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CONDOM USE IN HOTELS/MOTELS

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1. BACKGROUND

The Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, and has a population of 6.5 million. Santo Domingo, the capital, has 2 million inhabitants. In addition, nearly 1 million Dominicans reside legally and illegally in the United States.

The first cases of AIDS were discovered in 1983. By September 1989, there had been over 1,250 AIDS cases registered of which 40% were female. At the present, the most frequent mode of transmission is between heterosexual couples.

With the idea of interrupting or reducing the HIV transmission, the MOH began in 1985 a massive campaign to promote condom use using posters, stickers, as well as billboards, TV and radio spots.

An innovative program was also initiated to distribute free condoms to groups considered to have high risk behaviors such as: female and male sexual workers, homosexuals, HIV patients, and prisoners.

The Dominican Republic, like many developing countries, does not have a cultural setting regarding sex relations as easy as those where people say "Your apartment or mine?" A large number of people live together with their families, and usually the only opportunity to have casual sexual relations is in the one night stand hotels/motels.

Those who have cars go to transient motels. Normally, they are more expensive but do not require registration nor does one have to show his/her face. After entering, the car is driven into a garage and a metal door is closed. The couple descend off the car and enter into a private room through a side door. In the "one night stand hotels" the persons enter on foot, and are much cheaper.

In 1987, the Ministry of Health issued a mandate through which all the types of hotels and motels should have two condoms in each room, even though the client has not requested them.

An observation survey conducted in mid-1988 in approximately 100 establishments, showed that over 70% of them complied with the Ministry's mandate. Of course, aside from preliminary meetings with proprietors in order to explain the measure, periodic supervision and temporary closings of those not complying with the norm were enforced. It was noted that, in the beginning, some resisted the measure or bought expired condoms, but soon most of them complied.

2. THE STUDY

2.1 Objective

The purpose of making this study was to determine the actual use of the condom in one night stand hotel/motels of Santo Domingo and find out the possible implicit attitude change towards its use.

2.2 Methodology

5 hotels and 5 motels were selected for the study with attention to geographic distribution and the price for each room. A team of 10 observers were trained to take note of what happened to the condoms after "the couple" had left their room. Two of these observations were made at an interval of 8 months - one in 1988 and the other in 1989.

2.3 Operational Definition of Condom Use in Hotel and Motel Rooms

OPEN, USED : ONE OR MORE CONDOMS FOUND OPEN; EVIDENCE OF USE
ONE OR MORE ENVELOPES FOUND.

OPEN, NOT USED : ONE OR MORE CONDOMS FOUND OPEN BUT WHOLLY
PARTIALLY UNROLLED,

FULL OF WATER, AIR OR ANY OTHER MATERIAL EXCEPT
SEMEN. ENVELOPES WERE TORN AND CONDOMS WERE
INTACT.

OPEN, BROKEN : ONE OR MORE CONDOM TORN, WITH OR WITHOUT SEMEN
EVEN IF CLASIFIED OPEN, USED.

2.4 Results of the First Visit

67% did not use the condoms, meaning that the condoms were found intact. 30% were found broken or without evidence of having been used. 40% were found opened but unused. 9% of condoms not found probably because they took them with them or, less likely, they flushed the condom and the wrapper down the toilet.

2.5 Comparison of the First and Second Visit

- The number of users increased in the hotels from 12 to 17%.
- The number of users in the motels decreased from 23 to 18%.
- The proportion of users did not change during the year. It remained at 18.5%
- The majority of clients in the hotels that had not touched the condoms before, now did something with them.
- The number of condoms that disappeared increased from 8.5% to 18.2%

2.6 Broken

When we take the total number of open condoms and the number found broken, we find that breakage increased in the hotels. However, it decreased significantly by 9.5% in the motels. This suggests that the majority of these breakages were either intentional or due to misuse. Since the only difference between motels and hotels is the price, the difference of breakage could be attributed to the type of person that goes to the motels who are wealthier and/or more educated.

2.7 Suggested Attitudes

The personalities of the Dominicans and, possibly, of people of other nations can be inferred by the other results:

- 57.8% - Did not use them = Indifferent/passive non-users.
- 2.9% - Broke them without use = Aggressive.
- 4.9% - Opened them and did not use them = Careless/clownish.
- 16.1% - Took them with them = "I'm paying for this."
- 18.2% - Used them correctly = wise users.

Those who used them correctly also had particular characteristics. For example, in 30% of those who used them correctly, we found that more than 1 condom was used and, in 2 rooms, 3 condoms were found to have been used.

In 3 rooms, condom wrappers were found that differed from the condoms provided, which shows that there are those who are untrusting and bring their own condoms.

Finally, the motel users had a very low percentage of condom breakage, which is a good indicator that many failures can be corrected.

3. CONCLUSIONS

- 1) There was a high percentage of hotels/motels that complied with the mandate of offering condoms to the incoming clients.
- 2) The percentage of condoms used kept steady at a level of 18.0%.
- 3) The percentage of condom breakage in motels was reduced from 9% to 3%.