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Title: Call for joint effort to protect children

By Gabi Khumalo

Pretoria - A study by the Health Sciences Research Council (HSRC) has recommended a concerted effort by all stakeholders to minimise the risks facing children due to sexual abuse and HIV at community level.

The 2008 study, titled "The Health of our Children in South Africa: Results from a national HIV prevalence population survey" found that more than one in ten males and one in seven females aged 12-14 had previously had sex.

It found that most of the young males tended to have sex with partners in their own age, while 26.4 percent of females aged 12-18 had recently had sex with males five or more years older than themselves.

This puts the females at risk for HIV at an early age because older male partners are more likely to be HIV positive, the report noted.

On the positive side, HSRC CEO, Olive Shisana who handed over the report to Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi on Thursday said among the males 15-18 years, who were sexually active and had more than two sexual partners, were using protection.

"Condom use among those aged 15-18 is reported to be high with 92.1 percent among males and 83.9 percent among females," Dr Shisana said.

The study noted that although parents were seen as an important source of information on sexual matters and discussing sexual abuse with children, they were less likely to discuss HIV transmission or prevention.

It recommended that national mass media communication programmes focus on complementing school-based programmes and that government's HIV and AIDS campaign include a focus on children.

Dr Motsoaledi said the information in the report comes at a critical point to address research and development, which is point 10 in the department's programme.

"We should not shy away from research findings, even if they highlight shortcomings and challenges.

"This report will also make an important contribution to the midterm review of our National Strategic Plan for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections for 2007-2011. - BuaNews

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