

## Exploring the intersection of HIV/AIDS knowledge and rapid testing attitudes in higher education: A student perspective

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**Abstract:** The research explored the intersection of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards rapid testing among higher education students. The study aimed to assess the current state of knowledge, identify gaps and inconsistencies, and provide insights into effective strategies to promote accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards testing. The review found that while students generally demonstrate a basic understanding of HIV/AIDS, significant gaps and misconceptions persist, influencing attitudes towards testing. Positive attitudes were associated with greater knowledge and awareness of the benefits of testing, but barriers such as stigma, accessibility, and misinformation hindered testing uptake. The implications of the findings underscore the importance of targeted educational interventions, accessible testing services, and supportive environments within higher education institutions to promote accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards testing. Addressing these factors can contribute to reducing barriers, dispelling myths, and ultimately improving health outcomes among higher education students and the broader community.

**Keywords:** Attitudes towards testing; Higher education students; HIV/AIDS knowledge; Rapid testing.

### Introduction

HIV/AIDS remains a significant global public health issue with profound implications on individuals and communities (Bekker et al., 2018; Tran et al., 2021). Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the body's immune system, specifically the CD4 cells (T cells), which can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) if not treated (Saravanan et al., 2018; Shelton, 2019). Since its identification in the early 1980s, HIV/AIDS has caused millions of deaths worldwide, with Sub-Saharan Africa being disproportionately affected (Dwyer-Lindgren et al., 2019). The disease not only impacts the health of individuals but also poses severe economic, social, and psychological burdens. Advances in medical research have significantly improved the prognosis for individuals living with HIV, transforming it from a fatal diagnosis to a manageable chronic condition through antiretroviral therapy (ART). Despite these advancements, stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS persist, hampering efforts to encourage testing, treatment, and prevention. Comprehensive education and awareness are crucial in combating these stigmas and improving public health outcomes. Understanding the disease, its transmission, and the importance of early testing and treatment is vital, particularly in higher education settings, where young adults are at a critical stage of developing health behaviors and attitudes that can last a lifetime.

Knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing are critical components in the fight against the epidemic (Alwafi et al., 2018; Assefa et al., 2019; Youssef et al., 2021). Comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS, including its transmission, prevention, and treatment, empowers individuals to make informed decisions regarding their

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sexual health and behaviors. This knowledge can lead to a reduction in risky behaviors that facilitate the spread of the virus, such as unprotected sex and sharing needles. Furthermore, positive attitudes towards rapid HIV testing are essential for early detection and treatment. Rapid testing provides a convenient, quick, and confidential means of determining HIV status, which is crucial for initiating timely medical care and reducing the risk of transmission to others. However, misconceptions and stigmas surrounding HIV/AIDS and testing can create barriers, discouraging individuals from seeking information or getting tested. Addressing these attitudes is vital; promoting a supportive and stigma-free environment can encourage more people to get tested regularly, thus contributing to better health outcomes and reducing the spread of HIV. In higher education settings, where young adults are at a pivotal stage of forming lasting health behaviors, fostering accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing can have long-term benefits, shaping a generation that is better equipped to combat the epidemic.

The relevance of studying HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards rapid testing within the context of higher education is particularly significant (Jahangiry et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2020). Higher education institutions are unique environments where young adults, who are often at a critical stage of developing their health behaviors and attitudes, congregate. This demographic is considered high-risk for HIV infection due to factors such as increased sexual activity, exploration of identity, and varying levels of health education. Addressing HIV/AIDS in these settings is crucial as it provides an opportunity to implement targeted educational interventions that can significantly influence students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. By understanding the intersection of knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing, educators and policymakers can design effective programs to promote safer sexual practices, reduce stigma, and encourage regular testing. These interventions not only improve the health and well-being of students but also foster a culture of awareness and responsibility that students can carry into their communities. Moreover, higher education institutions can serve as a model for other sectors by demonstrating effective strategies for combating HIV/AIDS, ultimately contributing to broader public health efforts. The insights gained from this study can inform policies and practices that enhance the overall effectiveness of HIV/AIDS education and prevention programs within higher education and beyond.

The primary research questions guiding this review include: How knowledgeable are students in higher education about HIV/AIDS? What are their attitudes towards rapid HIV testing? How do these knowledge levels and attitudes intersect and influence each other? The objectives of the review are to systematically analyze existing studies to understand the current state of knowledge and attitudes within this demographic, identify gaps in the literature, and provide a comprehensive synthesis of factors influencing both knowledge and attitudes. Additionally, this review aims to examine how educational interventions in higher education settings can enhance understanding and positively shape attitudes towards rapid testing. By achieving these objectives, the review seeks to offer evidence-based recommendations for educators, policymakers, and health practitioners to develop targeted strategies that improve HIV/AIDS education and testing uptake among students, thereby contributing to the broader goal of reducing HIV transmission and enhancing public health outcomes.

### Methodology

The research approach employed in this study is a structured method designed to comprehensively gather and analyze relevant research on the intersection of HIV/AIDS knowledge and rapid testing attitudes among higher education students. The search strategy involves identifying a set of keywords and phrases related to HIV/AIDS, rapid testing, knowledge, attitudes, and higher education. These keywords are used to search through multiple academic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, ensuring a broad and thorough collection of literature. Inclusion criteria for

this review include studies published in peer-reviewed journals within the last two decades, written in English, and focusing specifically on higher education populations. Exclusion criteria involve studies that do not directly address the intersection of knowledge and attitudes, those that focus on non-student populations, and non-peer-reviewed sources such as opinion pieces or conference abstracts. By adhering to these criteria, the review ensures the inclusion of high-quality and relevant studies. Additionally, reference lists of selected articles are examined to identify further relevant studies. This systematic approach allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing research, providing a robust foundation for understanding and addressing the knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing in higher education contexts.

The data extraction and synthesis process in this systematic literature review involves a meticulous and structured approach to collate and analyze the relevant information from selected studies. Once the eligible studies are identified based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, data extraction begins by systematically recording key details from each study. This includes information on the study design, sample size, population characteristics, geographical location, key findings related to HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitudes towards rapid testing, and any interventions or educational programs implemented. Data extraction forms or software are often used to ensure consistency and accuracy in capturing this information. Following extraction, the synthesis process involves aggregating the data to identify common themes, trends, and patterns across the studies. This can include qualitative synthesis for themes and narratives and quantitative synthesis, such as meta-analysis, for numerical data. By synthesizing the data, the review aims to provide a coherent and comprehensive understanding of how knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing intersect among higher education students. This process highlights the variations and consistencies in findings across different contexts and populations, offering insights into effective strategies for improving education and attitudes in this critical demographic.

The quality assessment of the included studies is a crucial step in ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings in this systematic literature review. This process involves critically evaluating each study to determine its methodological rigor and the robustness of its results. Various standardized tools and checklists, such as the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) Critical Appraisal Checklist or the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool, are employed to assess key aspects of study quality. These aspects include the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions, study design, sample size, data collection methods, and statistical analyses. Additionally, the assessment examines the potential for biases, such as selection bias, measurement bias, and publication bias, and evaluates how these biases might impact the study's findings. Studies are rated on a scale or categorized into levels of quality, ranging from high to low. This thorough quality assessment helps to ensure that the review's conclusions are based on the most reliable and valid evidence available. It also aids in identifying gaps in the current research and areas where further high-quality studies are needed. By incorporating only well-conducted studies, the review can provide more accurate and trustworthy insights into HIV/AIDS knowledge and rapid testing attitudes among higher education students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

An overview of relevant theories related to health knowledge and behavior change provides a foundational understanding of the mechanisms driving how individuals acquire health information and modify their behaviors accordingly. The Health Belief Model (HBM) is a prominent theory that suggests health-related behavior is influenced by personal beliefs about the severity of a health issue, the perceived susceptibility to the issue, the benefits of taking preventive action, and the barriers to taking such action. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which are shaped by attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes the role of observational

learning, self-efficacy, and the interplay between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior. Additionally, the Transtheoretical Model (TTM), or Stages of Change Model, outlines a progression through stages of precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance as individuals move towards adopting healthier behaviors. These theories collectively highlight that knowledge alone is often insufficient for behavior change; attitudes, social influences, perceived control, and readiness to change are also critical factors. In the context of HIV/AIDS knowledge and rapid testing attitudes among higher education students, these theories help explain how educational interventions can effectively alter perceptions and behaviors, thereby enhancing the uptake of testing and preventive measures. Understanding these theories is essential for designing and implementing strategies that successfully promote health-enhancing behaviors in this demographic.

Applying these theories to HIV/AIDS knowledge and rapid testing attitudes provides a framework for understanding and influencing student behavior in higher education settings. The Health Belief Model (HBM) can be used to assess students' perceived susceptibility to HIV and the perceived severity of the disease, which can drive their motivation to seek information and undergo testing. Interventions can be tailored to emphasize the benefits of rapid testing, such as early detection and treatment, while addressing perceived barriers like stigma and fear of positive results. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers insight into how students' attitudes towards rapid testing, the influence of peers and social norms, and their perceived control over getting tested affect their intentions and actions. Educational programs can leverage TPB by fostering positive attitudes towards testing, promoting supportive social norms, and increasing students' confidence in their ability to access and undergo testing. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) can be applied by using role models and peer educators to demonstrate positive behaviors and outcomes associated with HIV testing, enhancing students' self-efficacy. The Transtheoretical Model (TTM) is useful for segmenting students into different stages of readiness for change and providing stage-appropriate interventions to move them towards regular testing behavior. By integrating these theories, educators and health practitioners can design comprehensive strategies that not only increase HIV/AIDS knowledge but also positively influence attitudes and behaviors towards rapid testing, ultimately improving health outcomes in the higher education population.

Theoretical frameworks related to health behavior change are highly relevant to the higher education context due to the unique characteristics of this setting and its impact on students' health knowledge and attitudes. Higher education institutions serve as influential environments where students undergo significant personal and intellectual growth. The application of theoretical frameworks such as the Health Belief Model (HBM), Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), and Transtheoretical Model (TTM) helps contextualize and understand students' health-related decisions and behaviors. These frameworks provide insights into how students perceive and respond to health information, including HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards rapid testing. Given that students are at a crucial developmental stage where lifelong health behaviors are formed, interventions informed by these theories can effectively address the specific needs and challenges faced by students. Additionally, higher education institutions have unique opportunities to deliver targeted health education and interventions that can reach a large and diverse population. By applying theoretical frameworks within this context, educators and health practitioners can design tailored interventions that promote positive health behaviors, foster supportive environments, and ultimately contribute to the overall well-being of students.

### **HIV/AIDS Knowledge among Students in Higher Education**

The summary of findings on the level of HIV/AIDS knowledge among students reveals a mixed landscape of understanding and awareness. While many students in higher education demonstrate a basic understanding of HIV transmission routes and prevention methods, significant gaps persist in more nuanced areas of knowledge. Studies indicate

that misconceptions and myths surrounding HIV/AIDS are prevalent among students, particularly regarding modes of transmission, effectiveness of prevention methods, and misconceptions about HIV testing and treatment. Additionally, knowledge disparities exist across demographic groups, with some studies showing variations based on factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, and educational background. While educational interventions and campaigns have contributed to increased awareness over the years, ongoing efforts are needed to address persistent gaps in understanding and ensure that students have accurate and comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS. These findings underscore the importance of continued education and targeted interventions in higher education settings to improve HIV/AIDS knowledge and reduce misinformation among students.

Several key factors influence HIV/AIDS knowledge among students in higher education, including the effectiveness of educational programs and the influence of cultural backgrounds. Educational programs play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of HIV/AIDS, with well-designed and comprehensive programs shown to improve knowledge levels. These programs often incorporate information on transmission routes, prevention methods, and the importance of testing and treatment. Additionally, culturally sensitive approaches are crucial for addressing diverse beliefs, attitudes, and practices related to HIV/AIDS. Cultural background can influence perceptions of HIV/AIDS, stigma, and willingness to engage in preventive behaviors or seek testing. Factors such as language barriers, cultural taboos, and religious beliefs can impact students' access to accurate information and their willingness to discuss or address HIV/AIDS-related issues openly. Therefore, educational programs that consider cultural diversity and tailor messaging accordingly are more likely to be effective in improving HIV/AIDS knowledge among students. Understanding and addressing these key factors are essential for developing targeted interventions that can effectively promote accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and testing among higher education students.

Gaps and inconsistencies in current research on HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards rapid testing among higher education students highlight areas where further investigation and improvement are needed. Despite the wealth of research in this field, several notable gaps exist. One significant gap is the lack of studies focusing on specific subpopulations within the higher education setting, such as minority groups, international students, or students from marginalized communities. Understanding the unique experiences and perspectives of these groups is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Additionally, inconsistencies exist in the measurement and assessment of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes across studies, making it challenging to compare findings and draw definitive conclusions. Some studies use self-reported measures, while others use objective tests, leading to variations in reported levels of knowledge and attitudes. Moreover, there is a need for longitudinal studies to assess changes in knowledge and attitudes over time and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of educational interventions. Lastly, research exploring the intersectionality of factors influencing HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes, such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, remains limited. Addressing these gaps and inconsistencies is essential for advancing our understanding of HIV/AIDS among higher education students and developing effective strategies to promote accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards testing and prevention.

### **Attitudes Towards Rapid HIV Testing in Higher Education**

An overview of students' attitudes towards rapid HIV testing reveals a range of perspectives and factors influencing their acceptance or reluctance. Rapid HIV testing offers several advantages, including convenience, confidentiality, and quick results, which are appealing to many students. Positive attitudes towards rapid testing are often associated with a desire for peace of mind, early detection, and the potential to prevent transmission. However, barriers such as fear of a positive result, stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, concerns about privacy and confidentiality, and mistrust of healthcare

providers can deter students from seeking testing. Moreover, misconceptions about the testing process, its accuracy, and implications may also influence attitudes negatively. Cultural, social, and personal factors further shape attitudes towards testing, with differences observed across demographic groups. Some studies suggest that interventions focusing on reducing stigma, increasing awareness about the benefits of testing, and addressing logistical barriers can positively impact students' attitudes towards rapid HIV testing. Understanding these attitudes is crucial for developing effective interventions that promote testing uptake and encourage proactive health-seeking behaviors among higher education students.

Several factors significantly affect students' attitudes towards rapid HIV testing, including stigma, accessibility, and perceived importance. Stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS remains a pervasive barrier, often leading to fear of discrimination and social rejection among students. Negative attitudes towards testing can stem from the fear of being associated with the virus or being judged by peers and society. Accessibility plays a critical role, as students may face challenges in accessing testing services due to factors such as cost, availability of testing sites, and convenience. Perceived importance also influences attitudes, with some students viewing HIV testing as unnecessary if they perceive themselves to be at low risk or if they underestimate the severity of the disease. Conversely, those who understand the importance of early detection and treatment may have more positive attitudes towards testing. Additionally, misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission and testing accuracy can contribute to negative attitudes. Educational interventions that address these factors by providing accurate information, reducing stigma, improving accessibility to testing services, and highlighting the importance of testing in preventive care can help promote more positive attitudes towards rapid HIV testing among higher education students.

A comparative analysis of attitudes towards rapid HIV testing across different demographics reveals variations that highlight the influence of gender, age, and field of study on students' perspectives. Gender differences in attitudes towards testing have been observed, with some studies indicating that females tend to have more positive attitudes and higher testing uptake compared to males. Age is another factor influencing attitudes, with older students often exhibiting greater awareness and acceptance of testing, while younger students may be more hesitant or uninformed. Additionally, attitudes vary across fields of study, with health-related disciplines generally showing more positive attitudes towards testing due to greater awareness and understanding of the importance of regular testing. Conversely, students in non-health-related fields may exhibit more stigma and fear surrounding HIV/AIDS testing due to lower exposure to relevant information. Understanding these demographic differences is crucial for tailoring interventions and educational campaigns to effectively reach and engage diverse student populations. By addressing specific concerns and barriers associated with each demographic group, efforts to promote positive attitudes towards testing can be more targeted and successful within higher education settings.

### **Intersection of HIV/AIDS Knowledge and Rapid Testing Attitudes**

An analysis of how HIV/AIDS knowledge influences attitudes towards rapid testing reveals a complex relationship where greater knowledge often correlates with more positive attitudes and increased testing uptake. Students who possess accurate and comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, and treatment are more likely to recognize the importance of regular testing for early detection and prevention of transmission. Understanding the risks associated with HIV/AIDS and the benefits of early diagnosis through rapid testing can lead to more favorable attitudes towards testing among students. Conversely, misconceptions and gaps in knowledge about HIV/AIDS may contribute to fear, stigma, and reluctance to undergo testing. Studies suggest that interventions aimed at improving HIV/AIDS knowledge can positively influence attitudes towards testing, highlighting the crucial role of education in shaping attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, the quality of information and sources from which

students acquire knowledge can also impact their attitudes towards testing. Therefore, efforts to promote accurate and accessible information about HIV/AIDS are essential for fostering positive attitudes and increasing testing uptake among higher education students.

Several case studies and examples from the literature provide valuable insights into how HIV/AIDS knowledge influences attitudes towards rapid testing among higher education students. For instance, a study conducted at a university health center found that students who participated in comprehensive HIV/AIDS education programs demonstrated more positive attitudes towards rapid testing and were more likely to seek testing compared to those who did not receive such education. Another case study explored the impact of peer-led educational interventions on attitudes towards testing among college students, showing significant improvements in knowledge and attitudes following peer-led sessions. Additionally, research has highlighted the influence of culturally tailored interventions on attitudes towards testing, with programs that address cultural beliefs and norms showing greater acceptance and uptake of testing among minority student populations. These case studies illustrate the importance of targeted educational interventions in shaping attitudes towards testing among diverse student populations, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive approaches and peer-led initiatives to effectively promote testing uptake in higher education settings.

The discussion on the interaction between knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and rapid testing highlights the intricate relationship between these two factors and their impact on student behavior. Higher levels of HIV/AIDS knowledge are often associated with more positive attitudes towards rapid testing, as informed individuals recognize the importance of testing for early diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of transmission. Conversely, gaps in knowledge or misconceptions about HIV/AIDS can lead to fear, stigma, and negative attitudes towards testing. However, attitudes towards testing can also influence the acquisition and retention of knowledge, as individuals with positive attitudes may be more receptive to educational messages and seek out accurate information. Moreover, socio-cultural factors, personal beliefs, and past experiences further shape the interaction between knowledge and attitudes. For example, students from marginalized communities or those with previous negative experiences may harbor more stigma and fear, impacting their attitudes towards testing despite having adequate knowledge. Understanding this interaction is crucial for developing effective interventions that not only improve knowledge but also foster positive attitudes towards testing, ultimately leading to increased testing uptake and improved health outcomes among higher education students.

### **Barriers and Facilitators to Knowledge and Testing**

The identification of barriers to acquiring HIV/AIDS knowledge and accepting rapid testing reveals several challenges that hinder individuals from engaging with testing services and obtaining accurate information. Stigma remains a pervasive barrier, causing fear of discrimination, social rejection, and reluctance to discuss HIV/AIDS-related topics openly. Misinformation and misconceptions about HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, and testing methods contribute to confusion and reluctance to seek testing. Additionally, cultural taboos, language barriers, and mistrust of healthcare systems can further impede access to accurate information and testing services. Accessibility issues, such as cost, distance to testing sites, and availability of testing hours, also present significant barriers, particularly for marginalized or low-income students. Fear of a positive result and the potential implications on personal relationships, academic and professional prospects, and mental well-being can also deter individuals from undergoing testing. Addressing these barriers requires multifaceted approaches that include education to dispel myths and reduce stigma, improving accessibility to testing services, providing culturally sensitive care, and offering support services to alleviate fears and concerns associated with testing.

Facilitators that enhance knowledge and positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS testing play a crucial role in encouraging individuals to engage with testing services and adopt healthier behaviors. Education emerges as a significant facilitator, providing accurate and comprehensive information about HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, and the benefits of testing. Effective educational programs delivered through diverse channels, including schools, peer-led initiatives, and community outreach, help dispel myths, reduce stigma, and promote a better understanding of testing. Accessible and confidential testing services, including rapid testing options, enhance convenience and encourage individuals to seek testing. Supportive environments and non-judgmental healthcare providers also facilitate testing uptake by creating safe spaces where individuals feel comfortable discussing their concerns and accessing services. Additionally, positive social norms and peer influence can promote testing by encouraging open conversations, normalizing testing behaviors, and reducing stigma associated with HIV/AIDS. Tailored interventions that address cultural beliefs, language barriers, and the unique needs of different demographic groups further enhance testing uptake and foster positive attitudes. By leveraging these facilitators, communities and healthcare systems can promote knowledge, reduce barriers, and ultimately improve testing rates and health outcomes related to HIV/AIDS.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in addressing barriers and facilitating positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS testing among students. Firstly, institutions can implement comprehensive educational programs that integrate accurate information about HIV/AIDS into curricula, workshops, and campus-wide initiatives. These programs not only enhance knowledge but also reduce stigma and foster supportive attitudes towards testing. Furthermore, educational institutions can provide accessible and confidential testing services on campus or through partnerships with healthcare providers, addressing barriers related to cost, accessibility, and confidentiality. By offering testing services in familiar and convenient settings, institutions encourage students to prioritize their health and access testing regularly. Additionally, institutions can create supportive environments by promoting open dialogue about sexual health, providing resources for students to access accurate information, and offering support services for those affected by HIV/AIDS. Peer-led initiatives and student organizations can also play a significant role in normalizing testing behaviors and reducing stigma. Overall, by actively addressing barriers and leveraging facilitators, educational institutions can create environments that promote positive attitudes towards testing, empower students with accurate knowledge, and ultimately contribute to healthier and more informed communities.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

Several recommendations can be made for higher education institutions to effectively address HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing among students. Firstly, institutions should prioritize the integration of comprehensive HIV/AIDS education into curricula and campus-wide programs, ensuring that students receive accurate information and have opportunities for open dialogue about sexual health. Regular workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns can help dispel myths, reduce stigma, and promote positive attitudes towards testing. Secondly, institutions should establish accessible and confidential testing services on campus or through partnerships with local healthcare providers, ensuring that testing is convenient, affordable, and stigma-free. Thirdly, efforts should be made to create supportive environments that foster a culture of acceptance and inclusion, where students feel comfortable discussing HIV/AIDS-related topics and seeking support if needed. Peer-led initiatives and student organizations can play a vital role in promoting testing behaviors and providing peer support. Lastly, institutions should prioritize the needs of diverse student populations, including minority groups and international students, by offering culturally sensitive education and support services tailored to their unique experiences and challenges. By implementing these recommendations, higher education institutions can contribute significantly to reducing barriers, enhancing knowledge, and promoting positive attitudes towards HIV/AIDS.

testing among students, ultimately fostering healthier and more informed campus communities.

Several potential interventions can effectively improve HIV/AIDS knowledge and testing attitudes among higher education students. Firstly, educational institutions can implement comprehensive HIV/AIDS education programs that incorporate accurate information about transmission, prevention, and testing methods into curricula and campus-wide initiatives. These programs should include interactive workshops, seminars, and campaigns aimed at dispelling myths, reducing stigma, and promoting positive attitudes towards testing. Secondly, accessible and confidential testing services should be made available on campus or through partnerships with local healthcare providers, ensuring convenience and privacy for students seeking testing. Additionally, peer-led initiatives and student organizations can play a crucial role in promoting testing behaviors, normalizing conversations about HIV/AIDS, and providing peer support. Culturally sensitive interventions that address the unique needs and beliefs of diverse student populations should also be prioritized to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness. Furthermore, utilizing technology and social media platforms for targeted messaging and outreach can enhance engagement and reach a wider audience. Lastly, ongoing evaluation and assessment of interventions are essential to measure effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and ensure that efforts are meeting the needs of students. By implementing these interventions, higher education institutions can effectively improve HIV/AIDS knowledge and testing attitudes, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes among students.

Policy implications at institutional, local, and national levels are crucial for addressing HIV/AIDS knowledge and testing attitudes among higher education students comprehensively. At the institutional level, policies should prioritize the integration of HIV/AIDS education into curricula, ensuring that all students receive accurate information and access to testing services. Institutions should also establish protocols for providing confidential and accessible testing services on campus or through partnerships with healthcare providers. Additionally, policies should promote a supportive environment that fosters open dialogue, reduces stigma, and provides resources for students affected by HIV/AIDS. At the local level, policymakers can support initiatives that increase access to testing services, promote community-based education programs, and allocate resources to support organizations working on HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. At the national level, policies should prioritize funding for HIV/AIDS education, prevention, and treatment programs, as well as research initiatives targeting higher education settings. Additionally, policies should support initiatives aimed at reducing healthcare disparities, addressing social determinants of health, and promoting inclusive and equitable access to care for all individuals. By implementing policies at these various levels, policymakers can create environments that support HIV/AIDS education, reduce barriers to testing, and ultimately improve health outcomes among higher education students and the broader community.

### **Future Research Directions**

Identified gaps in the current literature on HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing among higher education students highlight areas where further research and attention are needed to address critical issues effectively. One significant gap is the lack of studies focusing on specific subpopulations within the higher education setting, such as minority groups, international students, or students from marginalized communities. Understanding the unique experiences and perspectives of these groups is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Additionally, there is a need for more longitudinal studies to assess changes in knowledge and attitudes over time and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of educational interventions. Furthermore, inconsistencies exist in the measurement and assessment of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes across studies, making it challenging to compare findings and draw definitive conclusions. Additionally, research exploring the intersectionality of factors influencing HIV/AIDS knowledge

and attitudes, such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, remains limited. Addressing these gaps requires further research efforts and interdisciplinary collaborations to develop comprehensive strategies that effectively promote accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards testing among higher education students.

Suggestions for future research studies in the field of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing among higher education students include several key areas that warrant further investigation. Firstly, there is a need for more in-depth studies focusing on specific subpopulations within the higher education setting, including minority groups, international students, and individuals from marginalized communities, to understand their unique experiences and perspectives. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess changes in knowledge and attitudes over time and evaluate the effectiveness of educational interventions in the long term. Additionally, research should focus on developing standardized measures for assessing HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes to enable better comparison across studies. Exploring the intersectionality of factors influencing knowledge and attitudes, such as gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic location, would provide valuable insights into how to tailor interventions more effectively. Moreover, there is a need for studies that explore innovative approaches, such as technology-based interventions or community-engaged research, to reach and engage students more effectively. Finally, research should also focus on evaluating policy interventions and their impact on promoting accurate knowledge and positive attitudes towards testing among higher education students. By addressing these research gaps, future studies can contribute to a better understanding of how to effectively promote HIV/AIDS education and testing uptake among higher education students, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes.

The potential for interdisciplinary research in the field of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing among higher education students is significant and holds promise for addressing complex challenges comprehensively. Collaborations between disciplines such as public health, psychology, education, sociology, and healthcare can provide diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to understanding and addressing issues related to HIV/AIDS. For instance, public health researchers can contribute expertise in designing and evaluating educational interventions, while psychologists can provide insights into behavior change theories and attitudes formation. Sociologists can explore the social determinants of health and how social networks influence testing behaviors, while healthcare professionals can offer insights into the delivery of testing services and healthcare access. Additionally, education researchers can contribute to designing effective educational programs tailored to the needs of diverse student populations. Interdisciplinary research can also leverage methods and approaches from fields such as epidemiology, anthropology, communication studies, and technology to enhance data collection, analysis, and intervention delivery. By bringing together expertise from multiple disciplines, interdisciplinary research has the potential to develop holistic, evidence-based strategies that effectively promote accurate knowledge, positive attitudes, and testing uptake among higher education students, ultimately contributing to improved health outcomes and reduced HIV/AIDS transmission.

### **Conclusion**

The research on HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing among higher education students has yielded several key findings. Firstly, while students generally demonstrate a basic understanding of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention methods, significant gaps and misconceptions persist, particularly regarding testing. These gaps contribute to fear, stigma, and reluctance to undergo testing. Secondly, attitudes towards testing are influenced by factors such as stigma, accessibility, and perceived importance, with positive attitudes associated with greater knowledge and awareness of the benefits of testing. Thirdly, demographic factors such as gender, age, and field of study influence

attitudes towards testing, highlighting the need for tailored interventions. Additionally, the literature suggests that educational interventions and supportive environments can positively impact knowledge and attitudes, but disparities exist in access to these resources. Lastly, while progress has been made, there are still gaps in the literature, including the need for more research on specific subpopulations, longitudinal studies, and standardized measures for assessing knowledge and attitudes. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of continued efforts to improve HIV/AIDS education and testing uptake among higher education students, aiming to reduce barriers, dispel myths, and promote positive attitudes towards testing for better health outcomes.

Reflecting on the importance of the intersection of knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS and testing among higher education students reveals the critical role they play in shaping health behaviors and outcomes. Knowledge serves as the foundation upon which attitudes are built, influencing individuals' perceptions of risk, understanding of preventive measures, and decisions regarding testing uptake. Positive attitudes towards testing are often a result of accurate knowledge and awareness of the benefits of early detection and treatment. Conversely, gaps in knowledge or misconceptions can lead to fear, stigma, and reluctance to seek testing. Understanding this intersection allows for the development of targeted interventions that not only improve knowledge but also address attitudes and perceptions surrounding HIV/AIDS and testing. By promoting accurate knowledge and fostering positive attitudes, higher education institutions can empower students to make informed decisions about their sexual health, reduce stigma, and ultimately contribute to better health outcomes for themselves and their communities. Therefore, efforts to bridge the gap between knowledge and attitudes are essential for effective HIV/AIDS prevention and control strategies among higher education students.

The implications for higher education and public health stemming from the intersection of HIV/AIDS knowledge and attitudes towards testing are significant and far-reaching. Higher education institutions have a critical role in promoting accurate knowledge, reducing stigma, and fostering positive attitudes towards testing among students. By integrating comprehensive HIV/AIDS education into curricula, providing accessible testing services, and creating supportive environments, institutions can empower students to take charge of their sexual health and make informed decisions. Additionally, public health efforts must prioritize reaching and engaging higher education populations through targeted interventions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by students. This includes tailoring educational campaigns, leveraging peer networks, and ensuring equitable access to testing services. Ultimately, by addressing barriers, promoting accurate knowledge, and fostering positive attitudes towards testing, higher education institutions and public health agencies can contribute to reducing HIV/AIDS transmission, improving health outcomes, and fostering healthier and more informed communities. Collaboration between academia, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organizations is essential to achieve these goals and create a supportive environment where all individuals can access the resources they need to protect their sexual health.

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### **Authors' Contributions**

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