

Abstract Preview - Step 3/4

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Abstract category: E55 Initiatives led by adolescents and young people, including those from key populations

Title: Using real-time SMS to understand barriers to HIV prevention services among adolescents in Zambia : Lessons learned and implications for adolescent health programming

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Text: **Background:** Despite the growing use of mobile phones among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa, programmes targeting this age group have not fully capitalized on this medium to improve policy and programming. We report results and lessons learned of a SMS-based polling initiative focusing on barriers to HIV prevention services in Zambia among adolescents.

Methods: The SMS platform "Zambia U-report" was launched in 2012 to provide young people with free, confidential counseling on HIV and STIs. The initiative registered 40,000 young people after 13 months. We randomly selected a sample of 15,228 'U-reporters' aged 10-24 years and asked two questions via SMS: one on bottlenecks and one on solutions to address low uptake of three key HIV prevention services—HIV testing and counseling (HTC), male circumcision (MC) and condom use. Responses were analyzed using Python®. In parallel to the virtual consultation, a group of 50 youth from 10 provinces gathered in Lusaka for a consultation to answer to the same questions.

Results: The SMS polls received a 25% response rate for the question on bottlenecks and 13% response rate for the question on solutions. The main barrier to HTC was fear of a positive test result. Lack of awareness of the importance of HTC was highest among younger adolescents. Older adolescents and youth recommended increasing targeted campaigns, while younger adolescents prioritized incentive-based demand creation and campaigns targeting parents. The most common barrier to MC was fear of pain, followed by the fear of losing sensitivity during sex. All age groups reported a need for more education on benefits of MC beyond HIV prevention. A majority of young people reported that a main barrier for condom use was that sex was more enjoyable without condoms. While all age groups recommended making condoms more readily available, older adolescents and youth wanted confidential condom distribution centers managed by young people.

Conclusions: These findings were presented by adolescents themselves at the "3rd HIV Prevention Convention"—a National High Level Forum on HIV in November 2013. Real-time SMS methodology could help ensure meaningful participation of young people in policy and programme design, implementation and monitoring beyond HIV.

Country of research: Zambia

Key Population: Youth, Orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC), Women

Related to women and girls: Yes

Related to children: Yes

Ethical research declaration: Not applicable

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