



Engaging MSM in Research, in Malawi

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Schema of this talk

- What is known about MSM in Malawi
- Overall HIV landscape
- Key populations in HIV transmission
- Experiences in developing MSM cohort
- Strategies to identify study participants
- The future for MSM in Malawi

BACKGROUND (HPTN 075)

- HPTN 075 was a one year cohort study evaluating the feasibility of HIV prevention research among men who have sex with men (MSM), at least once in preceeding three months.
- Study Area: In sub-Saharan Africa, 4 sites.
- Scant research has examined HIV testing, diagnosis and care among MSM in SSA.
- Papers, CROI, IAS, MSc, etc
- Inform further research & Policy Makers....

Background

- Homosexuality has long existed in Malawi, it has existed long enough to have a word in vernacular: Mathanyula
- Still some denial of its existence by several Malawian communities especially religious groupings
- Homosexuality is criminalized (silence/stigma on it)
- Condoms not allowed in prisons since same sex intimacy not “expected”

First publicly proclaimed gay couple attracted a lot of media, legal, religious, social discourse



In 2010, the late Judge Nyakwawa Usiwasiwa sentenced the first admitted gay couple—Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza—to the maximum jail sentence.

Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza during one of their court appearance Malawi

Arrests in Malawi, 2010

NATION
on Sunday

NAMISA PRINT MEDIA HOUSE OF THE YEAR Making freedom of expression a reality

REGISTERED AT G.P.O. AS A NEWSPAPER VOL. 5 NO. 9 SUNDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2010 WWW.NATIONMWA

Herbalist cashes in on 'cleansing' P2

POLICE HUNT FOR PROMINENT GAYS

ANTHONY KASUNDA, News Analyst

Suspects include MPs and priests

You can run but you cannot hide. This is the warning police are sending to some high profile people suspected of engaging in homosexuality following a public tip-off and the consequent confiscation of gay pornographic films from a house at Chichiri in Blantyre.

The warning comes at a time when the country is battling to come to terms with the reality that homosexuality exists. Law enforcers have since launched a massive probe to hunt down prominent people who have been engaging in the illegal act.

A source within Malawi Police Service said the law enforcers started trailing the high profile homosexual

Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga: Police believe there are prominent people behind them

Mal high ind

Nkhaliranyanga has police claimed they did him five goats. Initially

MPs, priests implicated in gay sex

← PAGE 1

went there after a call for help, they discovered a lot of things that led them to suspects after a house they were allegedly meeting in was searched suspect that homosexual activities were taking place in the house," said

track them down," added the source.

She said police have heard that the group stopped operating from the house and has opened an office in Lilongwe.

"You will be surprised with the names that are coming up. According to people around the house, these people used to frequent the house and watch the DVDs and documents we found, one can easily conclude that these people were engaging in gay sex," she said.

Southern Region Police public relations officer Davie Chingwalu said on Wednesday the law enforcers had launched investigations targeting some prominent people who have been implicated in the homosexuality allegations.

Chingwalu said among the suspects the police are trailing are MPs, priests, academics and other professionals but he

→ PAGE 3

Police close in on gays

← PAGE 2

4 NATIONAL NEWS

Police tracking down gays

← PAGE 3

Homosexuality has become a household issue after the arrest of 20-year-old Chimbalanga and Monjeza, 26, following their public engagement at Chacha, Blantyre in December 2009, which led to their being charged with engaging in unnatural acts with women.

Some campaigners in both Malawi and outside the country say homophobic legislation is driving gays and lesbians underground, making it hard to reach them with information that could protect them from Aids.

"We are deeply concerned about this spate of homophobia across the continent."

In Uganda, Parliament passed a bill that would impose life imprisonment as the minimum punishment for anyone convicted of homosexual acts.

Having left Malawi in 2011, Tiwonge in RSA where “she” feels safer, with less stigmatization



Hate Speeches

Gays worse than dogs — Bingu

DII
16/05/2011

BY WYCLIFFE NJIRAGOMA

PRESIDENT Bingu wa Mutharika says Malawians should guard against Western influences such as homosexuality which he said lowered its practitioners to a level that is worse than that of dogs.

Mutharika made the remarks during a political mass rally in Lilongwe yesterday as debate on decriminalising homosexuality and lesbianism in the country gathers momentum.

"If, as human beings created in the image of God, we are failing to appreciate the difference between males and females and start marrying man-to-man or woman-to-woman, are we not worse than dogs that appreciate nature's arrangement?" Mutharika asked.

President Mutharika's comments came after Traditional Authority Tsabango and the officiating clergy at the rally condemned gay practices in their speech and prayer respectively.

"Have you ever seen a he-goat getting attracted to another he-goat? Or a male dog to another male dog? Think about these things," Mutharika said.

His description of gays echoes Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe

famous homophobic remark where he referred to gays as worse than pigs and dogs.

Earlier, Tsabango argued that it is ironic advocates of homosexuality have 'proper' sexual relationships themselves.

"If you look at their passports you will see that they have villages where they come from and parents who bore and raised them up. Why then should these people who came out of a man-woman relationship mislead Malawians by bringing unnatural and immoral practices?" Tsabango argued.

Ironically, last year Mutharika pardoned Malawi's first publicly declared gay couple - Steven Monjeza and Tiwonge Chimbalanga - amid pressure from the international community led by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

Weeks earlier, the courts had sentenced Monjeza and Chimbalanga to 14 years imprisonment for declaring their sexual orientation which is illegal in the country.

Recently, some civil society organisations have been lobbying for the decriminalisation of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals as one way of mitigating against the spread of HIV/Aids while at the same time providing care for affected people.



'TRAILBLAZERS' — Monjeza and Chimbalanga

From front page

Mutharika

BY ALICK PONJE

THERE was commotion in Lilongwe's Area 25 Township in the early hours of Monday after two men allegedly had carnal knowledge of each other in the house of one of the suspects.

Homosexuality remains a criminal offence according to the laws of Malawi and those found practising it face up to 14 years imprisonment.

Kanengo Police spokesperson Esther Mkwanda confirmed in an interview yesterday that law enforcers had arrested 19-year-old Cuthbert Kulemera and 33-year-old Kelvin Gonani on suspicion that they engaged in homosexual acts.

Police arrest 'gay' suspects

"Kulemera who is a student and Gonani who hails from Kafupa Village, Traditional Authority Kapeni in Blantyre but stays in Area 25, are suspected to have had carnal knowledge of each other and this did not please people around the area who

fear that their children might fall victim to Gonani," said Mkwanda.

According to the police spokesperson, Kulemera left home for a drinking spree at Nsungwi Trading Centre within the township, where he met Gonani who took the

student to his house.

"Kulemera revealed that he acted as a man while Gonani acted as a woman in their sexual activity when he was questioned by the police. We are still investigating the matter. We took the two for a medical assessment at

Kamuzu Central Hospital and we are still waiting for the results," said Mkwanda.

She added that the two suspects—who remain in police custody—will be charged with appropriate offences under the laws of Malawi once the police are

done with the investigations.

The first homosexual couple to hold a public engagement ceremony—that of Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steve Monjeza—received a lot of condemnation from both the public the court handed them a sentence of 14 years.

However, the punishment was overturned by late President Peter Mutharika who forgave the two homosexuals apparently after being pressured by United Nations (UN) Secretary General Ban Ki Moon who visited the country at the height of the saga.

There is a lot of resistance from the public and other sections including the clergy.

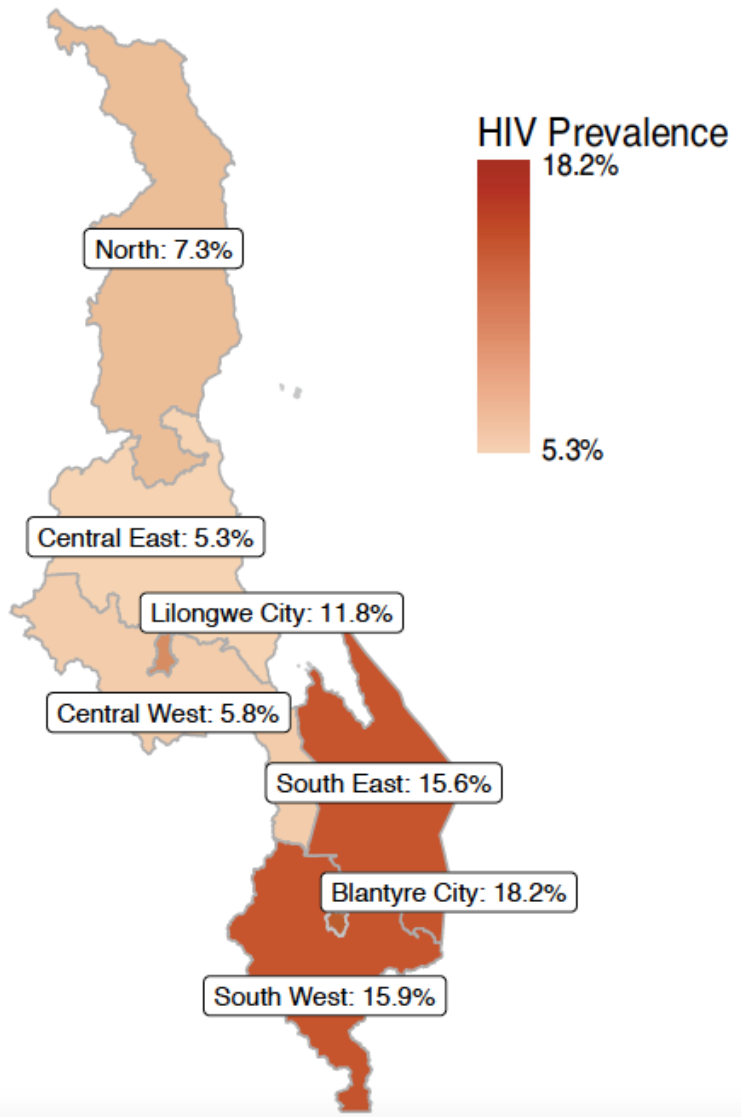
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HIV PREVALENCE AMONG ADULTS, BY ZONE

Among adults ages 15 to 64 years, prevalence of HIV varies geographically across Malawi, ranging from 5.3 percent in the Central East to 18.2 percent in Blantyre City.

Zone	HIV Prevalence	95% CI
North	7.3	5.8-8.7
Central East	5.3	4.0-6.6
Central West	5.8	4.9-6.8
Lilongwe City	11.8	10.4-13.1
South East	15.6	13.4-17.8
South West	15.9	14.0-17.8
Blantyre City	18.2	16.4-19.9



HIV Prevalence amongst MSM in Malawi

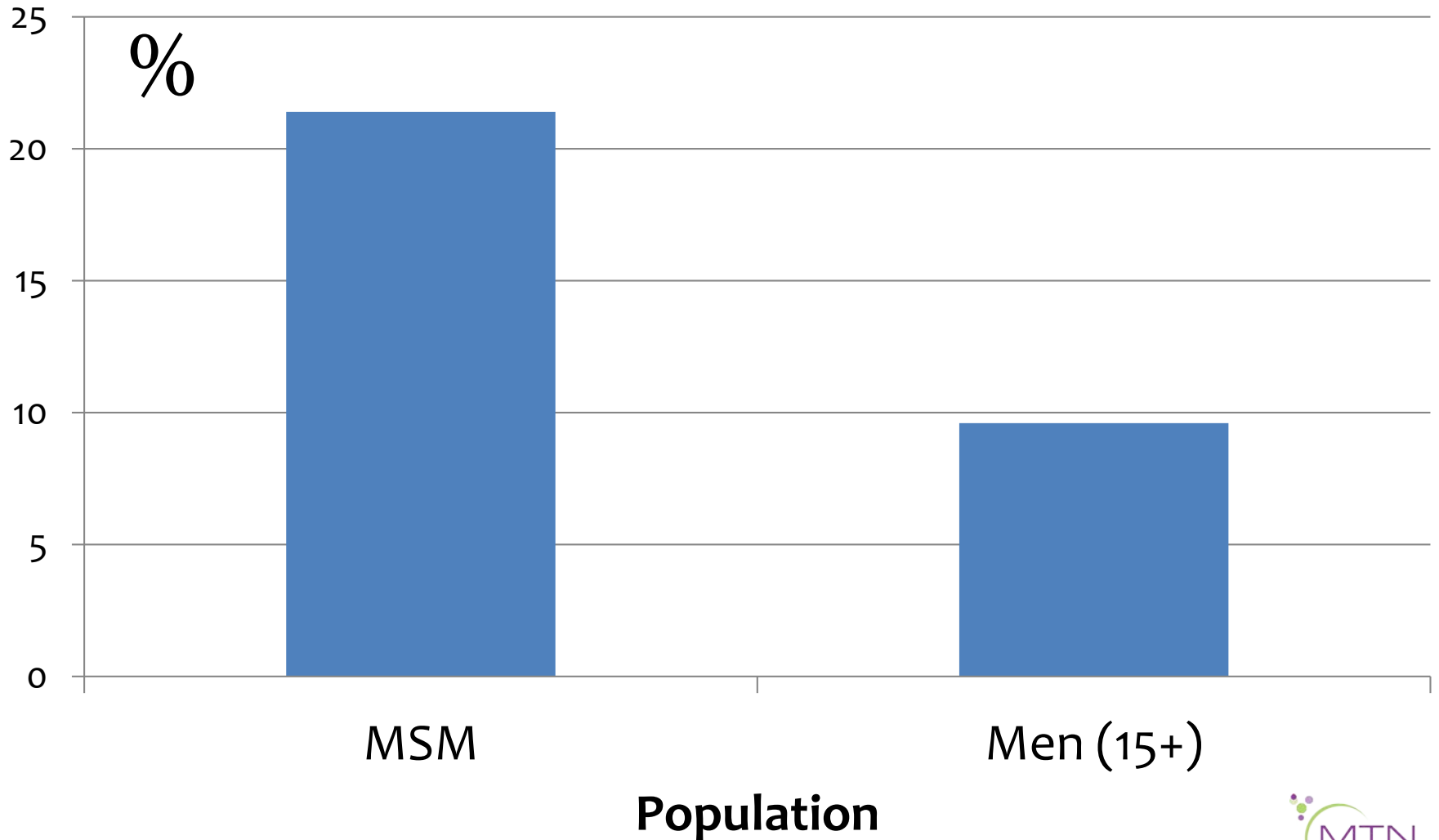
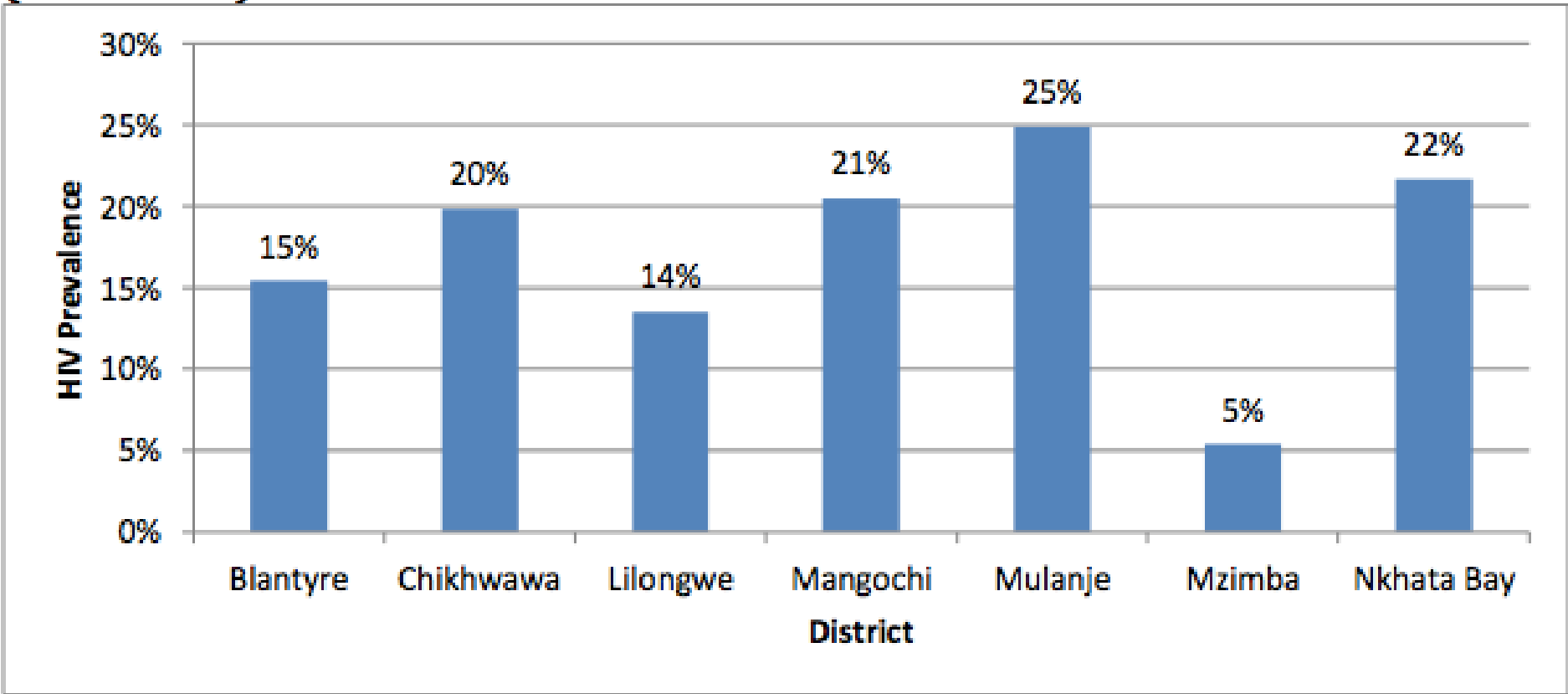


Figure 3: Estimated prevalence of HIV among MSM in selected districts in Malawi (2013-2014)



http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/country/documents/MWI_narrative_report_2015.pdf

MALAWI POPULATION-BASED HIV IMPACT ASSESSMENT

MPHIA 2015-2016

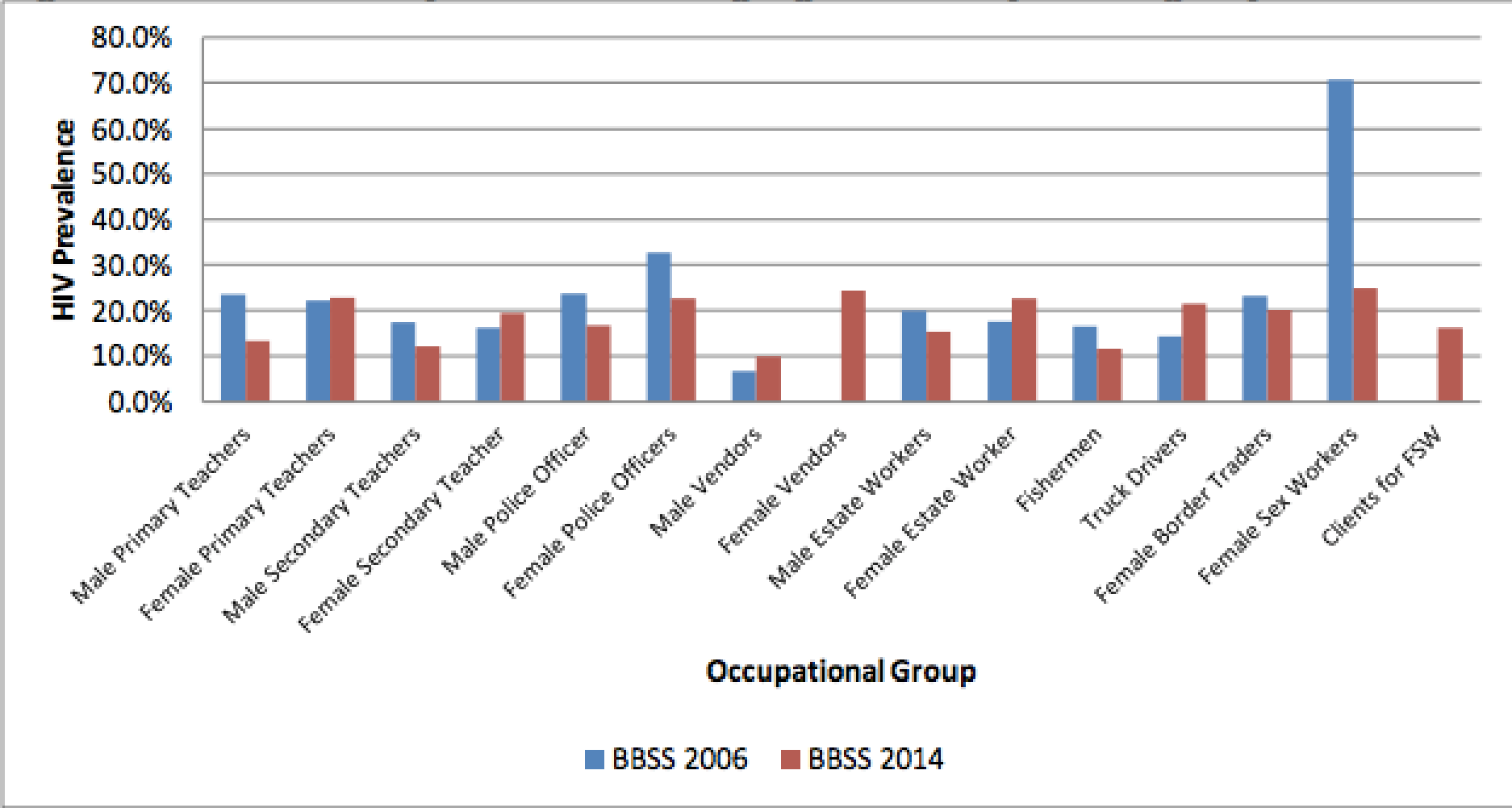
KEY FINDINGS

HIV Indicator	Female	95% CI	Male	95% CI	Total	95% CI
Annual incidence (%)						
15-49 years	0.39	0.15-0.63	0.24	0.03-0.46	0.32	0.16-0.48
15-64 years	0.48	0.20-0.76	0.25	0.05-0.46	0.37	0.20-0.53
Prevalence (%)						
15-49 years	12.4	11.4-13.4	7.5	6.8-8.3	10.0	9.4-10.7
15-64 years	12.8	11.9-13.7	8.2	7.5-8.9	10.6	9.9-11.2
0-14 years	---	---	---	---	1.6	1.2-2.0
Viral load suppression (%)						
15-64 years	72.9	69.9-75.9	58.6	54.3-63.0	67.6	65.0-70.2

95% CI (confidence interval) indicates the interval within which the true population parameter is expected to fall 95% of the time.

Viral load suppression is defined as HIV RNA <1,000 copies per ml of plasma among HIV-positive adults.

Figure 2: Trends in HIV prevalence among high risk occupational groups 2006-2014



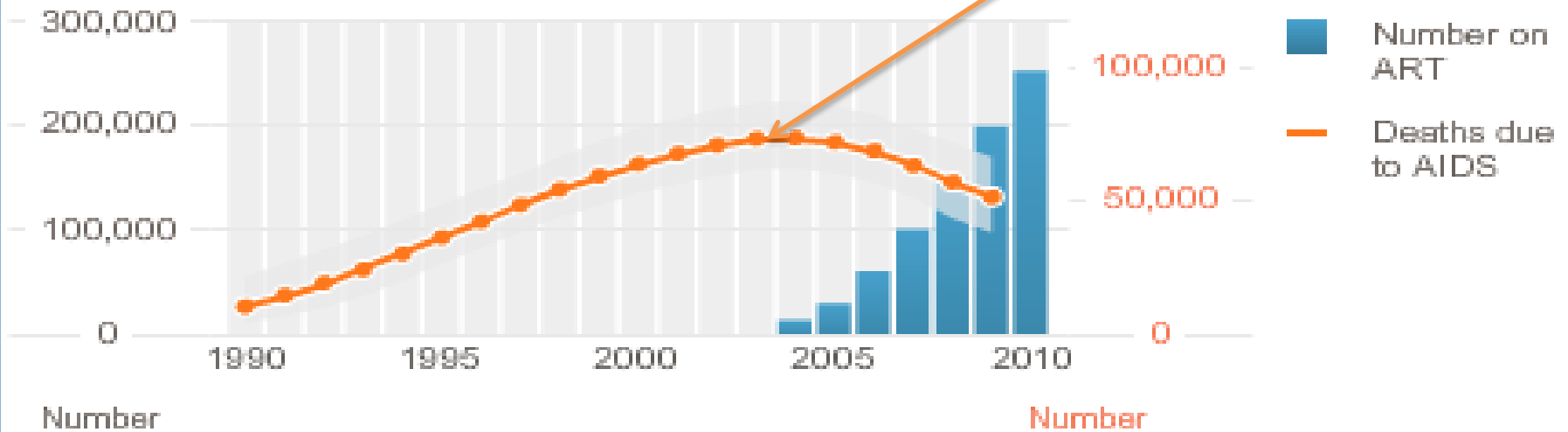
Biological and Behavioral Surveillance Surveys

HIV/AIDS Landscape in Malawi

- Incidence lower than 2005 → 09 → 16
- Prevalence lower
- Great strides in
 - HTC, PMTCT, ART roll-out
- Slow progress in addressing
 - FSW, **MSM**, Adolescents, young ones
- Need to focus on HIV prevention

Treatment and care in Malawi

Antiretroviral treatment scale-up vs. AIDS deaths



Mortality due to AIDS reached a maximum of about

75,000 in 2005

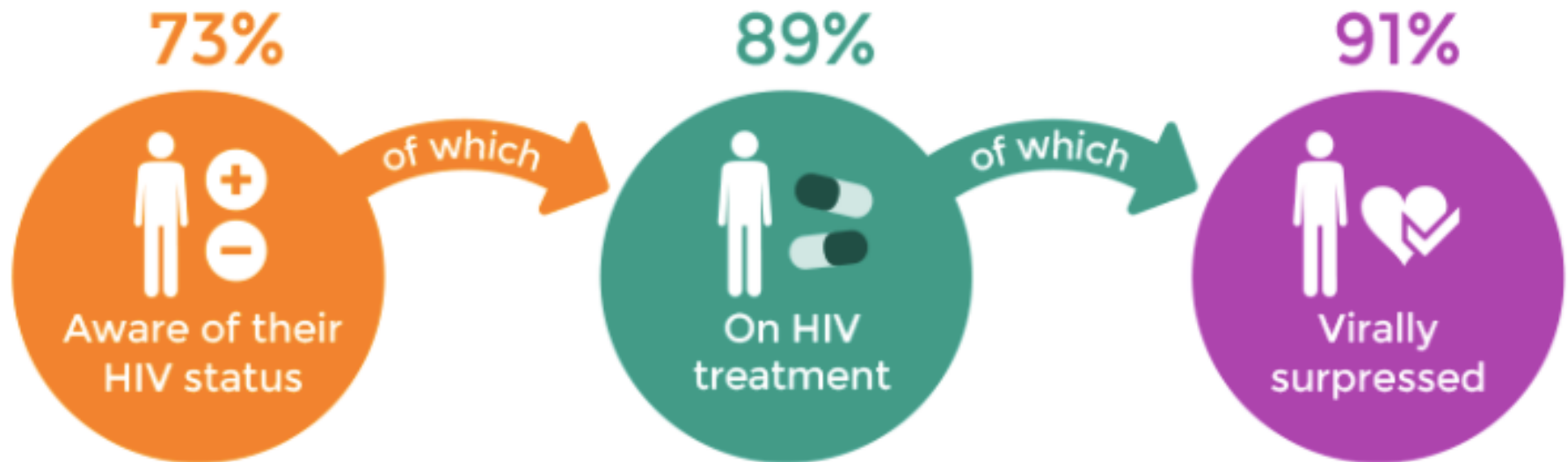
more than 870,000 of 980,000 now on ART

Ref: Palella et al., Declining Morbidity and Mortality among Patients with AIDS, NEJM, 1998
Harries et al., Scaling up antiretroviral treatment in resource-poor settings. Lancet. 2006
UNAIDS, Malawi AIDSinfo, Treatment and care, www.UNAIDS.org, 2010

Malawi is on the right path in several facets, but....

MALAWI

Progress towards 90/90/90 targets among adults aged 15-64



AVERT.org

Source: PEPFAR (2016) 'PEPFAR Latest Global Results'

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Key affected populations in Malawi

- **Women and HIV in Malawi**
- **Young people and HIV in Malawi**
- **Men who have sex with men (MSM) and HIV in Malawi**
- **Sex workers and HIV in Malawi**
- **Children, orphans and HIV in Malawi**

2010 Baseline Survey

- MSM are mostly young and relatively better educated. This could be a reflection of their more willingness to respond to the interviews than older perhaps less well educated.
- The majority have a slightly higher SES than general popⁿ
- Most in a relationship with a female partner as well (or married), most likely to be accepted by the society and avoid disclosure and stigma.

Some MSM marry women to fit into social norms

Leading a double-faced life remains a major challenge for the country's underground population of gays estimated at 40 000.

For three years, Watipaso has been dating a female nurse in Mzuzu.

However, he does not sound keen to marry her.

"I like my girlfriend because she makes me relate well with my family, but I am in love with my best friend, Gregory, who lives in Mangochi," he explains.

These arrests, hate speech and mob justice compel gays to have male and female sexual partners as HIV infections abound in their midst.

The secretive gay relations are "a recipe for disaster", says Centre for the Development of the People (Cedep) executive director Gift Trapence.

"Accepting and acknowledging that there are people leading a double life just to be seen to conform is the first step towards a holistic response to HIV and Aids," he says.

Experiences in developing the MSM cohort : HPTN - 075

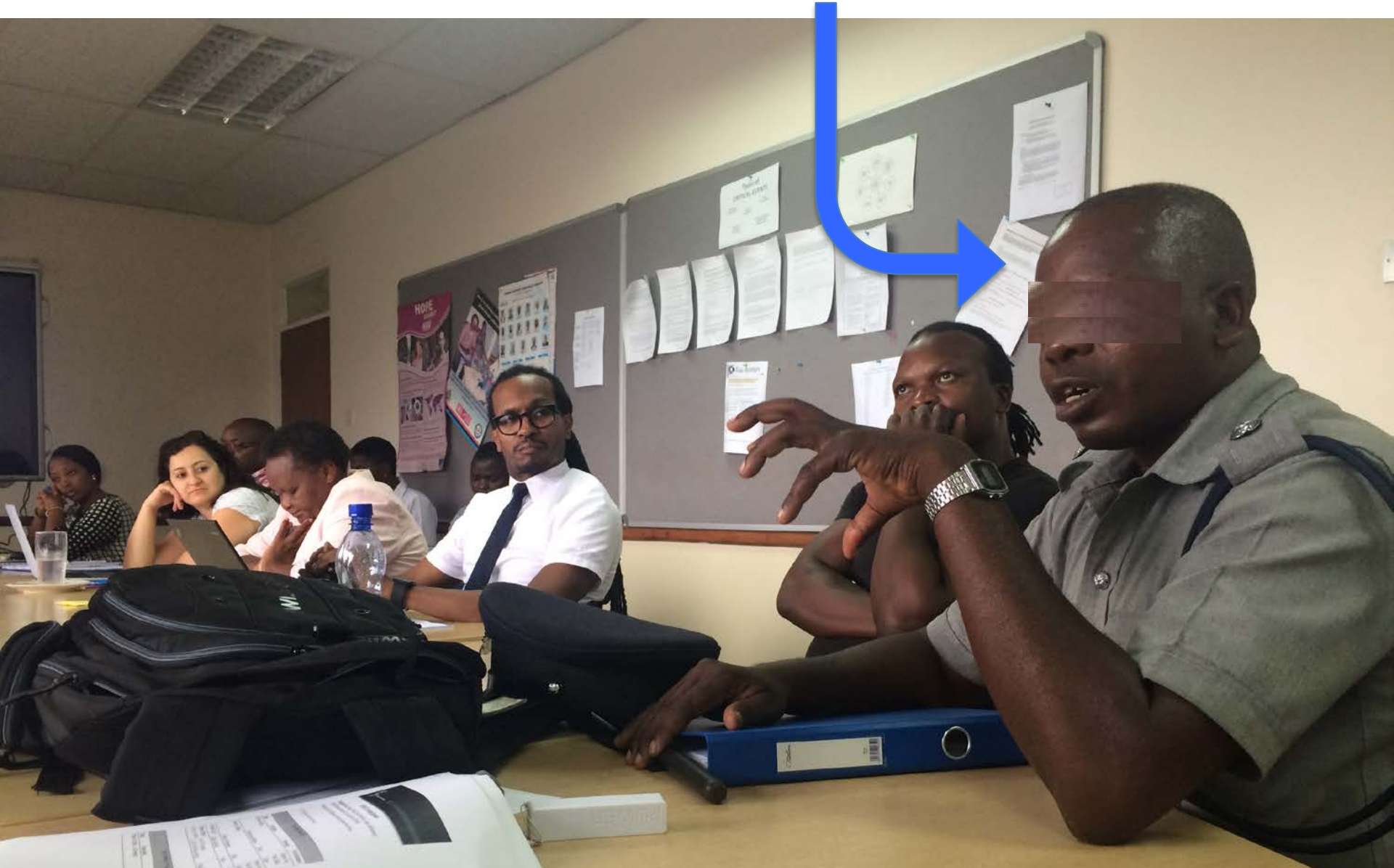
- This study aimed to determine the feasibility of **recruiting** and **retaining** men who have sex with men (**MSM**) in a multi-country prospective cohort study in preparation for HIV prevention studies in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

Incorporating key players in society on our Protocol Advisory Committee = **PAC: Police....**

- Senior police-man
- Hospital Administrator
- Blantyre city assembly representative
- Journalist
- Human rights lawyer
- School head-teacher

- Security of participants
- Institutional access
- The landlord (mayor)
- Fair reporting
- Marginalized population
- Marginalized population

Incorporating key players in society on our PAC: **Police....**



BLANTYRE CRS CAB

Name

Community

Representation

1. Anne Magola	Professional women
2. Levie Mwale	Government health workers
3. James Chitonde	Internal security (police)
4. Family Kaduka	CBOs
5. Francis M'bawa	Government health facility committee
6. Perpetua Malitowe	Teachers
7. Nicholas Pondeponde	Chiefs
8. Francis Chimenya	Adolescents/youth
9. McLoud Phiri	Former study participants
10. Brian Ligomeka	Media
11. Pr George Kukhala	FBO (faith based organizations)
12. Dunker Kamba	NGOs (Key populations)
13. Confidence Mnthengu	Young women
14. Mary Kamwendo	Business women

In the process of identifying new members for possible recruitment into the CAB to reflect upcoming studies (and to make the number 20).

Practical measures to minimize risk to our participants

Identification of the study

- Good and adequate safe meetings with potential ppt
- Studies housed under same roof as HTC and STI provision
- Study/service location well communicated to all the potential seekers
- Schedule follow up visits sparingly/spread per day
- One to one contacts with staff at clinic
- Oral (not written) Consenting in 075

Managing risk to participants

>>> HPTN - 075 Risk mitigation plan

- Responsibilities
- Consultations
- Monitoring staff/participant interaction

Managing risk to participants

>> Responsibilities

□ Ensured that:

- all study staff and indirect team had a full knowledge of the emergency reporting system
- Potential threats and vulnerabilities are discussed at the weekly meetings and how to mitigate them.
- PAC meetings were held quarterly to review safety concerns and emergency procedures, and plans that were in place.
- Ready to develop and implement plans for addressing identified problems if any.

Managing risk to participants

>> Consultations

Ongoing, dynamic engagement with:

- MSM community
- CEDEP bi-monthly and periodically
- HIV treatment centers (QECH, DREAM,....)
- Police
- Chiefs
- Key community gate keepers
- CAB
- PAC

Managing risk to participants

>> Monitoring staff interactions with participants

- Participants were advised to contact the Study Coordinator or Clinic Manager if they have concerns
- A call away was the PI, Clinic Manager, and POW,
>>>> available 24/7
- Random chats with participants on how they are being handled at the study clinic
- Staff signed confidentiality statements at recruitment and reminded of the same throughout study progress

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Strategies to identify participants: General best practices

- Referral system
 - Linkages to referral centres such as ART, HTC, STI and skin clinics (all within 100 meters of 075 clinic)
- MSM-friendly services
 - Inclusive even to those who didn't meet inclusion criteria
 - Must care about the person, not just the participant
- Retention activities
 - One meeting outside of Blantyre every quarter
 - Listen to concerns in an informal, non-clinic setting
 - Peer tracer

Strategies to identify participants

- Study preparation
- Staff Training
- Referral centers
- Holistic approach service provision
 - Key players: CEDEP, MSH, MSF, Pakachere.....
- Safety / social harm reports

Strategies to identify participants

PRE-SCREENING

- On and off-site general meetings
- Waiting area sensitization talks
 - OPD, ART clinic, Diabetes clinic, etc.



RECRUITEMENT

- Collaboration with CEDEP (peer recruiters)
- Former 075 participants
- Snowballing
- **Peer outreach worker**

Strategies to identify participants

CHALLENGES ANTICIPATED

- MSM are criminalized, but a key population
- Unstable MSM geographical dynamics
 - Residence, employment, phone numbers, relationships

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES BY PARTNERING

- Ensure security for participants: PAC, CAB
- Key MSM and HIV prevention community leaders
- MSH, CEDEP, Pakachere Drop-in staff, MSF clusters

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Gays dying to conform

Sexual minorities are living risky double life to conform to societal expectations, our contributor MERCY CHILONGO writes.

Call him Watipaso because he is usually resented by the people around him.

The 30-year-old has grown up suspected of being gay.

But it is no longer a suspicion. Watipaso lives a life of pretence to elude incessant disapproval from his family, friends, neighbours and onlookers.

His double life cost him jobs at a bank and security firm.

Despite opening up about his sexual orientation 15 years ago, he tells his story in whispers, afraid of being jailed.

"The rejection gays face everywhere we go makes me totally resent life," says the man who now works at a non-governmental organisation in the Northern Region.

Leading a double-faced life remains a major challenge for the country's underground population of one estimated at 40,000



Aunt Tiwo migrated to South Africa after being pardoned by Bingu wa Mutharika in 2011

in sexual relations with straight men.

The climate of fear worsens exclusion among the key population

Eric Samisa got arrested shortly after he appeared on a local television and asked government to decriminalise same-sex affairs or kill homosexuals.

Recipe for disaster

These arrests, hate speech and mob justice compel gays to have male and female sexual partners as HIV infections abound in their midst.

The secretive gay relations are "a recipe for disaster", says Centre for the Development of the People (Cedep) executive director Gift Trapence.

"Accepting and acknowledging that there are people leading a double life just to be seen to conform is the first step towards a holistic response to HIV and Aids," he says.

In the country, homosexuality attracts jail terms of up to 14 years.

In 2010, the late Judge Nyakwawa Usiwasiwa sentenced the first admitted gay couple—Tiwonge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza—to the

Important steps in progress

- The community aware that arrests, hate speech, and mob justice compel MSM to have both Male and Female partners in risky relationships
- The 2012 moratorium to halt arrests of MSM being adhered to (not fully yet)
- A movement to have sections 153 and 156 of the Penal code scraped off gaining ground, now on pending agenda of parliament
- **Prevent HIV transmission !**

Thank You

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Thank you



Key players :

- Participants
- Staff
- Stakeholders
- Funders
- Advisors

