

Harvard researcher: pope's comments on condoms supported by scientific evidence

ROME - While a top medical journal criticized Pope Benedict XVI's remarks that condoms increase the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, a Harvard-based researcher said the pope's comments are supported by scientific evidence.

An editorial prepared for the March 28 edition of the British medical journal *The Lancet* said the pope made "an outrageous and wildly inaccurate statement about HIV/AIDS" during an interview with journalists on a flight to Cameroon March 17.

"The pope has publicly distorted scientific evidence to promote Catholic doctrine on this issue," said *The Lancet* editorial posted online before the publication date.

Pope Benedict had said, "One cannot overcome the problem with the distribution of condoms. On the contrary, they increase the problem."

He said halting the spread of HIV could only come about through "a humanization of sexuality" that includes abstinence outside marriage and fidelity within marriage, as well as the continued care of those struck by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, the head of a Harvard University research center said the center had found "no consistent associations between condom use and lower HIV-infection rates, which, 25 years into the pandemic, we should be seeing if this intervention was working."

Edward C. Green, director of the AIDS Prevention Research Project at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, told *National Review Online* March 25 that "the best evidence we have supports the pope's comments."

"There is a consistent association shown by our best studies, including the U.S.-funded 'Demographic Health Study,' between greater availability and use of condoms and higher - not lower - HIV-infection rates," he said.

Mr. Green said when an individual uses a condom thinking it will reduce the risk of exposure to HIV that person may also take part in riskier behavior and take greater chances than one would take without condoms, for example, by having multiple and concurrent sexual partners.

Fidelity or reducing the number of sexual partners in one's lifetime "is the most important single behavior change associated with reduction in HIV-infection rates," he said. Male circumcision is the other major factor in reducing the risk of HIV infection, he added.