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**HEALTH KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICES OF GEORGIA'S
MIGRANT ~~AND SEASONAL~~ WORKERS RELATIVE TO AIDS:
A COMPARISON OF TWO GROUPS**

Georgia Southern College

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Authors: Rebecca Ryan, MPA
Project Coordinator, Department of Nursing
Georgia Southern College

David Foulk, EdD
Director of the Center for Rural Health
Georgia Southern College

Jerry Lafferty, PhD
Dean, School of Health and Professional Studies
Georgia Southern College

Ann Robertson, RN
Public Health Nurse
Pineland Migrant Health Program

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BACKGROUND:

2.7 million people pursue farmwork in America. This unique rural population is composed of 1.9 million seasonal farmworkers and dependents and 800,000 migrant farmworkers and dependents. These workers and their families tend to be isolated, impoverished, and ill educated. Many groups are Hispanic and members often do not speak English. Because of their itinerate lifestyle and poverty, their health care is--at best--sporadic and limited. Their knowledge of illness and disease prevention is also constrained by limited literacy and inadequate contact with the general society. They are at considerable risk for most communicable disease.

A blind study of migrant and seasonal workers was conducted in North Carolina in 1987 (Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Review, Sept. 2, 1988) using 426 blood samples collected for other reasons. The samples were tested for HIV-antibody. This analysis detected 11 (2.6%) positive cases. It should be noted that, in all likelihood, this convenience sample overestimates prevalence because some of the samples were probably drawn in relationship to AIDS symptoms. However, it demonstrates clearly that there is AIDS in this highly mobile population and that, if precautions are not taken, it has the potential to spread widely.

With the exception of the North Carolina epidemiological study there seems to have been little exploration of the AIDS risk for this population. Bibliographic reviews, including a search of the NIH Medline computerized data base, indicate no published research exploring the AIDS knowledge, or sexual practices of farmworkers.

RESEARCH PROBLEM:

This is an exploratory and descriptive study designed to describe the AIDS knowledge, sexual practices, and AIDS risk status of a health underserved and commonly ignored rural population--farmworkers. To explore this problem, sixty-seven migrant and seasonal farmworkers workers were interviewed at their work sites in rural south Georgia by a health educator. They were questioned about their knowledge of AIDS, their sexual practices, and their drug/alcohol use. It is obvious from the data collected that both migrant and seasonal farmworkers are likely to be high risk groups. However, detailed examination of the data make it clear that farmworkers are not homogeneous. Different farmworker communities may have diverse cultural/ethnic backgrounds, unique behavioral patterns, and different risk patterns. The data below is divided into two groups. The group labeled "indigenous" is composed mostly of seasonal workers. In the camps used in this study, almost all of these workers were black. The group labeled "immigrant" is almost totally hispanic and catholic.

AIDS KNOWLEDGE INDEX

One of the most important prerequisites to responsible AIDS prevention is having adequate knowledge about AIDS, its likely fatality, and the transmission routes. An index was designed to assess knowledge. The index was scored using the opinions about transmission which have been released by the Surgeon General of the United States. These data demonstrate that, while neither sub-group has adequate information, the indigenous groups have less accurate knowledge than the migrant groups.

Percent of correct answers to AIDS knowledge questions		
	Indigenous	Immigrant
1 Women infect men	71.1%	84.0%
2 Men infect women	63.2%	80.0%
3 Vaginal sex infects	65.8%	96.0%
4 Anal sex infects	60.5%	84.0%
5 Can have without symptoms	28.9%	64.0%
6 Get from transfusion	57.9%	84.0%
7 Get from sharing needle	50.0%	96.0%
8 People not usually die	57.9%	76.0%
9 Get shaking hands	50.0%	68.0%
10 Infectious without symptoms	44.7%	68.0%
11 Get from donating blood	31.6%	52.0%

Because fully understanding the implications of AIDS is critical to motivation of prevention activities, particular note should be taken of the low levels of understanding of the likely fatality of AIDS.

SEXUAL PRACTICES AND RISK INDICATORS

Almost all of the respondents (95%) have been sexually active at some time. 77% are sexually active and 32.8% acknowledge having multiple partners in the past year. Protective behavior is low, however, and only 12% report that they always use contraception. More than half never use condoms. The following data demonstrate that the "immigrant" groups are less likely to have a large number of sexual partners but they are also far less likely to use condoms when they have sex.

	Frequency of condom use		Partners in the past year		
	Indigenous	Immigrant		Indigenous	Immigrant
Almost always	21.2%	13.0%	None or 1	67.5%	72%
Most Times	18.2%	4.3%	2-4	27.0%	16%
Sometimes	24.2%	4.3%	5-10	5/4%	12%
Never	36.4%	78.3%			

HOMOSEXUAL ACTIVITY: The lifestyle of migrant workers is patterned in isolation and the predominately male populations have a tendency to homosexual experimentation.

Sexual Preferences of respondents

	Indigenous	Immigrant
Homosexual or Bisexual	23.7%	0
Heterosexual	76.3%	100%

FAILURE TO USE EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

The risk factor obvious in the sexual activity of this sample (e.g., multiple partners and failure to use condoms) has already produced high levels of sexually transmitted disease (STD). Here again, there are substantial differences between the two sub-groups.

Percent with history of sexually transmitted disease

	Indigenous	Immigrant
Genital herpes	2.6%	0%
Syphilis	23.7%	0%
Gonorrhea	31.6%	8.0%
Pelvic inflam disease	2.6%	0%

Neither group uses condoms on a regular basis but the respondents from the "immigrant" are more likely to report using washing after sex as a strategy for disease prevention than they are to use a condom or restrict intercourse to one partner.

Strategies for prevention of AIDS

	Indigenous	Immigrant
One partner ever	26.3%	12.0%
One at a time	39.5%	24.0%
Use condoms	42.1%	16.0%
Douche after sex	40.0%	63.6%
Wash after sex	16.7%	45.5%
Partners check	15.8%	8.0%

Knowledge of the sources of information a group has about AIDS is critical to educational intervention. These groups have quite different sources of information.

Source of information about AIDS

	Indigenous	Immigrant
TV	78%	40%
Radio	5%	16%
Newspaper	16%	36%
Magazines	19%	32%
Friend	8%	20%
Worker	14%	16%
Pamphlets	3%	4%

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS FOR INDIGENOUS AND MIGRANT FARMWORKERS

SEX AND RACE:

	Male	Black	Hispanic	Other
Indigenous group	81%	89%	0	11%
Migrant group	100%	4%	96%	0

RELIGION:

	Catholic	Protestant	Oth Relig	No Relig
Indigenous group	10%	63%	5%	22%
Migrant group	100%	0	96%	0

RELATIONSHIP STATUS:

	Unmarried	No regular relationship
Indigenous Group	92%	46%
Migrant Group	72%	60%

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Knowledge about AIDS is inadequate
 - 25% do not know the AIDS transmission routes
 - Almost 40% are not aware that AIDS is usually fatal
2. Sexual practices produce considerable risk
 - 33% had more than one sexual partner last year
 - 15% are bisexual or homosexual
3. Condom use is very limited
 - 55% never use condoms
 - Only 13% almost always use condoms
4. There are high levels of sexually transmitted disease
 - 35% have had at least one sexually transmitted disease
5. Different groups have different risk factors, different levels of knowledge.

CONCLUSIONS

These exploratory data show that migrant workers, as reflected in this sample, are at very high risk for sexually transmitted disease--including AIDS--because many workers have multiple sexual partners and there is considerable homosexual intercourse. The findings further show that the levels of knowledge about AIDS are inadequate and that the workers are not practicing safe sex. The data also demonstrate clearly that different groups have different risk factors, different levels of knowledge (although any increase related to AMNESTY may be short lived). They indicate the need for targeted interventions programs.

The group labeled "indigenous" is composed mostly of seasonal workers. In the camps used in this study, almost all of these workers were black. Levels of homosexual, bisexual, and promiscuous heterosexual behavior is highest in the "indigenous" camps and more of these workers have a history of sexually transmitted disease. However, condom use is somewhat higher for these workers. The group labeled "immigrant" reported no homosexual or bisexual relationships and somewhat less promiscuous heterosexual behavior. Their knowledge of AIDS is considerably higher (probably due to interventions related to the AMNESTY project). However, they report very little condom use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Further research should be conducted to estimate the AIDS risk for the farmworker population and contiguous communities.
2. Research should be conducted to estimate the actual incidence and prevalence of AIDS among migrant and seasonal farmworkers, their families and rural communities near the migratory paths.
3. Research should be conducted to identify and estimate the AIDS risk for other socially isolated, impoverished, ill-educated and health underserved populations.
4. Special programs should be IMMEDIATELY targeted to provide AIDS prevention and intervention. The first task of these programs should be to provide AIDS education. They should also provide free condoms (although they are aware that catholic migrant workers may be unlikely to use condoms) and attempt intervention to improve the overall health and social status of farmworkers and families.
5. Each community of farmworkers should be assessed and provided with a tailored intervention. To be effective, AIDS prevention programs must be targeted to the cultural background and social situation.