Voluntary Medical Male Circumcision (VMMC): Appraising Media Coverage

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26 September 2012
VMMC – in the eyes of the media

↑ Proven beyond reasonable doubt as scientifically viable method of HIV prevention

↑ Widely accepted among communities that perform circumcision traditionally

↑ Safe and relatively cheap procedure

↓ Misconceptions and behavioural issues – decreased risk perception

↓ Resistance by communities that do not traditionally circumcise

↓ Legal and ethical issues - e.g. informed consent

↓ Political leadership and sustained commitment

↓ Safety and risk associated with procedure

↓ Dispute around the level of prevention

↓ Socio-economic factors surrounding the epidemic – funding, pharmaceuticals, governance, etc
Media coverage of VMMC – positive trend
Media coverage of VMMC – positive trend

- Comprehensive
- Well researched and accurate
- Positive about VMMC as HIV prevention intervention
- Clear indication of MC as partial protection
- Emphasis on awareness of HIV status
- Through explanation of the benefits – both for men and women
Media coverage of VMMC – negative trend
Media coverage of VMMC – negative trend

- Misconception
- Bias
- Missed opportunities to frame MC in broader intervention aspects
- Omission of key messages
BAD NEWS TRAVELS FURTHER  FASTER!

(WHO Study showed that articles with negative reporting had 2.9% repeat rate)
Media coverage of VMMC – Broader HIV Reporting

- Scientific and technical
- Political + economical + developmental
- Preachy and/or cautioning messaging
- Widely spread and emotionally distressing
- Social and cultural taboos
- Awkward - extremely private issues gone public
- Lack of coordination among stakeholders in sensitising media
- HIV fatigue
Media coverage of VMMC – Game Changers

- Coordinated media/communication strategy - as in programmes
- Active engagement of the media – Proactive over reactive
- Mutually beneficial media partnership – (minimise adhoc)
- Repackaging messaging – (e.g. reconceptualising masculinity)
- New marketing strategies – make even the most boring scientific concepts appealing
- Simplify information to encourage accuracy
- Work on misconceptions – listen to public concern and respond
- Scale-up of social and behaviour change communication – media can not do it alone
Thank you!