

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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OVERVIEW

There is growing interest in engaging men and boys in health and development programs targeting the intersection of HIV risk, substance abuse, and violence. Masculinities or masculine identities shape both behaviors and provide opportunities for interventions. This paper examines an intervention using soccer and job training to engage and deliver activities for HIV prevention, substance abuse, and gender-based violence in a South African township in the Western Cape.



Figure 1. Champions League



Figure 2. Champions

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

Table 1. Ethnographic methods.

Data collection method	Specific data elicited	Sample description
In-depth interviews	Participants' understanding of the program; perceptions of the impact of the programme on young men's behaviour and attitudes about substance use, HIV testing, finances, and gender-based violence	35 key informants: 5 coaches 15 players 15 family members
Focus group discussions	Gather data on participants' experiences in the programme; what they learned about substance use, HIV, gender relations and gender-based violence; the changes participants experienced or observed as a consequence of the intervention	4 focus group discussions: 3 with players (n=15) 1 with coaches (n=5)

Demographic Characteristics (n= 1155)

Age (median)	22
School, <9	13%
School, 9-12	87%
School >12	1%
Monthly income ≤ R500	52%
Ever held job	70%

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 to 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)

Gender-based violence

Do you sometimes deem it necessary to physically abuse women?

"Yes it is necessary sometimes because they can also be abusive and you also end up losing tempore and physically abuse her."

"A little bit sometimes.... Maybe a klap [hit] on the face...When she cheats on you."

DISCUSSION

The lens of gender theory buttresses the push for public health intervention research to address HIV-risky, dominant male norms in a relational aspect, in order to promote sexual and reproductive health.

Gender dynamics between players and coaches is essential to understand the acceptance of or resistance to HIV, gender-based violence, and drug abuse preventions tailored for young, African men

Highlights the importance of culturally compelling interventions in challenging populations.

Soccer is a domain where discourses take place and reinforce the paradox of hegemonic masculinity.

- Men who participated in the Champions League clearly have agency but their agency is limited and dependent on socioeconomic and cultural contexts that constrain and shape their choices.
- Violence or the threat of it is used by some men to construct status when otherwise marginalized within broader society.

Milder forms of gender-based physical abuse seemed to be socially accepted in the context of highly emotional situations that include women provoking men into abusive actions.



Figure 3. Champions League Graduates.

CONCLUSIONS

Using soccer as a vehicle for behavior change combined with job training is a culturally compelling development 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

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