



## DFID MSP PROJECTS: SURVEY AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

**Project Title: Rapid assessment to determine prevalence and risk behaviours of men who have sex with men in South Africa**

**Service provider: Human Sciences Research Council**

### **Aim and objectives**

The aim of the study was to review and collate information on the HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men (MSM) in order to advocate for improvements in line with the HIV&AIDS and STI National Strategic Plan. The objectives were to document the prevalence of HIV, describe the risk behaviours and document access to services.

### **Project description**

Between October 2007 and November 2008 the Human Sciences Research Council conducted a rapid assessment of the prevalence of HIV; attitudes and risk behaviour; and service availability for men who have sex with men in Durban and Johannesburg.

This survey was the largest study of its kind to date and was envisaged as a pilot for more systematic surveillance and research on MSM in South Africa. The study comprised three components – a survey of 250 men from both cities; focus group discussions and interviews with people and organizations providing services for MSM.

Participants ranged from 18-61 years of age with 66.7% under age of 25 years. Overall 88.3% were black Africans and 77.5% reported being homosexual or gay.

### **Results**

The results showed that HIV prevalence in MSM was higher than in the general male population – with raw un-weighted data suggesting a prevalence of around 40%. The study also found high levels of risk behaviour, such as unprotected anal sex, age-mixing and multiple concurrent partners. Condom use was inconsistent, with 54.6% reporting that they did not have condoms when they were needed; 41.8% reporting at least one instance of slippage and 57.5% reporting instances of breakage. Use of incorrect lubricants was common.

Transactional sex was also common, with 29.1% offering money, goods or favours and 42.6% receiving the same. More than a third of participants reported sexual coercion, and this was more common among those who were HIV positive.

Misconceptions about HIV and risk were common, with only 36.9% having good knowledge of ways to protect against HIV infection.

In both the cities, HIV services for MSM were rudimentary and inadequate. The men faced considerable stigma and judgmental attitudes from health care workers and this acted as a barrier to accessing mainstream services.

### **Conclusion**

The report concluded that the framework provided by the NSP should be used to urgently improve surveillance and services to combat this hidden epidemic.