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Analysis of routine Voluntary HIV Counseling and Testing client data in PSI Rwanda-supported VCT sites: implications for Rwanda's national HIV prevention programs

Background

Rwanda currently offers both routine "fixed" voluntary HIV counseling and testing (VCT) services at 419/490 health facilities and seven youth centers, as well as periodic mobile "outreach" VCT services for most-at-risk populations (e.g. persons within Gikondo Transit Camp [GTC]). We analyzed routine data collected from both types of PSI Rwanda-supported VCT services to inform national counseling and HIV behavior change communication (BCC) practices.

Methods

PSI Rwanda-supported VCT services are undertaken following National HIV prevention Guidelines. Counselors complete a client intake form that includes socio-demographics, risk behaviors, and HIV testing history. We analyzed forms from clients attending VCT services from August 2009 – September 2010.

Results

Since January 2001 PSI Rwanda has conducted >290,000 VCT sessions, through "fixed" and "outreach" services. VCT clients attending PSI-Rwanda services are mostly young (median age: 24 years; 79.3% are <30 years), single (70%) and out of school (84.4%). The overall HIV positivity rate was 5.5% (8.8% F and 3.7% M), with highest rates found in GTC (34.6% F and 10.2% M). Among those who reported having sex in the past 12 months, concurrent partnerships are more commonly reported by HIV-infected clients (31.8% M and 41.9% F) than all clients (6.9% M and 20.1% F, $p < .01$). Condom use is low: only 15.5% and 20.4% of all VCT clients reported using a condom at last sex with a non-regular partner or sex worker, respectively, compared to 17.7% and 25.6% among HIV-infected clients. Approximately 85% of HIV-infected individuals did not know their true HIV status at the time of the VCT encounter.

Conclusions

Counseling efforts must urgently reinforce the need for correct and consistent condom use especially targeting clients with non-regular or concurrent partnerships. National BCC campaigns should stress the importance of "knowing your own and your partner's HIV status."