BACKGROUND

About 5% of new HIV infections in Mozambique occur among men who have sex with men (MSM) (UNAIDS-2009). However, as of 2009 no studies of risk behaviors have been conducted with MSM. MSM are not included in the national HIV prevention strategy. In 2009, we conducted a qualitative study to understand risk behaviors among MSM in Maputo. Lambda, with support from PSI and Pathfinder/UNFPA, is implementing a targeted peer educator program in Maputo which will expand in 2010 to Beira and Nampula. Peers have been trained to provide correct information about condom and lubricant use, STI diagnosis and treatment, the importance of HIV CT and other health services. PSI and Pathfinder/UNFPA are working with health care workers to provide MSM with quality HIV counseling and STI treatment in targeted health centers.

CONCLUSIONS

MSM in Maputo need targeted non-discriminatory interventions to reduce their vulnerability and risk for HIV, including:

- MSM-friendly health services;
- Communications on the risk of unprotected sex and concurrent sexual partnerships;
- Improved access to and messaging regarding water-based lubricants; and,
- Initiatives that guarantee the protection of MSM’s sexual and reproductive rights.

METHOD

- 15 MSM peer researchers were trained; each met with 2 interviewees to complete 30 in-depth interviews on MSM risk behaviors.
- 15 semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a convenience sample of MSM.

RESULTS

- Reported risk behaviors included: transactional sex, sex with both men and women, group sex, and sex while intoxicated.
- Despite high levels of general HIV knowledge, some respondents did not associate the practice of oral or anal sex with HIV transmission. Many MSM believe that they are at low risk of HIV and STI infections.
- MSM reported inconsistent condom use due to trust in their sexual partners, the perception that one can tell if someone has HIV, the belief that only vaginal sex can transmit HIV, and the belief that HIV transmission occurs only when there is contact with the blood of an infected partner.
- Mistrust in condoms or the perceived lack of condom quality was also reported as one of the reasons for non-use.
- MSM reported high availability of condoms, but not water-based lubricants. Generally, there was a lack of knowledge regarding the benefits of water-based lubricants. Lubricant is used to facilitate penetration, but not to prevent condom breakage. Many respondents reported using oil-based lubricants to facilitate penetration.
- Men reported discrimination from health workers when seeking HIV testing and STI treatment.
- Respondents reported that stigma and poverty are serious issues facing MSM in Maputo. Transactional sex was reported to occur within this population as a means of survival or achieving a certain standard of living.

"When I don’t trust the person I am going to have sex with, because it is the first time I meet him, I prefer to use it [the condom]. When I am with my partner, who I trust, and because I am sure that he doesn’t cheat on me, I don’t use, although there is always a bit of fear in the bottom of my heart.”

(25 years old, university student)

"…we never needed to use lubricant… after my partner was no longer a virgin, we had another type of relationship. So, I decided it was no longer necessary to use lubricant. Well, many people talk about Vaseline and also talk about soap, I have heard people talking about [using] these products.”

(28 years old, grade 12)

"...a friend of mine… was involved with someone who had more sexual experience… He ended up having serious problems in his penis and anus… At the hospital they said that it was a matter that did not interest them, because it was a result of bad behavior. They said that he needed another way of satisfying himself sexually, without putting his anus at risk, so he should find another way of overcoming this problem because it was his fault.”

(29 years old, university student)