

# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions in ASPIRE:

## A Zimbabwean Experience

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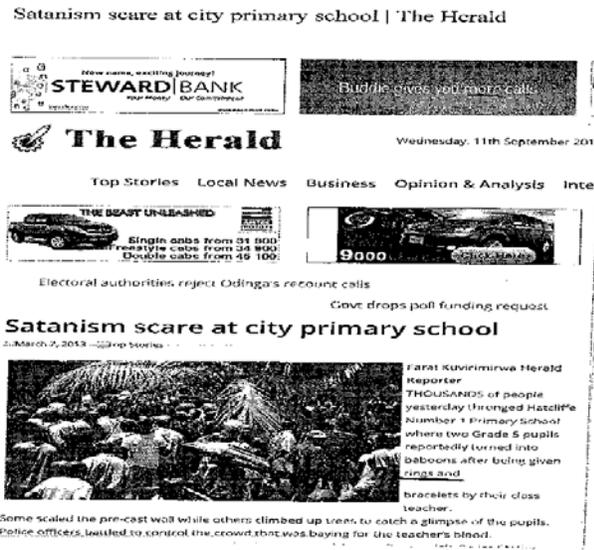


# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

- Medical practices and research in SSA are often a source of popular rumours about:
  - The deliberate, malicious creation and spread of deadly diseases such as HIV (Pool, Nyanzi & Whitworth, 2001; Stadler, 2003; McNeill 2009)
  - Sterility as a side-effect of various health products (Kaler, 2009),
  - Surreptitious , clandestinely inflicted sterility (Kaler, 2009),
  - Blood theft (Geissler, 2005) and the trade in or theft of body parts (Scheper-Hughes, 1996; Campion-Vincent, 2002).
- The South African experience.
- Malawi blood bank scenario.
- Sierra Leone: Ebola – “*a way to harvest organs and steal blood.*”
- ‘Satanists’ as the end users of blood or body parts. (Comaroff & Comaroff 1999; Nchito et al. 2003).
- These concerns reflect the intensity of spiritual insecurities, spiritual gullibility and growing occult practices in SSA in the modern era. (Ashforth, 2005) (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1999)

# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions in Zimbabwe

**Satanism scare at city primary school –**  
Two primary school pupils reportedly “turned into baboons” after being given rings and bracelets by their class teacher



# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions in Zimbabwe

Wednesday, May 22, 2013

**Zimbabwe miracle baby that was born after a 3 day pregnancy has died**

A BABY claimed to have been born after a “three-day pregnancy” following a “miracle” performed by a charismatic preacher, has died, it was reported on Tuesday. The baby boy, who was born on November 18 last year .... is believed to have died on Sunday.

# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions about the Vaginal Ring (VR)



# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions about the Vaginal Ring (VR) in ASPIRE

## VR function/properties

Used for Satanic rituals

Causes infertility  
Results in miscarriages  
or birth defects or  
infant death

## Effect on vagina/ cervix/uterus

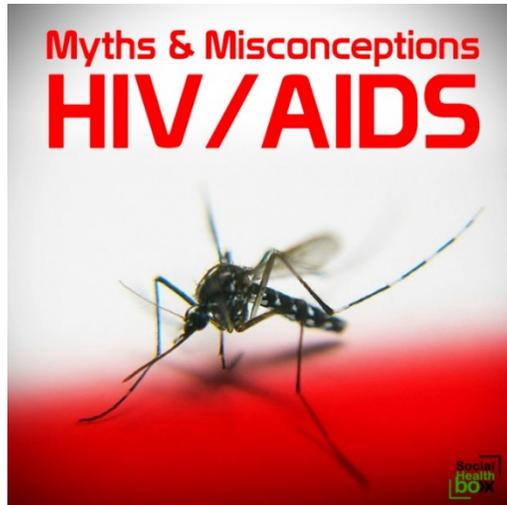
Uterus will rot, corrode,  
shrink,  
or develop cancer

Blocks menstrual  
blood flow

## Effect on sexual function

Tightens or loosens the  
vagina  
Increases sexual  
pleasure  
Decreases female  
libido  
Absorbs/steals sperm  
Leads to erectile  
dysfunction  
Blocks vagina – poor  
penile penetration

# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions about Blood, HIV and Study Participation



"Only wayward girls use condoms"



"You won't stop bleeding"

"You won't ever be able to have children"

# Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions about Blood, HIV and Study Participation

## Blood collection

Used for Satanic rituals  
Sold for a profit

Amount drawn –  
*“buckets of blood,  
dangerously high”*  
(concerns of anaemia)

## Reimbursement

Payment for blood  
Payment for sex

Too much - coercive  
Too little – guinea pigs

## Stigma

Participants labelled  
HIV+, using study as  
“cover” to collect ART  
Prostitutes  
Guinea pigs

Women are made to  
have sexual intercourse  
with HIV infected men  
so researchers can tell  
if ring works

# When did the Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions Occur?

- The vast majority occurred early on in the study - 2013.
- Became less or sporadic as the study progressed.
- Usually took place in the clinic waiting area, with family members at home and in the community at large.
- People likely to raise these rumours were the ineligible women, some partners/significant others, influential community members as well as other participants.
- Earlier on in the study, participants/communities believed these rumours, myths and misconceptions.

# Impact of Rumours, Myths and Misconceptions in ASPIRE



# Impact: Early Terminations

- Of the 91 early terminations in Zim, 18 (19.8%) were a result of rumours, myths and misconceptions.
- All were allegedly a result of problems related to the VR itself, contraception in ASPIRE, blood draws and study participation or the ring “causing infertility and sexual dissatisfaction.”
- All these 18 early terminations were influenced by partners and other significant others

# Impact: Social Harms

- One participant reported that her partner regularly put his fingers in her vagina to feel if she was still wearing the ring – this marriage ended up in a divorce.
- She had not fully disclosed details of the study to the partner.
- Another participant was assaulted by partner after he discovered that she had the VR and was failing to get pregnant “due to ring use.”

# Addressing the Challenge

**BUSTING THE MYTHS**



# Participant Engagement

- Between September 2012 and June 2015, we enrolled and followed up 678 participants
- Daily morning discussions / talks.
- One-on-one discussions.
- Adherence workshops/small group participant discussions
  - We conducted a total of 57 such workshops
  - Cumulatively, 620 participants attended these workshops
- We held a total of 6 Retention meetings
  - > 80% attendance of enrolled participants
  - Small group discussions/break out sessions
  - Male break –out sessions
  - Drama group
- Laboratory Tour.  
Informative laboratory video.



# Participant Engagement



Site used creative approaches to engage participants and talk about the study

Motivational activities



# Laboratory Tour



- To dispel myths and misconceptions surrounding the handling/processing of bio-specimens in ASPIRE.
- To give an insight of what happens to study bio-specimens from collection, processing, testing , storage and destruction.
- To empower the representatives with the adequate knowledge concerning specimen collection and storage.
- Two participants from each site were randomly selected to take part in the lab tour.
- One CAB member also participated to allow the discussion of bio-specimen management to be continued in the community.

# Male Involvement

- A very effective strategy
  - Male involvement meetings with male-based organisations
  - Male break-out sessions
  - Male involvement in community activities
  - Couples counselling and testing.
  - Cumulatively approx. 40% of male partners attended these male-oriented activities



Staff, CAB and male partners - Clean-up campaign



# Community Engagement and Education

- Activities ranged from meetings, media sessions to social responsibility activities.
- Social responsibility days - a way of giving back to the community – health education, free health checks, fun and games, clean-up campaigns and dispelling of rumours, myths and misconceptions.
- Partnered with CAB, stakeholders, civic organizations and government departments
- Our motto – **MTN: Madzimai Tsvakurudzo Ndeyedu!** – *Ladies, this research is ours!*



# Conclusion

- In ASPIRE - we employed several and dynamic strategies to address the rumours, myths and misconceptions that arose during study implementation.
- **Accrual**
  - Initial target was 600, surpassed by 13% to 678
- **Adherence**
  - Very good
  - Quarterly IoR site metric reports
- **Retention**
  - Maintained high visit-to-visit retention

# Thank you



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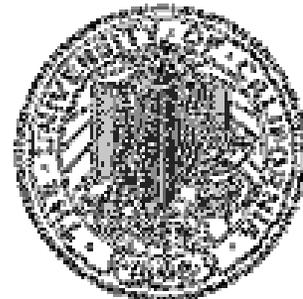
- The 678 study participants and their partners for their participation and dedication.
- The research communities
- CABs
- Ministry of Health and Child Care
- Zimbabwe National Family Council
- Chitungwiza and Harare City Health Departments
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- UZ-UCSF
- The Protocol Management team and at the MTN Leadership Operations Centre



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