

BROTHEL-DISTRIBUTED HIV SELF-TESTING BY LAY WORKERS IMPROVES HIV TESTING RATES AMONG MEN WHO PURCHASE SEX IN INDONESIA

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Background: The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends community-based approaches (HIV self-testing, and testing outside of clinics by lay workers) to improve HIV testing coverage. Men who purchase sex (MWPS) are identified as a key priority population for HIV prevention, yet in Indonesia HIV testing rates are <10% among the 5.2 million MWPS in this country. This study explored the uptake and acceptability of HIV self-testing among MWPS, when offered at brothels by lay workers.

Methods: A health survey was conducted among men attending seven brothels in Bali, Indonesia in 2017-2018. Once complete, men were then offered HIV self-test by lay workers, and could opt to be assisted (supervised or unsupervised when reading their results at the brothel), or unassisted (could take the kit off-site). They were also asked to complete a survey on preferences and acceptability of HIV self-testing.

Results: Among the men approached, 292 completed the health survey, of whom, 189 (64.7%) agreed to have a HIV self-test. Among these men, the median age was 38.5 years, and 12.7% reported a HIV testing in the past. Most men, 186 (98.4%), requested to have assisted HIV self-testing (156 supervised reading, 30 unsupervised), and 3 (1.6%) unassisted. Of the tests done, 2.1% were reactive. The majority of men reported they like HIV self-testing because they could test themselves (89.8%), it was easy (99%) and in the future they were likely/very likely to testing themselves again with the HIV self-test (89%), test their partners (63.5%), and recommend it to other men (91%).

Conclusion: This is the first international study of HIV self-testing among MWPS. The study shows the potential utility of scaling up HIV testing among MWPS through a community based approach involving HIV self-test distribution at brothels by lay workers. Future research should assess costs, and the scalability of this model of HIV testing.

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