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HIV Field Outreach Workers' Performance and Utilization of *Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Services in Kendari City*

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ABSTRACT : *One of the greatest global health concerns is Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infection, particularly among individuals with limited access to HIV testing, such as members of specific at-risk populations. Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) is a critical entry point to HIV prevention and care, but the service remains underused. Fieldworkers conducting community outreach are an effective strategy for recruiting individuals for HIV testing. This study aimed to investigate the correlation between outreach workers' activities and VCT service uptake among key populations in Kendari City. This quantitative cross-sectional study used secondary data from community-level HIV service records of 2,785 individuals reached by fieldworkers. The study variables were outreach activity and VCT service uptake. Data were analyzed descriptively and analytically to determine outreach outcomes and the success of referrals for HIV testing. The results showed that of the 2,785 individuals reached, 73.5% were referred and subsequently tested for HIV at VCT services. Successful referral rates were higher among men who have sex with men (MSM) (74.0%) than among transgender persons (59.3%). These findings suggest that effective outreach by fieldworkers significantly contributes to increased utilization of VCT services. Strengthening outreach activities is therefore essential to further improve HIV testing uptake among key populations.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The advances made in HIV prevention and treatment do not alleviate the seriousness of the world's continued battle with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus. One of the difficulties in reducing the number of new HIV infections is the HIV testing issue related to the structural barriers to testing and the social barriers of infectivity stigma in the healthcare system (WHO, 2019).

HIV testing is essential to antiretroviral treatment, HIV care, and the HIV prevention continuum. One HIV testing option is called Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT). VCT is a unique HIV testing option as it offers testing confidentially and includes pre- and post-test counselors. VCT is pivotal in HIV positive individuals using preventative health services, lowering HIV risk behaviors, and linking individuals to follow-up services (UNAIDS, 2021).

Use of VCT services is especially low in those groups that, due to stigma, discrimination, and a lack of trust toward the healthcare system, encounter the most barriers (Hatzold et al., 2019; Pettifor et al., 2020). To combat the VCT testing and treatment barriers, Community-based HIV service delivery has emerged. In this strategy outreach workers are key in providing HIV education and referrals to HIV testing, VCT inclusive, in the community. Previous studies have shown that effective outreach by fieldworkers can reduce access barriers and improve.

2 METHODS

The researcher conducted a study with a quantitative cross-sectional design by using secondary data from the HIV service records available to the author at Kendari City. The study populations were community-based HIV services records from fieldworker outreach activities with a total sample size of 2,785 people.

The main variables were the outreach performance of the fieldworkers and the uptake of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) services.

Outreach performance was evaluated based on HIV testing referrals achieved, while VCT uptake was described as HIV testing done by the participant after referral. The researcher analyzed data both descriptively and analytically to evaluate the outreach outcomes and the correlation between the outreach performance and the utilization of VCT services.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

3.1.1 Outreach and Client Referrals by Population Group

Table 1. Distribution of Client Outreach and Successful Referrals by Population Group

Population	Community outreach (n)	Successful referral (n)	Referral Percentage (%)
MSM	2.699	1.997	74,0
TG	86	51	59,3
Total	**2.785**	**2.048**	**73,5**

Table 1 shows that a total of 2,785 individuals were reached through community outreach activities, of whom 2,048 (73.5%) were successfully referred to HIV testing services. Among men who have sex with men (MSM), 2,699 individuals were reached and 1,997 were successfully referred, resulting in a referral rate of 74.0%, while among transgender (TG) individuals, 86 were reached with 51 successful referrals, yielding a lower referral rate of 59.3%. These results indicate that community outreach was generally effective in facilitating HIV testing referrals, although referral success varied between population groups.

3.1.2 HIV Testing Status (VCT) of Clients Based on Referrals made by Fieldworkers

Table 2 HIV testing status (VCT) of clients based on referrals made by fieldworkers

HIV Testing Status (VCT)	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Ever Tested (Successful Referral)	2.048	73,5
Never Tested	737	26,5
Total	**2.785**	**100**

Table 2 shows the HIV testing (VCT) status of clients based on referrals made by fieldworkers. Of the 2,785 individuals reached through outreach activities, 2,048 (73.5%) had undergone HIV testing through VCT services following successful referrals. In contrast, 737 individuals (26.5%) had never been tested for HIV. These findings indicate that the majority of clients reached through fieldworker outreach were successfully linked to HIV testing services, although a substantial proportion remained untested.

3.1.3 Association Between Population Type and HIV Testing Status (VCT)

Tabel 3. Association Between Population Type and HIV Testing Status (VCT)

Population	Ever Tested (n) (%)	Never Tested (n) (%)	Total
MSM	1.997 (74,0)	702 (26,0)	2.699
TG	51 (59,3)	35 (40,7)	86
Total	**2.048**	**737**	**2.785**

HIV testing uptake differed by population group. Among men who have sex with men (MSM), 74.0% had ever been tested for HIV, compared with 59.3% among transgender individuals. Overall, of the 2,785 individuals reached through outreach activities, 73.5% had undergone HIV testing, while 26.5% had never been tested. These results indicate variations in VCT uptake across population groups.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that outreach activities conducted by fieldworkers play an important role in increasing the utilization of HIV testing services (VCT) among key populations. Of the 2,785 clients successfully reached, 73.5% were successfully referred and subsequently underwent HIV testing. These findings suggest that the performance of fieldworkers in community outreach is effective in linking at-risk populations to formal healthcare services.

The higher referral success rate observed among men who have sex with men (MSM) (74.0%) compared to transgender individuals (59.3%) indicates differences in outcomes across population groups. These differences may be influenced by levels of service acceptance, the strength of community networks, and previous experiences with healthcare services. International studies have shown that community-based outreach and peer support interventions tend to be more effective among populations with relatively strong social networks, such as MSM, compared to groups experiencing

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