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Formative research to inform the development of a peer-led HIV self-testing intervention to improve HIV testing uptake and linkage to HIV care among adolescents, young people and adult men in Kasensero fishing community, Rakai, Uganda: a qualitative study

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Abstract

Background: Despite efforts to improve HIV testing and linkage to HIV care among adolescents, young people and adult men, uptake rates remain below global targets. We conducted formative research to generate data necessary to inform the design of a peer-led HIV self-testing (HIVST) intervention intended to improve HIV testing uptake and linkage to HIV care in Kasensero fishing community in rural Uganda.

Methods: This qualitative study was conducted in three study communities in Kasensero fishing community in Rakai district, Uganda, in May 2019. Six single-sex focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising 7–8 participants were conducted with adolescents and young people (15–24 years) and adult men (25+ years). We collected data on people's perceptions about peer-led HIVST; potential acceptability of a peer-led HIVST intervention and suggestions on how to improve linkage to HIV care after a positive HIVST result. Peer-led HIVST was defined as an approach where trained lay people distribute HIVST kits to other people in the community. FGDs were audio-recorded with permission from the participants, transcribed verbatim and analysed manually following a thematic framework approach.

Results: Forty-seven participants (31 men and 16 women) participated in the FGDs. Across communities and age-groups, most participants mentioned that peer-led HIVST would be generally acceptable to people in the fishing community but people will need support in performing the test due to fear of performing the test wrongly or failing to cope with HIV-positive results. Most participants felt that peer-led HIVST would bring HIV testing services closer to the community "because [the peer-leader] could be my immediate neighbour", making it easier for people to obtain the
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