

Mini-Oral Abstract Presentations 1

#37 Traditional Healers Can Increase Uptake of HIV Testing among Adults of Unknown Serostatus: Results from a Cluster Randomized Pilot Study in Southwestern Uganda

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Traditional healers can increase uptake of HIV testing among adults of unknown serostatus: results from a cluster randomized pilot study in southwestern Uganda

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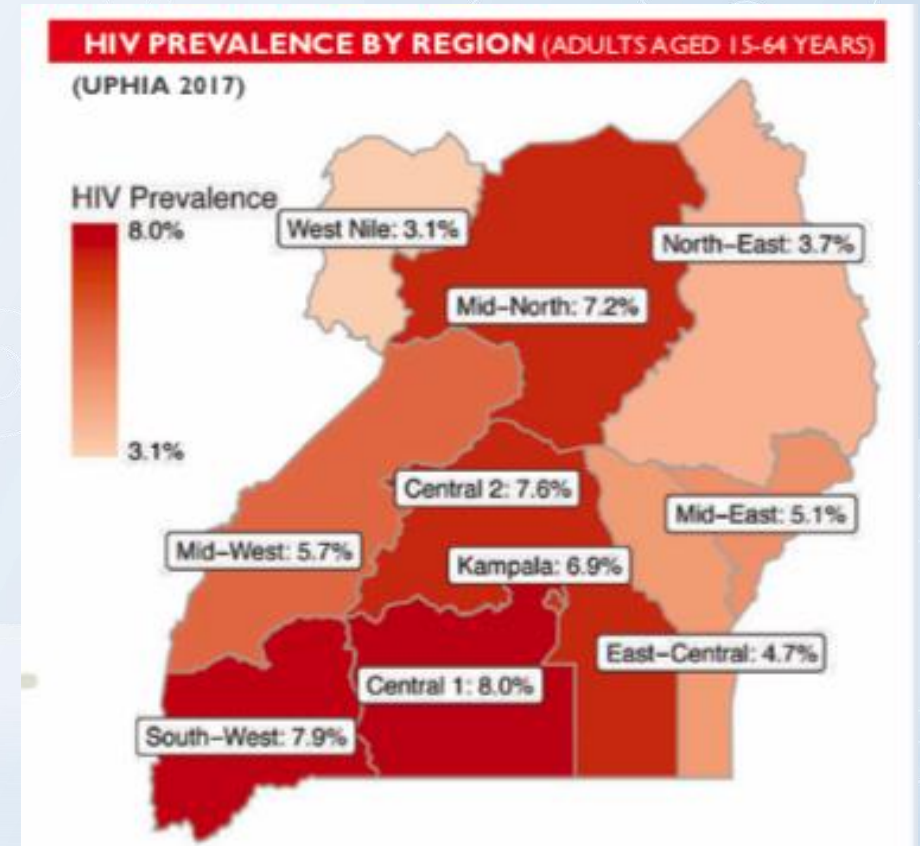
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Conflicts of Interest:

- Nothing to disclose

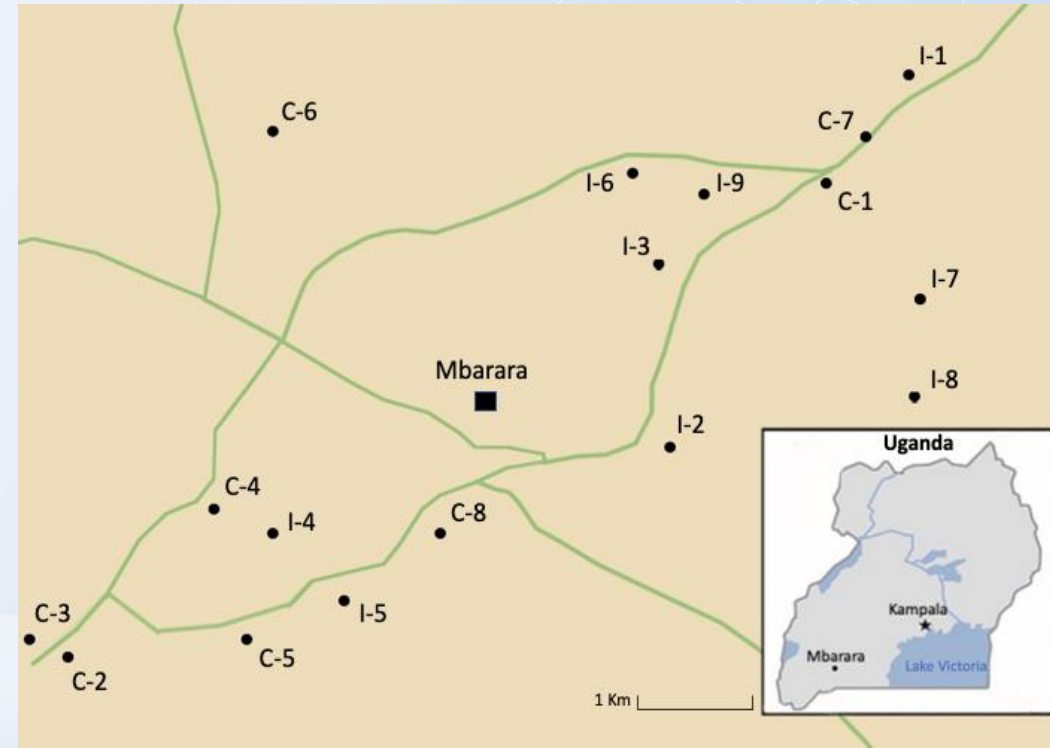
Background:

- In sub-Saharan Africa, a major barrier to HIV epidemic control is low rates of HIV testing
- In the study region of rural Uganda, it is estimated only one-third of sexually active men know their HIV status
- *Traditional healers* are a common resource for healthcare in these communities.
- Collaborating with healers has been proposed as a strategy to increase uptake of HIV testing



Materials and Methods:

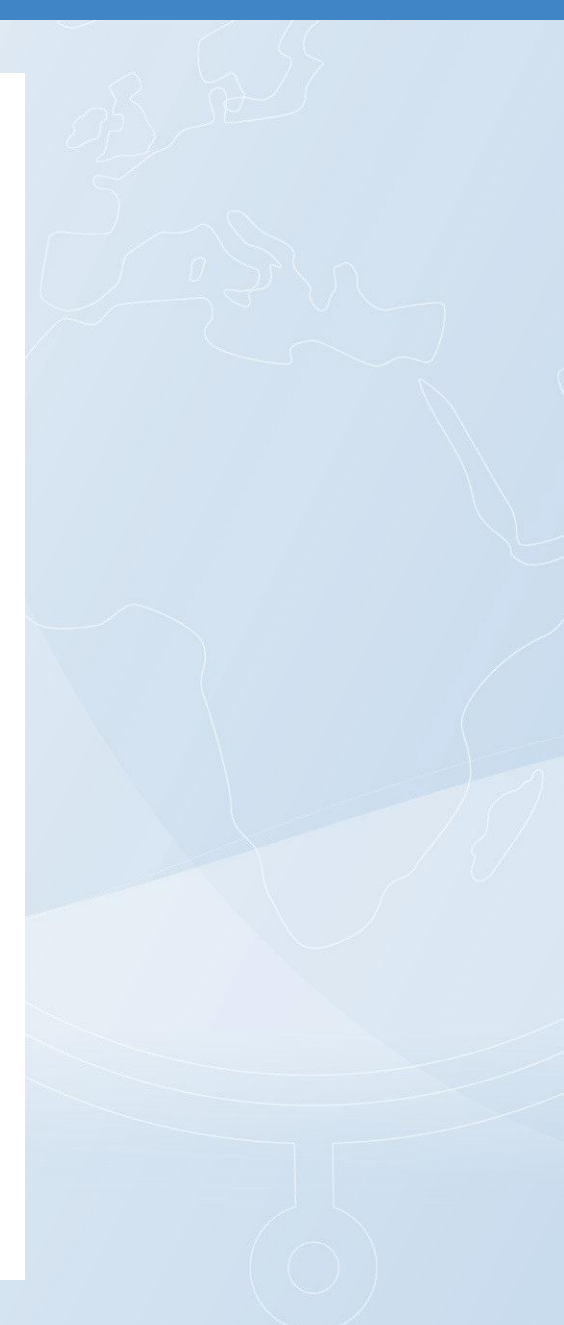
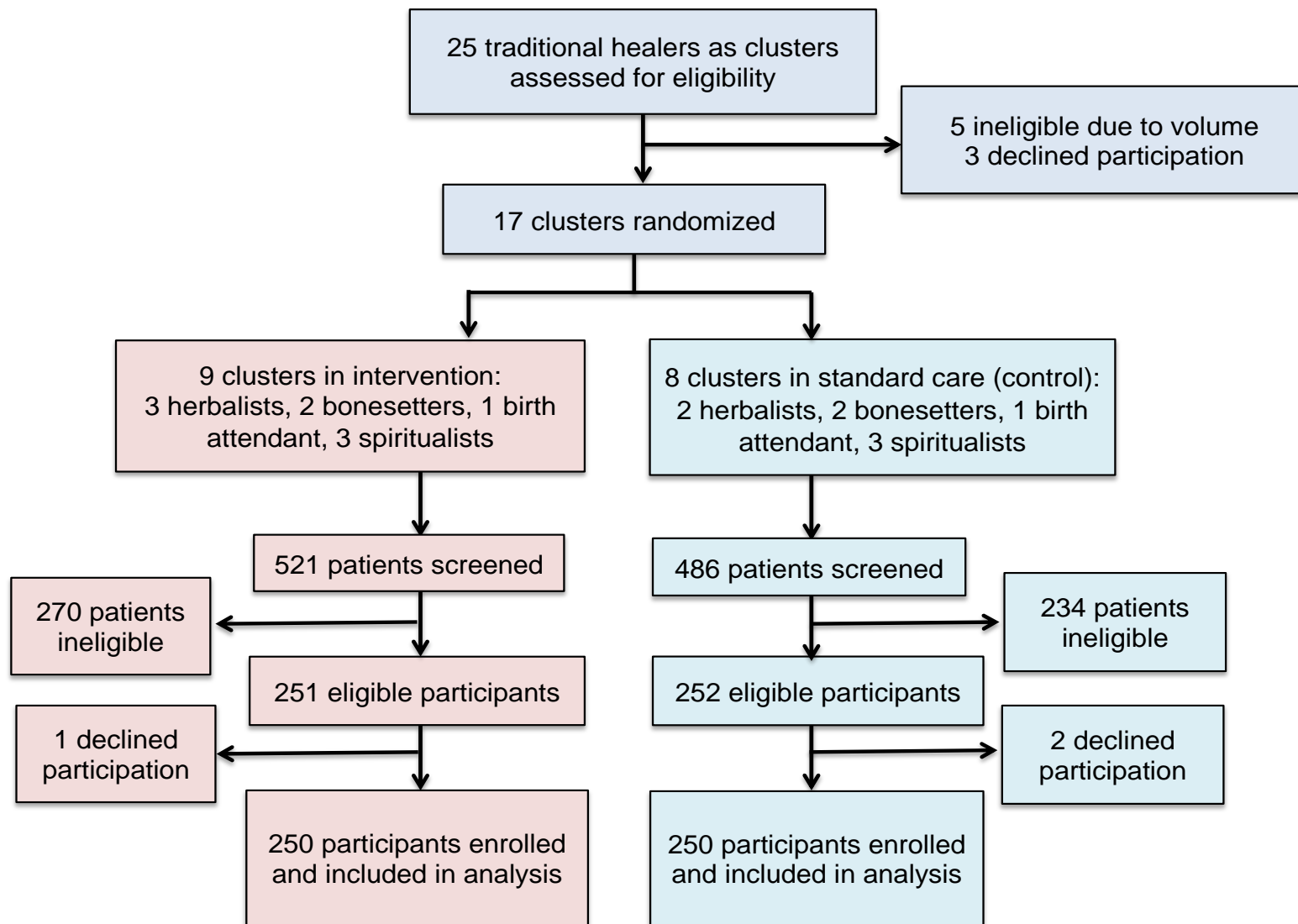
- We designed a community-based point-of-care HIV testing program delivered by traditional healers to their clients, using oral swab test kits
- We evaluated the effectiveness of this program in a cluster randomized controlled trial (NCT03718871)
- Traditional healers and their clients were randomized to an intervention arm with point-of-care HIV testing, versus a control arm with referral for HIV testing at nearby facilities



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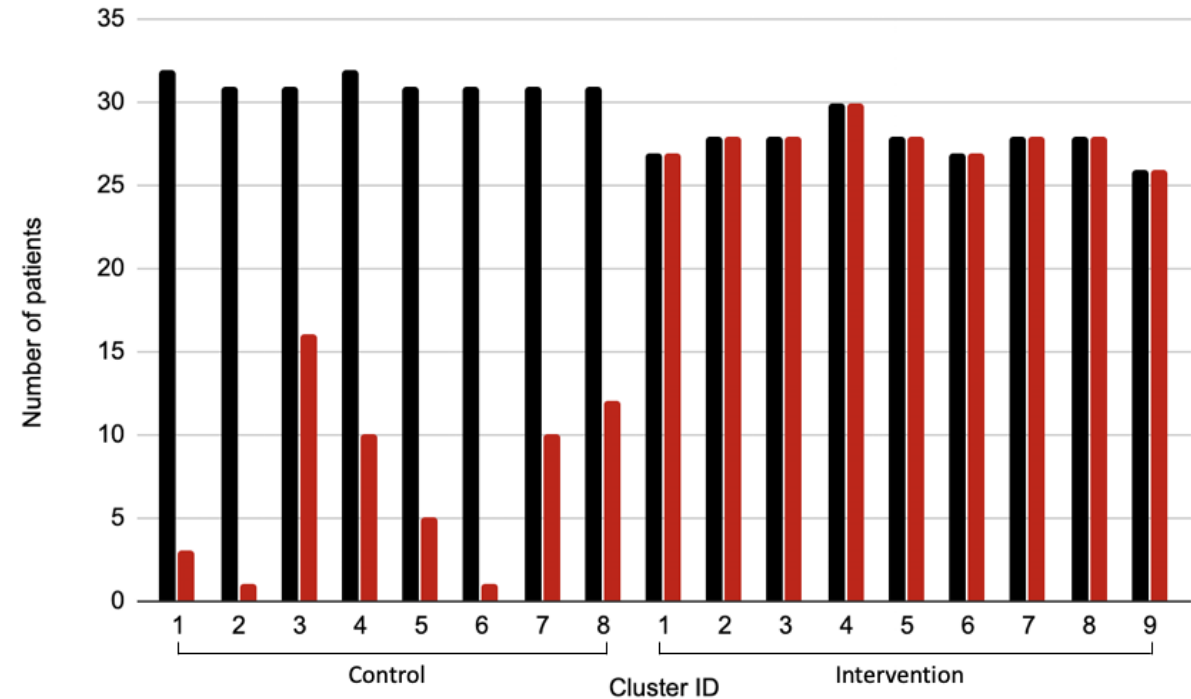
- Primary outcome: individual clients receiving an HIV test within 90 days of their visit
 - Secondary outcomes: new HIV diagnosis, linkage to HIV care for those newly testing positive
- Traditional healers eligible if within 10 km of Mbarara Township, and patient volume of at least 7 patients/week
- Patients of traditional healers eligible if 18 years or older, sexually active, not received an HIV test in prior 12 months and not HIV infected
- Trial conducted between August 2019 – February 2020





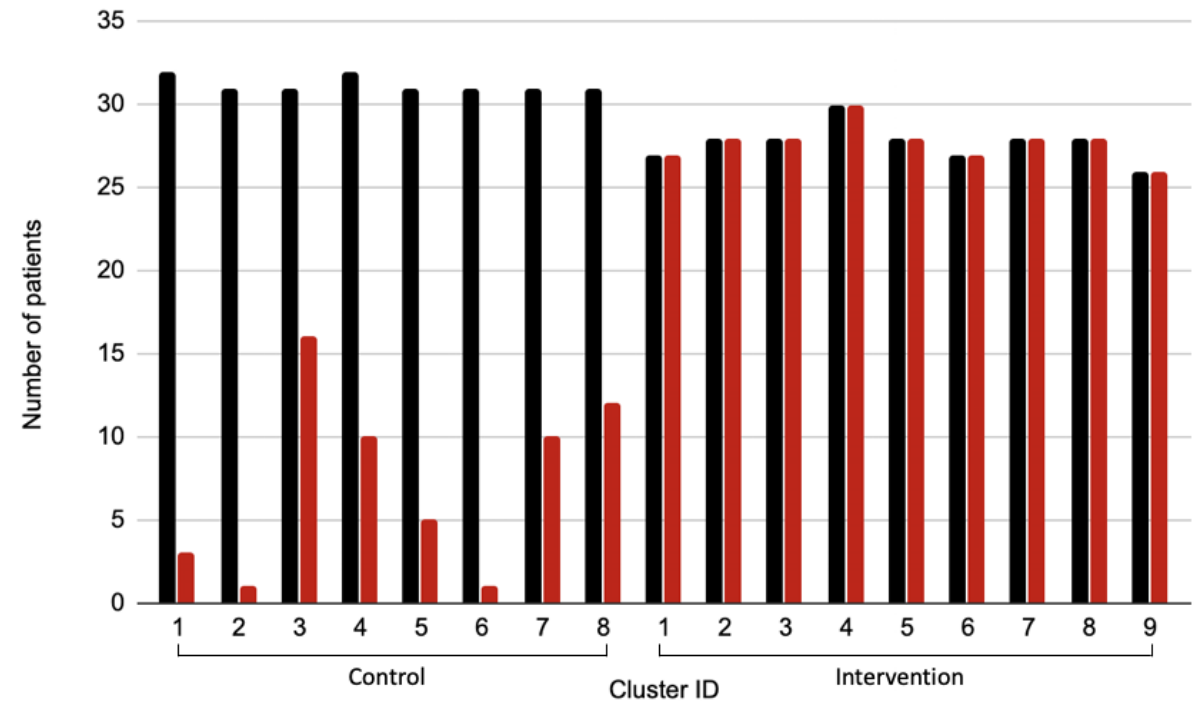
Results:

- In the intervention, 250 participants (100%) received an HIV test compared with 57 (22.8%) in the control arm
- This reflects a **77.2% increase in HIV testing uptake** (95% CI 72.8 – 81.6%, $p < 0.001$).
- Ten participants in the intervention arm (4%) tested HIV-positive; 7 of these linked to HIV care.
- No new HIV cases were identified within the control arm.



Conclusions:

- Delivery of point-of-care HIV tests by traditional healers to adults of unknown serostatus significantly increased the rate of HIV testing in rural Uganda
- This strategy holds promise for increasing uptake of HIV testing in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in areas where conventional biomedical outreach has had limited impact



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