The Population Council: Evidence to enhance global health and development

Population Council

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The Population Council strives to enhance the health and well-being of people around the world by addressing critical issues that impede health, social, and economic development. Our work allows couples to plan their families and chart their futures; we help people avoid HIV infection and access life-saving HIV services; we empower girls to protect themselves and have a say in their own lives.

The Population Council conducts research and informs policy in nearly 50 countries worldwide. Through our biomedical, social science, and public health research, we change the way the world thinks about health and development. We build local capacity in developing countries to design and implement health programs and collaborate with local researchers, organizations, and governments. Our work delivers solutions that lead to more effective policies, programs, and technologies to save and improve lives.

FACTS AT-A-GLANCE

- Nonprofit, nongovernmental organization founded in 1952
- 15 global offices and 600 staff members conducting research in nearly 50 countries
- Conducts field and desk-based public health and social science research to enhance policies and programs to stop the spread of HIV; improve sexual and reproductive health; empower girls and women; and lift the most vulnerable out of poverty
- Home to biomedical research facilities conducting basic, translational, and clinical research to understand reproductive health and disease transmission and develop new products to prevent unintended pregnancy, HIV infection, and other STIs

“MOST [NGOs] CLAIM TO PROMOTE CHANGE FOR THE BETTER; THE POPULATION COUNCIL ACTUALLY HAS HARD EVIDENCE OF HAVING CHANGED THE LIVES AND EXPECTATIONS OF HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE.”

—THE LANCET
## OUR PROGRAMS

### HIV/AIDS

The Population Council’s research spans the biological and behavioral continuum of HIV by exploring the cellular science of the virus, supporting people living with HIV in accessing treatment, and determining the most effective prevention strategies. Our research focuses on expanding access to care and services for people affected by HIV/AIDS, especially underserved communities, and developing innovative biomedical products. Highlights include:

- The Council was among the first to document the HIV prevalence and incidence rates among some of the most vulnerable populations in sub-Saharan Africa, including men who have sex with men. Our researchers are using these findings to help inform national strategies for effectively meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and to promote dialogue in countries where discriminatory laws and policies exist.

- The Council’s Project SOAR (Supporting Operational AIDS Research) is generating critical evidence to increase coverage and the quality of HIV services and improve HIV prevention, care, and treatment policies and programs around the world.

- Our work under the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored and Safe) initiative helps adolescent girls and young women in countries with high HIV burdens achieve a safer, healthier future.

### REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The Population Council conducts research to increase access to sexual and reproductive health information, supplies, and services. With a focus on advancing rights, equity, and quality, the Council develops contraceptive products, generates evidence, and delivers program and policy solutions that protect and promote women’s health and well-being and encourage men’s supportive engagement. Highlights include:

- The Council strategically generates, translates, and uses evidence through projects like the STEP UP (Strengthening Evidence for Programming on Unintended Pregnancy) Research Programme Consortium and the Evidence Project to address unintended pregnancy and improve family planning policies, programs, and practices.

- Our groundbreaking research on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has shaped national, regional, and international policy and practices, such as the creation of the first SGBV national policy in Zambia and the World Health Organization’s SGBV guidelines. The Council continues to lead the Africa Regional SGBV Network—a multi-country, multi-partner prevention and response research initiative in East and Southern Africa.

- In Nigeria, Council research on training health providers on the administration of magnesium sulfate resulted in a 40% reduction in maternal mortality. Today, the Council’s Ending Eclampsia project continues to save mothers’ lives in Nigeria, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Pakistan by expanding access to proven, underutilized interventions and commodities to prevent, detect, and treat pre-eclampsia and eclampsia.

- Two decades of Council research have revealed the drivers, global prevalence, and most effective interventions to reduce female genital mutilation/cutting. Our leadership in the world’s largest, Africa-led research program on the practice continues to drive evidence-based strategies to prevent the practice and improve related programs and policies.

### POVERTY, GENDER, AND YOUTH

The Council carries out research and programs that improve the lives of vulnerable girls. We focus on identifying best practices, refining the critical elements of girl-centered programs, and helping governments formulate the most effective, evidence-based policies to improve girls’ lives. The Council has designed and evaluated programs that have successfully delayed age at marriage, increased girls’ savings and social support, improved their literacy, and returned girls to formal schooling. Highlights include:

- In Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Tanzania, Council programs have successfully delayed child marriage through sustainable strategies that engaged and empowered girls, their families, and their communities. These strategies—including school support, conditional economic transfers, and community conversations—are being further evaluated and scaled up.

- The Council conducts research, evaluates program impact, and provides resources and technical assistance to help place gender, rights, and empowerment at the heart of sex and HIV education, notably through the development of the It’s All One comprehensive sexuality education curricula and resources. Council research found that comprehensive sexuality education programs that address gender norms and unequal power in relationships are five times more likely to reduce STIs and unintended pregnancies than programs that do not.

- For decades we have published two highly cited, peer-reviewed journals (*Population and Development Review* and *Studies in Family Planning*) that shape programs, policies, and research methodologies.
The Population Council's Center for Biomedical Research (CBR)—located at New York’s Rockefeller University—is a vibrant hub of scientific investigation and product development. For more than 60 years, research conducted in the CBR laboratories has addressed critical questions in reproductive health and HIV prevention, and supported the development of innovative products that help protect the health and well-being of millions of women, men, and young people worldwide.

CBR researchers pioneered the field of long-acting, reversible contraception (LARC), developing IUDs such as ParaGard® (the copper-T IUD) and Mirena®; contraceptive implants; and more recently, vaginal rings and male contraceptives. The work of CBR has allowed millions of women and couples to plan their families and has informed an entire field of product development. Today, more than 170 million people worldwide are using contraceptive technologies developed at CBR or based on Council products.

The need for innovative new tools to protect against unplanned pregnancies, HIV, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is greater than ever. CBR researchers are working to develop the next-generation of safe, effective contraception and HIV and STI prevention options.

The Council’s new Girl Innovation, Research, and Learning Center (GIRL Center) is a global research center that generates, synthesizes, and translates evidence to transform the lives of adolescent girls. The GIRL Center is building the largest data repository on adolescents, curating the Council’s data on more than 120,000 adolescents along with data from other organizations to provide practical insights on how girls’ lives evolve through their adolescent years, and what interventions are most effective and cost-efficient at delivering the best outcomes. By challenging ourselves to prioritize investments in what works—and to disengage from what doesn’t—we can better direct limited resources to supporting evidence-based solutions that have been shown to improve girls’ lives.
The Population Council confronts critical health and development issues—from stopping the spread of HIV to improving reproductive health and ensuring that young people lead full and productive lives. Through biomedical, social science, and public health research in 50 countries, we work with our partners to deliver solutions that lead to more effective policies, programs, and technologies that improve lives around the world. Established in 1952 and headquartered in New York, the Council is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization governed by an international board of trustees.

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