

Title of abstract: Innovative demand creation for HIV testing and counseling using mobile phone SMS among young people in Lusaka and Chongwe districts “Zambia U-Report”

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Background: HIV Testing and Counseling (HTC) is ultimately the entry to HIV prevention, treatment and care. Uptake of HTC remains low among adolescents and youths in Zambia. We modelled the use of free, confidential and interactive mobile phone SMS campaign to generate demand for HTC among young people (Ureporters) in Zambia.

Methods: Zambia U-Report is an SMS-based counselling platform for young people launched in December 2012 with 17,000 Ureporters to date. During the June 2013 HTC campaign, a package of SMS tailored to the baseline profile of Ureporter was designed and delivered in 10 days (one SMS per day) to all Ureporters in Lusaka and Chongwe. This triggered a two-way interactive SMS counselling between Ureporters and trained SMS counsellors. SMS counsellors referred Ureporters to the nearest HTC site in their location. We analysed HTC uptake among Ureporters at baseline, and measured the increase in HTC uptake two weeks after the SMS campaign.

Results: A total of 5,702 (52% males; 48% females) U-reporters were reached via SMS at baseline, 83% aged 10-24 years. At baseline 8%, 26% and 23% of Ureporters aged 10-14, 15-19 and 20-24 years respectively reported HTC uptake in past 12 months. About 22% of female and 16% of male (10-24 years) reported HTC uptake in the past 12 months at baseline. Among 1139 Ureporters (10-24 years) who did not test for HIV in the past 12 months, 207 (18%) went for HTC during the SMS campaign; majority (62%) among adolescents 15-19 years.

Conclusions: Zambia Ureport has the potential to provide targeted demand creation for HTC among young people using interactive SMS counselling. Further evaluation of its efficacy is warranted.