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Improving access to sexual and reproductive health services in South Sudan: Empowering women and girls through health services

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Context

- In South Sudan, about 65 percent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Approximately 33 percent of women have experienced sexual violence from a non-partner, primarily during attacks or raids.
- Lack of knowledge and social stigma are the leading causes limiting young people's access to sexual and reproductive health services. Cultural and religious beliefs also invoke stigmatising behaviours in some family and community members (Baigry et al. 2023).
- In 2020, Malaria Consortium started a four-year gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) programme to address barriers that prevent women, girls and marginalised communities from accessing health services.
- The goal of the GESI programme was to increase awareness of gender-based violence (GBV), improve access to health facility services and empower survivors to report the perpetrators of GBV.

Approach

To increase awareness and support survivors of GBV, the GESI programme:

- provided adolescent sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services
- established school health clubs
- supported people living with disabilities
- provided mental health services.

To establish these services, we:

- provided training, resources and supervision
- used existing community structures and influential women to increase uptake of SRH services.



Key success highlights

Adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights champions

We identified highly influential female community and religious leaders who are trusted by, and regularly interact with, marginalised women and girls to become adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) rights champions.

The ASRH rights champions:

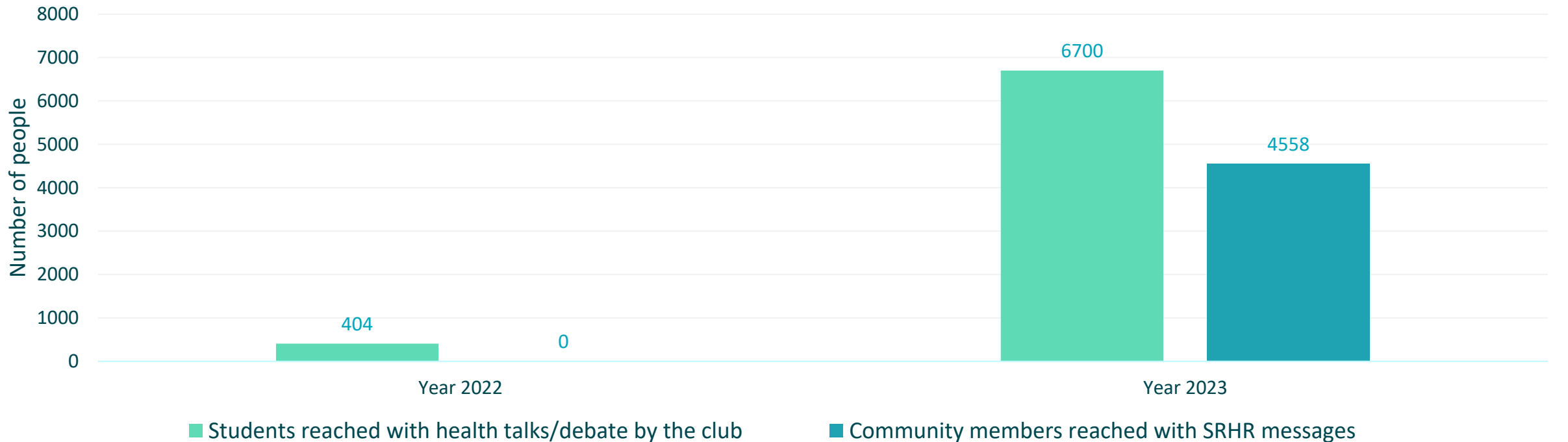
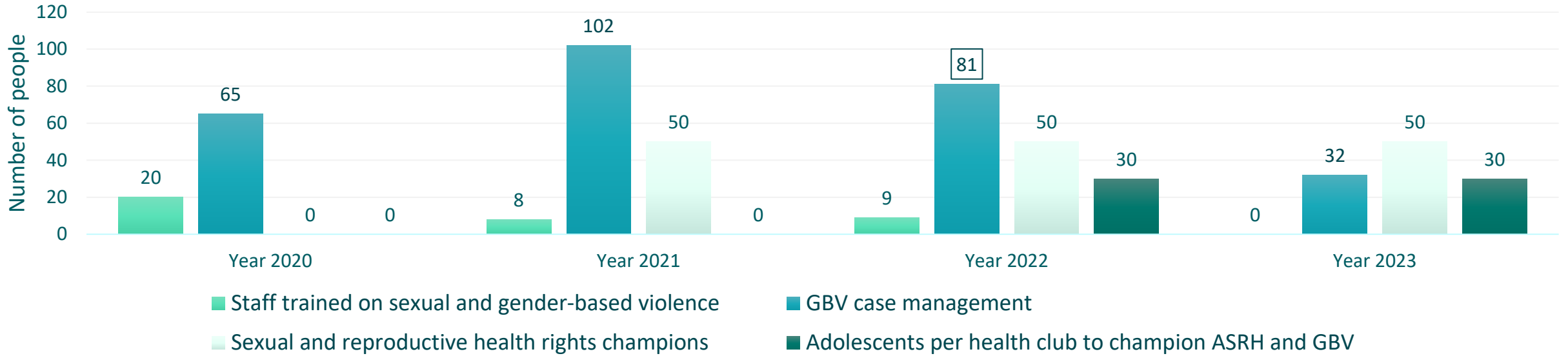
- hold community dialogue sessions to create awareness of GBV
- provide health support to GBV survivors through referral to health facilities
- protect and empower survivors and their families to report perpetrators of GBV.



Project progress over four years

Indicator description	Target	Achievement	Percentage of target	Male	Female
Number of health facility staff trained in management of GBV survivors	40	37	93%	33	4
GBV case management provided	440	280	64%	75	205
Number of ASRH rights champions	150	150	100%	85	65
Number of adolescents per health club to champion ASRH and GBV rights	60	60	100%	28	32
Number of students reached with health talks or debates by the clubs	2,400	7,104	296%	3,835	3,497
Number of community members reached with SRH rights messages	4,000	4,558	114%	2,461	2,097

Project progress over four years



Conclusion

Our project showed that community engagement is an effective way to:

- increase awareness of GBV
- remove barriers (such as social stigma) to accessing SRH services
- empower women to speak up about GBV and use SRH services.

Future work is needed to continue to empower women and girls in South Sudan to make progress towards gender equality.

Key recommendation

Persistent and continuous engagement at all levels is essential

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