

SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS AIDS IN GHANA AND NIGERIA, 1987

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INTRODUCTION

These data form part of a four country survey on knowledge and attitudes of adults towards AIDS, as well as respondents use of barrier contraception. The countries included in this report are Ghana and Nigeria. These two countries have relatively few cases of AIDS - Ghana had reported 127 and Nigeria 2 cases at the time of the survey but there is significant public awareness of AIDS and its consequences.

The survey was designed to be a quick and inexpensive way to assess public understanding of the AIDS problem in these countries.

METHODS

The sample in Ghana comprised 107 patients attending three outpatient clinics in Africa. This was a non-random selection of subjects interviewed over a three day period. Interviews were conducted by three very experienced interviewers trained over several hours by one of the authors. The Nigerian sample of 100 persons was derived from a non-random of households in twelve census enumeration areas in Benin City. Interviews were again conducted by experienced interviewers who were trained prior to the survey.

The data were collected using both open and closed ended questions on a standardized instrument. The questionnaire covered such topics as the respondent's own description of AIDS, the respondent's assessment of his or her own risk as well as the risk of others getting the disease, how AIDS has affected their sexual and contraceptive behavior, their willingness to

use condoms and spermicides to reduce transmission of the disease, and their recommendations for solving the the AIDS problem. Data processing and analysis were done at Family Health International (FHI) in North Carolina, USA.

Caution should be exercised in the interpretation of these results. Although individual interviews were conducted with considerable care, the sample were small and were drawn in an unscientific fashion.

RESULTS

The sample was almost evenly divided between men and women (45 percent male and 55 percent female). 47 percent of the respondents were from 15 to 29 years of age and 53 percent were aged 30-55. 45 percent were never or formerly married, while 55 percent were currently married.

Virtually all (90 percent of these 207 persons had heard of AIDS, and 70 percent were able to describe one or more aspects of the disease - that it kills, weakens bodily defenses and causes weight loss, among other features. About three quarters correctly reported that transmission can occur by sexual contact, 29 percent said it could occur through blood transfusion, 3 percent mentioned homosexual contact, and 12 percent reported AIDS is transmitted by unsterile needle. But over 70 percent believed that AIDS can be spread through kissing or by breast feeding.

Respondents were asked to define groups at risk of contracting AIDS. Prostitutes were deemed at highest risk, followed by sexually active single men, sexually active single women, married men, married women, and children, respectively. These assessments varied little by the age, sex or marital status of the respondent.

Respondents were asked if the AIDS epidemic had changed their sexual behavior in the past 12 months. 79 percent reported no change in sexual activities, 16 percent reported fewer sexual contacts, and 1 percent reported condom use. 57 percent of never married males and 28 percent of never married females reported multiple sexual partners in the past year. Among currently married male respondents, 48 percent reported multiple sexual partners in the past year.

With regard to prevention, 64 percent thought abstinence would prevent AIDS, and 59 percent believed that sex with only regular partners can help prevent transmission. 64 percent said use of condoms, and 21 percent said use of spermicides, prevented the disease.

Among those included in the study, 34 percent had used condoms (28 percent of the men and 40 percent of the women). 22 percent used spermicides (no difference between male and female respondents). They were then asked if they would be willing to use the contraceptive methods for disease prophylaxis. Nearly 60 percent of the respondents said they were willing to use condoms, about one third were unwilling and 8 percent unsure. Only one third were willing to use spermicides.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that, as of early 1987, knowledge of AIDS was widespread among the adult population of Ghana and Nigeria. In addition, most of those interviewed were aware that the disease may be spread through heterosexual contact, the principal means of transmission in Africa. Particularly for those with multiple sex partners, programmes and services are needed to reduce the spread of AIDS. Barrier methods of contraception — condoms and spermicides — must be made more widely available to those willing to use them and more effectively promoted among others at high risk of exposure to AIDS.

FHI is keenly interested in collaborative research on AIDS. We are actively seeking funds for additional projects in Africa and elsewhere, and hope to initiate studies of the acceptability of condoms and spermicides among high-risk populations around the world.