

High prevalence of HIV and low awareness of HIV infection among young MSM and transgender women in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, South Africa



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Background

Men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (transwomen) are disproportionately impacted by HIV globally, but data about the burden of HIV across Sub-Saharan Africa remain sparse.

Understanding the patterns of the burden and awareness of HIV infection is important in defining the scale and content of HIV prevention, treatment, and care programs.

Methods

Sibanye Health Project

- ◆ Longitudinal cohort study evaluating the feasibility and acceptability of a combination package of HIV prevention interventions.
- ◆ Adult MSM and transwomen in Cape Town (CT) and Port Elizabeth (PE), South Africa.
- ◆ Participants choose services from a prevention package including condom choices, lubricant choices, couples voluntary counseling and testing, sexually transmitted infection screening and treatment, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for eligible persons, and post-exposure prophylaxis.
- ◆ All participants receive individual HIV testing and linkage to care is provided for those living with HIV. HIV testing used the provincially approved algorithm.
- ◆ Prospectively enrolled participants attend visits at baseline, 3, 6 and 12 months, with additional visits for participants who initiate PrEP or who drop in to study clinics to receive services.
- ◆ Demographic, behavioral, and clinical data were collected by study staff and through tablet-administered surveys.

HIV Prevalence Analysis

- ◆ Age- and race- specific prevalence of HIV at baseline are described.
- ◆ Differences by race were evaluated with chi-squared tests.
- ◆ Trends by age were evaluated with the Cochran-Armitage test for trend.

Results - Sample

292 participants enrolled and completed a baseline visit, 115 in CT and 177 in PE.

Across sites, 88% of participants were black and 12% coloured or white.

Fifteen percent were aged 18-19, 42% were 20-24, 20% were 25-29, and 24% ≥30.

Ninety-one percent were MSM and 9% TW.

Results - HIV Prevalence

43% (125/292) of participants were living with HIV at baseline
30% (35/115) in Cape Town
51% (90/177) in Port Elizabeth

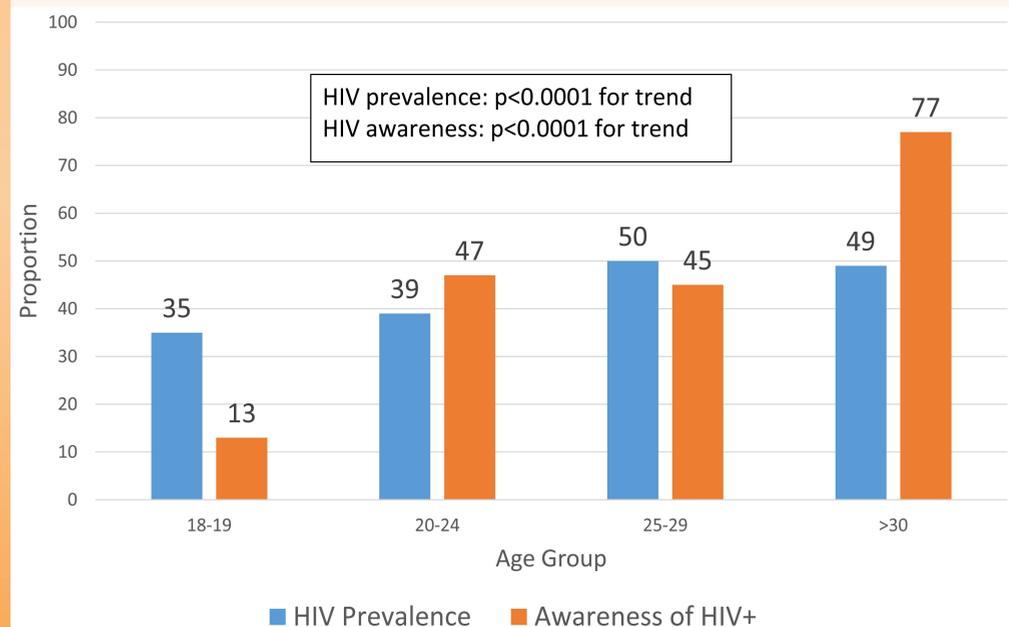
HIV prevalence significantly increased with age (Figure).

HIV prevalence was significantly ($p < 0.0001$) higher among black (46%, 117/254) than coloured or white persons (21%, 8/38).

50% (63/125) of those living with HIV were aware of their HIV infection
34% (12/35) in Cape Town
57% (51/90) in Port Elizabeth

HIV infection awareness increased with age (Figure), but did not differ by race ($p = 0.45$).

HIV Prevalence and Aware of HIV Positivity by Age, Sibanye Health Project, 2015-2016



Conclusions

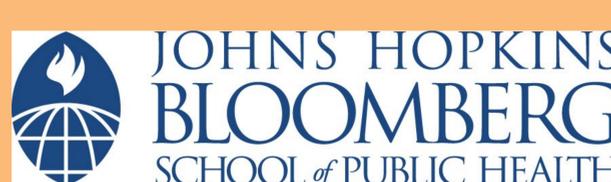
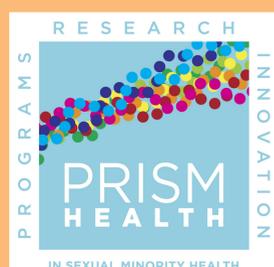
HIV prevalence was high among our study participants in both Cape Town and Port Elizabeth.

HIV prevalence of 35% among 18-19 year olds suggests early sexual initiation and/or very high HIV incidence among young MSM/transwomen.

HIV prevention programs for MSM and transwomen should include PrEP and should address the needs of adolescent and young populations.

HIV testing programs should also target adolescent and young MSM/transwomen, among whom 8 of 9 living with HIV were unaware of their infection.

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