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Abstract

WEPE0339 - Impact of voluntary counselling and testing service on reported risk behaviour within the integrated HIV/TB/STI ProTEST intervention in Malawi

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Background: The Malawi ProTEST project promotes voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) as an entry point for care and support. To assess how ProTEST impacts on HIV transmission, a prospective cohort study of clients attending the MACRO VCT services in Lilongwe, Malawi was conducted in 2002/3.

Methods: At baseline a systematic sample of men and women waiting for HIV testing were interviewed about their sexual behaviour. Respondents were requested to return six months later for a follow-up interview. The follow-up study design tried to ensure sufficient numbers of HIV positive men and women were included.

Results: At baseline 1408 men and women were interviewed. 715 were selected to receive a detailed follow-up interview. 70% returned at follow-up. Comparing baseline and follow-up responses on sexual behaviour in the preceding six months, there was a significant increase in the proportion reporting not having had sex (22% to 37%, $p < 0.001$); being completely faithful (77% to 97%); and the proportion of HIV negative and HIV positive males reporting abstinence (22% to 46%, $p < 0.001$ for HIV negative males and 16% to 30% $p = 0.05$ for HIV positive males). Increases in reported fidelity were particularly high among HIV negative males (59% to 92%, $p < 0.0001$). Overall there were significant decreases in reports of high risk partnerships.

Conclusions: The results suggest that VCT has an important impact on reported sexual behaviour, with its impact differing by sex and HIV status. Men seem more able to change behaviour than women, with the greatest changes being among HIV negative men. The findings suggest that as well as providing an entry point for care and treatment, VCT may have an important impact on the behaviour of clients testing negative. Further research is needed to explore the sustainability of behaviour change reported.