

Paidamoyo Chipunza in Sydney, Australia

THERE is need for Government to consider HIV transmission preventive measures in prisons as evidence has shown that a considerable number of men practice anal sex in prisons. Presenting results of the survey conducted in Harare during the on going International Microbicide Conference here yesterday, a Zimbabwean researcher, Mr Blessing Dzingirai, said 49 percent of men in prisons were having anal sex. Mr Dzingirai said 22 percent of commercial sex workers who were interviewed also confirmed to have anal sex on some occasions. The survey, which was done by a University of Zimbabwe Medical School lecturer, Mrs Tsitsi Grace Monera, was meant to find out the level of knowledge on microbicides among prisoners and commercial sex workers.

“There is really need for Government to consider provision of HIV and AIDS information and prevention services for both prisoners and commercial sex workers because they are a high risk group,” Mr Dzingirai said.

The survey, Mr Dzingirai said, also found out that majority of the prisoners and commercial sex workers did not even know of microbicides. Microbicides are compounds that can be applied inside a female's genital organ or rectum to protect against sexually transmitted diseases including HIV, which are still in development stages.

However, the Zimbabwe Prisons Services is on record saying they will never introduce HIV and AIDS preventive services such as condoms as it is tantamount to legalising crime despite the existence of homosexuality in jails.

The ZPS said Zimbabwe prisons will only provide condoms in prisons should Zimbabwe legalise homosexuality.

According to the Prisons Act, homosexuality is viewed as sodomy and if there are witnesses to the act the offenders will be punished as they will be committing an offence.

Zimbabwe is among the countries with high HIV prevalence rate with recent statistics indicating that at least 14,7 percent of the population is living with HIV.

Prisons and commercial sex workers are among the high risk groups.