Psychosocial Determinants of Condom Use Among MSM in Togo

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BACKGROUND
In Togo, HIV prevalence among MSM is estimated to be higher than 30%. An exploratory study conducted in 2006 indicated that MSM on average have their first sexual experience with a male at 17.6 years. While sixty percent of respondents used a condom at last sex, only 21% percent used condoms consistently. In 2007, with support from the Global Fund, PSI launched a program to reach MSM in Lome. The project was later scaled up to include three semi-urban cities (Kpalime, Aneho and Kara). Programmatic activities include providing information about HIV and promoting condom use through interpersonal communication, discussion groups and special events implemented by peer educators. Mobile HIV counseling and testing services are promoted through peer educators and offered at special events. In 2008, 2,681 MSM were reached by peer educators and in 2009, this number increased to 4,907. The purpose of the present study was to examine the psychosocial determinants of condom use among MSM in Togo.

METHODS
• Qualitative study using in-depth interviews with a standardized discussion guide.
• A purposive sampling strategy was used and MSM were recruited through their social networks.
• Respondents were categorized by age (18-30 or 31-59) and primary sexual position (insertive, receptive and versatile).
• Participants were interviewed by other MSM who were trained to conduct interviews.

RESULTS
A total of 33 MSM were interviewed for this study. The data suggested a number of important psychosocial determinants were related to individual ability and motivation to use condoms. Among these were: attitudes about using condoms, perceived susceptibility to HIV infection, friend’s social support for condom use and level of self-efficacy to discuss condom use.

• Attitude: Respondents reported that condom use facilitates anal penetration and makes anal intercourse more hygienic since it acts as a barrier to sperm entering the rectum. Some respondents reported that condom use was very practical (contributes to peace of mind, provides comfort and security) and that using condoms was proof of love. Others reported that condoms decrease pleasure and condom use is disliked.

• Susceptibility: Perceived susceptibility to HIV infection varied according to reported sexual behaviors. All respondents, regardless of their primary sexual position, reported that bisexual and insertive MSM were at less risk of infection than receptive MSM. Perceived susceptibility to HIV infection also varied according to condom use habits or whether respondents had multiple partners or not.

• Friend’s social support: MSM share information about consistent condom use with their friends. They advise and encourage each other to use condoms consistently during sexual intercourse.

• Partner’s social support: To protect themselves and their sexual partners, MSM ask or encourage their sexual partners to use condom.

• Self-efficacy: MSM felt that was very important for men to have the capacity to discuss condom use with friends and every sexual partner (regular and casual). This capacity was expressed as their ability to ask questions, provide explanations and attitudes on the need to use condom.

CONCLUSIONS
The findings suggest a need to develop communication messages that go beyond basic HIV education and aim to influence MSM-specific psychosocial determinants of condom use.

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