

# Health Systems Navigators - improving access to public sector HIV and sexual and reproductive health services among female sex workers in KwaZulu-Natal

8<sup>th</sup> South African Aids Conference 2017

Letitia Greener\*, Ross Greener, Mags Beksinska, Kedibone Sithole, Yves Lafort, Jenni Smit

\*MatCH Research Unit (Maternal, Adolescent, and Child Health Research Unit),  
University of the Witwatersrand, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology,  
Faculty of Health Sciences

Email: [Lgreener@matchresearch.co.za](mailto:Lgreener@matchresearch.co.za)

**MRU** | **MatCH Research Unit**  
Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of the Witwatersrand



**Diagonal Interventions to Fast Forward Enhanced Reproductive Health**

# Background

- Female sex workers (FSWs) are recognized as a key population due to their increased risk for HIV acquisition and sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- This vulnerability is largely attributed to sexual practices, but is compounded by the social and structural barriers such as experiences of prejudice discrimination and gender based violence due to the criminalisation and stigmatisation of sex work
- Strengthened peer support and supportive linkages to services are associated with an increased willingness among FSWs to engage in testing, care, treatment, and subsequent improvements in adherence

# Background

- Only one in three sex workers (SW) in Africa receive adequate HIV prevention services, and fewer have access to HIV treatment, care and support
- A national health survey (2013-2014) found that FSWs in Durban were not being reached by peer educators with only 1 in 7 FSWs reporting being in contact with HIV peer educators in the last year
- Interventions that enhance healthcare seeking among this population and reduce barriers to access are needed

# Background - DIFFER: Diagonal Interventions to Fast-Forward Enhanced Reproductive Health

- Project sites: Mombasa, Kenya; Tete Province, Mozambique; Mysore, India; Durban, **South Africa**
- Time frame: October 2011 – September 2016
- To improve SRH services for women (both general population women and female sex workers) by implementing a ‘diagonal’ strategy
- By identifying and testing a package of services that incorporates both:
  - ‘horizontal’ health systems strengthening for maximum population-level impact and
  - more targeted ‘vertical’ approaches to improve access for populations most at risk, such as *sex workers*

# Strengthening referrals between Clinics and NGOs

- The Health systems navigation approach is a combined **peer support** and **outreach activity** that aims to assist **patients navigating** complex health-care arrangements
- HSN programmes have expanded into the realm of HIV/AIDS and have been shown to have:
  - success in increasing engagement and
  - retention in HIV health care
- Designed to link SRH needs as well as HIV/AIDS services more effectively with a key focus on:
  - Community outreach
  - Client level interventions
- As '**service extenders**', navigators aimed to strengthen referral systems and minimise situations where clients are lost when accessing SRH and HIV services

# Who were the Navigators

- Three, female **Community Health Workers** (or equivalent level) were recruited from the local communities
- **They were trained in:**
  - Monitoring referrals
  - Building rapport with clients
  - Client confidentiality
  - Providing health talks and record-keeping
  - Female and male condom demonstration
  - Information on clinic services: STIs, Pap smears, Family planning, HIV testing and counselling
- **Training was provided by:**
  - Non-Government Organisations
  - Community healthcare workers
  - Healthcare providers from clinics

# Community outreach



## Intervention activities: SRH packs

- For FSW's hesitant to go to a public healthcare facility *'just to get condoms'*, peers ensured steady supply by administering SRH packs on a monthly basis
- These packs included:
  - Male and Female condoms,
  - Home pregnancy testing kits,
  - A menstrual cup
  - Information brochures (HIV, STIs, FP, testing and treatment) and contact information for FSW services / support groups / helplines



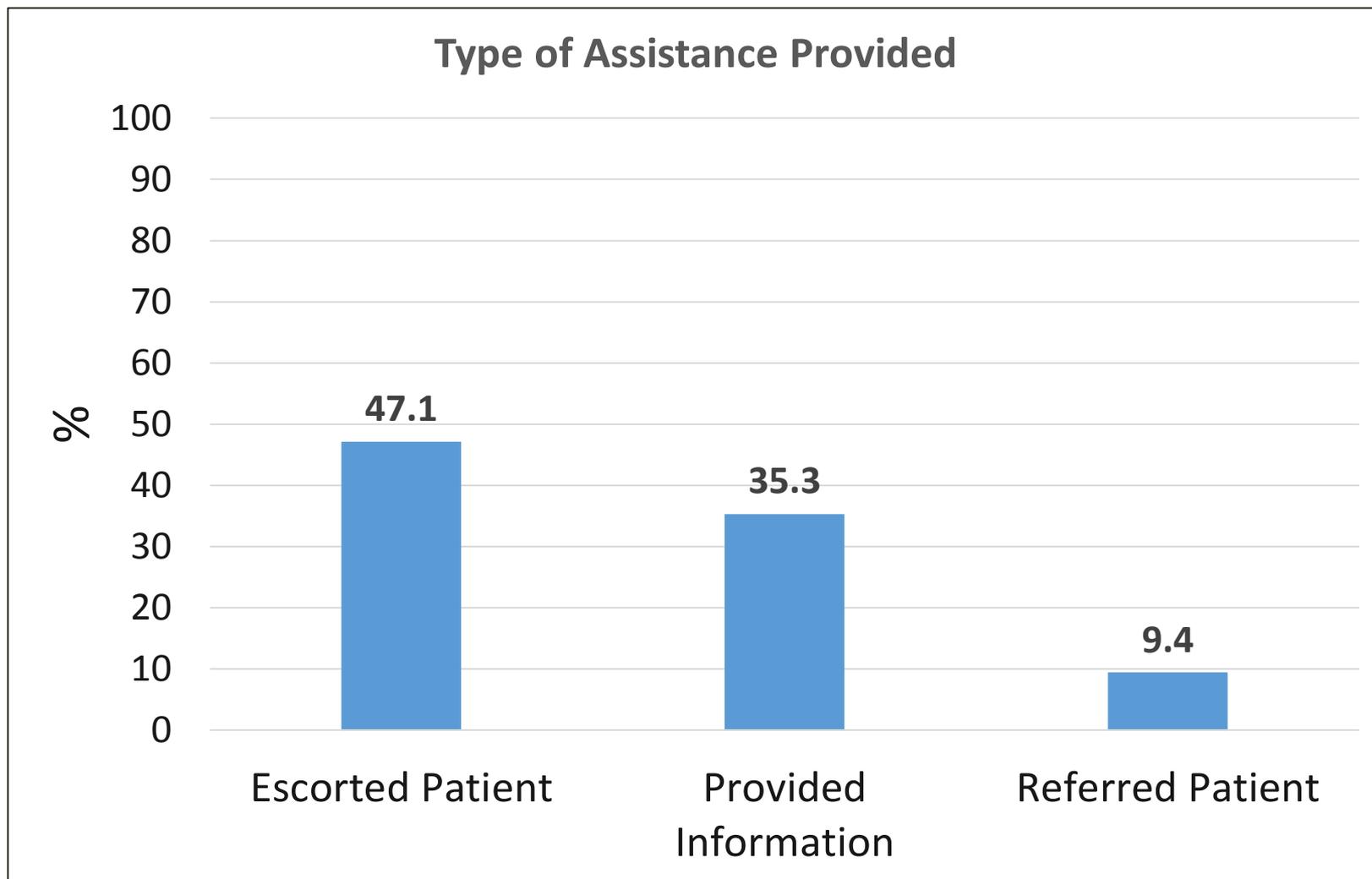
# Monitoring and evaluation of HSN Pilot

- Evaluations were completed by the Navigators monthly
- The Navigators used:
  - Monitoring log books
  - Client follow-up logs
  - Diaries
  - IEC material distribution logs
  - Logs of their health education talks
- Interviewer administered questionnaires were completed with women and FSWs at the end of the pilot

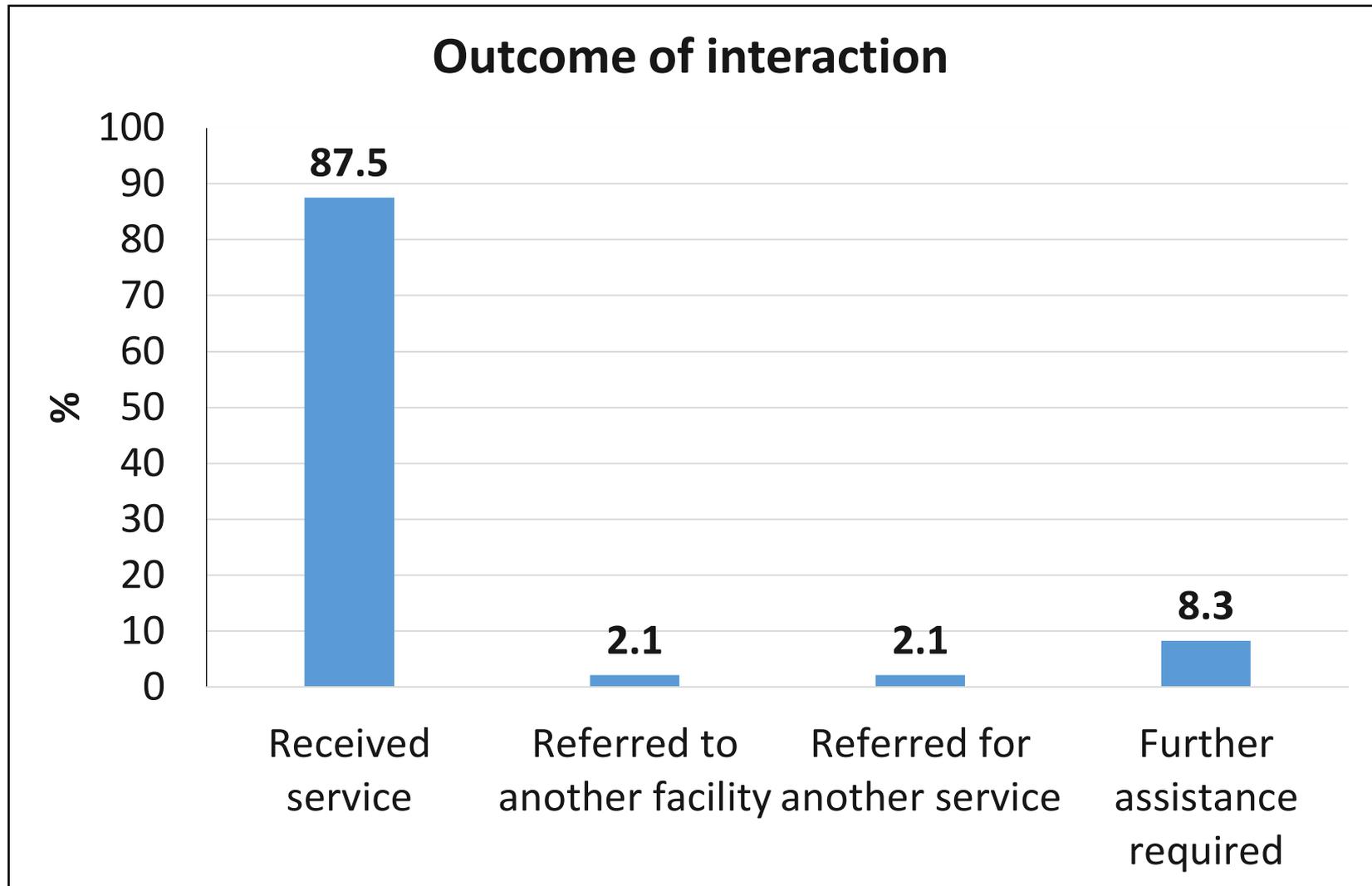
# Findings: Navigator logs

- Assisted 436 clients attending the healthcare facility over 18 months
- 104 (24%) identified themselves as FSW
- Clients assisted largely attended the facility for family planning (new method or repeat) or for STI services

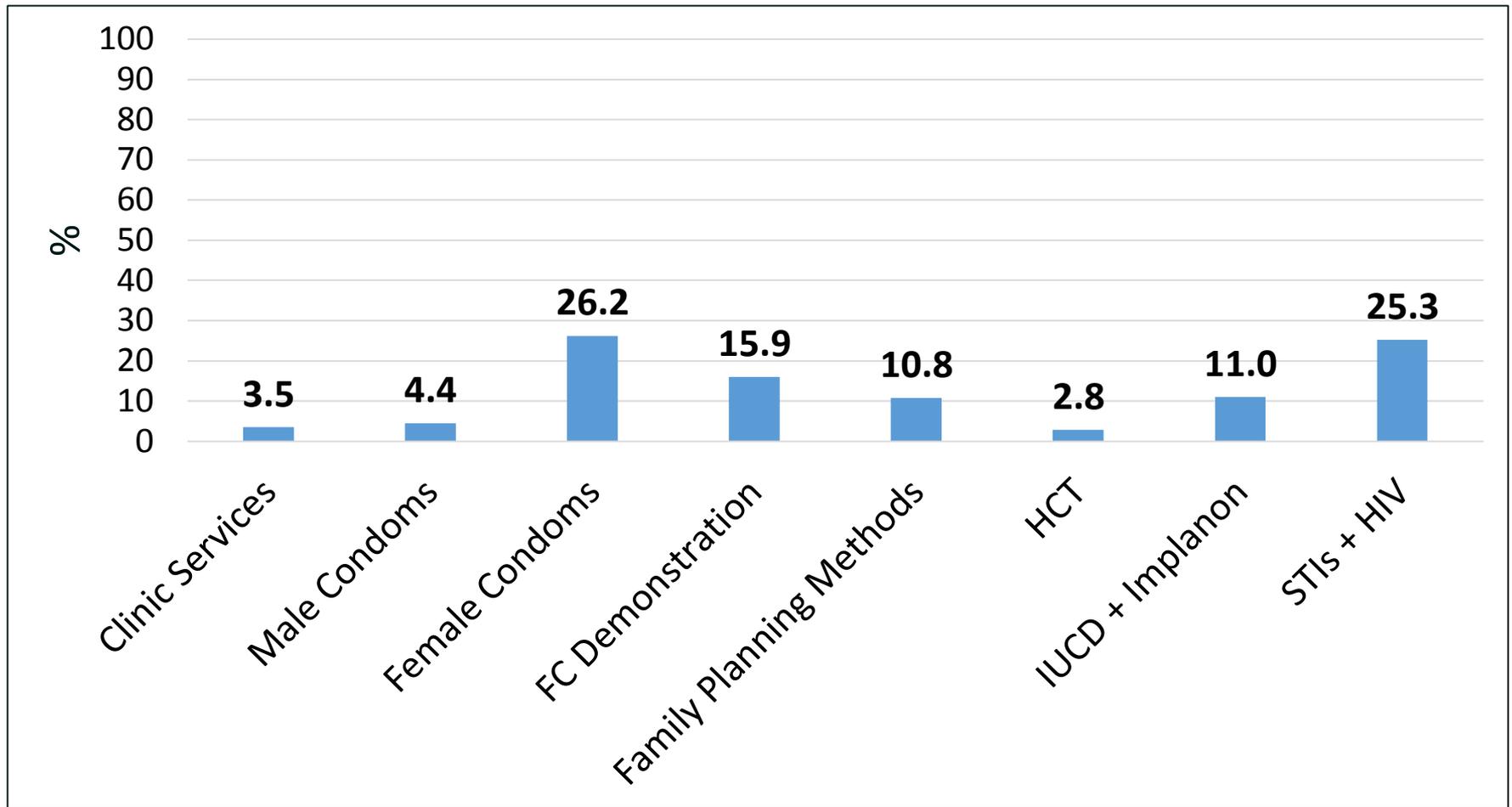
# Findings: Navigator logs



# Findings: Navigator logs



# Findings: Facility health talks

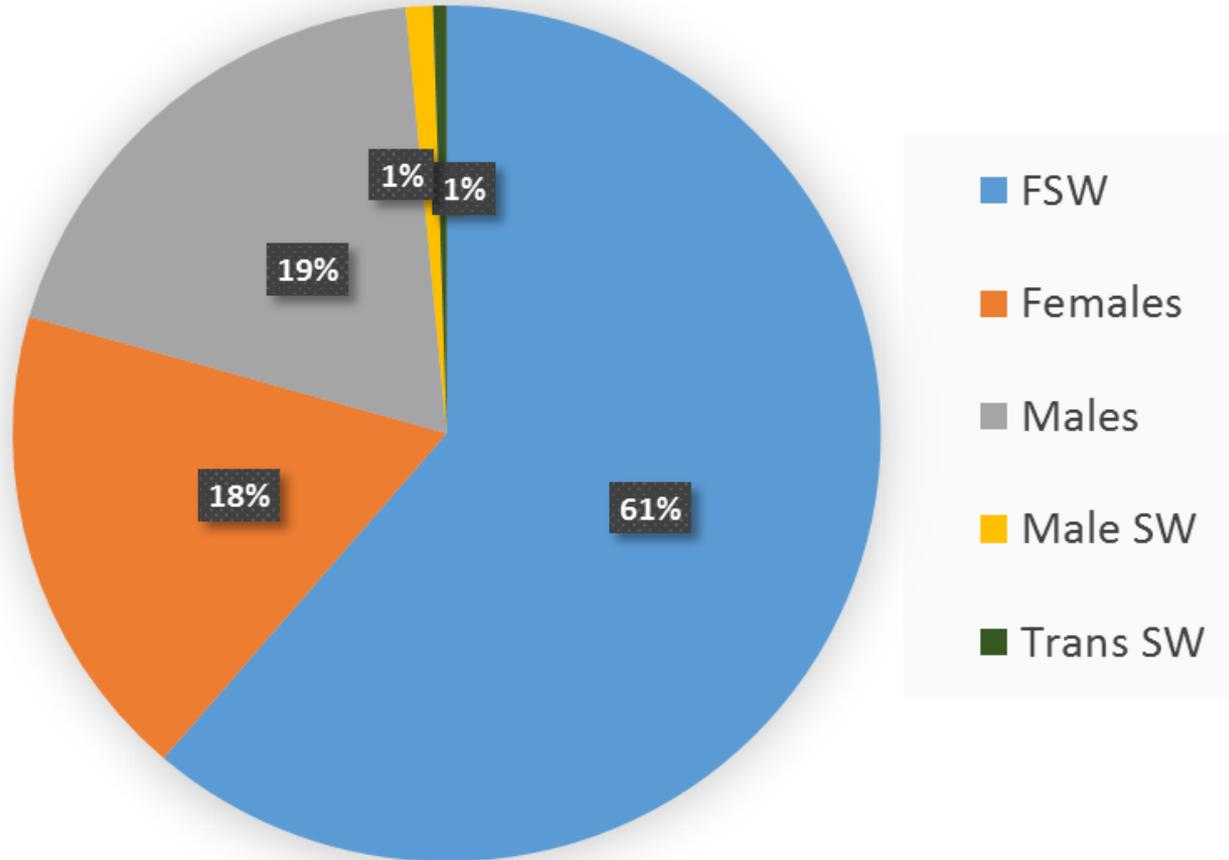


**Total number of health talks within the facility: 426**

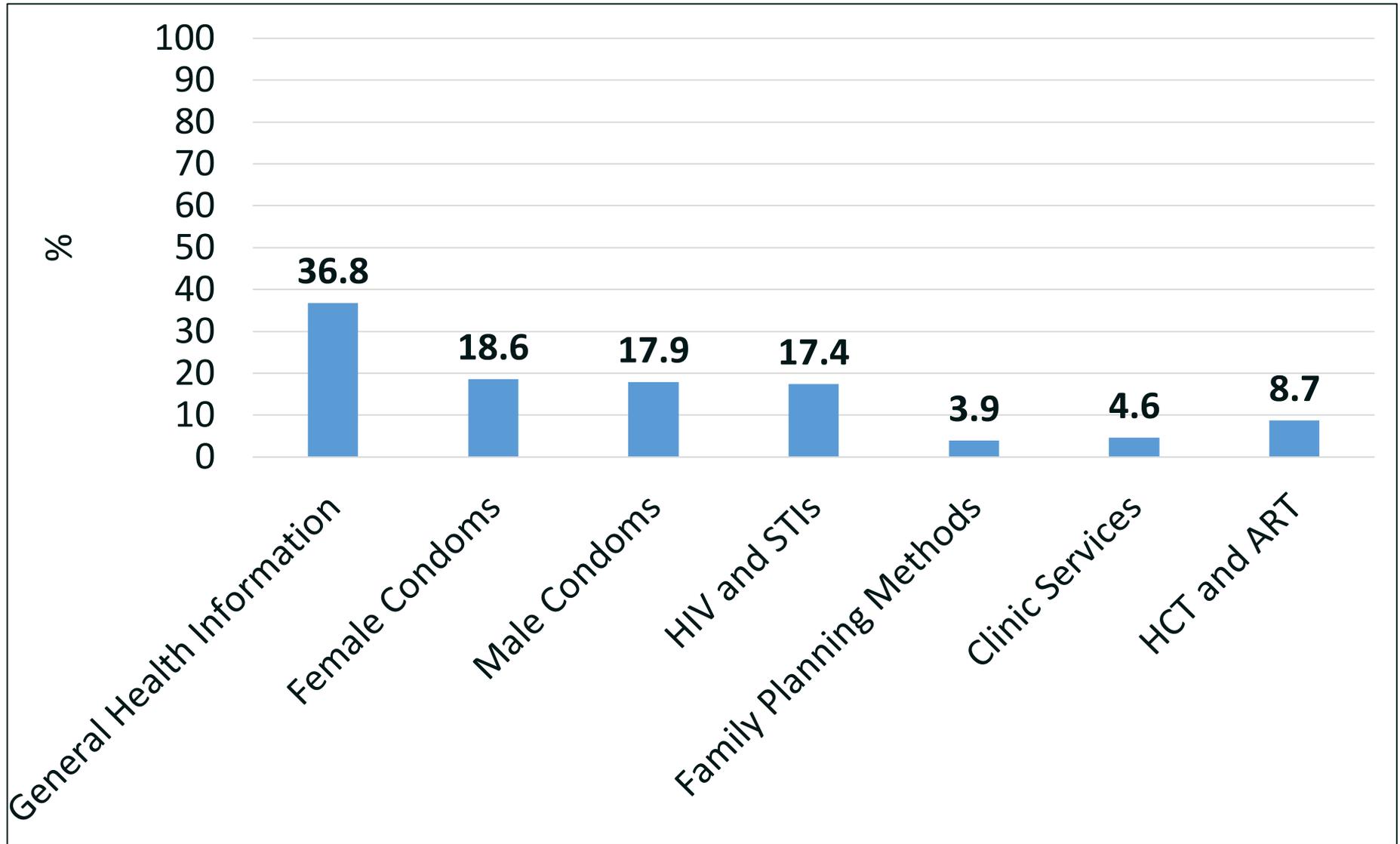
# Community activities

- Average number of community members reached per month: 250
- Many attended multiple talks or participated repeatedly in monthly community activities

Outreach Attendees



# Community activities



# Discussion

- Overall, the pilot was positively received by both patients and providers
- Positive response from providers:
  - *“the clients and the staff can approach and talk to them about anything, they are there to help.”*
- This intervention has the potential to:
  - Ease some of the burden created by staff shortages and high client loads,
  - Improve adherence to healthcare
  - Improve FSWs capacity to access and request services whilst encouraging the adoption of less risky behaviours
- HSN interventions that support effective HIV prevention methods, and are tailored for FSWs, could reduce the epidemic in the longer term

# Acknowledgements

- Financial support for this project is gratefully acknowledged as well as the institutions that contributed to project development and implementation. The project funder is the 7th Framework programme of the European Community, grant agreement number 282542
- The DIFFER project team members
- DoH (Provincial & District) and the providers and clients at participating facilities
- Our partners, Lifeline, Sisonke and TB HIV Care

# References

1. Scorgie, F., et al., *Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Behavioral Risk Factors of Female Sex Workers in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review*. AIDS Behav, 2011.
2. UNAIDS., *The Report of the UNAIDS Advisory Group on HIV and Sex Work*. Geneva. 2011.
3. WHO, UNAIDS, and UNICEF, *Towards universal access: scaling up priority HIV/AIDS interventions in the health sector: progress report 2008*. 2008
4. Kate Shannon, S.A.S., Shira M Goldenberg, Putu Duff, Peninah Mwangi, Maia Rusakova, Sushena Reza-Paul, Joseph Lau, Kathleen Deering, Michael R Pickles, Marie-Claude Boily., *Global epidemiology of HIV among female sex workers: influence of structural determinants*. Lancet, 2015. 385(9962): p. 55-71.
5. South African National AIDS Council and SWEAT. *Estimating the size of the sex worker population in South Africa*. 2013.
6. Baral, S., Beyrer, C., Muessig, K., Poteat, T., Wirtz, A. L., Decker, M. R., Sherman, S. G., and Kerrigan, D., *Burden of HIV among female sex workers in low-income and middle-income countries: a systematic review and meta-analysis*. Lancet infectious diseases, 2012. 12(7): p. 538-549.
7. Shisana, O., Rehle, T, Simbayi LC, Zuma, K, Jooste, S, Zungu N, Labadarios, D, and D.e.a. Onoya, *South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence and Behaviour Survey, 2012*. Cape Town, HSRC Press., 2014.
8. UCSF, Anova Health Institute & WRHI (2015). *South African Health Monitoring Study (SAHMS), Final Report: The Integrate Biological and Behavioural Survey among Female Sex Workers, South Africa 2013-2014*. San Francisco: UCSF.
9. Bradford J, Coleman S, and Cunningham W. 2007. *HIV System Navigation: An Emerging Model to Improve HIV Care Access*. AIDS Patient Care and STDs, 21, Suppl. 1: 49-58.
10. Kennedy, CE, Spaulding AB, Brickley DB, et al. 2010. *Linking sexual and reproductive health and HIV interventions: a systematic review*. Journal of the International AIDS Society, 13:26.