



**Introduction**

Zambia is a low-income country in southern Africa with an estimated population of approximately 19 million people. Although accurate data about drug use in Zambia are unavailable, it is widely recognized that drug misuse is an ongoing and growing problem, especially in poorer communities. Drug use is a highly stigmatized in Zambia, punitive laws exist for minor drug-related offences, and drug related crime is high. However, few drug treatment and harm reduction services exist.

**Description of Interventions(s)**

Decisive Minds (DM) is a service for people who use drugs in Lusaka, Zambia. The organization provides: harm reduction information for people who use drugs; HIV prevention and treatment; drug use and mental health counselling; and advocacy on drug-related issues. We are working in five local communities where drug use and associated violent crimes are high. We engaged with key stakeholders (religious/community leaders) and ran workshops with people who use drugs to educate about drug-use related harms (including blood borne virus (BBV) transmission). We also worked with the police to help find community-led solutions to drug-related crime.

**Methods**

The study used Key informants Interviews as well as Focus group discussions to discuss issues regarding the effectiveness of the interventions. Where possible case studies were also used to validate the group discussions findings.

*10 Focus group Interviews were conducted: 5 for those below 19years , and 5 for those above 19 years.*

*Key Informant Interviews included 2 with Project Officers, 1 With Drug Enforcement , 1 with psychiatric department*

**Data collection tool:** Key Informants Interview Guides, Focus Group Discussion Guides and Observational Check list

**Study Site:** Lusaka Districts within Lusaka provinces of Zambia

**Results (continued)**

- Evidence from the study demonstrated that the program is reducing stigma and discrimination against people who use drugs in the community; some people who use drugs have been reunited with their families as a result.
- Others are now accessing services to address health needs (including HIV treatment and mental health counselling), and some have accessed skills training to help find employment. Some participants have also reported drug-related crime rates have reduced in their communities.
- Stakeholders from both law enforcement and government have appreciated the innovation of using our innovation to reach out to those who need help
- Our intervention effort through advocacy has collaboratively resulted into the establishment of a rehab center at the highest tertiary hospital in Zambia. This has never happened in the 50 years of independence and it will provide a complementary effort to the only psychiatry or rehab center in Zambia that is public owned.

**Discussion**

- Decisive minds efforts have demonstrated that use of community led structures in the implementation of strategies aimed at curbing organized crimes is key.
- Establishing linkages between the community and established law enforcement structures has proven to be more effective than working in isolation

**Conclusion and next steps:**

- Moving forward, DM is continuing to engage with law enforcement officers to advocate for less punitive and more humane responses to drug use (e.g., arbitrary arrests). DM is also planning to extend their work with local media, to address the stigmatizing narratives that are prevalent in the community.

**References**

1. Fox MP. Retention of adult patients on antiretroviral therapy in low-and middle-income countries: systematic review and meta-analysis 2008–2013. *J Acquir Immune Defic Syndr*. 2015;69(1):98.
2. Zandoni BC, Sibaya T, Cairns C, Lammert S, Haberer JE. Higher retention and viral suppression with adolescent-focused HIV clinic in South Africa. *PLoS One*. 2017;12(12):e0190260. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0190260>.