*Social Behavior and Interactions And Its Effects On HIV Infection: A Report On Community Field Work In Babadogo*

HIV infection is a wide spreading epidemic in Babadogo area (a low income area within Nairobi county). The high infection rates have also been noted in similar areas of low social economic status such as Majengo.

Currently the Bababdogo is divided into 8 units, the field study was able to cover 2 areas, namely: laundry and Ngomomgo. These areas have exhibited high infection rates with a prevalence rate of 67% (which roughly translates to 3 in 5 individuals being infected at the remaining 2 being highly susceptible to infection).

In a survey conducted in the clinic, patients were required to input their biodata in a form provided by the clinic staff. The biodata specified their age, sex and area of residence. Provisional data indicated that women were more likely seek treatment for HIV infection as compared to their male counterparts. In a sample group of 50 patients, the data indicated that 85% were women while the remaining 10% and 5% were men and children respectively. It was also observed from the clinic’s data that men were more susceptible to succumb to HIV related deaths as compared to women. Provisionally this may be indicative of a positive correlation between higher mortality rates observed in men and the poor health seeking behavior seen in men.

Another interesting observation made in regards to social behavior that may contribute to the spread of the infection, is that in these areas the breadwinners were mostly men. The women on the other hand were mostly housewives and fully dependent on the men economically. This scenario of dependency has resulted in the women being disempowered and thus reducing their say in matters that affects their sexuality. For instance, it would be difficult for a woman to demand that her sexual partner adhere to safe sexual practices such as the use of condoms for every sexual contact, even if she is aware that her partner is engaging in risky sexual behavior. Another important factor that contributes to the low uptake in condom use, is the perception that condom use between intimate partners is an indication of infidelity. This provides an incentive for most residents to shun condom use due to the fear of being perceived as immoral. For married couples there is a higher preference for injectable contraception as compared to barrier methods such as condoms. It should be noted that studies in the country have indicated higher infection rates in married couples as compared to single individuals.

Another challenge that has also contributed to higher infection rates is poor compliance due to misinformation that improved CD4 counts of over 1000 are indicative of cure following initial ARV treatment. Due to them still being infective, they contribute to new infections.

In conclusion, given that HIV infection and related deaths are influenced by the behaviors and social interactions, there should be concerted effort to educate the residents of Laundry and Ngomomgo about the appropriate HIV prevention methods and what HIV is to debunk the myths associated with the disease. The clinical staff should also educate the patients on the importance ARV compliance even if their CD4 counts go up or if they no longer feel ill.