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Acceptability and willingness among young people in Soweto to use at-home HIV test

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Abstract

HIV testing among young people aged 15-24 remains at sub-optimal levels in South Africa. To increase HIV testing, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that an at-home HIV test be made widely available in all countries. In 2017, the South African Pharmacy Council approved the availability of an over-the-counter HIV home test kit in South African pharmacies. However, little is known about the knowledge and use of HIV home test kit among young South Africans. In this study, I conducted 15 in-depth interviews with young males and females aged 18-24 years old in Soweto, Johannesburg. Participants were first asked to share their experience with testing for HIV, their views about the benefits of testing, and their perceived HIV risk. Participants were then showed a video of the HIV home test (as a demonstration of how it works) and were asked to provide feedback on whether or not they would find it easy to use. All of the participants that were interviewed had previously tested for HIV. The interview data revealed that the majority of the participants were not aware of the HIV home test but they expressed their willingness to use it. However, some raised concerns about the absence of HIV counselling and suggested that a toll-free number be made available should one need to speak to someone regarding the test. Additionally, young people were willing to purchase the HIV home test at an affordable price ranging from R25-R100 from their local pharmacies, retail stores, or for free from their local clinic. All participants agreed that the HIV home test would improve the uptake and frequency of HIV testing among young people in South Africa. This study suggests that an HIV home test kit has the potential to increase HIV testing rates among young people. There is a need for increased awareness around the availability of the HIV home test kit. Further consideration should also be given to ensuring the affordability of the HIV home test kit for young people in South Africa.

Key words: Acceptability, Health belief model, HIV home test, HIV self-testing, South Africa, Young people