

Leveraging Behavioural Economics to Increase Demand for Free HIV Testing Services at Private Clinics in Johannesburg, South Africa

Increasing HIV testing services (HTS) among individuals at high risk of HIV exposure is essential for ending the HIV epidemic in South Africa, especially for uninsured people who are not aware of free HTS at private clinics.

HIV testing is an essential for step in achieving epidemic control. In South Africa, over 92% of PLHIV know their status, however HIV testing rates are not equal with gaps in higher risk populations. There is a need for innovative approaches to promoting HIV testing across the country.

Current testing approaches are largely focused on increasing access in public facilities and mobile testing points. However, certain care recipients may prefer expanding HST delivery to include private clinics due to to perceived trust and quality which in turn may motivate people to follow through with treatment.

STUDY OVERVIEW

Objective: The study investigated whether HTS demand creation materials that used behavioural economics (BE) principles could increase demand for HIV testing at private clinics with low HIV testing rates at baseline.

Study design: This randomised controlled study included three arms 1) "standard of care" brochure 2) "healthy lifestyle screening" brochure and 3) "recipient of care voucher" brochure.

Location: The study took place at 5 private clinics supported by the Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) in Johannesburg from January to April 2022.

Population: Brochures were distributed to adults aged ≥ 18 years in the catchment area of each clinic.

Outcome: Care recipient presentation to any of the 5 private study clinics.



Advertised a free HIV test and access to ART services



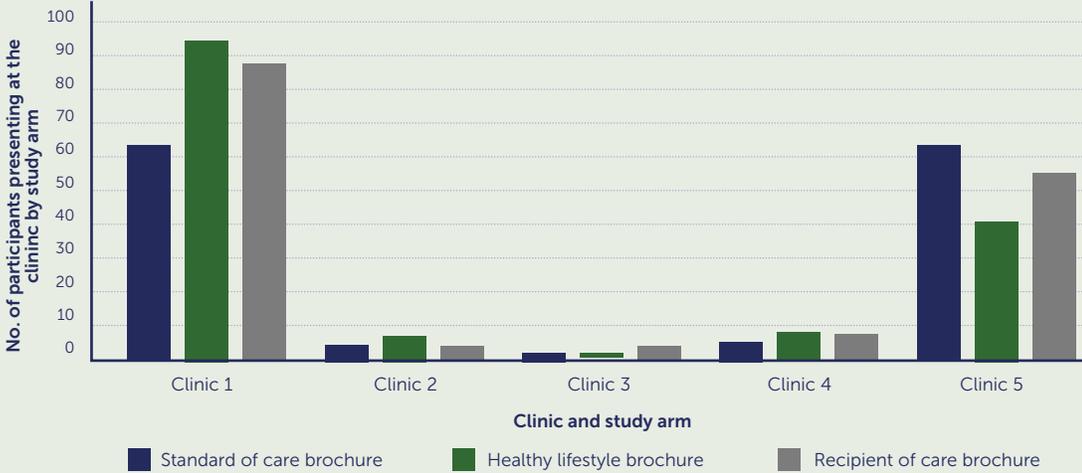
Addressed stigma associated with HIV testing by bundling free HIV test a health screening



Leveraged loss aversion (the tendency to avoid losses more strongly than enjoying equivalent gains) and the endowment effect (valuing something you own more than something that does not yet belong to you)

RESULTS

- Over 11,000 brochures were randomly distributed across the 3 study arms
- The majority of brochure recipients (59%) were men and 50% were between 25-34 years old
- A total of 4% of recipients who received a brochure visited a private clinic, and 51% were men
- There was no significant difference in HTS uptake between study arms



INTERVENTION PROTOTYPING

Prototyping of the three brochures took place at one participating private clinic with 11 participants and collected feedback on the format, structure, language and understanding of the brochure content. This process informed revisions to the brochures prior to study implementation.

KEY FINDING 1	KEY FINDING 2	KEY FINDING 3
<p>People were 5.3 times more likely to visit a private clinic that had high visibility and was centrally located for HIV testing services, as shown in Clinics 1 and 5 above</p> 	<p>While there were no significant differences between study arms, any brochure distribution in the private clinic catchment areas increased the likelihood of HIV testing service uptake overall</p> 	<p>The distribution of brochures as demand creation material reached more men than women, a group that is largely challenging to reach with other HIV testing service marketing approaches</p> 

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

	Even low-cost and low-technology investments in HTS demand creation, such as distributing brochures around centrally located and visible clinic locations, may reach more men with HIV prevention services.
	Leveraging existing HIV testing service programmes, even within the private sector, is central to increasing access to HTS in hard-to-reach populations.
	Co-designing demand creation materials with clinic staff and potential care recipients is important in facilitating HTS uptake at private clinics.
	While behaviorally informed demand creation strategies can help increase the uptake of HTS services, structural and environmental factors, such as clinic location and visibility, are key drivers of the effectiveness of these programmes.