The Four-fathers of HIV: Ignorance, Impoverishment, Inadequacy and Inequality

Lauren Rueda
Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM); University of Botswana
University of California—San Diego, La Jolla, CA

Introduction

HIV and AIDS have been perceived as a biological disease in the Western society. However, in the Sub-Saharan Africa, where the disease is more prevalent, it is not only a biomedical issue, but it is also contributed by cultural and economical problems. Looking at the trends of HIV and AIDS prevalence over the years, the age range continually increases, on the higher and because more people are receiving treatment and prolonging their life, but also, as the younger and because children, girls in particular, are starting to contract the disease at a younger age (Abdela, 2006). Throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, young women of ages 15-24 are twice as likely to be living with HIV/AIDS than young men (UNICEF, 2004). Through comprehensive surveys, the knowledge of university age women can help identify any existing patterns as far as sexual behavior, as well as confirm current knowledge or popular beliefs about HIV and how it is spread.

Methods

Twenty-question surveys were administered only to women on the University of Botswana campus. Women were approached as long as they were not with males, in groups over four people, or in a busy area. The University of Botswana educates about 15,000 students a year both male and female. With such a large student population it is difficult to trick private areas to administer surveys, but it is even more difficult to get students to agree to take the time to change their location all for a survey that they see no immediate benefit from. For this reason, surveys were administered all over campus with little regard to privacy. Places such as cafeterias, laundry rooms, queues for the library, and any tables outside of classrooms were approached to administer the survey. The only privacy guard that was given was the knowledge that many of the questions on the survey were of the personal nature and that they were confidential and anonymous.

Results

Seventy-nine surveys were distributed the results are shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18 YRS</th>
<th>19 YRS</th>
<th>20 YRS</th>
<th>21 YRS</th>
<th>22 YRS</th>
<th>23 YRS</th>
<th>24-27YRS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The age range is 18-37 years. The average age is 21.3 years.

Two questions are used in conjunction to show how often couples use condoms versus how effective they believe condoms to be. The first question is “Does your partner ever use condoms?” The answer options are never, sometimes, most of the time, and always. These answers are only applicable to those who are sexually active, therefore non-condom users are identified as celibate or abstinent. Celibate refers to those who have previously engaged in sexual activity, but are no longer sexually active, whereas abstinent refers to those who have never been sexually active. The non-condom using section refers to the percentage of women who are celibate or abstinent and therefore they did not have a response for this question. The table below shows the percentages of each answer.

Discussion

The average age of 21.3 years old, young women who attend the University of Botswana are a risk group for being infected with HIV. The spread of HIV seems not to come from sustained sexual behavior such as multiple partners, but from more sudden means. The effectiveness of condoms is questionable across the board, and this is seen in the fact that less than half of the women consistently use condoms with their partners. As far as these women protecting themselves from the disease, HIV is very stigmatized and therefore makes it difficult for them to discuss the topic with their partner. This is seen in the fact that only half of the women ask their partner what their status is, and also only half ask their partner to get tested. Many of these women do not know their own HIV status, which would make it difficult to ask their partner, and ultimately protect themselves. While more in depth studies are needed, the knowledge of condom users can help identify any existing patterns as far as sexual behavior, as well as confirm current knowledge or popular beliefs about HIV and how it is spread.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the University of Botswana for allowing me to conduct my research on campus, as well as the students of the university, without whose willingness to participate this study could not have been conducted. I would also like to thank the Associated Colleges of the Midwest for their program allowing me to do interesting and stimulating research. Lastly, I would like to thank Witten Moseby for directing the independent research class from which I learned so much.

References

