



# **The Mpondombili Project:**

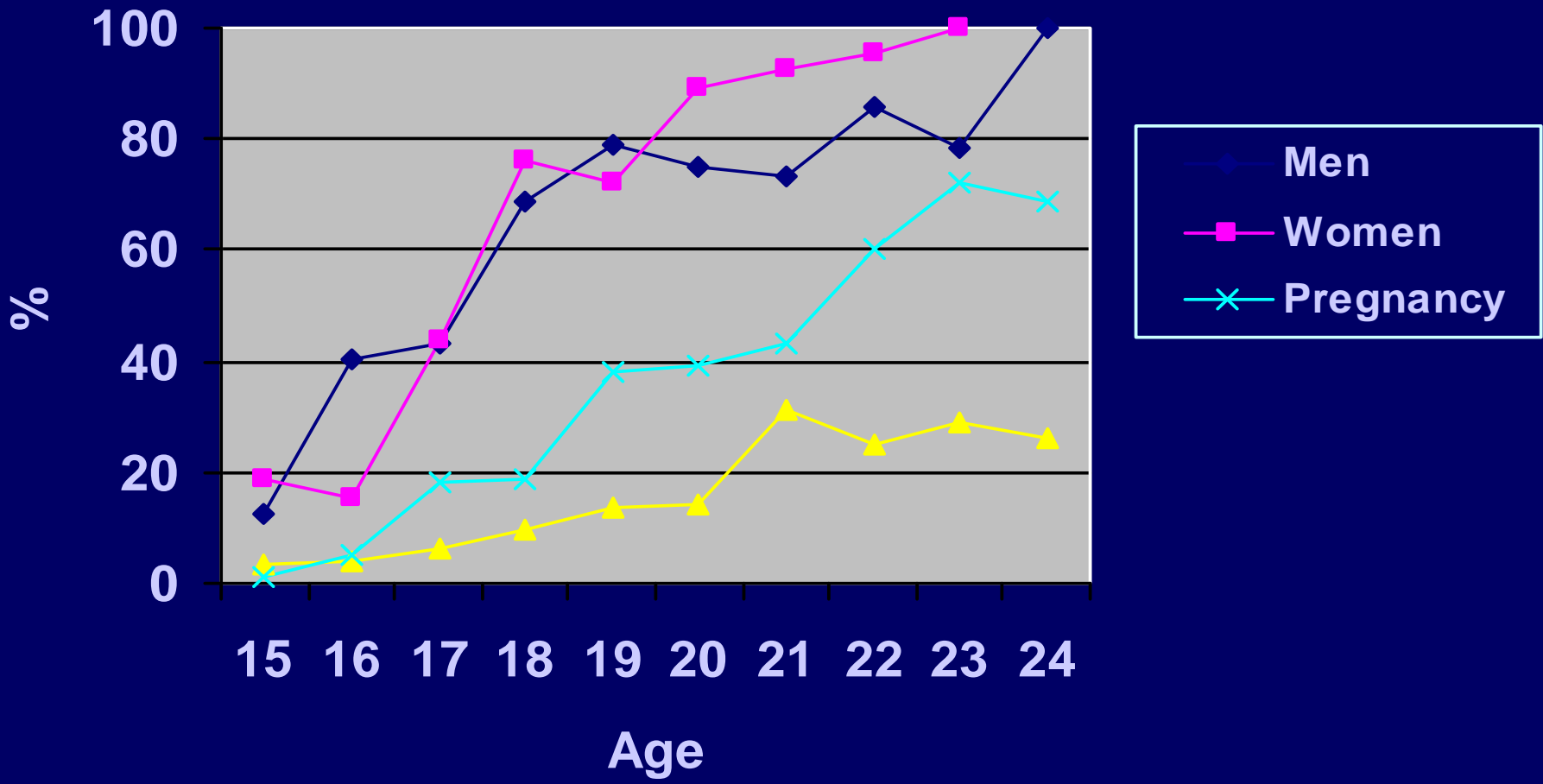
## **Preventing HIV and Pregnancy among Rural South African School-going Adolescents**

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# Context

- South Africa: severe HIV epidemic
  - 10.1% youth 15-24 are infected
  - 24.5% young adult women aged 20-24 (vs 7.3% men)
  - Teenage years critical for prevention
- No sign of decline in HIV prevalence: 18%
- Youth: increasing condom use
- No change in reported age at first sex

# Sexual Activity through the Adolescent Lifecourse in South Africa, in relation to % Pregnancy and HIV



# Youth Research Studies

- Rural KwaZulu/Natal Province
- Adolescent lifecourse in context of HIV/AIDS
- Qualitative research: young people's voices
- Secondary emphasis:
  - community and school surveys
- Development of intervention programmes

# Research Methods

- Peer Group Discussions: Serial Focus Groups
  - Same group meets over time (6-8 month period)
  - Single sex, divided by age (younger 14-15, older 16-19)
  - Sexually active and abstinent youth
  - Series of 8 topics: sexuality & prevention
- School-based survey:  
N=983 youth aged 14-17

# Main Findings

# Condoms: Qualitative Findings

- **Myths, negative attitudes and dislike are often expressed but ...**
- **Positive attitudes are also there**  
**“Using a condom is a sign of love & respect”**
- **Most encouraging: young people are using condoms:**
  - 46.1% at last sex
  - 72% report lifetime use

# We need to know more ....

- Gender dynamics of use – are they changing?
- How consistent is condom use?
- What are the dynamics of use?
  - Who introduces condoms
  - How often is first sexual intercourse protected
  - Have attitudes toward young women's agency in condom negotiation changed?

# Sex is Contested

- Conservative & restrictive environment surrounding sexuality
- Sexuality stigmatized:
  - “I know what I am doing is wrong”
- Gender & sexuality coincide from an early age:
  - Young Girls: hidden relationships
  - Boys: “we’ll look the other way”

# Implications for Prevention

- Clandestine relationships hinder prevention
- Difficult to access condoms or negotiate their use when girls are not even able to acknowledge they are having sex
- Creates permissive context for coercion, multiple partnering

# Social Meaning of Abstinence

- Strong adult and community attitudes favoring abstinence
- Younger adolescents internalize these attitudes
- Abstinence = preferred prevention strategy, even among sexually active girls

# Sexual Activity

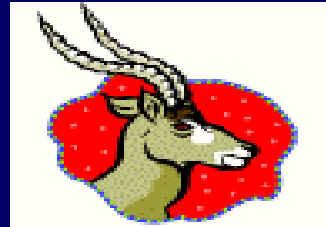
- Age at First Sex: median 17 years
- Many more abstinent youth
- Sexual activity in rural school survey:
  - 37.7% boys and 13.8% girls
  - Age 14: 12.1% overall
  - Age 17: 33.9% overall

# Abstinence

- Intersection of global policy (top down) with local priorities and religious values (bottom up)
- Skewed perspective on prevention: “condoms don’t work”
- South Africa: late age of marriage, abstinence “until marriage” unattainable

# Implications

How to design a “culturally appropriate” intervention that responds to the needs of youth and their communities?



# **Mpondombili Project: Intervention for School-based Youth**

# Mpondombili Project

- **Intervention for secondary school youth in Grades 8-10**
  - 85% youth still schooling in early secondary years
- 15 month participatory development process:  
Youth Peer Educators – Adult Role Models
- Youth were “in charge”: initial review & feedback on modules
- Adult Role Models = Teachers & Nurses
- End of Process: 15 Session Classroom Curriculum

# Objectives

- Prevent HIV and pregnancy
- Promotion of Safer Sex
- Pathways:
- Challenge gender role norms & attitudes
  - Communication, skills, assertiveness
- Reducing stigma & fear around sexuality
  - Fostering positive norms

# Dual Protection

- Delay sex (if you can and want to)
- Use condoms consistently if sexually active
- Age-appropriate definition: 14-17 year olds
- Complementary and reinforcing strategies

# Research Partnership

- HIV Prevention Research Unit,  
South African Medical Research Council, Durban

(Pinky Kunene, Muriel Kubeka, Thobile Nzama, Musa Mpanza,  
Nelly Ntuli, Jenni Smit, Reproductive Health Research Unit)

- HIV Center for Clinical and Behavioral Studies,  
Columbia University, New York  
(Joanne Mantell, Theresa Exner, Susie Hoffman)

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# For more information ...

[www.sexualhealthexchange.org](http://www.sexualhealthexchange.org)

The Mpondombili Project, December 2004

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A Harrison. Social dynamics of adolescent risk for HIV: using research findings to design a school-based intervention. *Agenda* 2002; 53: 43-52.