Reviewer's report

**Title:** Facility and home based HIV Counseling and Testing: a comparative analysis of uptake of services by rural communities in southwestern Uganda

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 10 August 2010

**Reviewer:** Susan Kiene

**Reviewer's report:**

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Overall, the manuscript is well written and is an important contribution to the literature and I commend the authors on their important work. I am very pleased to see papers being published on home-based HIV testing since the literature on that topic is relatively small. However, the manuscript has some weaknesses that need to be addressed. Addressing these weaknesses will strengthen the manuscript’s specific contribution to the field.

- **Major Compulsory Revisions**

  1. The title, abstract, and introduction sections make the reader think that the authors’ are reporting the actual uptake of HIV testing comparing those offered home-based testing vs. those offered facility-based testing, however, in my read of the manuscript they are only reporting participants’ willingness/motivation to accept/uptake HIV testing. Since willingness does not necessarily correspond with actual behavior it is misleading to equate the two. This should be clarified throughout the manuscript: the use of “received [facility-based or home-based] VCT” should be changed to indicate participants’ study condition such as “assigned to the facility-based VCT group” or “assigned to the home-based VCT group.”

  2. Similarly, the section in the results section labeled “Willingness and motivation to use VCT services” should be in the “Variables” section within the methods.

  3. It is also not clear what are the main objectives/findings of the paper. Is it to compare the baseline differences between the two groups or describe the participants? Reporting data only from the baseline assessment (before participants had the opportunity to accept/seek VCT) precludes the authors’ ability to infer that differences between the groups are due the “intervention.” The authors need to clearly state the objectives of the paper in the abstract and at the end of introduction, and frame the results and discussion according to the objectives.

  4. In the variables section the authors describe how they dichotomized the “knowledge on transmission of HIV” and “risk perception” variables characterizing participants as either “low” and a “high.” Their choice of split point between low
and high is arbitrary. For example, a participant who got 8 out of 12 items correct on the knowledge items would be classified as “low” knowledge whereas a participant who got 9 out of 12 correct would be classified as having “high” knowledge. Those variables should not be dichotomized and should remain as scale (continuous) variables and used that way in the analyses.

5. Most of the major limitations of the manuscript are not noted in the limitations section. First, the fact that they assessed willingness to received VCT and not actual uptake/receipt of VCT must be highlighted as a major limitation. Second, other limitations such as that the study was not a randomized study, that they are only reporting data from the baseline assessment and can’t compare how the two VCT models affected participants’ behaviors or perceptions, and that STI symptoms not actual biologically confirmed STIs were used also need to be noted.

6. The groups should not be compared on each STI symptom but rather on any vs no reported STI symptom.

7. Tables 1, 2, 3 and 6 should be combined into one table since they all report comparisons between the two study groups. Furthermore, the authors need to report the both the unadjusted ORs (when only the variable of interest is included in the model) and adjusted ORs (when all variables that were statistically significant are included in the model).

- Minor Essential Revisions

8. In the methods section and in the abstract the authors should clarify that the study was not a randomized trial. This should also be mentioned as a limitation of the overall study.

9. In the results section the authors’ report data regarding participants’ sexual behavior and other variables but these variables are not described in either the instruments or variables section. For the variables which the authors report findings the reader needs to know the details of what was specifically assessed and how each variable was assessed.

10. In the third paragraph of the “Design and sample population” section the authors estimate that the uptake of facility-based VCT would be 60% by citing the uptake of VCT during antenatal care. Given that women attending antenatal care are already at a health facility and thus do not have to travel to a health facility just for an HIV test the uptake will be much higher than if individuals are not already visiting a health facility for another medical concern. I suggest that the authors estimate the expected uptake of facility-based VCT using data from the Wolff et al. study done in Uganda and published in Health Policy and Planning, 2005.

- Discretionary Revisions

11. Since the authors describe the larger study from which this data comes they should also specify how long after the baseline was the follow-up data
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:
I declare that I have no competing interests