

ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish gender perceptual differences and their effects on the implementation of Policy in the prevention of HIV/AIDS in Makoni District, Zimbabwe. The role of women as caregivers to HIV/AIDS sufferers is also highlighted and how this has deprived them towards social, political and economic development. The source of the data used was the World Health Organisation (WHO) project on Family Planning and AIDS. The sample of the study comprised of 100 men and women from Makoni District, Zimbabwe. In addition to the survey question, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted. The FGD data complimented the survey results with qualitative information.

The objectives of the study looked at people's attitudes, cultural practices and sexual practices. These were analysed to determine how the gender issues within them affected the HIV/AIDS prevention strategies. The five major prevention strategies focused on in this study are:

- promotion of condom use;
- reduction of the number of sexual partners;
- sticking to one sexual partner;
- control and Treatment of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs); and
- Voluntary Counseling and Testing (VCT) for HIV to prevent vertical transmission of the disease.

Although, the majority of the women indicated that it was acceptable for a married woman to ask her husband to use condoms, this was disputed by the findings from the FGDs. Issues of trust and fidelity were raised, but many men and women reported that they were not prepared to confront one another. The FGD results revealed that the men assert that it is normal for every man to have extra marital relationships, therefore they do not see anything wrong with it. It also came out that there are women who both have no income or partner to support them financially and are living in absolute poverty. These

women, if anything, are more likely to increase the number of their sexual partners than reduce them so that they increase their economic base in order to support their families.

It has been established that for effective treatment and control of STDs, there is need for both partners to cooperate and seek treatment at the same time. However, the findings from this study revealed that lack of communication between sexual partners hampered the treatment of these diseases. On the other hand, the men indicated that talking to their wives about STDs would compel them to say where they got it. On the other hand the women reported that their men would accuse them of infidelity if they told them of an STD.

FGD results however revealed that men and women were prepared to have HIV testing so that they would know of their status before planning a family. The gender perceptual differences on HIV/AIDS prevention have been identified as follows:

- the need for male compliance to use condoms effectively;
- the fear of losing trust by suggesting condom use; and
- acceptance of male promiscuity by society that perpetuates that risky behaviour and exposure to HIV/AIDS infection and lack of communication between sexual partners, are a hindrance for effective control and treatment of STDs.

