

## **Utilization, Perception and Sources of Knowledge on VCT Services among Youth in Public Diploma Colleges in Nairobi, Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

HIV/AIDS discussion has revolved in Kenya for quite a number of years, triggered by the effects experienced both by individuals and communities. Various interventions such as VCT services were started to curb the pandemic. However, the utilization and perception of VCT services by the young people remain poor. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the utilization, perception and source of knowledge about VCT services by the youth in public diploma colleges in Nairobi. The study employed cross-sectional survey research design with a sample size of 200 students from five major public diploma colleges in Nairobi. Simple random sampling procedure was used to arrive at the sample. Questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The collected data were analyzed with the help of a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative approach of data analysis was used. The results were reported using frequencies and percentages. The study revealed that 75% of the students feared utilizing VCT services. Their perception of VCT services was highly informed by the underlying fear of turning HIV positive and what others would think of them. The main sources of information and knowledge about VCT services included TV (29%), Church (23%), Radio (21) and Newspapers (21%). Parents however hardly played any role as far as provision of VCT information were concerned. Only 1% indicated that they obtained their information from them. These findings have deep implications in terms of contributing towards design and implementation of policies guiding voluntary HIV/AIDS counseling and testing services in colleges and universities in developing economies.

**Keywords:** Voluntary Counseling and Testing, VCT, Youth VCT utilization, VCT knowledge, VCT perception, HIV/AIDS perception

### **1. Introduction**

The first cases of AIDS in Kenya were reported between 1983 and 1985 (AVERT, 1986). The pandemic reached its peak of 13.4% in 2000 and continued to decrease steadily to 6.3% by the year 2010 (National Aids Control Council, 2010). The decrease in prevalence coincided with the rapid expansion of preventative interventions since 2000, which resulted in a change in sexual behaviour and the increased use of condoms

(Cheluget, 2006). Despite the increased awareness about HIV/AIDs in the country, utilization of key preventive interventions such as Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services still remained and remains questionable especially among young people.

This study investigated the utilization, perceptions and sources of knowledge on VCT services among the youth in Public Diploma Colleges in Nairobi, Kenya. The choice of study was informed not only by utilization concerns but also lack of empirical evidence on perceptions and sources of information and knowledge about VCT Services among youths in public diploma colleges in Nairobi.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The study employed cross-sectional survey research design. The design was appropriate since it allows data collection from a sample which was statistically representative (Owen, 2002) and use of questionnaire as the key method of data collection, thus being able to reach a large number of respondents within a short period of time. It was also appropriate in terms of use of quantitative approach of data analysis which the study utilized. The sample consisted of five (n=5) Public Diploma Colleges in Nairobi, with each college providing forty students (n=40). In total, the sample consisted of two hundred (N=200) respondents. Simple random sampling procedure was used to arrive at the sample. Questionnaire method was used to collect data from the respondents. Questionnaire was used to gather data on background characteristics of the respondents, utilization of VCT services, sources of information about VCT and perception about seeking VCT services. The instrument was validated by experts in the area of health sciences from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and Kenya Medical Research Institute (KEMRI). The collected data were analyzed with the help of a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The processed data were analyzed quantitatively and reported using frequencies and percentages.

## **3. Results**

### *3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents*

The demographic characteristics of the respondents included sex and age. Out of the two hundred students who took part in the study, 49% of them were male. The remaining 51% were female. Distributions of students by age showed that majority of them, (62%) were between the ages of 21 to 25 years; a third of them, (33%) were between the ages of 18 and 20 years.

### *3.2 Utilization of VCT Services by Youth in Colleges*

The study investigated whether the students had utilized VCT services in the past and if not, to provide reasons why they had not.

Majority of students, (75%) indicated that they had not sought VCT Services in the past. Only 25% of them indicated that they had sought the services.

Those who indicated that they had not visited the VCT centres were asked to give reasons why they had not. Table 1 presents their reasons.

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
I am a virgin	54	36.0
I am scared of the results	51	34.0
What people will think of me	51	34.0
I don't know where VCT centers are	27	18.0
I am faithful to one partner	15	10.0
<i>Number of respondents: 200</i>		

As shown by Table 1, slightly over a third, (36%) of students indicated that one of the reasons for not visiting VCT was the notion that one was a virgin and therefore may not be positive. Other students, (34%) indicated that they never utilized the services due to being scared of the results and what others would think of them. Further, some (18%) lacked awareness about the existence of the services while others, (10%) indicated that they were faithful to their partners.

### 3.3 Sources of Information about VCT

The youths were provided with a variety of sources of information about VCT which they were required to choose from. These sources included the following: radio, TV, parents, friends, newspapers and church. Table 2 shows the distribution of their responses.

Sources of Information about VCT	Frequency	Percentage
TV	58	29
Church	47	23
Radio	42	21
Newspapers/ magazines	42	21
Friends	10	5
Parents	1	1
Total	200	100

A good number of the students, (29%) indicated that their main source of knowledge about VCT was Television. Another 23% of them indicated that they got their information about VCT services from churches while 21% indicated that they got their information from radio. The same trend was noted concerning newspapers as sources of information as indicated by another 21% of students who took part in the study.

A small percentage of students, (5%) indicated that they got information regarding VCT services from friends. Only 1% of students indicated that their source of knowledge was from parents.

### 3.4 Perception about Seeking VCT Services

In order to establish the perception concerns that youth in respective colleges had regarding seeking VCT services, the respondents were asked to indicate what they would do if they visited VCT and tested HIV positive. The following statements were provided: commit suicide, stop college, look for culprit, and look for treatment. Table 3 shows their distribution.

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Commit suicide	28	14
Stop college	19	9.5
Look for culprit	3	1.5
Look for treatment	150	75
Total	200	100

The majority of students, (75%) indicated that they would look for treatment if they tested positive. Another 14% of them indicated that they would commit suicide if found to be positive. The remaining, 9.5% and 1.5% respectively indicated that they would stop college and look for culprit.

When asked what informed their perception about seeking VCT services, the majority of youth (75%) indicated that they were not ready to seek VCT services. They indicated that their worst nightmare was fear of testing positive and what others would think about them if they realized they had sought the services. A few, (25%) of youth indicated that they were ready to seek VCT services. They indicated that their perception was informed by the desire to know their status so as to live responsibly based on the test results.

## 4. Discussion

The findings of the study showed that slightly over a third of students, (33.7%) indicated that there was no need of visiting VCT centres if one was a virgin. An early study by Anderson, Beutel and Maughan-Brown (2007) indicated that perceived risk of HIV/AIDS was positively associated with having had sex. This however does not imply that if one had no sex he/she could not be infected by HIV virus. Lack of adequate knowledge about the mode of HIV transmission may prevent the youth from seeking VCT services. Virgin or no virgin, all stand the possibility of being infected with HIV virus since there are various modes of transmission.

Other reasons cited for not seeking VCT services included being scared (34%) and what others would think of them (34%). Evidence from other studies show that people are generally slow in seeking VCT services for fear of stigmatization. A study by (Iliyasu, Abubakar, Kabir, & Aliyu (2006) conducted in Nigeria showed that uptake of voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) was still low, especially in the rural areas. This was associated with the fear of stigmatization.

The study further revealed that some 25% of the students had a positive perception about seeking VCT services. This was informed by the desire to know their status so as to live responsibly. This is consistent with Baggaley and Boswell (2001) findings that most of the young people who had taken a HIV test, said that they would adopt safer sexual behaviors such as abstinence, keeping one sexual partner and using condoms. However, there was another percentage of respondents whose perception about seeking VCT services was informed by deeply rooted fear of knowing the results. These had negative perception about seeking the services. A study by Adeneye<sup>1</sup>, Ogunro, Ogunbamigbe, Elemile, Olowu, Adeneye and Mafe<sup>1</sup> (2006) showed similar trend where perceived fears about seeking VCT services among respondents included outcome of test result.

The main source of information and knowledge about VCT services according to the study was television (29%), radio and (21%), print media (21%) and church (23%). These findings are consistent but higher when compared to the findings contained in KNBS (2007) report which showed that urban residents gathered HIV/AIDS information from television (14.9% ), Internet (2.7%) and from print media (5.3%). This study however showed that church was another major source of information about HIV/AIDS. Parents however appeared not to play much role towards informing youth about VCT services and HIV/AIDS related information.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Conclusions**

Based on the findings, the study concluded the following:

The utilization of VCT services among college going students in Nairobi is still low at 25%. Further, students' utilization of VCT services is crowded with fear and uncertainties mainly because of their own perception associated with HIV/AIDS.

Students' perception about VCT services is mainly informed by fear of testing positive and what others would perceive about them if they realized they had sought VCT services.

Parents have not adequately participated in enhancing the awareness of their children on VCT related matters.

## 5.2 Recommendations

College administrators in higher institutions of learning should work out ways of having sensitization programs for the students on utilization of VCT services. This would require either starting VCT centres or collaborating with organizations that provide VCT services and sensitization programs within the institutions.

Government should ensure that all institutions of higher learning have well structured programs on VCT services. The programs would enhance the sensitization initiatives that are aimed at education and attitude change of both students and parents.

Other than government, other partners need to be involved in supporting higher institutions of learning, parents and guardians in appreciating VCT services intervention in the formation of the students.

The findings in general have implications in terms of contributing towards design and the implementation of policies guiding voluntary HIV/AIDS counseling and testing services in colleges and universities in developing economies.

## 5.3 Recommendations for Further Studies

A study could be undertaken to investigate the strategies that can be adopted to address the issue of perception on seeking VCT services. Another study on the role of parents and guardians in providing information about VCT services to young people could be undertaken.

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