

Proposed Project Title: Exploring the impact of social norms on aspects of individual sexuality, intimacy, shame, guilt and pleasure in high HIV transmission areas and areas with low HIV prevalence in South Africa.

Preferred Scholar On-Site Project Dates: Flexible 8-10 weeks on site between May 2024 -November 2025

Project Site: Klerksdorp, South Africa (Aurum Institute Klerksdorp Clinical Research Site)

Project Overview:

The project will be conducted at the Aurum Klerksdorp Clinical Research Site (CRS) which is situated in the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District in the Matlosana Sub district of the Northwest province. The CRS is a Clinical Trials Unit and has been conducting HIV Vaccine and Covid prevention trials with the HIV Vaccine Trials Network. In addition, the CRS has experience in conducting TB prevention, COVID treatment and PrEP trials. The CRS has established strategic and sustainable relationships with our community partners and collaborators and has established a strong footprint in our community. Our Community Engagement work is grounded in the principles of Good Participatory Practice (GPP) and we have adopted the Community People-Centered Participatory Practice approach. We take pride in the prioritization of our relationships with our community partners and placing people at the core of our community engagement. *This is an 8-to-10-week project and during this time the RAMP scholar will have the opportunity to work closely with the community engagement staff of the CRS and with our diverse key community stakeholders.* The project is the first component of a two-phase project. In this first phase, the scholar will conduct an in-depth literature review to provide insight into the variables of interest, develop a survey in collaboration with the site staff, utilize RedCap or similar programing to administer the survey, analyze the data, dissemination, and completion of the survey by appropriate populations, survey data analysis, and preparing the data for a poster and oral presentation for the HVTN Network meeting. Analysis of the data will likely extend beyond the scholar's time at the CRS, so this scholar will need to have ample time to work on analysis and write-up for 6-8 months after leaving the site. Co-authorship in a manuscript is also possible if desired.

During the project the scholar will learn about the important principles of people- centered- participatory community engagement and GPP. The scholar will also gain an understanding of our local community culture and norms. For the scholar to gain maximum benefit from this project, the scholar will be expected to accompany the recruitment teams on outreach activities related to the project. This will enable the scholar to have a feel of how our local communities look and feel. The project will obtain data from a total of 150 participants. Which will include community-based key stakeholders, health care workers who provide direct SRH and pHIV services, and community members who are service users. The scholar will sit in on key stakeholder engagements related to the study and will be introduced to key stakeholders and their role on the project will be outlined to our key stakeholders.

The project hypothesizes that social norms celebrating intimacy, pleasure and sexuality are associated with greater sexual reproductive health (SRH) and HIV prevention (pHIV) services, while social norms reinforcing shame and guilt associated with sex will be associated with no or lower service use. This project will sample from both high HIV transmission Areas (HTAs) and low incidence areas to explore dominant attitudes regarding sexual identity, perceptions of shame, guilt, pleasure, and intimacy establish if differences between high HIV transmission areas and low prevalence areas towards SRH knowledge and perceptions exist. The project will use survey data to explore the social norms, sexuality, and engagement with sexual reproductive health (SRHs) and HIV prevention (pHIV) services. The project will target adults aged 18 to 65 years and the sample will include Adolescent Young Girls and Women, Health Care Workers (HCWs), and community-based stakeholders which will include faith-based organizations, learner support agents and traditional health practitioners with experience in SRH and pHIV services. After the data

collection phase, the scholar under supervision of a mentor and co-mentor, will analyze the demographic and survey questionnaire data by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The scholar throughout the duration of the project will be supervised and provided with the necessary support and capacity building. The capacity building will include training on local norms and culture to create awareness on the local norms and culture for the scholars to value and be sensitive to the unique culture. The data collected will be used to inform the development of Focus Group and In-depth Interview guides which will be used to collect qualitative data in phase 2 of this research project.

Project Summary:

One hundred and fifty (150) participants will be recruited to complete a brief demographic and survey questionnaire, which will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete. The survey will be adapted from previous SRH studies conducted in South Africa and Portugal and informed by the in-depth literature review conducted by the scholar. The questionnaire will consist of 2 sections: a demographics section and a section measuring knowledge of SRHs, and perceptions and experiences of SRH utilization. The data obtained from the project will inform our understanding of how social norms, guilt, shame, intimacy and pleasure influence opinions, perceptions, and sexual health decision making. Data collected will inform the development of focus group and in-depth interview guides for phase 2 of this project, where we will further explore associations found in the survey data. The quantitative and qualitative data will be used to inform program design and community engagement plans to enable researchers to design and implement plans that address the structural and environmental barriers to pHIV and SRHs.

Regulatory requirements for the project and plans for completing them:

- The proposal will be submitted to the University of Witwatersrand Human Research Ethics Committee for approval in January 2024. The time frame for approval to be granted is generally 3 months and by submitting the protocol in January 2024 this will ensure that approval is obtained before the study commences.
- The scholar will be required to complete Good Clinical Practice, Human Subject Protection and GPP training.

Expected Deliverables:

- In-depth understanding of local culture and traditions
- Utilization of Good Participatory Practices
- Conduct an in-depth literature review.
- Use literature review to develop a framework that describes the impact of social norms, guilt, shame, intimacy, and pleasure on SHR and pHIV services.
- Develop and administer survey and analyze survey data.
- Poster and Oral Presentation at the HVTN Full group Meeting: May 2025
- Use of data to develop a report on what needs to be explored in Phase 2 (qualitative component)
- Publication of the findings

Project Contact Person(s) (Name, Email):

- Blossom Makhubalo, BMakhubalo@auruminstitute.org
- Dr Michele Andrasik, mandrasik@fredhutch.org