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Rising STI prevalence among MSM clients in Calabar, Nigeria: A call to action

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Introduction: Evidence has shown that there are increasing rates of new HIV and other STI infections occurring among Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) in Nigeria, with the prevalence 3 times higher than the general population as reported by the 2011 National Integrated Bio Behavioral Surveillance Survey. The poor state of health care and support services hinders our effort to control the high rates of these new infections among MSM.

Methods: The Initiative for Improved Male Health (IMH-Initiative) works to provide a safe space for young MSM living with HIV to access comprehensive palliative care and support, as well as referrals for other services through drama and dance competitions. An STI assessment was conducted in IMH-Initiative's Community Center in Calabar, for gay men and other MSM. An STI history was conducted for all clients who visited the community clinic specifically for HCT and STI counseling and referrals within a 5 month period, and their data were collated.

Results: 61 MSM were diagnosed, and reported the following in the last 6 months. 49 were living with HIV. 46 had previous histories of untreated anal warts. 20 had previous histories of treated Gonorrhoea by self-medication and herbs. 21 had untreated boils and rashes around the genitals. 10 clients were living with HIV, and reported untreated penile and rectal gonorrhoea. All clients indicated that there were not comfortable discussing STI infections with staff of public hospitals.

Conclusion: It is evident that a reasonable number of STI infections among MSM are not completely treated or ignored. This thereby increases the individual's risk of HIV infection, and cripples HIV prevention programming in Nigeria. HIV programs targeting MSM must incorporate STI syndromic management, so as to increase access to non-stigmatized diagnosis and treatment of STIs. Also, access to STI drugs for clients cannot be overemphasized.

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