



Afrique Rehabilitation and Research Consultants NPC  
Registered in terms of section 14 of the Companies Act, 2008  
Registration No: 2015/184619/08

**Research Report Summary:** In the Daily Life of Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) with Disabilities – *evidence gathering for AGYW policy and advocacy* Project

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) have emerged as a priority group, particularly in the realm of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Exacerbated by gender inequalities, power imbalances and gender-restrictive norms, AGYW face stigma and discrimination increasing their vulnerability and risk to a number of SRHR-related issues, including violence and HIV infection. In South Africa, the rates of transmission and HIV infection are higher among AGYW when compared to their male counterparts. Among the group, AGYW with disabilities have been shown to have significantly greater vulnerability and risk for HIV infection and violence as well as poorer sexual health outcomes and access to SRHR-related services as compared to their peers without disabilities. Despite this they remain largely excluded and invisible in programmes, policies and services targeted at the SRHR needs of AGYW. This project sought to address this gap by gathering evidence on the needs and issues of AGYW with disabilities, as a means to amplify their voices and to gather evidence that could be used for advocacy towards policy change; thereby making a positive difference to the health, well-being and lives of AGYW with disabilities in South Africa. Facilitation was conducted by peer supporters (young women with disabilities themselves) to gather information from participants in a safe and supportive environment. The group consisted of 148 AGYW with disabilities from two provinces in South Africa (viz, the Eastern Cape and Gauteng) with an average age of 20.5 years. Findings from the project highlighted that majority of the group were unemployed (68.6%) and had only completed some secondary schooling (41.1%). AGYW with limited economic options and poor education have been shown to engage in risky behaviours, including risky sexual behaviours, and have increased risk to exploitation and poorer sexual health outcomes. 41.7% of participants scored 25% and below on HIV knowledge while 56.7% highlighted they engage in sexual intercourse. The average age of first sexual intercourse among the group was 17.3 years. Regarding violence, 15.7% reported experiences of rape while experiences of intimate-partner physical (19.3%) and sexual (20.7%) violence in the last 12 months from the commencement of facilitation were also highlighted. Lastly, it was found that the majority (86.4%) do not make use of or access services. Incidentally, these findings are worrying, considering AGYW with disabilities still lack access to SRHR-related services and comprehensive sexuality education in South Africa. In view of the gravity of the issue and increased vulnerability of AGYW with disabilities to SRHR-related issues, it is recommended that more evidence be gathered on the priority areas and challenges AGYW with disabilities face in order to provide for evidence-based and targeted interventions. Secondly, more focus needs to be given to developing combination interventions focused on the social, economic and demographic determinants of HIV infection and violence amongst this vulnerable group. Lastly, more provision needs to be made towards increasing the inclusion and access of AGYW with disabilities to SRHR-related services, including justice-seeking and counselling services.





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The project was funded by Her Voice Fund (HVF), a Global Fund project funded by ViiV Healthcare Positive Action and implemented by GNP+ and Y+ (Global Network of Young People Living with HIV).

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