

CHALLENGES IN ACCESS AND USE OF HIV SELF-TESTS (HIVST) BY SOCIALLY VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

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Background:

Brazil freely distributes HIVST since 2018 to reach groups with difficulties to access HIV diagnosis in health services. This study evaluated HIVST users' experiences to support strategies to expand access.

Methods:

Users were instructed to fill out an online questionnaire, available through a QR code in the user's guide, after performing the HIVST. Sociodemographic and sexual activity information and experiences regarding access, execution and interpretation were collected from December 2018 to November 2023.

Results:

From 1471 respondents, 40.8% obtained the HIVST in health facilities, 32.4% through extramural activities, 11.8% from peers, 10.1% from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and 4.9% answered others. 45.3% were MSM and 1.8% were trans people. Young people (15 to 29 years) represented 51.6%. 64.4% had university degree and 4.2% did not complete high school. Within the last six months, 81% had unprotected sexual intercourse. 92.8% had no difficulties using HIVST and 60.6% performed it alone. At least 98.6% would do it again and recommend to a friend. Main advantage was privacy (74.7%) and disadvantage was difficulty of use by illiterate people (41.9%). 31.7% tested for the first time with the HIVST and their main reasons for not testing were fear of a positive result (12.5%) and not thinking they could be living with HIV (8.3%). Considering HIVST results, 3.3% were positive, from which 70.8% reached a health service to complete diagnosis and 29.2% did not.

Conclusion:

Results showed users satisfaction and the importance of HIVST in expanding access to diagnosis. However, the influence of social vulnerabilities on difficult access is evident, especially those related to education and gender identity. HIVST distribution in health public services, outreach strategies and NGO partnerships are essential to expand diagnosis. Qualification in offering and expansion in distribution through peers and partnerships are needed to favor the achievement of the 95-95-95 targets.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.