

## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN AIDS RELATED SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES AMONG PEOPLE IN OCHO RIOS, ST. ANN, JAMAICA.**

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Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), caused by infection with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), is now of pandemic proportions and taking a severe toll in human suffering and death. The stigma attached to AIDS, with fear of contagion, moral issues relating to drug use and sexual orientation have greatly affected individuals and communities experiencing HIV/AIDS. For persons with HIV/AIDS community based care may also be a problem because of rejection by family members, discrimination and harassment.

A cross-sectional survey was carried out among residents of Ocho Rios, St. Ann, Jamaica, during February of 1998, to determine their level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS; their attitude towards persons with HIV/AIDS; current practices toward HIV/AIDS persons known to them, and their level of support for community based care of these persons.

A total of 188 questionnaires were completed from a sample size of 276, selected from the 1997 Electoral Register, using the systematic sampling technique.

The results showed a generally high level of knowledge of HIV/AIDS among respondents, although a few myths persist.

Attitude towards persons with HIV/AIDS were mainly positive, although ambivalence was shown towards homosexuals with HIV/AIDS. The current practices of those who knew of persons with HIV/AIDS revealed a hesitancy to become too closely involved in spite of being sympathetic towards them.

Respondents were also supportive of care of persons with HIV/AIDS at the community level but showed indecision and unwillingness to participate in the care of persons other than their own family or close friends diagnosed with HIV/AIDS.

The findings suggest that while compassion, acceptance and understanding are being shown towards persons afflicted with HIV/AIDS, the underlying fear of contagion persists, and prevents persons from reaching out to those suffering from this deadly disease beyond their immediate family.