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DISEASE

H.I.V. infections drop sharply in Zimbabwe



Defying expectations in a region devastated by AIDS, rates of H.I.V. infection in Zimbabwe have fallen precipitously in the past decade.

In 1997, an estimated 29 percent of adults were infected. A decade later, only 16 percent were.

The basic explanation is simple, according to a new study published online last week by PLoS Medicine: Zimbabweans had less extramarital sex.

Seeing other people die was the “dominant” reason for that, according to the study, which was based on large demographic surveys and interviews with more than 200 Zimbabweans.

The second biggest factor was the collapse of the economy under President Robert Mugabe. Men said that left them less able to buy sex or pay for multiple girlfriends. Sexual norms also changed, the study said. DONALD G. MCNEIL JR.