Preliminary Baseline Findings from the GIRLS Study: Recruitment Venue and Testing Option Preferences

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BACKGROUND

Adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) in the age range of 15 to 24 years are twice as likely as their male peers to be HIV-infected, making females in sub-Saharan Africa the most at-risk group for HIV infection. Expansion of HIV testing services in the sub-Saharan region has not translated into increased access and uptake of testing, and HIV associated mortality remains unacceptably high. Given the disproportionate risk faced by AGYW, nurses and other providers need to be aware of AGYW preferences to ensure that this vulnerable population can receive effective primary prevention, HIV testing, and linkage to care services.

METHODS

Within a framework of implementation science, we are evaluating prevention-treatment continuum interventions to increase uptake of HIV testing, linkage to and retention in care, and prevention among AGYW. We are comparing two “seek” recruitment strategies, three “test” strategies, and pilot “linkage to care interventions (SMART design) among AGYW in Homa Bay County, western Kenya. Participants are recruited from urban, fishing, and rural communities via home-based or community-based (mobile events) strategies that run concurrently. AGYW are offered three testing options: (1) oral fluid HIV self-testing, (2) immediate staff-aided rapid HIV testing or (3) referral to a health care facility for standard HIV testing services. For those who select self-testing, reactive results and a proportion of non-reactive results are confirmed per Government of Kenya guidelines. We administer a standard baseline questionnaire that collects data on sociodemographic characteristics and sexual risk taking. Newly diagnosed HIV positives are enrolled in a cohort to pilot the strategy and staff increase awareness of recruitment site. High prevalence of high risk HIV-negative AGYW demonstrates the importance of HIV testing to inform prevention interventions to avert new infections.

RESULTS

Recruitment & Testing

May 15, 2017 – February 14, 2018

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Recruitment &amp; Testing</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>In the Home Mobile Events</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>759 (84.1%)</td>
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Testing Options

| Testing Options | 728 (80.7%) | 170 (18.8%) | 4 (0.4%) |

Baseline Characteristics

Mean Age 18.5 yrs
Minor 15.1%
In School 29.5%
Ever Had Sex 85.5%
Sexual Debut 16.1 yrs
Used Condoms 32.4%
Ever HIV Tested 95.9%
Access to cell 89.1%
IPV (ever) 15.7%
Depression Screen 11.0%
Alcohol Screen 2.7%

HIV Self-testing Survey

Acceptability 99% strongly agreed or agreed that HIVST was acceptable
Difficulty 99% thought doing HIVST was easy or very easy

CONCLUSION

- For those who selected self-testing, no invalid results or serious adverse events have been reported.
- There were 24 (2.7%) newly diagnosed HIV-positives, all enrolled in the pilot, and 15 (62.5%) have linked to care.
- Out of 876 HIV negatives, 158 (18.0%) were identified as high risk and 77 have been randomly selected and enrolled to the HIV negative cohort.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The research described was supported by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases of the National Institutes of Health under Award Number R01AI122779. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.
- The authors would like to thank Impact Research and Development Organization of Directors for supporting the implementation of this project.
- Kenya Ministry of Health.
- Study participants and the GIRLS Study team.

REFERENCES


