

Promoting HIV self-testing among female sex workers in Zambia

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Highlights

Evidence impact

- Citing findings from several 3ie-supported studies, the World Health Organization recommended the use of community-led approaches such as the distribution of HIV self-test kits by peer networks to promote HIV self-testing and facilitate linkages to HIV testing services among hard-to-reach populations. The recommendations appeared in the organization's 2018 HIV self-testing strategic framework and 2019 consolidated guidelines on HIV testing services.

Factors that contributed to the impact

- Engagement with multilateral organizations and government authorities through different platforms — including conferences, closed-door meetings and workshops organized by 3ie and the research team on HIV — facilitated use.

Impact evaluation details

Title: [Zambian Peer Educators For HIV Self-Testing: A Randomized Study Of Testing Prov...](#)

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Status : Completed 2017



Context

Despite significant progress in increasing HIV treatment and reducing deaths since 2010, progress in reducing new infections has been [slower](#). Reducing new infections requires reaching groups who may be left out by existing HIV prevention efforts. Female sex workers (FSW) represent one group that is disproportionately affected by the HIV epidemic. The rates at which they are tested for the virus are limited by factors like healthcare provider stigma, restricted access to tests and lack of legal protection.

HIV testing is a critical step to achieving the UNAIDS target that 90 percent of all HIV-positive persons know their status. The World Health Organization recommends focused and strategic use of innovative approaches like peer-delivered HIV self-tests to increase uptake of HIV testing among key populations such as FSWs.

To better understand the efficacy of peer-delivered HIV testing services, a 3ie-supported randomized control trial evaluated the effectiveness of two delivery models: HIV self-test provision and standard facility-based HIV testing to increase HIV testing coverage among urban FSW in Zambia. The study hypothesized that peer-based HIV test kit delivery would lead to improved testing rates and better knowledge of HIV status as compared to standard practices. Peer educators were current or former sex workers recruited by partner organizations operating in the study communities.

The evaluation compared standard facility-based testing, which consisted of peer educators referring FSWs to existing HIV testing facilities, with the distribution of HIV self-testing kits for FSWs. The evaluation was conducted in three of the country's transit border towns: Livingstone, Chirundu and Kapiri Mposhi. HIV self-tests were distributed through two mechanisms: 1) direct distribution from peer educators and 2) referral via coupon to HIVST distribution points in the

town, such as drugstores and health centres. As a part of these trials, 160 peer educators and 965 participants were enrolled.

Evidence

The findings indicated that HIV self-testing was accessible and acceptable to the FSWs. There were no significant differences in rates of testing or in access to care among the different treatment arms four months after the intervention.

Multilevel stigma was a barrier to HIV self-testing within the FSW community. The study indicated that access to peer educators provided participants agency to seek HIV testing.

While HIV self-testing did not appear to increase intimate partner violence on average, findings show that implementation programs need to recognize the possibility of intimate partner violence following self-testing.

Evidence impacts

WHO guidelines on HIV self-testing draw from the evaluation

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends improving access to HIV self-testing among key populations, men and young people as a means to increase testing, especially in eastern and southern Africa. The recommendation, in the organization's HIV self-testing strategic framework of 2018, offers countries and implementers guidance in planning, starting and scaling up HIV self-testing implementation, citing the 3ie-supported evaluation among others. The findings of the evaluation inform the WHO's recommendations on leveraging health facilities and community outreach for more effective distribution and uptake of HIV self-testing in key populations.

The evaluation is also one of the 32 randomized control trials reviewed by the WHO to inform its consolidated guidelines on HIV testing services (2019). The updated guidance strongly recommends HIV self-testing as an approach to HIV testing services. The guidelines emphasize community-based HIV testing models and tools. They recognize the effectiveness of HIV self-testing kit distribution by peer educators in encouraging HIV testing among hard-to-reach key populations, as was studied in this evaluation. The guidelines also cite seven other 3ie evaluations; [more details are here](#).

Suggested citation

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