

Increasing the satisfaction of adolescents and young people with HIV, SRHR and GBV counseling services in health facilities in Zambia

Learning Brief | June 2023

Background

This learning brief explores the results and lessons learnt of the project “Strengthening Girls’ Rights! Reproductive Health, Family Planning and HIV Prevention for pupils, especially girls, in Zambia” with regard to increasing adolescents’ and young people’s satisfaction with services for HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and gender-based violence (GBV). The Strengthening Girls Rights project implemented by the German Gesellschaft für International Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, in collaboration with the National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council. Among others, the project aimed to improve level of satisfaction of adolescents and young people (aged 10-24 years) with the youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity of counseling services, in line with criteria of the World Health Organisation (WHO). This learning brief sheds light on how the youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity of counseling services were improved and which measures were most effective, as perceived by adolescents and the young people. Furthermore, it aims to provide recommendations for policies and programmes.

Study on youth satisfaction with services

The results and lessons learnt presented in this learning brief are based on a study conducted amongst more than 600 adolescents and young people, in 9 health facilities, between December 2020 and February 2023. The study comprised of a quantitative baseline and endline survey (N=604 and N=360 respectively) conducted by the consulting firm Syspons as well as Focus Group Discussion (N= 117) conducted by GIZ staff. As part of the quantitative survey, adolescents and young people indicated their level of satisfaction with the various criteria for youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity, such as non-judgmental attitudes of health care providers, the level of privacy and confidentiality, accessibility and content. The responses to the 32 statements were captured in an index-value for youth-friendliness and an index-value for gender-sensitivity on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being completely dissatisfied and 5 being completely satisfied. To better understand the changes in the index-values achieved (see below), focus group discussions with adolescent boys and girls were carried out in 6 health facilities. These discussions explored the causes of the changes in satisfaction, the effectiveness of GIZ’s support measures as well as recommendations for future action.

Strengthening Girls’ Rights project at a glance

Project name	Strengthening Girls’ Rights! Reproductive Health, Family Planning and HIV prevention for learners, especially girls, in Zambia
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Lusaka Province, North-Western Province, Luapula Province, Southern Province
Lead executing agency	National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council (NAC)
Duration	01.01.2020 – 31.08.2023



Results: Increased levels of satisfaction

The study found that the level of satisfaction of adolescents and young people with both the youth-friendliness and the gender-sensitivity of counseling services increased:

- The index value for youth friendliness increased from 3.62 to 4.01 out of 5
- The index value for gender sensitivity increased from 3.45 to 3.83 out of 5
- Satisfaction increased more amongst boys and amongst young adolescents, aged 10-14 years

Other key findings from both quantitative and qualitative study included:

- The uptake of services increased, with more young people visiting the facilities and young people coming more often and/or spending more time at the youth-friendly spaces
- The type of counselling services changed, shifting from group counselling to 1:1 counselling
- The awareness of available services increased, though knowledge gaps remain around certain services – notably those related to GBV, mental health as well as post-abortion care
- The interaction with the counsellors improved, with young people indicating higher levels of privacy, confidentiality and non-judgmental attitudes

Key findings at a glance



Figure 1: Overall Satisfaction

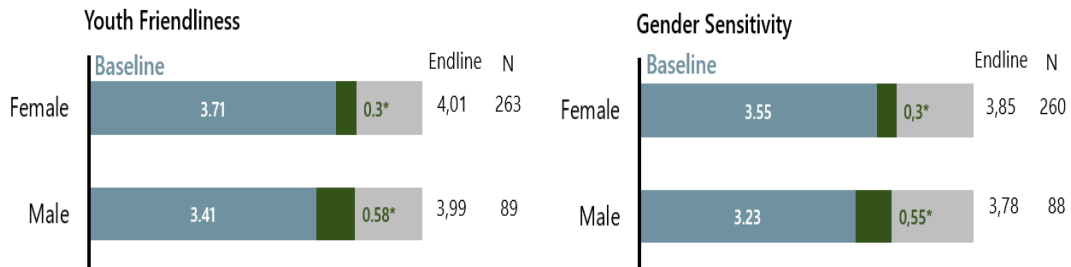


Figure 2: Satisfaction according to Gender

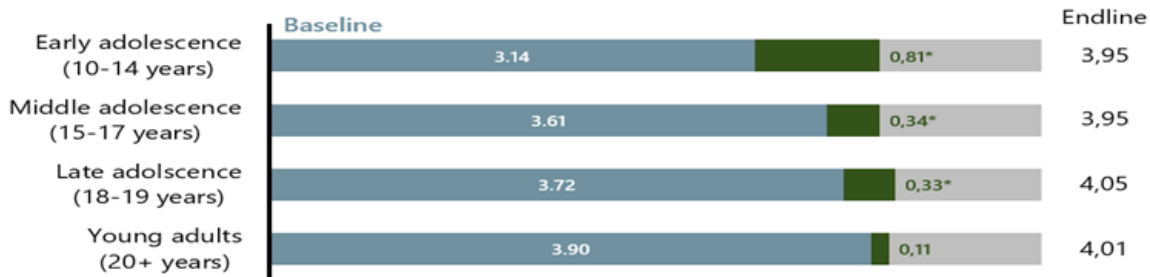


Figure 3: Youth friendliness satisfaction according to Age

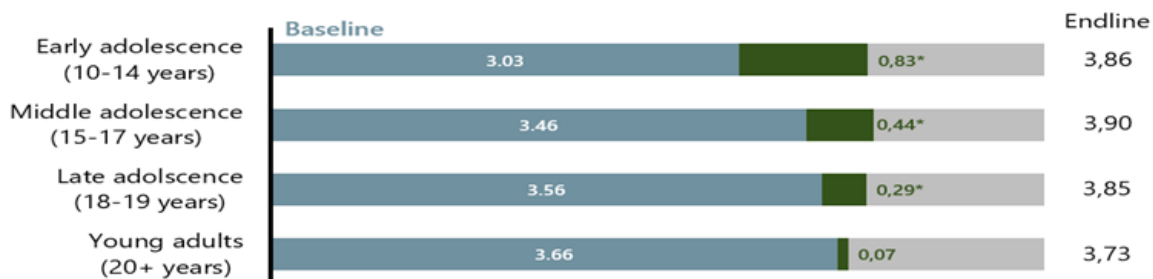


Figure 4: Gender sensitivity satisfaction according to Age

Lessons learnt: what works for improving young people's satisfaction with services

In the time period between the baseline and endline survey, the GIZ Strengthening Girl's Rights project supported 18 healthcare facilities in becoming more youth-friendly and gender sensitive. Results of the baseline survey were used to hold facility-based dialogues between health care workers and young people on the priority areas and interventions for support. In all facilities, healthcare workers and peer educators were trained on Adolescent Health, using the standard training of the Ministry of Health with additional modules on gender and gender-sensitivity. Furthermore, peer-educators were trained as facilitators of the "Join-In Circuit on AIDS, Love and Sexuality" (J-IC), an interactive social behavior change methodology on topics such as HIV, SRHR and GBV (see textbox on the right).

Moreover, the project provided material support such as: drums and attires/ costumes, games and sports equipment (such as balls and goal posts for football and netball, chess boards), suggestion boxes, IDs and T-shirts for peer educators as well as Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and drama-scripts. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Strengthening Girls' Rights project also provided COVID-19 support packages – e.g. consisting of cleaning and hygiene products, masks and PPEs – to youth-friendly spaces, peer educators and young people.

According to the adolescents and young people, the following activities made the biggest difference for improving their awareness on and access to the available services:

- **Training of peer educators**, which led to 1) more outreach activities in the community and 2) more word-of-mouth on the youth-friendly space and services on offer. It was further mentioned that the **ID-cards and T-shirts** for peer educators increased their recognition/acceptance in the community and helped to create a sense of group identity.
- **Provision of drums**, which helped to mobilize the young people during community outreach. Drums were considered to be more important than e.g. the attires/ costumes.
- **Provision of games and sports equipment**, which were used during outreach activities and attracted more young people. This support was particularly effective for younger adolescents (10-14 years);

In terms of improving the youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity of services, adolescents and young people felt that the most effective interventions included:

- **Training of health workers**, which young people associated with reduced levels of prejudice, less stigmatization and more confidentiality;
- Use of more youth-friendly, interactive and fun methods for passing on information, in particular the **Join-In Circuit** on AIDS, Love and Sexuality;
- Increased offer and uptake of **1:1 counseling**, which led to more attention, confidentiality and privacy.

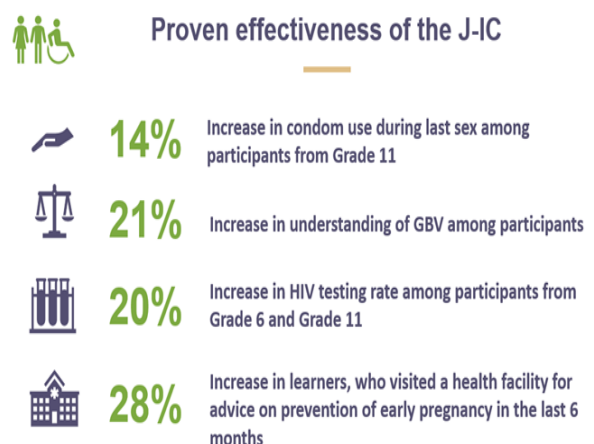
The Join-In Circuit at a glance

The "Join-In-Circuit on AIDS, Love and Sexuality" (J-IC) is a learner-centered, interactive and effective social behavior change methodology. The J-IC aims to increase knowledge of adolescents and young people on HIV, AIDS, sexual and reproductive health and healthy relationships while also building a foundation for positive changes in attitude and behaviour. During a one-off session of 2,5-3 hours, small groups of participants move between 'J-IC stations' to discuss and explore various topics using games, role-plays and problem-solving skills. Currently, 11 stations are available, covering the following topics:

1. Ways of HIV Transmission
2. Sexually Transmitted Infections
3. Body Language
4. Positive Living
5. Love, Sexuality, and Protection from HIV
6. Contraceptives
7. Condom use
8. Gender and Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
9. Sexual reproductive health
10. Sexual reproductive health rights
11. COVID 19

All stations are adapted for engaging (young) persons with disabilities i.e. through the use braille and guidelines for facilitators on inclusion of persons with disability.

In 2018 and 2021, two randomized controlled trials provided evidence on the effectiveness of the J-IC in terms of comprehensive knowledge, health seeking behavior/ uptake of services and self-protection.



Note: Effectiveness results from 2 Randomized Controlled Trials (2018 & 2022). The figures depict relative increase against baseline values and end line values

Lessons learnt: challenges for improving young people's satisfaction with services

Both the survey and focus group discussions provided insights into some of the challenges for improving the youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity of counseling services. These included:

- **High mobility and turn-over of peer educators**, which often leads to a lack of peer educators and the need to frequent trainings. The high mobility of young people, especially boys and young men, could also be seen in the participants of the baseline and end-line study. Of the 602 young people that responded to the survey in December 2020, only 270 could be traced in August 2021
- **Impact of Covid-19**, which disrupted in-person meetings. In one facility, the youth-friendly space was re-assigned to the Covid-19 response, which led to a *decrease* of young people's satisfaction with services in that facility
- **Lack of male counselors** was mentioned as a barrier for accessing services by boys
- **Limited time and space** for young people, especially girls and young women, to meet both as a result of their household chores/ family responsibilities as well as limitation in the time and space allocated for young people at the facilities
- **Service Quality Assessments** generally do not involve involvement or capture the views of young people on the services provided

Recommendations for action

The findings and lessons learnt from the interventions and study on improving the youth-friendliness and gender-sensitivity of HIV, SRHR and GBV counseling services lead to the following recommendations for policies and programmes:

1. Address the persistent knowledge gap of adolescents and young people on the (counseling) services available – including by increasing support for outreach activities using drums, sports and drama
2. Promote the use of high-impact methods for adolescents and young people, including by integrating the J-IC into standard trainings for health workers and peer educators
3. Ensure increased demand is met with increased (quality of) services, including by making confidentiality, gender sensitivity and value clarification an explicit part of trainings on adolescent health for health workers, counselor and peer educators
4. Establish facility-based opportunities to train new peer educators, to mitigate the impact of high-turn over and mobility amongst young people
5. Strengthening opportunities for youth-led monitoring and accountability, including (facility-based) dialogues to ensure national standards for youth-friendly spaces are met



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