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Trends. Controlling AIDS Through Control

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Acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) poses an increasingly dire threat for politics, economics, culture, and the very social fabric of an expanding list of countries. To help meet the threat, some public-health officials have posited the benefits of controlling AIDS through control--i.e., by reinforcing through public-education programs the belief that people are in control of their own behavior and can, therefore, control the incidence and prevalence of AIDS.

There are some problems with such an approach. Individuals who already are positive for a variant of the virus that is thought to cause AIDS may experience combinations of guilt, anger, anxiety, and depression contributing to a lowered quality of life for the time they have left. Some may act out psychological conflict involving these emotions by purposefully engaging in risky behavior with others who may not be infected.

Individuals who may not be HIV positive may develop the same emotional combinations by finding that they are, indeed, less in control of such powerfully reinforcing behaviors as sex and the self-administration of drugs. This development may lead to risky behavior through believing that, since control has been lost at least momentarily and one's risk status has increased, perhaps lethally, one may as well continue to engage in risky behavior. In this way, one is in control by not being in control.

Public-health data on the psychological calculations involved in risky behavior may well be viewed as suggesting that different public health education approaches will be effective with different population segments. In this regard, the quest for control may be both a boon and a bane for human welfare. (See Brown, T. (2000). AIDS, risk and social governance. *Social Science & Medicine*, 50, 1273-1284; Buchanan, D., & Cernada, G. (1997). AIDS prevention programs: A critical review. *International Quarterly of Community Health Education*, 16, 295-313; Klepp, K-I, et al. (1997). AIDS education in Tanzania: Promoting risk reduction among primary school children. *American Journal of Public Health*, 87, 1931-1936; Valente, T. W., & Bharath, U. (1999). An evaluation of the use of drama to communicate HIV/AIDS information. *AIDS Education & Prevention*, 11, 203-211; Wren, P.A., et al. Preventing the spread of AIDS in youth: Principles of practice from 11 diverse projects. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 21, 309-317.) (Keywords: AIDS, Control, Epidemic, HIV, Public Health, STD.)