SEXUAL RISK, SEROSTATUS AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AMONG COUPLES DURING PREGNANCY IN RURAL SOUTH AFRICA

Karl Peltzer1,2, Deborah Jones3, Stephen M. Weiss4, Olga Villar-Loubet5, Elisa Shikwane1
1HIV/AIDS, STI and TB (HAST) Research Programme, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa
2Department of Psychology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa
3Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, Miami, Florida, USA

HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH COUNCIL

ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND

Though male to female transmission of HIV has been estimated as 2.3 times greater than female to male transmission, the risk of HIV acquisition rises for both men and women during pregnancy. This change is likely to be due to both sexual risk behaviours and to hormonal changes affecting the genital tract mucosa or immune responses. The aim of this study was to describe sexual risk behavior among couples during pregnancy in rural South Africa and to examine the relationship of sexual risk behavior with HIV serostatus and intimate partner violence.

METHODS

This study recruited 239 couples (n = 478 individuals) from 12 community health centres (about 20 couples per clinic) in Nkangala and Gert Sibande health districts, Mpumalanga province, South Africa. Female participants were pregnant (24-30 weeks gestation), aged 18 and older and had received HIV counselling and testing (HCT) at the antenatal care clinic; male participants were aged 18 or older with an enrolled pregnant partner.

RESULTS

One third (31.8%) of pregnant women and 20.9% of male partners were HIV positive.

HIV risk factors included lack of knowledge of partners' HIV serostatus (46.9% of women and 51.9% of men were unaware), unprotected sexual intercourse in the past week (47.7% of women and 51.9% of men had at least one incident) and multiple sexual partners in the past month (10.0% of women and 17.6% of men had at least one additional partner). Among men, multivariate logistic regression identified awareness of HIV negative partner status, multiple sexual partners and low levels of minor intimate partner violence as associated with unprotected intercourse. Among women, only Zulu or Swati ethnicity was associated with unprotected intercourse in the past week. HIV positive concordance was associated with protected sex and in multilevel analysis of couples HIV positive status and awareness of the HIV positive status of the partner were associated with protected sex.

CONCLUSION

High levels of HIV risk behaviour was found among couples during pregnancy calling for HIV risk reduction interventions.

Correspondence:
kpeltzer@hsrca.ac.za
HAST, Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa

Email addresses:
KP: kpeltzer@hsrca.ac.za
DJ: dines@med.miami.edu
SW: sweiss2@med.miami.edu
OV: ovillar@med.miami.edu
ES: eshikwane@hsrca.ac.za

13 - 16 June 2012