

The Soul City Institute Regional Programme



Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partnerships in Southern Africa

A Ten Country Research Report



Soul City Regional Programme Partners

Choose Life (Populations Services International – PSI)

Botswana



Phela Health and Development Communications

Lesotho



Pakachere Malawi



Nweti Mozambique



Desert Soul Namibia



Lusweti Swaziland



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All photographs are of characters in Soul City programmes and do not represent any living person.

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The regional programme uses the power of mass media (television, radio and print) and social mobilisation and advocacy, to drive social change in each country.

Executive Summary

Southern Africa remains the epicentre of the global HIV and AIDS epidemic, with an HIV-prevalence rate of approximately 11%. This compares to an average of 1% in the rest of the world. This means that about 40% of people living with HIV and AIDS are in southern Africa. Studies show that even in the current era of education and treatment around HIV and AIDS, prevention remains a major challenge. In 2006, a Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) think tank meeting in Maseru, Lesotho, identified Multiple and Concurrent sexual Partnerships (MCP) between men and women – with low consistent condom use and in the context of low levels of male circumcision – as key drivers of the HIV pandemic in southern Africa. In direct response to these findings, the Soul City Regional Programme (SCRP) is embarking on a three-year HIV-prevention campaign, which aims to reduce new infections in the region by focusing on reducing MCP.

The SCRП, which started in 2002, works with partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in ten southern African countries: Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The programme aims to promote health and development through health communication and capacity building. The regional programme uses the power of mass media (television, radio and print) and social mobilisation and advocacy, to affect social change in each country. The SCRП is research based and focuses on the issues, concerns and practices of the target audience. All SCRП interventions are evaluated.

The research upon which this report is based was designed to inform the development of a campaign and campaign materials aimed at reducing MCP. Research was conducted in each of the ten countries.

The primary aim of the research was to gain insight into the audience's understanding, attitudes and practices around sexual relationships in the context of HIV prevention.

Research Methodology

A total of 179 focus groups and 116 in-depth interviews were conducted in the ten countries. Separate group discussions were held with men and women of different ages living in a variety of different contexts, both urban and rural.

Further in-depth interviews were conducted with men and women of all ages who were, or had been, involved in MCP.

The interviews were recorded electronically, translated and transcribed verbatim. The data was analysed thematically within the audience segments in each country before the country reports were written.

Meta-analysis of the country-specific findings was performed by identifying common and unique themes in each country before writing this report.

Research Results

Meta-analysis of the country results showed marked consistency between all ten partner countries in terms of perceptions, attitudes and practices around sexual relationships across gender and age. However, in certain countries some issues were more pronounced than others, and there were some differences in how respondents presented the issues.

Forms of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Research participants reported several different forms of MCP.

Steady Partner and other 'side' partners

In all countries respondents talked about a relationship where a person has a steady or 'love' partner and other partners. The 'other' partners are often kept secret and the relationship exists to satisfy sexual, material or emotional needs.

Intergenerational sexual relationships

These were explained as relationships where young people¹ – especially girls – get into sexual relationships with older men ('sugar daddies'). In a few instances, relationships between older women and young boys were also reported. Young people were said to engage in these relationships for material gain driven by peer pressure to acquire various high-status items and by poverty.

Transactional sexual relationships

Most of the MCP had monetary or material benefits attached. This was especially prominent in the cases of 'sideline' relationships and intergenerational relationships where research showed that female partners generally became involved in such relationships for material benefits. Research participants classified sex work and 'one night stands' in this context.

Polygamy

The institution of polygamy was discussed in the context of culture and social norms. Participants talked about polygamy as a cultural institution that allows multiple partners. Men in particular use the practice of polygamy to justify other multiple relationships.

¹ Generally, the age range of participants in this research was 15 years and above. The terms 'youths' or 'young people' in this report refer to respondents in the age group 15 – 25 years. 'Adults' refers to those above 25 years. In Tanzania, however, the youth respondents included 30 year olds.

The term 'multiple concurrent sexual partnerships' is used to define a situation where partnerships overlap in time, either where two or more partnerships continue over the same time period, or where one partnership begins before the other terminates. A sexual partnership is considered to be concurrent in surveys if a person reports having two or more sexual partners in a month.

Reasons for Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Participants reported a range of reasons for their involvement in MCP.

Dissatisfaction in relationships

Many participants talked about being sexually dissatisfied with their 'steady' or 'love' partners. Men and women discussed looking for variety, sexual adventure and specific physical characteristics in additional partners.

Respondents generally spoke of a lack of communication between partners on sexual issues in relationships. This lack of communication between partners contributes to sexual dissatisfaction.

Participants identified physical abuse, domestic discord, emotional abuse and neglect, and financial neglect by a spouse as reasons for seeking out other partners.

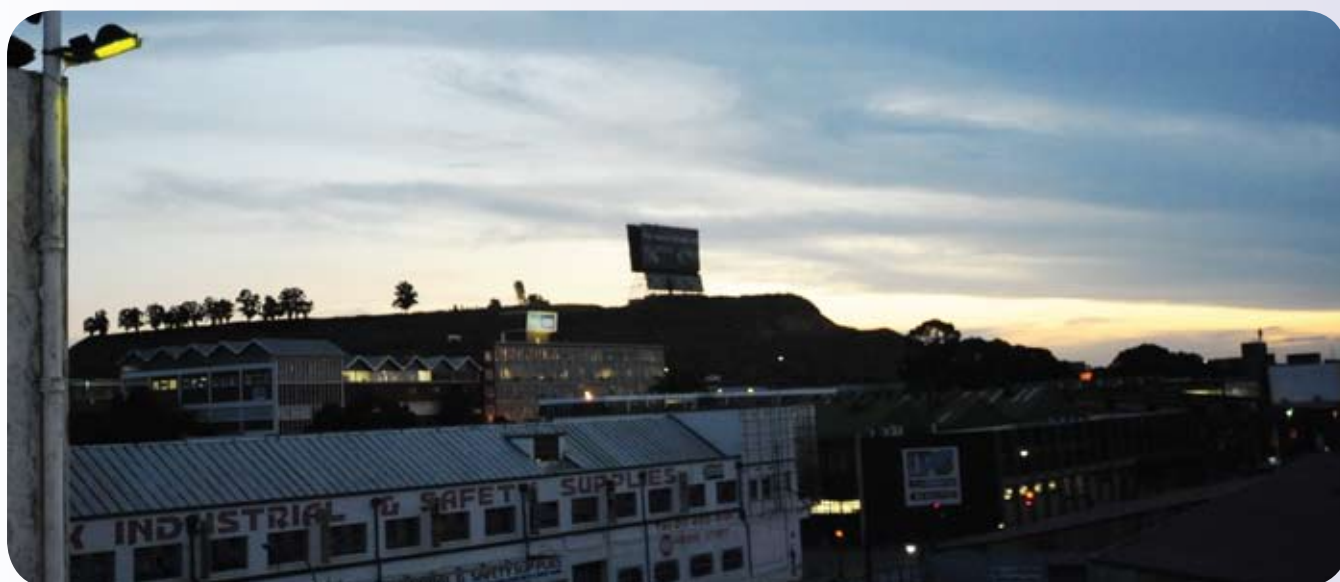
Culture and social norms

Participants claimed that cultural norms encourage men to have more than one sexual partner. Communities often celebrate men who are in relationships with more than one partner and condemn women who do the same.

Cultural norms further require that women submit to men's authority. Respondents identified how strict socialisation ensures that people accept cultural norms, values and practices that promote MCP.

Money and material possession

Interviewees spoke of poor people becoming involved in MCP in order to survive. Other people have multiple relationships to get money for luxuries.



Alcohol

Alcohol was identified as a contributor to MCP. In general, increased sexual activity was reported in bars. Participants said that when one is drunk one has to have sex. Participants also said they are more likely to have sex without a condom when they are drunk.

HIV and AIDS

Knowledge about HIV and AIDS

Participants are knowledgeable about HIV and AIDS, though this knowledge can be superficial. People generally know how HIV is transmitted and how to prevent transmission, but this knowledge does not necessarily inform different sexual practices.

Inconsistent condom use

The knowledge of condom use as a preventive measure also did not match with the practice of consistent, correct condom use. The fact that people 'trust' their long-term sexual partners means that they do not consistently use condoms in medium- to long-term relationships.

Fatalism

Many participants were fatalistic about contracting HIV, saying that they were resigned to becoming infected: saying that 'everyone will die anyway'.

Summary

Overall research findings reveal common reasons for multiple concurrent partnerships among people in the ten countries of this study. Most of these reasons are driven by gender inequality and cultural and social norms that create a context for MCP. Transactional sex and alcohol also play an important role. These findings will be the basis for a region-wide campaign implemented locally in the ten countries.





1 Introduction

This integrated report was based on meta-analysis of ten country-based, target-audience, qualitative research reports. The studies were conducted by the SCRP partner organisations in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Partner organisations in each country conducted a qualitative research study as part of a process that will inform local and regional interventions on HIV prevention in the next three years. The primary aim of the research was to explore the views of youths and adults on multiple and concurrent sexual relationships as one of the key drivers of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa.

About 40% of all people living with HIV and AIDS are in the SADC region. Approximately 37% of all new infections in 2005 occurred in this region.

1.1 Background

It is estimated that 39.5 million people worldwide are living with HIV and AIDS. Of these, 63% are in sub-Saharan Africa. People under the age of 25 years account for half of all new HIV infections worldwide. Approximately 6 000 people are infected with HIV every day.² In the SADC region the adult HIV prevalence rate averages 11% compared to a 1% prevalence rate globally. This means that about 40% of all people living with HIV and AIDS are in the SADC region. Approximately 37% of all new infections in 2005 occurred in this region.³

A SADC Think Tank meeting in Maseru, Lesotho in May 2006, identified multiple and concurrent partnerships by men and women with low consistent condom use – and in the context of low levels of male circumcision – as key drivers of the HIV epidemic in southern Africa. Further drivers are:

- male attitudes to sex and male sexual behaviour
- intergenerational sex
- gender and sexual violence
- stigma
- lack of openness
- untreated Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

The SADC Think Tank report concluded that these factors, in the context of high population mobility, wealth inequalities, cultural factors and gender inequality, explain the high HIV prevalence in the region.

² UNAIDS (2006)

³ SADC Think Tank Report 2006

Following this meeting, a SADC Regional Consultation on Social Change Communication for HIV Prevention was held in Swaziland in October 2006. It was recommended that MCP reduction be a key focus for social-change communication interventions in each country and in the region for the next five years.

1.2 Soul City Regional Programme HIV Prevention Research Process

Following these developments, SCRCP embarked on a three-year HIV-prevention campaign across ten countries. The campaign is aimed at reducing multiple and concurrent sexual partners and will include mass media communication, social mobilisation and advocacy.

The campaign is based on a three-stage formative research process:

- A research-design workshop for nine countries⁴ was held in May/June 2007. Contributions from each country ensured that the research was consistent in all countries and at the same time considered local contexts.
- Following this, each of the ten countries conducted qualitative target-audience research.
- The ten detailed country reports were then meta-analysed to produce this integrated report. The aim was to identify common and unique themes in the region and in each country to inform the regional HIV-prevention campaign.

1.3 Research Objectives

The overall aim of the country-based research studies was to gain insight into the audience's understanding of, attitudes to, and practices around multiple and concurrent relationships in the context of HIV prevention.

Specifically, the study aimed to:

- explore the audience's knowledge and understanding, perceptions, attitudes and views on multiple and concurrent partnerships
- assess audience risk perception with regard to multiple and concurrent partnerships and HIV and AIDS
- explore audience practices around, and motivation for, being involved in multiple and concurrent partnerships
- explore the influence of culture and social norms on multiple and concurrent partnerships.

⁴ Tanzania came on board after this research-design workshop but followed a similar research-design process.

The Soul City
Institute for Health
and Development
Communication
Regional
Programme has
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campaign across
nine countries.

1.4 Research Methodology

The number of groups and individuals interviewed, the age range of the groups and the specific questions in discussion guides varied across the ten countries to suit different local contexts. However, the following common themes were explored in the field work following a similar discussion guide.

- Relationships in the community
- Forms of MCP in the community
- Reasons for engaging in MCP
- HIV risk perception
- Culture and MCP
- Sex and MCP

A total of 179 Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) – each with 9-12 participants – and 116 In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with individuals were conducted in the ten partner countries.

Focus Group Interviews

The FGIs were conducted with men and women in urban and rural areas and in informal settlements in South Africa, on farms and mines in Zimbabwe and in semi-urban settlements in Lesotho. In Zambia and Zimbabwe separate groups were conducted with married and unmarried people.

In Zambia, Malawi and Swaziland participants were further grouped into categories of people who may be more susceptible to HIV infection such as truck drivers, migrant workers, cross-border traders and uniformed personnel. These individuals were interviewed separately.

In Tanzania, data was collected among people aged between 15 and 30 from two study sites (Iringa, an urban, and Morogoro, a rural district) that were selected because they are medium and high HIV prevalence areas.⁵

A total of 179 Focus Group Interviews – each with 9-12 participants – and 116 in-depth Interviews with individuals were conducted in the ten partner countries.



⁵ Iringa region has an HIV prevalence of 18.2% while in Morogoro region prevalence is 7.2%.

Table 1: Focus groups conducted by age and sex.⁶

Country	15-20	20+	15-20	20+	Total
	Females		Males		
Botswana	4	3	4	2	12
Lesotho	2	4	2	4	12
Namibia	2	10	3	7	22
Malawi	6	8	5	8	27
Mozambique	3	6	3	6	18
South Africa	5	11	4	10	30
Swaziland	2	8	2	8	20
Tanzania	2	3	3	2	10
Zambia	1	7	1	7	16
Zimbabwe	1	5	1	5	12
Totals	27	65	28	59	179

In-depth Interviews

IDIs in all countries except Namibia were conducted with people who have multiple sexual partners. The personal experiences of MCP were documented. The participants interviewed were men and women from rural and urban areas.

Table 2: In-depth interviews by age and sex

Country	15-20	20+	15-20	20+	Total
	Females		Males		
Botswana	4	-	4	-	8
Lesotho	1	1	1	1	4
Namibia	-	-	-	-	-
Malawi	2	7	2	7	18
Mozambique	3	3	3	3	12
South Africa	-	6	-	4	10
Swaziland	-	12	-	12	24
Tanzania	6	7	7	6	26
Zambia	-	4	-	4	8
Zimbabwe	-	2	-	4	6
Totals	16	42	17	41	116

Country Research Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were thematically analysed. In all countries but Tanzania ATLAS.ti computer software was used to analyse the data. In Tanzania NUD*IST computer software was used. Themes that emerged from the data and conceptual categories within the researchers' understanding of social change were used as a framework for the reports.

⁶ Note that there are some overlaps in group segmentation. The table attempts to present the closest common segments.

Meta-analysis of Ten Country Reports

Before writing this integrated report, a team of three researchers meta-analysed the ten country reports. Using both ATLAS.ti and manual analyses, the researchers identified specific themes in each report and then analysed across all countries to identify common and unique themes. FGI and IDI findings were analysed separately.⁷ Thereafter, researchers compiled a list of themes that emerged from the FGIs and was confirmed by IDI findings. Case studies based on selected IDI transcripts were written up to illustrate some of the themes emerging from the FGIs.

1.5 Challenges in Analysing the Reports

Because different countries selected different age categories and other characteristics for groups, only two common age categories (youth and adults) could be meaningfully used. This made it difficult to consider categories such as marital status across the region.



⁷ All countries except for Swaziland, Malawi and Tanzania presented FGI and IDI findings separately.

2 Research findings

This section presents the research findings in two categories. The first category describes the most common forms of MCP described in the region and the second presents the participants perspectives on why concurrent partnerships occur.

The forms of concurrent partnerships and the reasons why people are involved in concurrent partnerships are similar in all ten countries. Where there were differences it seems that these are due to the way questions were framed differently in that country.

The research findings presented below are those common to all ten countries across the targeted age range and for both genders unless otherwise specified.

2.1 Forms of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

'Steady' Partner and Other 'Side' Partners

Both men and women talked about men having a 'steady' partner who is a wife or girlfriend they love or have a commitment to, and at the same time having 'girlfriends', 'secret affairs' or extra marital affairs. Men gave three main reasons why they generally have additional relationships: they are seeking sexual satisfaction, they are driven by peer pressure, and there is a strong belief that men are naturally inclined to have more than one sexual partner.

In Zimbabwe and Tanzania, participants said that married men may have other 'small houses' where they have secret homes with a secret 'wife' and sometimes children. In South Africa and Lesotho, people talked about *nyatsi*, which can refer either to a 'small house' or an open sexual relationship apart from a 'steady' relationship.

Respondents said that women also have 'steady' partners, who can be husbands or 'steady' boyfriends, and then have other 'boyfriends' who provide for different needs – from sexual satisfaction to money and material goods. In South Africa, female participants talked about women having a fling – *makhwapeni* – or a side partner who meets different needs to their primary partner.

These multiple relationships happen among both youths and adults. The 'side' partnerships are generally kept secret from the 'steady' partner. In Tanzania, it was reported that community members maintain the secrecy of people involved in multiple relationships. Maintaining secrecy is said to be necessary to avoid fights in 'steady relationships'. One then also avoids monetary compensation (a cultural tradition in Tanzania), and divorce that would follow if a woman were unfaithful. The additional relationships depend on individuals being able to find means – such as money and time – to maintain the relationships.

Both men and women talked about men having a 'steady' partner who is a wife or girlfriend they love or have a commitment to, and at the same time having 'girlfriends', 'secret affairs' or extra marital affairs.

Intergenerational Sexual Relationships

Participants spoke of intergenerational relationships – where an older man ('sugar daddy') has a sexual relationship with a young girl. In fewer instances, older women ('sugar mommies') have sexual relationships with young boys. The relationship is usually transactional: sex in exchange for money or goods. Participants said that young people are often pressured by their peers to acquire material possessions they cannot afford and so they become involved with an older person who provides these things in exchange for sex. In Swaziland and Namibia, female participants talked specifically about teachers being involved in this type of relationship with students.

*It's **the relationship between teachers and students** yet the teacher has got a wife or girlfriend and at the same time the student has got a boyfriend.*

FEMALE, 20-29 YEARS, RURAL, SWAZILAND

“It is something that we cannot run away from: Girls are after cell-phones, cash, cars Same with young boys ... as long as I get what I want, you understand – sex.”

MALE, 28-40 YEARS, URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Transactional Relationships

In most cases participants associated concurrent relationships with material benefits. In some relationships, couples do not overtly agree to exchange sex or romantic pleasures for material gains, but the man gives the woman material 'rewards' as a norm. In others, respondents said, women engage in prostitution and have 'one night stands' to get money. In these cases, there is a prior agreement.

*But you don't call someone you are not familiar with. Like in the evening you see her passing by, you call her and say: I was always looking for the right time to tell you that I love you, and things like that... if she agrees **you ask her for a favour of having sex that day... these are normal things here.***

So you agree when to meet or you simply go behind the building and make love. After sex, you give her what you have (money)... if she meets another man... he may approach her as well. It is upon her to accept his proposal or not.

MALE, 15-20 YEARS, RURAL, TANZANIA

*We are talking of girls who just start prostitution which is caused by poverty or who have been divorced and **the girl will just go to shebeen to prostitute to get money to survive.***

FEMALE, 15-19 YEARS, PERI-URBAN, ZIMBABWE

*You can link it to poverty in the sense that you may have some money and you want to go some place then you realise that you do not have enough money **you might engage in commercial sex so that you have more money to meet your needs.***

FEMALE, 36-45 YEARS, RURAL, LESOTHO

Many 'one night stands' were linked to alcohol consumption where participants said that when they are drunk they often have sex with people they might not have sex with if they were sober.

*And what you also find is like... **when we meet at clubs... how can I say it? That that that one-day stories... Yes, like one day things... One night stands...***

MALE, 30+ YEARS, URBAN, NAMIBIA

Polygamy

In their responses, participants spoke of polygamy as a cultural institution and men in particular said that it is a norm for men to have multiple partners. In Malawi, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Mozambique, participants said that polygamy has always been part of their culture. This is discussed in more detail in the section on 'Culture and Social Norms' later in the report.

2.2 Reasons for Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Dissatisfaction in Relationships

Dissatisfaction in relationships was an important issue identified by participants in all ten countries as a reason for why they seek additional partners. Three common types of dissatisfaction in a relationship were identified – sexual, emotional and physical dissatisfaction.

Sexual dissatisfaction

Many participants claimed to be sexually dissatisfied. Responses talked about both men and women wanting different options and variety in their sexual partners. Many respondents said they look for the most skilled love makers as additional sexual partners 'to have a change' from their regular relationships. In Tanzania, male youths talked about women being different not only in appearance but also 'taste' when having sex. Many young men said they want to explore this variety.

*'Some believe that **none can live from one type of meal, you need to change. So, that's the case with sex... they want variety...***

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS, RURAL, BOTSWANA

“It's only about being a bull. You want to feel a variety of women.”

MARRIED MALE,
25+ YEARS, RURAL,
ZIMBABWE

*It's because **now we are discerning** – we know the **difference between good sex and bad sex**. You carry on with the other one if he gives you other things but you know that he just doesn't do it for you sexually.*

FEMALE, 25-35 YEARS, RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

*Maybe you have two children and the love starts to become less in the family because **the husband sees you as you are out of fashion**. He can go out and ask other women about sexual relationships. He doesn't know that women are the same ...*

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

“You may not be intending to have sex outside your steady relationship but the type of sexual styles you want may force you to go out (and have sex)...”

MALE, 21-30 YEARS,
URBAN, TANZANIA

Many men and some women said that they have more than one partner because their regular partners (especially where these are married women) are not sexually adventurous. Men said they prefer to look for younger women who are willing to experiment with a range of different sexual positions and watch pornographic movies with them. Willingness and ability to perform some sexual acts like cunnilingus, anal sex and mutual masturbation were considered by youths in Tanzania as signs of sexual competence.

*There is this tendency whereby women suck a male's private parts. The whole entire penis goes in the mouth and starts chewing it like she is eating sweets (more laughter). **You find that the house wife doesn't know those things ... As a result ... he will consider the outside to be the best ... an extra marital affair.***

SINGLE MALE, 26-35 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

*... There are different styles in blue movies and your wife doesn't manage to do this and he thinks to go to a sexual partner. **The life of children is improving because they are watching movies ... A sexual relationship starts when men meet with such kinds of girls.***

MARRIED MALE, 25-49 YEARS, URBAN, MALAWI

You may not be intending to have sex outside your steady relationship but the type of sexual styles you want may force you to go out (and have sex)...

MALE, 21-30 YEARS, URBAN, TANZANIA

Partners with sexual appeal are identified differently in different regions. In Zambia, participants reported that men look for women who wear beads around their waists and girls who have been through the initiation ceremonies because they believe that these

women know how to please a man sexually. In Malawi and Tanzania, participants explained that men look for women with big buttocks. Malawi participants also talked about women who have their labia pulled as sexually appealing. They also said that wives are 'outdated' or boring because their husbands have had sex with them often. In South Africa, interviewees reported that men look for women who have nicely curved bodies – this was explicitly expressed in the local language as *o pakile*.

Here women pull their labia, so if you do not have pulled labia they leave you and go to the ones that have pulled labia.

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

There are some who like those ladies who have beads, (around their waists). They say once you have sex with one... you feel that butototo (nice feeling)... At home, your wife doesn't have those beads around the waist so...you want to try one with beads.

SINGLE MALE, 26-35 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

Many participants said that men do not want to be sexually adventurous with their wives as they feel this shows a lack of respect. In South Africa, some respondents referred to the practice of seeking alternative partners for sexual adventure as 'preserving' a wife.

athi amaXhosa isitya esihle asidleli (a beautiful plate is reserved for later use). What it mean is that if the woman is your wife, you better look for sex somewhere and preserve her for later use because you are still going to use her for the rest of your life. I don't want to abuse (overuse) her.

MALE, 21-28 YEARS, RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

Some women, especially in South Africa, talked about being afraid to ask their husbands to vary sexual positions, saying if they did their husbands would accuse them of learning 'such things' from other sexual partners. Participants in Swaziland said, 'good women' are not allowed to initiate sex.

If you ask him to try something he will hit you because he will accuse you of being unfaithful. So you will keep to what you know all your life. If all you do is look upwards that's how it's going to be.

FEMALE, 28-40 YEARS, INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, SOUTH AFRICA

“We mean buttocks. They do tell you he is going to a woman who has big buttocks and he leaves you a house...”

MARRIED FEMALE,
25-49 YEARS,
RURAL, MALAWI

“Maybe you had not had sex with her for more than a week and the day you go to her and ask her to do it, she tells you she is tired and this and that... so I don't have to wait for explanations, I go out and take another one (and have sex).”

MALE, 21-30 YEARS,
URBAN, TANZANIA

Men and women claimed that men are 'driven' into additional sexual relationships because their wives 'bribe' them with sex – saying that when wives are tired or unhappy with their husbands they 'deprive' them of sex.

*I think the problem starts in the house. You will find that **you ask your wife that I want to have sex. Then she just tells you that she's tired**; or me being the president of the house; I know when my wife is having her periods and when they are safe days. So **when she says that she is tired a man is forced to go out and have someone else.***

TRUCK DRIVER, ZAMBIA

In Swaziland, many participants felt that people who marry young, and with little sexual experience, are more likely to become sexually dissatisfied with their partners. When people who marry young become aware of sexual practices that they have not experienced they often choose to seek out new sexual partners. Participants also suggested, however, that people who get married when they are older may be accustomed to having more than one partner and struggle to commit to a serious monogamous relationship. Participants said that people often seek sexual relationships with married men and women who are assumed to be sexually experienced.

*Another thing is that people want to sleep with women who have a reputation for being good in bed. So **if your friend tells you that such a woman is good you try your best to end up sleeping with her especially if your wife does not do what the other woman does.***

MARRIED MALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

In polygamous relationships, participants felt, a man usually favours one partner over others and cannot satisfy all his wives equally. Women who are not sexually satisfied in a polygamous situation may establish relationships outside the marriage.

According to respondents, other factors that lead to people becoming sexually dissatisfied include not having sexual intercourse often enough. In Tanzania, youths talked of excessive sexual desire (*mzuka*) or prolonged sexual deprivation (*vigonera*) that might occur when partners separate for a long period (such as migration for education or business, or when a woman is abstinent postpartum) as reasons for having multiple sexual partners.

... you may want to do it four times, but maybe the wife wants to do it once, that means you are not agreeing or sometimes the woman wants you to do it five times and you only want to do it once, ... so she just starts to sleep around, (chiwewe)⁸ since she is not satisfied. And the same with a man ...

MARRIED MALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

8 literally 'a dog with rabies that wanders'

Maybe you had not had sex with her for more than a week and the day **you go to her and ask her to do it, she tells you she is tired and this and that... so I don't have to wait for explanations, I go out and take another one (and have sex).**

MALE, 21-30 YEARS, URBAN, TANZANIA

Men and women also complained that their partners are physically inadequate or do not behave in ways that will satisfy them sexually.

*If the man is having a small penis and he is not satisfying you obviously look for another one who will satisfy you. And **this one who does not satisfied you, you keep him for his money and you also keep the other one for sex.*** (Agreement)

FEMALE, 21-30 YEARS, URBAN, NAMIBIA

Yes **some don't know how to handle men and some women are watery so the men go to the dry one.**

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-34 YEARS, RURAL, ZIMBABWE

*I think we have got many sexual partners perhaps because of monotony, the other reason has got to do with bed, the sexual pleasure ... certain boyfriends who have got a small penis (laughter) ... She would like to have a bigger size, Now **there are certain men who are able to give sexual pleasure to their wives, even the ladies, there are certain ladies who are not able to satisfy their boyfriends or husbands sexually.***

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, URBAN, MOZAMBIQUE

Many women complained of a lack of romance or courting period in relationships where men are 'in a rush to have intercourse'.

*The reason for having more than one partner is that my partners' approach is wrong especially when it comes to sex, **in some cases men just have sex without warming up and they are not concerned about my sexual satisfaction so you will enjoy sex with the person who start with foreplay before sex.***

FEMALE, 46 YEARS, RURAL, LESOTHO

“Also in terms of satisfaction, we men have to know how to prepare our wives for sex. Preparing them first will help them get satisfied during sex.”

MARRIED MALE,
45-55 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

“Sex is something that is supposed to be enjoyed. But we as girls are not able to negotiate or to talk about our needs. To be honest as girls we have given up on ourselves.”

FEMALE, 16-20 YEARS, INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, SOUTH AFRICA

Lack of communication

Respondents said that men and women do not talk about sex in relationships. This lack of communication between partners contributes to sexual dissatisfaction. In Zambia, participants said that talking about sex in polygamous relationships is taboo.

Sometimes the reason we are unfaithful is because at home between me and my wife we don't discuss sex issues ... but when I go to my friend we watch porn movies. When I suggest that we buy the pornography she [my wife] will ask where [I] got those ideas from and I must not bring dirty ideas to our home.

MALE, 28-35 YEARS, URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Cultural norms oblige women to be subservient to men and not express their own feelings and desires. In Swaziland and South Africa, women said they cannot initiate sex, they cannot tell their husbands that they are not satisfied sexually, and they cannot talk about what will satisfy them. This was echoed more generally by women in other countries who say they cannot talk to men about sex.

Sometimes I would say that a guy is boring because he does not want to be sexually active and even if he does, he does not touch me the right way and I am afraid to tell him if I am not satisfied.

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, RURAL, LESOTHO

Like the way you've said it how do you know your friend is not satisfied with you if they don't tell you where to improve? For example, if you need to use medicine to make your body warm or tell elderly people to help you. Men should be telling us like we do tell them when there is something we don't like about our sex relationship.

MARRIED FEMALE, 26-35 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

Physical abuse, domestic discord, emotional and financial neglect

Participants identified physical abuse, domestic discord, emotional abuse and neglect, and financial neglect by a spouse as reasons for seeking out other partners.

...woman being mistreated will also meet some men who would promise her comfort, rest and such nice things. Hence she will be enticed to be going out with him.

MARRIED MALE, 45-55 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

... You find that your husband is abusive and when you tell a man out there he feels pity and comforts you. In that way a relationship can start.

FEMALE, 20-29 YEARS, RURAL, SWAZILAND

*The other thing which makes possible the practice of having more than one partner in the same period of time in our community is that there are other of who are **cruel to their wives, when they reach home all they do is be rude to the wife so how can this women be free with her husband?. Therefore she goes ahead to have another sexual relationship.***

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

In Swaziland, women complained that their male partners do not 'pamper' them and men said their female partners 'nag'.

*The other reasons why **men have small houses it's because ladies treat their husbands badly. They don't prepare hot bathing water for their husband in the morning, there is no romance but at a small house they get that.***

MARRIED MALE, 25-34 YEARS, URBAN, ZIMBABWE

“If there are disagreements in a family then either the man or woman can have another/ several relationships because they are looking for peace and happiness.”

MARRIED FEMALE,
25-49 YEARS, MALAWI



Case Study 1

Married Female, 37 years, Urban, South Africa

I am 37 years old, married and have two children, a daughter and a son. I have been married for 13 years now. My husband is in his 40s.

Now my husband also comes home after midnight when his knock off time is five. Over the weekends he is never home, and does not support the children. I have been crying over all this and sometimes I shout at him. He then stays home for two days and start staying out again, telling me he was too drunk to come home and other lies.

I therefore also ended up having my own *nyatsi* (adulterous affair). I have been with him for six months now. I never thought I would be going out with him but when one day he came, grabbed me, kissed me and we had sex, that was the beginning of the affair. I now get love and sexual satisfaction from this man, ... and I love him.

When my husband comes home, start shouting as usual and then sleep without sex because he has been drained by his girlfriends, I don't get worried as I will have already had sex with my *nyatsi*.

My *nyatsi* also has other girlfriends. I once found him with a young girl, and later with an older woman. So I try to have sex with him as much as possible so that he should not complain.

My *nyatsi* used to come with condoms – once or twice – but he stopped because he says he loves me and he wants me 'straight'. Since I also love him, we have sex without a condom, and I also enjoy it. I know I might get HIV but there is nothing I can do.

My daughter knows about my other affair. I actually tell her that when a man 'plays' her, she should not just cry and get stressed, she should find herself other men.

“... a man who is the man has got that spirit of the culture of seven women for one man...”

MALE, 16-25 YEARS,
URBAN, MOZAMBIQUE

Culture and Social Norms

Polygamy

Polygamy is a generally accepted practice in all ten countries. Participants explained that there are certain values and attitudes which keep the institution of polygamy alive. For example, most women said that they believe it is a disgrace to divorce and will rather stay in a polygamous relationship. In Malawi, participants said that polygamous relationships guarantee a man children and allow a number of wives to share domestic responsibilities. In Tanzania, respondents said that polygamy guarantees a man sex all the time even if one wife is menstruating or breastfeeding.

In our Herero culture is accepted for a man to have many sexual partners a man can marry ten wives and they will build their houses randomly and the husband house will be in the middle.

FEMALE, 21-29 YEARS, URBAN, NAMIBIA

Polygamy is also supported by religions such as Islam (according to Tanzanian respondents particularly) and the Emmanuel and Abraham churches in Malawi.

Different churches have different rules for example CCAP and Anglicans have different rules so when people have sexual desires they can go to specific churches where they will be helped like Emmanuel church. This is happening we have seen church elders impregnating women from the women's guild and marrying them and still finds a church that will accept them. There some churches who allow men to marry up to 6 wives. You find church leaders have so many wives.

MARRIED MALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

In Tanzania men in polygamous relationships are supposed to provide for all their wives. However, respondents said that in many cases men fail to fulfil this responsibility and wives have to support themselves. A man might also fail to satisfy all his wives sexually. In such situations women may have extra-marital affairs to get material support and sexual satisfaction.

R: You can't be sure of their fidelity...

R: And other men will definitely be helping you....

R: ...they are warming up your house (with your wife)...

MALE, 15-20 YEARS, RURAL, TANZANIA

Male dominance and female subservience

Participants in all ten countries said that it is an accepted cultural and social norm that men are superior to women. An extension of this belief is that men are not expected to control their sexual desires and women are obliged to accept that it is 'natural' for men to have more than one sexual partner. South African respondents said that women are socialised from an early age to accept the idea that men 'make mistakes' and 'cheat' and should be forgiven for having other women.

'Men cannot control their sexual desire'

Both men and women participants said that they believe that men cannot control their sexual desire and they cannot be satisfied with one woman in one sexual relationship. For a man to be accepted by his peers and society he should have many girlfriends 'to show that he is a man'. Thus there is a general understanding that a man should pursue a sexual relationship with any woman he feels attracted to.

“Yeah, when you move from this wife to another wife in the next house, there are men behind you who are replacing your absence...”

MALE, 15-20 YEARS,
RURAL, TANZANIA

*In addition, we are talking about nature. You can't control the feelings. Basotho believed that the solution is to marry many wives. **The person who said he can manage to control the feelings is mentally ill. Men are born that way.***

MALE, 46 YEARS, URBAN, LESOTHO

*The saying that says **'Monna ke selepe wa adimanwa'** [literally: 'a man is an axe and can be borrowed.' meaning: '**a man can just have as many partners as he wishes and it is not a crime**'].*

MALE, 16-25 YEARS, URBAN, BOTSWANA

*Indeed the clothing has played a major role in increasing this thing because **a man's eye is not the same as that of a woman. It's mainly the clothing that attracts these men to all these different girls**, because even the pants when they wear them you find that it is sitting right on the private parts and everything is out in the open.*

FEMALE, 40-49 YEARS, URBAN, SWAZILAND

*But more especially on men because **if a man can go out to a tavern, he is unable to hold himself because there are those who wear mini skirts**. He desire that. And **a man's desires are very quick. And it is rare for him to discipline himself**. With us women it is much better because we are able to discipline ourselves and stay at home.*

FEMALE, 16-20 YEARS, RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

However, while cultural norms heroise men who have multiple partners, they condemn women who do the same. In South Africa, male respondents said they would kill their partners if they found them 'cheating'.

*... sometimes **the boy wants to surprise you by visiting you only to find that you have this other boy**, truly speaking nowadays **the boys don't fight each other instead they will beat the girl up** because you are the player, you are the one who made a fool of them.*

FEMALE, 16-20 YEARS, INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, SOUTH AFRICA

“The problem with men is that they are never satisfied. They keep on looking at and appreciating other women.”

MARRIED MALE, 35+ YEARS,
MIDLANDS MINE, ZIMBABWE

Some respondents drew attention to the fact that even language celebrates men and discredits women in concurrent relationships:

*with the guys there is this thing about **if you have many girlfriends uyis'khokho (you are the man) but if a woman has many boyfriends she is called isifebe (she's a bitch) ...***

MALE, 16-20 YEARS, URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Participants argued that men who have more than one partner not only gain respect from their peers, but that women are also attracted to men with reputations as good lovers.

*Even **women begin to wonder why the men have so many sexual partners. This curiosity makes them draw closer to the man so that they too can also feel what other ladies feel when they have sex with him.***

TRAVELLING BUSINESSMAN, RURAL, ZAMBIA

*Also, **when you have many sexual partners women tend to give you respect. They say 'that one is a real man (and) not that other one; his wife is constantly complaining'. Now, because of such praises...in the end, you will have had sex with the entire community.***

MALE, RURAL, ZAMBIA

These factors lead to a situation where men feel pressurised by society and their peers into having more than one partner. In Zimbabwe, research participants said that 'a bull is seen by its wounds'. This means that a man has to have more than one partner to be seen as a man.

*People have a belief that, in fighting bhuru rinowonekwa nemavanga so **they will be meaning if you are a real man you must have many wives or you have to get sick to have siki chaiyo (STI) and if you are a boy you must have two or three or four, I mean the real boys.***

FEMALE, 15-19 YEARS, PERI-URBAN, ZIMBABWE

*It's not a concern to them and **boys take it that you are a real man if you have more than one sexual partner. You are also respected by ladies...***

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS, RURAL, BOTSWANA

“A woman can't have more than one man if she does she is called a bitch, whereas a man can have more than one woman and he is called a ladies' man.”

MALE, 28-35 YEARS,
URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Case Study 2

Single Man, 36-44 years, Rural, Zambia

I have several sexual partners in this community. In this community, once a boy has become of age, people expect him to have sexual relationships. Those who don't get girlfriends are laughed at and are called *kibolobofwa*, meaning someone who has erectile dysfunction. The more women you have, the more you are considered a real man.

I also have several sexual partners because I want variety. If you only have one, you can get tired of her in no time at all. But if you have several girlfriends, you can be rotating and it might take some time before going back to the first girlfriend, and when you go back, it becomes a fresh relationship and you are attracted to each other.

Most girls know me very well as someone who has many girlfriends and out of curiosity some even come to me and they fall for me. Young men also come to me for advice as to how to propose a girl. You know, when people appreciate my exploits, I feel good and go for more girls. Some girls actually fight over me.

My thoughts are that this disease (HIV and AIDS) has been with us for a long time and it is affecting people. If a person gets infected, it is just a matter of time. In fact those who indulge in multiple sexual relationships are not highly infected. But those who respect and restrain themselves are the ones who are getting infected. Some of these respectable women are being infected by their husbands.

This *Muzezempuya* (disease) is just about time. If it is time for you to get it you will surely get it. Everything has time. If your time has come, there is nothing you can do about it. Even children who are not infected, they die, and elderly people continue living. This is to say death and illnesses have been there even before HIV and AIDS. So, for me it is not a big issue, it does not scare that much to the extent that if I do this or that I will be creating a problem for someone, not at all.

Young girls are taught a song about having sexual relations with a sister's husband during initiation.

Other cultural practices

In Swaziland, people accept traditional practices such as sleeping with an in-law. Young girls are taught a song about having sexual relations with a sister's husband during initiation. This is called *kulamuta*. Forced and arranged marriages were described by participants in Zambia and Swaziland. In Zambia, people said that girls are sometimes compelled to marry a 'tribes mate' (someone from within the same clan) and in Swaziland, a girl could be made to marry her sister's husband if the sister is not able to take care of him.

In Tanzania, respondents said that postpartum sex is taboo and men are required to wait sometimes for as long as two years before resuming sexual relations with a wife who has had a child. They believe that having sex during this period can result in a baby being stunted, or becoming ill. During this time, men often have sex with other women. Some participants said however that condoms may be used during this period to avoid fluid exchange as that is what is said to affect the baby.

Money and Material Possessions

Money and material possessions influence concurrent partnerships in different ways. According to the research, people who have money and material possessions have MCP because they can afford it.

... most of the time you will see that it is sugar daddies and sugar mommies that are gambling around with money. And we mostly find it with the school children.

...and basically it is the unemployment that can lead to certain things like this HIV and AIDS and so on, which is the most important thing in the community that we must advise each other about.

MALE, 30+ YEARS, URBAN, NAMIBIA

Culturally, polygamous relationships require that a man has cattle – or money to buy cattle – to pay a dowry for each wife. In Malawi, participants said that men in polygamous relationships encourage their sons to become polygamous by paying dowries for their sons' wives. According to respondents, some women in Malawi also encourage their sons to be polygamous.

Some people tell their son that they can marry two wives (mitala) because they have herds of cattle. They do this because he wants those wives to help his parents. Some marry three wives without noticing that they are doing wrong.

MARRIED FEMALE, 25+ YEARS, MALAWI

Participants pointed out 'men with money' – those who drive nice cars and live in expensive houses – saying they are often involved in MCP. It was said that they use their money to lure needy or greedy people into their networks of sexual partners. Prominent people like soccer stars, musicians and political leaders were identified as people who often have many concurrent partners.

There are people like sugar daddies; they take advantage of beautiful girls who are poor. They take advantage of the fact that she is poor and there are things that she needs so they promise to give her everything...

FEMALE, 20-24 YEARS, PERI-URBAN, ZIMBABWE

Some people have multiple sexual partners so that they can survive, respondents said. People who have money or something to offer take advantage of poor and desperate people who need food and money. It is most often women with children who get involved in these sorts of MCP in order to provide for the children. However, young girls who are disadvantaged often find themselves with older men who provide them with what they need in exchange for sex. These men are usually married or involved with other people.

“There are things that have caused them to have many sexual partners. If a man or woman has money, they would think nothing can prevent them from having other sexual partners.”

MARRIED MALE,
45-55 YEARS, URBAN, ZAMBIA

That is a common problem here...you find a girl she is in need of something, they have not changed meals for more than a week at her family ...or you look at her and you see that she has not taken breakfast yet, so you take advantage of her; you buy her some tea or you give her some cash to support her and later she will definitely come to you (for sex).

... It is not like she is paying you back...No, she is also helping you as you have helped her with her problems of money ...

MALE, 21-30 YEARS, RURAL, TANZANIA

*We agree with them that prostitution exists in the village. Most of **these young girls are poor and they have nothing at home. So, for them to get what they want or to buy clothes it is to go and have sex in exchange for money.***

MALE, 25+ YEARS, RURAL, BOTSWANA

“You cannot tell me to leave my other boyfriend because he is advanced and has a car.”

FEMALE 16-25 YEARS,
RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

*There are two types of sexual relationships. There is one which is done by professional women; they are rich and are just enjoy doing it (having sex). You will even find them advising you to put on a condom when having sex with them; no condom no sex. But **these (poor ones) from our compounds; it's walale (unprotected sex) because all that they want is money.***

MARRIED MALE, 25+ YEARS, RURAL, ZAMBIA

Although poor people become involved in MCP to provide for basic necessities, many people also have sexual relationships to get money for luxuries. Young people especially look for older people who have cars and money to buy them mobile phones and trendy clothes so that they will fit in with their friends from better off families.

*You **may have a relationship with only one person but it is difficult because you may want a pair of expensive trousers and he may not have money to buy them, and we end up having other partners as a way of getting money to buy what we want.***

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, RURAL, MOZAMBIQUE

*With others is for **a young girl to be involved with an older man because she loves money and she wants something special to buy for herself.** Then she took a decision of saying that 'if I can get involved with a working person I will be able to do whatever I want and buy everything I desire.'*

FEMALE, 16-20 YEARS, RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

I am going to talk about myself, I have got a girlfriend with whom I only go to disco, I have got a girlfriend who gives me money, I have got a girlfriend with whom I only go for walks in the streets, I have got a girlfriend who is a friend of my brother. All of them are my friends, why? Is because, I benefit from all of them.

MALE, 25+ YEARS, RURAL, MOZAMBIQUE

In Tanzania, boys said they feel embarrassed because they cannot afford the material rewards girls look for. As a result they have multiple partners so that when one partner leaves them they still have another girlfriend. Some young men have temporary relationships and they end the affair before their girlfriends ask them for material things.

Alcohol

In all countries except Namibia and Malawi, participants reported a close link between people drinking alcohol and having more than one sex partner. When people get drunk, they are more likely to have casual sex. Participants said, further, that women often go to bars without money – intending to get drinks from men in return for sex. When people are drunk they are also more likely not to use condoms or to use them incorrectly.

*Sometimes it could be caused by alcohol, when a person drinks alcohol, there is a time when she/he loses consciousness and that is when **clever men attend to women**. And **after she gets drunk that is when they have sex with her**. There are people out there who just go to bars to have sex with others after getting drunk.*

FEMALE, 25+ YEARS, RURAL, BOTSWANA

*Alcohol drives them to have sex, after drinking they go for sex. If they can cut down on the rate of alcohol consumption because **when you are drunk you end up forgetting to use a condom** even though you still have it in your pocket. Moreover, it is the illness of the young generation they are heavy drinkers.*

MALE, 46+ YEARS, RURAL, LESOTHO

*Sometimes it happens at the clubs **when you take too much alcohol than you start proposing ladies while they are also under the influence of alcohol**. This is how sometimes people find themselves having many partners.*

MALE, 30+ YEARS, URBAN, NAMIBIA

“When a person drinks alcohol, there is a time when she/he loses consciousness and that is when clever men attend to women. And after she gets drunk that is when they have sex with her. There are people out there who just go to bars to have sex with others after getting drunk.”

FEMALE, 25+ YEARS, RURAL,
BOTSWANA

Peer Pressure

Women, especially young women, feel pressure from friends who benefit materially from a number of partners to become involved in MCP themselves for material benefit. Participants – especially youths – also indicated that most young people have more than one partner ‘to be famous’. For young men, fame was associated with being a ‘real man’ whereas for young women it was linked to feeling wanted and beautiful.

*‘We might be three very good friends and one being someone not interested in men and always telling us to stick to one partner we love; but us being interested in high class life and money, you see. **If one day we get invited to a party with her, we would come dressed beautifully. ... She would become shy because she is wearing cheap clothes.** We would tell her that these things were bought by the men she hates, our extra sexual partners. **She would then be interested and tempted, and then I would connect her to the one who has a business and a lot of money.***

FEMALE, 25+ YEARS, URBAN, BOTSWANA

*R: **but why ... why should you have only one? All your friends have many ...***

*R: **It (having only one girlfriend) is clear that our friend is very weak...***

*R: **He feels shy to seduce women.... We call them domo zege⁹ ...***

I: Meaning that...

R: Slow-mover...

*R: **We know he is not one of us...***

R: He won't be in our group... we will try to help him to get one because this will be uncommon...

R: We try to ask him: what's wrong with your Babu Mlungwana¹⁰ (penis). And we will ask: Are you sure you are ok down there?

MALE, 15-20 YEARS, RURAL, TANZANIA

***Also, I think that other girls do it just to say that they are the best one in the area** or that they go out with the best one in the area or that they have had sex with everybody, or to feel that they are beautiful.*

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, SEMI-RURAL, MOZAMBIQUE

“And when you are drunk, at the club but you know you don't have condoms, when things start heating up, you definitely not going to hold yourself back.”

MALE, 24-28 YEARS,
STUDENT, SOUTH AFRICA

9 Zege in Kiswahili means a mixture of cement and small stones ready for construction of thick walls. Domo means mouth. It is always heavy but soft. For youth it implies that one's mouth is too heavy like zege to open up and speak to women.

10 Mlungwana in local terms refers to a famous adult man - here the penis is reified to have power and authority to act like a famous adult man.

Other Reasons

Participants gave some additional reasons for being involved in MCP. Some young women talked about being in multiple relationships as a way of searching for the right (life) partner. This was said in the context where women felt that most men are not committed and it is hard to find a committed man.

F: You cannot tell him that (you have another partner and) he is just a casual partner, you have to wait first. If he tells you that he is serious it is then that you can ask him to introduce you to his family, which you might find that they turn to love you. Let's say you did not take him seriously and as an adult you still expect to get married, as you visit the guy's home the family realizes that you can both make a good couple.

What would you do if they surprise you and want to pay lobola, will you refuse and say that you were not serious with the guy?

F: No if they pay something you drop the other one.

All: Yes, yes.

F: If this one pays something you drop the other one.

FEMALES, 16-20 YEARS, INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, SOUTH AFRICA

Many participants felt that the general shift toward greater gender equality undermines social structure and causes conflict between partners. In Malawian groups, men spoke of their beliefs that certain jobs must be done by women. These men said that when women ask them for help with domestic chores they refuse and move on to have other relationships.

Gender issue encourages people to have multiple sexual partners because gender leads to women having authority in the home. This then leads to misunderstandings.

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, MALAWI

In Tanzania, youths associated having sex with many sexual partners as a proof of sexual maturity.

Visual media – especially pornography – often shown at night on public video shows in semi-urban and rural areas or on TV are also another factor fuelling MCP in Tanzania and in South Africa.

“Gender issue encourages people to have multiple sexual partners because gender leads to women having authority in the home. This then leads to misunderstandings.”

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, MALAWI

“The disadvantage is HIV and AIDS if there were no HIV and AIDS it was alright. If you have another sexual partner and your wife without HIV and AIDS there is no problem but when there is HIV and AIDS there is a problem.”

MALE, 20-24 YEARS,
RURAL, ZIMBABWE

2.3 HIV and AIDS

Knowledge about HIV and AIDS

The research showed overwhelmingly that participants in all groups know about HIV and AIDS, how it is transmitted and how to prevent it. Respondents spoke about HIV and AIDS without being prompted when they discussed risks associated with having more than one sexual partner at a time. They identified the risk of contracting HIV and other STIs when involved in multiple sexual relationship and not using condoms.

It is very risky and not wise to have more than one sexual partner in this era of HIV and AIDS especially when you know that you are at risk to contract the disease, I think that it is better to have one partner if it is a sexual relationship, ... even though you will be at risk but you will not be at a high risk compared to when you have many partners.

HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS, RURAL, BOTSWANA

*The disadvantage is HIV and AIDS if there were no HIV and AIDS it was alright. **If you have another sexual partner and your wife without HIV and AIDS there is no problem but when there is HIV and AIDS there is a problem.***

MALE, 20-24 YEARS, RURAL, ZIMBABWE

In addition is not good to have more sexual partners at the same time because you won't know which one will give you a disease and also better if you have one and both of you will be tested so that you can know each other's status. Then having more sexual partners that the things causing disease.

FEMALE, RURAL, NAMIBIA

Findings however show that despite this knowledge, many people have more than one partner at a time, do not use condoms consistently, and are resigned to contracting HIV.

Lack of Condom Use

In all countries very few people use condoms consistently and correctly. The lack of condom use was strongly linked to trust that is developed in a sexual relationship over a period of time. Most participants were of the view that it is not appropriate to use a condom with a 'steady' or 'permanent' partner because that shows a lack of love and trust and undermines the very essence of the relationship. This sentiment was stronger in marriage. They

said that condoms should be used with casual or new partners. However, even in 'sideline' relationships, people tend to stop using condoms because they develop love and trust over time. This finding is true for men and women and across age groups.

*Sincerely, I think that people use condoms on the first days of their relationship. **As from the moment, they jump the fence, often, there are cases in which they start doing it on a part-time basis.** He goes there for the first time, comes again for the second time, one month has passed, then one year, and then he relies on you, I am your friend, I am safe, take that condom away.*

FEMALE, 25+ YEARS, URBAN, MOZAMBIQUE

*I come today at seven she is home and I'm not suspicious about anything and I use the condoms. Tomorrow I come at eight she is home, I use the condom. The following day, I come at nine she is home. **I start to develop trust for her and that day I won't use a condom. That's how we get HIV.***

MALE, 28-35 YEARS, URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

“If you insist on using a condom, she would ask if you don't trust her so you would not use it to prove that you trust her.”

HIGH SCHOOL BOYS,
RURAL, BOTSWANA



“If you insist on the use of condoms, you will have to explain why. Otherwise he may even present the case to your parents...even if you suspect him of having extramarital relations or even if he had ever compensated you when you caught him with another woman, still this is not enough reason to insist on condom use...”

Female, 21-30 years, Rural, Tanzania

Women reported that, though they might want a man to use a condom, they are often afraid to ask. These women said this is because they are not comfortable talking about sexual issues with their partners. Women also claimed that most men demand sex without a condom and, in South Africa for instance, women were sometimes beaten for asking a man to use a condom. In Tanzania, female participants indicated that it was culturally not acceptable for women to ask their husbands to use condoms.

If you insist on the use of condoms, you will have to explain why. Otherwise he may even present the case to your parents...even if you suspect him of having extramarital relations or even if he had ever compensated you when you caught him with another woman, still this is not enough reason to insist on condom use...

FEMALE, 21-30 YEARS, RURAL, TANZANIA

We women have no power to tell our husband that we should use a condom because they suspect something on us. We have no right to tell the husband that we should use condoms.

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-49 YEARS, RURAL, MALAWI

She will be afraid to tell him even though she knows that my husband is in love with someone and this husband will just sleep with her without condom because he is married to him. That is why there is AIDS in the homes, they must also be able to tell their husband but you find that he might beat her up.

FEMALE, 21-28 YEARS, URBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Many male participants and some women also said that they do not like using condoms – they feel that sex without a condom is more satisfying than sex with a condom.

*Where can someone have a good (sexual) taste? (Laughter)
This is because good taste comes from men. Can you experience a good taste when he puts on a paper? (Laughter)*

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-49 YEARS, URBAN, MALAWI

... one thing that I want to emphasize is that, there is no pleasure in doing sex if you if you are using a condom than when you are doing it flesh to flesh. This is what I have experienced and it is nice without a condom.

MALE, 21-28 YEARS, RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA

Rural youths in Tanzania said that condoms are not available in their areas, even should they want to use them. Other participants said that they do not use condoms because they cause rashes, they are not 100% safe, they burst or they have worms.

Fatalism

In this study respondents said that most people seldom take measures – such as using condoms – to protect themselves from contracting HIV. When asked why they do not protect themselves against HIV, participants responded that they believe that everyone will die – be it from AIDS or something else. This fatalistic attitude was consistent throughout the ten countries.

Well as for diseases there is nothing you can do to run away from them. No one can runaway from diseases.

MARRIED FEMALE, 25-34 YEARS, URBAN, ZIMBABWE

“They say even if you do not ever get AIDS the fact is you are still going to die.

We are all going to die one day.”

FEMALES, 16-20 YEARS,
RURAL, SOUTH AFRICA



Other Risks Associated with Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Other risks participants associate with concurrent relationships include unwanted pregnancies, quarrels and fights among the partners when they find out, and expenses associated with maintaining the relationships.

*And also the issue of having small houses can cause us not to develop. **At times the money which I was suppose to build a home in the rural area but when you go there you don't just go, just sleeping in the woman's blankets for free.** The woman will say she will need soap.*

MARRIED MALE, 25-34 YEARS, URBAN, ZIMBABWE

Women of all ages and both married and single, were worried about falling pregnant – saying that it might be difficult to know the identity of the father in a situation of concurrent partnerships. For young girls, getting pregnant also posed the risk of raising a child without a father and with no (financial) support – or alternatively, in some countries, having an unsafe abortion.

*While dating this old guy, **there was a time when I thought I was pregnant.** Then I told my friend what happened between me and that guy and that I thought I was pregnant. **She made me a mixture to drink.** It was made of spirit and other stuff, I drank it. After that I menstruated as usual. I think it was four days later; **I became very, very ill. I was hospitalized for four days.***

FEMALE, 16-25 YEARS, URBAN, LESOTHO



3 Discussion of findings

3.1 Common Factors Driving Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

There are several common factors that promote multiple and concurrent partnerships across the ten countries. People have multiple and concurrent partners and seldom use condoms in these relationships despite being aware of the risks of contracting HIV.

The most reported pattern of MCP, that of having a 'steady' and other 'side' partners, is consistent with other research findings on MCP. The CADRE report (2007) about South Africa, for instance, talks about 'main' and 'other' partners as a prevalent form of MCP.¹¹ The 'steady' partner is said to be a loved and long-term partner such as a husband, wife or steady boyfriend – while 'side' partners generally satisfy emotional, sexual or material needs or desires. This points to the likelihood of multiple and serial sexual relationships in 'side' partner arrangements so that these needs and wants continue to be fulfilled.

Concurrent partnerships are generally kept secret as people strive to maintain the 'steady' relationship.

3.2 Reasons for Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Of the reasons given for having multiple and concurrent partners, the need for sex and sexual satisfaction, and the need and/or desire for money and goods were most prominent. Materialism and peer pressure to conform to fashion trends were reported to drive many women and men into multiple and intergenerational relationships.

Cultural and social norms – including polygamy and gender inequality – create serious power imbalances that fuel MCP.

Other similar studies echo these findings. For instance, in a study of an urban settlement of Umlazi close to the city of Durban in South Africa, Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala found that women used sexual transactions to conform to modern trends largely constructed by the media.¹² These findings highlight that people, especially women, engage in MCP and transactional sex not only for subsistence, but also to conform to fashion and modern trends. HIV-prevention interventions need to acknowledge this reality.

3.3 Lack of Communication

This study shows that most reasons for MCP – such as sexual dissatisfaction – stem from a lack of communication between partners in sexual relationships, especially 'steady' relationships. Social norms dictate that women may not initiate sex or talk about

Cultural and social norms – including polygamy and gender inequality – create serious power imbalances that fuel MCP.

11 Parker, W. et al (2007) Concurrent Sexual Partnerships Amongst Young Adults in South Africa: Challenges for HIV Prevention Communication CADRE, p22.

12 Leclerc-Madlala, S. 'Transactional Sex and the pursuit of Modernity' Social Dynamics Vol. 29, No. 2, 2004, pp1-21.



Deeply-embedded cultural and social norms perpetuate the social climate that drives MCP.

sex with their partners. Women who attempt to behave differently may be regarded as unfaithful and are often reprimanded or beaten by their husbands. This lack of communication has resulted in both men and women seeking sexual satisfaction with other partners. This implies that gender inequality, which is embedded in cultural norms, and effective communication in communities and among couples all need to be addressed.

3.4 Culture and Social Norms

Deeply-embedded cultural and social norms perpetuate the social climate that drives MCP. Cultural norms make it 'normal' for men to have more than one sexual partner while at the same time condemning women who engage in MCP.¹³ This seems to be accepted by both men and women.

Gender-based violence has resulted in women seeking solace, support and sex from additional partners, while maintaining a relationship with their 'steady' partner. Research in Botswana on power imbalances in relationships is consistent with these findings. The research indicates that many women stay in relationships with men who are involved in MCP and who abuse them because they are afraid to be alone.¹⁴ Gender imbalance remains a significant challenge that fuels MCP.

The fact that MCP are entrenched in social and cultural life challenges simplistic didactic messages that do not promote dialogue and critical thinking among individuals, communities and policy makers. HIV-prevention interventions must acknowledge the complexity of these social power dynamics – including culture, tradition, power and status – if they are to succeed.¹⁵

3.5 HIV Knowledge and Fatalism

People are at least superficially aware of the risks associated with MCP and HIV and AIDS especially where they do not use condoms when having sex. However, they generally feel resigned to contracting HIV, a finding echoed by Parker et al.

13 This finding is also highlighted in a literature review on MCP in Botswana (Pitso, M (2007) Multiple Concurrent partnerships among Youths aged 15-18: A Literature Review Choose Life/PSI Botswana.

14 Ibid p35

15 SW Sinding as cited in Centre for the Study of AIDS (CSA), University of Pretoria (2006) Prevention in Context: HIV and AIDS and Social Responses in South Africa – A Literature Review commissioned by Soul City.

This attitude offers one possible explanation to the finding that people's knowledge about HIV prevention is not matched by the practice of safe sex.¹⁶ Fatalism needs to be explored further if it is to be effectively addressed.

In addition, the knowledge of condom use as a preventive measure against HIV infection did not match with the practice of consistent, correct condom use. People feel they can trust long-term partners, and this prevents condom use in medium- to long-term relationships.

4 Conclusion

Multiple concurrent partnerships are key drivers of the spread of HIV in southern Africa. This study confirms other studies, which show that few people acknowledge that reducing sexual partners reduces the chances of contracting HIV.¹⁷ The report further highlights common factors that encourage MCP in the ten southern African countries.

This integrated report cannot reflect the nuance of the individual country reports. However, it has shown that there are good reasons for a co-ordinated regional intervention that can be adapted and implemented in the different countries to reduce MCP.

5 Recommendations

In view of the above discussion, the following recommendations are made:

- Findings show superficial knowledge about risks associated with MCP. There is therefore a need to communicate messages to reinforce the knowledge of the risks associated with MCPs.
- There is a need for sexuality education which includes ways to talk about sex with a partner without fear of negative consequence. Communication needs to promote the idea that a lifelong relationship can be happy and fulfilling.
- Gender inequalities that reinforce female subservience and male dominance need to be addressed.
- Cultural norms that support the idea that it is 'natural' for men to have MCP and that women should not talk about sex, need to be challenged.
- Consistent and correct condom use should be encouraged.

16 In his study, M Hunter considers a 'huge paradox' the finding that despite high levels of awareness about AIDS, unsafe practices are still common. See M Hunter as quoted in Centre for the Study of AIDS (CSA), University of Pretoria (2006) Op. Cit: 40.

17 CADRE report shows that 20.2% of males and 24.5% of females mentioned sticking to one partner and being faithful as one way of preventing HIV as compared to 94.3% of males and 93.3% of females who mentioned using condoms. Reducing the number of sex partners was only mentioned by 5%. (Parker, W. et al (2007) Op.Cit pp15-16).

Multiple concurrent partnerships are key drivers of the spread of HIV in southern Africa.



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