

ABSTRACT

Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices of Inmates in Jamaica's Prison System Regarding HIV/AIDS

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Local mass media and us as individuals have been accused of insensitivity to HIV/AIDS issues and no previous research has been undertaken to examine inmates' level of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices regarding HIV/AIDS in Jamaica's Prison System.

The aim of this study was to determine at some level the extent of knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Practices of inmates and to determine if information of this nature will have any influence on our societies perception of their role in contributing to the prevalence of the infection in the wider community.

The survey instrument was a questionnaire of thirty-four (34) items revised after exposure to a pre-test in both the male and female prisons. It was exposed to a random sample of one-hundred and eighty (180) prisoners. Associations were determined using SPSS 7.5 software.

The respondents varied in age from as young as eighteen (18) years of age to as mature as thirty-four (34) and above. The male inmates showed a high level of awareness about factors which makes one susceptible to HIV/AIDS, but at the same time a considerable number of inmates expressed great doubt about certain factors and demonstrated the tendency to support misconceptions.

There was evidence of a low level of awareness of the vulnerability of women to HIV than men. A high percentage of the inmates were not aware that HIV could be transmitted by vaginal sex between a man and a woman without a condom, but consequently a high percentage of the inmates were aware that HIV/AIDS could be prevented by avoiding anal sex. Hence this is part of the misconception that AIDS is a homosexual disease.

As high as 23.3% of the inmates surveyed knew themselves to be HIV positive, whilst 68.3% believe that they can protect themselves by testing themselves and their partner for AIDS before engaging in unprotected sex.

Inmates need to be targeted as a special group of people who will eventually have a vital role in National HIV education – prevention efforts. The gravity of the HIV epidemic and its abominable consequences for Correctional Services should make it a high priority within the Ministry of National Security and Justice in close collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

There should be recognition of the rights and dignity of every individual, including those who are socially marginalized.