



SUCCESS STORY: SOUTH AFRICA

Study Findings Help Improve HIV/AIDS Services

USAID-funded research evaluates family planning and HIV integration



Population Council/Horizons Program

A nurse takes a patient's blood pressure at a primary health facility in Durban, South Africa.

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April 2005

A STUDY OF 98 PROVINCIAL health facilities in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, is helping improve HIV/AIDS services in the region. “Reproductive Health Services in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: A Situation Analysis Study Focusing on HIV/AIDS Services” identifies gaps in the delivery of HIV counseling and testing; the integration of family planning, antenatal care, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) services with HIV prevention; and the promotion of prevention strategies.

More than 100 stakeholders from the government, research institutions, and nongovernmental organizations reviewed the data and formulated recommendations. Some stakeholders are now part of task teams to more effectively integrate HIV/AIDS activities into reproductive health services at the provincial level.

South Africa has the highest number of HIV infections in the world. Yet the study found that only about a third of women seeking antenatal care in KwaZulu-Natal are counseled on HIV, STIs, and prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission. While these services or referrals are available in most hospitals, only 42% of community health centers and 17% of clinics—the types of facilities most pregnant women use—offered these options. One study recommendation is to increase information and emphasis on HIV/STI prevention and mother-to-child transmission in antenatal care services.

Observations of family planning counseling have shown that about 70% of clients were encouraged to use condoms, an important prevention message in this high-prevalence region. Yet providers seldom discussed condom negotiation with partners or other HIV-prevention strategies such as abstinence and mutual monogamy. Therefore, a key recommendation is to strengthen counseling training for health providers to better address all aspects of HIV prevention.

HIV counseling and testing are relatively new services in primary health facilities in South Africa. Of the counseling and testing clients surveyed, 78% were female, and their median age was 26. Because counseling and testing are the entry point for treatment, care, and support, study recommendations are: (1) to improve gender sensitivity to encourage use of HIV counseling and testing, and STI services by males and youth; and (2) to offer HIV counseling and testing, and STI services at every contact with reproductive health clients. Strategies being implemented in all districts to address identified gaps in contraceptive services, cervical cancer screening, and youth health will be assessed at the end of a year.

This research study, funded by USAID, was conducted by the Population Council through the Horizons Program, in cooperation with the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Health and District Health System.