

European Seminar
VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND TESTING

Bucharest, May 30 – 31, 2008

HIV VCT - concept and practices

A comparative assessment among HIV-testing offers
in 5 EU countries

BORDERNET Project, 2005-2007

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordnet.net



BORDERNET briefly

Four cross border pilot regions with „tandems“

Region 1:
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (DE)
Voivodship Zachodniopomorskie (PL)
TANDEM: Lwiv /UA and Rzow/PL

Region 2:
Brandenburg (DE)
Voivodship Lubuskie (PL)
TANDEM: Lwiv /UA and Rzow/PL

Region 3:
Austria (AT)
Slovak Republic (SK)
TANDEM: Kosice/Slowak Republic

Region 4:
Regione Veneto (IT)
Slovenia (SI)
TANDEM: Rijeka/Croatia/

Tzvetina Arso
SPI Research
www.bo



Goals

- Improvement of HIV/AIDS and STI prevention:
 - for general population (especially young people)
 - for vulnerable groups (MSM, Sex workers, IDUs)
 - for uninsured persons (migrants)
- Collection of regional epidemiological data on HIV and STIs
- Outline patterns of risk behaviour within selected target groups
- Improvement of standards for HIV voluntary counselling and testing
- Improvement of diagnostic and treatment of STIs

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordnet.net



Improvement of standards for HIV voluntary counselling and testing

Changed context.....



Decrease in attention in West. Europe - successful halt of epidemic's increase and treatment achievements;

Fatigue and Déjà vu- reiteration of same old "condom use" song;



Rapid escalation of new HIV cases in East. Europe, worrisome trend (*eurohiv*) of spread among young people (15-24) (EST, RO, PL, BG);



Low uptake of voluntary HIV counselling and testing (esp. young people);

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordernet.eu



HIV-testing - entry gate to HIV/STIs prevention

.....new priorities.....

- Adoption of additional approaches to expand access to HIV-testing;
- Increase the uptake of HIV-testing;



..... new dilemmas

- HIV-testing- exceptional status or routine screening?
- HIV-testing – with or without counselling?

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV-testing approaches (rundown)

VCT (WHO/UNAIDS) Client-initiated voluntary HIV-testing upon counselling	Opt-out (CDC, 2006) Routine test in all health care settings (<i>adults, adolescents, pregnant women</i>):	Provider-initiated (WHO/UNAIDS, 2007) Provider-initiated testing in health facilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidential for the client (declared and ensured) • Accompanied by counselling (not only information) • Conducted with informed consent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test result reflected in medical records • Prevention counselling should not be required • Separate written consent is not required (assumed unless one opts-out) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored to 3 types of epidemic: low-level, concentrated and generalized • Simplified pre-test information individually/group session • Informed consent is given individually, in private

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HIV-testing approaches

Essential contrasts

VCT

Person-centred



OPT-OUT

Case-centred;

Individual autonomy



Public health benefit;

Confidentiality,
human rights



Public responsibility

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV VCT-practices

Assessment survey BORDERNET

Rationale

- Reflects the VCT concept;
- Assumed discrepancies between guidelines and local practice settings;
- Great differences in coverage and threshold of HIV-testing services in old and new EU countries (*BORDERNET's model regions*);
- Insufficient testing among certain target groups;
- Discrepancies between utilized testing-facilities and the quantity and quality of counselling offered by them (i.e. general hospitals, private labs);

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordnet.net



HIV VCT-practices

Assessment survey BORDERNET

Design

- Policy papers on VCT (*WHO/UNAIDS, 2004*);
- VCT Toolkits (*Family Health International, 2005*);
- Client-centred model of counselling (*Humanistic Psychology, C.Rogers, 1959*);
- **Method:** 24-items questionnaire with multiple choice and open-ended questions;
- **Administration:** self-filled, individual interview, focus group

Sample

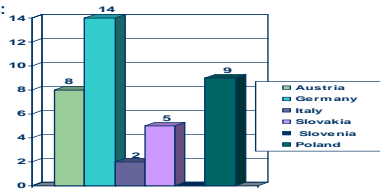
- 38 HIV-testing services
- 5 EU countries: Austria (8), Germany (14), Italy (2), Poland (9), and Slovak Republic (5)

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HIV VCT-practices Assessment survey BORDERNET

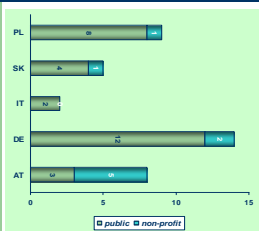
Participants:



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VCT survey – types of services

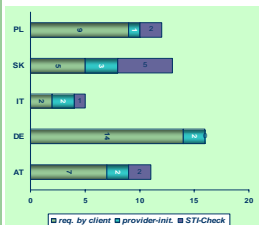


- The majority (29 of 38) are public, mostly in Germany (12):
 - public health office (GA),
 - clinic (in- and out-patient);
 - specialised STI service
- Non-profit (9 of 38), mostly in Austria (6):
 - AIDS-HELP (AIDS-Hilfe)
 - 2 mobile units (outreach)
 - No NGO in Italy

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VCT survey – types of HIV-testing offer



- Client-initiated - main HIV-testing offer (37 of 38):
 - mostly Polish, German, Austrian testing-sites
- Provider-initiated (upon detection of HIV/AIDS-related symptoms) - 10 of 38:
 - mostly health care services (only 1 Polish NGO);
 - !!!! NO DATA on OPT-OUT - testing !!!!
- STI-Check- related HIV-testing (10 of 38), mostly in Slovak Republic;

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV-testing in antenatal counselling (1)

The Guidelines

- CDC - HIV-testing promoted in the routine panel of prenatal screening;
- WHO/UNAIDS – no special differentiation between pregnant women and other groups;
- Germany - new instructions on HIV-test during pregnancy – active offer to all pregnant women but voluntary decision/ VCT-basis

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HIV-testing in antenatal counselling (2)

The Practice

- The majority services (23) offer HIV-test to pregnant women, **ONLY** if requested by them;
- Only 12 (5 Slovak, 5 Polish) offer provider-initiated testing **BUT** sporadically;
- Widespread attitudes (28 of 38 services) favouring mandatory HIV-test:

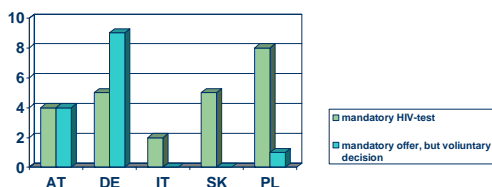
?? Provider-initiated = mandatory test ??
- **No data** about HIV test offered in gynaecological/SRH practices;
- Unexplored motivation and competence of antenatal care professionals (gynaecologists, midwives) to offer HIV-test counselling

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV-testing in antenatal counselling (3)

Should the HIV-test be mandatory for pregnant women?



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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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VCT survey - The Counselling Process

Counsellors' stance
(Roger's client-centred counselling model)

- Genuineness;
- Non-possessive empathy;
- Unconditional positive regard;
- Acceptance;
- Non-judgemental approach

Challenges in practice

- How to maintain authenticity on routine basis?
"when you work under long waiting time pressure";
"when same clients tend to present same problems over and over again"
- How to safeguard your personal boundaries?
"when you deal with highly personal and emotional topics as sexuality"
- How to refrain from prejudices?
"when they do not seem to learn from the counselling"; or *"come for 3rd time with syphilis..."*

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV Pre-test Counselling

Time – 10 up to 60 min (on av. 15 min./Austria to 30 min./Germany) ;

- **Standard components** – integrated from completely to a great extent :
 - Build trust, ensure confidentiality;
 - Provide information about HIV/AIDS, HIV test and results;
 - Assess personal sexual behaviour and risk exposure
- **Optional components** – integrated from occasionally/ to a small extent:
 - Assess costs and benefits of risk taking for the client;
 - Identify barriers to risk reduction;
 - Explain connection between HIV and STIs and refer to other STI/SRH services;
- **Missing components (often) – reduced prevention effect of pre-test counselling!!!!**
 - **Personal risk reduction plan,**
 - **Partner communication and condom use**

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV Post-test Counselling

HIV negative result

- Time – 5 to 20 min: rather short, simplified to test result delivery
– *"The result giving is not a counselling. One sentence and they are gone";*
- ??? Delivery of test result – personally in counselling conversation, hand-out in written form, on the telephone???
- **Standard components :**
 - Discussion of window period and re-testing
 - **Personal risk reduction plan** – only for the majority of the Austrian services and about half of the German, Slovak and Polish

!!!! Omitted chance...

.....To promote and support safer sexual behaviour choices

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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HIV Post-test Counselling

HIV positive result

- Time – 60 to 120 min, often followed by second counselling session
- Standard components :
 - Empathic presence, emotional support, crisis intervention;
 - Indications on medical assistance;
 - Psychological referral;
- Optional components, integrated during second session:
 - Rights and responsibilities
 - Positive living with HIV

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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VCT standards and quality assurance (1)

- VCT training guidelines and curricula – important interface between policy guidelines (WHO/UNAIDS) and the quality of HIV-test counselling;
- Psychosocial and communication competence – not yet systematically integrated in the university study courses of the medical professions;
- HIV-test and VCT – still prevalingly medicalized in many countries;
- Medical institutions – still predominantly preferred as HIV-testing sites
- Psychosocial professionals (social workers, psychologists) - engaged predominantly in free-standing services (NGOs)

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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VCT standards and quality assurance (2)

- Nationally standardized VCT training curriculum and certification: only in 9 services (Poland, monitored by the National AIDS Centre) from all 5 EU countries;
- Specific training guidelines either nationally or locally (AIDS-HELP): free-standing testing sites (in Germany - 4 services, in Austria-3);
- Management and quality control of VCT: depending on local resources and service's policy;
- Further training: sporadic practices of in-service continuous education;
- Ongoing supervision: **NEVER PLANNED BUDGET FOR** alias lacking

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SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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VCT standards and quality assurance (3)

Burn-out Factors

- Perceived from rather low (NGOs) to very high (public services, clinics);
- Discrepancy between time resources and work requirements ("lot of paper work");
- Lack of financial security, low recognition of non-medical performance;
- High emotional pressure - working alone, being exposed („emotional dustbin“ syndrome), boredom and resignation ("rewind button" syndrom)

Copying Strategies

"Counsellor is not a full-time job"

- Team work and de-briefing;
- Supervision;
- Regular upgrade training;
- Time management - proper balance counselling/prevention;
- Involvement of health workers in decision taking
- Reflection stance w.r.t. own sexuality

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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VCT survey- Challenges and Perspectives

ACTION NEEDS

- International exchange among practitioners;
- Update with the newest medical developments in AIDS treatment, ART, vaccination, STI diagnostic and therapy;
- Training in counselling process for medical doctors;
- Counselling skills update – interactive role-play training;
- Social-legislative aspects of the counselling for HIV+ persons;

CHALLENGES

- Internationally - synchronized standards of counselling
- Nationally - unified training curricula and certification
- Locally – further training and ongoing supervision

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordernet.eu



VCT survey - Conclusions

Prevention can't do
without HIV Test



Can HIV Test do without
prevention counselling?

Tzvetina Arsova Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordernet.eu



VCT survey - Conclusions

- The issue at stake is **NOT as much whether to offer counselling,**
 - safeguard wide coverage and high quality of counselling considering the constraints of health care settings;
- BUT how to:**
 - advertise better low-threshold HIV-testing offers and raise awareness and attendance of clients
 - conduct risk assessment in a non-stigmatizing manner;

Tzvetina Arsava Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
www.bordernet.eu



VCT survey - Conclusions

- The issue at stake is **NOT as much whether to offer counselling**
 - encourage behaviour change and risk management/reduction plan over a short-term (sometimes single-date) interaction;
- BUT how to:**
 - accompany the dynamic process of stepwise progress and relapses in behaviour change adopting a client-centred perspective;
 - keep balance between public health benefits and human rights and autonomy

Tzvetina Arsava Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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Thank you for your attention !!!!

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Tzvetina Arsava Netzelmann
SPI Research gGmbH, Berlin
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