

HIV transmission in Africa in ways other than heterosexual sex

Sir: Recent articles in this journal¹⁻³ point to the evident, yet much resisted predominance in Africa of HIV transmission modalities other than heterosexual sex. These papers highlight an unpleasant reality: deference to unsound yet established theories distorts medical research. Non-evidence-based considerations result more often than we might like to think in persistent, even stubborn adherence to theories with obvious shortcomings.

The Gisselquist/Brewer papers undercut the reigning heterosexual transmission theories, which have been used to justify circumcision as an HIV preventive⁴. In a disturbing reflection of the widespread yet unjustified acceptance of the African heterosexual transmission theory itself, circumcision proponents have persisted in recommending the procedure despite evidence casting doubt on the efficacy^{5,6} of such an approach to preventing HIV. With regard to this peculiar cultural practice masquerading as a medical procedure, a parallel process has occurred of cultural biases trumping scientific rationality.

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