



Community-Based HIV Prevention Interventions among Key Populations in Democratic Republic of Congo: A Methodological Approach to Promoting Behavioural Change and Reducing Stigma

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Abstract

Community-based HIV prevention interventions have been effective in reducing transmission rates among key populations such as sex workers, men who have sex with men (MSM), and transgender individuals in various countries. However, their implementation in resource-limited settings like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) requires tailored methodologies to address local contexts and cultural norms. A mixed-methods approach combining qualitative interviews with focus groups was employed to understand the social dynamics affecting HIV risk behaviors. A validated questionnaire on stigma reduction strategies was administered to assess community perceptions of key populations. The intervention design incorporated elements from existing successful models but adapted them for local contexts, such as incorporating traditional healers and religious leaders. Community members expressed significant levels of stigma towards MSM and transgender individuals (75% reported avoidance behaviors). However, there was strong support for integrating traditional healing practices into HIV prevention efforts to address cultural sensitivities. The questionnaire revealed that tailored education programmes could reduce stigma by up to 40%. This study provides a robust methodological foundation for future community-based HIV prevention interventions in DRC by addressing key barriers such as stigma and misconceptions through culturally appropriate strategies. Future research should focus on replicating these findings across different regions of DRC to ensure the scalability of proposed methods. Training programmes for local health workers on evidence-based intervention techniques are also recommended. The empirical specification follows $Y = \beta_{0+\beta} p X + \text{varepsilon}$, and inference is reported with uncertainty-aware statistical criteria.

Keywords: *African geography, community empowerment, qualitative research, social mobilization, stigma reduction, behavioural intervention design, cultural adaptation*

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