

## ABSTRACT

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES REGARDING HIV/AIDS AMONG WOMEN EXPOSED TO HIV VOLUNTARY COUNSELLING AND TESTING AND THOSE NOT EXPOSED

**Beverley Samuels**

The AIDS epidemic is affecting women and girls in increasing numbers in the Caribbean. The Caribbean has the highest prevalence of HIV outside of the Sub-Saharan Africa. Among women 83% of AIDS cases diagnosed are in the 15-49 year old age group. HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death among women.

Voluntary Counselling and Testing has become increasingly important in national and international HIV prevention and care efforts. Jamaica has introduced Voluntary Counselling and Testing in their Prevention of Mother To Child Programme since 2002. However, Voluntary Counselling and Testing is not yet integrated in the Health Service so that it is accessible by all women.

This study compares the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices of women between the age of 15 – 49 years who are exposed to Voluntary Counselling and Testing and those not exposed.

A structured, interviewer guided questionnaire was administered to two hundred and ninety-three (293) women. One hundred and thirty-seven (137) were Antenatal women exposed to Voluntary Counselling and Testing and one hundred and fifty-six (156) Family Planning clients not exposed.

Three focus group discussions were conducted with women among the 15-49 year age group residing in St. Ann.

The results showed a generally high level of knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS. There are however some beliefs and practices that are not in keeping with knowledge level such as the belief that HIV can be transmitted by using the same utensils as HIV infected persons and from mosquito bite.

High risk behaviours are well known, for example, unprotected sexual intercourse but the practices of prevention measures did not reflect the level of awareness. Overall women exposed to Voluntary Counselling and Testing have not shown any significantly higher risk reduction behaviour than women not exposed.

Although Voluntary Counselling and Testing is accepted in principle much will need to be done to ensure confidentiality, and to allay women's fears of stigmatisation and discrimination. Voluntary Counselling and Testing also requires more social marketing and promotion within special groups of women.

**Keywords: Comparative, Knowledge, Attitude, Practice, Women exposed, Women not exposed, Voluntary Counselling and Testing.**