

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES THIRTY-THIRD ASSEMBLY OF CIM DELEGATES

GENDER ASPECTS OF HIV/AIDS

Jamaica is chosen by the UN as one of four 'champion country' in Latin America and the Caribbean and one of 32 nations in the world which will play a leading role in showcasing the necessary steps to alleviate the chronic problems of HIV AIDS. Jamaica is noted to have been selected because of its work carried out here to protect and educate young people about HIV/AIDS.

Findings from MOH National Survey (1996) reveal that 36.0 per cent of adolescents acknowledge involvement in sexual intercourse. The mean age of initiation of sexual activity is 13 yrs for females and 11 yrs for males 10 per cent of adolescents reported being sexually abuse and 53 per cent indicated that they have never used any birth control method.

The risk of HIV infections for adolescent females in the age group 10-14 yrs was twice that for males of the same age group; and for those 15-19 yrs, it was three times as high (ESSJ, 2003)

LEGISLATION

The **Law Reform Age of Majority Act** of 1979, section 8(1) recognizes the rights of persons aged 16 to obtain medical services without parental consent. In Jamaica, the median age of first sexual experience at 15.9 yrs for boys and 17.1 yrs for girls.

In 2004, the former Minister of Health, John Junor reports that the Government is contemplating legislating that will not only protect persons with HIV/AIDS from stigma and discrimination but also persons with other forms of ailments. The objective is to normalize the condition and not single out discrimination against HIV/AIDS when there are other forms of discrimination among other health conditions. The legislation is expected to be taken to Parliament after the Bill of Rights is amended.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

On Tuesday November 21, 2003 the National Steering Committee on Orphans and Other Children Made Vulnerable by AIDS, which is headed by the Ministry of Health's Child Development Agency, with the support of UNICEF and the National AIDS Committee launched the **National Plan of Action for Orphans and Other Children Made Vulnerable by HIV/AIDS (2003-2006)**. The plan is created to support the Jamaica HIV/AIDS/STI National Strategic Plan (2003-2006). It is estimated that between 10,000 to 20,000 Jamaican children have been orphaned or made vulnerable. The plan is used as a guide for regional and parish level intervention. The focus is on conducting research on issues faced by children whose parental base has been affected by the disease, leaving them vulnerable in areas including receiving: adequate food, home-based care, housing and school fees.

The National Policy for HIV/AIDS Management in Schools

This is designed to protect students and others against discrimination. It reinforces section 23(2) of the Education Act and Regulations (1980) as it seeks to offer redress to parents and guardians in conditions when classroom access is denied, suspended or dismissed from school because of their HIV/AIDS status. The policy is criticized as 'lacking teeth' owing to the absence of punitive sanctions against discriminatory outcome. This purposive omission is designed as a technique of moral persuasion and a tool to counter-balance against stigma as opposed to a punitive outcome which may attract a hostile environment. The policy also states that no student, parent or educator is compelled to disclose his or her HIV/AIDS status to the institution or employer, and therefore cannot be ousted for not doing so. In cases of disclosure to appropriate authority, strict rules of confidentiality applies. In addition to this, the school administrator must disseminate information about the role of drugs, sexual abuse, violence and sexually transmitted infections and about prevention measures including abstinence from sex and the use of condoms.

TOURISM'S HIV/AIDS POLICY DRAFTED

The Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo) has drafted an HIV/AIDS policy to prepare the industry to address the threat of AIDS. The programme component of the policy include a series of seminars to sensitize hotelier and property owners to the programme of intervention, to heighten awareness of STI transmission and to review and draft guidelines for the sector and to provide feedback. This programme is part of a drive implemented by the Ministry of Health to educate the Jamaican workforce on the treat of the disease, to set policy guidelines for the treatment of persons infected with the disease, and to protect other employees and guests.

The National HIV/AIDS Policy

On May 12,2005, this policy was launched. It was also tabled in Parliament during the sectoral debate on May 13th by Health Minister John Junor. The vision is to protect the rights of all Jamaicans including those infected and those affected by HIV/AIDS, and to enable them to access prevention knowledge and skills, treatment, care, support and other services. Other objectives include:

- Mitigation of the socio-economic impact of HIV/AIDS on individuals, families, communities and the nation
- Providing a regulatory and legislative environment
- Treatment, care and support for persons living with or affected by HIV/AIDS

The National HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy

This was developed in 2004 and received approval from the Human Resource Committee (HRC) of Cabinet and presented to Parliament in 2005. It is based on the 10 Principles of the ILO code of practice. It recognizes HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue and should be treated like any serious illness or condition in the workplace and the encouragement of non-discriminatory attitudes against workers on the basis of real or perceived HIV status. Other principles include the recognition of the gender dimension of HIV/AIDS and therefore equal gender relations and the empowerment of women was vital to successfully preventing the spread of HIV infection.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Bailey, Wilma and McCaw-Binns, Affette (2005) Barriers to the Integration of HIV/AIDS infected/Affected children into the Jamaican School System. Main Findings:

- HIV/AIDS has created a crisis in family life. Most parents took great pains to keep their status a secret from their children
- Parents also noted that children were not performing in school due to worrying concerns of parental HIV/Status and voiced an appeal for therapeutic intervention

A 2005 Survey of Commercial Sex Workers reveal that 97% had easy access to condoms with 90% reporting condom use with clients.

The University of the West Indies HIV/AIDS Response Programme (UWIHARP)

A grant of \$4.9 million dollars from pharmaceutical company, Merck Sharp and Dohme to support the study to assess current knowledge , attitudes and practices (regarding HIV) of more than 200 regional pharmacists in the Bahamas, St. Lucia, Jamaica and Barbados. It is designed to improve the practitioner-client relationship in terms of breaches of confidentiality, loss of privacy, discrimination in the health facilities. The data is intended to assist with the planning of interventions and to strengthen the role of the pharmacist in the quest to reduce stigma and improving the services provided to and the treatment of HIV-positive people.

PROGRAMMES

CHILDREN FIRST

September 13,2005 Launched a campaign in Spanish Town against HIV/AIDS epidemic focusing on infants and adolescents. The **Bashy Bus Project** is a mobile health and Information Service which goes beyond dealing with adolescents in hospitals and health clinics but travels to different locations to counsel, educate and treat persons vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. It uses skits and drama pieces as well as tests and counseling to showcase the state-of-the –Art setting of the Bashy Bus. The bus was donate by Infinity Tours.

The Caribbean Family Planning Affiliation (CFPA)

On December 1, 2004 a regional AIDS awareness campaign was launched using a series of videos filmed in St. Lucia and Guyana as well as posters and pamphlets produced in Antigua. These were circulated across 20 Caribbean countries including Jamaica.. The new messages are aimed at young women who are at increased risk for HIV/AIDS transmission. The messages targeted at teenagers places and emphasis on the maxim ‘Say No’ and promotes the rights of these and other young women to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. The CFPA also has an ongoing program called Fighting AIDS Through Training and Education (FATE).

The Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD)

An island-wide program was launched in 2005 designed to educate hearing-impaired women and girls on the issue of violence and HIV/AIDS through seminars and skills building programme.. This one-year programme is funded by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and is developed to deliver information to assist women to protect themselves from abusers through survival and self-defense strategies as well as alternative skills which will empower women towards economic independence. These women are recognized as a vulnerable group within the community of persons with Disabilities.

UNFPA

In 2003, the educational and reproductive health care programmes received J\$102 Million in funding from the United Nations in response to the critical need to access youth-friendly reproductive services in an effort to change the soaring pregnancy and HIV/AIDS rates among young people. It is noted that globally the 10-19 cohort is the largest group of adolescents in history totally 1.2 billion. In Jamaica it is estimated that there are 530,000 adolescents which comprise 20 per cent of the total population. Birth among teens is 20 per cent of all births annually. The focus is on the World’s adolescents “in the context of changing norms and lifestyles including weakening of family support systems, amid globalization and urbanization

PEER COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION OF JAMAICA (PACJ)

August 27, 2006 disease awareness campaign was launched under the theme: “ Preventing the Spread of HIV/AIDS is Everybody’s Business... We Care. Do You?”

Noting that the 15 and 34 years account for 35 per cent of the total new reported AIDS cases in 2001. This cohort also represents a significant proportion of the labour force. The program was designed to complement and supplement the work being done by the PCAJ at the community level and involves the creation and dissemination of strategic messages using audio-visual and print media to reinforce the importance of HIV/AIDS prevention in Jamaica.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

World AIDS Day, 2004 was celebrated under the theme: “Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS :confronting the crisis”. The focus is on the increasing number of women and girls that are contracting the deadly disease. The age group 20-24 has a high rate of new infection compared to males of the same age. This is due to the prevalence of sexual relations between young women and older males. The activities include a women’s march, an exhibition and a concert in Emancipation Park, New Kingston.

Other initiatives of the Ministry has focused on reducing stigma and discrimination against persons with HIV/AIDS through the training and retraining of health officials in relation to the management of the disease. A mass media campaign which uses media personalities have been used to sensitise the public to understand that “we have to be inclusive and not reject persons with HIV/AIDS as well as to be supportive, compassionate and caring towards them. This campaign have brought positive results.

LASCO DISTRIBUTORS LIMITED

In 2002, the pharmaceutical division in partnership with an indicant company CIPLA pledged to assist the Ministry of Health’s HIV/AIDS treatment and support programme by donating a two-year supply of drugs valued at J\$300,000 that will assist in treating HIV-positive mothers and their children. The drug Nevirapine Solution, when administered to HIV-positive mothers, helps prevent the transmission of the disease to the child. A year earlier Lasco lowered the prices on HIV/AIDS medications ; A new line of LASMED (life’s Affordable Alternative) pharmaceutical products

and anti-retroviral medicines a few of which are 90 per cent cheaper than existing brand name drugs.

The Jamaica Association of Dramatic Artists

In 2005 a musical drama entitled 'positive' was sponsored by the US Embassy for an afternoon show at the Ward theatre targeting 3000 young people. The play arose out of a writers workshop organised by the National HIV/STI Control Programme of the Ministry of Health (2004). The play conveys the facts about HIV/AIDS and help the audience understand the taboos, stigmas, denials and cultural obstacles to protecting one's self from infection. The play was followed by a question and answer period that allow the cast to interact directly with the adolescent audience

The Jamaica National AIDS Committee

In 2001, the NAC outlined 10 principles for employers to implement and deal with HIV/AIDS in the Workplace. These principles are in keeping with the launch of the code of practice on HIV/AIDS and the world of work at the United Nations Special Assembly on HIV/ AIDS in New York, United States . Among the principles are:

- Employment practices should be based on the scientific and epidemiological evidence that people with HIV/AIDS infection do not pose a risk of transmission of the virus to coworkers through ordinary workplace contact
- The highest level of management should unequivocally endorse non-discriminatory employment practices and education programmes or information about HIV/AIDS

YOUTH.NOW

In February 2002, the USAID funded project launched a media campaign to speak directly to sex and teens and the reproductive health of adolescence appearing in newspapers, on television and radio. Some of the messages include:

- Go real slow...take time to know
- Mi nuh ready yet
- A big people business dat
- Since love so nice, wait 'til it's right
- Know yourself before you give yourself
- Me nah go inna di water without no life jacket

The essential thrust is to negotiate traditional customary assumption that sex is for adults and forbidden to teens and promote a more open discussion and at the same time seek to promote healthy sexual and reproductive behaviour among adolescents 10-19 yrs.

Youth.Now with the support of the Ministry of Health also established youth-friendly clinics in Balaclava and Junction, St. Elizabeth and also in May Pen, Clarendon. These clinics are receptive to young people including providing condoms, contraceptive and counseling to adolescent. The programme seek to work with clinicians to let them know what young people need. The program identifies a general confidentiality/privacy problem in service delivery as well as a need to promote better communication between parents and kids.

The International Cricket Council (ICC)

and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) are partners in a programmed aimed at using cricket's popularity to spread HIV prevention messages and reduce stigma and discrimination against HIV-positive people worldwide. The program was launched in September 2003 and is supported by data to indicate that of the estimated 42 millions people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, over 12 million live in cricket playing countries. The group started the sensitization of the 'Jamaica's Under 19 Cricket Team' who may serve as the first local set of 'ambassadors'. HIV Prevention and Stigma reduction is scheduled to become an integral part of activities for the next Cricket World Cup to be held in the West Indies in 2007. The proposal seeks to use the following approaches:

- Contact and educate young cricket players to protect self against AIDS as well as to recognize their status as role models at the community level
- Teach young people to take the message to peers and the community
- To enlist well-known cricked players to become HIV/AIDS ambassadors using their popularity to show people that persons with HIV/AIDS are not abnormal and should not be subjected to discrimination.

THE JAMAICA AIDS SUPPORT (JAS)

In September 2003, project Smiles was launched as a joint project of the Centre for HIV/AIDS Research and Educational Services (CHARES). It is a charity drive through which JAS collects items for children affected by or infected by HIV/AIDS. It is expected that the drive for the Christmas season will raise money to visit homes with gifts and bring smiles to the faces of young children in addition to providing for much needed medication, shelter and food.