

# HIV/AIDS study shows change in sexual behaviour



**A**ccurate planning is about accurate information. It's with this in mind that former President Nelson Mandela commissioned the most authoritative study yet on HIV/AIDS prevalence, backed up by oral-swab saliva HIV tests.

Officially called the Nelson Mandela/HSRC Study of HIV/AIDS, it includes a full cultural and demographic survey on prevalence. It provides information on different races, genders and age groups in urban and rural areas. It looked at sexual behaviour and current prevention, education and awareness programmes and campaigns; identified obstacles to reduce risky behaviour; and examined whether media messages were understood and accepted.

The study was a massive undertaking. It was based on a representative sample of 9 963 people drawn from households across the country, of whom 8 428 consented to submit saliva for testing. The study assumed

that there were 10 million households in South Africa, and expressed its findings in percentages, but stayed away from translating percentages into numbers.

One of the significant findings of the report was that behaviour changes were taking root. Since the 1998 Demographic and Health Survey, many more people were practising safer sex. Condom use among women (15–49) at last sexual intercourse has more than tripled (from 8% in 1998 to 28,6% in 2002), and in the age group 20–24 it has increased from 14,4% to 47%.

Young people (15–24) were most likely to use condoms, with 57,1% of the sexually active men and 46,1% of women having used a condom the last time they had sex.

Encouragingly low numbers of sexual partners and quite high levels of abstinence were found among the young. It also found that reported positive behaviour change was high, and knowledge of HIV/AIDS was quite

*Mr Mandela with members of the research team and collaborators.*

*Back: Mr Nelson Mandela, Dr Mark Orkin, CEO of the HSRC, Dr Kevin Kelly, Research Director, Centre for AIDS Development, Research and Evaluation (CADRE), Dr Leickness Simbayi, Project Director (HSRC), Warren Parker (CADRE), Julien Chauveau, French Agency for AIDS Research (ARNS), and Yoesrie Toefy (HSRC).*

*Middle: Dr Olive Shisana, Principle Investigator (HSRC), Dr Heather Brookes (HSRC) and Prudence Ditlopo (HSRC).*

*Front: Dr Mark Colvin, Medical Research Council (MRC).*

high, although there were still high levels of uncertainty over, for example, the relationship between HIV and AIDS.

Among young people (15–24), 55,6% of men and 57,9% of women had previously had sex, and there were very low levels of partner turnover. Among the sexually active in this age group, 84,7% reported having had only one partner in the past year. For adults aged 25–49, the rate was 93,5%.

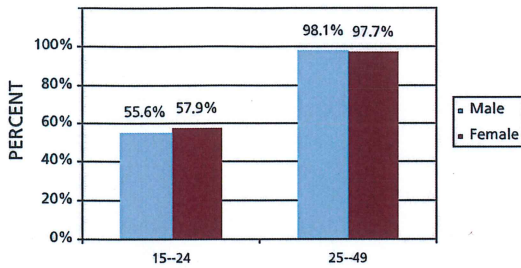


Figure 1: Proportion of males and females with sexual experience

Nearly half of all men and over a third of women over 15 years of age reported that they had changed their behaviour as a result of HIV/AIDS, including being faithful to one partner, reducing the number of sexual partners, abstinence and condom use. Those who knew someone living with HIV/AIDS, or knew someone who had died of AIDS, were more likely to take the epidemic seriously.

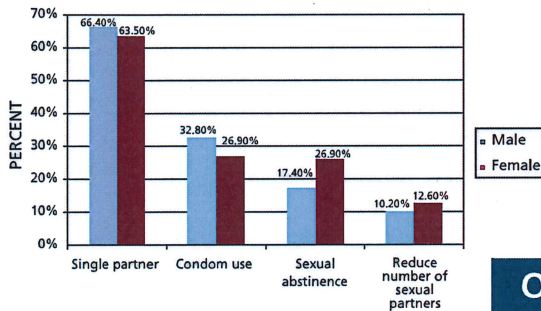


Figure 2: Strategies of sexual behaviour change in the face of the AIDS threat by sex (15 years and older), South Africa, 2002

Overall, mass media communication campaigns were finding their targets. Key HIV/AIDS messages were generally well understood, although there is a dire need for more information on sexual abuse, condom negotiation with partners, sexually transmitted diseases, counselling and testing, symptoms and treatment, and caring for orphans and people with HIV/AIDS.

Radio, television, schools, parents and health workers were the main source of information. Asked what HIV/AIDS messages they remembered, most participants recalled condom messages, followed by messages that AIDS was fatal, faithfulness, abstinence and partner reduction.

Concern was expressed that African languages (particularly seSotho, Tshivenda and Xitsonga) and Afrikaans seem to have been marginalised. Only 0,8% of Africans have English as a home language, while 83,5% of coloureds and 60,2% of whites have Afrikaans as a home language. •



## Other key findings

The overall HIV/AIDS prevalence in the South African population (over the age of two) is estimated at 11,4% (4,5 million). Among the age group 15-49 it was 15,6%.

**GENDER:** Women are biologically more susceptible to HIV infection than men, explaining the fact that 12,8% of women were HIV positive, compared with 9,5% of men. Among the youth (15-24), 12% of women and 6% of men were infected.

**RACE:** HIV prevalence was the highest among Africans (12,9%), followed by whites (6,2%), coloureds (6,1%) and Indians (1,6%).

**PROVINCES:** HIV prevalence was highest in the Free State, followed by Gauteng and Mpumalanga. KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) – until now regarded as the province with the highest HIV rate – came in fourth.

**AGE:** The highest prevalence was among the 25-29 age group (28%), followed by the 30-34 age group (24%). Prevalence among children 2-14 was unexpectedly high at 5,6% and it remains unclear how these children were infected – an important area for further investigation.

**LOCALITY:** People living in urban informal settlements had the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence (21,3%), followed by formal urban areas (12,1%), tribal areas (8,7%) and farms (7,9%).

The study includes several pages of recommendations, which require serious consideration by all involved in HIV/AIDS policy, education and implementation.

Purchase a printed copy or download a copy of the Nelson Mandela /HSRC Study of HIV/AIDS from <http://www.hsra.ac.za/publishing>.

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# review



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**Nelson Mandela/HSRC HIV/AIDS Study:  
positive changes in sexual behaviour**

