

Substance Use, Gender, and Applied Research



RTI International uses community-based research strategies to advance treatment and prevention programs for underserved and key populations. Our Substance Use, Gender, and Applied Research program uses behavioral and biobehavioral approaches to reduce HIV, hepatitis C, and other adverse health consequences associated with substance use. We also focus on preventing sexual violence and ending gender inequalities.

Overview

RTI conducts multisite, multidisciplinary research to develop, implement, and evaluate evidence-based interventions addressing health risk behaviors. Our research advances the fields of substance abuse treatment, HIV, and gender-based violence prevention. Using applied research that incorporates behavioral and biobehavioral approaches, we partner with community agencies and community collaborative boards comprising citizens and professionals to address social and biobehavioral issues through a gender lens. This includes

- Working with underserved, hard-to-reach populations in community-based settings
- Developing, implementing, and evaluating age-, gender-, and culture-appropriate interventions
- Disseminating research findings to communities and other key stakeholders

Research Populations

Our research focuses on the prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections, gender-based violence, and other health outcomes among substance users and

underserved populations in domestic and international settings, including

- Women
- Couples
- LGBT individuals
- Adolescents and youth
- People who inject drugs
- People who use alcohol and other drugs
- Sex workers
- Racial and ethnic minorities

Rigorous Research and Evaluation

Our strengths include our diverse research experience and the application of evidence-based approaches, such as

- Respondent-driven sampling and peer outreach workers
- Randomized controlled trials to determine intervention efficacy, effectiveness, and comparative efficacy
- Gender- and culturally appropriate mixed-method data collection strategies
- HIV counseling and testing (HCT), drug and pregnancy testing, and referrals to community health services
- Implementation science to determine adoption and long-term sustainability in usual care settings

Global Reach and Impact

We work locally and globally to produce results that have significant reach and impact. Our current projects include

- **Young Women-Focused HIV Prevention: Seek & Test in North Carolina Clinics (2015–2020):** This study, supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), is developing a mobile health application to deliver an HIV risk-reduction intervention. It will test the relative efficacy of intervention delivery via the app compared with face-to-face delivery. This intervention for young, sexually active, substance-using African American women is an adaptation of the original NC Women's CoOp, an evidence-based intervention that has also been adapted globally. In collaboration with local health departments in North Carolina, this study aims to reach women aged 18 to 25 from low-resource communities who have not been recently tested for HIV.
- **Expanding HIV Testing and Prevention to Reach Vulnerable Young Women (2015–2020):** This NIDA-funded study builds on the Young Women's Health CoOp project and is reaching female adolescents aged 16 to 19 who use alcohol and other drugs and have dropped out of school in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in Cape Town, South Africa. This intervention aims to increase uptake of HCT; reduce substance use, victimization, and sexual risk behaviors; and improve access to effective treatment and support services through linkages.
- **Linking High-Risk Young Women to HIV Prevention and Care for Comorbid Conditions (2015–2017):** This study, supported by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, seeks to adapt and determine initial feasibility of a woman-focused, trauma-informed risk-reduction program that is modeled after the Women's Health CoOp (WHC) and provides linkages to treatment for co-occurring substance use and victimization. This project—based in Cape Town, South Africa—aims to reach women aged 18 to 25 who use alcohol and other drugs and have histories of trauma.
- **Implementation Research for Vulnerable Women in South Africa (2014–2019):** This study, supported by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, seeks to develop and test an implementation strategy for adoption and sustainably integrating the WHC into existing clinics and substance use rehabilitation centers in South Africa. This project uses a hybrid implementation science framework to assess barriers and facilitators associated with the implementation of the WHC, engages key stakeholders, and addresses risk reduction among substance-using, vulnerable women living with HIV.
- **Combination Prevention for Vulnerable Women in South Africa (2011–2017):** This NIDA-funded study combines a biomedical strategy (seek, test, treat, and retain) with an evidence-based intervention (the WHC) to reach at-risk, vulnerable women in Pretoria, South Africa, who use alcohol and other drugs. Preliminary findings suggest a decrease in the proportion of women using substances between intake and follow-up appointments and an increase in the uptake of antiretroviral medications for HIV.
- **Tajikistan Low Dead-Space Syringe Study (2013–2016):** This NIDA-funded implementation pilot project recruited 200 needle and syringe program clients in two cities in Tajikistan and completed follow-up interviews with 199 participants. The study demonstrated the feasibility of needle and syringe programs distributing low dead-space detachable needles and the acceptability of these needles to their clients. Future research will aim to scale up the program to all 50 needle and syringe programs in Tajikistan.

More Information

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