

# The Weekly

## Information Resource Bulletin

### FOCUS: HIV Testing Among Young People

Malawi has a youthful population. According to the National Statistical Office (NSO) nearly three-quarters of the population is under the age of 30.

According to the National AIDS Commission (NAC), out of the reported one million people with HIV in Malawi, nearly a third are believed to be people under the age of 24.

Knowing one's HIV status is important for helping individuals decide to adopt safer sex practices in order to reduce the risk of becoming infected or transmitting HIV.

For those who are HIV positive, knowledge of their HIV status allows them to take measures to protect their sexual partners and to access treatment services.

### The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To help create a positive attitude among the youth towards getting tested for HIV
- To encourage the youth to go for HIV testing whether they are sexually active or not
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members about why some young people do not go for HIV testing and the importance of HIV testing

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### The Problem: Youth Shunning VCT Services

The United Nations Development Assistance Framework of Malawi, indicates that "most of the HIV infections are occurring among people between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. It says the infection rate among young girls is six times higher than that of boys in this age group.

There are several reasons why this may be occurring: failure to negotiate for safe sex, cultural factors such as initiation ceremonies and having unprotected sex with multiple partners.

The 2004 Malawi Demographic Health survey found that most youths in Malawi, in both urban and rural areas shun HIV

Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services.

Therefore there is a strong need to encourage young people to seek VCT services and to let them know that being informed about their HIV status will help them plan their life better.

From random interviews conducted in the city of Lilongwe, young people said fear of being found HIV positive and stigma are some of the main reasons that cause them to avoid HIV testing.

Out of the 16 young people interviewed – only one indicated they would want to know their HIV status.

## Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community, especially young people, understand that HIV testing (Voluntary Counseling and Testing Services) is very important whether a person is sexually active or not.

VCT is when a person chooses to undergo HIV/AIDS counseling so that they can make an informed decision about whether to be tested for HIV

Make the following points;

If the youth make a decision to go for HIV testing and they are found to be HIV positive, they can start their treatment before the infection causes too much damage to their body and health.

Getting tested is important because someone who has the HIV virus, but has not gone for testing can look and feel healthy for years, but the infection will be damaging their health and they can also pass the infection on to their sexual partners.

Encourage traditional leaders and religious leaders to always talk to young people about

the importance of getting tested for HIV.

Also encourage youth clubs to come up with a day once every six months to go as a group to the clinic to get tested for HIV. Assure them that their results will be confidential and that none of their peers will know their results -- unless they decide to tell their friends.

Talk to schools within your area and HIV testing service providers such as Banja La Mtsogolo (BLM) about the possibility of BLM taking their testing services to schools.

The schools should arrange for a day when BLM can visit them and do a motivational talk for students about the importance of HIV testing. Tests can be conducted during the visit.

Have a vox pop with a few young people about why they think some young people shun HIV testing.

Talk to the District Health Officer in your district and find out how many young people have tested for HIV since January. Ask he/she what can be done to get more young people go for testing.

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