

ABSTRACT

Globally, 4.9 million young people aged between 15-24 years are living with HIV and AIDS, and 75% of them live in sub-Saharan Africa. Maseno University students fall in this age bracket. In 2001, Commission for University Education (formerly Commission for Higher Education) encouraged Universities to set up Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) centers as a strategy to reduce HIV infection by promoting behaviour change among students. Despite the fact that Maseno University set AIDS Control Unit (ACU), records show low levels of utilization of VCT services by students for reasons that are not clearly known. Therefore, this study set out to: determine the knowledge of students on VCT services, find out the perception of students on VCT services and identify other factors that influence student's uptake of VCT services. The study adopted the theory of reasoned action (TRA) developed by Ajzen and Fishbien (1980) and theory of planned behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991). The study used a cross-sectional survey design. The study was conducted in Maseno, Main Campus, which has 12 Schools with 6535 students. Fisher et al. (1992) formula was used to obtain a sample size of 363 students. Stratified random sampling was first used to select samples from each school. Simple random sampling was then used to select the sample from each stratum based on gender and year of study. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative data from interviews and discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis and presented in form of verbatim quotations. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables of frequencies and percentages. The results show that students had basic knowledge on the utilization of VCT services. However, they did not identify VCT as a preventive mechanism. They perceived VCT in the university as scary, unreliable, where university obtains names of HIV positive students and place for immoral people. Other factors which influenced student's uptake of VCT were; fear of stigma in case they were found HIV positive, time, and peer influence, fear of unknown, confidentiality, and geographical location. The study recommends that the university should integrate HIV activities with other services within the unit, reinforce confidentiality and decentralize VCT sites. The findings of this study are relevant for policy making, especially those targeting tertiary institutions in terms of promoting utilization of VCT services in order to reduce new HIV infections among students.