

## Peer Review Report

# Review Report on Determinants of Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) service uptake among adult Sub-Saharan Africans: A systematic review and meta-analysis

Systematic Review, Public Health Rev

Reviewer: Sinaa Al Aqeel

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### EVALUATION

#### **Q 1** Please summarize the main theme of the review.

This is a systematic review of determinants voluntary counselling and testing uptake in Sub-Saharan Africa . Eight determinants were found to increase uptake of VCT uptake, therefore, interventions should focus on these determinants.

#### **Q 2** Please highlight the limitations and strengths.

limitations

The methods reporting can be improved as discussed in the review report to the authors.

Strength

Important research question

Detailed presentation of analysis and results in the Appendices

#### **Q 3** Please provide your detailed review report to the authors, structured in major and minor comments.

Major comments

Methods

Search strategy: Please specify the search timeframe and search dates.

Line 74: Patient and Public Involvement: I am not sure the written text is appropriate for the subheading.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: the authors should elaborate on the following exclusion criteria "Men having sex with Men (MSM), pregnant women". It is acceptable to have exclusion factors to have for example a homogenous population but this need to be explicitly indicated for the reader. Also, the type of study design considered should be stated in this section.

Line 87: I think the word ' extracted ' is missing form "relevant data include". Also, specify if data extracted by single researcher or multiple researchers.

Line 92: referring to Table S1 and S2 should be in the results section. Also, Figure 1 should be in the results section.

Line 107: what special about these 27 studies? I understood from the results section line 121 these are studies deemed suitable for meta-analysis. but more information on why these studies were suitable for meta-analysis and the other 40 studies not is needed.

Discussion

The authors discussed the interpretation of the findings in light of previous research very adequately.

However, the discussion could be improved by discussing strength and weakness of the current review.

Results

Figure 1 what are the reasons for excluding 62 studies in the full articles screening stage.

Line 146: I think 'of' is missing out "out the 14 factors".

Line 146: it is not clear to the reader if the 14 factors were all the factors assessed in identified studies or if they were selected by the review authors to be assessed.

Line 146: it would be useful for the readers especially decision makers if the manuscript presents some explanations/interpretations of the odds ratio in the results section rather than using words such as “our meta results were significant for” “Our meta-analysis was significant for the following eight determinants”. A sentence such as (Persons with the following characteristics had higher odds of VCT uptake ) would be sufficient.

Table S2: Most of the studies are of good quality scoring the highest score according to the NOS scale. However, some discussion of any strong or weak points in the included studies design would be a good addition to the discussion of future research. Also, indicate in the methods section if one or more researchers evaluated the quality.

Minor comments

Abstract

Please spell out of STIs.

Introduction

Line 42: Please present both the spelled out and the abbreviation of VCT first time you use it in the text.

Line 60: “and make robust concrete conclusions” I advise the authors to change the wording of this sentence as systematic reviews not necessarily result in concrete conclusion for many reasons including lack of evidence, poor quality evidence, or heterogeneous evidence. I find the sentence used in the contribution of the study section more appropriate “the evidence still remains insufficient and conflicting, thus warranting a systematic review and meta-analysis.”

Table S3: what does the third column (No.) stand for? Number of what. Also, for access predictors what does >5 year in Germany mean?

#### PLEASE COMMENT

**Q 4** Is the title appropriate, concise, attractive?

Yes

**Q 5** Are the keywords appropriate?

Yes

**Q 6** Is the English language of sufficient quality?

Yes

**Q 7** Is the quality of the figures and tables satisfactory?

Yes.

**Q 8** Does the reference list cover the relevant literature adequately and in an unbiased manner?

Yes

**Q 9** Does this manuscript refer only to published data? (unpublished data is not allowed for Reviews)

Yes.

**Q 10** Does the manuscript cover the issue in an objective and analytical manner

Yes.

**Q 11** Was a review on the issue published in the past 12 months?

No answer given.

**Q 12** Does the review have international or global implications?

Yes

#### QUALITY ASSESSMENT

**Q 13** Quality of generalization and summary



**Q 14** Significance to the field



**Q 15** Interest to a general audience



**Q 16** Quality of the writing



#### REVISION LEVEL

**Q 17** Please take a decision based on your comments:

Major revisions.