



PRESS STATEMENT

IMR04/13

14 March 2013

STUDY CALLS FOR CONDOMS IN PNG PRISONS

Condoms are recognised by the PNG Government as necessary for HIV prevention and should be available to prisoners and detainees in police holding cells to guard against HIV, a study by the PNG Institute of Medical Research (IMR) has found.

[Emerging HIV Risk in Papua New Guinea: HIV risk, prevention, treatment and care in closed settings](#) makes it clear that unsafe forced and consensual sex between men and between women and men occurs in prisons and police holding cells. The study was commissioned by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, with funding from UNAIDS.

“The greatest risk for HIV in prisons or holding cells is sexual transmission. All detainees in PNG have a right to health care and HIV prevention through distribution of condoms,” said IMR’s Dr Angela Kelly, Principal Investigator for the study.

Male-to-male sex was reported in all four prisons visited, despite denial from some senior staff and prisoners. It comprised long-term relationships, sex for goods or as punishment, and sometimes included one or more men. While women are safer in prison, in police holding cells they face sexual assault and rape and offers of “snake bail” -- sex for bail money.

The risk of HIV transmission is further complicated by penile modification practices common in PNG. Many men in prisons have undergone procedures such as full or partial foreskin removal and insertion of materials such as ball bearings under the skin of the penis.

“These practices that involve cutting the skin pose a risk for blood-borne virus transmission when cutting or piercing implements are shared,” Dr Kelly said.

Health and HIV counselling services are limited and prisoners are not provided a health assessment on entry into prison. Only one facility visited for the study provided condoms to prisoners – and this was only to prisoners going on weekend release.

“The study recommends that UN agencies in PNG push for open discussion about sexual violence in prisons and holding cells, and better security including separate holding cells guarded by female wardens for female detainees in holding cells. Decriminalising male-to-male sex will ensure all people in PNG, including prisoners, have access to HIV prevention.

“The UN will provide further technical assistance in this matter. Closed settings such as prisons and holding cells must become a priority for prevention of HIV and sexual violence,” Dr Kelly said.

The study is available on our website under [Research Publications 2013](#).

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