

IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING IN THE DREAMS INITIATIVE

In sub-Saharan Africa, AIDS is the leading cause of death for adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) aged 10–19. In addition, girls and young women aged 15–25 account for 75 percent of new HIV infections among young people. Given their disproportionate risk and a precedent of global neglect, a shift in programming is urgently needed to change the social, economic, and cultural norms and practices that predispose them to becoming infected with HIV. The Population Council is a key partner in the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) initiative, a visionary response to the heightened vulnerability of AGYW to HIV.

With support from the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Girl Effect, Johnson & Johnson, Gilead Sciences, and ViiV Healthcare, DREAMS is working in 10 high-burden countries in sub-Saharan Africa. DREAMS is groundbreaking in its commitment to deliver evidence-informed approaches that go beyond the health sector to address the structural factors that fuel girls' HIV risk, including poverty, gender inequality, sexual violence, social isolation, and lack of education.

THE POPULATION COUNCIL: TWO KEY ROLES WITHIN DREAMS

The Population Council leads the initiative's **implementation science** portfolio with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Project SOAR funded by the United States Agency for International Development. Population Council experts, with support from Girl Effect, are also working to **strengthen the capacity of local organizations** to build girls' social and protective assets necessary for a healthy entry into adulthood.



The Population Council is building the world's largest body of research on programs to improve the lives of adolescent girls in developing countries.

Decades of rigorous Population Council research show that improving adolescent girls' health, keeping them safe and in school, and giving them critical skills and a say in their own lives, including over their sexual and reproductive health, help put girls on a path to healthy, productive adulthood.

Our programs have delayed age at marriage, increased girls' savings and social support, improved their literacy, and returned girls to formal schooling—all of which may also play a role in reducing their HIV risk.

What we bring to DREAMS:

- Practical, evidence-informed tools that help program implementers translate lessons from research on girls into programmatic action.
- Extensive HIV and AIDS operations and implementation research, particularly with key vulnerable populations and youth.
- A large body of work examining the intersection of gender and power on health behaviors and outcomes for men and women.

Implementation Science

There is a critical need to assess activities taking place under DREAMS in order to understand whether they improve HIV-related outcomes among AGYW and, if so, how. The Population Council's implementation science studies are exploring whether the beneficiaries are being reached and retained in services, how different components of the DREAMS package are being delivered to the target groups, and ultimately whether HIV risk among AGYW is being reduced. The studies in our portfolio consist of formative research and program evaluation related to the following themes:

Implementation Science Sites

Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia

- **Identifying, linking, and retaining vulnerable AGYW in programs.** Population Council research in Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia explores the effectiveness and relative costs of community-based, girl-centered efforts to reach AGYW most at risk to HIV, sustain their use of services, and reduce their risk of HIV infection.
- **Reaching male partners of AGYW and linking them to services.** In Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, and Uganda, Population Council researchers are determining the profiles of the male partners of AGYW, men's perceptions of their own HIV risk, and whether programs are linking men most at risk to HIV to clinical HIV services.
- **Introducing PrEP among AGYW.** HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a powerful HIV prevention tool that may help AGYW control their sexual health and reduce HIV infection. Population Council studies in Tanzania and Uganda will add to the evidence base on PrEP by identifying the key considerations in introducing PrEP to AGYW, learning lessons from projects rolling out PrEP in "real-world" settings, and promoting strategies that enhance adherence.

The Population Council's research will provide actionable evidence that implementers, policymakers, and others can use to improve how programs and services are delivered to vulnerable AGYW and their male partners.

By leading the DREAMS initiative's implementation science portfolio and capacity-strengthening partnerships, the Population Council is playing critical roles in the DREAMS initiative to help adolescent girls and young women achieve a safer and healthier future.

Strengthening the Capacity of DREAMS Implementing Partners

A central focus of our work is supporting DREAMS implementing partners in developing program approaches to reach and engage different groups of vulnerable AGYW and their partners. The Population Council's capacity-strengthening work is grounded in our large body of research on successful interventions for adolescent girls, who are often excluded from traditional HIV prevention programs. Our innovative approach helps to maximize the impact of girl-centered programming – to ensure programs are reaching the right girls, with the right interventions, at the right moment. We provide mentorship, technical support, skills-building trainings, and practical resources to local DREAMS partners so they are better able to:

Capacity-Strengthening Sites

Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda

- **Generate local** information to inform effective policies and programs for AGYW.
- **Design, target, and implement programs** to strengthen the social and protective assets of AGYW, including social support, personal safety plans, financial literacy, and health knowledge and skills.
- **Adapt program content and strategies** to respond to the realities of particular segments of program participants, such as out-of-school girls, migrants, and 10–14-year-olds with children.

The Population Council's three-year implementation science work on DREAMS began in 2015 and is expected to begin yielding findings by the end of 2016. For more information, contact Sanyukta Mathur, Project Director, DREAMS Implementation Science Research, Population Council, at smathur@popcouncil.org.

The Population Council's DREAMS capacity-strengthening work began in late 2015. For more information, contact Miriam Temin, Project Director, Strengthening Capacity for DREAMS Girl Platforms, Population Council, at mtemin@popcouncil.org.