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Media Release

Behavioural Surveillance Research in Rural Development Enclaves in Papua New Guinea: A Study with the WR Carpenters Workforce: NRI Special Publication 59

A new NRI report, released today identifies the need to target populations such as the WR Carpenters workforce with HIV prevention and consider social factors, sexual practices and contexts in response to HIV. This is in response to behavioural surveillance research conducted by NRI with the WR Carpenters workforce.

The report suggests that there is a need to understand changes in marital partners over time and polygamy in the context of HIV prevention and that the prevention message 'be faithful to one partner' does not fit well for those in polygamous marriages with more than one wife, a common practice in the Highlands region.

The data identified that increasing condom use across a range of partner types is a needed focus for prevention programs and understanding the reasons why workers are not using condoms to prevent HIV.

Literacy and educational levels were highlighted as a critical factor when considering HIV prevention and behaviour change strategies targeted for the workforce, with more innovative and different approaches needed to be taken to engage with socio-cultural, contextual and individual factors and practices that support high numbers of concurrent sexual partnerships and low condom use. It was argued that ongoing oral presentations and information passed through networks of people and from drama and video, and discussion would appear to be a way to start getting more information across on HIV prevention.

The report highlights that there is a need to focus on men as agents of change in relation to their own sexual health and to increase support women to gain more access to and information on condoms, gender inequities and sexual violence, access for women on information about HIV and increase the recognition and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and HIV testing.

It was highlighted that there is a need to begin prevention within the institution of initiation in the *haus man* to ensure that instruments being used are not shared and clean, and create targeted information for men on safer cutting practices with men in more informal contexts.

While many of the workers were not clear on the WR Carpenters HIV Policy, at the same time, workers expressed the view that the WRC and the Rural Enclave Project were main contacts for HIV prevention and provided condoms, and information on HIV and VCT, and the WRC clinics were main sources of condoms and information.

The report identified that Increasing and promoting confidential testing (VCT) within treatment and prevention efforts is important, considering the sexual practices and networks of the workforce in this higher HIV prevalence region.

While there have been considerable prevention efforts nationally, through its analysis, the report finds evidence that the workforce still lacked information on preventing the sexual transmission of HIV and that there are still misconceptions about HIV transmission such as transmission through mosquitoes and sharing food. It was argued that HIV programs must be clear about these misconceptions and focus on the ways that one cannot get HIV if levels of stigma and discrimination are to be lowered in the workforce.

During the collection of research data, it was highlighted by the workforce that conditions of life such as access to clean water and good sanitation need consideration as policy issues at WR Carpenters. A lack of access to clean water and good sanitation for WR Carpenters workforce made them more vulnerable to water borne and hygiene related diseases and can impact on overall health, public health and the spread of disease. These conditions become more critical for people living with HIV or AIDS who have suppressed immune systems, and who would benefit from better hygiene and access to clean water.

The report argues that it is crucial to have evidence-based responses to HIV prevention with particular populations across Papua New Guinea.

This report is launched today at the NRI HIV Seminar Series

The National Research Institute - hosting the policy discussions that will shape Papua New Guinea's future development.

For more information:

Contact: Lorraine Ponifasio
Ph: 326 0300/0061 Ext. 314
Email: lponifasio@nri.org.pg

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