

Knowledge and Practices Related to Condom Utilisation among the People of Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe.

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Abstract

The study is coming against a problem of an increase in cases of sexually transmitted diseases in spite of a good condom distribution programme in place in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. The researchers therefore sought to investigate the knowledge and practices related to condom utilisation among the people in the community. To answer the research problem, the researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods. A sample of 72 participants was selected from a population people of have been diagnosed of having sexually transmitted diseases and those that have not. Convenience and snowball sampling was used to identify the participants. Questionnaires, an interview guide and a focus group discussion guide were used as research tools. Findings revealed that generally the community is aware of the existence of condoms in the community. However, the majority of people in the community are not well equipped with the knowledge on condom utilisation because they are failing to use condoms consistently and correctly. To this end, the researchers recommended massive awareness campaigns to educate the community on condom utilisation in order to reduce the prevalence rate of sexually transmitted diseases.

Key Words: Condom Distribution, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Community, Condom Utilisation.

1.0 Introduction

Condom promotion is usually the major priority in sexual health improvement strategies since condoms are considered 'the only products that can offer protection against both pregnancy and infections.' (Curtis et al, 1995). To this end, Zimbabwe has managed to maintain the condom distribution programme well. With the rapidly escalating rates of sexually transmitted infections, for instance in the area under study, the effectiveness of condoms is increasingly being questioned. Some schools of thought have attributed the increase of cases of sexually transmitted diseases to poor condom utilisation. As such, this study sought to explore the knowledge and practices related to condom utilisation among the general population of Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe.

2.0 Background

For Crosby et al (2002) a condom is 98% effective if used correctly and consistently with each act of sexual intercourse. This is supported by CDC (1999) when it states that condoms must be used consistently and correctly to provide maximum cooperation. Warner and Steiner (2007) also believe that condoms are manufactured to provide a strong barrier that prevents penetration of STD pathogens and the sperm. What it shows is that if used consistently and correctly, the prevalence rate of STIs should be low. On the contrary, in the area under study the condom distribution programme seems to be well on course yet the prevalence rate of STIs also seems to be high.

Information obtained from the National Aids Council in Mashonaland West province shows that in 2014 a total of 6 482 885 male condoms were distributed by the public sector in the province. On the other hand, the private sector distributed a total of 850 916 male condoms during the same period bringing the total number of condoms distributed to 7 333 801. What it shows is that the condom distribution programme in the province is well above board.

However, statistics provided by the National AIDS Council in Mashonaland Province also show that there were many cases of STIs which were treated in the province during the same period under review. There was a fluctuating trend of STI cases as the year progressed. According to the statistics, a total number of 20 624 cases of new STIs were received in the area under study.

Given the number of condoms that that were distributed in Mashonaland West province in the year 2014, one would expect a lower prevalence rate of STIs. On the contrary, the number of STIs recorded during the same period was high. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to establish the level of knowledge among community members towards condom utilisation.

3.0 About the study

Statistics show that condoms are being distributed consistently in Mashonaland West Province. Be that as maybe, statistics also indicate that the prevalence rate of STIs in the area under study was also high in the year 2014. The aim of this study was thus to identify the knowledge gap in condom utilisation in Mashonaland West

Province.

4.0 Methodology

4.1 Research Setting

The study was carried out in [Mashonaland West Province](#), in central northern Zimbabwe. The province has an estimated population of 1 501 656. According to ZimStat (2012) about 26% of the population has never been married, 62% is currently married while about 12% is either divorced/separated or widowed.

4.2 Research Methods, research design and data collection

The researchers used a case study, described by Yin (2003) as an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. Cohen et al (2007) observed that a case study portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible accounts. This study is coming against the background of an increase in cases of STIs inspite of high condom distribution programme in place in the province. To this end Cohen et al (2007) claims that the purpose of a case study is to contribute to action and intervention. Case studies have also been known for presenting and representing reality.

The target population in this study were people who have been treated of sexually transmitted diseases and those who have not. Mack et al (2005) defines a study population as the pool from which research participants are drawn. From this study population, only a sample (that is, a subset) of a population was selected (Mack et al, 2005). The researchers used a sample of 72 participants in Mashonaland West province. Among these, 60 participants responded to questionnaires, a focus group discussion was conducted with 10 participants and 2 key informants provided in-depth knowledge on the subject matter. The researchers used convenience and snowball sampling to identify the participants who had been diagnosed of sexually transmitted diseases. Convenience sampling, or as it is sometimes called, accidental or opportunity sampling involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time (Cohen et al, 2007). In snowball sampling, researchers identify a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which they are interested and this method is useful for sampling a population where access is difficult, maybe because it is a sensitive topic (Cohen et al, 2007). Participants or informants with whom the contact had already been made used their social networks to refer the researchers to other people who could potentially participate or contribute to the study, i.e. those that had been diagnosed of sexually transmitted diseases (Mack et al, 2005).

The researchers used questionnaires, interview guides and focus group discussions guides as tools to gather information from the participants. The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed ended questions. For Patton (1990), the purpose of open-ended (semi-structured) interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind but to access the perspective of the one being interviewed.

4.3 Study Limitations

The study suffered from methodological limitations particularly in the sample size. The study focused on only one province, which is Mashonaland West Province. However, the number of respondents for the study was large enough to ensure a representative distribution of the population and to be considered representative of groups of people to whom results will be generalized or transferred.

4.4 Data Analysis

Data was collected using questionnaires and presented in graphs and pie-charts. In-depth interviews were recorded, translated into English and typed in Microsoft Word. Content analysis was then used to analyse these interviews. The interviews were read several times and recurring themes were identified. For the purposes of this study, the analysis focused on the knowledge and practices on condom utilisation among the people in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe.

5.0 Results

5.1 Does the community appreciates the existence of condoms?

The first objective of the study was to find out if the people in Mashonaland West Province really appreciates the existence of condoms in their community. To this end, participants were asked to explain their understanding of the condom. Some participants described it simply as a *"bag made of plastic to use for sex, a cylindrical rubber tube for use during sex, a rubber for use during sex"*. One participant described a condom as *"a barrier device that may be used during sexual intercourse to reduce the probability of pregnancy and spreading sexually transmitted diseases."* Asked to comment on these definitions, a health expert said, *"Yes, they could not define it clearly but these explanations show that the idea of what a condom is can be noted."* Another key informant noted that condoms are found everywhere in the community, for instance in shops, hotels, fast foods outlets and or even in public toilets. They are only for sale in the shops but generally condoms are provided for free in the Zimbabwean community. A group participant noted that even school children now appreciates the existence of condoms, and the Minister of Primary and Secondary School Education of Zimbabwe was quoted in the media stating that students can now also be allowed to carry condoms with them to school. What it shows is that the community really do appreciates the existence of a condom.

5.2 Are these condoms being used consistently?

The second burning issue was on condom utilisation. Participants were asked if they had utilised condoms in their life time. Results showed that from the questionnaires distributed, 60 (100%) participants had utilised condoms in their life time. All the participants at a group study also indicated that they had used condoms in their lifetime. A key informant noted, *“There is nothing unusual on condom utilisation, given the way they are advertised in the media and their availability in the community, definitely one is bound to want to have that experience of utilising it.”* What it means is that the majority of people in the community have used condoms at some point, but are they being utilised with fellow married partners or girlfriends and or boyfriends?

To answer the above question, participants were further probed on who they had used condoms with. Participants were given two options; married partner or boyfriend/girlfriend. Findings revealed that 60 (100%) participants had never used condoms with their married partners. Participants at a focus group discussion indicated that it was a taboo to introduce condom utilisation in the bedroom with your married partner. The misconception is that condoms are used when you having sex with prostitutes. If a man proposes to use a condom, the wife may demand to know why and eventually may become suspicious. On the other hand, some male participants claimed they would not want to eat a *“sweet with its paper.”* Some have claimed that condoms interfere with spontaneity, a claim that was also investigated by the researchers.

Number of Participants: 60

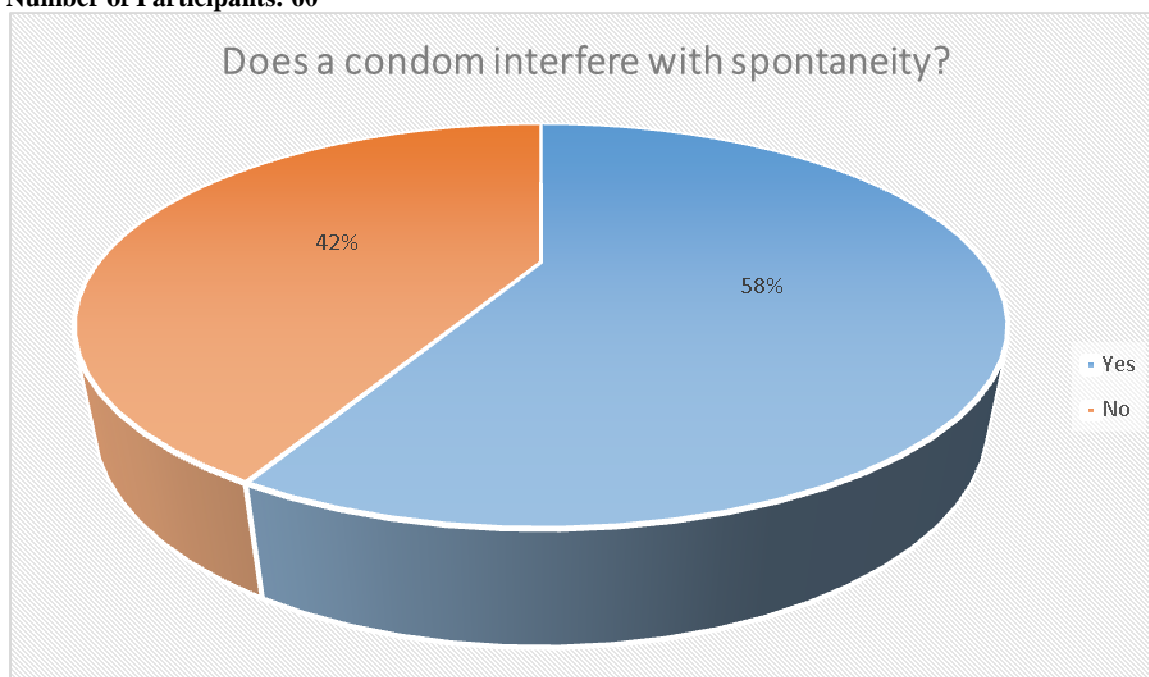


Figure 1: Results on whether a condom interferes with spontaneity or not

Results on figure 1 above show that the majority of the participants (58%) feel that condoms interfere with spontaneity. This explains the reason why many people have never used condoms with their married partners in their lifetime. A key informant noted, *“People want to enjoy the full benefits of sexual intercourse and a condom interfere with the pleasure associated with the skin to skin sensitivity. The reason why these condoms are used with girlfriends or boyfriends is because they are not trusted unlike married partners.”* What it means is that the majority think that condoms interfere with spontaneity and they only use them to avoid sexually transmitted diseases. Still on condom utilisation, the researchers wanted to know if the participants use condoms each time they have sexual intercourse.

Number of Participants: 60

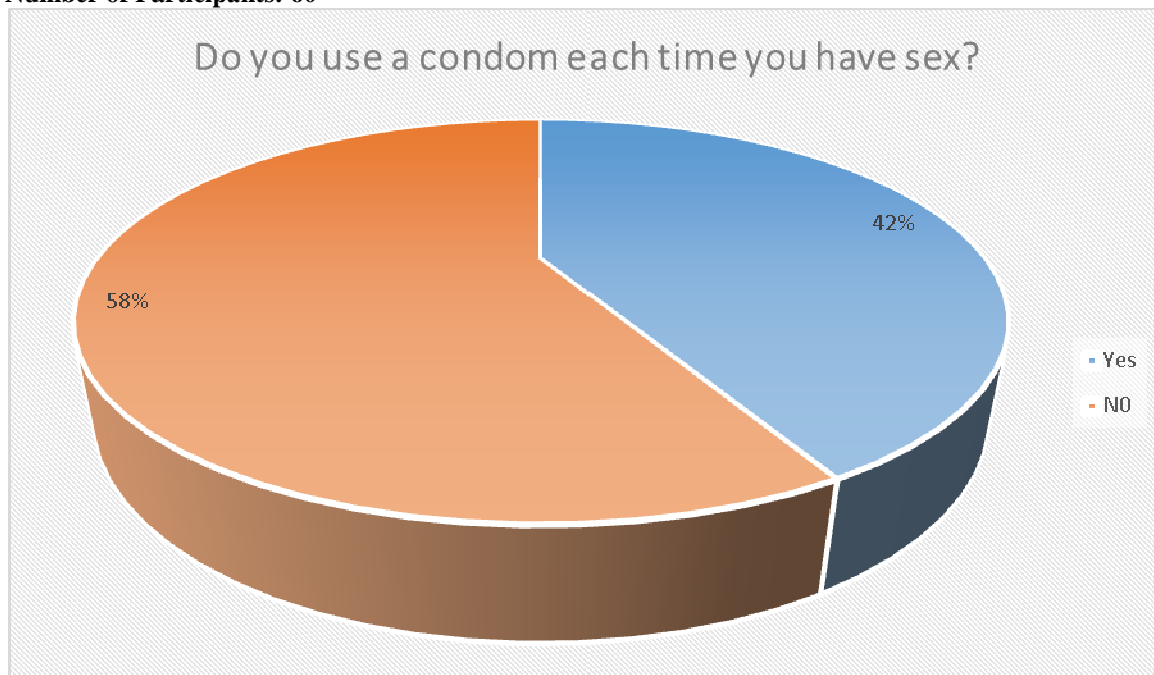


Figure 2: Findings on whether participants use condoms each time they have sex

Results on figure 2 above show that the majority of the participants do not use condoms each time they have sex. Maybe it follows the assertion raised above that condoms interfere with spontaneity. Some participants at a focus group discussion indicated that they do not utilise condoms each time they have sexual intercourse with their girlfriends or boyfriends. A key informant noted that this has to do with the attitude by majority of people in the community towards condom utilisation. What these results show is that condoms are not being used consistently in the community.

5.3 Are these condoms being used correctly?

The study also looked at the correct utilisation of condoms. Participants were asked whether they know how to use condoms correctly and the following were the findings;

Number of Participants: 60

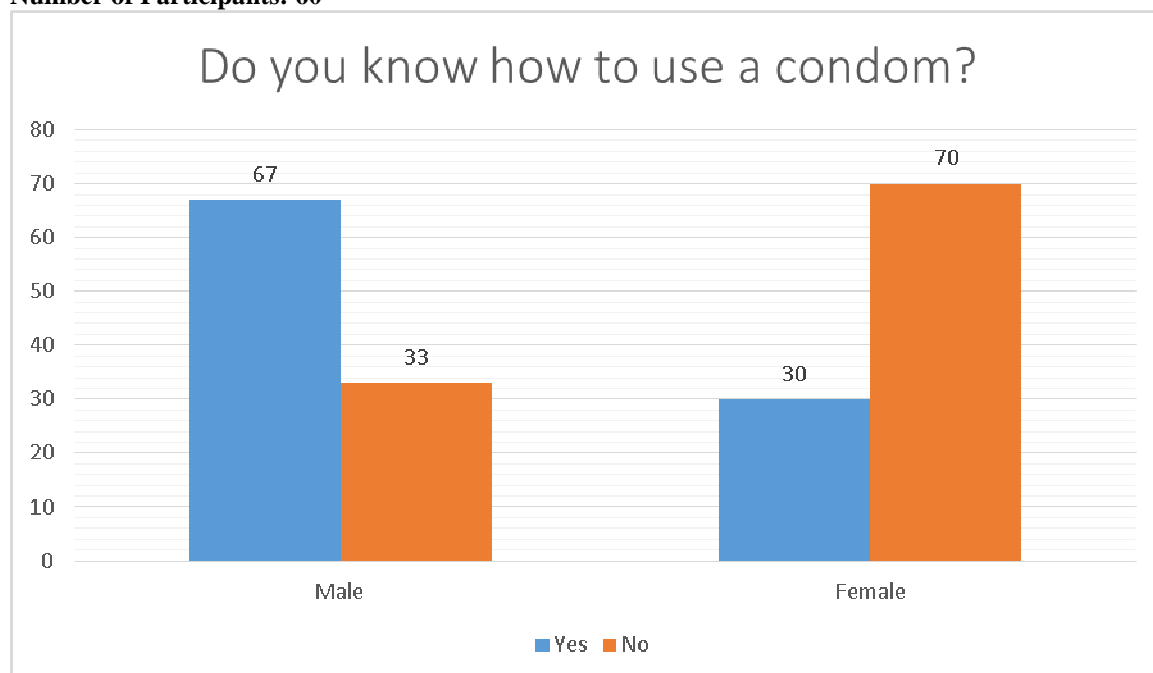


Figure 3: Findings on whether participants know how to use a condom?

Findings revealed that the majority of men indicated that they know how to use a condom. On the contrary, the majority of female participants indicated that they do not know how to use a condom. In a focus group

discussion interview, several women indicated that it is unusual to see a “woman in her right senses” holding a condom. For the majority of participants, female condoms are meant for prostitutes. A key informant noted that men have enjoyed the privilege of using condoms unlike their female partners. What it shows is that the majority of women cannot use condoms. Be that as it may, participants were asked to demonstrate how to use a condom. Some participants simply claimed that a condom is fitted well on the penis or in the vagina. From what the researchers gathered, the majority were shy to give a clear demonstration and this shows that they are not well educated on how to use condom. It also shows that the majority are not comfortable to ask for information related to condom utilisation. However one brave participant had this to say;

“Before you use a condoms, store them in a cool, dry place away from sunlight. Check the expiry date on the condom and do a pillow test. Tear the condom package carefully and put it well. Use it with care to avoid bursting. Avoid touching inside the condom.”

From the excitement that was gathered at the focus group discussion after this demonstration by a fellow participant, the researchers concluded that the majority of participants were lacking knowledge on the correct utilisation of condoms. To this end, participants were asked if they have checked for the expiration dates and visible damages on condoms before they use them.

Number of Participants: 60

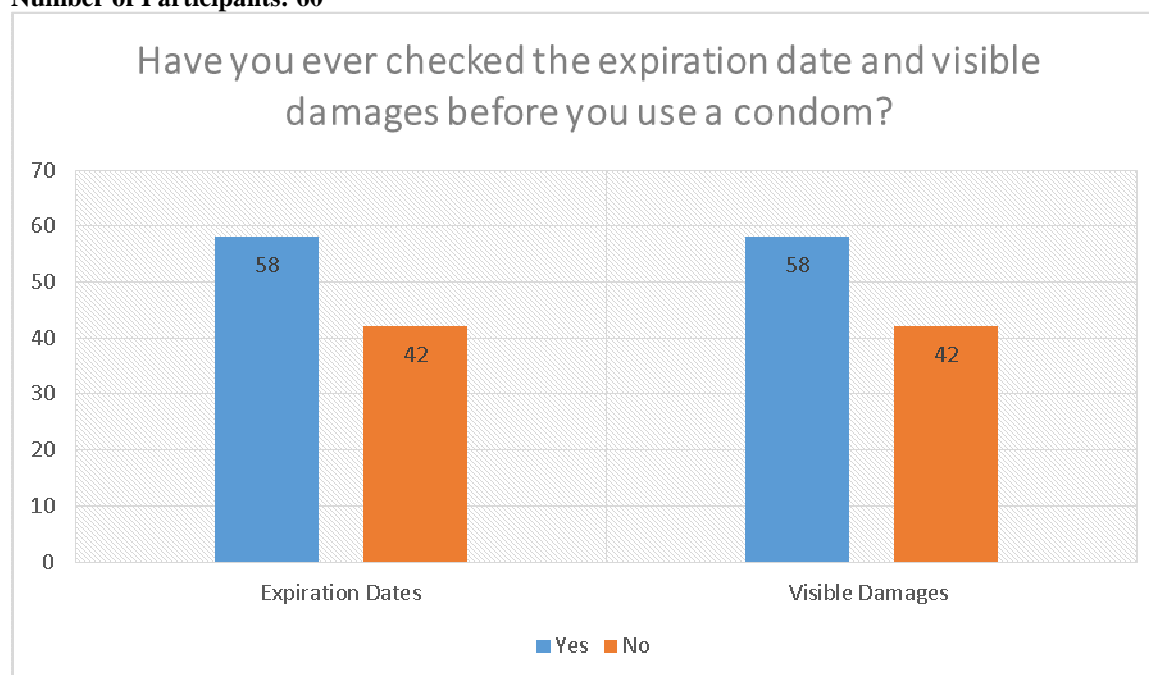


Figure 4: Findings on whether participants have checked for the expiration dates and visible damages before they use condoms.

Results showed that the majority of participants did not check for expiration dates and visible damages before they used condoms. Similarly, in a focus group discussion the majority indicated that they have never checked for the expiration dates as well as for any visible damages before they use condoms.

Participants were asked to comment on the assertion that the incorrect, inconsistent and non-use of condoms have contributed to the high prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases. The majority indicated that this assertion is correct because it may burst during sexual intercourse. Another participant added, *“Because of the stigma associated with condom utilisation it is very difficult to pick a condom in supermarket.”* The majority of participants agreed with this notion. A key informant also added that condoms are readily available in supermarkets but people are shy to pick them. Another key informant also added that condom availability is not an issue, but that the community needs to be seriously educated on condom utilisation.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Appreciation by community on the existence of condoms

Participants demonstrated that they appreciate the existence of condoms in their community. Condoms are found in supermarkets, beerhalls, and public toilets among some other places. Even school children are now aware of the existence of condoms and what it shows is that the Government of Zimbabwe is doing well in promoting condom utilisation during sexual intercourse. In a similar study, Curtis et al (1995) observed that condom promotion is usually the major priority in sexual health improvement strategies, since condoms are considered ‘the only products that offer protection against both pregnancy and infections.’

6.2 Consistence use of condoms

The study showed that participants had used condoms at some point in their lifetime. Sadly, the majority indicated that they had not used condoms with their married partners, but with girlfriends/boyfriends. The researchers also observed that the majority of people are not using condoms each time they have sexual intercourse. In a similar study on condom utilisation, a large survey of around 10 000 Americans found out that only 40% of unmarried 18-59 year olds used condoms at last intercourse, and even among those whose last sexual contact was casual, only 62% used condoms (Anderson et al, 1999). In another study, Diehl et al (2014) note that generally people do not use condoms consistently. As observed in this study, condoms are used with girlfriends/boyfriends and they interfere with spontaneity. Similarly, Diehl et al (2014) made a similar observation and indicated that the main reasons for not using condoms include steady partners, disruption of sensitivity and too much sexual arousal.

6.3 Correct use of condoms

Many women do not know how to use a condom. Diehl et al (2014) observes that condom use involves social norms and interpersonal dynamics with structural and cultural conditions framing social cognitions and setting limits on autonomy that cause the irrational choice of avoiding condoms to be a rational decision. Similarly, women are not free to make a choice on whether to use a condom or not, as such they lack the much needed knowledge on condom utilisation. Participants also failed to clearly demonstrate how to use a condom. In their study, Fu, Darroch et al (1999) noted that the method failure rate for condoms is 3% but the use failure rate is much higher at 14%. Similarly, Mohammed et al (1999) observed that condom users are more likely to experience method or user failure than pill users. As such, incorrect use of condoms is an issue of concern in the community.

The majority do not check for expiration dates and visible damages of condoms before they have sex. In a study on condom utilisation, Crosby et al (2002) discovered that 74% of their participants had failed to check the condom for visible damages before sex and 61% did not check for an expiration date. Such condom errors are common among condom users and Crosby et al (2002) also noted other errors like failing to discuss condom use with partner before sex, putting on condom after starting sex, and slippage or breakage of condoms during sex. Such incorrect, inconsistent and non-use of condoms is contributing to the rise of STDs. According to CDC (2002) inconsistent and incorrect use of condoms can lead to STD transmission because transmission can occur with a single act of intercourse.

7.0 Conclusion

Following the above findings, the researchers concluded that the community have a general appreciation and understanding of the existence of condoms in their country. The researchers also identified a knowledge gap that is existing in the community on condom utilisation in that condoms are not being used consistently and correctly. This explains why community has a high prevalence rate of sexually transmitted diseases inspite of the good condom distribution in place.

8.0 Recommendations

Inconsistent and incorrect use of condoms limit the success of condom programmes in preventing sexually transmitted infections and HIV worldwide, especially in vulnerable populations such as the community under study (Diehl et al, 2014). To this end, the researchers are recommending serious awareness campaigns on condom utilisation. The community needs to be equipped with the knowledge and practices related to condom utilisation. In terms of HIV and STI prevention, abandoning condom use carries severe implications (Mohammed et al, 2004). As such, vulnerable communities must be equipped with safe sex behaviours, such as utilising a condom each they have sex.

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