

Mixed Methods Study of Implementation, Outcomes, and Costs of Support Clubs for Haitian Children and Adolescents Living with HIV

Helping children and young adults living with HIV adhere to antiretroviral therapy (ART) regimens and maintain viral suppression remains a critical challenge. Community support groups have emerged as a promising strategy and have been documented in a variety of settings for adults and children. Some are designed to relieve congestion at overcrowded health facilities and dispense medications; others promote patient self-management; while others seek to reduce loss-to-follow-up and sensitize members to a variety of health topics.^{1,2}

In Haiti, which has the largest population of people living with HIV in the Caribbean region, nearly half (49 percent) of HIV-positive children aged 0–14 years are on ART.^{3,4} While the percentage has increased significantly in recent years, children and young adults living with HIV continue to face many challenges including adhering to treatment regimens.

Caris Foundation, through the U. S. Agency for International Development's *Bien Et ak Sante Timoun* project and its successor *Project Impact Youth*, supports early infant diagnosis services that include tracking and follow-up of HIV-positive children at more than 130 hospitals throughout all of Haiti's 10 departments. At 26 of those facilities, it supports hospital-linked psychosocial support

groups, referred to as Kids Clubs, for children and young adults living with HIV. These clubs are intended to help ensure that HIV-positive children stay in contact with the hospital and serve as a conduit for delivery of other services to them and members of their households.

The Kids Club program provides a promising platform for further study of adherence and support groups among children and young adults. Given that the clubs have been operating for more than five years, much can be learned from the project's experiences in implementing them. Project SOAR's study will systematically and critically examine program operations and costs as well as the program's effects on club participants and their families. Findings will help inform future programming in Haiti and globally.

OUR RESEARCH

The overall goal of the study is to characterize the Kids Club program that Caris Foundation has established with the aim of providing evidence and learning on:

- **Kids Clubs:** history, how they operate, costs of operation, programming and implementation, factors contributing to their successes, challenges that have arisen in implementing the program, and approaches to improve their implementation.
- **Kids Club participants:** who participates in the clubs and what effect their participation has had on their lives including their schooling and use of health services, adherence to ART, viral suppression, and general well-being; and what effect their participation has had on their caregivers and families.

We will examine similarities and differences among the three types of clubs, which are defined by age, i.e., 9–12 years, 13–17 years, and 18 years and older.

Research Partners: Palladium, Société d'Études et de Formation en Information Stratégique, and Caris Foundation

Location: Haiti [nationally]

Study Duration: 2018–2019

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The mixed-methods research design includes four components: 1) a “program/institutional” history on the establishment and operation of the Kids Club program; 2) quantitative analyses to compare participants and non-participants in Kids Clubs, 3) an in-depth study of selected Kids Clubs, their participants, and parent/caregivers; and 4) a cost analysis to determine the costs of establishing and operating a Kids Club.

RESEARCH UTILIZATION

The study team will use a variety of approaches to foster uptake of research findings, including:

- Convening a research advisory committee to monitor study implementation throughout the course of the study and advise on potential technical and ethical issues as they may arise. The committee will be made up of representatives from the Haitian HIV and AIDS research and program communities and the global pediatric HIV and AIDS community.
- Conducting a mid-study webinar to review and discuss emerging results, highlight key findings, and identify areas of further exploration.
- Holding a dissemination and response planning workshop to present study results, validate findings with regard to stakeholder experiences and perspectives, review and elaborate recommendations, and develop actions plans to improve pediatric HIV and AIDS policies and programs based on study results and recommendations. The workshop will engage representatives from the Ministry of Health/Programme National de Lutte contre les IST/VIH/Sida (National Program to Fight STIs/HIV/AIDS), PEPFAR/Haiti, other funding agencies, Project Impact Youth, other pediatric HIV/AIDS implementing partners, the Haitian HIV/AIDS research community, and advocacy organizations.

Viewing results through a gender lens

Considerable evidence shows that girls and boys, young women and young men have different life experiences and are affected differently by HIV and AIDS. The study will collect data to help identify these differential experiences and needs among Kids Club participants, characterize how clubs address age- and gender-specific needs, and explore gender-differentiated effects on female and male children and youth. Recognizing the gender dimensions of caregiver roles, we will aim to interview couples, where appropriate and feasible, to gain a better understanding of how both female and male caregivers characterize and assess their child’s participation in a club. We will highlight gender themes and considerations in the presentation of our findings and recommendations.

REFERENCES

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Population Council leads the Project SOAR consortium in collaboration with Avenir Health, Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, the Johns Hopkins University, Palladium, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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