

# RAP\* Time



## RURAL CENTER *for* AIDS/STD PREVENTION

A JOINT PROJECT OF  
INDIANA UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO,  
AND UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

\*Rural AIDS/STD prevention. rap (rap) v. *Slang*. To talk freely and openly

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## For many Americans, concern over HIV/AIDS in the United States has lost salience

HIV/AIDS continues as a major public health problem in the US. For example, in 2005 AIDS was the sixth-leading cause of death among all persons aged 25-44 and third leading cause of death for African-American women aged 25-44. HIV/AIDS is becoming a greater community burden: only half of persons living with HIV are receiving quality care.

Recently, there has been as growing public perception that HIV/AIDS is under control. The percent of the public believing that AIDS is our most urgent problem has dramatically decreased.

This study explored whether people are aware of the incidence of HIV/AIDS domestically as well as the composition of those living with HIV/AIDS and the challenges these individuals face.

### Methodology

Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and citizen engagement organization that studies public issues, conducted focus groups around the country in five cities: New York, NY; Westchester, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Des Moines, IA; and Birmingham, AL. In addition, 13 interviews were conducted with experts

specializing in HIV. The focus groups permitted an in-depth qualitative assessment.

### Outcomes of the Study

For Los Angeles, Des Moines and Birmingham, the groups were the general public. The group for New York City was young adults under age 30. For Westchester, parents of children under age 25 was the group. Major findings include:

- As research has shown and experts indicate, HIV in America has lost salience with the public. African-Americans and New Yorkers were more aware of issues surrounding HIV.
- Though their HIV knowledge was low, many group members had great sympathy for what they thought it may be like living with HIV/AIDS, envisioning a life of loneliness and isolation.
- Even with high knowledge levels, some clearly overstated some risk behaviors and questioned if enough is known about HIV, which may explain anxiety being near persons having HIV.
- Many group members stated that, unlike heart disease or cancer, HIV mostly affects persons who take risks and engaged in unimproved behaviors.

- Both the experts and group members supported education as the best way to address HIV.
- Some noted that finding a vaccine should take precedent over education.
- Group members were willing to discuss and consider trade-offs for public policies such as condom distribution and testing.

### Implications for Prevention

The focus groups confirmed that for most Americans, HIV/AIDS is now perceived with less concern, although African-Americans had greater awareness. Most expressed sympathy for those infected with HIV and most strongly support more awareness campaigns.

Experts noted that the public believes that HIV/AIDS treatment is available to all (i.e. HIV has now been successfully managed) and that HIV still happens to "those people."

### SOURCE:

Rochkind J, et al. (2009). Impressions of HIV/AIDS in America: A report on conversations with people throughout the country. New York, NY: Public Agenda. [www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/HIV-AIDS-May-2009.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/files/pdf/HIV-AIDS-May-2009.pdf)

### Many reported use of safer sex products lessens their arousal

Sexual pleasure and arousal may influence one's willingness to use STD prevention methods. This study explored sexual arousal loss related to the use of safer-sex products and perceived risk of unintended pregnancy in men and women. Participants were 2,399 men and 3,210 women from a 2004-2007 Internet survey.

About one-third (34%) reported arousal loss related to use of condoms and other safer-sex products. Those strongly agreeing that use of safer-sex products can lessen their arousal were significantly more likely to have had unprotected sex in the last year than those strongly disagreeing. Arousal loss related to safer-sex behaviors was more strongly associated with unprotected sex among women than among men.

This study found that some men and women are sexually "turned off" by safer-sex products. Issues related to arousal should be integrated into sexual health behavioral models.

SOURCE: Higgins, J. A. (2009). Arousal loss related to safer sex and risk of pregnancy: Implications for women's and men's sexual health. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 41, 150-157.

### Male circumcision found not to protect women from HIV

This study assessed whether circumcision in HIV-infected men would reduce HIV transmission to female sexual partners. The study was conducted in Rakai District, Uganda, between 2003 and 2007.

922 uncircumcised, HIV-positive Ugandan men participated. Half were circumcised. Their HIV-female partners were enrolled: 90 women in the circumcised group and 70 in the uncircumcised group.

After two years, 18% of women in circumcised group had become HIV-infected and 12% in the uncircumcised group became infected. Most of the new HIV infections in the circumcised group occurred within the first six months of the procedure. This may have been due to some men not waiting long enough for the wound to heal properly, thus exposing their partners to HIV-infected blood.

The researchers concluded that circumcision of HIV-infected men did not reduce HIV transmission to female partners. Condom use after male circumcision is critical

SOURCE: Wawer, M. J., et al. (2009). Circumcision in HIV-infected men and its effect on HIV transmission to female partners in Rakai, Uganda: A randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 374, 229-237.

### HCV infection was high and increasing among HIV+ MSM

The prevalence of hepatitis C virus infection among MSM (N = 689) attending a STI clinic in the Netherlands was assessed. Over the study period, HCV prevalence among HIV-infected MSM increased from 15% to 21%. Seven of the 28 (25%) HIV/HCV coinfecting MSM has acute HCV infection. HIV-infection, fisting and GHB use were significantly associated with HIV infection.

SOURCE: Urbanus, A. T., et al. (2009). Hepatitis C virus infections among HIV-infected men who have sex with men: An expanding epidemic. *AIDS*, 23 (12), F1-F8.

### ART may reduce HIV sexual transmission

Data suggests that effective antiretroviral therapy may greatly reduce sexual transmission from infected to uninfected partners. Studies also show that HIV-infected persons with undetectable viral loads are less infectious.

SOURCE: CDC. (2009). Effect of antiretroviral therapy on risk of sexual transmission of HIV infection and superinfection.. *Fact Sheets*. [www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/treatment/resources/factsheets/art.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/treatment/resources/factsheets/art.htm)

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The opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the cooperating universities.

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