SUMMARY

Background: Over sixty-five million persons worldwide have become infected and are living with or have died of HIV/AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, over fifty percent of those living with the virus are women. Majority of these women acquired the infection through heterosexual intercourse. Investigating the sexual practices and contraceptive use of these women is very important for strategic planning aimed at reducing sexual transmission and its prevalence in our community.

Objectives: To determine the proportion and characteristics of HIV-infected women in the reproductive age group attending PEPFAR clinic JUTH who engage in high risk sexual activity. To also determine the prevalence of, methods and reasons for contraceptive use and its relationship to pregnancy desire among HIV-infected women.

Design: Descriptive cross-sectional study.

Subjects: Three hundred and sixty three HIV-infected women in the reproductive age group seeking care at PEPFAR clinic, Jos University Teaching Hospital.

Methods: Data on the women’s demographics, contraceptive use, sexual practices, pregnancy intention, sexual partner’s HIV serostatus and other contraceptive and sexual characteristics were entered in a questionnaire. Weight, height and blood pressure were measured.

Results: About seventy-three percent of the women were sexually active, with 60.9% of them being aware of their sexual partner’s HIV serostatus. Seven percent of the women had more than one sexual partner. All (100%) the women on contraceptives were using the condom, mainly to avoid transmitting the infection to their sexual partners or to prevent pregnancy. Over 70% of them desired to be pregnant. However, pregnancy desire declined linearly with increasing number of children (p for linear trend <0.01). About 30% of the women who knew the HIV serostatus of their sexual partners were discordant.

Conclusions/Recommendations: The condom is the most commonly used contraceptive among HIV-infected women attending PEPFAR clinic at JUTH. However, some are using it inconsistently and some still engage in high risk sexual practices such as having multiple sexual partners. Addressing these issues would help reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in our community. Emphasis on abstinence and marital faithfulness might be a more effective method to stem the spread of the virus. Addressing pregnancy related issues among these women is also very important as many of them desired to be pregnant. The family physician is well positioned to address issues such as HIV serostatus disclosure to a partner and sexual risk reduction behaviors.