Occupational Exposure to HIV Infection Among Kenyan Health Workers: Findings from a National Survey

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Study Rationale

Health workers are the backbone of HIV/AIDS initiatives and the key to their success. Health workers have high rates of occupational exposure to HIV infection. Their health impacts patients’ health and well-being.

Focus of the Study

Concerns about getting infected at work:

- Knowledge about post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).
- Received availability of infection control supplies.
- Potential exposure to HIV infection in the last 12 months.
- Access to PEP.
- Barriers to uptake of PEP.

Methods

- National survey of medical personnel (n = 1,087) in 245 health facilities, 28 districts.
- Part of a national study assessing preparedness of health workers to implement diagnostic HIV testing and counseling.
- Used guided self-administered questionnaire.
- Conducted 24 focus group discussions in selected facilities.
- Used the 2004 KISPA sampling frame; employed stratified proportionate sampling.
- Weighted data to reflect national distribution of health workers.
- Fieldwork May–June 2005, following standard ethical approval and informed consent procedures.

Sample Characteristics

Most respondents were female, employed in the public sector, and were nurses (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>n %</th>
<th>n %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender: Male</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>14.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,787</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of education: Illiterate</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 8</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 10</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 12</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 14</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 16</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard 18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% employed in public sector</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>73.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% employed by hospitals</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Kenya Health Worker Survey 2005 Participating Districts

To learn more about this study, contact K enyaHorizons@path.org

Key Findings

The majority of health workers feel there is an adequate supply of important infection control supplies, but important gaps remain (Figure 2).

- Nearly 3 out of 4 say there is a lack of gloves.
- About a third believes that supplies of disinfectant and soap are inadequate.
- About a fourth note a lack of sharps containers.

Figure 2: Percent report an adequate supply of selected infection control supplies

Although most respondents say they know of PEP, only half have operational knowledge about how to access and use it (Figure 3).

- More than half of health workers (55%) who had operational knowledge of PEP and were potentially exposed to HIV infection did not seek PEP.

Figure 3: Awareness, knowledge, and availability of PEP

The vast majority of Kenyan health workers are concerned about getting infected at work, yet most say their health facility lacks written guidelines about occupational exposure.

- 93% “very concerned” about getting HIV on the job
- 64% DO NOT have written guidelines in their health facility on what to do in case of occupational exposure
- 17% report potential HIV exposure in the past 12 months (Figure 4)
- Doctors are most likely to report potential HIV exposure; VCT counselors least likely
- 46% of potential exposure respondents reported multiple experiences

Figure 4: Percent report a potential HIV exposure past 12 months

More than half of health workers (55%) who had operational knowledge of PEP and were potentially exposed to HIV infection did not seek PEP following exposure (Figure 5). Major reasons were lack of information and fear.

Figure 5: Reasons for not seeking PEP among those with operational knowledge and potentially exposed

Recommendations

- Strengthen infection control supplies, procedures, and guidelines in health care facilities in Kenya.
- Educate health workers about PEP, including how to use and access it.
- Help providers overcome fears and seek PEP.