

A new study has revealed that more than 35 per cent of women living around fishing communities believe HIV can be got from mosquito bites.

The study, conducted by International Organisation for Migration Uganda, said: "About 38 per cent of women and 35 per cent of men were not aware that one cannot get HIV through mosquito bites. This shows that while most respondents demonstrated knowledge of HIV/Aids, significant pockets of misconceptions still abound."

This, according to Ms Rosemary Kindyomunda, the national programme officer HIV/Aids at United Nations Population Fund, is one of the reasons contributing to the high prevalence rate in fishing communities which stands at about 35 per cent.

"This is a social economic problem because these people do not value life and having HIV is a normal thing. As a result, they can easily get involved in risky behavior that can lead to getting the disease," Ms Kindyomunda said.

Aware of risk

The study also showed that 97 per cent of the people were aware that they were at a higher risk of HIV infection mainly because they engage in unprotected sex.

Eighty six per cent of those interviewed have tested for HIV, which shows a positive attitude towards testing and counselling despite the increasing prevalence rates.

Speaking at the launch of the study over the weekend, Dr Bernadette Ssebadduka, the HIV officer at International Organisation for Migration Uganda and a researcher in the study, said one of the reasons for the careless attitudes towards HIV is the low life expectancy.

"When they go out to fish, they are faced with the possibility of death so when they are on land, they engage in risky behavior. They also have access to a daily disposable income and after drinking alcohol, the next best thing to do is spend on women," Dr Ssebadduka said while presenting the findings of the study.

Despite the worrying status of the fishing communities, Ms Lillian Tatwebwa of Uganda Aids Commission, said Uganda as a country has not done well to curb the increasing prevalence rate.

"There is limited access to HIV services for people in fishing areas and where they are accessible; there are non-friendly human resource so people deliberately refuse to access the services," she said.