

HIV Prevention with Young Men Using Soccer and Vocational Training: A Feasibility Study

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BACKGROUND

Young South African men need new pathways for pro-social behaviours, as they experience intersecting epidemics of HIV, alcohol and drug abuse, and unemployment. Research suggests that some men compensate for the feeling of emasculation resulting from their inability to find work by reinforcing gender hierarchies through violence or through a heightened sense of sexual entitlement. Unemployed young men may drink and have unprotected sex, for example, because they have no sense of future. Due to these increased risky sexual behaviours, men are at a higher risk of contracting HIV.

While young South African men represent a population with high rates of unemployment, substance abuse, and HIV infection, many organizations struggle to create demand among men for basic services and many fail to design interventions to which men can relate.

Grassroots Soccer (GRS) uses the appeal of soccer to deliver HIV prevention and life skills curricula to young people. Champions League is an all-male soccer league designed for unemployed men, ages 18-25, which incorporates GRS life skills programming and rewards. A feasibility study was conducted with Champions League participants in Khayelitsha, Cape Town to investigate the role of soccer and incentives in promoting healthy living and pro-social behaviours among young men.

METHODS

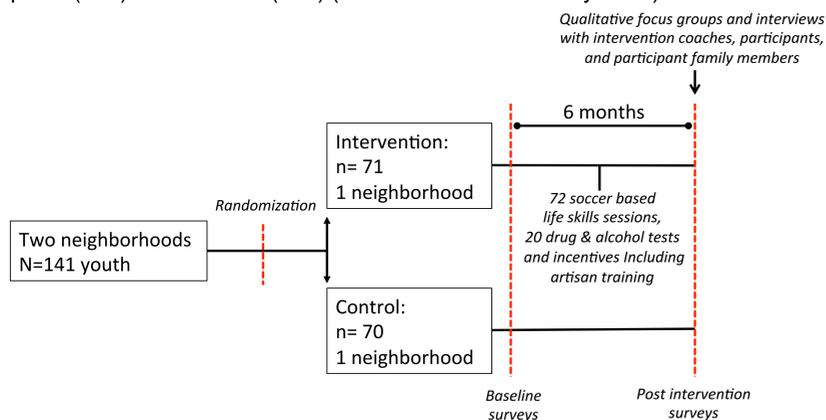
Two neighborhoods in Khayelitsha were identified and matched for participation in the feasibility study: 71 participants from the intervention neighborhood received the Champions League intervention; 71 participants from the control neighborhood received the intervention after completion of the study. Surveys were administered with participants at baseline (n=142) and 6-months post (n=134) (March 2012-February 2013).

	Control (n=71)	Intervention (n=71)	Total (n=142)
Average Age	22 years old	22 years old	22 years old
Relationship status- single	96.0%	97.0%	96.5%
High school diploma	26.0%	25.0%	25.5%
Ever tested for HIV	76.0%	80.0%	78.0%
HIV tested in past 3 months	23.0%	15.0%	19.0%
Ever used serious drug	53.0%	30.0%	41.5%

Table 1: The sample of men between the ages of 18-25 was primarily single, poorly educated, had tested for HIV in the past but not in the last 3 months and had made use of serious drugs.

Surveys assessed changes in knowledge, self-reported behaviour and attitudes toward substance use, employment, support networks, sexual behaviour and criminal activity. Individual attendance, punctuality, and drug and alcohol tests were collected from the intervention group (April-October 2012). Table 1 presents demographics of programme participants.

Qualitative data was carried out, including in-depth interviews with participants (n=15), coaches (n=5), and family members of participants (n=15); and focus group discussions with participants (n=3) and coaches (n=1) (November 2012-February 2013).



INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

Champions League is an all-male soccer league that incorporates GRS life skills programming for unemployed men, aged 18-25. The Champions League curriculum, delivered by local community men as coaches, focuses on improving routines and behaviours towards drug and alcohol abuse, sexual behaviour, relationships, violence, communication, economic empowerment, and other health regiments.

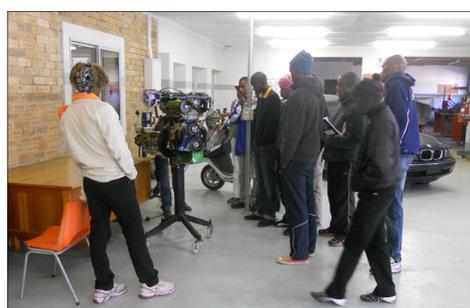
Through the use of short-term, daily, concrete incentives (e.g. airtime, soccer gear, etc.), players are rewarded for demonstrating pro-social behaviour such as attendance, punctuality, sportsmanship on the field, agreeing to test for drug and alcohol and negative test results. Players are also rewarded with the long-term incentive of an artisan job-training course once they reach a certain requirement of attendance, participation, and programme involvement.



Champions League Curriculum Cover



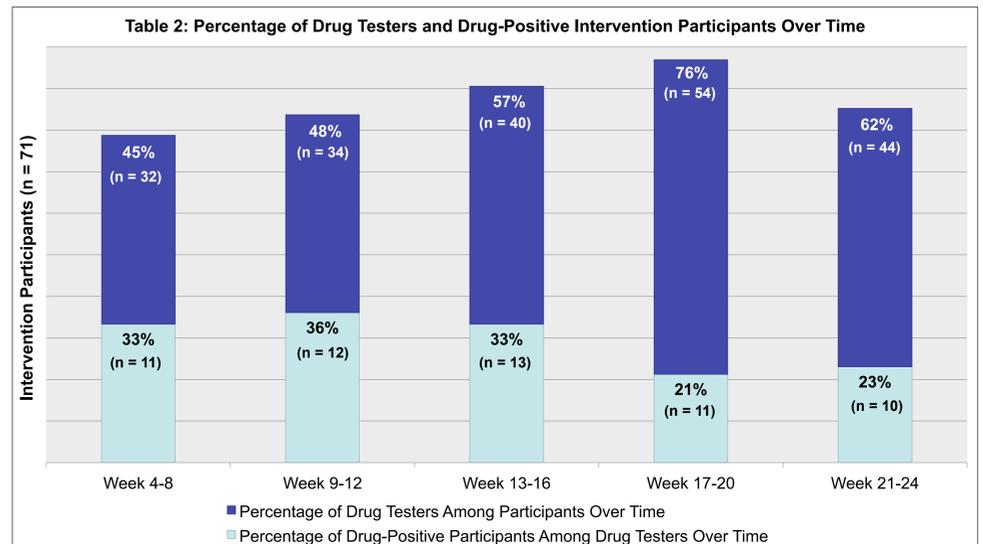
Champions League participants and coach before a weekend match



Champions League participants during an artisan mechanical training session

RESULTS

Results suggest an increase in willingness to test for drugs (from 45% to a high of 76%) and a decrease in percentage of participants that test positive for drugs (from 33% to a low of 21%) during programme implementation (see Table 2). Differences between control and intervention groups were observed on several markers, including violence towards women (e.g. hit, pulled, dragged, or used a weapon on a partner in past 3 months), crime (e.g. ever arrested), and drug usage (e.g. used tik in past 3 months) (see Table 3).



	Control (N=66)		Intervention (N=69)		P
	n	%	n	%	
Hit, Pulled, Dragged, or Used a Weapon on Partner in the Past 3 Months					
No	58	87.9	69	100	0.003
Yes	8	12.1	0	0.0	
Forced Woman to Have Sex While Too Drunk to Give Consent					
No	48	72.7	62	89.9	0.010
Yes	18	27.3	7	10.1	
Ever Arrested					
No	25	37.9	44	63.8	0.003
Yes	41	62.1	25	36.2	
Used Tik in the Past 3 Months					
No	57	86.4	68	98.6	0.007
Yes	9	13.6	1	1.4	
Frequency Used Dagma in the Past 3 Months					
Mean, SD	23.0	37.8	12.3	28.6	0.077

Preliminary qualitative results suggest an increase in players' self worth and confidence, positive social interactions between peers, and positive views among community members on the programme.

"It was a norm on Friday and Saturday to go with friends to the taverns and binge on alcohol but during Champions League we had something to keep us busy and that also kept us from wayward activities."
-Champions League participant, Cape Town

"The gangster groups—the boys from Sections 34— used to not come this side [Section 35] but football brought about reconciliation, as they can come now."
-Champions League participant, Cape Town

"Champions League has changed [my son]. People respect him now and they can see that he is different from other kids. Some parents come to my house looking for him. They do not even know him but they say they heard that he is able to solve problems because he is part of Grassroot Soccer. He has really changed. He is willing to go to someone else's house and make positive change."
-Mother of a Champions League participant, Cape Town

DISCUSSION

The feasibility study provides encouraging evidence that young men between 18 and 25 are willing to participate in a research project and test for drugs and alcohol. Results suggest potential benefits of the Champions League programme in improving outcomes pertaining to violence against women, crime, and drug usage. Given the small sample size of this feasibility study, further research is needed to assess the effects of a programme combining soccer, life skills, and incentives on the promotion of healthy living and pro-social behaviours among young, unemployed men. Stellenbosch University and the University of California, Los Angeles, in partnership with Grassroot Soccer are currently applying for funding to expand the Champions League program to 24 neighborhoods in Khayelitsha and conduct a rigorous randomized controlled trial.



Champions League participant during weekend match

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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