Dynamics in Utilization of Voluntary Counselling and Testing Services by Persons with Hearing Impairments in Nairobi, Kenya

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Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has killed more than 25 million people since it was recognized in 1981, making it one of the most destructive epidemics in recorded history. Persons with hearing impairments have died of the disease and even more do not know enough how to protect themselves. They have been left out in education campaigns and prevention efforts. HIV/AIDS information is disseminated through mass and electronic media like radio, television and internet, video cassettes, public advertisements, public talks, seminars, health centres and counselling centres. Due to their low education, low reading ability and low economic levels, persons with hearing impairments have been unable to access the information effectively. There are no interpreters in seminars and workshops to sign for them and counsellors in Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres who can sign are too few. The purpose of this study was to investigate the dynamics in utilization of Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres by persons with hearing impairments in Nairobi. The major objectives of the study were: to establish the level of awareness among persons with hearing impairments about VCT facilities set for them, find out the extent to which they utilize them, analyze the barriers to the utilization of VCT Services and finally collate recommendations from them on how access to HIV/AIDS information can be enhanced for them. The study was quantitative in approach. It utilized the survey methodology to investigate the dynamics in utilization of Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centres by persons with hearing impairments in Nairobi Province, Kenya. Snowball sampling technique was used to sample thirty persons with hearing impairments, while purposive sampling technique was used to identify informants at the Nairobi Deaf VCT. Data were collected by use of an interview schedule prepared for both persons with hearing impairments and counsellors at the Nairobi Deaf VCT who were also hearing impaired. It contained socio-demographic data, knowledge data and attitude assessment. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Responses received from the questionnaires were organized, tabulated and analyzed using simple frequencies and percentages and presented in form of frequency and percentage tables and figures. Conclusions of the study indicate that HIV/AIDS awareness and VCT utilization among persons with HI are still far from being achieved. Though the policy makers have supported the initiative, the measures taken are still wanting. Without a strong political will in terms of laws and policies, persons with disabilities and more so persons with HI will still lag behind in matters related to
HIV/AIDS awareness and VCT utilization. The study established that communication methods for persons with hearing impairments need to be addressed so that they are brought on board in relation to HIV/AIDS awareness and Testing. It was also evident that the media needs to improve methods of passing HIV/AIDS information by using friendly Information Educational and communication materials. The study revealed that the government should review the HIV/AIDS policy to include persons with disabilities and in particular persons with hearing impairments. There is need to empower the community with skills and finance to uplift the knowledge about HIV/AIDS among this vulnerable group. It is also paramount that the literacy levels among persons with HI be addressed to make HIV/AIDS awareness and VCT utilization a reality.