GUIDELINES ON
HIV SELF-TESTING AND
PARTNER NOTIFICATION
SUPPLEMENT TO CONSOLIDATED
GUIDELINES ON HIV TESTING SERVICES

Annex 26: Report on the values and preferences on partner notification in Uganda: a qualitative study

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#Test4HIV
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26.1 Background

HIV partner notification, also known as assisted partner services or contact tracing, involves contacting the sexual partners of people who test HIV-positive to link people at heightened HIV risk to testing services, treatment, and prevention. As partner notification programs expand across sub-Saharan Africa, organizations must consider community perceptions and preferences to design acceptable, effective programs. We conducted a qualitative study to understand values and preferences around HIV partner notification in Rakai, Uganda.

26.2 Methodology

Sixty three in-depth interviews were conducted, with 20 health care providers and 43 community members in both high-risk fishing communities (including sex workers and fishermen) and low-risk rural mainland communities. We also conducted 6 focus group discussions (FGDs). Questions explored specific approaches to partner notification, including passive referral (self-disclosure), provider referral (anonymous provider-led notification), and contract referral (provider-led notification after a period for self-disclosure). Interviews and FGDs were conducted in Luganda or English and audio-recorded after obtaining written informed consent. Qualitative data were translated, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using a team-based matrix approach.

26.3 Results

Participants generally supported partner notification programs. Sex workers, fishermen, and health care providers agreed that passive referral is most effective for married couples or those in close, intimate relationships. Mainland community members felt contract referral was also acceptable for married couples. Provider referral was preferred for individuals with multiple, casual partners and was highly acceptable among sex workers and fishermen. Anonymous provider referral appealed to sex workers and fishermen, though participants worried provider involvement might encourage skepticism and rumors. Health care providers voiced concerns about limited time, resources, and training for provider-assisted approaches.

26.4 Interpretation

We found generally positive views of partner notification programs, with different approaches meeting the needs of different groups and for different relationship types. The anonymity of provider-assisted partner notification may help people overcome the social and economic barriers to HIV serostatus disclosure. Findings suggest that a range of services may help expand HIV services to high-risk individuals in this setting.