What We Found
Somali Women’s Initiative Sexual Health (SWISH)

HIV infection among Somalis is increasing in Minnesota. In 2012, more Somali-born people were diagnosed with HIV/AIDS than any other ethnic group. Many Somalis living in Minnesota do not know they are infected and are not getting the medical treatment they need.

The University of Minnesota and Midwest Community Development, Inc. launched a project to explore HIV risk and sexual behaviors in Somali women. This report, designed for the Somali community, reviews what we found in our interviews with 30 local Somali women ages 18-40.

Who were the 30 Somali women we interviewed?
- Average age was 32 years
- Over half were married
- All were Muslim
- All were heterosexual
- Average time living in U.S. was 12 years

Main Findings

Communication
- Sexuality was considered private and only discussed with one’s husband

HIV Testing
- Most women (86%) had been tested for HIV

Condoms
- Many women had used condoms for pregnancy prevention
- Very few used condoms for disease prevention

Sexuality
- Vaginal intercourse was seen as the only allowable form of sex
- Women stressed the importance of the Qur’an’s teachings which encourage husbands to satisfy their wives sexually
- More Somali women had pain with sex than American-born women

Circumcision
- Almost all women had been circumcised but wouldn’t circumcise their daughters
- Those who had Pharonic circumcision were more likely to have pain with sex

Education
- Women had limited knowledge about how HIV is spread
- Women were willing to learn about HIV AIDS in a classroom with other women and men

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