

Planning Families: What are the Needs and Desires of Women Living with HIV who Sell Sex in Tanzania?

Women of reproductive age living with HIV need access to comprehensive, voluntary family planning (FP) services to support their decisions about whether and when to have children. Contraceptive need is particularly acute among HIV-positive women who sell sex, who often have multiple partners and are socially and economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, recognizing that many HIV-positive women who sell sex intend to have children—either imminently or at some point in the future—it is equally important to understand their potential need for “safer conception” services.

Project SOAR is contributing to the evidence base by conducting research that describes these women’s FP needs, fertility intentions, and safer conception knowledge in Tanzania, and to assess ongoing community-based FP services for HIV-positive women who sell sex. In addition, we are examining the knowledge and opinions around safer conception strategies among health

Research Partners: Sauti project, **CSK Research Solutions**, Ministry of Health Community Development, Gender, Elderly and Children

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Findings from this study will help inform national and global guidance on the provision of family planning and “safer pregnancy” counseling services and integrated reproductive health services to HIV-positive women who sell sex.

providers and women living with HIV who sell sex. Although there are various strategies for conceiving safely, it is unclear the extent to which providers and HIV-positive women find these options acceptable or feasible.

In Tanzania, national guidelines recommend providing FP and “safer pregnancy” counseling services for women living with HIV, as well as integrated reproductive health services for women who sell sex. This research will help inform national and global guidance on the provision of both types of services to HIV-positive women who sell sex, thereby reducing mother-to-child HIV transmission and improving and upholding women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights.

What is “safer conception?”

Safer conception refers to strategies to help HIV-affected individuals and couples get pregnant while minimizing the risk of HIV transmission to HIV-negative partners and the baby. Low- and high-technology safer conception strategies include, for example, timed unprotected intercourse (limited to the periovulatory period), self-insemination, and biomedical interventions such as PrEP—or pre-exposure prophylaxis for the HIV-negative partner—and antiretroviral therapy for the HIV-positive partner.

Our Research

We are conducting this study at selected community-based service delivery sites for women who sell sex in Dar es Salaam offered by the local implementing partner, Jhpiego’s Sauti project.

The study objectives are to:

- Describe Sauti’s ongoing community-based FP services provided to HIV-positive women who sell sex.
- Describe these women’s fertility-related needs and desires (e.g., contraceptive need, fertility intentions, dual method use and acceptability).
- Explore awareness, accessibility, and acceptability of safer conception strategies among HIV-positive women who sell sex and wish to get pregnant, and among Sauti healthcare providers.

SOAR is conducting 300 quantitative client exit interviews with HIV-positive women who sell sex, qualitative interviews with 5 Sauti providers and 15 women who are currently trying to get pregnant, and 25 structured observations of women’s consultations with providers. By exploring both providers’ and women’s perspectives, this study will produce valuable insights to inform future efforts to support the

Sauti community-based services

The PEPFAR-supported Sauti project provides an integrated set of FP and HIV services for key populations in discreet and safe locations throughout Tanzania. These services include HIV testing services, gender-based violence services, sexually transmitted infection screening and treatment, alcohol and drug abuse screening, and FP counseling and methods (all modern methods except for intrauterine devices or sterilization, for which Sauti provides referrals). In communities, peer educators generate demand for Sauti services, encouraging peers to attend these key population-friendly, community-based services.

holistic FP needs of HIV-positive women in Tanzania and other developing countries.

Research Utilization

This study is of interest to stakeholders in both the HIV and reproductive health arenas, and we will identify and convene a research advisory committee (RAC) that represents both constituencies. For example, the RAC will include representation from both the National AIDS Control Program as well as the Reproductive and Child Health Section. Community members and program Sauti program staff will play a critical role in developing and refining research protocols. Furthermore, the Population Council enjoys a strong international presence as a technical leader in the cross-cutting thematic areas of reproductive health, HIV, and gender. Leveraging Council staff’s global professional networks and communities of practice, the study team will seek out opportunities to disseminate and promote utilization of study findings among stakeholders who promote HIV and FP integration, reproductive rights, and gender equity.