Migrant laborers, spouses and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Rural Mozambique: Why do migrants’ spouses get infected by HIV?

Mozambique likely other southern African country is experiencing one of the fastest growths of HIV epidemic in the world. Crush (2002) and Lurie (2004) for instance, point out that migration is one of social factors that have contributed to the AIDS pandemic. Additionally he argues that the role of migration in the spread of HIV to rural Africa has conventionally been seen as a function of men becoming infected while they are away from home, and infecting their wives or regular partners when they return. However, as the author refers the precise way in which migration contributes to the spread of HIV and other STD’s in rural areas is complex and not well understood. Yet Crush et al (2010) point out that in southern Africa migrants’ socio-economic environment creates multiple opportunities for mobile sexual and transactional sex, which makes people vulnerable to engage in high risk sexual behaviour. Migrant workers are subject to social conditions that render them susceptible to a number of risks including Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) and HIV.

INSIDA- Mozambique National Survey about HIV (2009:7) points out that prevalence rate of infection by HIV in the country is 11.5% and the southern region has the highest rate, which is 17.8% against 5.6% in northern and 12.5% in central region. However, the country where the Mozambican migrant labor go, which is South Africa has the highest rate of infection within southern Africa as according to the Country Progress Report the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS Report (www.unaids.org) attests that South Africa has 29.3% prevalence rate among people ageing 15 and 59 years.

The history of labor migration from Mozambique to South Africa is nothing new. It begun in the late nineteenth century when young Mozambican men started to work in the mines of Johannesburg and Mpumalanga plantations as part of the agreement signed between the Portuguese State and the Republic of South Africa (Raimundo 2010; Penvene 1982; Covane 2001; 1996; das Neves 1998). This migration to South Africa appeared to respond the need for large supplies of cheap labor. This labor migration from Mozambique was not isolated since African men from many parts of the region were involved in the South African labor system (Brown 1980; de Vletter 2000; 1998).Young men migrated to earn money to pay taxes and to pay lobola (Traditional wedding where the bridegroom pays a gratuity or dowery to the bride’s relatives – namely parents and/or grandparents). For more than two centuries of labor migration Mozambican men have developed a chain of relationship in two borders and transnational families in which men leave their homes for long periods of time that varies from 3 and 18 months at a time, and some only come back home once a year. Desmonda et al. (2005), Yang (n.d), Barnet and Whiteside (1996) and Saggurti, Schensul and Verma (2009) show that separation from a spouse or regular sexual partner due to migration, as well as post migration exposure to a new social environment in the place of destination, living and working conditions and alcohol abuse are factors that can drive miners to a sexual risk behaviour such as multiple and concurrent partners, commercial sex, that render them susceptible to STDs and HIV. So, this
is the situation that exposes men and women from Gaza province in permanent vulnerability to HIV/AIDS.

Hypothesis

The study has the hypothesis that HIV dissemination in Gaza province is primarily due to social factors that include practices such as unprotected sex after long period of men’s absence without knowing his HIV status and widows cleansing ceremonies through unprotected sex that practices that maintain women under male dominium. Migration appears as a channel that spreads out infection either in departure area (Gaza) or in arriving area (South Africa) as migrant workers are subject to social conditions that render them susceptible to a number of risks including Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD) and HIV.

Objectives

This paper aims to understand why rural women do die silently under HIV pandemic.

Methodology

The information used for this paper resulted from data collected under the Men’s migration and women’s HIV/AIDS risks in Mozambique project”. This project was funded by NHI/NIHAD of US and is a collaborative project with the Department of Sociology of the Arizona State University and the Centre for African Studies and the Centre for Policy Analysis of the Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique.

The data was collected between 2006 and 2011 in three rounds. This involved 72 women for qualitative interviews out of 2,860 surveyed women of four districts of Gaza province in Southern Mozambique were trucked in order to check main changes related to their economic and social status. Importantly was to follow how many women have eventually died since the study started and if yes, what cause their death. The study resulted from a combination of quantitative methods and in depth interviews of laborers migrant’s wives. What makes disparities between the study areas can be either the level of knowledge about HIV including prevention, the socio-cultural practices and economic income, which varies in each study area?

Results

The data collected demonstrates that women are under risk of infection due to their weak capacity of negotiating sex and sexual intercourse with their husbands as, for instance, are not allowed to question whether the husband performed HIV test or to suggest the use of preservative before HIV test.
On the other hand women do not necessarily accept passively to get infected. They do have their ways of protection against HIV as they do use several strategies including the use of herbs that protects them against any infection. As a matter of fact women do have ways of dribbling the disease as some do not accept to have sexual intercourse without knowing men´s HIV status.

References


Raimundo, I.M, 2010. Gender, choice and migration in Mozambique: Household dynamics and urbanization in Mozambique, Verlag Dr. Muller Aktiengesellschaft & Co. KG, Saarbrucken, Germany

