“If she tests negative, it means I am also negative”: Men’s
collection of HIV testing in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

1. Introduction

- Globally, South Africa has the highest number of people (over 7 million) living with HIV/AIDS, with an estimated 2.7 million men living with HIV.
- The province of KwaZulu-Natal is mostly burdened with an estimated 18.1% HIV prevalence rate.
- High HIV infection (estimated 30% in district surveillance area) in our setting in Hlabisa sub-district, and men are more likely to die of AIDS-related death than women.
- Nationally, most men living with HIV are unaware of their status, not on treatment, and are not virally suppressed (particularly 25-44 years old).
- Men’s utilization of HIV services is low in our setting despite substantial investment and availability of free HIV testing and treatment services.
- Uptake of confidential HIV testing services is key to achieving zero new infections and zero AIDS-related death in men.

2. Objectives

To understand men’s barriers to HIV services and how these could be addressed through development a new mobile phone-connected HIV diagnostics with online clinical care pathways into the current health system for HIV prevention, diagnosis and care.

3. Methods

- m-Africa study was carried out in uMkhanyakude district (rural and semi-urban areas) in KZN, South Africa.
- Data for this presentation forms part of the qualitative component of m-Africa study led by the Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) and University College London (UCL).
- Fifty-four semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) and nine focus group discussions (FGIDs) were conducted between November 2017 and February 2018 with healthcare providers and potential end-users (both sexes aged 18-79 years) to understand men’s attitudes towards HIV services including HIV self-testing (HVST) as well as their willingness to use the proposed technology.
- Prior to the main data collection, pilot study (4 IDIs and 2 FGIDs) was conducted in November 2017 to strengthen our research strategies, methods and tools.
- Themes were identified from the interview transcripts, manually coded and thematically analysed following an interpretivist approach.

4. Results

- It emerged strongly that it is difficult for men (both young and old) to test for HIV. Men are more afraid of knowing their HIV status than HIV itself.
- Some men often infer their HIV status from the status of their female partners, particularly pregnant partners in antenatal care.
- The research leading to these results has received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union’s seventh Framework Programme FP7/2007-2013 under REA grant agreement n. 612216.
- This study is supported by the Global Challenges Research Fund and funded by the MRC, AHRC, BBSRC, ESPRC IRC Early-warning Sensing Systems for Infectious Diseases (i-sense) EP/K031953/1 and NERC MR/P024378/1.
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5. Conclusion

- To increase men’s utilisation, HIV prevention programme needs to address stigma and improve access to confidential male-friendly HIV testing and treatment services.
- Regardless of the anxieties that were raised, older and young males are eager to do HVST and link to care using the online clinical pathway.
- Therefore, HVST and the proposed technology are potential interventions that could increase the number of men accessing HIV care in our setting, thereby reducing the prevalence rate if those tested positive are virally suppressed.

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Mobile phone ownership in SA

Focus Group Discussion With older females from community 2.

Group discussions in rural homesteads near AHRI
(Source: DREAMS Project)

HIV rapid test pictures for the development of the proposed technology.