Sex workers **still** HIV**-resistant**

Late last year, a newspaper article on HIV resistance

among sex workers in Nairobi, generated a

lot of interest. Reactions to the finding were published

in the letters to the. editor forum. Since

then, I have received many telephone calls at the

research clinic of the University of Nairobi from

members of the public wanting to know more

about this issue.

We have established that many people still

doubt the HIV resistance claim among the Majengo

commercial sex workers. We, therefore,

feel there is need to give the public more information.

The research at our clinic is a joint venture between

the University of Nairobi, several foreign

universities, and the Commercial Sex Workers

involved. It was established to study the patterns

of sexually-transmitted diseases and how they

relate to HIV and Aids. We also offer quality

STDs treatment, HIV and Aids opportunistic infections

management and promote condom use.

The research has been going on for the past 11

years and the issue of HIV resistance is one among many observations at the clinic. To the women, the clinic also acts as a club house where

they get the latest information on STDs, HIV and

AidSs, condoms, attention for their medical complaints

and counselling. They also hold meetings

on their general welfare or on methods of negotiating

safer sex with their clients. This interaction

helps us to monitor their disease progression and

to learn how to assist to cope with their problems.

They are not "used as research materials"

as sever!!l callers thought. .

About 40 out of 2,000 women who have been

followed for more than seven years and who

"ought" to have contracted the virus due to their

occupation remained disease free. Since they do

get other STDs from their work and they do not

choose their sex clients (average six, condom use

70 per cent, HIV seroprevalence among STDs

transmitters core groups' >30 per cent), then it

was demonstrated that this could not be by

chance.

These sex workers have been found to be HIV negative by any test currently known. However, this conclusion was reached from their level of natural exposure. Nobody innoculated them with the HIV virus as some people may have thought.

Currently, high-level research focusing on this

issue is being carried out and abroad. Preliminary

data suggests that the women could have

white blood cells (lymphocytes) that clear or kill

any HIV virus contracted. That clearing or killing

factor has not been isolated.

Several people have called the clinic asking to

be transfused with blood from these women.

Most of the callers seem to have done their home

work and have challenged points and observations.

Studies are being carried out to answer this

question.

Our research is published in major local and

international medical journals and presented at

international conferences. We are ready to assist

the public to get up to date information on HIV

management.

Dr Joshua Kimani.

STD/HIV Project.

Nairobi University