

HIV/AIDS in Prison: Problems, Policies, and Potential

Presented by KC Goyer
Institute for Security Studies
18 February 2003

Overview

- High Risk Population
- High Risk Behaviour
- HIV/AIDS Prevalence in Prison
- Impact of Prison Conditions
- Policy Options
- Recommendations
- Conclusion

High Risk Population

- Socio-economic indicators of crime and incarceration are similar to those for HIV.
 - Poverty
 - Joblessness
 - Illiteracy
 - Substandard living conditions
 - Marginalised communities

High Risk Population

- Demographic characteristics
 - Prisoners are primarily young people between the ages of 18 – 35
 - Most prisoners are black or coloured
 - The majority of prisoners are young un/under-educated un/under-employed black men from marginalized communities without proper housing or health care

High Risk Behaviour Prior to Incarceration

- High risk sex
 - Unprotected sex with multiple partners
 - Commercial sex work, survival sex
 - Sexual violence
- Drugs and Alcohol
 - Needle sharing for IV drug use
 - Impaired judgment from intoxication, drugs
 - Sex in exchange for drugs

High Risk Behaviour During Incarceration

- Contaminated cutting instruments
 - Tattooing
 - Stabbing/Assaults
 - Scarring/Self Mutilation
- High Risk Sex
 - Receptive anal intercourse
 - Rape, sexual assault

HIV Prevalence in Prison

- High risk behaviour prior to incarceration, socio-economic and demographic factors, compounded by high risk behaviour inside prison create a concentration of HIV prevalence in the prison environment far greater than amongst the general population
- In the US, HIV prevalence in prisons is up to 10x that of the general population

HIV Prevalence in South African Prisons

- DCS statistics show an increase of 750% in reported HIV/AIDS cases since 1995
- But these stats still underestimate the infection rate, currently reported at ~ 3%
- Natural deaths in prison have increased ~600% since 1995, currently 6.38 per 1,000
- 90-95% of deaths in prison are AIDS-related, primarily in conjunction with TB

HIV Prevalence in South African Prisons

- Estimated prevalence rates in prisons can be calculated using statistics from the general population applied to the demographics of the prison population.
- ASSA model estimates prevalence for men between the ages of 20-65 at 25% for 2002. 85% of prisoners are in this age group

HIV Prevalence in South African Prisons

- Most prisoners are much younger than 65; primarily 18-35, which increases prevalence
- The extent of high risk behaviour in prison may also increase the risk of infection
- One estimate is to double the ASSA amount, adjusted for gender differences
- This yields an estimated HIV prevalence of 41.4% amongst the prison population

Impact of Prison Conditions

- Conditions inside prison contribute to HIV transmission, the progression of HIV infection, the onset of AIDS and death
- Overcrowding increases high risk behaviour as it reduces the ability of DCS personnel to ensure safety and security.
- Crowded conditions lead to increase violence, gang activity, sexual assault

Impact of Prison Conditions

- Prison conditions increase the progression of HIV and the onset of AIDS, and death
 - Nutrition
 - Stress
 - Opportunistic infections
- Crowded, poorly ventilated cells increase the risk of TB for all prisoners

Policy Options

- Mandatory Testing and Segregation are not viable options, either in the community or in prisons.
- Prisons are an intervention opportunity, a chance to reach a high risk segment of the population that might otherwise be missed.
- Health care, treatment, and education are critical.

Recommendations

- Justice System Reforms
 - DCS can do very little about overcrowding
 - Investigation and prosecution of crimes should be expedited to address current court backlogs
 - Longer sentences, harsher sentencing laws can only be relied on to fill prisons, not deter crime
 - Roughly 1/3 of the current prison population are awaiting trial prisoners, many simply could not afford bail and are imprisoned for 4-5 mos.

Recommendations

- Structural reforms
 - Most prisons built during apartheid-era were designed to warehouse and control people, not to rehabilitate or care for them.
 - The health facilities available were never designed to face the HIV pandemic
 - Older prisons especially resemble mining dormitories, with communal cells meant for only 12 but holding up to 50 prisoners

Recommendations

- The use and role of prisons in the criminal justice system should be critically evaluated
- Alternatives should be explored for those awaiting trial and non-violent offenders
- Essential prison reform, to reduce overcrowding, gang activity, and violence , must occur before meaningful HIV policies and programmes can be effective

Recommendations

- Peer education programmes, particularly those which incorporate the gang leaders
- Condoms should be available discreetly and easily, and means should be provided for their safe and discreet disposal as well
- Water-based lubricants prevent condom breakage and reduce rectal tearing, thus reducing the likelihood of transmission

Recommendations

- Screening and treatment at intake can eradicate STIs from the prisoner population
- The prison environment provides an ideal opportunity for STI and TB treatment regimen adherence, education, and training
- Prisoners should also be trained in DOT and AIDS hospice care to provide assistance within their communities upon release

Further Research

- A national study is necessary. A prevalence study has been conducted at Westville Medium B in KwaZulu-Natal, but DCS has not yet approved this study for release.
- A cohort should be studied, from intake through release, to learn more about the nature and extent of transmission before, during, and after incarceration.

Conclusion

- Prison Health is Public Health
- Over 40% are sentenced for < 1 yr
- ~25,000 are released each month, about 300,000 prisoners per year
- Without intervention, education, and treatment, prisoners will return to highly infected communities with additional illnesses and cont'd high risk behaviours.