Rakai Health Sciences Program
Improved Health Through High Impact Research

THE RHSP NEWSLETTER

MAY-AUGUST 2026 | THE OFFICIAL RHSP NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 12

Learning beyond the classroom: Students' experience of research at RHSP

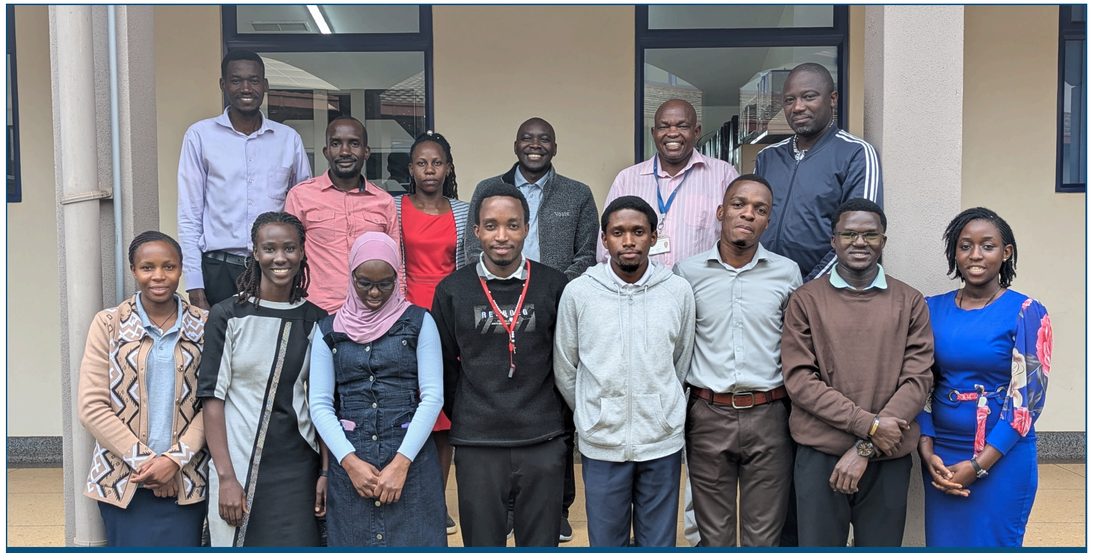


Western University students during their visit to Ddimo landing site in Kyotera District.

Between May- August 2026, the Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP) came alive with a season of learning, discovery, and collaboration as students, interns, and fellows from Uganda and beyond joined the Program to experience public health and research beyond the classroom.

The period brought together a diverse group of learners, including national interns from institutions such as Makerere University, Muni University, Victoria University, Kampala International University, Makerere University Business School, Uganda Martyrs University and Kyambogo University. RHSP also welcomed visiting students from Western University Canada and hosted Dr. Mohamed Jalloh, a Fogarty fellow, creating a rich environment for knowledge exchange, mentorship, and professional growth.

For many of the students, the experience was an opportunity to see firsthand how research translates into real-world impact.



Some of the students from the national universities pose for a group photo with Dr. Godfrey Kigozi (Executive Director), Dr. Robert Sekubugu (Deputy Research Director), and some of their RHSP supervisors.

Throughout the internship season, students worked alongside RHSP teams across different departments, gaining practical exposure to research, data management, information technology, communication, research studies and other areas of the Program's work.

The Western University students, in particular, had the opportunity to interact with research teams and participate in community field visits, giving them a closer look at how prevention, care, treatment and research are implemented within agrarian and fishing communities.

For Dr. Mohamed S. Jalloh, a clinician and public health professional from Sierra Leone who joined RHSP as a Fogarty fellow, the scale of the Program was one of the most striking aspects of his experience.

"I saw a very massive lab, a data center, and other areas which show that things have been going on on a bigger scale than I was expecting," Dr. Jalloh says.

His observation reflects what many learners discovered during their time at RHSP: that behind the research findings and publications is a collaborative ecosystem of people, technology, infrastructure, and communities working together to generate evidence and improve health.



Western University students touring Nalubaale coffee farm in Kyotera District.



Joel Musiitwa, Procurement Officer, guiding Isaac on some procurement processes

For the national interns, the experience was equally transformative. Beyond acquiring technical competencies, many discovered lessons that will continue to shape their professional journeys.

Isaac Lwanga says his time at RHSP strengthened his communication, teamwork, management and documentation skills. However, one lesson stood out above the rest.

“The biggest lesson for me has been the importance of value for money. I have come to understand that you have to think about value for money in everything you do. That is something I will carry with me into my career.”

For Christine Nabayiga, a student at Makerere Business School, the people she encountered became an important part of her internship experience.

“The people here are very hospitable. Personally, I find it easy to talk to everyone. I don't have that fear of wondering whether someone will be difficult to approach. Everyone has been welcoming, and my experience has proved that,” she explained.

Her experience highlights another important part of RHSP’s internship environment: creating a workplace where young professionals feel comfortable asking questions, interacting with colleagues, and learning from experienced teams.



Joan Nankya and Prossy Nantale (HR team) pose for a group picture with interns during the onboarding exercise



Matovu and Kalungi (IT interns) getting familiar with the immersion cooling system .

For Matovu, an IT intern, the experience challenged his assumptions about the role of technology in a health research organisation.

“Initially, I thought that because RHSP focuses on health, IT might not be as crucial. But that perception changed completely. I discovered that RHSP has a very advanced IT environment and uses sophisticated technology. I was actually shocked to find such advanced technology here,” he explained.

The experience demonstrated how modern research increasingly depends on strong digital infrastructure, data systems, and technology to support everything from data collection and management to laboratory operations and research implementation.

Full accounts of their personal experiences are featured on pages 12–16..

Dr. Kathryn Risher Visits RHSP to Support Qualitative Research Training for the Sexual Network Study

From 4th to 8th May 2026, Dr. Kathryn Risher, the U.S.-based Principal Investigator (PI) for the Sexual Network Study, visited the Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP) to conduct a five-day qualitative research training aimed at preparing the study team for field implementation. The training brought together four qualitative research staff members, Ms. Nambi Rodah, Ms. Nabiyiki Dorothy, Ms. Lilian Nagesa, and Mr. Ddaaki William—and focused on ensuring that the team had a shared understanding of the study objectives, data collection procedures, ethical requirements, and qualitative interviewing skills.

The Sexual Network Study seeks to explore sexual partnership networks among individuals recruited from the Rakai Community Cohort Study (RCCS). The study aimed to conduct in-depth interviews with 30 HIV-negative men and women aged 18–49 years living in trading and fisherfolk communities who reported having two or more sexual partners within the previous year. understanding participants' sexual relationships and partnership patterns is expected to generate important insights to inform HIV prevention research and programming

During the training, Dr. Risher guided the team through the study protocol, research questions, and sampling strategy, ensuring that all staff understood the scientific goals and methodological approach of the study. Considerable time was devoted to reviewing the English and Luganda interview guides, discussing the intent of each question, appropriate probing techniques, interviewer neutrality, and cultural interpretation of key concepts. The team worked together to refine the Luganda version of the guide to ensure clarity, consistency, and accuracy while maintaining the intended meaning of the original questions.

A major component of the training centered on research ethics and informed consent procedures. The team carefully reviewed the Luganda consent forms and participated in several role-play exercises designed to strengthen skills in obtaining informed consent and conducting qualitative interviews.



Dr. Kathryn Risher (Left) and Dr. David Dowdy (right) during her visit in May 2026.

These practical sessions allowed staff to receive feedback, identify challenges, and improve their interviewing techniques before entering the field.

The training ended in pilot testing activities, during which the team conducted three pilot interviews in the field. The pilot exercise provided an opportunity to assess the flow of the interview guide, test consent procedures, identify logistical challenges, and evaluate participants' understanding of interview questions. Findings from the pilot interviews were discussed during a final debriefing session, leading to further refinement of the study tools and procedures.

Dr. Risher's visit and training were valuable in strengthening the capacity of the qualitative research team and ensuring readiness for implementation of the Sexual Network Study. Through detailed discussions, practical exercises, and pilot testing, the team enhanced its technical skills, standardized data collection procedures, and developed a clear plan for the next stages of the study. The training concluded with a discussion of implementation timelines, staff roles and responsibilities, and key action points for successful study execution.

Dr. Mohamed’s three weeks journey at RHSP



Dr. Mohamed poses for a group photo with RHSP senior Management Team and heads of section.

What happens when a clinician steps beyond the walls of a hospital and into the wider world of public health? For Dr. Mohamed Sanusi Jalloh, three weeks at the Rakai Health Sciences Program offered a new perspective—and a reminder of how much can be learned when health professionals across borders, share experiences, and step into the field.

Dr. Mohamed’s journey into public health was shaped by experience on the front lines. During the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone, he worked as a disease surveillance officer. When COVID-19 emerged, he joined the country’s outbreak response team and later supported COVID-19 vaccination efforts. But these experiences sparked another interest in research.

That interest eventually led him to the 2025–2026 Fogarty ACHIEVE Fellowship, through which he was given the opportunity to strengthen his research skills and gain practical experience. His current research focuses on antiretroviral therapy among adolescents, girls, and young women aged 12–24 in Sierra Leone.

An unexpected destination

His fellowship was initially expected to take him to the United States. When circumstances changed, Rakai became an alternative destination. Rather than hesitate, Dr. Mohamed embraced the opportunity.

“I will definitely take it,” he recalls saying. “I will be learning, meeting people, and then you can't tell what I also will be contributing.”
He arrived in Rakai with an open mind and, as he puts it, tried to manage his expectations.
Three weeks later, his assessment was clear: the experience had gone beyond what he expected.

Seeing research beyond the textbook

One of the things that immediately stood out to him was RHSP’s research infrastructure. His visit included exposure to the laboratory, data center, and other research facilities, giving him a firsthand look at the scale and systems supporting research in Rakai.
“I saw a very massive lab, a data center, and other areas which show that things have been going on on a bigger scale than I was expecting,” he says.

But for Dr. Mohamed, the value of the experience was not only in the facilities. It was also in the people.
He describes the RHSP team as professional, supportive, and willing to help. From IT and laboratory teams to researchers and support staff, he found people ready to answer questions and help him navigate a new environment. His interactions with researchers also helped him think differently about his own ideas and how they could be developed into feasible research projects.

Coming to Rakai after the Bundibugyo Ebola Crisis

Perhaps one of the most memorable parts of his experience was stepping outside the research environment and engaging with communities.
During a visit to a fishing community, Dr. Mohamed participated in conversations around Ebola. Having previously worked in Ebola and COVID-19 response, the experience was familiar—but the setting offered a different perspective.

He found community members open to learning, while also encountering misconceptions and gaps in knowledge about Ebola. For him, the experience reinforced the importance of meeting people where they are and creating spaces where communities can ask questions and receive accurate information.
He was also struck by the impact of climate change on the community, particularly how changes to the environment were affecting settlements and livelihoods.



Dr. Mohamed visits a landing site to speak with some community members about their Ebola awareness.



Dr. Mohamed poses for a picture infront of the RHSP main building.



Dr. Robert Ssekubugu shows Dr. Mohamed a household in the fishing community.

A wider lens on public health

Perhaps the biggest lesson from his three weeks in Rakai was a shift in how he sees his own profession.

As a clinician, Dr. Mohamed is accustomed to caring for individual patients. Public health, however, offers the opportunity to influence the health of entire populations.

“Public health gives you the mandate to manage or prevent disease from affecting a large chunk of the population compared to practicing in the clinic,” he explains.

The fellowship has also helped him connect the theory he encountered during training with real-world experience.

“Now you are in the field and getting a first-hand experience of some of the things you've been tutored in and some of the things you've been hearing about. And now you are applying it.”

For a clinician transitioning into research, this practical exposure has been particularly valuable. He describes the experience as giving him “the lens to see medicine or healthcare delivery from a different perspective.”

His message to the next generation

So, what does Dr. Mohamed think young health professionals can do to shape better healthcare?

His answer is simple: use the platforms young people already have.

With so many young people connected through social media, he sees an opportunity for healthcare professionals to use platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook to share reliable health information, address misconceptions, and encourage people to seek care.

He practices what he preaches, using community WhatsApp groups to discuss different health topics, answer questions, and encourage people to recognize symptoms and seek medical attention.

For him, social media is more than a space for entertainment—it can be a tool for saving lives.

Dr. Mohamed arrived at RHSP looking for an opportunity to learn and contribute. He left with new experiences, new perspectives, and a stronger appreciation of the possibilities that emerge when clinical practice, research, and community engagement come together.

His story is also a reminder that fellowships create opportunities to step into new environments, work alongside experienced researchers, learn from communities, test ideas, and discover new directions for a career.

Proudly Representing RHSP at the IAS conference



DR. EDWARD KANKAKA AT THE AIDS CONFERENCE 2026

Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP) was proudly represented at the International AIDS 2026 Conference, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from July 26–31, 2026, where global experts gathered to advance dialogue on the future of HIV research and care.
Representing RHSP was Dr. Edward Nelson Kankaka, Director of Research, who stepped in for Dr. Cissy Kityo during a satellite panel discussion titled "Galvanizing HIV Cure Research in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs)– Lessons and Perspectives from Africa."

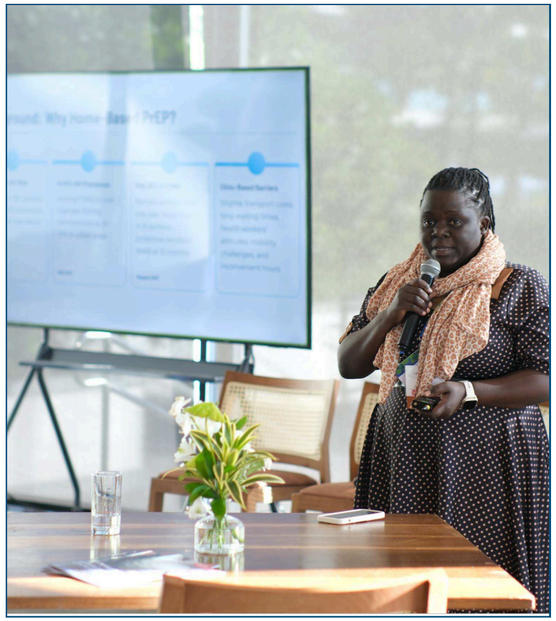
Drawing on RHSP's extensive experience in HIV research, Dr. Kankaka shared Uganda's perspective on the opportunities and challenges of preparing LMICs for HIV gene therapy trials. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that research is inclusive and responsive to the realities of diverse communities, particularly by involving participants from both urban and rural settings.

His participation highlighted the valuable contribution of African research institutions to the global HIV cure agenda and reinforced RHSP's commitment to advancing locally relevant, inclusive, and globally impactful HIV research.

DR. LYDIA NAKIGANDA HIGHLIGHTS HB-PREP STUDY AT THE AIDS CONFERENCE 2026

Dr. Lydia Nakiganda presented the Home-Based PrEP (HB-PrEP) study at AIDS 2026 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, highlighting efforts to make HIV prevention more accessible to rural female sex workers in Uganda. Supported by Gilead Sciences, the study is exploring whether bringing selected PrEP services closer to women's homes and communities can reduce barriers such as travel costs, long distances, clinic waiting times and stigma, while improving adherence and retention in care.

The study will test a peer-supported home-based PrEP model involving 50 women over 12 months, with trained peer workers providing services such as PrEP refill support, HIV self-testing and urine collection for PrEP-use monitoring. During the conference, Dr. Nakiganda also received the Gilead Research Scholars Award certificate from Prof. Sunil Suhas Solomon of Johns Hopkins University, Chair of the Scientific Review Committee for the Gilead Research Scholars Program, which supports the research grant.





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Adolescent and Youth Advisory Board's First quarterly meeting.

The Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP) continues to strengthen the involvement of young people in health research through its Adolescent and Youth Advisory Board (AYAB).

On 19 August 2026, AYAB members held their first quarterly meeting at RHSP Headquarters in Kalisizo. The meeting provided an opportunity for members to share their experiences engaging fellow young people, refresh their knowledge of key research concepts, and identify barriers to youth participation in research.
Members reported growing confidence in engaging their peers but also highlighted challenges, including misconceptions about research, concerns around confidentiality and consent, limited access to research information, and cultural perceptions.

They proposed practical solutions, including using clear, age-appropriate language, strengthening confidentiality messages, reaching young people through platforms they commonly use, and involving youth throughout the research process.
The meeting also reinforced the importance of continued mentorship and support for AYAB members. Going forward, members will maintain engagement through virtual interactions and the AYAB WhatsApp platform to support peer learning, mentorship, and coordination between quarterly meetings.

Through AYAB, RHSP is creating space for young people to move beyond being research participants to becoming active voices in shaping research that affects their lives.



Picture above: The Youth and Adolescents Advisory Board has a photo moment with Dr. Robert Kairania after their quarterly meeting. **Picture below**: The RHSP IT team conducts a cyber awareness training in the RHSP conference room

Building a Stronger Cybersecurity Culture at RHSP

From July 7–10, 2026, the RHSP IT team, led by Oscar Birungi and Joseph Kisirinya, conducted a four-day cybersecurity awareness training for colleagues from the Security, Finance, Human Resources, Procurement, Transport, Laboratory, and Research teams.

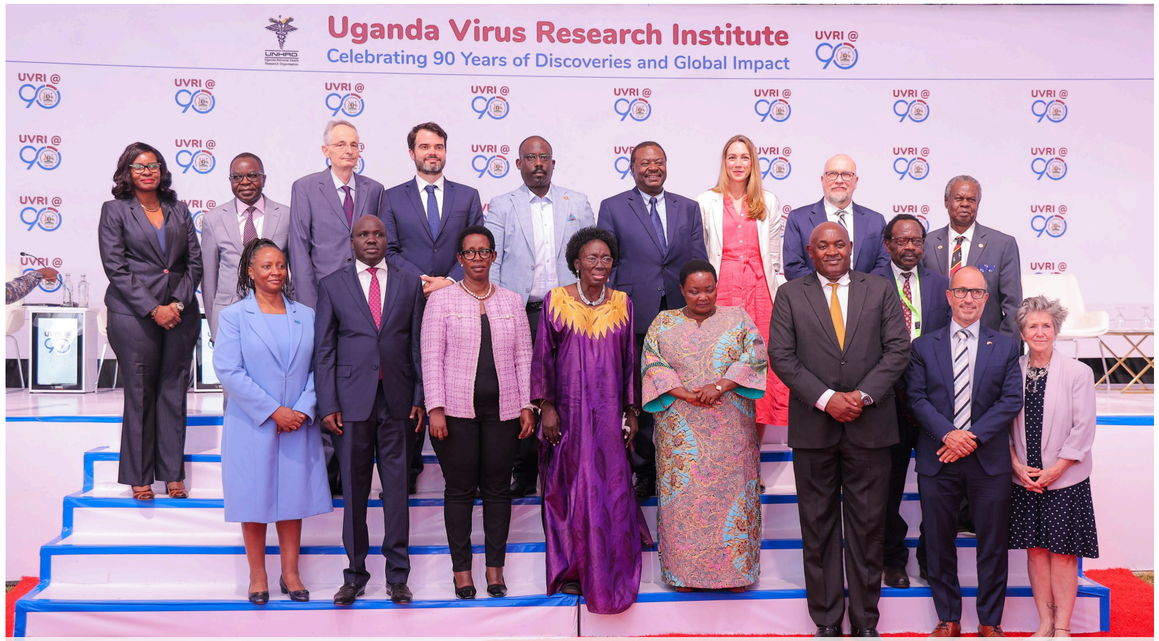
The interactive sessions covered password security, phishing and social engineering, safe browsing, secure data sharing, data privacy, incident reporting, and the responsible use of AI when handling patient and participant information.

The training reinforced a simple but important message: cybersecurity is everyone's responsibility. By equipping staff with the knowledge to identify and prevent digital threats, RHSP is strengthening its security culture and safeguarding the information that supports its research and health services.



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RHSP Joins UVRI in Celebrating 90 Years of Scientific Excellence



Picture above (courtesy image): UVRI director Pontiano Kaleebu with chief guests and key dignitaries from government and other institutions. **Pictures below**: some of the RHSP team members who attended the UVRI 90-year celebrations.

On 21–22 July 2026, Rakai Health Sciences Program's Board members and Senior Management Team joined research institutions, scientific collaborators, government leaders, and global health partners to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the Uganda Virus Research Institute (UVRI).

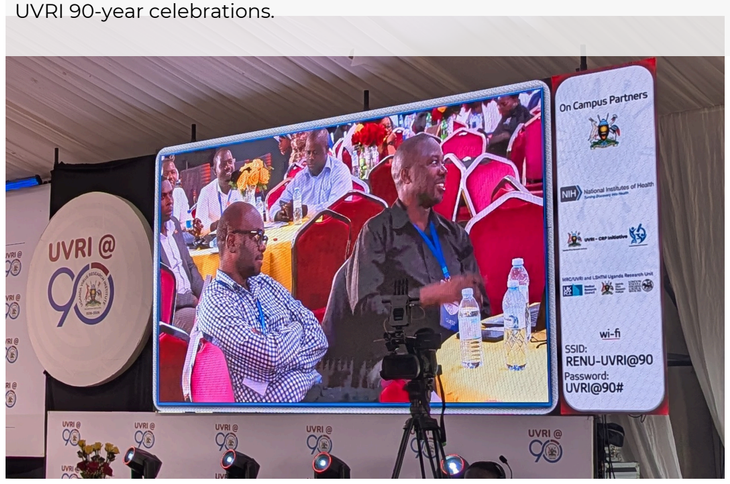
Established in 1936 as the Yellow Fever Research Institute in Entebbe, UVRI has grown into a leading centre of scientific excellence, contributing significantly to research on infectious diseases, disease surveillance, immunology, virology and public health in Uganda and beyond.

This two-day celebration showcased UVRI's rich scientific legacy, innovations and contributions to global health. RHSP was honoured to join partners in marking this important milestone and celebrating the enduring collaborations that continue to advance health research.

Day One featured an open day, scientific exhibitions and a high-level symposium, showcasing UVRI's work across virology, immunology, entomology, epidemiology, genomics and disease surveillance. Visitors also engaged with researchers and explored laboratory demonstrations highlighting how science is translated into public health action.

Day Two brought together national and international leaders, including government officials, development partners, and representatives from the World Health Organization, the United States of America, the UK, Germany, the European Union, and the East African Community, to celebrate UVRI's scientific legacy and its enduring contribution to global health.

RHSP congratulates UVRI on 90 years of science, innovation and impact, and looks forward to many more years of partnership and discovery.









Rakai Health Sciences Program
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Sexual Network Structure and HIV Testing and Treatment in Sub-Saharan Africa: Understanding the implications for ending the HIV epidemic



Despite major advances in HIV prevention and treatment over the past two decades, HIV transmission remains a significant public health challenge in Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa. Although expanded HIV testing and antiretroviral therapy (ART) have reduced HIV-related illness, deaths, and new infections, the full population-level impact of "test and treat" strategies has not always been achieved. Evidence from large community-based studies in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that factors beyond treatment coverage may play an important role in shaping HIV prevention outcomes.

This study, led by Dr. Kathryn Risher of Pennsylvania State University in collaboration with William Ddaaki and the Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP), seeks to examine how sexual network structures influence HIV testing and treatment outcomes in sub-Saharan Africa. The research is based on evidence that HIV testing and treatment engagement are not randomly distributed across communities. Instead, individuals with similar patterns of healthcare engagement are often more likely to form sexual partnerships with one another.

Consequently, if people who are less likely to test for HIV or initiate treatment tend to partner with others who share similar behaviors, clusters of untreated HIV infection may persist within sexual networks, allowing HIV transmission to continue despite high overall treatment coverage.
The project employs qualitative research to investigate whether sexual network clustering affects the success of HIV treatment as prevention strategies. Through this work, the research team aims to better understand community perspectives on HIV testing, treatment, sexual partnerships, and network-based HIV interventions.

The study was initiated in Rakai District, Uganda, and has made substantial progress. The first 2 years of implementation have been successfully completed, involving participant recruitment, data collection, transcription, and the initial stages of data management. Preliminary analysis of the qualitative data is currently underway, and the study team is now planning year 3 activities.

To achieve the study objectives, approximately 30 in-depth interviews will be conducted with men and women aged 18–49 years who participate in the Rakai Community Cohort Study (RCCS). Participants are being selected from trading and fishing communities and include individuals who reported having two or more sexual partners in the previous year and who tested HIV-negative during the most recent RCCS survey round.

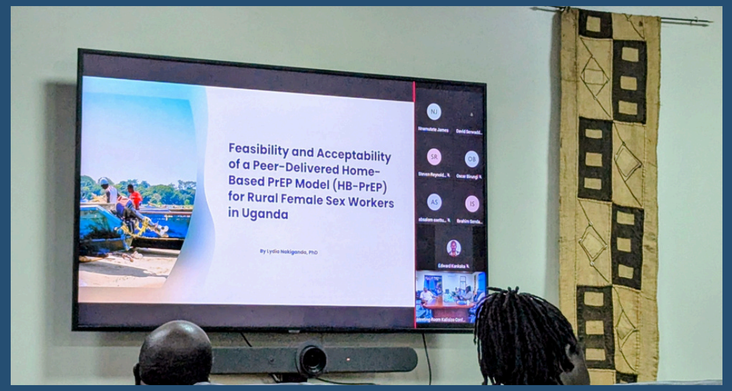
Interviews are conducted in Luganda by trained, sex matched interviewers using a semi-structured guide. Discussions explore participants' views on sexual networks, partner relationships, HIV testing behaviors, disclosure of sexual partners, mobility patterns, and the acceptability of network-driven HIV interventions such as couples' HIV testing, assisted partner notification, partner-delivered HIV self-test kits, and recruitment of sexual partners into HIV prevention services. The study is expected to provide valuable insights into how sexual relationships and social connections shape engagement with HIV services. By understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder participation in network-based interventions, researchers will be better positioned to design programs that reach populations currently underserved by conventional HIV services.

Participation in the study has involved minimal risk, although discussions about sexual partnerships and HIV-related issues may cause emotional discomfort for some participants. To protect participants, strict confidentiality procedures have been followed, interviews are being conducted in private settings, and participation is entirely voluntary. Ethical approvals were obtained from the relevant Ugandan regulatory bodies, including the Uganda Virus Research Institute Research Ethics Committee and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology.

By integrating community experiences with network science, the research seeks to enhance understanding of how HIV spreads through sexual networks and identify innovative approaches to ensure that HIV testing and treatment services reach those most at risk.

Bringing PrEP Closer to Women: Exploring Home-Based HIV Prevention for Rural Female Sex Workers





For many women engaged in sex work in rural Uganda, accessing HIV prevention services can mean travelling long distances, spending money on transport, waiting at health facilities, or navigating concerns about privacy and stigma. These everyday barriers can make it difficult to consistently access PrEP and remain engaged in care.

A new study by the Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP), with support from Gilead Sciences, is exploring whether bringing PrEP services closer to women could make HIV prevention more accessible, convenient, and responsive to their needs.

The Home-Based PrEP (HB-PrEP) study will assess the feasibility and acceptability of a peer-delivered, home-based PrEP care model among rural female sex workers in Uganda.

The study will begin by listening to the women who use PrEP, as well as peer workers and healthcare providers. Their experiences and perspectives will help the research team understand the barriers women face and identify services that can safely and effectively be delivered closer to where they live and work.

Using these insights, the team will refine the HB-PrEP model and train female sex peer workers to support its delivery.
The study will enroll 50 female sex workers using PrEP. Half will receive the new home-based model, while the other half will continue receiving standard facility-based PrEP services.

For women in the home-based group, trained peer workers will provide selected services closer to their communities, including PrEP refill support, HIV self-testing, and urine collection to monitor PrEP use. Women who need additional clinical services will be linked to healthcare providers

Over 12 months, the study will examine whether the peer-delivered model is feasible, acceptable and able to support continued engagement in PrEP care.
The approach puts women at the centre of HIV prevention—recognising that effective prevention is not only about having access to medicines, but also about making services fit into people's everyday lives.

If successful, the HB-PrEP model could provide valuable evidence for more flexible, convenient and person-centred approaches to HIV prevention in rural communities, helping bring PrEP closer to the women who need it most.

She watched the research teams leave. Her internship took her into the field.



On the left, Cate Nabukenya poses for a photo during her internship. On the right, Cate while on duty at the RHSP main building.

For Nabukenya Cate, joining RHSP as a security guard in 2023 was the beginning of a journey she had long hoped for. Today, as she pursues a degree in Social Work and Social Administration, she is discovering new possibilities for her future.

Growing up in Kalisizo Town Council in Kyotera District, Nabukenya Cate often saw Rakai Health Sciences Program (RHSP) teams working in the community. She had always known it as “the Rakai Project,” as it is commonly referred to in the community. However, RHSP was an organisation she admired and hoped to join one day. Little did she know that getting through its gates would be the first step towards a much bigger dream.

After completing her Senior Six education at Blessed Sacrament in Masaka District, Cate spent two years at home because of financial constraints. With further education out of reach, she underwent security training and began taking on odd jobs to support herself. Although she previously had the encouragement of her siblings, their ability to support her education eventually became limited as they started families of their own.

When an opportunity to join RHSP as a security guard arose, Cate was determined to take it. She interviewed twice before succeeding on her second attempt in 2023.
“I was very excited to become part of RHSP. It was not easy to get in, but I kept trying,” she recalls.

A workplace that inspired a new dream

Working at RHSP exposed Cate to people from different professional backgrounds and departments. She became curious about their work, often asking questions and taking an interest in what happened beyond her security duties. One thing particularly inspired her: several members of the security team had returned to school to pursue further education.

Seeing her colleagues take that step planted a seed. Cate began to believe that she, too, could return to the classroom and build a different future. With some colleagues already studying at Kampala University’s Masaka campus, finding a path to university became easier. After consulting her supervisors, she received the go-ahead to enroll in a weekend programme in Social Work and Social Administration. She began paying her tuition using part of her salary.

It was a decision that demanded sacrifice. Balancing work, studies, transport, meals and other responsibilities was not easy. Weekend road runs, which are mandatory for the security team, added another challenge to her already demanding schedule. Yet Cate remained determined, drawing encouragement from colleagues who had faced similar challenges and progressed into other departments at RHSP.

Taking her learning beyond the classroom

As she approached her internship, Cate hoped to gain practical experience in a department where she could apply her growing knowledge. With guidance from Dr. Kankaka Edward, RHSP’s Research Director, she secured an opportunity with the Health Education and Community Mobilization team. Her security supervisor also supported her in balancing her duties with the internship, helping her complete it successfully.

The experience took Cate beyond the security gate and into the communities she had previously watched RHSP teams visit. She participated in community mobilization and engaged study participants about ongoing research.

“I used to be at the gate, watching people get onto the bus, searching their bags, and wondering what they were always doing in the field. This time, I got to go out myself and see how RHSP works closely with people in the community. I also took part in high-impact research,” she says.

Cate’s internship was more than a chance to gain practical skills; it helped her overcome shyness and become more confident interacting with people. With guidance from the Health Education and Community Mobilization team and the RHSP training committee, she grew both personally and professionally. As she works towards completing her degree, Cate hopes to become a social worker or social scientist. She remains proud of her beginnings in security, describing them as the foundation of her journey.

A Message to Young People

Cate encourages young people to pursue their dreams, make use of available opportunities, and remain open to learning from others. She describes RHSP as a place where young people can grow with the support and guidance of colleagues.
“Use what you have to go where your dreams are,” she advises. “From my humble beginnings in security, I anticipate that something bigger is coming my way,” she emphasized.

Finding new possibilities in Data Management

When Babra first considered RHSP for her internship, she imagined an organisation largely centred on medicine and healthcare. Instead, she discovered something much broader, a place where data, technology, research and people work together to influence health and policy.

A second-year Business Statistics student at Makerere University Business School, she joined the RHSP Data Management team, where she gained hands-on experience in data cleaning, analysis, and software packages she had previously encountered only in the classroom. One experience that stood out was helping develop a digital data collection tool and using it to collect simulated data. Seeing something she had created work on her own phone made the learning feel real.

The internship has also changed how she sees her future. While Business Statistics students often gravitate towards finance and accounting, her experience at RHSP has opened her eyes to the possibilities of data analysis. “I feel like when that time comes, I will go for data,” she says. “I can see the tools and knowledge I acquired applicable in everyday life.”

Beyond the technical skills, Babra explained that she found an environment where collaboration and professionalism made learning easier. From her supervisors to colleagues across the organization, she says the willingness to help and engage with interns made a lasting impression.

Her biggest takeaway is one: “At RHSP, there’s a lot to learn, and I hope more young people will join the institution. They should keep an open mind to learn; they’ll learn a lot.”



Babra Nakanwagi, Makerere University Business School

A First Look at the Technology Behind Research

Inside RHSP’s IT environment, Elias Matovu Andrew came across something that stopped him in his tracks: servers immersed in a specialized cooling liquid. “I was in awe,” he recalls. The experience gave him a glimpse of the sophisticated systems behind the organization’s research work and changed his perception of what technology looks like in a health research setting. As he puts it, “RHSP has very advanced technology.”

A second-year student pursuing a Bachelor’s in Information Technology and Computing at Muni University, Andrew spent eight weeks with the IT team, where computers, networks, and systems became more than concepts from a textbook. He worked on troubleshooting and maintaining devices, explored organizational networks, and gained hands-on experience with the systems that keep a large research organization connected and running.
The experience constantly challenged him to look beyond what he already knew. Some of the laptops he worked on were difficult to open and repair, requiring patience, research, and a willingness to find solutions. His supervisors encouraged him to investigate problems independently, helping him develop the confidence to approach unfamiliar technical challenges.

More importantly, Andrew began to appreciate how deeply technology is woven into research. He had initially assumed that, because RHSP focuses on health and research, IT might play a smaller role. His internship showed him otherwise—from networks and servers to the everyday devices and systems that support staff and research activities across the organization.

The experience has since strengthened his interest in technology and his ambition to become an IT specialist. He leaves RHSP with practical skills, greater confidence and a new appreciation for what is possible when technology meets research.
Looking back on his eight weeks, Elias describes the experience simply: “It was really a very interesting and knowledgeable experience for me.”



Elias Matovu Andrew, Muni University

From the classroom to the community: Adrian's journey into research

For Adrian Ssentongo, an internship at RHSP has been more than a learning opportunity—it has been a chance to discover how research can directly connect with people and communities.

A third-year Social Work and Social Administration student at Kampala International University, Adrian joined the POST-TB study, where he gained hands-on experience in research processes, including community engagement, informed consent, counselling, health education and mobilisation.

The experience introduced him to the importance of research ethics, confidentiality, and informed consent, while strengthening his communication and community engagement skills. His time at the ART clinic also gave him his first practical counselling experience—an area he had not encountered during his first internship.

More importantly, the internship has helped shape Adrian's career aspirations. With experiences spanning community work and research, he has become even more committed to working with and for people.
His personal motto captures that purpose: "Humanity needs me." For Adrian, being a social worker means helping, educating, connecting people to support, and bringing valuable health information closer to communities.



Adrian Sentongo, Kampala International University

How RHSP Shaped Julius's Journey in IT

For Julius Kalungi, an internship at RHSP has been a chance to move beyond the classroom and discover what is possible when knowledge meets real-world experience. A second-year Bachelor of Information Technology student at Victoria University, Julius joined RHSP with a simple goal: to learn, challenge himself, and gain practical skills that would prepare him for the world of work. What he encountered was an environment that pushed him to grow, not only as an IT student, but as a young professional.

Working across the RHSP IT and Data Management teams, Julius gained hands-on experience in troubleshooting computers, working with systems, and learning how data is collected and managed. One of his favorite projects involved assessing about 40 laptops, testing, updating, and determining whether they were ready to be reassigned or needed disposal. The experience even taught him how to disassemble and reassemble a computer, a skill he says could become a useful "side hustle."

But it was RHSP's technology that truly surprised him. Seeing the organization's servers submerged in dielectric liquid for cooling was a first for Julius. "I was in awe," he recalls, having never seen servers cooled this way before. The experience opened his eyes to emerging technologies and reinforced the value of learning beyond the classroom.
Beyond technical skills, Julius says the internship taught him professionalism, time management, public speaking and how to interact confidently with senior management. He also came to appreciate the organization's culture, describing it as a place that "nurtures you both professionally and personally."

His advice to other young people considering an internship at RHSP is simple: "Distance is just a mindset." For Julius, the six-week experience has helped him grow, build meaningful connections, and affirm the career path he wants to pursue. As he puts it, "If I could do it again, I would."



Kalungi Julius, Victoria University

From Procurement Theory to Practice

University has taught Isaac Lwanga the theory of procurement. His internship at RHSP gave him the opportunity to see what that knowledge looks like when applied in a real organisation.

A Bachelor's student in Procurement and Supply Chain Management at Makerere University Business School, Isaac spent two months working with the Procurement team, taking part in price analysis, stock verification, documentation, vendor follow-ups, and other day-to-day activities. Through these experiences, he began to understand the important role procurement plays in keeping an organisation running.

His experience of RHSP, however, extended beyond procurement. When Isaac brought his father to RHSP to seek laboratory services, he was impressed by the level of care and professionalism he encountered. He recalls how a staff member continued to check on his father's progress even after their initial interaction. "Every day, it's like, 'How is your dad? Is he improving? Is he responding well to the medication?'" he says. The experience reinforced his view that RHSP is an organisation where people are committed to its mission and to the people they serve.

One experience that stood out in his internship was stock verification. Moving through different areas to check supplies and compare records with what was physically available gave him a clearer picture of the responsibilities of a procurement officer. "In fact, you are the father of organisations," he says. "Whoever wants a pen, they have to come to you."
Isaac further explained that the internship also strengthened his communication, teamwork and management skills, while introducing him to the importance of value for money in procurement.

More importantly, the experience turned procurement from a university subject into a career he could see himself pursuing. "I was just studying the theories just to finish," Isaac reflects. "But then after that, we've gotten to know what it really means to be in this course."
He describes RHSP as "well-organized and focused"—an environment that gave him practical skills while helping him see his chosen profession in a new light.



Isaac Lwanga, Makerere Univeristy Business School.

Seeing Data Differently

For Benjamin, data is no longer just something studied in a lecture room. As a Bachelor of Science in Quantitative Economics student at Makerere University, his internship in RHSP's Data Management department has given him the chance to see how data is collected, organised, and analysed in a real research environment.

Benjamin was introduced to tools used throughout the data management process, including Kobo Collect and REDCap for data collection, and Excel, Stata and R for data entry, cleaning and analysis. What he had encountered largely as theory at university began to take shape through practical experience.
"I have gained practical skills in data collection, data cleaning and analysis, as well as technical writing through report writing and developing SOPs," he says.
One experience that stood out was learning to work with different data analysis software. Rather than simply knowing what the programmes were, Benjamin had the opportunity to use them and understand how they support research. The experience also strengthened his confidence in working with data and interpreting information.

Beyond the technical skills, the internship has helped Benjamin think more deliberately about his future. He now hopes to build a career in data management, drawing on the practical foundation he has gained at RHSP.
"I am an aspiring data manager, and I would say that the experience I have gained at RHSP has prepared me. It has met my expectations and has been a great and fruitful experience," he says.



Benjamin Tumwebaze, Makerere University

Christine's RHSP experience

With a tablet and an asset list, Christine Nabayiga spent her internship moving from one department to another, checking equipment, scanning serial numbers, and discovering items she had previously only heard about. What seemed like a routine assignment became one of the experiences that helped her see RHSP and her own abilities in a new way.

A second-year Bachelor's in Commerce student at Makerere University Business School, Christine spent eight weeks with the RHSP Finance Department, gaining practical experience in record-keeping, filing, financial reporting, and bank reconciliation. During the asset verification exercise, she encountered everything from computers and routers to equipment with unfamiliar medical names, giving her a closer look at the wide range of resources that support RHSP's work.

Beyond the technical work, Christine discovered a new confidence in herself. Moving between departments and approaching staff for documents, approvals, and information gradually reduced the hesitation she once felt about speaking to people she didn't know. "I would freely go... and approach different people without any panic," she says.
Her understanding of RHSP also expanded. "I arrived thinking of it largely as a health organization but discovered an institution where finance, procurement, ICT, data, research, and other teams work together," she explained. This broader view helped her understand how the different pieces contribute to research and public health.

One lesson Christine hopes to carry into her career came from watching how people interacted at RHSP: "Just be good to everyone." She was particularly struck that even staff with advanced academic qualifications remained approachable and willing to give their time.
After eight weeks, Christine is leaving with more than professional experience. She is leaving with new skills, greater confidence and an appreciation for the people who made her internship memorable. "I'm going to miss the internship," she says. "I wish it would even be extended because it has been very, very nice to me and I've learned a lot and I've experienced a lot."



Christine Nabayiga, Makerere University Business School

More Than She Expected

Shinairah's internship at RHSP was rarely spent behind a desk. From climbing ladders in the stores to moving between departments and speaking to staff, her time at RHSP turned what she had learned in class into something she could see, touch, and experience.
Shinairah, who had completed her Bachelor's Degree in Science in Accounting and Finance at Kyambogo University, joined RHSP's Finance team hoping to connect classroom knowledge with practical work. She found herself reviewing payment vouchers and accountabilities, learning bank reconciliation and taking part in cash counts, before moving into the organisation-wide asset verification exercise.

Bank reconciliation was one of the moments when theory finally clicked. "We studied bank reconciliation in class, but I found it challenging and did not fully understand it at the time. Through the practical experience at RHSP, I now have a much better understanding of it," she says.

The asset verification exercise brought a different kind of learning. Moving from office to office, Shina encountered equipment she had never realised was part of RHSP's operations—from UPSs and monitors to routers and other equipment stored across the organisation. She enjoyed the movement, the discovery and the chance to interact with people from different departments. "I have enjoyed that activity," she says.
Perhaps more significant was the confidence she gained along the way. Shina says she was not naturally very interactive, but constantly communicating with staff and working across departments helped her become more comfortable approaching people and asking for what she needed. "I don't feel the fear... to approach different people without any panic."

She was equally struck by the culture around her. A supervisor who made time to check on the interns every day, colleagues who were quick to help, and senior professionals who could be approached freely all shaped her experience. What stood out most was the openness of people at RHSP. "You meet a doctor, she goes, and you talk to him, he stops and talks to you. Very nice people."
By the end of her internship, Shina had gained more practical accounting experience. She had strengthened her teamwork, communication, and time-management skills, and developed a clearer sense of what professional life looks like. And perhaps her best summary of the experience is also the simplest: "I gained everything I wanted and even what I didn't expect."



Ndagire Shinairah Raihana, Kyambogo University

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