

BACKGROUND

Adolescent boys are hard to reach with HIV and SRH information and services, given their fears of stigma and reluctance to utilise health services (DTHF, 2016). Sports programs are considered one novel point of entry to reach early adolescent boys (UNFPA, 2016).

In 2016 Grassroot Soccer (GRS) conducted a mixed-methods evaluation of an HIV prevention and life skills programme (SKILLZ) delivered to adolescent boys by Coaches from local football associations (LFAs) within the South African Football Association (SAFA). The objective was to assess the effectiveness of SKILLZ at improving knowledge of HIV risk factors and prevention strategies; gender equitable beliefs; and positive self-image among participants.

INTERVENTION OVERVIEW

SKILLZ Health is an innovative, youth-centred, evidence-based and interactive HIV prevention and life skills programme designed for South African youth aged 15-19 years. LFA coaches were trained over 5 days to deliver the curriculum to their soccer teams. The 7-practice intervention uses soccer language, metaphors, and activities to address key behaviours that drive the transmission of HIV in Southern Africa, including multiple sexual partners, older sexual partners, and gender-based violence.

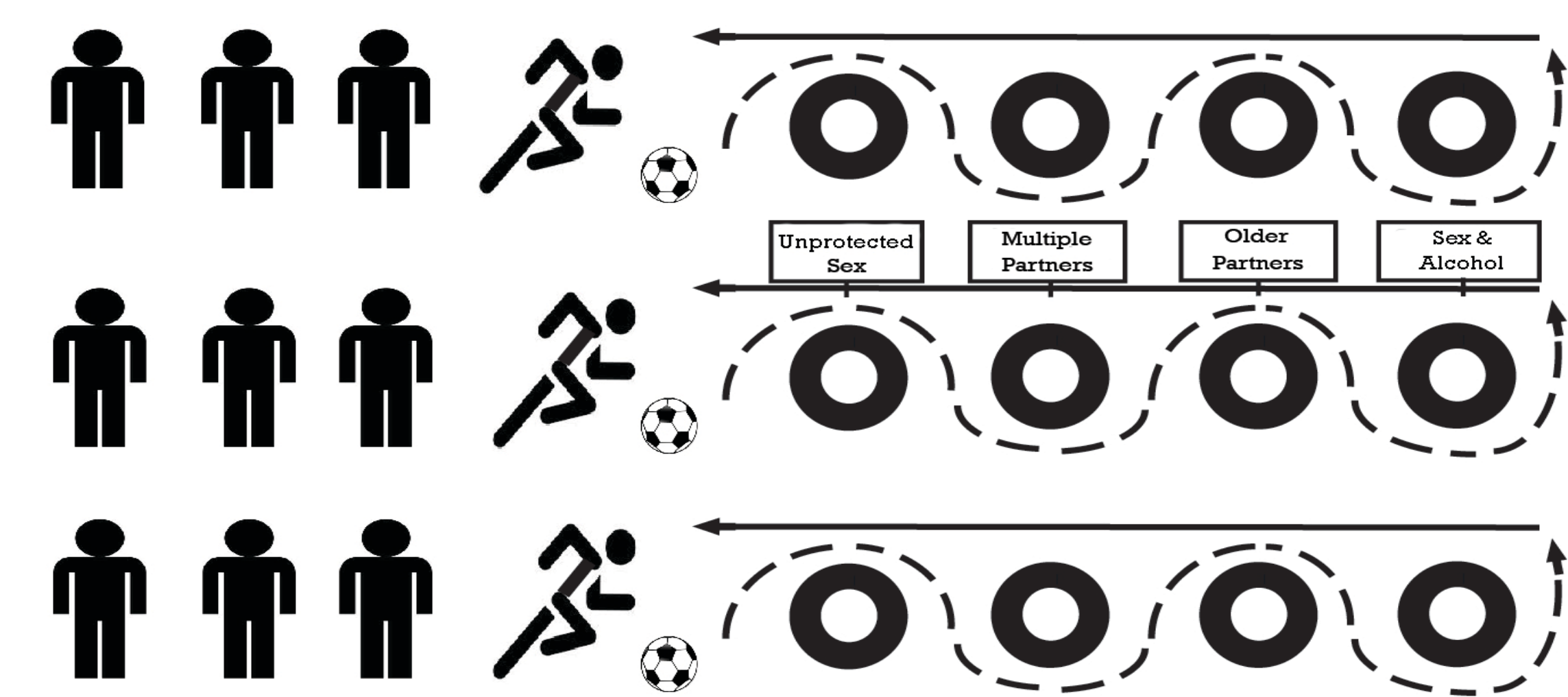


Figure 1: Example of 'Risk Field' activity



Image 1: 'Risk Field' activity

METHODS

- LFA coaches facilitated SKILLZ Health (seven 1.5-hour sessions) in peri-urban communities of Alexandra and Soweto in Johannesburg, and Khayelitsha in Cape Town.
- Participants (mean age = 13.8 years) completed a 17-item questionnaire pre-intervention (September-December 2016, n=974) and post-intervention (March-May 2017, n=974).
- Focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with adolescent participants (n=1) and coaches (n=1) and in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with GRS staff (n=2) and LFA administrators (n=1).



Image 2: Coaches being trained on a SKILLZ curriculum activity encouraging participants to work together as a team to stand up at the same time, representing helping one another in the community

RESULTS

➤ Results of quantitative data analysis:

- All 17 questionnaire items showed significant improvements pre to post intervention as shown in Table 1 (Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test; P <0.01).
- The largest changes were seen in items about communication about HIV with friends, gender equitable decision-making, responsibility in relationships, and drinking alcohol increasing HIV risk.
- On average, HIV stigma questions reported a 38.2 % positive change, highlighting the potential for SKILLZ to influence participants' views and communication norms surrounding HIV.
- Among participants aged 10-13 years, the average pre post-test score improvement was 29%, compared to 36% amongst participants aged 14-17 years.

➤ Results from qualitative data analysis demonstrate:

- Positive change in participants' attitudes towards women and alcohol, substantiating the quantitative gender equitable norm and substance abuse findings.
- Demand for more support and training among LFA Coaches from Grassroot Soccer.
- Unanticipated improvements to discipline and communication on the football pitch.
- Potential to train an LFA Coach as a 'master trainer' for future LFA Coaches, creating a sustainable network of mentors for adolescent boys.

Outcome Statements	Baseline	Endline	% Change
HIV Stigma			
I have talked about HIV with an adult in the past two months (outside SKILLZ).	43%	61%	41%
I have talked about HIV with a friend in the past two months (outside SKILLZ).	44%	67%	53%
I can tell if someone has HIV by looking at him or her.	59%	84%	41%
I would say no to playing sport with someone who has HIV.	64%	84%	32%
I would be willing to care for a friend with HIV.	75%	93%	24%
Gender Equitable Norms			
Unequal power in relationships can contribute to the spread of HIV.	57%	83%	45%
Guys and girls should listen to each other.	81%	94%	17%
It is the male's responsibility to make decisions in a relationship.	50%	80%	61%
Men should share the work around the house, such as cleaning.	73%	92%	26%
Substance Abuse			
Drinking alcohol can increase my risk of getting HIV.	57%	89%	57%
Drinking alcohol is a choice.	68%	90%	33%
HIV-Testing/Demand for Health Services			
I am ready to take an HIV test.	70%	88%	26%

Table 1: Pre Post results from LFA SKILLZ Participants (n = 974)

LFA COACH - "The players were very scared to ask some things about HIV or sex at first when I was a soccer coach, so I now I am a SKILLZ coach **they are free to ask anything**"

LFA PARTICIPANT - "My most favourite practice is alcohol self-reflection because I used to love alcohol but **after I attend SKILLZ I see that alcohol is not good for me.**"

CONCLUSIONS

Local football structures may be under-utilised in reaching adolescent boys, showing that SKILLZ can be an effective intervention for short-term improvements to HIV knowledge and attitudes towards gender equitable beliefs and health.

Greater positive change was seen among older youth in several items, indicating that the intervention could be more effective for older adolescents. Both the intervention (SKILLZ) and delivery channel (LFAs) present opportunities for scale and merit more rigorous, longer-term evaluation.

NEXT STEPS

- Scale partnership between Grassroot Soccer and LFAs into new provinces.
- GRS will continue training new LFA coaches on the SKILLZ Health programme.
- GRS will provide refresher trainings for LFA Coaches to ensure high standards are maintained.
- Continued routine monitoring and evaluation of LFA SKILLZ Health programmes by GRS to use these findings to inform the future of LFA partnership.
- Consider developing specific curriculum for LFA participants based on the group's specific needs, ages and ongoing routine monitoring data.



Image 3: SKILLZ Graduates receiving their certificates upon completion of the intervention

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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