

NIMH Collaborative HIV/STD Prevention Trial in Peru

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Project Description: The NIMH Collaborative HIV/STD Prevention Trial is a randomized study designed to test a community-level popular opinion leader (C-POL) preventive intervention in five international sites. UCSF collaborates with UCLA and Cayetano Heredia University in Lima to test the intervention in Peru. UCSF, UCLA and the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (UPCH) are collaborating to test this intervention among men and women in lower income neighborhoods. The study is being conducted in Lima, Trujillo and Chiclayo, three coastal cities in Peru. The aims of the study are:

- To assess prevalence and incidence of HIV and STDs and risk behaviors in the target populations aged 18-40 in 20 low-income neighborhoods.
- To design and implement a community-level prevention intervention in 10 of those neighborhoods by training and monitoring CPOLS for a period of two years to promote HIV and STDs risk reduction.
- To assess the impact of the intervention in intervention neighborhoods compared to control sites.

We have completed collection of behavioral and biological data for the baseline and two annual follow up assessments. The intervention also has been completed.

Significance: Community-level interventions, in contrast with individual interventions, focus on affecting the entire community in order to promote change in norms and risk. This study is testing the CPOL model in different countries, adapting and tailoring the intervention to cultural contexts and with populations different from which the model was originally designed for in the US.

Interesting Findings: The study venues (low income barrios), provide opportunities for social interaction in bars, pool halls, sports fields, street corners, and hair salons. Much of this interaction occurs at night, accompanied by alcohol and drug use, which frequently leads to sexual activity and risk. Study population segments are (1) “esquineros” (men who hang out at street corners) mostly single, unemployed men, who frequently engage in petty theft and gang activity, drug use and dealing, and transactional sex with gay men; (2) “movidas” (“loose women”), who, contrary to social norms around female behavior, have multiple partners; (3) men identified as gay or transvestites, who often work or own hair salons and may sell sex outside the barrio; within the barrio they will frequently have sex with young esquineros and may become their partners, supporting them financially. For the men, we found that HIV, herpes, and syphilis are epidemic among MSM. Chlamydia and gonorrhea are prevalent among esquineros. For the women, we found that sexuality is strongly conditioned by the perception of “being in love”, particularly in poor areas. Among monogamous women, their concept of love, faithfulness and a steady permanent partnership place them at a higher vulnerability for HIV and STDs.

Project End Date: August 2007