

“DREAMS means future and hope.” Perceptions of young women selling sex of how the DREAMS package is affecting their HIV risk in Zimbabwe

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Background

- Young women who sell sex (YWSS) 18-24 years are at high risk of acquiring STI and HIV due biological, structural and behavioral factors.
- DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) combined package of interventions provide clinical services, cash transfers, educational subsidies, economic strengthening, psycho-social support and health education. DREAMS has been implemented in Zimbabwe in 2015 aiming to reduce HIV risk among adolescent girls and young women.
- This evaluation focused on young women selling sex who are at highest risk of incident infection.



Methods

- 2 rounds of in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 YWSS aged 18-24, 6 and 12 months after starting their participation in DREAMS, to understand their experiences and perceptions of the programme. The interviews were digitally recorded, translated, transcribed and manually thematically analysed.

Results

- In round 1 most of YWSS perceived DREAMS as a package that gave them hope, improved their self esteem, self control and sense of empowerment.

“DREAMS helped me with a lot of things. I was just someone who was just living thinking there was nothing else I could do but it uplifted me so much because I was someone with a very low self-esteem especially when I would hear others talking about school. I felt like I was a nobody among them so through DREAMS it uplifted me and I can now go to school”. Mutare 18 year old in school form 3

- In 2nd round most YWSS felt DREAMS gave them greater sense of self worth, greater belief in positive future, confidence in being able to improve life/empowerment, greater sense of self determination and self control over sexual relationships condom use and PrEP.

“It had helped me to bring me out of troubles. If I have continued doing that I might have contracted HIV and AIDS. They have helped me now I am going to school and I will have a brighter future”. Mutare 20 year in school form 5

“The reason why I continue taking PrEP is that I want to prevent myself from getting HIV since I have many sexual partners” Bulawayo 20 year in school form 4.

“A lot has changed, I don't go to bed on an empty stomach when I am working at the garage. Even when our bosses are not around we can still fix clients cars and get whatever little amount and earn a living.” Bulawayo 22 yr old learning motor mechanic

- However YWSS highlighted challenges they face struggling to get jobs after placement, to earn a living through sex work while attending school.

“No getting a job is the problem when you are done with courses, it is the reason why I am at home”. Bulawayo 22 recently finished a course in events management

Conclusion

- In conclusion, DREAMS is giving hope to YWSS and making them feel empowered and have self control. More work needs to be done to change attitude of service providers towards YWSS. There are still questions around sustainability of their motivation, will, and ability to find alternative ways of support outside of sexual relationships.