

Linking the Twin Pandemics: HIV and Gender-Based Violence

By Elisha Dunn-Georgiou, Population Action International

In the session, “Women’s Rights Equals Women’s Lives,” advocates and researchers came together to discuss the twin pandemics of gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV. Researchers Charlotte Watts from the London School of Hygiene and Claudia Garcia-Marcos of the World Health Organization, noted that while the body of evidence on direct biologic linkages between HIV and GBV is limited, the evidence we do have demonstrates an extremely strong correlation between the two. Not only does the evidence tell us that women who experience gender based violence are more likely to be at risk for transmission of HIV, but we also know that many of the risk factors for gender based violence are the same as those for HIV-- including gender inequities, poverty, lack of financial independ-

ence and lack of education. While the risk of HIV from gender-based violence is often limited to a discussion of the risk of rape as a transmission factor, Watts stressed that there are many forms of gender based violence beyond rape, including perpetration by an intimate partner (spouse, boyfriend, etc.) rather than a stranger.

Other panelists discussed the implications for GBV among specific populations, namely sex workers, people living with HIV/AIDS and men and boys. For sex workers, violence, not only from partners, but also perpetrated by the state, is a particular issue in HIV prevention, treatment and care. Policies that promote brothel raids and detention of sex workers contribute to violence and

can cause sex workers to lose their homes, interrupt their ARV regimens and shatter any security they might have.

Panelists agreed that interventions to fight these two pandemics must be complex and long-term. Policymakers must remove laws that criminalize sex work or same-sex relationships and must work to change gender perceptions and increase accountability for the perpetration of violence. Part of this change in perceptions can be brought about through comprehensive sexuality education. Importantly, these interventions should not be limited to the HIV arena but should involve domestic violence, women’s rights and other advocates.



What are the Sacred Cows of HIV Prevention? An Evening with Elizabeth Pisani

By Jennifer Johnson, Population Action International

“We need to be clear that this is the best researched disease in history. We know what to do to prevent HIV infection, but we’re not drawing a straight line between what we know and what we do,” stated Elizabeth Pisani, author of *The Wisdom of Whores: Bureaucrats, Brothels, and the Business of AIDS*.

This session, sponsored by the Caucus for Evidence-Based Prevention and the International Rectal Microbicides Working Group, was a frank discussion among advocates, framed around Pisani’s idea of the “sacred cows of HIV” (an analogy taken from drivers in India swerving to avoid cows in the road). What are the

“sacred cows” standing in the way of progress in the fight against AIDS?

Religious groups that advocate for policy based in ideology rather than evidence may be one. Or the AIDS industry itself, which has framed AIDS as “everybody’s problem” in order to draw attention and funding, rather than focusing attention on the groups most at risk. The history of HIV/AIDS activism may be to blame, creating anti-testing and pro-treatment biases rather than a focus on prevention. There is also the assumption that people will make rational decisions about their health (e.g., using condoms and clean needles), when the evidence is that people are not rational about sex and drugs.

The group also discussed the need to strengthen health systems in general. Are poverty reduction, food security and women’s empowerment issues also AIDS issues or should they be kept separate? As Pisani stated, “Why do we need HIV to fight against sexual violence?” Some liked the idea of using HIV as a catalyst for ensuring these basic human rights, but others thought the fundamentals of HIV prevention should be the focus.

This discussion is only one of many that are necessary to topple our “sacred cows” and promote HIV prevention based in scientific evidence.

For more information about Elizabeth Pisani, please visit www.ternyata.org. For more information about the Wisdom of Whores, please visit www.wisdomofwhores.com. Her book will be available for sale at the Caucus for Evidence-Based Prevention’s Satellite Session today at 18:30 in Session Room 7.

Does HIV/AIDS Still Require an Exceptional Response?

Please join the Caucus for Evidence-Based Prevention
For a reception and roundtable discussion on
Wednesday, August 6th 5:30-8:30 pm
Session Room 7, Centro Banamex

Today, the world of HIV prevention finds itself situated among a list of competing global health priorities such as food and income insecurity, access to maternal and reproductive health services, and health system strengthening. Please join the Caucus for Evidence-Based Prevention for, ***Weighing the Evidence: Prioritizing HIV Prevention in the Fight Ahead***, an innovative and interactive dialogue where panelists and audience members alike discuss and debate whether HIV/AIDS still requires an exceptional response.

Moderator

Stephen Lewis

Co-Director, AIDS-Free World

Panelists

Dr. Helen Gayle
Chief Executive Officer
CARE International

Dr. Peter Figueroa
Chief of Epidemiology and AIDS
Ministry of Health, Jamaica

Vuyiseka Dubula
Secretary General
Treatment Action Campaign

Nonkosi Khumalo
Chair
Treatment Action Campaign

For more information about this panel, please visit www.hiv-prevention.org
