Background

Retaining the title of the 2016-2017 global HIV targets requires focused testing approaches to reach people with undiagnosed HIV. To date, men have only 30% of all HIV tests in 123 LAMs. Typically, men receive care at earlier stages of infection and thus are more likely to be diagnosed and have fewer lifetime sexual partners than the mortality rate of women. Men are also more likely to delay, refuse or discontinue HIV treatment. Identifying men at high risk and providing them HIV testing is an important starting point for meeting targets.

Methods

We analyzed nationally-representative Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from six Sub-Saharan African countries: Ethiopia, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. For the analysis, we included countries with standard DHS data and corresponding HIV laboratory results collected in 2011 or later. We included adult men and women and their corresponding HIV laboratory results for the most recent survey years. Eligible men were 15-49 years in Lesotho, Rwanda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, 20-49 years in Malawi, and Zimbabwe. Eligible women were 15-49 years. All survey respondents were household residents or overnight visitors.

Results

Among respondents, we collected six factors for voluntary HIV testing from consenting men and women. All men were offered HIV testing. All women were offered HIV testing in Ethiopia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Women in half of the households in Lesotho and Malawi, and in one-third of households in Malawi, were offered testing. HIV testing in each country followed the national testing algorithm.

Data analysis

We analyzed self-reported questionnaires on an HIV testing, known behavioral risk factors and corresponding HIV test results. We included survey participants who responded to the question on whether they had previously been tested for HIV. Survey results were weighted using country-specific sampling weights provided by DHS.

Conclusions

A gender gap in HIV testing persists in sub-Saharan Africa. Compared to women, men were approximately twice as likely to have never been tested for HIV in six out of six countries studied. In this analysis, we found being single, having lower levels of education and not having any children were associated with increased likelihood for never previously testing for HIV. Although higher proportions of men than women had never tested for HIV, between 84% of men who had never tested before did accept testing when offered during the survey.

Factors associated with never testing for HIV among men:

Across countries, factors associated with never having tested for HIV after adjusting for age, were:
- never being married (aOR 2.14-3.51)
- not having children (aOR 1.19-3.51)
- being primary education (aOR 2.24-3.45) or less (aOR 2.77-3.60)
- never touching alcohol (aOR 1.27-3.31)
- being unemployed (aOR 2.63-4.15)
- those employed were less likely to be in professional services, more likely in agriculture 
- those employed were more likely to be in middle management (aOR 1.77-3.42)
- those employed were more likely to have more than 10 lifetime sexual partners (aOR 1.86-5.27)

Factors associated with never testing for HIV among women:

Across countries, factors associated with never having tested for HIV after adjusting for age, were:
- never being married (aOR 1.49-2.56)
- not having children (aOR 1.39-3.06)
- being primary education (aOR 2.24-3.45) or less (aOR 2.77-3.60)
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