way that I learnt something as some will come forward to alert me that so and so is high on drugs.”

Hegemonic masculinity, circumcision

“Yes the fact that we were all men, we were looking at each other and judging if who is older than who? And they even challenged and asked the coach they suspect was younger than the players. That led to the topic of who was circumcised before who, that was discussed even out of the program, which wasn’t the focus here, but what I liked also is that they waited for the program to come to an end and called us aside and ask us as it was something that they had been discussion for a long time amongst themselves during the course of the program. The coach in question didn’t take it well also it disturbed him and he distanced himself from his players although he cared about them because he just did not like that. (Coach 2)

CONCLUSIONS

Using soccer as a vehicle for behavior change combined with job training is a culturally compelling developmental tool in South Africa (Rotheram-Borus et al., 2016). Men from different gang affiliations shared the soccer pitch and facilitated socializing in the streets. The inclusion of circumcision in future prevention projects may be a valuable cultural component.

REFERENCES