

**Title:** Factors influencing utilization of voluntary counselling and testing services among out of school youth in Nakuru North District, Kenya

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**Abstract:** HIV/AIDS is increasingly affecting youth worldwide. Half of all new cases of HIV infection occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Recent health and demographic studies reveal that in Kenya young people aged 15-24 years face a greater risk of HIV infection than any other group. According to (KDHS, 2008), Rift Valley province had 45.8% of women and (60.20/0) men who had never tested. But out of school youth may be facing the greatest danger from the pandemic in Africa and especially in Kenya due to the rising poverty levels, unemployment and the fact that they lack access to prevention education programs. High quality voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) is a cornerstone in reducing spread of the disease. However the number of people who test in VCTs is low. This study therefore sought to determine the factors that influence the utilization of VCT services as a strategy in prevention and control of HIV/AIDS among out-of-school youth in Nakuru North District. The specific objectives of the study were to determine possible socio-demographic, individual related and health service related factors influencing utilization of VCT services among out of school youth in Nakuru North District. To achieve the objectives, a cross sectional survey of 369 out of school youth was carried out in the three Divisions of Nakuru North District over a period of eight weeks. Proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of youth to be sampled from the three Divisions in Nakuru North District. In each Division, youth were purposively selected. Data was collected using semi-structured questionnaires and through focus group discussions (FGDS) and questionnaires were analyzed using the statistical package for social scientists (SPSS VERSION 11.5). Utilization of VCTs and the association between various independent variables was determined. The study sample consisted of more males (56.1%) than female (43.9%). The mean age was 24 years. Majority of the out-of-school youth had not utilized VCT (62.6%). Poor utilization of VCT services among out-of-school youth in Nakuru North District was associated with distance to the VCT centre ( $\tilde{n}=0.0003$ ), knowledge of HIV/AIDS ( $\tilde{n}=0.0001$ ), knowledge and perception of VCT ( $p=0.0001$ ), stigma ( $p=0.0001$ ), cost ( $p=0.025$ ) and perception of quality of VCT services ( $p=0.0201$ ). Socio-demographic factors like level of education ( $p=0.0004$ ), income ( $p=0.0001$ ) and marital status ( $p=0.0039$ ) were associated with VCT services. Multiple logistic regression was performed to determine the factors independently associated with VCT utilization. The findings highlighted the need for more VCT centers to be established to address the need of accessibility which was found to be more associated with VCT utilization. Stakeholders also need to launch campaigns with out-of-school youth specific message to make the group change their perception and VCT services need to be promoted as being offered by professionally trained and competent staff. The counselors also need refresher course on how to relate with their clients.