

Embracing positive living for our people

“We do not feel safe as women if [we] go there”

How unsafe spaces in South African townships contribute to the HIV vulnerability of women

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INTRODUCTION

The 2012 national household HIV prevalence, incidence and behavioural survey revealed the following:

- ‘Black’ South African men (25 - 49 years old) and;
- ‘Black’ South African women (20 - 34 years old) have HIV prevalence and incidence rates above the national average (Shisana et al., 2014).
- New HIV infections remain high among young women aged 15 to 24 (Rehle et al., 2007; National Department of Health (NDOH), 2012; Shisana & Simbayi, 2002; Shisana et al., 2009).

Key populations with higher risk of HIV exposure and hence require targeted HIV prevention interventions (Shisana et al., 2014).

OVERALL AIM OF THE STUDY

Primary aim: To describe the personal, social and structural contexts that frame HIV risk for ‘black’ South African women (20-34 years old), ‘black’ South African men (25-49 years old) and young ‘black’ South African women aged 15-24 years old.

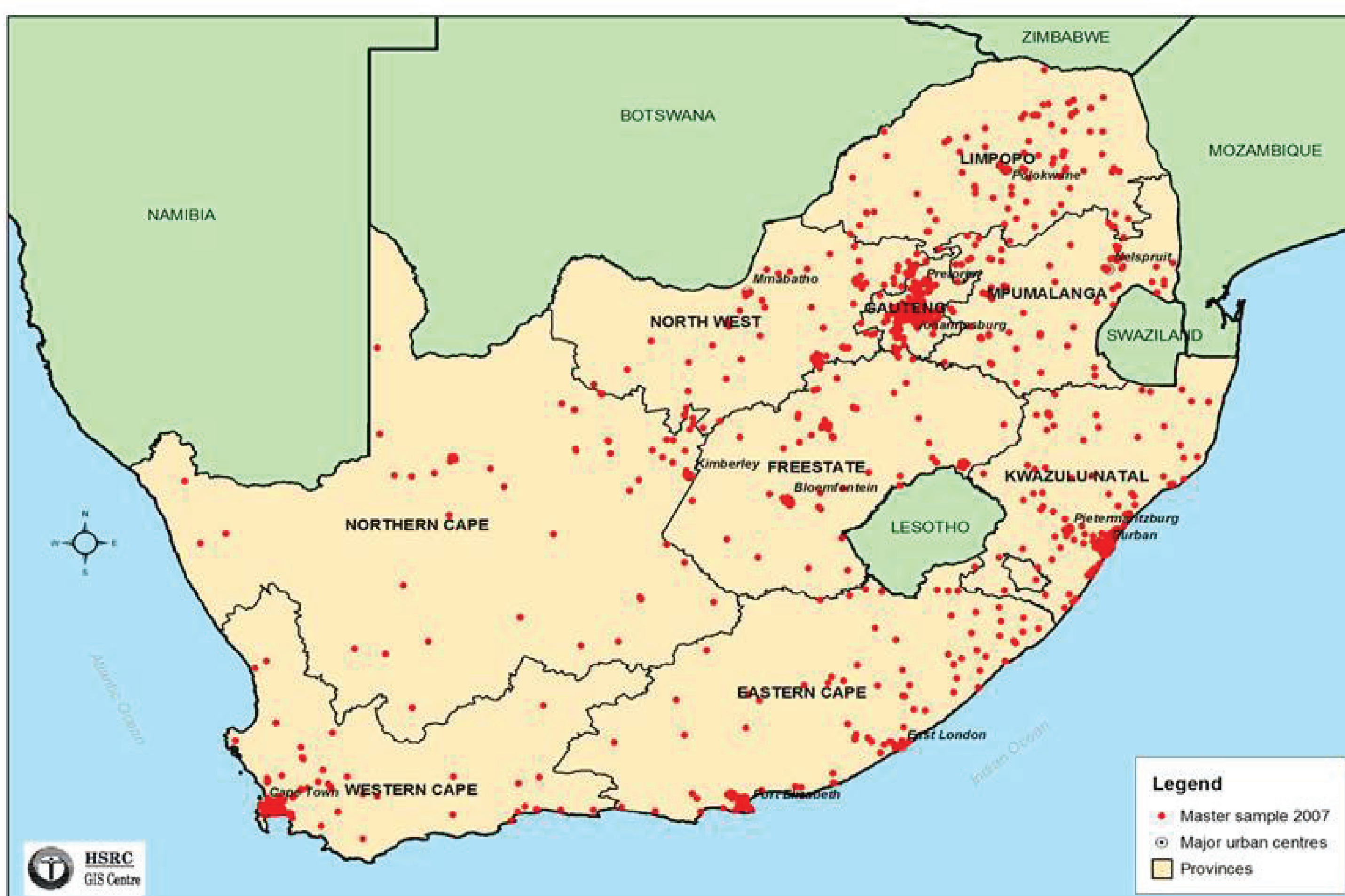
STUDY SETTING

Districts with high HIV prevalence rates in each province were selected:

- The Cape Metro District (Western Cape Province)
- The Sedibeng District (Gauteng Province)
- uMgungundlovu District (KwaZulu-Natal Province)

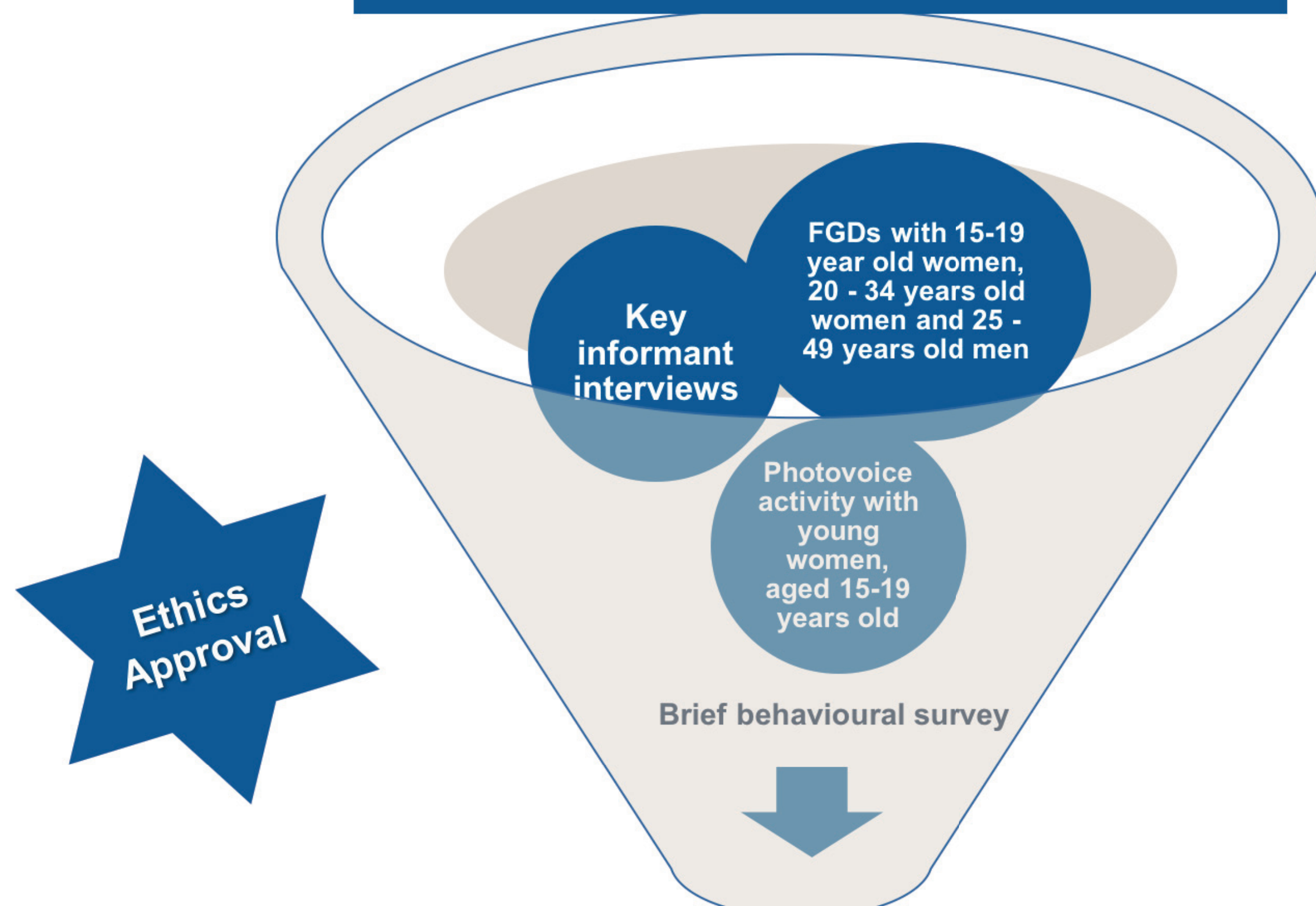
Selected an urban informal township where predominantly ‘black’ African men and women reside.

Established relationships that the HSRC has developed in previous research endeavors with NGOs/health centres/community based organisations



STUDY METHODOLOGY

Recruitment of members for the Rapid assessment and Response (RAR) working group



RESULTS

Women aged 20-34 years old:

Unsafe spaces in the townships lead to increasing reports of sexual coercion

In general women described their local townships and informal settlements as “unsafe” spaces.

• Participant 1: *They [men] create the thing that it is not safe. Which means when we are at Zone 11... There is fighting [gang fights] in another Zone...it is unsafe for the people from Zone 11 to go to another Zone*

• Participant 2: *They create that thing about which place is not safe and you can't go pass there because it is at night*

Women aged 20-34 years old:

Unsafe spaces in the townships lead to increasing reports of sexual coercion

The threat of violence is always looming:

• Participant 3: *The people who are killers...they will hear about the room and then they will get there and kill people. And like, they destroy the fun wherever they are...*

• Participant 4: *Like there are areas where as women, we walk and do not feel safe. Like for example, if I am from this area and I walk to Transnet and get to Caro to look for work, it is not safe at all because there are 10 rooms. So we do not feel safe as women if you go there*

Women aged 20-34 years old:

Unsafe spaces in the townships lead to increasing reports of sexual coercion

• Interviewer: *...What challenges are they faced with in those places?*

• Participant 1: *Being raped, and being murdered. Yes, and knowing they will be killed after being raped*

• Participant 2: *A girl was drunk and she was raped and the guys beat her up because they know that girls likes to drink and like going to taverns..., maybe I would be returning from the tavern and he will grab me and rape me*

Women aged 20-34 years old:

Unsafe spaces in the townships lead to increasing reports of sexual coercion

• *And there is rape..., even around here in this area; there are people who rape other people. And some of the cases you will find that the people who are raping these women are stepfathers and stepbrothers, and people like that. Because they take advantage of the fact that the mother is not around, and then they will do that, you see? So those are the kind of challenges that are there* (Sebokeng: FGD of Women 20-34 years old)

• *Another thing is that when a man is drunk, he would force you to sleep with him just because you are his girlfriend* (FG 1: Dambuza)

CONCLUSIONS

- Unsafe spaces in the townships lead to increasing reports of sexual coercion
- In contradiction to the general opinion that ones home is considered a place of safety and security, women who took part in FGDs expressed that this can also be considered an “unsafe” space
- In FGDs, it also became evident that in domestic spaces, the threat of violence is imminent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that community based strategies aimed at reducing HIV risk among ‘black’ women and men in urban informal townships should take into consideration the persistence of gender inequalities.
- Engaging owners of local drinking places as part of advisory teams in the development of HIV risk reduction programmes could contribute to raising awareness about the importance of creating safe environments free of gender-based violence