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Individuals have the right to avoid sex with partners unwilling to test for HIV but do not have a right to force them to test for HIV

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Running head: No right to force HIV testing

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Dear Editor,

We appreciate the thoughtful response and largely agree with the points raised on serosorting for risk reduction and coercion. The focus of our paper was to point out coerced testing in the context of expanding self-testing, and the importance of promoting *voluntary* testing.

Negotiated safety arrangements between partners could be useful for HIV prevention.^{1,2}

Within these settings, improving effective communication skills to persuade, rather than coerce, a partner to HIV test is important. An individual has the right to self-protection when there is concern regarding a sexual partner's HIV serostatus, and has the right to refuse sex with their partner who declines testing for HIV. However, this does not mean they can force someone else to test for HIV against their will, even if it is ultimately for that person's benefit

or good. We acknowledge that balancing an individual's right to self-protection and another's right to autonomy raises ethical conflicts and is not always easy to resolve.³ The World Health Organization (WHO) and The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) HIV self-testing guidelines opposes coerced HIV test in any setting, including from sexual partners.⁴

We acknowledge that what constitutes coercive testing is clear in its extreme manifestations but is less well-defined when it overlaps with pressured testing that may be motivated by altruism or self-protection. In order to explore the nuances of how men defined and experienced coerced HIV testing, we subsequently conducted a mixed-methods study in the same cohort. This study found that pressure to test for HIV occurs on a spectrum, with clear instances of coercion (e.g. threats to lose employment). At the same time, we also found examples where a man pressured their partner to receive an HIV test 'in the name of love'.⁵

The main conclusion of our letter is about highlighting the possibility for coerced testing, especially in decentralized settings. To be clear, we agree that men have the right to withhold sex as part of an HIV risk reduction strategy. Further research is needed to better understand the risk of coerced HIV testing in diverse settings.⁶

Kind regards,

Jason J. Ong, Chongyi Wei, Stephen Pan, Hongyun Fu, Joseph D. Tucker

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