HIV Risk among Male Prisoners, Formerly Incarcerated Men, and Their Female Partners

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**HIV Testing**

- **Prisoners in the United States are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS:** 1.5% of male prisoners in the US are known to be HIV+ - 41/600,000 prisoners are estimated to have confirmed AIDS, compared to 170,000 people in the general population (Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, "HIV in Prisons, 2007-08")
- **Women of color in the US are also disproportionately affected:** - African-American women accounted for 66% of new AIDS diagnoses in 2007, compared to 15% for Latinos and 17% for white women (Source: Kaiser Family Foundation, "Women and HIV/AIDS in the United States", September 2009)

**Findings**

Men's HIV Risk in Prison

Men report that HIV risk in prison is driven by a constellation of factors:

- **Personal level:**
  - individual sexuality
  - desire for pleasure
  - trading sex for commodities
  - engagement in substance use
  - desire for pleasure
  - individual sexuality
- **Interpersonal level:**
  - prison social networks
  - degree of contact with non-incarcerated partners
  - trading sex
  - lack of knowledge about HIV/AIDS
- **Structural level:**
  - no access to safe injection materials or condoms in prison
  - unclear HIV testing policies
  - lack of confidentiality
  - restrictions on conjugal visitation

Women's HIV Risk During Her Partner's Incarceration

Research on sexual risks during incarceration can lead to women starting or resumes relationships with other sexual partners:

- “[My boyfriend] was incarcerated. And my boyfriend was just jumping and jumping. And I’m like, ‘Please! Please! Just let me have just one! And I went back in my boy’s father.”
  - “When my boyfriend went in jail [my ex-boyfriend] knew about it. He was over here throwin’ rocks at my window. I was like, ‘Get away from my window! Just because he is in jail doesn’t mean I’m a fit to be brought in.” I done done that before.”

Couples' HIV Post-Incarceration

- **Barriers to communication about HIV risk during a man’s incarceration include:**
  - distance and difficulty in staying in touch
  - lack of privacy in crowded visiting rooms
  - excessive phone calls
  - reluctance to address sensitive topics during a valuable time in the relationship
- **Women may want a nice, peaceful visit...**
  - “You said to me to be a certain kind of person, then you be him bein’ out [of prison] and with a female type thing more...”
  - “I know that I’ve never caught anything from him on the streets or in here [when he’s in prison] and I got tested at the time... So that’s why I guess I don’t worry about it too much because he hasn’t done anything [STIs]...”

**Women with former incarcerated partners:**

- **Men are less likely to test during incarceration in part due to concerns about confidentiality, which is often absent or compromised in prison**
- **When partners reunite, the male partner’s serostatus is often unknown and women assume their partners are HIV-negative:**
  - “I knew that he’s never caught anything from him on the streets or in here [when he’s in prison] and I got tested at the time...”
  - “Well with you feel you there really isn’t a risk.”

**HIV Testing**

- **Women report frequent testing in the community**
  - **Men are less likely to test during incarceration in part due to concerns about confidentiality, which is often absent or compromised in prison**
- **When partners reunite, the male partner’s serostatus is often unknown and women assume their partners are HIV-negative:**

**Incarceration-Related HIV Risk Dynamics**

**Incarcerated Risk**

- **Men are less likely to test during incarceration in part due to concerns about confidentiality, which is often absent or compromised in prison**
- **Incarcerated men:**
  - reluctance to test while incarcerated
  - low communication with partners
  - high rates of UPI with partners of unknown serostatus
  - low communication with partners

**Post-Incarceration Risk**

- **Women with recently released partners:**
  - less likely to test due to fears of stigmatization
  - lack of privacy in crowded visiting rooms
  - excessive phone calls
  - reluctance to address sensitive topics during a valuable time in the relationship

**Conclusions**

- **Incarceration affects the context of HIV risk not only for male prisoners, but also for their female partners.**
  - **Incarceration may encourage concurrent partnerships, discourage or prevent condom use, and inhibit HIV testing.**
  - **Incarcerated men:**
    - reluctance to test while incarcerated
    - low communication with partners
    - high rates of UPI with partners of unknown serostatus
  - **Women with incarcerated partners:**
    - less likely to test due to fears of stigmatization
    - lack of privacy in crowded visiting rooms
    - excessive phone calls
    - reluctance to address sensitive topics during a valuable time in the relationship

**Public Health Recommendations**

- **Advocate for confidential HIV testing in prisons.**
- **Develop interventions for couples affected by incarceration that focus on communication about HIV risk behavior and HIV testing**
- **Discuss alternatives to condom use for couples post-release, since we’ve had mixed HIV testing and facilitated disclosure of results**
- **Provide access to rapid HIV testing for couples post-release, particularly for couples wanting to reunite and children.**