

STI'S AMONG MIGRANT POPULATIONS

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Human mobility is recognized as one of the major determinants for the spread of HIV as it increases both individual and societal vulnerability to HIV infection. The SADC STI/HIV and AIDS project aimed at strengthening the enabling environment in which mobile women, men and young people most vulnerable to HIV infection in BLNS can reduce their HIV related risk behaviour.

Mobile groups like seasonal farm workers or truck drivers spend days away from home or their families. There is an infrastructure of networks of disadvantaged women and youth who serves as partners to this mobile population. From a public health perspective, the key link between human mobility and the epidemic profile of STIs and HIV is not the origin of the migrant, but the conditions of life during the voyage and the site of destination.

Factors that increase the vulnerability include:

- Need for company as work involve mobility and living away from spouses;
- Separation from socio-cultural norms that regulate behaviour in stable communities; so people indulge in some high risk behaviours
- Work in environments with limited recreational options and easy access to transactional sex, risky sexual behavior with casual partners & multiple partners, drugs and alcohol;
- Isolated working and living environments which often create a sense of anonymity that allows for more sexual freedom;
- Limited access to health facilities, including treatment for sexually transmitted infections (STIs); so can continue with infection for longer periods.
- Types of accommodation such as single-sex, overcrowded living quarters or having to sleep in trucks; allowing opportunities for casual sexual encounters.

The assumption is that there is a 'core' group that plays a vital role in STI and HIV transmission in communities. People who have many sexual partners play an important role in maintaining high STIs transmission rates among the 'bridging' populations and through them keep STIs widespread in the general population.