

## **Abstract**

The Heterosexual spread of HIV/AIDS is greatly increased by the inability of many women to protect themselves from the disease. Applying a gender aware approach to combat the HIV/AIDS epidemic is to examine how the social relationships between women and men reveal new perspectives on the epidemic and to provide new responses to it.

A study was done of women who called into the National HIV/STD Helpline.

The objectives of the study were to determine the socio-demographic distribution of callers, to determine factors that contributed to knowledge and practice of safe sex, to determine the role of gender relationships in the practice of safe sex and finally to determine the links between risk status and personal behaviour. A convenience sample was taken. A total of fifty women were interviewed.

Significant results from the study centered around gender relationships and risk taking behaviour. Risk taking activities such as multiple partners, irregular condom use, an self reported incidence of STDs were an indicator of the reality of risk and need for intervention of this group.

General views of callers were that they had a "good relationship" with their partners, however, 56% of callers stated that their partner would become angry at request of a condom.

Seventy-two percent of the callers stated that they were at-risk for HIV/AIDS. Suspicion of out-side heterosexual or bisexual relationships were seen as the main reasons for perception of risk.

Current studies have shown that women of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds are being affected with HIV/AIDS. Having control over her body, feeling empowered within her sexual relationships enable women to practice and request safe sex. Producing optimal behaviour change is the goal of Health Education and Promotion. Issues of gender awareness and gender relationships must be instituted into programmes for change to take place.