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Trinidad & Tobago : HIV Epidemic

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HIV epidemic in Trinidad & Tobago

Madison Caldwell

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Demographics of Trinidad & Tobago :

- Twin Islands located off the Caribbean coast in South America.
- Considered a high income country, with a population consisting of 1.218 million people who primarily speak English and practice Protestant Christianity.
- There are two main ethnic groups that together account for roughly 60% of the population, which are East Indians, and Africans (“The World Factbook” 2017).
- Government type follows a parliamentary republic. The electoral processes include electing both a president (five year term) and a prime minister.
- Majority of the country's challenges arise from public health related issues, one of which is environmental degradation. However, this brings along a whole list of other smaller issues like flooding, deforestation, widespread water pollution, and excessive soil erosion just to name a few (“The World Factbook” 2017).

What is HIV?

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus and is a disease largely spread through sexual intercourse, as it can be transmitted when in contact with infected blood, semen, or vaginal fluids. It can also be passed from mother to child during birth. HIV is often very hard to detect once it is contracted because it tends to “hide” inside the body’s cells to avoid an immune system detection, meaning that the affected being will often be asymptomatic for a long period of time. However, if symptoms do develop, they seem to present themselves similar to the flu, which again, makes it difficult to detect a positive presence of HIV (Jones, 2009). This is quite dangerous because if you are unaware of having the disease, then you can act as a carrier, meaning you can unknowingly pass the virus to others by having unprotected sexual intercourse. After a while of having HIV, it can progress to AIDS, which stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. This stage of the disease is usually accompanied by symptoms such as: weight loss, fever, night sweats, fatigue, and recurrent infections. There are medicines that may be taken to help subdue symptoms and prolong the progression of the disease, but there is currently no cure for AIDS so eventually the outcome is fatal.

Epidemiology of HIV in Trinidad & Tobago

Trinidad and Tobago are among some of the countries that have the highest annual prevalence rates for HIV in the world (Jones 2009). Some of the highest risked groups are African men and women aged 15-49, prostitutes, and children.

- Male to female ratio in 1999 = 1.3:1
- Children account for 5% of all reported HIV cases in Trinidad & Tobago
- 29,000 adults and children living with HIV in 2003 (UNAIDS Data : Trinidad & Tobago 2004)

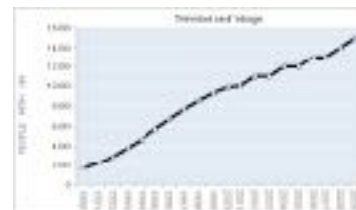
Interventions attempted :

- Educating the public about HIV via educational talks, giving out informational pamphlets, and passing out free condoms (Grenrich, Brathwaite 2005).
- Public health officials have also attempted setting up clinics for people to have more accessibility to getting tested for early detection of sexually transmitted diseases.
- Early detection of the disease has been a huge stride in intervening with the amount of people being infected in recent years because once a person is aware they have the disease, they are more likely to practice safe methods to avoid spreading it to others. (Laptiste, Edwards-Wescott 2013).

New Ideas for Intervention Methods :

Personally, I think that targeting specific high risk groups such as mothers and children rather than just the general public is important in combating the prevalence of the disease because it has potential to make a greater impact.

- Mothers — should get tested during their pregnancy to see if they are HIV positive. Doctors can then determine different birthing and feeding methods such as cesarean section and bottle feeding to avoid mother to child transmission.
- Children — especially young African boys, I believe are one of the most important groups to educate about methods of safe sex such as: wearing condoms and getting tested for sexually transmitted diseases. This will help to create change in the upcoming generations. If they collectively attempt to practice sex safely, the HIV/AIDS epidemic should see a major decline in the coming years.



Life expectancy, HIV, AIDS Trinidad and Tobago. (n.d.). Retrieved October 25, 2017, from <http://www.lifemanagementonline.com/health-info/statistics/hiv-aids-life-expectancy-trinidad-and-tobago.php>

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