

# **Review of Reviews Assessing the Effectiveness of HIV Prevention**

Simon Ellis

Health Development Agency



# Health Development Agency

- Our Healthier Nation 1999
- Established April 2000
- Build evidence base in public health
- Focus on inequalities in health
- Evidence into practice
- Obesity, low birth weight, accidents, smoking, alcohol, sex, drugs...

# National Strategy for Sexual Health and HIV

“The evidence base... still dispersed and unsystematic”

“Effective commissioning needs up to date evidence of what and how different interventions work. The DH has commissioned the HDA to draw together the available evidence...”

# HDA Evidence Base

- Public Health Evidence Steering Group
- FIRST step = reviews of reviews
  - advantages (eg balanced overview)
  - limitations (eg out-of-date quickly)
- In future: other evidence...

# HDA Reviews of Reviews: Quality assurance

- Standardised methodologies
- Critical appraisal tools
- Reference groups and peer review

# HDA Reviews of Reviews

- **Searches:** 'reviews'
- **Critical appraisal:**
  - transparent
  - systematic
  - analytically sound
  - relevant
- **Synthesis:**
  - what works?
  - gaps
  - research recommendations

# Review of reviews on HIV Prevention

- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- African communities
- Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs)
- People with HIV (PWHIV)
- Voluntary Counselling & Testing (VCT)

# How interventions work

- NOT 'magic bullets'
- Multiple 'modifying factors' influencing risk:
  - low self-esteem
  - lack of knowledge
  - lack of skills (eg negotiate safer sex)
  - availability of resources (eg condoms)
  - societal attitudes (eg discrimination)
  - laws and policies



# Results

- Searches: 800 references
- Filter: 151 papers
- Critical appraisal (systematic, transparent, analytically sound, relevant):
  - 9 ‘Core reviews’
  - 14 ‘Supplementary reviews’

# Findings

- Limited review evidence
- Focus on narrow range of interventions
- Experimental evaluation
- ‘Effectiveness’ = behavioural outcomes
- ‘Health promotion outcomes’ (changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, access to resources) not used to judge ‘success’

# African communities

Ickovics, JR & Yoshikawa, H (1998).  
Preventive interventions to reduce  
heterosexual HIV risk for women: current  
perspectives, future directions. *AIDS* 12  
(Suppl. A): S197-S208.

- 18 primary studies
- Effectiveness of groupwork with African-American and Latina women
- No UK interventions

# Men who have sex with men

- **Multi-component, multi-level**, ie within broader context of men's lives:
  - address factors at personal level (eg knowledge, skills) and structural level (eg discrimination, peer norms)
- **Tailored and targeted** to sub-populations
- **Multi-component group-work**:
  - risk reduction, sexual negotiation and communication skills training and rehearsal (eg through role-play)

# Commercial sex workers (CSWs) and people with HIV infection (PWHIV)

- Lack of review evidence
- CSWs: some evidence for peer-led community interventions
- PWHIV: no review evidence

# Voluntary counselling and testing (VCT)

- Positive diagnosis *can* influence sexual risk behaviour for *some* individuals
  - but not predictable
- Effects of negative diagnosis not clear
- Target VCT at individuals likely to test positive

# Gaps and limitations

- No review-level evidence about majority of interventions: condom schemes, small media, community development, outreach
- No review-level evidence about interventions to address structural factors: laws & policies, discrimination
- Limited UK research

# Gaps and limitations (cont.)

- Inequalities
- Cost-effectiveness
- No evidence does NOT = ineffective!
- Limitations:
  - experimental, narrow range



# General recommendations for research: Reviews

- Theory based
- Systematic and transparent
- Qualitative research
- Inequalities
- Health promotion outcomes
- Details of the interventions

# General recommendations for Primary research

- UK evaluations
- Socio-political
- Multi-level and multi-faceted
- Health promotion outcomes
- Process evaluations and better descriptions of interventions
- Cost effectiveness

# Recommendations for African research

- Evaluations of UK interventions with African communities
- Reviews of interventions, when primary data available
- Investigate groupwork further
- Involving communities and community organisations in design, implementation and evaluation of interventions

# Gaps: implications for policy and practice

- **No evidence NOT = ineffective**
- **Best available evidence from other sources:**
  - ‘promising practice’ case studies
  - qualitative evaluations
  - non-experimental
  - process evaluations
  - expert and practitioner opinion
  - formative research, needs assessments, local data

# HDA Evidence Base: Next Steps 2003-5

- Map and analyse other evidence
- Evidence into practice
- Co-ordination and dissemination of evaluation research

# African HIV prevention: HDA work 2003-4

- Map ongoing and completed UK research
- Dissemination and sharing of research
- Evaluation workshops

**[sexualhealth@hda-online.org.uk](mailto:sexualhealth@hda-online.org.uk)**

**NHPIS, Freepost LON20535, London WC1V 7BR**

**[www.hda.nhs.uk/evidence](http://www.hda.nhs.uk/evidence)**

