

## 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on **HIV/AIDS, STDs & STIs**

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### **Emphasizing reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention to youths from the religious perspective**

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**Background:** It is assumed that religion shapes everyday beliefs and activities of individuals including that of youths. The problem is that most times, some religious groups out of ignorance exclude their members from associating themselves with HIV prevention. The need to use religious beliefs to enhance prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections among youths in the Church cannot be overemphasized. Here the roles of religious leaders in discouraging HIV-related issues like stigma, discrimination and others among members including youths will be emphasized. In this study, awareness will be created on how youths could integrate religious beliefs with HIV prevention to ensure compliance to HIV/AIDS interventions

**Materials & Method:** An interactive seminar held with a sample of 538 youths between 18-51 years who attended the 2010 camp meeting was studied. In effect, all the 538 youth members of Seventh-day Adventist Church youth volunteer movement were studied. Researchers used combinations of methods to collect data. Story-telling and pictures of various STIs were used to explain mode of transmission and show how youths could be at risk of HIV infection. Certain strategies to enhance HIV prevention among youths like 'say no to sex' and others were highlighted. Thereafter, 23 self-administered questions which centered on knowledge of HIV risk factors, effective methods of preventing HIV infections and others were used for the study. Descriptive statistics including simple percentages on frequency tables were used for analysis.

**Results:** Before the training, a good number of the respondents 404 (75%) had poor knowledge of sexually transmitted infections as a risk factor for HIV infection. HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) were seen as punishment from God on those who committed adultery and fornication. A total of 377 (70%) respondents were of the opinion that people living positively with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and other STIs committed ominous sins and should be isolated. About 280 (52%) of the participants were of the view that they would not disclose their HIV status if infected. Although 119 (22%) of the respondents believed that prayer could cure HIV, as high as 102 (19%) of respondents are of the view that HIV has no cure and that youths should avoid being infected.

**Conclusion:** The fact that youths in the church regarded fellow members who are HIV positive as adulterers and/or fornicators shows poor knowledge of mode of HIV infection. There is therefore, the need to organize regular HIV-education outreach for religious groups to reduce beliefs that discourage HIV prevention.

#### **Biography**

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