



**Embracing positive living
for our people**



The Trans Women HIV Bio- Behavioural Survey



**HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted
Infections and TB**

INTRODUCTION

- HIV/AIDS, STIs and TB (HAST) research programme, Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)
 - Principal Investigator (Prof Leickness Simbayi)
- Funder: Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through PEPFAR
- Collaborators
 - University of California San Francisco (UCSF)
 - Social, Health and Empowerment (SHE) Feminist Collective

RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

- Globally, trans women have been shown to be at high risk for HIV infection.
- In South Africa we currently have no information regarding the specific HIV vulnerabilities of trans women.
- HIV prevalence among trans women also remains undocumented
- Hence this study is an important exploratory one in order to fill this information gap.

OVERALL OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the social, structural, economic and cultural factors that are related to HIV infection in trans women
- To understand individual behaviours and practices related to HIV in trans women
- To determine the percentage of trans women who are HIV positive in the three study locations
- To conduct a size estimation of trans women in the Cape Town and Johannesburg Metropolitan areas and Buffalo City Metro Municipality

STUDY SETTING

- This study will be conducted:
 - The Cape Town Metropolitan area, located in the Western Cape Province,
 - Johannesburg metropolitan area in the Gauteng province,
 - Buffalo City Metro Municipality located in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa.
- The rationale for conducting the study within the aforementioned cities and metros is because of the existence of organisations working with trans women.
 - Gender Dynamix
 - SHE Feminist Collective in East London
 - Sex Workers' Advocacy and Education Taskforce (SWEAT)
 - Access Chapter 2 (AC2)

STUDY POPULATION

1. Key informants, (rapid ethnography): These are men and women aged 18 and older in the selected areas who are knowledgeable about the specific HIV vulnerabilities (i.e. biological, social) of trans women.

Key informants will be purposively selected and will be identified from our existing relationships with universities, research institutions, and NGOs working within HIV prevention for trans women, and contacts made by our research staff.

STUDY POPULATIONS

- Trans women
 - Individuals who were assigned male at birth but who identify as women.
- In this study trans women will be recruited to take part in the rapid ethnography (i.e. key informant interviews; focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews), the pre-surveillance formative research (i.e. semi-structured interviews, FGDs and pilot of the draft questionnaires) and finally trans women will also be recruited to take part in the bio-behavioural survey.

STUDY POPULATIONS

- The inclusion criteria for the following activities (FGDs, semi-structured interview and the survey) are:
 - Aged 18 years or older
 - (Self-reported) consensual sex* within the last 6 months
 - Lives in the Cape Metropolitan area in the Western Cape Province, the Johannesburg metropolitan area in Gauteng as well as in the five districts of the Buffalo City Municipality
 - Sex at birth=male
 - Current Gender = Female or Trans/gender/female or identify as “other” than male or man
- *For inclusion criteria purposes, sex is defined as oral, vaginal, or anal sex.

STUDY PROCEDURE

- This study has three parts:
 1. First a rapid ethnography (in particular qualitative methods of enquiry) will be implemented in order to explore the specific HIV vulnerabilities of trans women.
 2. Secondly pre-surveillance formative research will be conducted in order to inform implementation of the proposed survey.
 3. Finally a behavioural survey and biological specimen collection to assess HIV risk taking behaviours and HIV prevalence among trans women.

ESTABLISHMENT OF A STEERING COMMITTEE

- The Steering Committee consist of NGOs working with trans women that are located in Cape Town, East London and Johannesburg.
- It is expected of the group to provide feedback and advice regarding recruitment of trans women into the survey part of the study, as well as any other guidance and recommendations that will facilitate the implementation of the study.
- Essentially the Steering Committee will act as a community advisory board providing guidance to the team of researchers.

Part 1: A rapid ethnography of the HIV vulnerabilities of trans women

1. Key informant interviews

The objectives are to:

- Understand the perceptions and constructions of HIV risk among trans women
- Explore current and proposed research and HIV prevention interventions for trans women
- Explore the level of stigma and discrimination experienced by trans women in health care settings and in the townships and residential suburbs where they live
- Document existing HIV prevention services for trans women in each of the three study locations

Sample size and recruitment

- Semi-structured interviews with approximately 30 key informants will be conducted, approximately 10 interviews in each of the three selected study areas
- Key informants will be purposively recruited from our existing relationships with universities, research institutions, NGOs working within HIV prevention for trans women, and contacts made by our research staff.

Part 1: A rapid ethnography of the HIV vulnerabilities of trans women

2. Focus group discussions (FGDs) with trans women

The objectives are to:

- Understand the sociocultural and structural factors that might contribute to HIV risk among trans women
- Examine the HIV prevention needs of trans women
- Explore barriers to accessing public health care and sexual health services

Sample size and recruitment

- We plan to conduct 6 FGDs (2 each study city) with a maximum of 12 participants per group.
- We will elicit the advice of the Steering Committee in terms of recruitment strategies of trans women.

Part 1: A rapid ethnography of the HIV vulnerabilities of trans women

3. Semi-structured interviews with trans women

The objectives are to:

- Understand the sociocultural and structural factors that might contribute to HIV risk among trans women

Sample size and recruitment

- We plan to conduct 30 semi-structured interviews in total, 10 in each of the study locations

Part 2: Pre-surveillance formative research

1. Semi-structured interviews & FGDs with trans women

FGDs and semi-structured interviews with trans women will be conducted in this activity. The main purpose of this part of the study is to obtain information that will inform the implementation of the survey.

- Information about the appropriate incentive
- Location of interview sites
- Any other survey logistics

2. Pilot the draft screening questions and HIV behavioural survey

- In this activity we will pilot the draft behavioural questionnaire in order to assess if potential study participants understand the questions and if it is understood in the same way by everyone in the study sample.
- We will also be able to assess how long it takes to complete the survey and the correctness of skip patterns used.

Part 3: HIV Bio-Behavioural surveys using RDS to recruit trans women

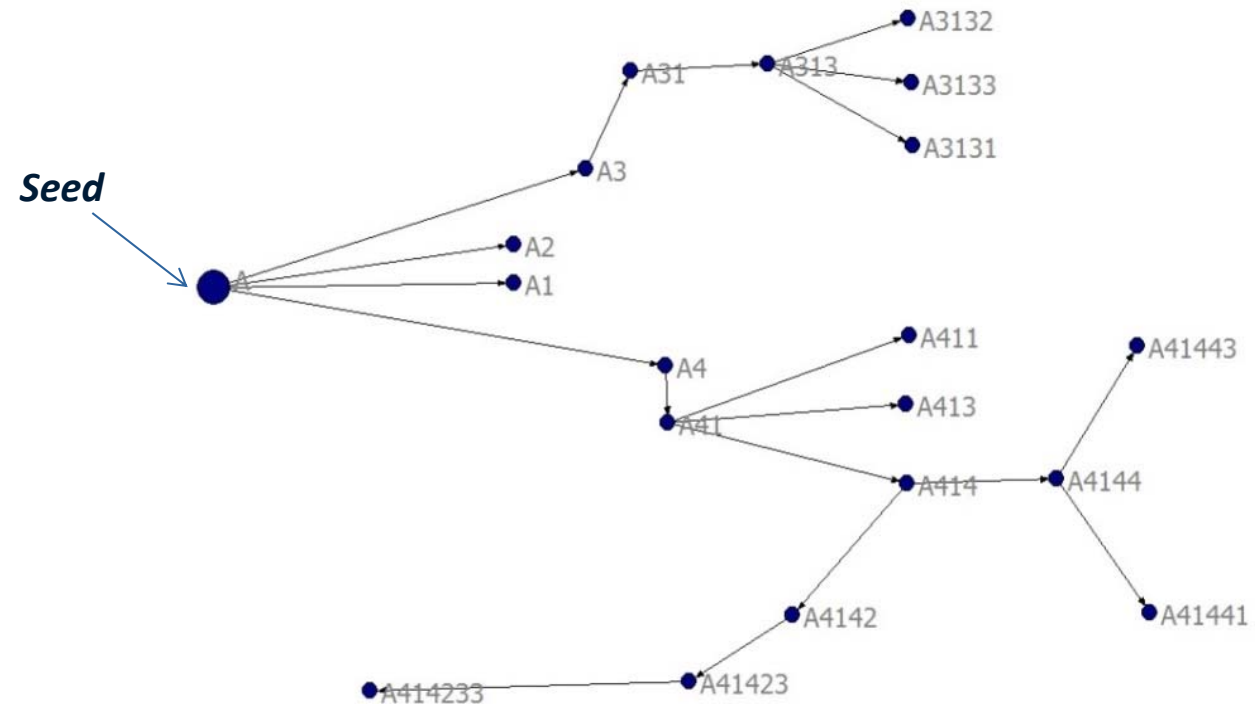
- Respondent driven sampling (RDS) is a form of chain referral sampling used to recruit members of a “hidden” and a “hard-to-reach” population through their social networks

RDS gets individuals to refer those they know, these individuals in turn refer those they know and so on.

- It assumes that those best able to access members of a ‘hard-to-reach’ (no sampling frame exists for them) and ‘hidden’ (behaviours that they engage in are often illicit or socially unacceptable) population are their own peers.

Part 3: HIV Bio-Behavioural surveys using RDS to recruit trans women

- RDS starts with initial respondents recruiting additional respondents from their network of friends



Part 3: HIV Bio-Behavioural surveys using RDS to recruit trans women

Inclusion criteria for survey participants

There will be two types of enrolees:

- 1) Initial survey participants (known as seeds) and
- 2) New survey participants subsequently recruited by previous survey participants. Respondents will only be able to enrol once in the study.

Part 3: HIV Bio-Behavioural surveys using RDS to recruit trans women

- For the purposes of this survey, each study area is only expected to recruit at least 300 eligible persons into the survey.

TESTING

1. HCT

Survey respondents who chose to be informed about their HIV status or who requested risk-reduction counselling (with or without HIV testing) will be referred to an HCT counsellor onsite.

2. HIV antibody testing

Blood specimens will be collected as a biomarker test for the prevalence of HIV among trans women

3. Antiretroviral testing

The presence of ARVs in HIV-positive DBS samples

4. HIV Viral Load Testing

HIV VL testing will be used to determine the amount of the HIV virus in the blood of infected persons.

5. Testing for TB

6. STI testing

SIZE ESTIMATION METHODS

- Estimates of population size are needed to help with decisions on how and where resources should be allocated for better programme planning and management.
 - We currently do not know the number of trans women in South Africa.
- Overall purpose of size estimation:
 - To determine the scale and size of the population of trans women in selected South African cities.
 - Size estimates help policy makers and program staff understand the scope of the HIV problem, plan appropriate interventions, and allocate sufficient resources.

SIZE ESTIMATION METHODS

- **Method 1: “Wisdom of the Crowds”**
 - Trans women of the IBBS will be asked their best estimate of the size of their respective population in their location.
- **Method 2: Unique Object Multiplier**
 - 1. Distribution of a fixed number of memorable, unique objects (e.g., a glass bead bracelet with a distinct pattern) to trans women in the geographic area of the study shortly prior to the RDS launch.
 - 2. Adding questions to the survey instrument asking about whether study participants had received the unique object.

SIZE ESTIMATION METHODS

- **Method 3: Unique Event Multiplier**
 - A memorable event is held (e.g., mobilization fair, house party) that records the number of unique target trans women in attendance.
- **Method 4: Service Data Multiplier Method**
 - The first part of this multiplier approach gathers de-identified counts of visits by population members to specific programs or services, such as utilization of HIV testing services from a specific service provider.
 - The second part of the multiplier will be to inquire in the IBBS survey about prior participation in HIV testing during a specified time period

ETHICS

- The protocol and research instruments together with consent forms were submitted first to the HSRC REC for ethics approval.
- The protocol has received Human Subjects Review approval from the CDC's Center for Global Health, Associate Director for Science.
- No human subject contact will take place until all ethics approvals are received