



U.S. Agency for International Development

Bureau for Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

HIV Testing in the Mali Demographic and Health Survey Sets Standard

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, the U.S. Agency for International Development has supported the collection, analysis, and use of data on international population and health through the MEASURE project's Demographic and Health Survey (MEASURE DHS+) and other data collection mechanisms. The first time that an HIV testing element was included in a DHS was in Mali in 2001. The resulting data have provided information on nationally representative HIV seroprevalence levels that is helping guide Mali in its resource allocation and decisions on HIV/AIDS policy and programs. Since the addition of the testing element was both cost-effective and efficient, other countries have added testing to their surveys.

The Mali Ministry of Health's objective in adding testing to the demographic and health survey was to estimate the rate of HIV prevalence at both the national and the regional level. To meet this objective, health workers were trained to administer HIV tests to a representative sample of female and male survey respondents while maintaining the anonymity of the respondents. The only information linked to each test was an identification number included in the blood sample bag and written on a separate card with the person's age, sex, and geographic area. Test results were not shared with respondents; rather, each person was given a referral card to a local clinic for free HIV testing and counseling. The survey did not try to measure the impact of the survey on motivating respondents to seek their HIV status, but it may have provided an effective impetus for respondents to visit a clinic for counseling and testing.

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The survey data concluded that the national HIV-seroprevalence rate was 1.7 percent. At that level, it was estimated that approximately 80,000 Malian adults were HIV positive at the time of the study. In urban areas, the prevalence rate was 2.5 percent for women compared to 1.9 percent for men; in rural areas, the rate was 1.9 percent for women compared to 1.1 percent for men. Thus, regardless of residence, HIV prevalence is distinctly higher among women than among men.

The successful inclusion of HIV testing in the Mali Demographic and Health Survey demonstrates the feasibility of conducting HIV testing as part of a data collection activity in order to provide a national seroprevalence level. Following the survey in Mali, the MEASURE DHS+ project incorporated HIV testing in Zambia and the Dominican Republic. Several other countries in sub-Saharan Africa have now committed to carry out the test in their upcoming demographic and health survey.



Photo courtesy of A. Alisaiad/ORC MACRO

A clinician takes a blood sample for HIV testing.

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