

HOMOSEXUALITY AMONGST MIGRANT OIL WORKERS IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

Aims: To determine the prevalence of homosexuality among migrant oil workers in Niger Delta.

Methods: A prospective questionnaire – based study was conducted among migrant oil workers in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The design was to determine the prevalence of homosexuality in the workers in oil workers. The questionnaire was administered to 314 subjects.

Results: Out of 314 subjects, only 5.14% of the subjects practice homosexuality. There was no case of Lesbianism. There was a 70.6% used of condom in those who were homosexual, while 29.4% did not use condom. All the subjects who practice homosexuality are below the age of 45years.

The synagestic behaviour profile thus reported points to a problem trigger that may fuel an already high sero-prevalence of HIV and STI in the region.

Conclusion: The emergencies of homosexuality in oil workers may worsen the existing problems of HIV and other STI in the community of Niger Delta region.

Keyword – Homosexuality migrant oil worker, Niger Delta; HIV.

INTRODUCTION:

The current pandemic of HIV/AIDS is known to be driven by several predisposing factors which include illiteracy, poverty, gender inequality, ignorance and high-risk sexual behaviour patterns¹⁻³. These high-risk behavioural pattern include homosexuality^{4,5} which is not a common feature in Nigeria where the major mode of transmission is through the heterosexual route.^{6,7}

In sub Saharan-Africa and Nigeria (both with a heavy burdens of HIV/AIDS), the interplay and influence of these factors on the dynamics of the pandemic are all the more crucial.⁸ One of the major catastrophes of the HIV/AIDS scourge in this regard is the effect on the industrial work force, economy and the social fabric of the society (especially when the bread winner is no longer there).^{2,5}

The Niger Delta area of Nigeria^{9,10} is the hub of the oil and gas industry which sustains the oil-based mono-economy of Nigeria. In the recent past, there has been an exponential

increase in the volume of Oil/Gas-related activities with the attendant continuous influx of both skilled/unskilled migrant workers (indigenous and expatriate). In view of the obvious impact of these critical Socio-economic factors on the dynamic of HIV/AIDS, we deemed it necessary to evaluate the existence of homosexual behaviour amongst the migrant work force of the oil industry, since they constitute an important sub-group who are economically empowered and play an important role in sexual networking which ultimately leads to the explosion of the HIV/AIDS in the community.

The Homosexual orientation entails men having sex with men. In recent times, several workers have adduced several evidence to show its biologic/genetic basis:

- (a) The study of levay, about the decreased size of the hypothalamus in homosexual as compare to heterosexuals
- (b) That homosexuality is four to five times more likely to have bisexual or homosexual brothers than do heterosexuals -22% compared to 4%(in a study of 76 homosexuals, they found 13.5% of their brothers to be homosexual – much higher than the rate of 2% found in the general population)
- (c) The report of Dean Hammer and colleagues linking some instances of

heterosexuality to a small stretch of DNA on the X chromosome

- (d) Another study has suggested that homosexuals had more maternal (as opposed to paternal) Uncles and Cousin who are themselves homosexuals: The sex-linked, chromosome is always passed from mother to son.⁵

However, in this environment there has been a paucity of data on homosexuality. This study therefore is aimed at evaluating the existence of homosexuals and their behaviour profile such as condom acceptance and sexual partnerships, amongst the migrant workers of an oil company operating in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria.

METHODS:

A survey was undertaken by way of structured questionnaires amongst oil workers who were consecutively sampled in an oil company in the operating in the Niger Delta.

- i. Location: Four major site of the company's operations were utilized: Lagos, Port Harcourt and two oil-ring installations (designated OB and UP for anonymity).
- ii. Subjects: All subjects were participants in an HIV awareness campaign. They were self-selected and also completed the structured

- questionnaires. Both male and female staffs were surveyed.
- iii. Total study population: 314.

Sampling Procedure

Phase I: Determination of the prevalence of homosexuals in the study population.**Phase II:** Further cohort analysis of the homosexuals to evaluate their attitude condom use was carried out. Here 4 main parameters were evaluated:

1. Convenience of condom-use
2. Regularity of condom-use
3. Condom is convenient and used regularly
4. Condom is not convenient but used regularly

Phase III: Evaluation of the coexistence of homosexuality with other high-risk sexual behaviour such as multiple sex partners.

RESULTS:

The total number of subjects consecutively sampled were 314, of which 17 (5.41x%) were Homosexuals. Thus, the prevalence of homosexuality in this study is 5.41%. however, we did not find any lesbians in this survey.

The following tables highlight the various characteristics of the homosexuals:

Table 1: HOMOSEXUAL PROFILE OF MIGRANT OIL WORKERS

Homosexuality	No.	%
Marital status		
Married	17	100%
Single	0.00	0.00%
Age		
<45 years	10	58.82%
<45 years	7	41.18%

Table I shows that the subject were all married which implies that they practiced “Closet homosexuality” –men who have sex with men while cohabiting with their spouse. Analysis of the age profile of these subject shows that 58.82% were above 45years.

Table 2: ATTITUDE PF HOMOSEXUALS TO CONDOM USE

	Yes	%	No	Yes
Convenient (n=17)	12	70.59	5	29.40
Regular Use (n=17)	10	58.82	7	44.18

This table shows that majority 70.59% of subjects found condom use to be convenient as compared to the 29.40% that did not find it convenient. We also found that the regularity of condom use in sexual activities by this cohort is 58.82% while those who do not use condom regularly were found to be in a slight minority of 44.18% compared to 17.65% on the one hand, and the 6/9(50.00%) who were above 45 years and used it regularly in comparison to the 3/9 (25.00% who were below 45years.

Table 3: REGULARITY OF CONDOM USE AMONG HOMOSEXUALS

Regular Use

Convenience	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Yes	9	75	3	25	12
No	1	20	4	20	5

Analysis of above data in terms of the influence of the subject’s perception of the convenience of the condom over regularity of use shows tat 75.00% find condom use convenient and also use it regularly in comparison to the 25.00% who do not use the condom regularly irrespective of the fact that they perceive condom use to be inconvenient.

This table also shows that of the 5 subjects who did not find condom use to be convenient, 80% were not engaged in the regular use of the condom as compares with the 20% who used the condom regularly in their sexual activities.

TABLE 4: ATTITUDE OF HOMOSEXUALS TO MULTIPLICITY OF SEXUAL PARTNERS.

Age Group	Homosexual Behaviour	Multiple Partnership Yes	Multiple Partnership No
<45 Years	10(58.82%)	4(57.14%)	5(50.00%)
>45 Years	7(41.18%)	3(42.86%)	5(50.00%)
TOTAL	17(100%)	7(41.18%)	10(58.82%)

The above table shows that 41.18% of the homosexuals were engaged in multiplicity of sexual partners (MSP) s against 58.82% who did not practice MSP. It was however not possible to ascertain if these partners were only males or belonged to both sexes, due to the sensitive nature of the target population. We also observed that of the 7 homosexuals engaged in MSP, 57.14% were below 45 years while 42.86% were above 45 years of age.

Conversely, the table shows that the figures for the homosexuals not engaged in MSP was equal: 50% for both those above and below 45 years of age.

DISCUSSION:

Homosexuality expresses an aspect of sexual desires. The practice of homosexuality in

itself is a deviant sexual behaviour in the Africa culture. Until recently its existence was negligible but increased oil exploration activities coupled with emigrant Caucasian population may have influence to a large extent the upsurge in this unusual behaviour.

Men who have sex with men may be easier to identify and sampled in areas such as Europe and U.S.A where there are organised social settings such as gay bars, than in places such Africa where male-male sexual relationship is highly stigmatized and clandestine. Work pattern or settings fraught with no other recreational or social activities create frames for this unusual sexual behaviour as is the case in migrant work environments such as oil rig locations and work camp mode of accommodation here is typically the Hostel or dormitory type with a limited area of movement.

In this study, we found that the prevalence of homosexuality amongst migrant oil workers was 5.41% while that of lesbianism was nil. The fact that homosexuals were all married indicates that we did not identify any “stand-alone” homosexual behaviour in our cohort and that they all practiced “closet homosexuality” which is also a form of bisexuality. This may be attributed on the one hand to the relatively new status of homosexuality in this environment and on the other to the fact that men who have sex with men do not view themselves as non-heterosexual and may not readily disclose their identity for fear of social stigmatization⁵. This may also be

responsible for the low prevalence of 5.41% recorded in this study as compared to the high values seen in Caucasians/non-resource poor settings where the “stand-alone” format is a more prevalent practice and also constitutes an important mode of HIV transmission.

The increase of 58.88% amongst homosexuals below 45 years may be a further confirmation of the relatively new status of homosexuality in this setting particularly amongst the nouveau-rich in the oil industry where factors such as rural poverty, the emigration of individuals in search of work which contributes to the separation of families and the absence of women or equal men to women ratio (common in most oil rig locations) in the migratory context foster an increase in high risk behaviours and the spread of HIV. It may also be argued that oil services generally provide better health services for their employees, however the men’s casual partners often find themselves with few options for STI’S prevention and treatment. This invariably leads to a cycle of infection-cure-re-infection which may also fuel HIV transmission in the community¹².

Furthermore, it has been shown that behaviour is one of the valued instruments in checking HIV spread in Africa although behavioural risks are more challenging to monitor, modify or change¹². In this study, behavioural analysis of this cohort in terms of attitude to condom use has brought several issues to focus. For instance, 12(70.59%) found

condom use to convenient while 7(58.82%) regularly used the condom in sexual activities. This data suggests that regularity of condom use may be influenced by the perceived convenience of the condom. This trend is further confirmed by the finding that out of the 12 subjects who found condom use to be convenient, only 3(25%) did not use it regularly as against the majority 9(75%) who did.

Conversely, the role of perception of personal risk awareness for HIV/AIDS as a modulating factor over regularity of condom use appears to be low as shown by the fact that only 1(20%) out of the 5 who found condom use to be inconvenient were engaged in regular condom use when compared with 4(80%) who did not exhibit regularity of condom use due to its perceived inconvenience.

Again, our data also suggested that those engaged in homosexual activities showed an increased tendency (41.18%) to also indulge in other high risk activities such as multiplicity of sexual partners, although this tendency did not appear to be affected by age. This again underlines the finding that indulgence in one type of high risk sexual behaviour invariably introduces one to other aspects and correlates of this network. The alternate sexual behaviour of homosexuality and heterosexuality at home spells a great danger of fuelling the HIV epidemic.

In conclusion, the findings of this study show that while we did not find any record of lesbianism, there is a prevalence of

homosexuality to the tune of 5.41% amongst the migrant oil workers in the Niger Delta. Behavioural analysis of this cohort shows that majority found condom use to be convenient, used it regularly and are also engaged in multiple sex partnerships. This study is however limited by the hard –to-reach nature of our target population which is characterised by high sensitivity to issues relating to HIV/AIDS and individual sexuality thereby making harvest/extraction of information difficult.

We therefore recommend the need for more studies in this field to authenticate our findings preferably by utilizing a larger sample size and to form the database required for the much-needed interventions aimed at preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS in this environment. We also recommend that strategies towards behaviour change should be incorporated into programs aimed at increasing personal risk perception of HIV infection particularly targeting high risk groups such as homosexuals.

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