

Mchinji VCT Qualitative Interviews  
38708  
21 July, 2006  
Joel Nkhonya

[Some noise of a plastic paper bag before the interview starts]

I: This is an interview by Joel Nkhonya for the client \_\_\_ id#38708 on the date of 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006 in [VILLAGE](...) So \_\_\_ we have found you here at your village, there are a few things we are going to chat on. Firstly, let me ask you to say, when people here at [VILLAGE] hear about VCT and HIV what exactly do people say about them?

R: You mean if they want to be tested?

I: Yes.

R: You mean what they discuss? I don't think I have understood the question.

I: Am saying people talk about blood tested and HIV. So what stories do people talk whenever they raise such topics?

R: Ok, the stories are that it's good to do blood test and know how you are.

I: okay.

R: Indeed.

I: Do you have a brother or sister who has ever undergone blood test?

R: I don't have a brother am just alone as I am, am the first born and my sisters are very young.

I: When these survey people started visiting you in the past since 1997 or 2004 have you ever tested blood?

R: For the past year, I have never been tested, but last month this year, 2004. In the past they used to come just talk talk and then go. And they came for the second time when they made a camp at Mkanda. But the time I recognized they are there, I went and I was only snapped, but not tested, and the snap identities got burnt in the house which was there...(respondent points at a position where the burnt house stood)

I: Okay, you mean those ashes was the house you are talking about?

R: Yes.

I: What worries are there to people who refuse to undergo blood test I they are approached? Even to you what worries can you say?

R: To me I have no worries.

I: No worries.

R: No worries, because if I accepted that they should test me, it means there was no worry.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed, it means there was no worry.

I: But maybe from your neighbors and friends, what worries do they have of failing to test blood?

R: I can't know their thoughts.

I: Okay.

R: I can't know what they think in their hearts.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: I remember in the past years the survey people could get your blood and go with it to Mchinji or Lilongwe hospital and bring the results later. But now in 2006 the system changed, so much that the results were told to you instantly. What way would you prefer of hearing the results instantly or later after some weeks or months?

R: Let me say it's the same, whether they test you there and then or you go to the hospital, you see it there.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: When the kafukufuku [Chichewa for research] people asked you for the very first time that, \_\_\_\_ we want to test you blood. How did you feel?

R: My heart was just okay, and from that time my heart has not changed, am just ok.

I: Okay.

R: My heart is not even beating faster. [Laughs]

I: Okay. Of course others just upon hearing of blood test their body completely changes at spot.

R: Those are just worries to people who do not think properly.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

[Interviewer and Respondent laugh]

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: When these blood testing people come, they also offer counseling. Did you see their counseling as helpful to you or not?

R: You mean before testing me or after testing?

I: They counsel on both, before they test you, you are supposed to be counseled and after testing you they have to counsel you again. But am mainly asking you the counseling before testing you: how was it?

[Respondent remains quiet]

I: Did they just arrive and prick your finger without counseling you?

R: Of course they just arrive and said we want you. So we sat there and later they asked me whether it was possible for them to test both of us me and my wife. I told them its ok with me but I don't know of my wife.

I: Okay.

R: Then I called my wife and we decided that we should be tested. Then my wife left where she was being attended by other counselors who had come together with those who were interviewing me.

I: Okay, so you mean there was no formal counseling on blood testing before they took your blood?

R: But about counseling....

[Laughing]

I: Be free to explain because it will help us to know whether our approach to people we visit in the village is okay, or needs to be improved. We need as kafukufuku [Chichewa for research] people to explain to our respondents what we have come for and what we want, so please feel free to say whether you were counseled or not counseled at all.

R: Yah, they gave the counseling. What they said was, we can test you alone separate from your wife and the results be communicated independently or we can test you together with your wife. So when they tested me, they showed me the results and off they went.

I: Okay.

R: Eyah.

I: You have said that you had a chance of being counseled together, though the testing was done separately. Have you seen any change since you were tested till today?

R: On my life I have not seen any change.

I: Not even quarrels that maybe it's you my husband or wife who accepted those VCT people to come and test us?

R: Not at all. There is nothing of that sort.

I: It does happen that couples at times quarrel after the visitors have gone that you are the one who allowed those survey people to come and ask us for blood test.

R: No.

[Respondent and interviewer shift place to inside the unfinished house to avoid disturbance from passersby. Some noise of children in the background.]

I: What I meant is that did your wife not complain that you were the one who first accepted that the kafukufuku guys [research team] should test you as a couple before consulting her first?

R: No she did not complain and there were no quarrels.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e. There have been no quarrels since then.

I: So you say, you were counseled together with your wife?

R: Eya.

I: Okay.

R: E-ee-e.

I: Do you go to any church?

R: I go to the African Church. But it has taken me almost three months without going there.

I: Okay.

R: Eyah.

I: We hear the messages of blood testing and HIV from different sources these days, in addition to pastors of different churches. Now for the past months you were going to the church, what did your pastor say on blood testing or HIV?

R: The pastors talked of that almost every Sunday, they could tell the Christians that the world now is dangerous, we need to protect ourselves. The pastor stressed protection from kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV] that starts AIDS in people's bodies.

I: Okay.

R: The blood testing messages and HIV is talked even in funerals where people are gathered in sorrow after losing their beloved.

I: Do village heads also stand up in funerals as well to talk about kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV]?

R: Not as such, the village head just speaks partly and he leaves the big part to the church people who talk more.

I: Are the church people free to talk such stories in funerals?

R: Eyah.

I: What if you compare the way church people talk on HIV and the way hospital people talk on the same. What difference is there?

R: The way hospital people and church people talk?

I: Yes, any difference?

R: Difference? I see them the same.

I: Do church people mention condoms?

R: No, church people do not speak of condoms.

I: So they don't?

R: But hospital people do mention of condoms.

I: Okay.

R: Or even on the radio, they too mention condoms.

I: Do people here in the village free to go to a shop and buy a condom, if they fail to resist sexual desires and want to have sex?

R: You mean to go and buy a condom?

I: Yes, I mean to go to a shop for example shop of Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ and ask, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ do you have condoms? Especially during broad daylight?

R: I can't know in their hearts, maybe they are shy [ashamed].

I: Okay.

R: Yes it all depends on how one was born shy or not shy.

I: okay.

R: Indeed.

I: Now when they came this time around and got tested. How was it?

R: You mean after testing? They arrived and showed us their measuring materials.

I: Okay.

R: They were two materials like pens. The materials had two lines at the middle. Then they explained that if both lines were colored it means you have kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], but if only one line is colored it means you don't have.

I: Okay, you mean the lines one was about the other or at the same level?

R: No the lines were labeled at the same place.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: So you mean when they got your blood, each one of you had to observe on his own?

R: When they got the blood, they were there for some minutes and later came showed me and my wife.

I: Okay. So they had separate measuring instruments for each one of you?

R: E-e-e.

I: When the results were out, did you try to share with your wife to say my results are like this, like this!

R: But from what they told us, we believed that it's like that. According to what they told us!

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: Did they say you have been found with it or not?

R: It just took what they explained at first on how their instruments work. But we were not told whether we have been found with it or not.

I: Okay.

R: They told us that if two lines appear it means you have been found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV].

I: Okay.

R: Yah that's what they explained.

I: So did the lines change color?

R: Color of what type? [Respondent seems a bit uncomfortable with the results issue]

I: What I mean is that: Were you not told that if this color or lines appear its when you have it or when these colors or lines appear then you don't have it?

R: Yes, they spoke. They said one line it means you don't have the kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], but with me both lines appeared colored.

I: Okay, did that mean you don't have kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV]?

R: E-e-e.

I: We have already said that the church people can talk about AIDS and the hospital people as well. Now imagine in a family set up where a spouse is found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV] and the other not. Do married people in these situations use condoms to avoid reinfecting each other?

R: But to say the wife is not having and the husband is having? What a family? Any way I have heard a case like that at the market of a certain lady who was fat, but when she was pregnancy she went to the hospital for blood test and she was found with it. So as it happened so, they called for her husband too, to be tested and when he was tested, he was found negative.

I: Okay.

R: So the lady came out of the hospital crying and we don't know whether the family is still there or not.

I: Okay.

R: But if you have been found with it as a wife or husband what is the purpose of ending the marriage? Because it means both of you have it.

I: Running away, when you too very likely have it?

R: It's better just to be keeping each other with your wife till time comes. It doesn't mean you die the same day.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: Do you spend some time with your wife in advising each other to say let us keep ourselves? Especially when you are alone as husband and wife?

R: Of course we do talk. If we are happy we discuss about that.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: Because it happens to some extent that some couples think radio messages are enough and no need to converse as a couple because each one hears for himself or herself.

R: Not with me and my wife, we do talk time after time.

I: Okay.

R: We say the issue of safety is in a person's hands.

I: Like here, how do you recognize a person who is suffering from AIDS? Just by looking at a person.

R: We see signs.

I: What signs?

R: There are others [some] who have rashes all over the body. Others [Some] have swellings.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: For you, do you see any goodness in testing blood?

R: Yes, you have to know whether you have it or not in your body.

I: Okay.

R: If you have it then you just start caring for yourself.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: What advice can you give to people who say, its better just to stay without testing blood?

R: The advice I can give is that, its not good for such people to just stay without knowing their body condition. I can tell these people that, you can be staying thinking that you don't have when you have it. And if people who have it don't go for testing it means they will keep on destroying anybody they sleep with.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: Now they are some people who upon being found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV] say, Its when I will become a womanizer and sleep with anybody on my way.

What piece of advice can you give to such people?

R: Of course I can advise such people that, what you are doing is bad. You need just to stay as per your situation of HIV. But if you decide deliberately to do more sex after knowing your HIV status then you are doing wrong. Imagine you sleep with a woman who has no kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], it means that woman has taken it and she will sleep with other men and so on, it means it continues to spread all over.

I: Okay.

R: But if such people refuse to stop and continue sleeping around, you just leave them, since it's their heart's desire to do those things.

I: Okay.

R: Indeed.

I: The survey people started visiting you people sometime back in 90s. Do you see some things which we need to improve so that our survey goes on well in future?

R: (Disturbed by some passers-by and later on returns to the conversation).

I: Many people whom we visit may have good ideas about how our project should be run. Since you are one of such people in the survey we want to hear your views on what we can be doing so that more people come and test their blood.

R: [asks to repeat the question as he was partly attending to the passers-by]

I: Am saying many people are sometimes not free as you have shown with your wife, that both of you have agreed to be tested.

R: E-e-e.

I: Yes, sometimes people do not consent or agree because of the approach of the survey people. So we can't tell why maybe not many people are coming to test. But you can know since you stay in the village. So what am asking you is, what are your views on all this? What should be done so that most people come for VCT?

R: Okay, since it's a project in which you explain first to an individual and the individual cannot refuse.

I: Okay.

R: Because its also helpful to us, since we want to know our bodies, so I don't think people can refuse since you start chatting with somebody first, before you test him, it's

just okay. Now through chatting with people before you test them, you will know what you want from them.

I: Okay. Thank you very much.

R: Welcome.

I: The other big issue on blood testing is behavioral change. You find that somebody is counseled not to do certain things but you still find such people continuing to do those things. For instance, you may talk of the pandemic that AIDS is dangerous but you still find out that some people do not understand. Why are people so resistant to change in your own understanding?

R: Of course you people need to help the nation of Malawi to change and that's why you find some of us like me very open with you.

I: okay.

R: Yes, because of your hardworking that's why we welcome you each time you come.

I: Thank you.

R: Yah.

I: Between the radio messages and the messages from the VCT counselors, which messages touch you most on blood testing or HIV?

R: You mean from the radio and from the counselors?

I: Yes.

R: Let me say both are good.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: Is it so?

R: Of course the radio just announces but you explain and we have time to chat face to face.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: If you compare your lifestyle before you met the kafukufuku [Chichewa for research] and now that you have met them, do you see any change in your life? Especially on what the survey is doing?

R: You mean satisfaction or what?

I: What I mean is that before you met the survey guys, it means hearing of AIDS was only through the radio. But meeting us its like we are the third people in addition to radio, and church people. What changes can you point then on your life?

R: For me no, I know they started in 2000 something, but I can not point any change, you have found me like this and when you come you shall find me the same.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: No when we visit you people who are in the survey here in the village. Probably people should be speaking something about you people in the survey. What do people say about you?

R: Of some people say, you are selective, because you don't visit the whole village, why do you select doors or houses to visit? That's what some people say.

I: Do you then chat properly with such friends, because its like you were chosen alone in this village?

R: No am not segregated in any way because am the only one in the village who is in the survey.

I: Like the traditions of most Malawians do parents here in village free to talk about AIDS and blood testing to their children?

R: Yes the parents are open, they explain to their children that the world is now dangerous. If not they say, you are going to die with disease. I have seen this in many families where people talk to their children.

I: Okay.

R: For instance in that next village they were two daughters who could not heed advice from their parents on the dangers of HIV and we have buried both of them now because of womanizing/sleeping around.

I: Were they of the same family?

R: Not necessarily the same family but rather neighbors only that they were more or less the same family.

I: Okay.

R: So because of womanizing going in beer halls in Mchinji. And they did not even take two years, they were gone.

I: Aaah.

R: E-e-e-e.

I: But parents tried to tell them that this is bad.

R: Yes the parents were advising these daughters but it remained to the daughters to take their parents advice seriously.

I: Okay.

R: E-ee-e.

I: Do you have children yourself who have reached the age that you can start advising them on the dangers of HIV?

R: I don't have a child, its six years now, my wife has no children.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: Did you say, you are alone in your family? Or you have some sisters?

R: I have sisters but very young one of them is 3 years.

I: Then I think you can't say anything to them.

R: But I have brothers who are old like myself.

I: So have you ever shared some knowledge on VCT issues as we are doing now?

R: I have not yet shared with them on VCT, because they have never stayed here, they stay with their uncle somewhere at [VILLAGE NAME].

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: And you say your heart did not beat fast when you were first approached by the VCT people to test your blood?

R: My heart did not beat faster.

I: Okay.

R: I was as any person, otherwise, I would not have given them my finger to prick if I had some worry. But I told them that do you job as far as you know it.

I: Okay.

R: E-e-e.

I: Did you say the village head here is [NAME]?

R: Yes, this is [VILLAGE] and the boundary is the road.

I: So you say she does not stand let's say on a meeting and tell her people the importance of blood test and dangers of HIV?

R: I have not heard her frequently saying something on VCT, and she does not usually call for meetings. You know she is a female village head, she was given [the position] just to follow the custom. But otherwise most issues of the village are run by the man of that house, where you found me when you were coming.

I: Okay.

R: Yes.

I: What reactions do people show who have been told that they are HIV positive?

R: You mean if they have it?

I: Yes.

R: There they have never shared with me.

I: Before we end our chatting, do you have something to comment or add in connection with what we have discussed on blood testing today?

R: Even if I ask, I was tested I saw the results for myself, even if I ask there will be nothing to happen.

I: We still ask because we people answer people differently and depending on the

question is simple or difficult to the person asked. It might also happen that maybe during the time these VCT people came you never thought of something but during this period of time you may have comments and questions.

R: My question then is, if a person has been found with it, what do you do?

I: There are several ways in which that person can be assisted, we may write a letter and give that person so that when he starts getting sick, he can go to the hospital and get free ARVs which the government has for its citizens who cannot afford to buy on their own. The ARVs are meant to prolong a person's life. Indeed, I know this maybe not well known here in the village but it's spoken on the radio now and again. That's why its good to know one's status on HIV so that, if you are found with it you can access such free drugs.

R: Okay. That was my only question.

I: People have also said quite a lot on gifts the VCT people have been giving since 1998 till today. Do you have any comment of such gifts?

R: You mean on gifts/

I: Yes.

R: Gifts were given to us whether lifebuoy soap, but at the end this other time I was give lifebuoy and 2ufresh soap.

I: Okay.

R: Of course when they came in one of their many journeys, they asked me about the foods I had in my house, what I possessed.

I: Okay.

R: If you don't' have certain things they asked, they could write them down.

I: Do you have anybody, whom you know that he was found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], don't mention the name.

R: You mean here?

I: Yes.

R: Of course I remember of 2000, one was found in this village.

I: Okay.

R: Of course when they came this time I rumor heard that everybody at [VILLAGE] has been found with it.

I: After hearing that, did the people who were suspected of being found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], were they chatting with their friends as usual?

R: People chat with them just good.

I: Have they changed anything in their habits or not?

R: Aa-a-a.

I: Especially to couples who were said to have the virus.

R: Only one person but the rest are just looking ok and fat.

I: Do friends still greet the person you are talking about.

R: They greet him without problems.

I: Do they play bawo with him?

R: Very much so.

I: Am asking this because some people think that if you are found with kachilombo [Chichewa term for HIV], they interpret you as being a sinner.

R: But its not like that.

I: Okay.

R: Not as such, here people still chat with her.

I: Let me thank you that you gave me some time to chat with you. If you don't have any question then this marks the end of our chatting. Let me that you again \_\_\_\_ for answering our questions so that we know what is going on here at [VILLAGE].

R: You can be coming no problem. [Laughs]

I: This marks the end of our interview with \_\_\_\_ ID#38708 on the 21<sup>st</sup> July 2006 in [VILLAGE]. Thank you!

#### Interviewer **Notes**

The respondent was called from the business of carpentry to be interviewed. He preferred indirect short answers at times. Otherwise he was able to say his mind on most questions posed to him.