Hair Salons as a Promising Space to Offer HIV/SRH Prevention Services for Young Women in Lesotho

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Among salon clients, 93.5% were comfortable receiving oral HIV self-testing (HIVST), 88.3% pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), 86.4% post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) from their hair stylist.

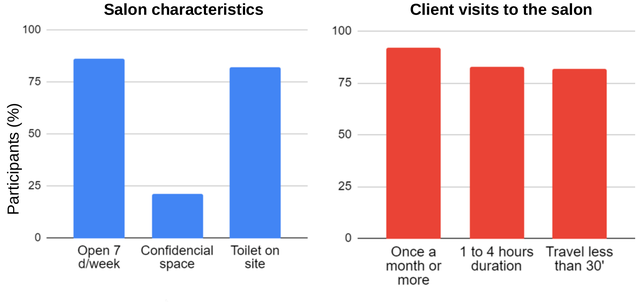
BACKGROUND

- In Lesotho, pregnancy complications and HIV are the leading causes of death for young women.
- Access to HIV and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) services at traditional health facilities is limited.
- There is a need for more accessible and differentiated community spaces to offer person-centred HIV/SRH services.
- We assessed the acceptability and feasibility of offering HIV/SRH services at hair salons in Lesotho.

METHODS

- Using a Citizen Science Approach, hair stylists were recruited through social media, completed a questionnaire, and subsequently recruited their clients aged 15-35 years as respondents.
- All questionnaires were co-developed with stylists and clients using a stepwise verification process.
- GPS geo-identification was used to verify each salon after registration.
- We conducted in-depth interviews among 14 stylists/clients, and analyzed them using rapid thematic analysis, supported by natural language processing.

Figure 1 Survey Findings on the Feasibility of Providing/Receiving Services at the Salon



RESULTS

- Between April and July 2024, **we recruited 157 hair stylists** (median age 29; [IQR 25-33]; from 157 salons across all ten districts) **and 308 female clients** (median age 26 [IQR 22-30]).
- Hair **salons were ranked more accessible than the nearest healthcare centre** in terms of cost and time (Figure 1).
- Only 10.8% of stylists thought that offering HIV/SRH services would negatively impact their business.
- Qualitative themes indicated **high acceptability of the hair salon as a low-threshold access space** and less judgemental than clinics, but raised concerns regarding confidentiality (Figure 2).
- **Most clients and stylists were highly comfortable getting HIV/SRH services at their hair salon,** however, immediate demand (i.e. if offered in coming 6 months) was lower (Figure 3)..

Figure 2 Barriers and Facilitators to Providing/Receiving Services at the Salon

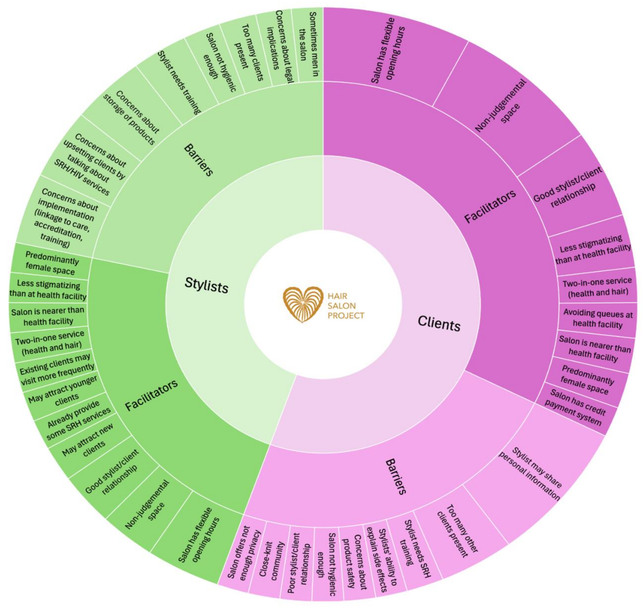
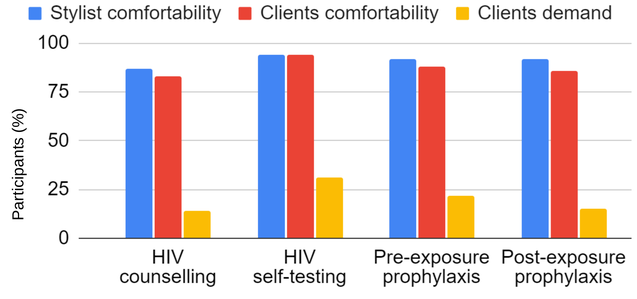


Figure 3 Survey findings on the Acceptability of Providing/Receiving Services at the Salon



Seeing [my stylist] every month, talking to her, and telling her what hairstyles I'd like. So **you become almost like friends. […]** you will eventually t**alk about contraceptives,** you end up **opening up to each other.**

Client

[.. if [a young woman] says, "I'm stopping by the salon to have my hair washed" and uses that chance to get the pills from her stylist, I think **the salon would provide a safe space**…. I'd l**ove to contribute to making women feel safe and comfortable.**

Stylist

CONCLUSIONS

- Clients and stylists alike view the hair salon **as a safe space** for HIV/SRH service needs.
- The findings suggest **high acceptability and feasibility** of HIV/SRH services at hair salons in Lesotho, if **confidentiality concerns are** mitigated, providing the basis for a **pilot intervention.**

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