

Text messaging to encourage uptake of HIV testing amongst African communities: findings from a theory-based feasibility study In: UK Society for Behavioural Medicine, 11th Annual Scientific Meeting, 8-9 December 2015, Newcastle, UK.

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Background

There is a public health need to tackle high levels of undiagnosed (or late diagnosed) HIV amongst the UK's African communities.

Aims

To assess the feasibility and acceptability of using a text messaging intervention to encourage uptake of HIV testing amongst this population in a UK city.

Methods

Participatory research adopting a mixed-methods design. Four distinct stages included:

[1] Formative Research: Six focus group discussions (FGDs) to assess perceptions about HIV and to inform message development (n=48) using health behaviour change theory.

[2] Message Development: SMS messages developed and tailored according to language, gender and religion.

[3] Intervention and outcomes: 172 participants recruited; all received 2 messages per week for 12 weeks. Data collected in pre and post questionnaire surveys assessing uptake of HIV testing, HIV-related attitudes and knowledge and perceived general health.

[4] Evaluation: Acceptability and meaningfulness of the intervention were explored via semi-structured telephone interviews (n=21).

Results

Follow up data was collected for 76 participants (44%). 8 (10.5%) reported having had an HIV test during/after the intervention. Risk perception remained low at pre and post-test. Non-significant improvements were observed in HIV-related knowledge (testing procedures and treatment availability) and attitudes towards HIV. Qualitative evaluation (n=21) showed that messages were perceived to be highly acceptable, useful and appropriately targeted.

Conclusions

SMS text messaging is an acceptable and feasible method of promoting HIV testing in African communities. Rate of testing uptake is comparable to other community-based strategies in this population.