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Using Trained Expert Client Approaches to Inform HIV Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa: Multi-Country Insights

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Background

- HIV stigma and discrimination (S&D) in health facilities limit service uptake in marginalized groups.
- Participatory approaches like the Trained Expert Client (TEC) support intervention evaluation.
- We used TEC to assess client experiences under the expanded Total Facility Approach (eTFA) project.

Figure 1. A nurse displaying discriminatory behavior toward a young adolescent girl seeking contraception.

Methods

- **Study setting**: 6 public hospitals (2 per country)
- **Population:** 82 marginalized clients (≥ 15 years) recruited between Aug - Dec 2024 (**Table 1**)

Table 1. Multi-Country TEC Populations

Category	Ghana	Tanzania	Zambia
Target Population	Adolescent and young women (AYW) accessing reproductive health services Men that have sex with men (MSM) accessing HIV and other services	People who use drugs (PWUDs) LWH Adolescents and young adults (AYAs) LWH AYA seeking HIV prevention services	AYALWH AYAs seeking HIV prevention services People living with HIV (PLWH) with co-morbidities accessing HIV and other services
Recruitment	Chain Referral	Hospital channels	Community based organisations (CBOs) Hospital channels
Sample size	6 AYW accessing family planning and antenatal care services 6 AYW seeking HIV prevention and STI services 6 MSM LWH 6 MSM seeking STI services	11 PWUDs LWH 12 AYALWH 1 AYA seeking prevention services	12 AYALWH 10 AYAs seeking prevention services 12 PLWH with co-morbidities
Training Workshops	19 - 20 Sept 2024 23 - 30 Sept 2024	18 – 19 Nov 2024 25 Nov 2024 7 Dec 2024 11 Dec 2024	9 - 10 Aug 2024 22 - 23 Aug 2024

TEC Approach:

- Each TEC attended a single workshop on the approach, ethics, observation techniques, role-playing, and safety measures.
- TECs discreetly observed routine or pre-identified hospital visits at baseline.

- Focused on service quality, HIV-related stigma, discrimination, overall impressions, and motivation to return.
- Social scientists debriefed TECs within 24 hours using an interview guide and hospital maps.

Data Analysis:

- Rapid thematic analysis identified key themes in service quality, S&D and client experiences.
- Findings were shared with the hospitals and stakeholders as part of the eTFA intervention.

Results

Multi-Country TEC Observations:

- TEC observations highlighted three systemic issues:

Ghana and Zambia, healthcare workers (HCWs) breached confidentiality and questioned young men about their HIV prevention service-seeking behaviours.

> *"I noticed from my own observation that **the way they were talking**…when you come for HIV prevention services, they would like others to know that they are seeking HIV services…. yes, **they don't keep confidentiality,** the attitude of health workers is not encouraging because they look down on young ones. They **think that certain services are for married people only,** so they think those are the right people to access HIV prevention services such as condom use, when even the adolescents ought to use them also. I don't think they support the adolescents' use of condoms*."
>
> **(Young man, accessing condoms - Zambia)**

Ghana, HCWs used derogatory language based on perceived femininity of MSM clients

> *"Yes, so immediately I got there and started interacting with the lady**,** I don't know who she was talking to or chatting with on the phone, so she was like, 'Go and sit behind those kojo besia'—excuse me, like, **'Go and sit beside those feminine guys. The guy will come and attend to you**. 'So when I was going, she called me back and said, 'Make sure you shouldn't talk to them or have an exchange of contact with them*."
>
> **(MSM, seeking HIV prevention services– Ghana)**

Tanzania, HCWs demonstrated lack of empathy when providing HIV test results compared to routine malaria results.

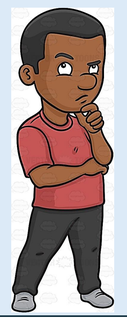
> When I came to, **the doctor spoke to me** and said, "There's nothing we've seen, but it's like this and this and this….you have HIV, and you need to start treatment immediately…First, I didn't appreciate the way he was telling me; it **felt like someone was telling me I had malaria**…."
>
> **(AYA living HIV – Tanzania)**

TEC Observation in Zambia:

- One case in Zambia sheds light on poor service delivery.

Adolescent and Young Adult TEC in Zambia

A young man requested an HIV test and during the interaction, a volunteer HIV counsellor did not greet him and compromised confidentiality.



> ……"I **didn't feel respected** at first... he didn't greet me. He just asked me where I came from…**the room was a bit open**, there was a friend of mine nearby, and I feared she might overhear…

Conclusions

TEC approach identifies gaps in HIV service delivery and informs stigma reduction interventions.

Empowers community members to report first-hand experiences.

Six-month follow-up will assess changes.

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