

Relationship Between Self-Concealment and Attitudes Toward Seeking Voluntary Counseling and Testing among Students: A Case of Kenyatta University, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Three hundred and fourth seven undergraduate students were studied to underscore the relationship between self-concealment and attitudes toward seeking voluntary counseling and testing (VCT). Results revealed that students who had low self-concealment had a higher probability of seeking VCT than students with high self-concealment. It was revealed that there was no difference between a student's sex and his/her self-concealment level. It revealed that married students had a more favourable attitude toward VCT services than students who were unmarried. It revealed that older students had more positive attitude toward seeking VCT services than younger students. Findings indicated that students who had undergone VCT had more favourable VCT seeking attitudes than those who had not. Findings indicated that students with low self differentiation had more preference of seeking VCT services than highly differentiated students. Implications of these findings and recommendations for further research are discussed.

Key words: Self-Concealment, Attitudes, Voluntary Counseling, Testing, kenya

1.1 Introduction

Testing for Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is an important aspect in a student's life as it enables one to pursue studies without worries and be able to lead a normal life. It is the disclosure of their HIV status which is regarded as an important strategy in the fight against the spread of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in college and beyond. Disclosure is revealing of one's self-concealment. Larson and Chastain (1990) describe self-concealment as a tendency of withholding personal, sensitive information that is perceived as negative, upsetting or embarrassing. Self-concealment controls a person's willingness to seek psychological help (Kelly & Achter, 1995). UNAIDS/WHO (2005) reports that HIV stigma and the resulting actual or feared discrimination have proven to be perhaps the most difficult obstacles to seeking VCT services. The fear of discrimination and stigma are rooted in self-concealment. The students' self disclosure about knowledge of their HIV/AIDS status is often of mixed feelings. Kenyatta University has a registered VCT centre (site 10203) where students are voluntarily counseled and then tested if they so wish. Records available at the VCT site indicate that the students who have been counseled and tested at the facility are interested in knowing their HIV/AIDS status in order to make new decisions and plans in a bid to minimize the risk of infection or re-infection. The centre, however, has been recording few student clients since its inception in 2004. Statistics obtained at the VCT centre show that an average fraction of 0.043 students per year since 2004 to 2009 have sought VCT services at the centre - this excluded statistics kept by Liverpool mobile sites in Kenyatta University. Compared to 24,484 registered students as at September, 2009, this average is insignificant to make any impact in the fight against HIV/AIDS at the university. It is therefore logical to conclude that students are avoiding the VCT facility located within campus. Whether this avoidance is mitigated or a thoughtless oversight by students owing to their self-concealment was a subject of concern.

Kenyatta University recognizes the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS in realizing its mission. In its strategic and vision plan 2005-2015, the university lists the HIV/AIDS pandemic at the forefront of threats facing it. ACU (2006) of Kenyatta University's reported that 'the don't care attitude', promiscuity and drug abuse are the main factors that predispose students to HIV. The survey failed to explore the possible compromising role of individual self-concealment alongside the acknowledged predisposing factors. Although the university provides VCT and peer education, majority of students are dissatisfied by alluding that the quality of services provided is low and that the facilities are few in relation to the huge student population (ACU, 2006). If the students develop a more positive stance towards utilizing the available VCT intervention services, then the prevalence of HIV/AIDS at Kenyatta University will significantly reduce. Self-concealment as a variable probably has an active role in influencing students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services.

The studies available have focused on HIV knowledge, testing, prevalence, attitudes and determinants of uptake of VCT services among university students. Liku and Kioko (2010), revealed that up to 77 per cent of students at the University of Nairobi have been tested for HIV and that 57 per cent did not use condoms every time they had sex, meaning that most students know their HIV status and could be acting in full knowledge of where the risk lies. Mumah (2003) revealed that teachers who had acknowledged the fatality of HIV had less extra marital affairs than those who acknowledged less. The implication of this acknowledgement is that with the disclosure of the hitherto concealed HIV status come the impetus of decreased promiscuity.

1.2 The study was guided by the following objectives;

1. To establish the extent to which self-concealment levels predict Kenyatta University students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services.
2. To ascertain the degree to which age, sex, marital status and prior VCT experience of Kenyatta University students influence attitudes toward seeking VCT services.
3. To verify if there are sex differences in self-concealment levels among Kenyatta University students.
4. To determine the expanse to which university students' level of differentiation of self influence VCT seeking attitudes.

1.3 This study tested the following hypotheses.

- H_{A1}: There is a significant relationship between students' levels of self-concealment and attitudes towards seeking VCT services such that students with high self-concealment levels may have a negative attitude toward VCT whereas those with low self-concealment levels may have a positive VCT seeking attitude.
- H_{A2}: There is a significant difference between students' levels of self-concealment and actual VCT testing such that students with high self-concealment levels may not have had a VCT test while those with low self-concealment levels may have had a VCT test.
- H_{A3}: There is a significant relationship between age and students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services whereby the older a student becomes, the more favourable his/her attitudes toward VCT services become.
- H_{A4}: There is a significant difference between marital status and students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services such that married students are likely to have more favourable attitudes toward VCT services than students who are single.
- H_{A5}: There is a significant difference between prior VCT experience and students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services such that students who have had a VCT test are likely to have a more favourable VCT seeking attitude than those who have not had a VCT test.
- H_{A6}: There is a significant difference between students' sex and level of self-concealment such that female students are likely to have high self-concealment levels than male students who may have low self-concealment levels.
- H_{A7}: There is a significant relationship between the level of students' differentiation of self and VCT seeking attitudes such that highly self-differentiated students may have more favourable VCT seeking attitudes than lowly self-differentiated students.

This study was guided by Carl Rogers' person centred theory formulated in 1951 and Victor Frankl's logotherapy formulated in 1962. Carl Rogers' theory proposes that human beings have an inherent self-actualizing tendency in which health functioning is achieved if one is self-actualized while maladjustment occurs when one distorts reality about him/her self. Frankl's theory explains the importance of dealing with problems of spiritual or philosophical nature. It explains problems related to meaning of life and death, suffering and love thereby influencing an individual towards development of appropriate behavior.

2.1 Methods and Procedures

A correlation design was used to establish relationships among self-concealment, marital status, sex, age, prior VCT experience, differentiation of self and VCT seeking attitudes. The independent variable in this study was self-concealment. This variable was measured using a self-concealment scale developed by Larson and Chastain (1990). The dependent variable was the VCT seeking attitudes. It was measured using

a 10-item attitudes toward seeking voluntary counseling and testing scale (ATSVCT) – a modified version of attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help scale (ATSPPH) (Fischer and Farina, 1995). The moderating variables of this study were differentiation of self, marital status, sex, age and prior VCT experience. These variables except differentiation of self were obtained using a demographic questionnaire. Differentiation of self was measured using a family systems personality profile (FSPP) developed by Howard Garfinkel (Garfinkel, 1981). A pilot study confirmed the ATSVCT scale had a Cronbach alpha of .70, self-concealment scale had a Cronbach alpha .80 and the FSPP scale had a Cronbach alpha of .63.

The study was carried out at Kenyatta University. 500 undergraduate students were provided with a demographic questionnaire, self-concealment scale, ATSVCT scale, and an FSPP scale. 347 participants returned the instruments satisfactorily filled accounting for a 69.4% questionnaire return.

The participants ranged in age from 19 to 30, with a mean age of 23.09. 327 participants were single and 20 were married. There were 125 single female participants and 203 single male participants. Of the married participants, 9 were females while 11 were males.

2.2 Results

Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between the participants' level of self-concealment and attitudes toward seeking VCT. A weak negative correlation that was not statistically significant was found ($r(345) = -.068, P > .05$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between students' levels of self-concealment and attitudes towards seeking VCT services was therefore retained. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation of VCT seeking attitude, Self-concealment, Differentiation of self, Respondents' age and Sex of respondent

Variables	VCT seeking attitude	Self-concealment	Differentiation of self	Respondents' age	Sex of Respondent
VCT seeking attitude	1				
Self-concealment	-.068	1			
Differentiation of self	-.130*	.267**	1		
Respondents' age	.043	.022	.001	1	
Sex of respondent	.006	-.049	.046	.252**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

N = 347

The weak negative correlation between self-concealment and VCT seeking attitudes however showed that the scores in self-concealment were increasing as the scores of VCT seeking attitudes decreased. These results indicate that the higher the score in self-concealment, the lower the score in attitudes toward seeking VCT and vice versa implying that students who had a high self-concealment level had a less favourable

(negative) attitude toward seeking VCT services while students who had a low self-concealment level had a more favourable attitude toward seeking VCT services .

A positive correlation between the participants' age and attitudes toward seeking VCT services was found ($r(345) = .043, P < .05$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between age and students' attitudes toward seeking VCT service was rejected (Table 1). Even though the finding showed a positive correlation, the results were not statistically significant therefore it is logical to conclude that age was correlated to students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services. Students' VCT seeking attitudes increased with age.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed for the relationship between the students' differentiation of self and attitudes towards seeking VCT services. A negative correlation between the students' differentiation of self and attitudes towards seeking VCT services that was statistically significant was found ($r(345) = -.130, p < .05$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between the levels of students' differentiation of self and VCT seeking attitudes was rejected (Table 1). The result indicate that the higher the score in differentiation of self, the lower the score in attitudes toward seeking VCT and vice versa implying that students who had higher differentiation of self scores (Highly differentiated) had a less favourable (negative) attitude toward seeking VCT services while students who had low differentiation of self scores (Lowly differentiated) had a more favourable (positive) attitude toward seeking VCT services.

A chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the frequency of yes for high and low self-concealers and no for high and low self-concealers. A weak interaction that was not statistically significant was found ($\chi^2(1) = .064, p > .05$). The null hypothesis that there was no significant difference between students' levels of self-concealment and actual VCT testing was retained. A higher percentage (65.58%) of the participants who had a low self-concealment level had gone for a VCT test than students who had a high self-concealment level (56.99%). These results are presented in Tables 2a and 2b.

Table 2a: Self-concealment levels and Prior VCT test

Self-concealment level	Prior VCT test		
	Yes	No	Total
High	110(56.99%)	83(43.01%)	193(100%)
Low	101(65.58%)	53(34.42%)	154(100%)
Total	211(60.81%)	136(39.19%)	347(100%)

2b: Self-concealment levels and Prior VCT chi-square tests

	Value	df	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.652(b)	1	.064
N of Valid Cases	347		

An independent-samples *t* test comparing the mean scores of the married and single students found a significant difference between the means of the two groups ($t(345) = -2.335$, $p < .05$). The mean attitude towards VCT of the married students was significantly higher ($m = 23.21$, $sd = 3.62$) than the mean attitude towards VCT of the single students ($m = 21.49$, $sd = 5.30$). The null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between marital status and students' attitudes toward seeking VCT services was rejected. These results are presented in Tables 3a and 3b.

Table 3a: Marital Status and VCT Attitudes Statistics

	Marital status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Attitudes	Single	318	21.4906	5.30266	.29736
	Married	29	23.2069	3.61919	.67207

Table 3b: Marital Status and VCT attitudes t- test results

t-test for Equality of Means							
	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Difference	Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Attitude	-2.335	39.901	-1.71633	.73491		-3.20176	-.23090

3.1 CONCLUSION

This study set out to establish the relationship between self-concealment and attitudes toward seeking Voluntary Counseling and Testing among students at Kenyatta University in Kenya. The study sought to achieve this through a number of ways. First and foremost, the study investigated the correlation between students' levels of self-concealment and their attitude toward seeking VCT services. The study analyzed the attitude of high and low self-concealers when it concerns HIV/AIDS self preservation. Withstanding the fact that there was a weak relationship between self-concealment and VCT seeking attitude in spite of the high level of HIV/AIDS sensitization, students with low self-concealment are at the forefront of fighting HIV/AIDS.

The study analyzed the extent to which age, sex, marital status and prior VCT experience influence students' VCT seeking attitude. The study considered how these variables manipulate the students' willingness to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS and whether such manipulation is able to bring out a new strategy to combat this scourge. Sex differences thought to be exhibited in self-concealment levels was considered as was differentiation of self levels in determining university students' attitude toward seeking VCT services.

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