

PROGRAM ABSTRACT

TITLE *VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND TESTING FOR FEMALE SEX WORKERS (VCT PROGRAM)*

SUMMARY The spread of HIV remains a growing concern in China. Sexual transmission, especially among high-risk groups such as sex workers, is thought to play a large role in its increasing prevalence rates. Since early identification of serostatus among newly infected individuals is key to preventing virus transmission, the *Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) Program* was designed to bring STI testing and STI/HIV education to female sex workers in China. This program aims to increase STI/HIV testing, awareness of infection, STI/HIV knowledge, and consistent use of condoms in order to ultimately reduce rates of STI infections.

The *VCT Program* is composed of a pre-test counseling session, STI testing, and a post-test counseling session. During the first 25-minute VCT counseling session, the counselor introduces the program and works with the participant to: complete a risk assessment; identify challenges related to risk reduction; create a risk reduction plan; and practice condom use skills. After the first counseling session, the participant completes STI/HIV testing and schedules a post-test counseling session when the results are available. During the 20-minute post-test counseling session, the counselor reviews and interprets the test results and checks to make sure the participant understands the implications of any positive results. The counselor also reviews common STI symptoms and discusses with the participant how she might implement the risk reduction plan including changes to the plan, condom skills, and other issues related to risk reduction.

A randomized controlled study evaluated the efficacy of the *VCT Program* compared to standard of care STI testing and treatment. Female sex workers (N=278) completed baseline and 6-month post-program questionnaires (measuring demographic information, knowledge of STIs/HIV and condom use, condom use self-efficacy, and consistent condom use) and STI testing (for gonorrhea, chlamydia, trichomoniasis, syphilis, and genital warts). All women who tested positive for any STI were provided with free treatment.

Effects of the *VCT Program* on STI/HIV knowledge and perceptions were analyzed with paired *t* tests and chi-square tests. A generalized linear model was also used to control for the influence of potential confounders (e.g., education level) on STI/HIV knowledge. Multivariate logistic regression was used to analyze the effect of the program on condom use and STI rates, while controlling for any potential confounding factors (e.g., age, marital status).

The VCT group exhibited significantly larger gains in STI/HIV knowledge than the control group ($p < .001$). Compared to the control group, the VCT group showed significant increases in knowledge of STI symptoms ($p < .001$); HIV transmission modes ($p < .05$); and condom use ($p < .01$). The VCT group demonstrated a significantly greater increase in consistent condom use than the control group ($p < .05$). Finally, significantly more individuals in the control group tested positive for an STI at the 6-month follow-up ($p < .05$) than individuals in the VCT group.

*GLOBAL HIV
ARCHIVE
CATEGORY*

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sexual risk reduction (secondary) | <input type="checkbox"/> Community mobilization | <input type="checkbox"/> Antiretroviral adherence |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HIV testing and education (primary) | <input type="checkbox"/> Reproductive health | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High-risk populations (secondary) |

Primary content categories reflect the main focus of the program, while secondary content categories may be addressed in other aspects of the program.

*IMPLEMENTATION
LEVEL*

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Individual (implemented one-on-one) | <input type="checkbox"/> Couple/ family (implemented with a couple or family) | <input type="checkbox"/> Group (implemented in small groups) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural (implemented on social, economic, political, or environmental levels) | | |

*IMPLEMENTATION
SETTING*

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Community (implemented through community-based organizations) | <input type="checkbox"/> School (implemented in schools) | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinic (implemented in clinics) |
|---|--|--|

The *VCT Program* may also be implemented in clinics serving individuals living with HIV or at higher risk for STIs/HIV.

*ORIGINAL
TARGET
POPULATION*

The original *VCT Program* was implemented in a suburban area of Nanning in southern China. Participants were female sex workers recruited from entertainment establishments (restaurants, barbershops, hair-washing rooms). They were at least 18 years old with a mean age of about 24 years. More than half (62%) were Han ethnicity, most lived with other female sex workers (72%), and most reported having a stable partner (72%).

The *VCT Program* may also be applicable to populations other than female sex workers. This program's voluntary counseling and testing content and approach may be useful in increasing testing and safer sex behaviors in many different types of communities and populations, especially those at high risk for STIs/HIV.

*PROGRAM
COMPONENTS*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Booster sessions for participants | <input type="checkbox"/> Formalized curriculum |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community outreach/mobilization | <input type="checkbox"/> Medication adherence and routine clinic visits |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Condom demonstration | <input type="checkbox"/> Motivational interviewing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Continual assessment of progress | <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-year program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational materials (e.g., leaflets, posters, comics, magazines) | <input type="checkbox"/> Needs assessment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electronic media (e.g., radio, cell phones, internet, videos) | <input type="checkbox"/> Peer education/ counseling |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Presentations |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Role Plays |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholder investment |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STI/HIV testing |

*PROGRAM
LENGTH*

The *VCT Program* consists of two sessions and an STI exam for each participant. Each VCT session is approximately 20 – 25 minutes in length. The STI exam lasts about 15 minutes.

*STAFFING
REQUIREMENTS/
TRAINING*

The *VCT Program* requires previous counseling education and experience for those implementing the program. Program supervisors must provide the VCT counselor training for all program counselors. The training duration is approximately 12.5 to 13.5 hours long divided into three sessions. The number of VCT counselors will

depend upon the size of the population you wish to serve.

*PROGRAM
MATERIALS*

The *VCT Program* package contains most of the materials needed to implement the program.

With the guidance provided in the Advance Preparation section of the Counselor Training Manual you will need to create/select the following materials for the counselor training sessions:

- Case studies/ role play scenarios
- Videos
- Sample lab reports

Additionally, you will need to obtain the following materials for the counseling sessions:

- Penis model/proxy and condoms (for the condom demonstration)
- Pens/pencils and paper
- Appointment cards
- Referral information for additional medical/psychosocial services

*A NOTE ABOUT
ADAPTATION*

The Global HIV Archive program package includes a Customized Adaptation Handbook to help program staff successfully adapt the *VCT Program* for new settings and target populations. The Adaptation Handbook details a set of pragmatic, easy-to-follow steps to facilitate making changes to the program, while preserving the components that made – or are believed to have made – it effective in the first place.

*A NOTE ABOUT
EVALUATION*

Each Global HIV Archive program package contains the original evaluation instruments used to evaluate the program. In the original evaluation of the *VCT Program*, participants completed a self-administered questionnaire at baseline and 6-months post-program. These questionnaires are included in the Original Evaluation Materials booklet.

The program package also includes an Evaluation Resource Guide, containing select questions to assess relevant HIV outcomes such as risk from sexual behaviors and condom use self efficacy.

If you would like to conduct an evaluation with your population, it is important to assess the applicability of the original studies' survey

questions to your context/setting. For instance, some questions contain region-specific language and terminology that you might need to adapt to make relevant to your population. Pre-test the instrument with a small group of individuals representative of your population prior to administering it to the entire group. This pre-test may reveal in advance potentially problematic questions.

*PROGRAM
ACQUISITION
AND
IMPLEMENTATION
COSTS*

Global HIV Archive program packages are available in boxed, flash-drive, and downloadable formats. The cost of this Global HIV Archive program package includes:

- *Quick Guide to Program Package* – a roadmap to get oriented to the *VCT Program* and tips for how to get started
- *User’s Guide* – an overview of the *VCT Program* including information about the original implementation and evaluation
- *Counselor Training Manual*– a guide to training counselors about the program
- *Counselor’s Manual* – a comprehensive guide detailing counseling session components
- *Handouts & Worksheets* – photocopy masters of documents needed for the counselor training and VCT counseling sessions
- *Customized Adaptation Handbook* – a guide to customize adaptations to the *VCT Program*
- *Original Evaluation Instruments* – surveys used to measure the effectiveness of the original implementation and other evaluation information, including:
 - Study Procedure Flow Chart
 - Outreach Worker Recruitment Training Manual
 - Data Collectors’ Handbook
 - Study Survey Field Guide
 - Baseline Survey
 - 6-Month Follow-up Survey
- *Evaluation Resource Guide* – a set of scales to consider using when evaluating HIV prevention program effectiveness

The following program materials are also available in Chinese:

- *Checklist for VCT Program Package* – a one-page guide of Chinese documents available

- *Counselor Training Manual*
(广西高危妇女干预项目VCT咨询员培训教学大纲) - a guide to training counselors about the program
- *Counselor's Manual* (广西高危妇女干预项目VCT咨询干预手册) - a comprehensive guide detailing counseling session components
- *Original Evaluation Instruments* – surveys used to measure the effectiveness of the original implementation and other evaluation information, including:
 - *Study Procedure Flow Chart*
(高危妇女VCT干预项目的工作程序)
 - *Outreach Worker Recruitment Training Manual*
(横县高危妇女STD/HIV预防研究项目外展工作人员培训方案)
 - *Data Collectors Handbook* (高危妇女HIV/STD干预项目
问卷调查人员工作手册)
 - *Study Survey Field Guide* (问卷调查工作人员备忘录)
 - *Baseline Survey* (服务行业工作人员调查问卷)
 - *6-Month Follow-up Survey* (服务行业工作人员调查问卷)

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INFORMATION*

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

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