

Peer Power- Harnessing Adolescent Peer Mobilisers to improve uptake of PrEP among Adolescent Girls.

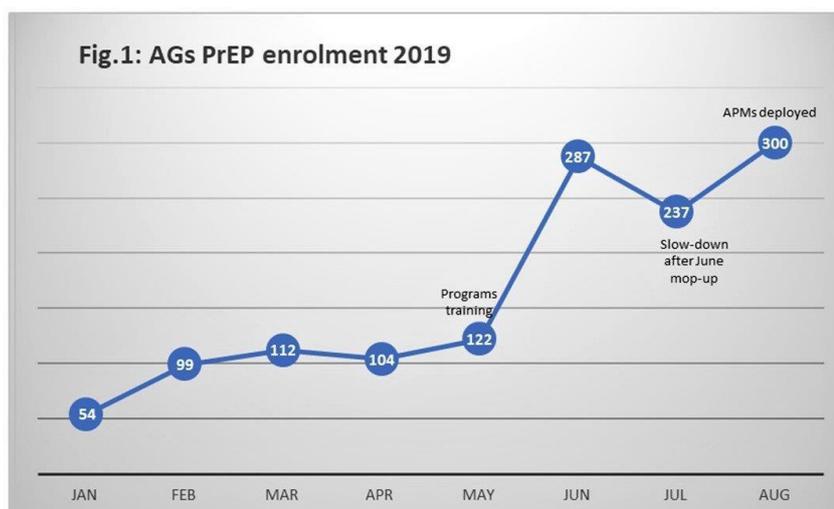
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BACKGROUND: Nearly 1,000 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) are infected by HIV daily in Sub Saharan Africa. Factors predisposing young women to HIV infection include early sexual debut and lack of modern contraceptive use. Adolescent Girls (AGs) in Zimbabwe as in many African countries, face provider and community stigma which prevents them from accessing HIV prevention and SRHR services. PSI Zimbabwe deployed 23 former DREAMS club facilitators to mobilize AG; 15-19 years for PrEP in 6 DREAMS districts using menstrual health management (MHM) as a conversation starter.

DESCRIPTION: Between July and August 2019, we deployed 23 twenty-three Adolescent Peer Mobilisers (APMs) to conduct small group discussions with AGs in selected high HIV burden peri- urban, urban and rural areas and refer them for PrEP services and modern contraception. We trained the APMs to discuss the menstrual health and pregnancy link, positioning MHM as a 'socially acceptable' hook in promoting uptake of modern contraception and PrEP. The APMs integrated mobilization with other HIV prevention programs such as Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision, Condoms and Key Populations. Mobilization was implemented concurrently with service outreach to allow AGs to immediately access services. Before deployment, the APMs accessed services as mystery clients to identify opportunities to improve the youth friendliness of services. They formed a Youth Advisory Board, acting as providers' mentors on youth friendliness.

LESSONS LEARNED: Using program data for the period January and August 2019, we observed a sustained uptake of PrEP among AGs between June and August (Fig 1). The increase in PrEP uptake between May and June is explained by improved program fidelity. This increase was sustained by the introduction of APMs in August.



CONCLUSIONS: Using peer mobilizers to recruit AG for PrEP while positioning MHM as a conversation starter and program implementation fidelity is associated with increased uptake of PrEP. Peer Mobilisers provide safe spaces for AG. Bringing PrEP services to AG where they feel most comfortable and messaging from whom they desire can increase uptake. Program seeking to improve PrEP uptake among AG need to consider these elements.