

Sex sells AIDS prevention message at conference

by Michel Comte

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From Yahoo News

Lessons in erotic art, pornography and talking dirty have been a spicy addition to the global AIDS forum here as campaigners try to make safe sex, well, sexy.

A workshop on finding a woman's G-spot, a display of explicit artworks and studies showing that great sex can be pivotal in halting the spread of HIV have been hugely popular at the 16th International AIDS Conference.

"Sex sells," commented one of over 100 delegates who crammed into a tiny room for a seminar entitled "Where is the Pleasure in Safe Sex?"

"People are tired of hearing about the doom and gloom of AIDS. This workshop seemed fun," explained another.

Wendy Kerr is a worker with the Pleasure Project, which has helped health educators in Cambodia to break the shyness barrier in talking about sex and enabled priests in Mozambique to counsel couples to have better sex so that husbands do not stray and possibly become infected with HIV.

Twenty-five years of AIDS activism has neglected that "sex is fun," Kerr said. "Safe sex doesn't have to be dull."

Her crew compiled a list of dozens of groups worldwide pushing the Kama Sutra to teach prostitutes how to pleasure clients without penetration and other tricks, and showed British film directors how to use condoms in porn movies "in a sexy way," Kerr said.

A 15-minute movie clip at the workshop showed women how to apply condoms on penises with their lips and other sex stunts.

Alexandra Lutnick of San Francisco-based St. James Infirmary promoted questioning prostitutes about their sexual or work satisfaction in counselling to help them open up, then share safe sex practices with them.

Many assumed they have to be victimized to access social services. Some 70 percent in a poll had never told health care providers about their jobs fearing they would be shamed, she said.

"If people feel good about sex, it minimizes risk (of getting sexually transmitted diseases)," said activist Neha Patel.

But cultural and language barriers to chats about sexuality in South and Southeast Asia, where such topics are "taboo" with a heavy emphasis on morality, make linking it to public health problematic there, she said. As well, some sex terms are not easily translated into all languages, she said.

Men often refuse to use condoms because it reduces their pleasure, commented a male observer. "The way men think about condoms is a big barrier," Wendy Kerr conceded. One person offered to share tricks taught to prostitutes in Montreal to make condom use more fun for men, but mostly the issue was left unresolved.

Lebogang Ramafoko of non-profit Soul City in South Africa said a May poll of hundreds of African men found that they would seek out daring sex with women other than their wives because they dared not talk to their wives about sex.

"All said: 'I can't have this discussion with my wife about pleasure, what makes me happy and experimentation,'" she told AFP. "This inability to talk about sex is fueling the spread of AIDS."

A new study presented at the conference found that men would likely welcome HIV-thwarting creams, called microbicides, that now being tested to stop AIDS.

"Using condoms is like eating wrapped sweets ... (but) gel use added a certain sweetness to sex," said one unnamed participant in the study which unfolded in South Africa, Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania.

But some men worried that if women equally enjoyed sex with the gel, they may seek out more sexual partners, according to researcher Charlotte Watts of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine in Britain.