

HIGH RISK SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AND HIV KNOWLEDGE AMONG MALE INMATES: A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY IN NAKURU G.K PRISON, KENYA.

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Abstract:-

Introduction: Globally the number of cases of HIV infection in prisons is greater than the general population with a prevalence ranging from six to fifty times more than the general population. When inmates are released back into the general population, they pose a threat to the population as they could serve as a reservoir of HIV infection.

Methods: The study was a cross sectional study which was conducted at the male prison in Nakuru West Sub-county in Kenya to assess the practice of high risk sexual behaviors and HIV knowledge among male inmates. A total of 295 prisoners were selected using stratified random sampling and interviewed. A structured interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the study participants. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS version 21.

Findings: The level of awareness of HIV among the prisoners was 98% with majority citing the source of information as media. 52% of the inmates did not know the meaning of HIV, 58 % knew that HIV is a virus. 86% of the respondents were aware that HIV can be transmitted from one person to another. 97.6% of the respondents were aware of sexual contact as a mode of transmission of HIV. Knowledge gaps existed in the modes of transmission with mosquito bites, sharing of clothes/ utensils and witchcraft/ spiritual being reported as modes of transmission of HIV. Masturbation was the most predominant mode of sexual practice, other sexual practices reported included oral sex, homosexuality and observing ladies. Majority (49%) of the respondents reported having multiple sexual partners, 26% reported having casual sexual contact under the influence of alcohol or drugs and 67% had had unprotected sex before incarceration. 27% of the respondents practiced oral sex while 22.7% practiced homosexuality in prison. 75% of the inmates practicing homosexuality had been coerced into the practice. Among the respondents practicing homosexuality 31% had multiple partners.

Conclusion: The level of general knowledge on HIV was high with myths and misconceptions existing on the modes of transmission and prevention of HIV. The prisoners were at risk of HIV infection as a significant number of the prisoners were practicing high risk sexual behaviors.

Key Words: HIV, knowledge, risky sexual behaviors, prisoners

INTRODUCTION:-

Globally the number of people living with HIV in 2015 was 36.7 million while the new infections accounted for 2.1 million. (UNAIDS, 2016) The number of incarcerated population globally has increased tremendously over the years. In Kenya just like other parts in the world there has been an increase in the number of crimes committed which has contributed to the number of prisoners increasing. Generally across countries, the rate of HIV infection is higher among prisoners than in the general population. (WHO, 2007) Prior to incarceration most prison inmates are at risk of HIV transmission as they engaged in risky sexual practices which include; having multiple sexual partners engaging in unprotected sexual contact, prostitution, drug abuse, Intravenous Drug Use and engaging in anal sex through homosexuality. Most prisoners who are infected with HIV acquire it before incarceration but the incarceration period also exposes them to risk of HIV transmission which could be attributed to overcrowding in the prisons which are male predominated, engaging in unprotected anal sex and oral sex. Most of the inmates are circumstantial homosexuals due to being confined to the prison precincts which are male dominated and lack of conjugal visits. Across countries there is evidence that sexual violence occurs in the prisons which could further increase the chances of transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among the inmates. The existence sexual violence in prisons has been decried for a long time, but in many countries there has been little or no societal outcry for its victims, and consequently little action to address it (Okie, 2007)

In Kenya just like other countries in the world the number of prisoners has been increasing tremendously. Further to this the rate of HIV infection in the prisons is higher than the entire population in the country. A study done in Lang'ata Women and Kamiti Maximum Prisons two of the correctional facilities in Kenya found that more than half(56%) of the prisoners were infected with HIV.(Musili & Mbatia, 2016).Health education is an essential component in the prevention and control of HIV. The prisoners and the staff working in prison should be adequately informed on modes of HIV transmission and its prevention. The dissemination of this information should be done in a similar way as it is done for the general population because prisoners are at a higher risk of infection. Studies across countries including low and middle income countries have shown the need for information and education programs. Designed programmes for HIV prevention can improve prisoners' knowledge about HIV/AIDS. Knowledge alone is not adequate but it is a precursor to behavior change to enhance uptake of preventive measures towards HIV infection. (WHO, 2007)

Prisoners may require the provision of preventive measures like condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV. This has been much debated as the availing of condoms in the prisons may be misinterpreted. Studies done show that even where condoms, are provided to prisoners in theory, they are not accessible to them. (MacDonald, 2005) If condoms are to be provided and used by the prisoners they should be readily available throughout and the prisoners should be able to access them in a discreet way to avoid embarrassment. Majority of the authority in the prisons have not been supporting the provision of condoms which may hinder the implementation of this strategy. Some prison authorities argue that providing condoms would send a mixture of messages and may be interpreted as condoning sexual relations. (Okie, 2007). In African context sex between two men may be considered a taboo and limit the acceptance of provision of condoms to enhance safe anal sex among prisoners. The aim of the study was to assess the level of knowledge on HIV and the practice of high risk sexual behaviors among male inmates in Nakuru GK prison.

METHODOLOGY

The study design was descriptive cross sectional that applied quantitative methods to collect data.

The study was carried out in Nakuru G.K. Prison which is situated in Nakuru-West sub-County in Kenya. The prison hosts all categories of prisoners and has a total capacity of 1390 inmates.

The study population consisted of convicted and un-convicted inmates in the prison. A total of 295 inmates were included in the study. Stratified random sampling was used to select the 295 respondents from the 12 houses in the prison.

A structured interviewer administered questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from the study participants. The data collected was analyzed using SPSS version 21. Ethical clearance was sought from Mount Kenya University Ethical review committee.

FINDINGS

Socio-demographic Characteristics

All the respondents were male as the study was conducted in a male prison. Majority (24.4% and 20%) respectively of the respondents were aged between 25-29 years and 18-24 years. This shows that a significant number of the prisoners are youths who are likely to be sexually active and at risk of HIV transmission through practice of risky sexual behaviors. Regarding their educational level majority of the respondents had attained primary education level and a significant number had acquired secondary education. This findings may be attributed to high literacy level among adults in Kenya. (KNBS, 2006). This implies that with high literacy levels the prisoners can be empowered with information to assist they protect themselves from infection with HIV. Majority (67.1%) of the prisoners were married at the time of the study.23.4% were single while 9.5% were either divorced/separated or widowed. Majority of the respondents (71.5%) were Christians. Regarding their occupation, majority (44.4%) of the respondents were unemployed before incarceration and 19% were casual labourers.74 % of the respondents were not convicted where as 26% were convicted at the time of the study.

Knowledge of HIV among prisoners

98% of the respondents were aware of existence of HIV infection in the study with 56.6% acquiring the information from media followed by friends 24.4% other sources cited included church, prison clinic and hospital. This findings indicate that dissemination of information regarding HIV in prisons is inadequate despite the prisoners being among groups at risk

of HIV transmission.52% of the inmates did not know the meaning of HIV and 58 % knew that HIV is a virus. 86% of the respondents were aware that HIV can be transmitted from one person to another. General knowledge and awareness of HIV was high among the prisoners. Similar findings were reported by Musili & Mbatia (2016) where they found that high level of awareness and general knowledge on HIV among prisoners in two correctional facilities in Kenya.

Table 1: Socio demographic characteristics of respondents

Socio-demographic characteristics		
Variable	Frequency	% n=295
Age(Years)		
18-24	59	20
25-29	72	24.4
30-34	56	19
35-39	59	20
40 and above	49	16.6
Education level		
None	25	8.5
Primary	138	46.8
Secondary	122	41.4
Tertiary	10	3.4
Marital status		
Divorced/Separated	28	9.5
Married	198	67.1
Single	69	23.4
Occupation before incarceration		
Business	28	9.5
Farmer	44	14.9
Casual worker	56	19
Formal employment	36	12.2
Unemployed	131	44.4
Religion		
Christian	211	71.5
Muslim	84	28.5
Status of imprisonment		
Convicted	77	26
Not convicted	218	74

Regarding the mode of transmission of HIV, the respondents were asked to indicate whether the various aspects contributed to transmission of HIV. 97.6% of the respondents reported sexual intercourse as a mode of HIV transmission, 34% mosquito bites, 22% sharing clothes/utensils, 18% kissing an infected person, 19% sharing needles and sharp objects and 8.5% spiritual/ witch craft as a mode of transmission of HIV. Misconceptions of modes of transmission like sharing of utensils and clothes, mosquito bites and witch craft may affect the uptake of preventive measures and also lead to stigmatization of people infected with HIV which negatively imparts the prevention and control of HIV/ AIDs. When asked whether oral sex contributes to transmission of HIV 86% of the respondents reported it does not whereas 3% reported that they did not know.41.4% of the respondents were not aware that HIV can be transmitted through homosexuality.81% of the respondents reported knowing someone who was infected with HIV. Similar findings were reported by Saliu & Akintunde (2014) where general knowledge was high among prisoners but there were myths and misconceptions regarding transmission of HIV.

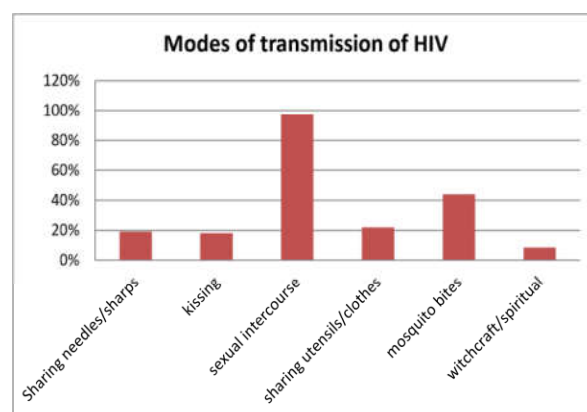


Fig. 2: Reported modes of transmission of HIV

When asked whether having one sexual partner can reduce the risk of one getting infected with HIV, 63% reported “yes”. 67% of the respondents knew that HIV testing and counseling services were available in prison while 33% of them were not aware of the services being offered in prison. 24% of the respondents believed that HIV infection is curable. This misconception may inhibit the uptake of preventive measures among the inmates and increase the chances of engaging in risky behavior. The prisoner’s general knowledge on HIV was high with a mean of 67% (14 %- 98% at 95% CI) among the respondents with knowledge gaps on the modes of transmission and prevention of HIV. Similar findings were reported by NASCOP (2012) on the MARPS surveillance report in Kenya that reported high knowledge level on the general awareness of HIV/AIDS transmission and prevention among inmates in Kenyan prisons.

Table 2: Respondents knowledge on HIV/ AIDs Variable

Variable	% n= 295
awareness of HIV	98
Meaning of HIV	48
HIV is a virus	58
HIV is transmissible	86
Modes of transmission of HIV	
Sexual intercourse	97.6
Kissing an infected person	82
sharing utensils/clothes	81
sharing needles and sharp objects	19
Witchcraft/ spiritual	91.5
Mosquito bites	66
homosexuality risk of HIV transmission	58.6
Oral sex risk of HIV transmission	14
one sexual partner can reduce the risk of HIV	63
knowledge of HIV testing & counseling services	67
HIV is curable	76

Sexual practices among prisoners

Sexual practices reported in the prison included Masturbation, oral sex, homosexuality and observing ladies. Masturbation was the most predominant mode of sexual practice (45%) among the prisoners as indicated in figure 2. Other sexual practices reported included oral sex (27%), homosexuality (23%) and observing ladies (5%). Regarding homosexuality, Majority (82.4%) of the respondents agreed that homosexuality was being practiced in the prison. 34.4% of the respondents were aware of someone who practices homosexuality in the prison. When asked about the action taken to those who practice homosexuality, majority (46%) said they don’t report them, 26% reported them to the authority, 15% beat them up and 13% were transferred to different houses. 75% of the respondents practicing homosexuality had been forced while only 25% had consented to homosexuality. This indicates that there is need for protection of the prisoners who may be forced to engage in a risky sexual practice. All the respondents reported that there were no condoms available in the prison. Lack of condoms in the prison may greatly contribute to the prisoners practicing homosexuality in the prison having unprotected anal sex which may greatly predispose them to HIV infection. Similar findings were reported

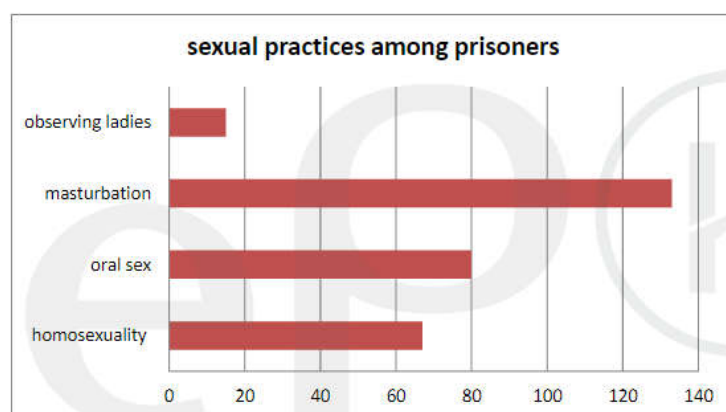


Fig.2 Reported predominant Sexual practices among prison

A significant number of the respondents were practicing risky sexual behavior before incarceration and during the period of incarceration. Majority (49%) of the respondents reported having multiple sexual partners before incarceration. 26% reported having casual sexual contact under the influence of alcohol or drugs and 67% had had unprotected sex before incarceration. This findings are worrisome as they indicate that the prisoners had engaged in risky sexual behavior before imprisonment which may predispose them to transmission of HIV which may be transmitted to other prisoners. 54% of the respondents knew their HIV status despite the services being provided in the prison. However 33% of the respondents were not aware of the existence of this services which shows that advocacy requires to be done to enhance the utilization of the services by all inmates. 27% of the respondents practiced oral sex while 23% practiced homosexuality. This finding indicates that a significant number are at risk of HIV transmission coupled by the existence of misconception on the risk of HIV transmission through oral and anal sex. The findings are consistent with the findings of a study done in Nigeria (Saliu & Akintunde, 2014). Among the respondents practicing homosexuality 31% had multiple partners within the prison. This sexual practices coupled with no availability of condoms is likely to predispose the prisoners to HIV infection during the period of incarceration. Prisoners require to be provided with condoms as Studies done have shown prisoners to be among other vulnerable groups in the population which have a higher risk of transmission of HIV than the general population. (UNAIDS, 2016). A study done in Kenya in two correctional facilities found that 56% of the prisoners were infected with HIV. Lack of condoms in the prisons will result in the prisoners engaging in unprotected anal sex. This may result in high rates of HIV infection in prisons which has been reported in several studies across countries. (WHO, 2007). The inmates require to be empowered with information and preventive measures to enhance behavior change.

Table 3: Practice of high risk sexual behaviors among prisoners

Variable	Frequency	% n=295
Multiple sexual partners outside prison Yes	145	49
No	150	51
Having casual sex under influence of alcohol/ drugs outside prison Yes	77	26
No	218	74
sex without condom outside prison Yes	198	67
No	97	33
Knowledge of HIV status Yes	159	54
No	136	46
Practice of oral sex in prison Yes	80	27
No	215	73
Practice of Homosexuality in prison Yes	67	22.7
No	228	77.3
Multiple sexual partners in prison Yes	92	31
No	203	69

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Knowledge about HIV was generally high among prisoners with existence of myths and misconceptions regarding the modes of transmission HIV, risky sexual practices like homosexuality and oral sex and prevention. The prisons authority needs to scale up dissemination of information on HIV in the prison to ensure that all the prisoners are empowered with

accurate information on HIV and its prevention. A significant number of the prisoners are at risk of transmission of HIV as their exists practice of risky sexual behaviors among them before incarceration and during the period of incarceration. There is need for advocacy on avoidance of risky behaviors and the provision of preventive measures like condoms in the prison coupled with the provision of counseling and testing services to all the inmates.

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