

Loss of male partner, risk behavior and HIV/AIDS transmission-A comparative study involving women in Government-arranged marriages in Northern Nigeria

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The study compares the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among women who have lost their male spouses to that of the general population of married women who sought counseling and testing (C&T) services in Kano and Zamfara states. It explores the relationship between loss of family head, sexual risk behavior and the transmission of HIV infection.

A cross-sectional structured record review involving data collected over a six-month period on women that were involved in community C&T activities in Kano and Zamfara state was analyzed. The Nigerian national HIV counseling and testing register and client-intake forms provided information for this study. The tools are standardized national monitoring and evaluation documents developed to track HTC activities in Nigeria. This is a retrospective study employing a convenience sampling technique to examine the C&T records of 686 women in the arranged marriage program in Kano state, Nigeria; and a control group of 6753 married women who received C&T through Jhpiego-supported targeted community HTC outreaches. The control group was spread across six local government areas of Kano and Zamfara states between the months of January to May, 2013. Majority of the widows (that make up the study group) and other unmarried women (forming the control groups) were in their early- to mid-teens; with ages ranging between 10-20 years for the study group, and 21-30 years for the control. Most the women (98.2% and 97.6% in the study and control group respectively) were aware of their HIV status prior to the C&T activities highlighting the success of the numerous donor- and government-supported HIV sensitization programs. 1.0% of the women in the study group and 15.4% in the control group claimed they had a regular sexual partner. However, comparatively lower number of the women in the study group, 2.0% admitted having had casual unprotected sex; compared to 13.2% in the control. 30.9% of the widows had regular unprotected sexual intercourse, compared to 24.1% within the control group. The study found that 0.4% of the women within the study group was pregnant, compared to 1% of the control (evidenced by significant levels of HCG in their serum). 1.8% and 4.5% of the study and control group claimed they have had no sexual intercourse.

An almost equal fraction of the study and control group (1.1% and 0.8% respectively) tested positive for HIV during the course C&T for the arranged marriage program and community outreaches. However, a significant number of women in the study group, 11.4%, and 0.8% in the control had a history of blood transfusion. 1.8% of the women in the study group had also been treated for a sexually transmitted infection (STI) at some point within the last six months of the study or after the loss of their partners; compared to 0.7% of the control group that reported treating an STI at some point within the same period.

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