New research suggests factors leading to spread of HIV also contributing to crime

Chicago (April 2, 2009) — A new study published in the Journal of the National Medical Association suggests that the factors contributing to the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, among African-American males might also be the same factors that contribute to crime.

Researchers at Chicago State University were expecting to find evidence of a direct correlation between rates of risk behaviors among African-American inmates who had been incarcerated more than once, compared to first-time inmates. But they found no significant difference in most HIV risk behaviors between those who had been incarcerated multiple times and those who hadn’t. Instead, their report said the lack of a link points to “the same factors that predispose African-Americans to crime probably predispose them to HIV infection.” Those structural factors include poor socioeconomic status, few employment opportunities, homelessness, and poverty.

The only difference the study revealed for offenders with multiple incarcerations was a higher number of female sexual partners, which has implications for an increased risk of transmitting the HIV virus to their primary female sexual partner.

“The study suggests that these risk behaviors are evenly spread among all demographic and risk groups. Hence, HIV prevention interventions are necessary for entire African-American populations,” said Dr. Joseph Balogun, dean of the College of Health Sciences and one of the study’s authors.

The article noted a number of interventions for ex-offenders that could reduce both crime and HIV infection in the African-American population, including employment opportunities, access to health care, safe housing, reestablishment of social networks, and changes in welfare policy such as allowing drug offenders access to benefit programs.

“There is an urgent need to address the individual and structural factors fueling the epidemic,” said Dr. Balogun. “These interventions also have the potential to reduce the incarceration rates among African-Americans.”

The study of HIV/AIDS among black populations is critical because they account for nearly half of all cases of HIV in the United States. The situation is even more urgent for young blacks; 61 percent of the nearly 19,000 people under the age of 25 diagnosed with HIV/AIDS between 2001 and 2004 were black.

The study was co-authored by Dr. Titilayo Abiona, and Dr. Adedeji Adefuye, of Chicago State’s HIV/AIDS Research and Policy Institute, and Dr. Patricia Sloan, former assistant to the president at Chicago State.

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