

The Four-fathers of HIV: Ignorance, Impoverishment, Inadequacy and Inequ



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Abstract

Botswana has the second highest HIV prevalence rate in the world just behind Swaziland at 24.80%. With one in four people being infected the Botswana Government has made many efforts to reduce the prevalence rate such as providing universal access to antiretroviral treatment for citizens and promoting free contraception at key locations. Despite the effort the prevalence persists, and at the university level men and women are still being infected. Women are considered an especially vulnerable group for many reasons including discrimination in terms of employment, credit, healthcare, land and inheritance. The objective this research is to try to find links between university women and reasons for their vulnerability in contracting the disease. The goal is to see if there is any correlation between knowledge or in many cases popular beliefs, and sexual behavior.

Introduction

HIV and AIDS have been perceived as a biological disease in the Western society. However, in the Sub-Saharan Africa, where the disease is most prevalent, it is not only a biomedical issue, but it is also contributed by cultural and economical problems. Looking at the trends of HIV and AIDS prevalence over the years, the age range continually increases, on the higher end because more people are receiving treatment and prolonging their life, but also on the younger end because children, girls in particular, are starting to contract the disease at a younger age (Ababa, 2008). Throughout sub-Saharan Africa, young women of ages 15-24 are twice as likely to be living with HIV/AIDS than young men (UNICEF, 2004). Through comprehensive surveys, the knowledge of university age women can help identify any existing patterns as far as sexual behavior, as well as confirm current knowledge or popular beliefs about HIV and how it is spread.

Methods

Twenty-question surveys were administered only to women on the University of Botswana campus. Women were approached as long as they were not with males, in groups over four people, or in a busy state. The University of Botswana educates about 15,000 students a year both male and female. With such a large student population, it is difficult to find private areas to administer surveys, but it is even more difficult to get students to agree to take the time to change their location all for a survey that they see no immediate benefit from. For this reason, surveys were administered all over campus with little regard to privacy. Places such as cafeterias, laundry rooms, queues for the library, and any tables outside of classrooms were approached to administer the survey. The only privacy guard that was given was the knowledge that many of the questions on the survey were of the personal nature and that they were confidential and anonymous.

Results

Seventy-nine surveys were distributed the results are shown below.

18 YRS	19 YRS	20 YRS	21 YRS	22 YRS	23 YRS	24-37 YRS
7.6%	11.4%	17.7%	30.4%	8.9%	13.9%	8.9%

Figure 1. The age range is 18-37 years. The average age is 21.5 years.

Two questions are used in conjunction to show how often couples use condoms versus how effective they believe condoms to be. The first question is "Does your partner use condoms?" The answer options are never, sometimes, most of the time, and always. These answers are only applicable to those who are sexually active, therefore non-condom users are identified as celibate or abstinent. Celibate refers to those who have previously engaged in sexual activity, but are no longer sexually active, where as abstinent refers to those who have never been sexually active. The non-condom users section refers to the percentage of women who are celibate or abstinent and therefore they did not have a response for this question. The table below shows the percentages of each answer.

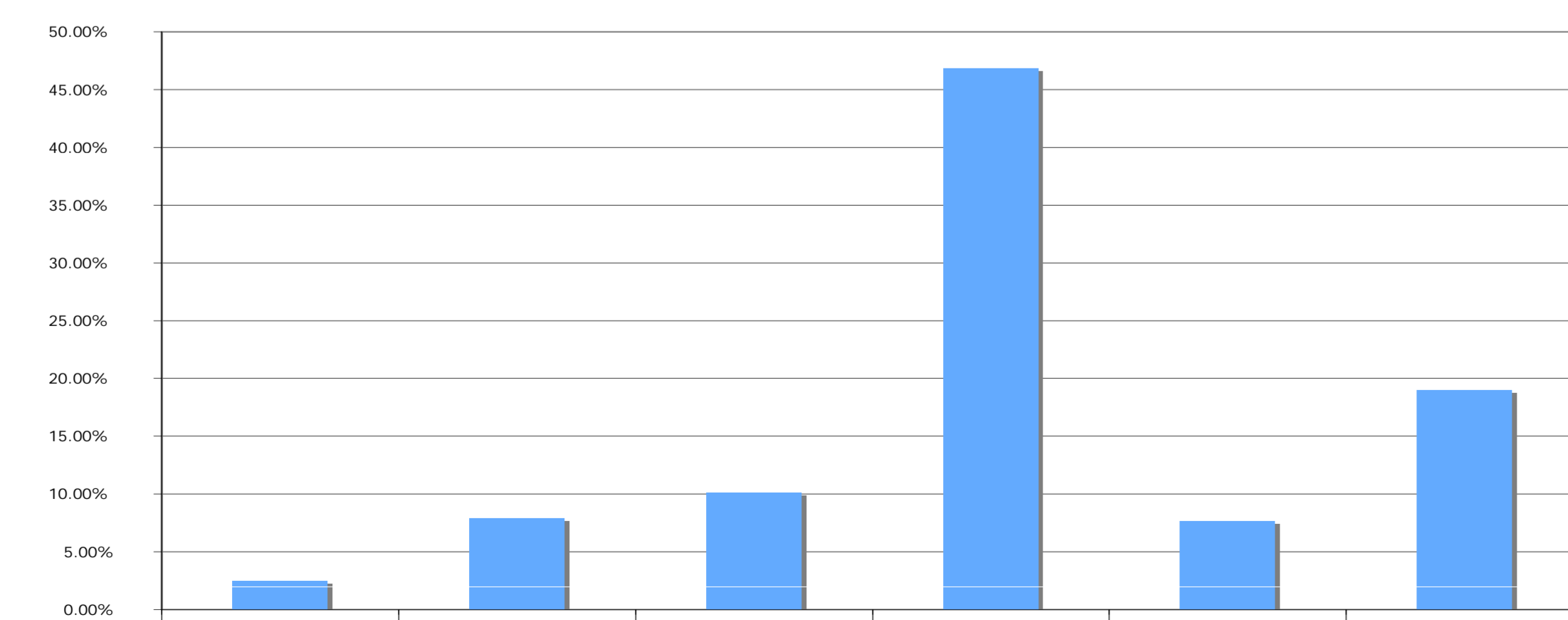


Figure 2. Does your partner use condoms? Non-condom users refer to those who are celibate or abstinent.

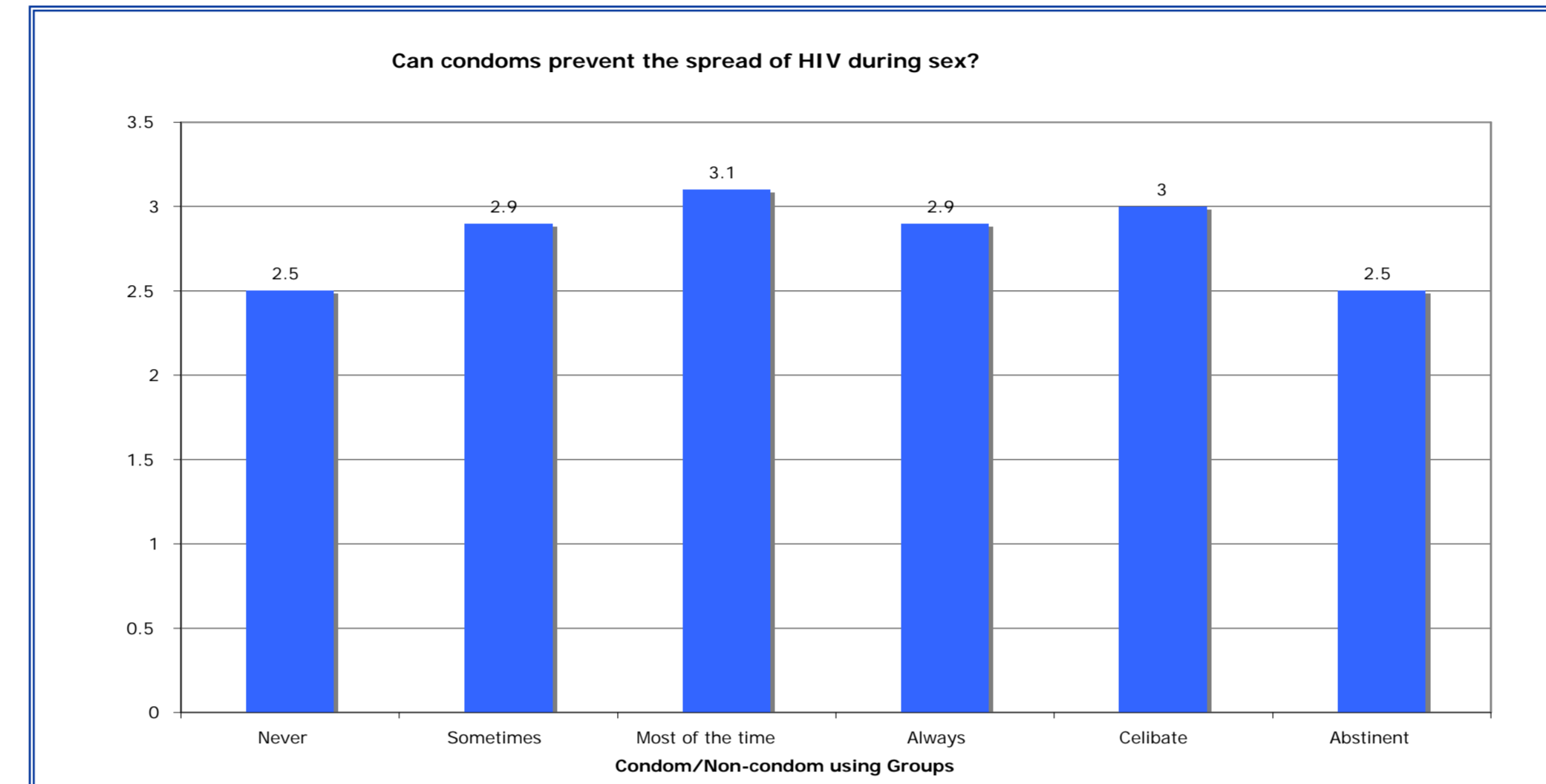


Figure 3. The graph shows how effective condoms are for each condom or non-condom using group.

The table shows that those who never use condoms believe condoms are only effective some of the time, where as people who use condoms most of the time believe that condoms are effective most of the time. It is interesting that although 46.8% percent of the women surveyed claim they always use condoms, that they still only believe they work most of the time (score of 2.9) where as the 2.5% who never use condoms believe that condoms only work sometimes (score of 2.5). While the difference in behavior is great, the difference in belief is minimal.

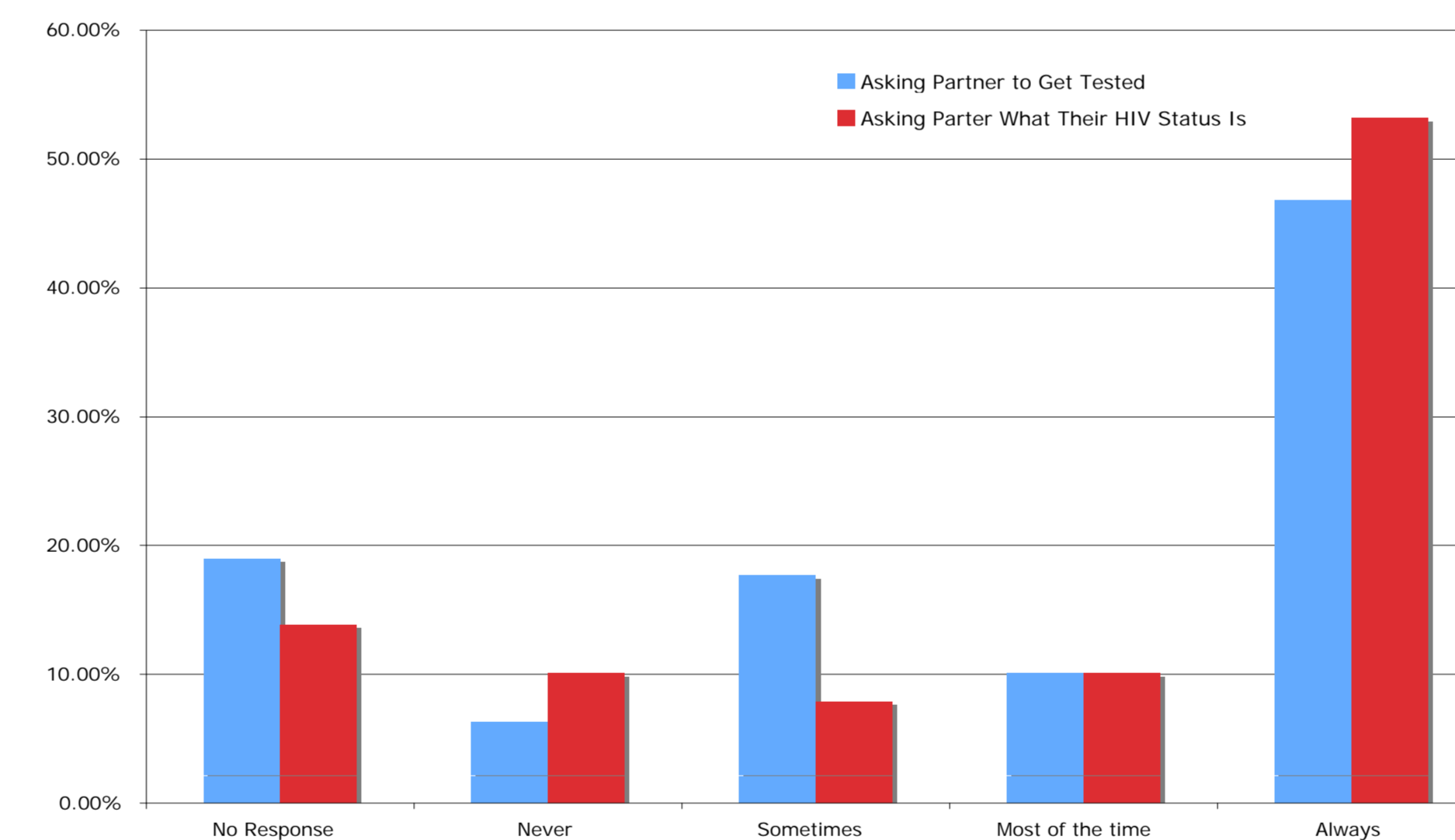


Figure 4. A comparison of how often the subjects ask their partners to get tested versus how often they ask what their partner's HIV status is.

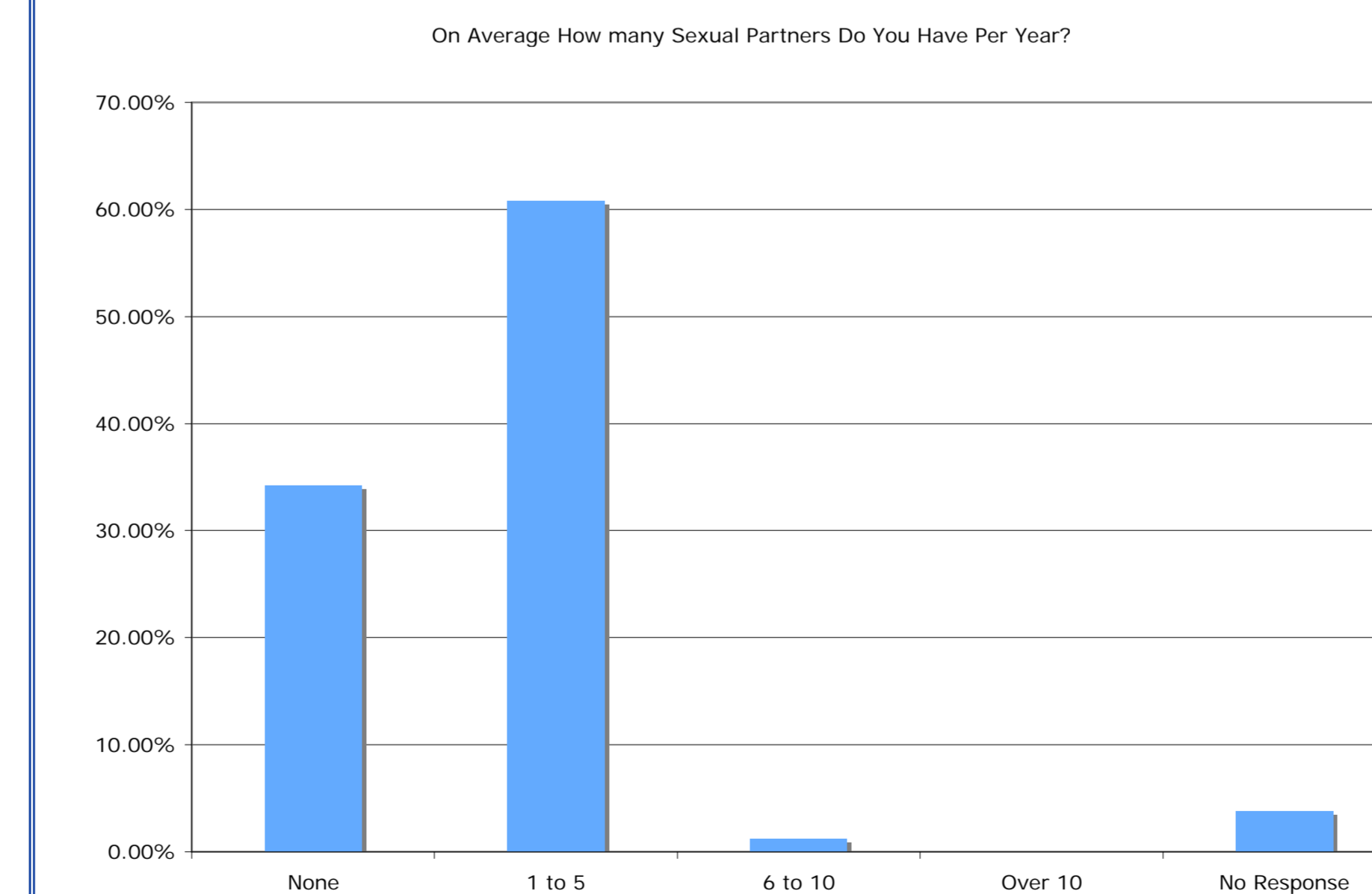


Figure 5. The subjects were asked to estimate the average amount of sexual partners they have per year.

Figure 5 shows that the two main responses for the average amount of sexual partners a year was none, or one to five. 34.2% of the women chose none, despite the 26.6% who are either celibate or abstinent. Also, many women made it a point to write in their answer as one, despite the fact that one to five was an option. It is possible that because of the social protocol of sharing answers between friends, that many women did not want to choose the one to five option, and instead chose to write in one that way there was no confusion.

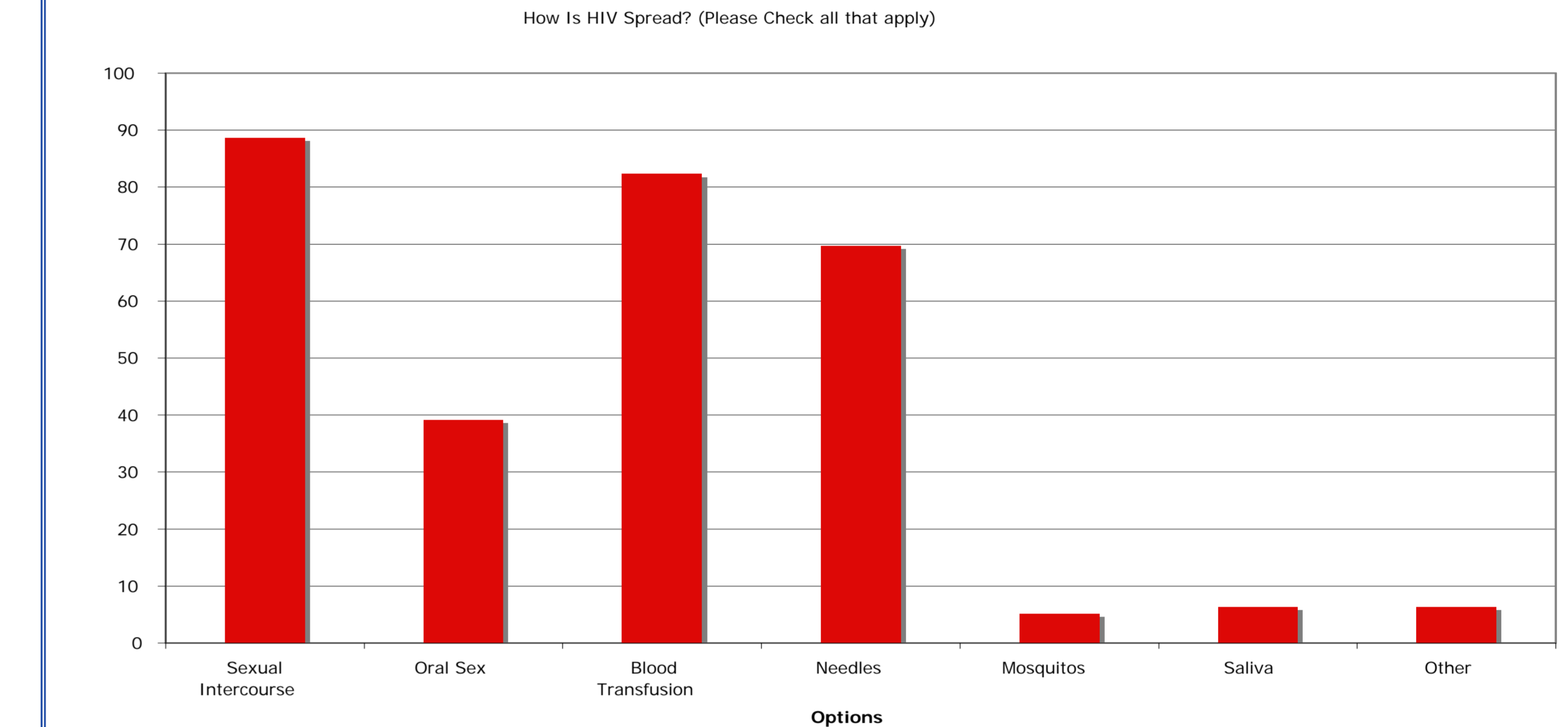


Figure 6. Subjects were asked to check all options that could spread HIV.

For the purposes of this study certain options were not included, although many that selected other wrote in mother-to-child-transmission. Botswana has made many efforts to increase the knowledge and awareness of HIV, including implementing sexual education in primary schools. Despite their efforts however, less than 90% selected sexual intercourse as a mode of HIV transmission.

Discussion

At the average age of 21.5 years old, young women who attend the University of Botswana are a risk group for being infected with HIV. The spread of HIV seems not to come from outlandish sexual behavior such as multiple sexual partners, but from more subtle means. The effectiveness of condoms is questionable across the board, and this is seen in the fact that less than half of the women consistently use condoms with their partners. As far as these women protecting themselves from the disease, HIV is very stigmatized and therefore makes it difficult for them to discuss the topic with their partner. This is seen in the fact that only half of the women ask their partner what their status is, and also only half ask their partner to get tested. Many of these women do not know their own HIV status, which would make it difficult to ask their partner, and ultimately protect themselves. While more in depth studies are needed to out-rule promiscuity as the main source of HIV for this age group, in this study it does not seem to be a leading cause. In fact many of the women surveyed, 26.6% to be exact, are not engaged in sexual activity at all with 18.9% of them being abstinent. While efforts to educate the young have been enacted, it would be beneficial to have campaigns promoting condom use, HIV testing, and eye-opening facts about sex and HIV. Many students here at the University of Botswana don't make it a personal goal to learn everything there is to know about protecting themselves from HIV, but with effort information can be made easily accessible and even annoyingly available. Knowledge is power, and being in a vulnerable at risk group for HIV, these women need to be empowered.

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