

Soccer and Vocational Training: Moving Out of Healthcare Settings to Engage Men in HIV Care

HIV, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment are pervasive among men in South Africa. Furthermore, standard HIV prevention programs in healthcare settings fail to engage men. This innovative program and randomized controlled trial (RCT) examines the effectiveness of soccer and vocational training as male-specific, HIV prevention strategies in Cape Town, South Africa.



Reaching at Risk Young Men

South African men are in need of effective interventions to reduce their risk for HIV. HIV incidence among young, black men in South Africa has remained stable at 3% per year, and is associated with a cluster of risky behaviors, including substance use and risky sexual practices.

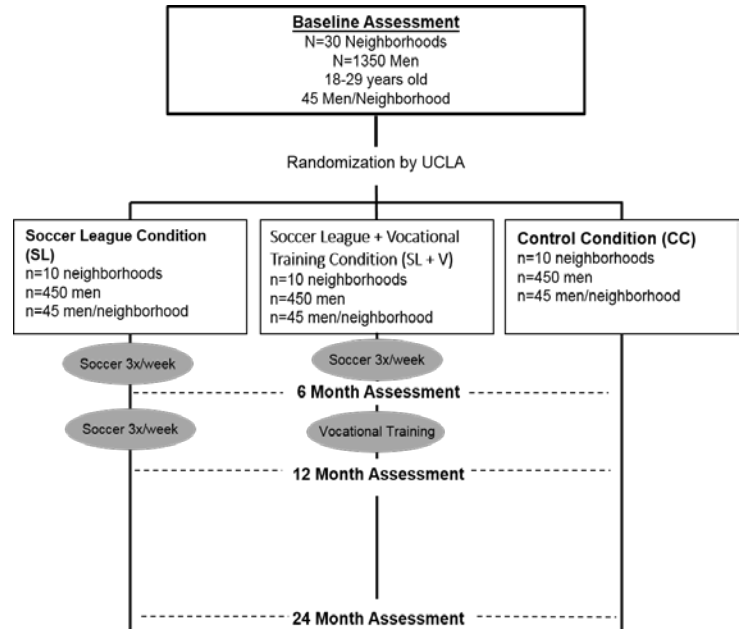
- 66% of young people in Cape Town are unemployed
- About 50% of township men have been arrested
- 50% young men in South Africa use marijuana
- 32% use tik (methamphetamine)
- 20% use mandrax (Quaalude)
- 30% have symptoms of alcohol dependency
- More than 30% have had recent concurrent sexual partnerships, fail to use condoms, and experience sexually transmitted infections (STIs) repeatedly.

HIV prevention resources are primarily anchored in healthcare settings, which are often underutilized by men. This program explores soccer and vocational training as HIV prevention strategies that engage men and promote professional and interpersonal skills. In the pilot, soccer was a highly desirable activity; it occupied young men and provided opportunities for the community to attend games and value the men. In addition, there is evidence that sports and physical activity are associated with reduced rates of substance abuse and HIV risk.

Intervention Model

Young men are randomly assigned by neighborhood to one of three conditions: 1) soccer league, 2) soccer league plus vocational training, or, 3) a control condition. Soccer practices and games occur three times per week. Vocational training is delivered by Silulo Ulutho Technologies, which offers computer course, and Zenzele Training and Development, which provides training in woodwork and welding.

At baseline, 6 months, 12 months and 24 months, the relative efficacy of these strategies is assessed by examining a number of outcomes related to HIV testing, substance abuse, employment, sexual risk, violence, arrests, and mental health.



Participant Characteristics

Age (years) median 22

Education and income

Years of schooling, <9 13%

Years of schooling, 9-12 87%

Years of schooling, >12 1%

Monthly income ≤R500 (US\$32) 52%

Ever held a job 70%

Criminal history

Ever been arrested 34%

Ever been jailed 6%

Ever joined a gang 22%



Substance and alcohol use

Drinks alcohol daily 76%

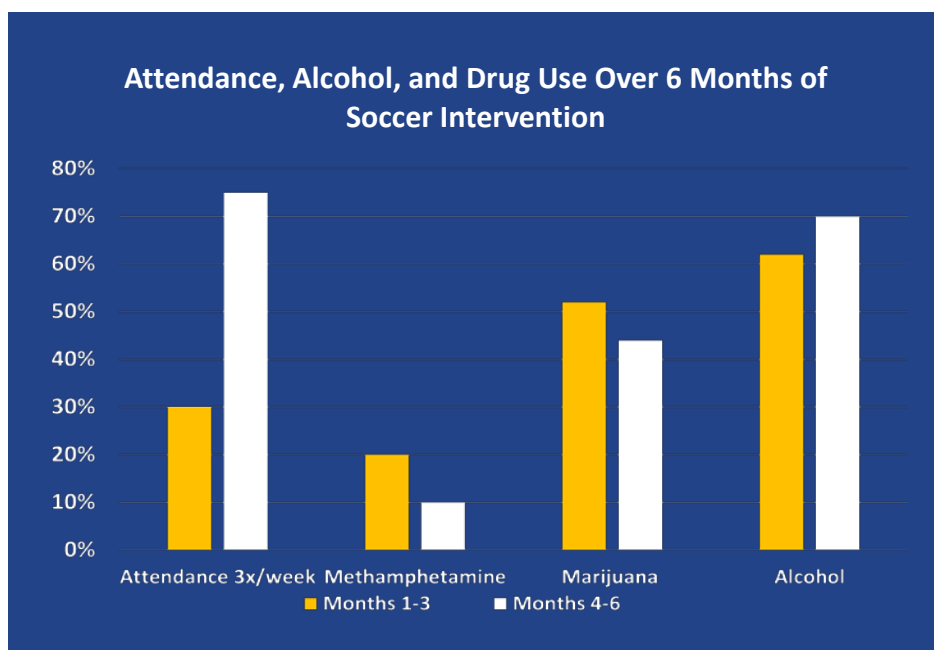
Ever used cannabis 75%

Ever used methamphetamine 27%

Selected Outcomes

From months 1-3 to months 4-6 of the soccer intervention:

- **Attendance increased** 250%, until an average of 75% of the communities' young men attended regularly (three times weekly).
- **Marijuana (dagga) use declined** from 52% to 44%.
- **Methamphetamine (tik) use declined** from 20% to 11%.
- A negative drug test became a source of team pride and cohesion.
- **However, alcohol use rose** from 62.5% to 70%.



Publications

- Arfer, K. B., Tomlinson, M., Mayekiso, A., Bantjes, J., & Rotheram-Borus, M. J. (2017). Criterion validity of self-reports of alcohol, cannabis, and methamphetamine use among young men in Cape Town, South Africa. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*. doi: 10.1007/s11469-017-9769-4. Grant linkage in process.
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- Chukwuemeka, O., Christodoulou, J., Bantjes, J., Qondela, T., Stewart, J., Shoptaw, S., Tomlinson, M., & Rotheram-Borus, M.J. (In submission). Understanding HIV Risk Behaviors among Young Men in South Africa: A Syndemic Approach.
- Medich, M., Mindry, D., Tomlinson, M., Rotheram-Borus, M.J., Bantjes, J., & Swendeman, D. (In submission). The pull of soccer and the push of Xhosa boys in an HIV and drug abuse intervention in the Western Cape, South Africa. *SAHARA-J*.
- Swendeman, D., Medich, M., Mindry, D., Tomlinson, M., Bantjes, J., & Rotheram-Borus, M.J. (In preparation). The experiences of young men, their families and their coaches following a soccer and vocational training intervention to prevent HIV and drug abuse. *AIDS & Behavior*.
- Bantjes, J., Tomlinson, M., Weiss, R., Yen, P., Goldstone, D., Mayekiso, A., Rotheram-Borus, M.J., & Rabie, S. (In preparation). Poverty, non-fatal suicidal behaviour and depression among young men living in low-resource communities in South Africa.