

ABSTRACT

Background: HIV self-testing (HIVST) provides a discreet and empowering testing opportunity for key populations, including men who have sex with men (MSM), which helps to increase HIV testing coverage.

Objective: To describe the acceptability, barriers, and associated factors for HIV self-testing among MSM attending the Central Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) clinic in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Methods: A cross-sectional analytical study was conducted among systematically selected 233 random MSM, from October 2022 to September 2024. Data collection was done using a pre-tested, assisted self-administered questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and inferential analyses were performed using SPSS.

Results: Out of 233 MSM, the mean age of respondents was 30.17 years. The majority of the MSM (91.4% (n=213)) were Sinhalese and most of the participants (82.8% (n= 193)) were single (never married). The highest educational level was postgraduate level accounting for 11.2% (n=26). Almost all the MSM (98.3%) reported multiple partners and 29.2% engaged in unprotected anal sex while 87.6% had unprotected oral sex in their last sexual encounter. Prevalence of insertive anal sex was high at 61.4% and 15% had both insertive and receptive anal sex. Awareness of HIVST kits was high (83.7%), however, only 34.3% had ever used HIVST. Common barriers included lack of access to kits (40%) and procedural knowledge (25.3%). Concerns about confidentiality and the availability of post-test support also impeded uptake. Despite this, the willingness to use HIVST in the future was 82.8%. There was a statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) association between higher educational level, having multiple sexual partners, sex under the influence of alcohol, group sex, understanding of the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS, previous awareness about the HIVST, difficulty in contacting the peer

educator, confidentiality concerns and unavailability of test kits outside STD clinics with HIVST acceptability.

Conclusion: HIVST is a promising strategy to enhance HIV detection among MSM in Sri Lanka. However, addressing barriers such as access, procedural knowledge, and confidentiality concerns is crucial. Tailored interventions, including community-based distribution and education campaigns, are recommended to improve HIVST uptake to achieve national HIV prevention targets.

Key Words: HIV self-testing, men who have sex with men (MSM), acceptability, barriers, peer educators