

Free and anonymous counselling and testing Sites in France: who attends and why?



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Background

Free and anonymous counselling and testing (FACT) is offered in France to persons at risk for HIV infection and represents 8% (255,000) of annual nonblood donation tests and 15% (750) of HIV(+) tests.

We describe the characteristics and reasons for testing of individuals who attend FACT sites.

Methods

A self-questionnaire on demographic characteristics, reasons for testing, behaviour, prevention attitude and testing pattern was proposed to subjects seeking test in FACT sites (n=287) during one week in October 2000. Seventy percent of FACT sites participated and 77 % of their attendees responded.

Analysis consisted of comparisons with the general population (2001 KABP study) and classification methods (SPAD software). Data presented are adjusted for sex and age of the general population.

Results

I. Characteristics of attendees (Table 1)

Compared to the general population (KABP 2001) respondents were :

- More likely to be male
- More likely to be Younger
- Their sexual orientation was mainly heterosexual (more than 80%) but male homo&bisexuals were over-represented (16%)
- More likely to have multiple partners
- They stated they used condoms more frequently, but they felt more risky
- More likely to have been previously tested.

Table 1. Characteristics of FACT sites attendees and comparisons with 2001 KABP study

	FACT 2000 (n=4 196)	KABP 2001 (n=2 682)	p
Sex			
% men	54%	50%	10 ⁻³
Age-			
18-29 years	68%	22%	<10 ⁻⁶
Sexual behaviour			
• Men			
Heterosexuals	81%	92%	
Homosexuals	12%	2%	<10 ⁻⁶
Bisexuals	6%	1%	
Virgins	1%	5%	
• Women			
Heterosexuals	96%	92%	
Homosexuals	1%	<1%	<10 ⁻⁶
Bisexuals	1%	<1%	
Virgins	2%	6%	
Sexual partners in the last 12 months			
• Men			
More than one partner	66%	10%	
Homo&bisexuals	82%		<10 ⁻⁶
heterosexuals	61%		
• Women			
More than one partner	47%	6%	<10 ⁻⁶
Condom use in the last 12 months			
• Men (Heterosexuals only)			
More than one partner	85%	29%	
With a casual partner	89%	77%	<10 ⁻⁶
With a casual partner	89%	53%	
Women (Heterosexuals only)			
More than one partner	82%	26%	
With a casual partner	90%	70%	<10 ⁻⁶
With a casual partner	87%	41%	
Risk perception			
Same risk of others	51%	38%	
More risk	7%	4%	<10 ⁻⁶
Less risk	22%	44%	
No risk 8%	14%		
Previously tested			
• Men	53%	44%	
• Women	55%	52%	<10 ⁻⁶

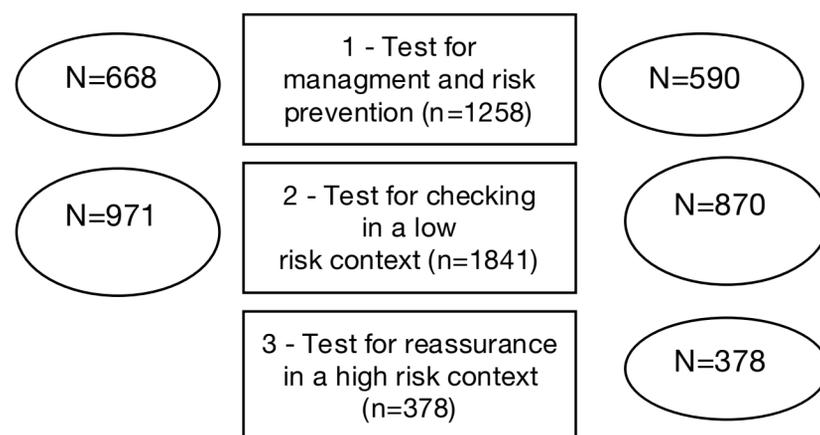
FACT sites attendees never tested differed significantly from those previously tested according to sexual behaviour (homosexuality less frequent), age (younger), number of partners (lower), risk perception (self-risk evaluation more difficult to assess).

II. Reason(s) for testing given by FACT sites attendees

- following sexual contact: 38%
- before removing condom: 19%
- before a new relationship: 15%
- following condom breakage: 11%
- just to know: 10%
- worry about partner fidelity: 7%
- to confirm a previous result: 5%
- HIV serodiscordant couple: 1%

III. Classification according to reasons for testing and testing pattern

The classification method (cluster analysis) was performed among 3 480 respondents. The method, using testing pattern and reasons for testing as active variables and demographic and behavioral variables as description variables, found 3 groups whose proportion differed according to testing pattern:



Never tested (1639)

Previously tested (1838)

group 1: (41% of attendees never tested, 32% of previously tested) included mostly heterosexual men, often coming in couple, at the request of their partner, to have a test to abandon condom use, with only one stable relationship in the last 12 months, always using condom, feeling no risk about HIV infection. This group was labelled "Test for management and risk prevention".

group 2: (59% of never tested, 47% of previously tested) included persons coming alone, with fear following a sexual contact, or because of breaking condom. They were more likely women, worried about fidelity of their partner, using condom irregularly, feeling same risk or more risk than the general population. This group was labelled "Test for checking in a low risk context".

group 3: (21% of previously tested) included persons coming alone, afraid of contamination without being able to formulate a precise risk; with numerous occasional partners, rarely using condom. This group was labelled "Test for reassurance in a high risk context".

Conclusion

This study confirms that FACT sites attracted persons at greater risk for HIV infection and more vulnerable people (mostly young people) when compared with the general population.

The study identified three distinct groups which seemed to have different needs :

- the first group follows recommendations and just needed to be conformed on their management of prevention;
- the second group, who had a test in answer to a particular incident in a low risk context, needed help and information on how to manage prevention with their partner;
- the third group, who didn't link behaviour to a precise risk and couldn't manage prevention with their multiple partners, needed assistance in all dimensions of the prevention measures.

These results emphasise the needs for a counselling strategy adapted to reasons for testing and behavioural profile of FACT sites attendees.