



Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partnerships in Zambia

A Target Audience Research Report



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Acronyms and Glossary

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARVs	Anti Retrovirals
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
MCP	Multiple Concurrent Partnerships
MoH	Ministry of Health
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
ZCCP	Zambia Centre for Communication Programmes
FGDs	Focus Group Discussion
IDIs	In-depth Interviews

Concurrent Sexual Partnerships

Sexual partnerships that happen at the same time or overlap in time; thus where two or more sexual partnerships continue over the same period of time, or where one sexual partnership begins before the other comes to an end. These partnerships are also referred to in this report as Multiple Concurrent Partnerships or MCP.

Multiple Sexual Partnerships

Having two or more sexual partners over a period of time - the multiple partners may be concurrent but may also be sequential and monogamous.

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Executive Summary

This summary represents findings obtained from qualitative research that explored the issue of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships (MCP). The overall aim of the research was to gain insight into the audience's views, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours and experiences around multiple concurrent sexual relationships and male circumcision in the context of HIV prevention. A total of 16 focus group discussions and 12 in-depth interviews were conducted.

Results showed that multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships were common among Zambians irrespective of age, marital status, or geographical location of residence.

Poverty was found to be a catalyst for MCP, intensified by the disintegration of the family safety net. Females are particularly affected as they seek support for themselves and their families.

Mobility encourages MCP because it provides opportunities for both the mobile partner and the partner at home to have other sexual relationships. Upbringing or background, alcohol and peer influence were found to contribute to MCP. Participants also identified the adoption of perceived western cultural attributes, including certain ways of dressing, as being responsible for MCP.

Further to this, some traditional cultural practices such as girls' initiation ceremonies and polygamy were also said to contribute to MCP. Cultural norms that expect women to be passive sexual partners contribute to the sexual dissatisfaction of both partners in a relationship – thus fuelling MCP, respondents also said. Research showed that attitudes around circumcision can be drivers for MCP, because many men who are circumcised believe they are protected against HIV infection and they have multiple sexual partners.

Mistrust, suspicion, misunderstandings and mistreatment in relationships, as well as lack of communication were reported to cause MCP, according to participants. Related to this, was lack of sexual satisfaction - particularly in the case of married couples.

Desire to get married or to have children, and forced marriages, were also reported to contribute to multiple concurrent sexual partnerships. Women wanting to get married often engage in MCP to search for a suitable partner. Married men and women were also reported to engage in MCP to have children, especially in cases when couples struggle to conceive. Those forced into marriages as a result of parental pressure or premarital pregnancies often engage in MCP because they are unhappy with their partner.

People were generally aware of HIV-related risks including the importance of prevention of infection through abstinence, mutual faithfulness, and condom use. Therefore, some approach MCP with caution and fear. However, despite the knowledge that those involved in MCP are at high risk of HIV infection, survey findings show that unprotected sex is common. It was reported that people - especially young men - engage in unprotected sex and MCP because they have a fatalistic attitude about HIV. Many participants dismiss the idea of changing their sexual practices to avoid contracting HIV, saying that no-one can avoid death and whether they die from AIDS or another cause is not significant.

Research showed a connection between condom use and ARVs and proliferation of multiple and concurrent partnerships. This is because people feel they are protected if they use condoms when having sex and thus feel free to have sex with many partners. In the case of ARVs, these were said to promote MCP because when an HIV positive person takes ARVs they look healthy so no one knows they are positive and they are able to engage in multiple partnerships.

People involved in MCP were envied and admired by some respondents, while others viewed them with indifference and disdain. Others, especially men, who engage in MCP, see the fact of having multiple partners as a sign of being manly and setting an example of how a man should behave.

Introduction

The Zambia Centre for Communication Programmes (ZCCP) is a Zambian non-governmental organisation, which seeks to improve the health status, well being and thus the general quality of life of Zambians through health communication for social and behaviour change.

This document is a report on the exploration of the topic 'HIV Prevention: Multiple Concurrent Partnerships among Youth and Adults' using the formative research processes described below. This topic was selected following the Expert Think Tank Meeting on 'HIV Prevention in High-Prevalence Countries in Southern Africa' held in Lesotho in May 2006, and the follow-up meeting held by the South African Development Community (SADC) on 'Social Change Communication for HIV Prevention' in Swaziland in October 2006. Subsequently, the Soul City Regional Programme held discussions and adopted MCP as an issue for focus in multimedia health and development communication materials.

Background

Concerned by the increasing HIV and AIDS epidemic, and in support of the 'Year for Accelerating Access to HIV Prevention', the SADC Secretariat and the Regional HIV Prevention Group¹ convened an Expert Think Tank Meeting on 'HIV Prevention in High-Prevalence Countries' in Southern Africa in 2006.

The meeting discussed ways of accelerating HIV prevention efforts. Various drivers of the epidemic were identified - particularly multiple concurrent partnerships by men and women in the context of inconsistent condom use. Other drivers identified were low levels of male circumcision, and behaviours such as sexual violence, intergenerational sex, stigma, lack of openness in sexual relationships, untreated viral STIs, high population mobility and culture.² Low condom-use and involvement in MCP is responsible for most new infections among the larger general populations.

Of Zambia's population of 10.9 million, over half of the population is below the age of 20 years. The socioeconomic impact of HIV and AIDS has been enormous. HIV prevalence is

¹ Consisting of UNAIDS, UNFPA,WHO, UNICEF, Sida and USAID

² (Expert Think Tank Meeting on HIV Prevention in High Prevalence Countries in Southern Africa Report, 2006)

higher among women than men. Young women are five times more likely to be infected than their male counterparts in the same age group. The prevalence is higher among women (18%) than men (13%) and is highest among those aged 25-34 years for females and 35-39 years for males; indicative of trans-generational sex with younger females having sexual relationships with older males. The age group 15-24 years is particularly vulnerable to trans-generational sex - in particular females in this age range.

Females have traditionally been taught to be obedient and sexually submissive, while it is seen as normal for males to have multiple sexual partners or to have extra marital affairs.³ Many youths report having had more than one sexual partner. Others are involved in a casual form of serial monogamy where they have sexual relationships with partners whom they meet only occasionally.⁴

However, there has been a general decline in sexual risk behaviours. This has been stronger in urban areas, among young people, and among the more educated. For instance between 1993 and 1998, there was an increase in the age of first sexual experience from 16 to 18 years and the prevalence of HIV infection among youth (15-19 years) dropped, according to the Zambian Ministry of Health.

Social, cultural, economic and demographic contexts have been significant drivers of HIV infection in Zambia. In the early days of the epidemic, HIV infection occurred more among those of higher economic status, but soon spread to those of lower economic status. Today it is this group that is most at risk of infection. While there are high levels of awareness around HIV and AIDS in both urban and rural areas; incorrect beliefs, misconceptions and stigma are still common. Most people, young and old still consider talking about sex to be taboo and many remain largely ignorant of ways to prevent HIV and many are not assertive enough to insist on safe sex. Transactional sex, gender inequality, multiple partnerships and high risk behaviours such as those influenced by the consumption of alcohol are all contributing to the spread of HIV infection.

³ Zambia's Progress Report on the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action 2000–2004, 2004

⁴ Dr Kaona A.D. Frederick, Tuba M, Khondowe S and Dr Kafwembe, Tropical Diseases Research Centre (TDRC), Institute of Tropical Medicine, Antwerp in Belgium.

Despite the fact that condom use has increased overall, it has decreased in transactional sexual relationships and with non regular partners. Condom use remains an almost exclusively male decision, with many men reluctant to use condoms correctly and consistently.

While the number of Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) centres has increased, the number of people accessing these services remains low. Meanwhile, it is worrying that 25% of pregnant women are HIV positive and about 39.5% of babies born to HIV positive mothers are born with the virus. Although Zambia has a high antenatal clinic attendance rate, many women do not get into the Prevention of Mother To Child Transmission (PMTCT) programme, for various reasons - mostly related to stigma.

Over the years, prevention interventions have successfully focused on groups that are more susceptible to HIV infection such as truck drivers, migrant workers, cross-border traders, and fish traders, as well as uniformed personnel. However, the epidemic in Zambia is a generalised one. Scaling up and strengthening interventions among the general population is therefore of utmost importance.

Formative Research Process

As part of a formative process of the HIV prevention campaign, the Soul City Regional Programme held a regional research design workshop in May 2007 where nine country-based health and communication teams brainstormed broad research strategies. Following this meeting, research teams from the nine Soul City partner countries conducted qualitative target audience research on multiple and concurrent sexual relationships in relation to HIV prevention. The research study was designed after an analysis of related literature, consultations with key informants and a brainstorming process.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To gain insight into the audience's understanding of, attitudes and practices around multiple and concurrent relationships and male circumcision in the context of HIV prevention.

Specific Objectives

- Explore audience perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, practices and experiences relating to multiple and concurrent partnerships.
- Assess audience risk perception with regard to multiple and concurrent partnerships and HIV and AIDS.
- To explore the influence of social, economic and cultural factors on multiple concurrent partnerships.
- Assess audience knowledge, attitudes and perceptions on male circumcision as an HIV prevention measure.

Methodology

Interviews were conducted with adult and youth groups in four areas: two urban areas - Lusaka and Livingstone, and two rural areas - Chirundu and Solwezi. The areas were selected because they are either urban or rural and/ or because they are border towns or have a sizable population with cultural male-circumcision practices.

The primary target audience for this study was adults between 16 and 55 years. The audience was segmented according to characteristics such as sex, age and marital status. This ensured that participants were able to discuss issues freely as peers and also ensured that the experiences of people in various circumstances were captured.

A total of 16 Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs), four in each district, were conducted each with between 9 and 12 participants. A total of ten In-depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted, three each in two districts and two each in two other districts. The IDIs were conducted with key informants including psychosocial counsellors, traditional leaders, those who may be more susceptible to HIV infection such as truck drivers and cross border traders, as well as people who are involved in multiple concurrent sexual relationships. The interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed verbatim. Data was processed and analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti.

Participant Characteristics

The breakdown of participants is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 In-Depth Interviews

URBAN		RURAL	
District	Profile	District	Profile
Livingstone	Psychosocial counsellor	Solwezi	Psychosocial Counsellor
Livingstone	Traditional leader	Chirundu	Traditional leader
Lusaka	Man involved in MCP	Solwezi	Man involved in MCP
Lusaka	Traditional marriage counsellor	Solwezi	Traditional marriage counsellor
Livingstone	Woman involved in MCP	Chirundu	Woman involved in MCP

Table 2 Focus Group Discussions

Area Characteristic	Urban				Rural		
	Lusaka	Livingstone			Chirundu	Solwezi	
General Population	Female 26–35 Single	Male 45–55 Married	Female 26–35 Married	Male 26–35 Single	Male 26–35 Married	Male 36–44 Single	Female 36–44 Married
Pregnant Women	Male 36–44	–			Female 26–34	–	
Youth	–	Male 16–20			–	Female 16–20	
Ex Sex Worker	Female all ages	–			Female all ages	–	
Mobile Business	Female all ages	–			–	Male all ages	
Mobile Truck Driver	–	–			Male all ages	–	

Findings

Research findings will be discussed under headings which are the key themes emerging from the data. Below each heading is a brief description of the theme followed by a narrative of the research findings divided into sub-themes.

Forms of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Types of relationships in Zambia

This section reports on the types/nature of sexual relationships that participants said existed in their communities.

Relationships between young people

Participants reported various forms of multiple concurrent relationships. Among these are relationships between young people, including boys and girls who may still be at school.

There are also those that are in a boy-girl relationship where they pretend as if they are in courtship heading for marriage. Yet at the end of it all, that relationship heads nowhere.

Urban Male involved in MCP

Boy-girl relationships; like these guys who are still at school; say at primary school; say grade seven and they decide to be in relationship.

Urban Male involved in MCP

Relationships between adults

Participants spoke of relationships between a married person and either another married person or a single person, and relationships between single adults. These relationships included widows and widowers in relationships with married or single adults.

You find that even those who are married such as wives are also going out with some people. Others will go out with unmarried men, and others they will go out with maybe their fellow married partners.

Rural Psychosocial Counsellor

There are times when people have been in a marriage for long years yet without a child. One of these, either the husband or wife, would want to go out and try others to see if he/she can have a child with those, so this is another kind of relationship.

Urban Male

You find married men having sexual relationships with single women.

Rural Counsellor

Intergenerational sex

Participants also talked of inter-generational relationships in which older men or women have sexual relationships with a younger partner. The older people in these relationships could be married while some of their younger partners could still be in school.

Then there are those where a married man, he's got a wife home and again he is indulged with an extra girlfriend within the community at the same time having another extra relationship with a school girl.

Single Urban Male

Kinds of sexual relationships that exist in the communities; there are those like an old man hitting it out with a girl.

Urban Males

And sometimes they are some relationships that we don't tolerate much whereby you find an old lady is involved with a school boy or young man, or maybe the garden boy.

Rural Married Females

Transactional sex

Participants' responses revealed that some forms of MCP involve the exchange of sex for monetary or material gain. This includes sex in return for employment or sex with a commercial sex worker.

So that relationship is also there where maybe a boss who gives an employee money for exchange of an extra job like maybe sex, so there is a relationship on those.

Urban Married Females

We've got of those call girls that are found in pubs; those who just want to use their bodies for the exchange of money. She doesn't care she doesn't want a permanent relationship; she just wants a short time relationship in exchange of some income.

Single Urban Male

Polygamy

Polygamy, where one man is married to more than one woman was also listed as a type of relationship that exists in the community. Participants also viewed polygamy as a form of MCP.

Since we are talking of the types of sexual partnerships, I think it's also important to mention polygamy. Although it's not common these days, it's there; it's happening.

Urban Single Males

Extent of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships were reported to be common across all the groups irrespective of sex, marital status, socio-economic status or geographic location.

Participants did, however, say that men generally engage in MCP more than women.

What I think about this issue is that here at the border...everyone has more than one partner married men sleep with anyone...People here don't care whether it's someone's wife or no.

Mobile Truck Driver

So I am seeing that having more than one sexual partner is very common among us the young, especially us who are at school, we are seeing it very much at our schools. We are having sexual partners exceeding even two or three or even more than that, so as to be giving us money to eat at school.

Rural Male Youth

For men, they are very few who do not have girlfriends. ...(Participants agree)

Rural Married Males

Because of the extent of MCP, some participants explained that it can be difficult to trust a partner. For the same reason, a number of people said that people are increasingly sceptical about marrying - not being sure if a fiancée may be having affairs elsewhere.

Even though you have known her for some months, how can you trust your girlfriend since you do not always spend nights with her?

Urban Married Males

Let me also ask a question. I am planning to get married soon but am so scared because people tell me that when I am away, she has sex with other men.

Mobile Truck Driver

Factors Encouraging Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

Various factors emerged that explain some of the drivers of MCP and these are outlined below.

Poverty

Poverty emerged as a leading reason that people have MCP. According to participants, women are more likely than men to be driven by poverty into multiple partnerships, in such

cases women exchange sex for money or they have many partners who support them in different ways. This category includes married women - some of whom have additional partnerships with the knowledge and consent of their husbands.

The biggest cause is hunger and unemployment. That is why am asking the government to do something like putting people in business.

Int. ⁵ Rural Traditional Leader

All this is because of poverty. If it was not for poverty, why would you bother yourself (to engage in multiple concurrent sexual partnerships)...For us who are not even educated because our parents are dead, you will also start doing it.

That is why even me, I will just do it as long as I eat.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

Some women resort to extra-marital relationships to provide for their personal and their family's needs because their husband's are not providing the family with financial support. Often the men are capable of providing support, but they spend the money they have on supporting other girlfriends. Widowed women who have been used to financial support from their husbands were reported to find it difficult to sustain themselves. Some parents, particularly mothers, were reported to encourage MCP by eating food bought by their daughters through their sexual affairs.

Sometimes it's because these wives need money. If, as a husband, you don't give her what she need; definitely she will go out to search for money...And this might cause her to sell her body to other men. So the best is let's give our wives what they are demanding for from us.

Int. Urban Traditional Leader

The widows; they tend to have many sexual partners depending on the way they were brought up by their husbands before they died...They cannot support themselves and the family, they can't pay for rentals. So if there can be a man who promises them to support them, they would just easily give in.

Int. Urban Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

Similarly, participants said, commercial sex workers need to find as many partners as possible. Even a successful sex worker, however, is still barely able to accumulate enough to buy the most basic necessities.

⁵ Int. denotes In-depth Interviews. This is to differentiate it from the rest of the quotes that are from Focus Group Discussions.

Some men 'use' (have sex with) you without giving you money. Others 'use' you and give you only two thousand kwacha with which you will not even buy a 'Pamela' (small pack of maize meal). This is what forces me to have more than one so that if at least this one gives you two thousand (Kwacha) the other one five thousand kwacha...you can manage to provide food.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

Wealth

In as much as poverty is seen as a driver of MCP – so is wealth. In a society where money is an inducement for sex, people with money use it to attract sexual partners. The definition of 'wealthy' was locally contextualised by respondents. For instance, people in a mining town perceived the employees of the local mining company as wealthy. Similarly, in a border town, truck drivers and customs officers were said to be wealthy. In these situations, according to participants, wealthy community members are the ones who engage in multiple sexual partnerships. Generally the wealthy people are men. In contrast, men without money are more likely to be faithful to their wives, participants said.

There are things that have caused them to have many sexual partners...It's because they are corrupted in their minds because of the money they have. If a man or woman has money, they would think nothing can prevent them from having other sexual partners.

Urban Married Males

That money makes them big headed. Even if a man has a very good wife, as long as he has money, he will want to have all the beautiful women. When he enters the bar everyone looks at him and envies him. The poor man usually sticks to his wife.

Urban Commercial Sex Worker

And also I have seen that these people with a lot of money are the people that are spreading the disease most especially to the ladies that are poor because them they go after money.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

Male and female participants said they would be reluctant to have a relationship with someone who had no money and that relative wealth was a strong inducement to have a relationship with a person.

If a person has got money the heart goes 'incha' (using hand to show the heartbeat)...Like with me who doesn't have the money; if I saw people with money I would follow them.

Rural Female Youth

If I also became rich, I would just be picking any man I want; knowing that I have the money to dress him and feed him; even supporting his mother because of the money I have.

Rural Married Females

Abuse of Authority/Office

Participants reported that people exchange sex for 'favours' in different contexts. For instance, an employer might promise someone employment in exchange for sex or an officer at a checkpoint would allow illicit goods to pass in return for sex. Participants said the practice of exchanging favours for sex is very common and they identified businessmen and businesswomen, those that work in the hospitality industry, doctors, teachers, taxi drivers and musicians as some of the people likely to be involved.

Some businesswomen have more than one sexual partner for favours. For example, passing through the road block and you are carrying fish on the C.R. bus coming from Maamba. Since they don't allow; you just sleep with the police there so that you are allowed to pass and next time you will do the same thing.

Rural Married Females

There are some...deliberately have more than one sexual partner...It depends on the work they do whereby they are exposed to a lot of temptations. For example, some (taxi) drivers after being booked by a woman and afterwards, instead of paying him, this woman strips naked inviting him to have sex with her in settlement of the payment (taxi fare).

Urban Married Females

Desire for material possessions

According to participants the desire for luxury material possessions is also a strong driver of MCP. Women especially, both single and married, were reported to have sex with many partners in order to acquire material goods or lifestyles they admire.

If she admires something from a friend like some clothing; she goes to look for a sexual partner or even two or many. When she sleeps with him, she is given money to buy clothes and she says 'that garment which my friend bought, I also have to buy it'. That is what causes some to go for multiple sexual relationships.

Rural Female Youth

Women who are not married and are never content with what they have but rather want whatever they see with others. They like buying a lot of things. In order for them to make that money to buy those things, they resort to sleeping with this and that one.

Urban Married Females

Mobility

Being away from home provides people with the opportunity to engage in planned or spontaneous sexual relationships whether they have long-term partners or not.

Some (men) are very sexually active. For example...they may be married and have left their wives to go out feel like having sex. What will they do? They will find somebody to fulfil their sexual desire.

Urban Youths

You see how long trucks here spend before they are cleared... . It will force you to go for someone. So the government should do something so that trucks do not spend much time here.

Rural Mobile Truck Driver

Some married women leave their husband and go to visit their parents for a long period of time, giving their husbands a chance to start having affairs or marry someone else.

Urban Married Females

Although you might want to be strong enough to resist on your own; women work hard to entice us into having sex with them. This is what I heard you say.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Women, especially the married ones, are more confined to their homes and less mobile than their male counterparts and so they have less opportunity to have extra-marital affairs even should they want to, said respondents. Given the opportunity, women too were reported to have additional sexual relationships.

Yes, indeed as for our friends with homes (married women), I look at them as though they are not very free...It is the men that usually find the time, because they go and met somewhere different. But for a woman...it is not common; only few do that.

Int. Rural Female Traditional Marriage Counsellor

These security guards leave their wives when they go for their night duties. These women most of them do not respect themselves. When the husband is at work...she brings other men into the home.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Others want more money; they add whatever they get to their business so that they don't get bankrupt...When she goes to order her goods, she gets extra money by prostituting herself or even gets her goods for free. She will go to this man, he gives her money; she will go to another one; he also gives her, just like that.

Urban Female General Population

Libido-enhancing Drugs and Obsession for sex

Libido enhancing drugs, traditional herbs, powders, and roots or conventional (manufactured) drugs are connected with an increase in MCP, participants said. According to respondents, when people take these drugs they are compelled to find someone to have sex with, even in the absence of their regular partner. Men and women said that sex seems to have become an obsession among some people, who see it as something that they cannot do without.

The way we grow (up)... we are taught to take more herbs so as to make our manhood (penis) strong. (This) has just contributed to people having many sexual partners because to have only one, they can't get satisfied.

Int. Urban Traditional Leader

When you eat this medicine make sure you sleep with someone and if your husband is not home, you start looking for a man otherwise you are in trouble. So these medicines contribute towards multiple sexual relationships and maybe you are also not satisfied with your partner you want to go look for someone to satisfy you.

Urban Married Females

Others want to have a strong libido. So they go to look for things like herbal roots so that they can be said to be...strong men in bed, or has tattoos. So in that way, you cannot sleep... You always want to have sex.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Dissatisfaction in Relationships

Lack of happiness, contentment and satisfaction of partners in a relationship seems to be a factor in people engaging in MCP. Men and women saw lack of communication, sexual dissatisfaction, squabbles, mistreatment by a partner and unfaithfulness as reasons for engaging in MCP. Mistreatment was defined as lack of respect and/ or not being given the money for personal or family needs.

Very few men...respect their wives...Women nowadays are having boyfriends...because of the treatment the husband gives her at home...Very few women are faithful in their marriages.

Urban Commercial Sex Worker

On the other hand, that 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.

Urban Married Males

As for the wife say if she is mistreated she will be tempted to find men that will make her feel comfortable.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

Revenge

Some additional sexual relationships are initiated when one partner wants to take revenge on a regular partner who is having an affair. Responses suggested that women were more likely than men to engage in additional partnerships for this reason. Some people seek out additional partners simply out of suspicion that their partner is having an affair, participants said.

When you are advising your husband that 'what you are doing my husband is not good for you because you will endanger your life and that of me who is innocent'. But he does not take heed of your words. When the woman sees that, she will begin to do the same.

Urban Male Youth

And at times she will do it just as revenge for what the husband had done to her; so that the husband in return may feel the pain she felt. She will do it to repay the husband. In fact, she will be doing this not in silence, but in public whereby the husband can see as well.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

Deprivation

In some cases, men were denied sex by their steady partners for various reasons and this was motivation for extra sexual relationships. Women denied their partners sex if they were menstruating, tired, pregnant, or had recently given birth - or sometimes when there was a quarrel, said respondents.

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 some else.

Mobile Truck Driver

Sexual dissatisfaction

Lack of sexual satisfaction emerged very prominently as a reason for people seeking other partners who provide better sex due to less inhibited sexual behaviour. While such practices were reportedly common among both men and women, they were attributed more to men. Some men blamed their lack of sexual satisfaction on their regular female partners' inhibited

and monotonous sexual behaviour and said they preferred the more exciting sex that they have with their additional partners.

The other thing for women is satisfaction. You find a lot of women are not being satisfied by their husband so they get involved with other men and the same applies to husbands.

Urban Married Females

You just know one style of looking up and counting the roof and then he goes out and finds different style, like today, sex in the bathroom or in the garden; or today it's in the sitting room and there is pleasure there. So he will leave you.

Urban Married Female

There is this tendency whereby women suck 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 housewife doesn't know those things. As a result...he will consider the outside to be the best. That's where you find that a married man goes for...an extra marital affair.

Urban Single Males

But when he goes outside somewhere these girls, he will find that everything is there; even cuts off his nails. Now when you look at such things, this man will stand there and compare, where am I getting the most.

Urban Married Male

Participants said that sexual dissatisfaction among women was due to various factors including a male partner's low sex drive, an undersized penis, lack of foreplay, or impotence. Men may fail to satisfy their regular female partners when they have sex with other people, whether in the context of polygamous marriages or other multiple partnerships. According to respondents, many older men who marry younger women are also unable to sexually satisfy their wives.

We men sometimes are weak. Some women are strong so they would need sex five times in a day. We men maybe can only manage one time; so these women will remain unsatisfied hence they will go out to seek others.

Int. Urban Traditional Leader

Like some of us whose husbands are truck drivers who go for work for long periods and we hear of places like Botswana where women are parading naked for truck drivers. So you find men would have sexual relationships with such women while you as a wife are waiting at home...You find such men not spending a lot of time at home because sexually they are already satisfied.

Urban Married Female

Some people...go to an extent of marrying ten women. Surely I cannot...satisfy them alone. So by not satisfying them by the time I am in the other houses, they will also do their things somewhere else.

Urban Married Males

Beads were mentioned as contributing to sexual satisfaction. Thus, some men were reported to seek extra-marital affairs with women who wore beads around their waists.

You find (that) as a wife, you don't know much (about) sexually satisfying your husband while those outside know a lot of things such as wearing beads in your waist...You find your husband goes for such (women) because of the difference there (in sexual satisfaction)thereby multiplying sexual partnerships.

Urban Married Female

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.

Urban Single Males

Low-rated spouse

Some husbands or wives have extra-marital affairs because their spouse is perceived as not of their 'class'; 'not attractive', or 'not clean'. Some troubled marriages are maintained in order to avoid the negative social image that is associated with divorce and with the knowledge that one or both of partners can have other sexual partners.

(He) is getting what he wants (from girlfriend) ...It's either it (marriage) will be kept to avoid divorce or not to tarnish his name.

Urban Single Males

There are men who like visiting one another such that when your husband brings his friends to meet you the wife who is dirty and not well dressed, he is ashamed of you. That's why he will start introducing the girlfriend as his wife.

Urban Married Females

You will find that the wife at his home is not attractive enough. So because of that he wants to have other women outside the home.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Lack of communication

It emerged from research that lack of communication in relationships is a major problem. Respondents said that despite the many problems that partners experience with each other, they do not talk about them. This lack of communication between partners is partly due to the social norm that a woman should be submissive to her husband and should not question

him - even if she suspects him of having an affair or placing her at risk of being infected with a STI or HIV. Participants argued that a husband should inform his wife of where he thought she needed to improve rather than resorting to extra-marital affairs.

A man who is married can be going after women. If the wife asks, he would say 'just keep quiet I am a man'...So for a woman, she will just be hurting inside her heart because of being a woman. You are not supposed to say anything, and a man is supposed to do whatever he wants, because he is a man.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

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.

Urban Married Females

Social and Cultural Influences on Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

This section highlights the social and cultural factors that further influence MCP. These factors can be understood as exerting an external force on individuals to engage in MCP. With this perspective, the individual may be seen as having little or no choice in engaging in MCP because of the desire to fit in or to do what is socially and culturally acceptable. In this context, MCP can be taken as something that is practiced for a justified end.

Alcohol

Alcohol was quite prominently reported across all the groups, especially among men, as influencing people to become involved in sexual affairs. When people drink they are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour, including MCP, said participants. This situation is being fuelled by the rising number of drinking establishments, reported respondents.

Also people who take alcohol, during the time they are taking alcohol, they change sexual partners like shirts. He drinks, with one sexual partner after another. In this way they are also seen and said to have many sexual partners.

Int. Rural Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

Again there is sex due to influence of alcohol, you find somebody never thought of having sex with a woman or a girl, now due to that alcohol and environment itself it will be found that that person will get involved in sexual relationship.

Urban Married Males

You are saying that no girlfriend! (participant looking very surprised) but what if you go to a night club where, after getting drunk, all your friends get some girls and even you since you are also drunk it will force you also to get one.

Rural Married Males

Influences of Modernity

Participants in rural and urban areas, mostly men, blamed MCP on the influences of Western culture through TV and on the way women dress. Participants also said that young people 'these days' do not listen to the advice of elders.

The way women nowadays are dressing these days is very tempting. You will find that she had worn her trousers, for example the pant is clearly being seen. It is making us men to get carried away.

Rural Male Mobile Businessmen

Look at the exposure...the culture which has come; especially that this time many people have DSTV the community are watching many things. Some of these things spoil their minds...we have taught sex to our children through doing sex in the bedroom whilst the child is watching us.

Urban Married Males

Our parents are telling us that the way you are doing things is not the way we were taught by our forefathers. Try to follow the examples we have been giving you...The response (of the youth) has been to say; 'all those things were ancient things'. They are out-dated and so we can't do that. This is why the diseases are continuously spreading; because we are not obeying what our elderly people are saying...All we say is; 'those are old ideas'.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Peer Pressure

Peer pressure emerged as a major factor influencing MCP. According to participants a person who does not have many sexual partners is likely to be teased and laughed at by friends. Even adults, both married and single, reported being influenced by friends to have MCP. Participants said that it is common for young people such as school girls to have more than one sexual partner to give them money or help support them. Peer pressure was also said to contribute to young people's urge to be independent from parental control.

When all friends ask us; and they all have sexual partners...Such friends tell us a lot and even say that if you are not going to have a sexual partner, you will not be my friend any more...Just because my friends have sexual partners, I should also have one. Now when you have one sexual partner, your friends will tell you that you shouldn't have only one sexual partner (but)...even three sexual partners so that they will be giving you transport money and money to eat at break time.

Rural Female Youth

People who usually have more than one sexual partner are mostly us single women...you run away from your parents just because you want more freedom. You start living on your own...by meeting with your friends and their telling you that they stay on their own, and say 'why can't you come and join us or find your own place so that you have the freedom'... You have this one, two or three boyfriends.

Int. Rural Female with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

Positive perceptions about MCP

It emerged that men with many sexual partners are often looked up to in communities and women are often drawn to them. Some people said they engage in MCP to avoid boredom.

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.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

(There are) others who want to constantly pick up fights over me...If a new girl comes into...the community and I pick on her for a relationship, the old girlfriends are usually not happy about it. They start fights. All I hear is that there was a fight...about me.

Int. Rural Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

(It is) something like a game, like we youths. You meet a friend and then he asks you like how many girls have you slept with? He tells you that he has slept with, maybe, five girls. You also want to beat that record. Just wanting to be like him, you also follow what he has been doing so you end up having many partners.

Urban Male Youths

This kind of attitude has kept me busy. Many are the times I don't feel bored. When I find a lady, I talk to her (and) I feel busy.

Int. Urban Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

Some men said they see sexual relationships as a way to find the most competent sexual partner, although not necessarily with a view to marrying the person.

I am exploring life and that is going to help me find a right partner; I...could have tested others but I need the best and one day I will find the best...I just feel like exploring more to find a suitable partner who would perform in the bed...I have to try these ladies and comes up with the best.

Int. Urban Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

"Immediately you see a new face...we all look at her like (and exclaim) shibale kwaa! (a local game with a prize for the winner)...Especially when she is latest here. You even begin to look at her more like a new jeans design from Dubai and you all want to have a test of her.

Rural Married Males

When he just sees a woman; he just thinks of having her. (When) another woman passes; he says 'that's a pretty face, I should have her'. Another one passes; he also admires and wishes of having her. That's pure selfishness.

Rural Married Females

Desire for a long-term relationship

Generally, women seemed to want to have only one steady and lasting sexual partnership and when they are involved in MCP it is often as a way of seeking out the most suitable marriage partner. Participants indicated that social expectations put pressure on individuals, especially females, to find a marriage partner. However, when men in these relationships do not show a preference for steady relationships or marriage, and as a safeguard in case a partner should terminate a relationship, many women seek additional concurrent relationships. This cycle is perpetuated by the fact that some men in these partnerships are already married.

In some cases respondents said, women fall pregnant in the hope that a man will propose marriage. If the father of the child does not make an offer of marriage, the woman will have relationships with other men. If a woman becomes pregnant, and a male partner denies the pregnancy, both are likely to go on to new sexual relationships.

By going out with so many men, we would also want to get married. We also admire to get married so we just try by going out with men (hoping) that maybe if I go out with this one, he will marry me. Then he disappoints you again. By going out with this (yet another) one, you think he will marry you (but) he also disappoints you.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

By going out with many sexual partners, that's where they even find a chance of finding a man to marry them... They think by going out, God can help them find a man to marry.

Rural Married Females

She was used to her late husband... As days go by; you just know how our bodies for us women are... She will find somebody (even) though he is not providing for her. She would just want to be called... a 'Mrs' for the sake of respect.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

Where a lady is going out with a married man; definitely there is no trust (hope of marriage) there, because she knows that that man is married... The lady will go and find someone to whom she can be married... She is having sex with two different people and when she is infected she doesn't know (who infected her).

Urban Single Males

Desire for a short-term relationship

According to participants, women generally want permanent or more long-term sexual relationships, but the men they have affairs with seem to prefer short-term relationships. Some men entice women into sexual relationships with the promise of marriage, whereas they are interested only in sexual exploration. Responses show that women are vulnerable to this sort of deceit and that men are aware of this. When men eventually get married, participants said, some maintain all their current or previous sexual partners.

Some (males) just...like lying and cheating girls that they will marry them. But at the end; they will just impregnate them and leave them.

Int. Urban Traditional Leader

You think of it, if I have sex with one person after another, and all of a sudden decide this one will be my wife, it will create problems. But to make sure there are no problems you must maintain all the relationships with all the ladies.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Forced Marriages

Participants, most of them urban, believed that some MCP occur because of forced marriages. Some couples are compelled to marry because of unplanned pregnancies and others are forced to marry a partner chosen by their parents. Still others were reported to marry at a time they are not ready for marriage. All such marriages, said respondents, lack love and often led to extra-marital relationships.

Sometimes you entered the marriage because the man damaged you (made you pregnant) and he was forced to marry you though he doesn't love you and is not happy with you. So even if you offer him service, he will always not appreciate you but he will continue leaving you for other women.

Urban Married Females

Our parents believe that when you are Tonga (ethnic group) you are to marry a Tonga. Where you've been dating a lady you know very much and who you plan to get married to; you introduce this lady to your parents and...they deny this person and they will force you to marry somebody you don't know. Unfortunately, you marry that person to please your parents.

Urban Single Males

Need for Children

Mostly among rural male participants, multiple concurrent sexual relationships were reported to be a result of cultural pressure for a couple to bear children or in some cases, the specific pressure to bear a son rather than a daughter. Sometimes, such relationships were said to be a quest to prove that 'barrenness' in a marriage lay with the other partner.

What brings about having sexual relationships is because of lack of children. Many times the blame is put on women. So the woman in order to try and prove if she is the one...decides to get into a sexual relationship with other men. Similarly the man might also decide to do the same. Where the woman went she gets impregnated, and the man also impregnates someone else. This too is bringing about multiple sexual relationships in homes.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Usually women are not satisfied with their husband if they are impotent and you as woman would want to sleep with a man who can give you children.

Urban Married Females

You know, mostly in tradition they believe that in marriage you must have children...So you find that the pressure that you have from brothers, sisters and other family members will make one divorce or have another affair with a different lady.

Urban Male Youth

Disintegration of the Social Safety Net

Some participants, including commercial sex workers and married male adults, reported that the support system that was offered by the traditional extended family system has broken down as a result of increasing poverty levels. Lacking support, individuals turn to MCP as a means of supporting themselves and their families. The disintegration of the extended family system also seems to affect children who, participants said, are often ill-treated at home by step parents or in-laws. Often these children run away from home and engage in MCP as a means of economic survival.

We mustn't...blame those people because if (they) came to me and said 'please could you help me with food'. I wouldn't give them...What will ring into my head is that she is not my relative...That olden type of living...(the) extended family relationship this time is not there; it's gone. Each man for himself and his children that is all.

Rural Married Males

If we had people to help us, we wouldn't be going in such ways. (It is because) we don't have families (to support us). That's what makes us (have multiple or concurrent sexual relationships).

Rural Female Commercial Sex Worker

When your mother dies and your father remarries, that woman will not take care of you well; she mistreats you. As a result you will have many sexual partners to help you. You are mistreated; you won't even think that...there are diseases.

Urban Female General Population

Obligation to family

Parents expect their children's financial support after they have completed their education and this puts pressure on the child to earn a living, even if it means having multiple sexual partnerships, said respondents.

Even when someone has completed school s/he will not be let by the parents just to be sitting home. Instead, they will be pushed to do something. They are expected to be bringing bread home. Hence they would also struggle hard to find a way out of this pressure. (This)...has made people to go out and have such sexual relationship.

Int. Urban Marriage Counsellor

Such people are those without families. They just stay alone and don't care what happened to them, no matter how many they have sex with. But a normal person with a family to look after will always take care of himself and the family.

Rural Married Males

Parents' communication with Children

Participants identified the lack of guidance given to children by their parents as part of the reason that young people engage in MCP. Respondents suggested that teachers should be required to provide children with sex education.

These young ones are supposed to be taken care of ...Parents need to know how to talk, but (instead), they say 'I can't talk to my kid about sex'. Meanwhile, if you talk to him/her, you will curtail the AIDS. If you gave it to the teacher, you are lucky. To the teacher, it becomes one of subjects.

Urban Married Males

It is important to teach the young ones about the dangers of AIDS. If we don't, there shall be no difference between those who are in the streets. In the end, even our children will find themselves in bars, and end up dying.

Urban Married Males

Initiation and public ceremonies/gatherings

Girls' initiation ceremonies were perceived by respondents as encouraging MCP. Men are attracted to these girls because of the kind of sex education the girls receive, participants said. The girls themselves were reported to be generally eager to go out and practise what they learn about sex during the initiation period with several sexual partners.

As the girl comes out of (initiation) institution, what is put in their mind is one, freedom; two, sex; and the way to handle a man. She will accelerate even before she is married. By that time, she will be in full swing (will have known how to make love).

Urban Single Males

These young, young girls who are becoming of age...when she comes out of that house she will want to practise everything that she was taught. So the child will go wild...and if she goes to a man, she does what she was taught for him...again he goes to another man and does what she was taught...The men now target the girls who come of age and were kept in the house.

Rural Commercial Sex Workers

Some public gatherings such as 'Sun Down' (gathering where people dance and drink till late) were also reported to encourage MCP.

In this community, there are times when things like traditional games come together; what they call 'Sun down'...When a girl comes of age, many people come to see the girl. During such occasions, many people get excited and get into sexual relations.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Negative Perceptions Surrounding People in MCP

While some community members view people in MCP positively, it emerged that others view them with indifference. Some involved in MCP experience stigma and discrimination, said participants. They are labelled as loose or prostitutes, or said to be infected with and soon to die of HIV. When someone is known to be involved in MCP in some communities, anyone they talk to is assumed to be a sexual partner. Respondents said many parents view their children's involvement in multiple concurrent sexual relationships as a disgrace.

Such people, the community is not even mindful of them. But you see, it's very difficult for the community to rise and confront such people. Instead it will just overlook such a person; they will not talk to you. They will consider you a prostitute. At times, if you have daughters they would conclude; 'like mother like daughters'.

Urban Married Males

We don't like such people for they are destroyers and we don't need them in our communities. Even just having them for your neighbour is scary because she could get your husband.

Urban Married Female

Those who are married...think you've already taken their husbands...They wouldn't want you even a bit; even to see you. Yet, their husbands go somewhere else (have sexual relationships with other women) though they think that you've taken their husband.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

It's very difficult for the community to rise and confront such people. Instead it will just overlook such a person; they will not talk to you.

Urban Married Males

Multiple Concurrent Partnerships and HIV and AIDS

This theme highlights knowledge, attitudes and practices with regard to HIV and AIDS in the context of MCP.

Knowledge of HIV and AIDS

Responses revealed general awareness of the risks related to MCP including HIV and AIDS. This includes awareness of the importance of prevention of infection through abstinence, mutual faithfulness, and condom use.

If that person cannot abstain, then he has to stick to his or her sexual partner. Then if that person cannot be faithful, let him just use condoms. However...a condom itself is not 100% perfect. So the only thing here is being faithful to one sexual partner. If you are married stick to your wife.

Urban Married Males

HIV/AIDS is directly related to extra marital affairs...For instance a driver is always on the road driving to different places and he meets different kinds of girls of different character and different backgrounds.

Urban Single Males

Perception of Risk

According to participants, some people who engage in MCP appear to approach their relationships with some fear and caution because of HIV and AIDS. This would be true especially for those who are involved in these partnerships as a means of support rather than for sexual satisfaction and also more so for women.

We have been brought up in cultures where they say a woman...can't dress a man in a condom. Also, for affairs which last for a long period of time; you find in the beginning they would be using condoms, but after sometime they stop using them because they have gotten used to each other as if they are married, which is risky.

Urban Married Females

[I] am planning to get married soon but am so scared because people tell me that when [I] am away, she has sex with other men. The other thing is that I have also been having sex with her without using condoms but am not sick. What advice can you give me?

Mobile Truck Driver

It emerged that while people do not generally practise safe sex consistently, they are aware that safe sex can protect partners against STI infection and HIV and AIDS. A prominent practice seemed to be that of using condoms during the initial stages of the relationship and having unprotected sex after a period of time when partners feel they can 'trust' that they are both free of HIV. Participants also indicated that condoms give licence to people to have MCP because partners feel they are protected against disease and unwanted pregnancy.

You find that you may use a condom twice or maybe three times. But after you get used to that woman, he forgets of using a condoms, after all our relationship has now lasted six months, it's just as good as trusting now.

Urban Single Males

There are married people who have girlfriends. That relationship at first will be based on trust. They even use condoms but in the end, it's 'walale' (unprotected sex).

Rural Married Males

Condoms have made people to get into having many sexual partners because they think that by using them, they are safe. But mind you, not every condom is safe; in fact it is risky using condom these days.

Urban Married Males

According to participants, when a spouse dies it is generally assumed that they died of an HIV-related illness and the widows or widowers is then thought to be potentially HIV positive. Respondents said that widows sometimes have sex with their late husband's relatives as a means of 'cleansing themselves' of the husband's ghost (sexual cleansing). This practice contributes to MCP.

The other thing I have discovered here is that HIV/AIDS as a disease is contracted from men whose wives have died because instead of finding a woman to please them they would go out and sleep around with many girls so that they are cleansed faster.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

Respondents said that some men who engage in extra-marital unprotected sex, nevertheless still have unprotected sex with their wives. They feared that suggesting condom use with a spouse would cause suspicions of unfaithfulness.

He might not want the wife to know that he is infected by a girlfriend. He takes the girlfriend for medication forgetting that wife (also) has an STI. Maybe the wife wants sexual satisfaction and he would agree to it for the sake of satisfying the wife. He would not want the wife know that he had an STI since the wife would discover that he was having an extra marital affair.

Urban Single Male

It would seem that among some males involved in multiple or concurrent sexual relationships did not believe that they themselves were at risk. Rather those who were infected were the innocent wives whose husbands were having extra-marital affairs.

Int. Rural Male with Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partners

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 even getting infected. Some of these respectable women are being infected by their husbands. his disease is just about time. If it is time for you to get it you will surely get it.

Int. Urban Male with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

It emerged that, despite relatively high levels of general knowledge on HIV-related risk of infection, such factors as poverty make it difficult for people to avoid risk of infection.⁶ Those most vulnerable in this context are the very poor, particularly women.

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.

Rural Married Males

Fatalism and HIV

Responses from participants generally revealed a fatalistic attitude towards the risks of contracting HIV in the context of MCP among those who are involved in multiple relationships for sexual satisfaction. Men were most prominent in this category. Some people involved in MCP said they are not afraid of contracting HIV arguing that everyone will ultimately die, and that trying to avoid HIV is as pointless as trying to avoid death. Others believe that HIV is just like any other disease and still others argue that HIV, unlike other diseases, does not kill instantly – making it preferable to many other illnesses. Still others seem to practise risky sexual behaviours because they believe they must already be infected, in which case the number of sexual partners they have makes no difference.

⁶ See section on factors encouraging MCP

Participants also said that some people who know or suspect they are infected with HIV try to infect others with the disease.

They know that they will die...They say even if I stick to one sexual partner I will still die, so even if I have more than one sexual partner I will die the same day my friend has died. We all will be buried at the grave yard.

Urban Male Youth

Some know that they have diseases (HIV) on their body but...just because they don't know who infected them, they want to spread the disease so that many people die together with them. They even boast that they will die many....He does not want to die alone.

Int. Rural Female with Multiple and Concurrent Partners

There are many things which make people not be afraid (of HIV). If this disease, HIV/AIDS was like cholera whereby if somebody contracts s/he can die the very next day or the following week, the disease would have not continued for this long.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

Role of ARVs in encouraging MCP

Participants made it clear that people judge one another's HIV status by appearance. Therefore if someone looks healthy people will believe they do not have HIV and vice versa. Given this, many people argued that ARVs contribute to the spread of HIV and AIDS as they allow an HIV positive person to look healthy. Respondents also argued that people are no longer afraid of MCP because of the availability of ARVs.

Sometimes, understanding is...narrow in the way one takes things; especially this HIV/AIDS...People are no longer scared because (of) the provision these ARVS. They are doing things deliberately because...although I get AIDS, there are ARVS. Now people are... not scared; they need intervention. People need to broaden their thinking; they need information on sensitization and update information.

Urban Single Males

Today you have sex with someone without knowing that someone is sick because nowadays there is what they call boosters (ARVs). People look healthy but they are sick...These pills (ARVs) are good and bad at the same time, because they bring about infection of HIV...They are bad because someone who is sick will look healthy and I will end up sleeping with her and I will be infected and later on will infect my wife.

Int. Rural Traditional Leader

HIV/AIDS will not be gotten rid of because of those ARVs...One cannot even suspect they are on drugs. So the government should cease to give these ARVs. If it does so; AIDS will be a thing of the past. Once it does that, AIDS will cease to exist...We are just all over; indulging ourselves in sexual relationships. Even after I get infected they will start giving me ARVs and in no time I will put on weight and no one will know I am infected.

Rural Single Male

Gender and Multiple Concurrent Partnerships

This section deals with the prevailing social, cultural and economic power relationships that exist between men and women and how these influence either one or both partners in a relationship to engage in MCP.

Responses revealed prominently that women were more affected by poverty than their male counterparts because they rely on their male sexual partners as their source of revenue. The situation seemed to be worse for single women because of the temporary nature of many of their relationships, and the fact that male partners often do not provide the money or support they promise. Participants said that these women become entangled in cycles of having several sexual partners to ensure they have an adequate income - thereby increasing their risk of HIV infection dramatically.

A body cannot stay without food for a long period of time. You see at times poverty is related to lack of food. So because someone needs food he/she will be forced to find some ways and means to get food for themselves and their families. This is especially common with women.

Urban Married Women

You could have a partner but if he's not satisfying you economically or financially; you try to find somewhere else, you may have that love, maybe the so called love but are you satisfied economically, are you satisfied financially? You see... so you end up finding someone who can give you some money.

Urban Single Males

In contrast, a woman who is financially independent was perceived by participants to be capable of being less submissive and more able to decide when she wants to have sex and when she does not want to negotiate for safe sex.

Because if say I am looked after by my wife, (she) will always dictate even on sex. The time she doesn't want, even if I need it, she never gives me. Now if this happens tomorrow, I will say, 'Yesterday she refused. Maybe even today, so let me have it somewhere else before I confront those headaches at home.

Urban Married Female

Poverty is the main one, because there are two types of sexual relationship, there is one which is done by professional women, they are rich but just enjoy doing it. You will even find them advising you to put on a condom when having sex with them; no condom no sex... but these from our compounds (the poor); its 'walale' (unprotected sex) because all they want is money.

Rural Married Males

It emerged that, apart from their financial dependency, married women are also negatively affected by some cultural norms. Among these are the expectations that women will not question their husbands' actions, that women will serve men; that women will depend on their husband's for finances, and that women will not deny their husband's sex. These cultural prescriptions not only discourage assertiveness or independence, but they put women at risk of HIV infection, said participants.

I had (got married) myself...to a man who even stopped me from doing the business I was doing; hoping that he would assist me. But all the same, when he just heard that I was pregnant, that was the end.

Rural Commercial Sex Worker

Also we have been brought up in cultures where they say a woman should not make the first move where sex is concerned. So you can't dress a man in a condom.

Rural Married Females

Women are expected to comply with their husbands' extra-marital sexual affairs, respondents said, but women who have affairs themselves are condemned.

You find that if they (men) go out...and have an affair, they will just regard it as normal and say...that is how a man should behave. You find that with females, if they do that, they are regarded as people who are prostitutes.

Int. Rural Psychosocial Counsellor

When your wife (says), 'my man, I've got...sores on my private parts, we men tend to become...very annoyed. You say, 'you are the one who infected me'...Forgetting that you are the one who got it from that girlfriend and you brought the problem in the house and pretending to be clean.

Urban Single Males

According to participants, while husbands expect their wives to comply with cultural dictates such as not initiating sex, men consider boring sex lives at home as push-factors for extra-marital sexual relationships.

He (husband) will identify the women with things that he likes to be done for him. That is the one he will prefer. You will find that maybe the one he has fallen for has been bought some lotion which makes her complexion to change...In so doing, he forgets about the one at home. Again he might find another woman wearing a trouser he falls in love with her also. He also has sex with her.

Rural Mobile Businessman

Circumcision

Participants had varied views about circumcision, but generally they believe that circumcision does not prevent HIV. Attempts to explain this seemed to reveal wide knowledge gaps and ignorance about the relationship between circumcision and HIV infection.

AIDS does not enter through the outer skin as they think. It is a venereal disease, it gets in like any other sexual disease; it moves through the veins. I don't think when somebody is circumcised then...the disease cannot penetrate the veins. It's the same where the sperms pass through and those are the veins which can transmit the same disease.

Urban Married Males

There is a major difference between going for circumcision and not going for circumcision. However, this does not mean that a person who has been circumcised has the guarantee that he will not get infected...The one who injects others can infect herself in the process by accident and end up contracting the disease.

Rural Mobile Businessmen

These being circumcised are not safe from HIV because sometimes they will use the same razor to cut so many people and some of them may already be infected by HIV .So to me there are no safe methods. We just need to use condoms.

Urban Married Females

Because of the belief that circumcision reduces risk of HIV infection and also that circumcised men have greater sexual prowess, many male participants said they support the practice of circumcision. However, some people pointed out that the practice of circumcision is culturally specific to certain ethnic groups. Others see circumcision as risky because the use of contaminated surgical instruments can lead to HIV infection.

Male circumcision depends on the people who do that; not all the tribes do that. There is a particular tribe which does that. You cannot take a Ngoni or a Tonga⁷ for [circumcision], tribes which don't practice such; then it will be unfair. Each tribe has its own culture to follow. So to me, it's very difficult to speak or teach people about circumcision.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

Beliefs and Misconceptions

While participants generally said they believe that circumcision helps to reduce the risk of HIV infection, some participants from both urban and rural sites believe that circumcision guarantees a man protection against STIs and HIV.

In fact, males who undergo circumcision do not even contract syphilis and gonorrhoea even HIV and AIDS also because they don't have some skin that keeps some germs. They are also strong and clean.

Rural Female Youth

It is said that men who are circumcised are not victims of sexually transmitted diseases so that's why a lot of women go for the 'Kalubales'⁸ who have been to 'mukanda'⁹ where they are circumcised because they are clean even after having sex.

Urban Married Females

I don't know the medicine they put, but they say that after going through that ceremony (circumcision) one doesn't get these diseases.

Urban Businesswomen

Participants also spoke of beliefs that circumcised men can prevent HIV infection by washing or wiping the penis immediately after sex and that circumcision boosts a man's sexual drive and prowess. Many respondents said that because of these sorts of beliefs, circumcision leads to MCP and consequently, the spread of HIV. The belief that circumcision prevents HIV infection was also reported as a reason for people having unprotected sex.

Male circumcision is good and helpful. I understand that they are not much affected with HIV infection during sex compared to those that are uncircumcised...because after sex, they can just wash their penis and the virus will leave.

Int. Urban Traditional Marriage Counsellor

After sex you would wipe the man with your hands the circumcised man he will be clean but for the uncircumcised man some dirty would remain in the fore skin.

Urban Married Females

⁷ Two of Zambian ethnic groups that do not culturally practice circumcision

⁸ One of the Zambian ethnic groups that culturally practice circumcision

⁹ Circumcision ceremony. (Participant was referring to a person who has undergone circumcision)

Men are circumcised because it's easy for them to keep themselves clean...They just get tissue and wipe after sex and they are okay. That's why they even refuse to wear condoms. (They will tell you): 'I don't want to wear a condom' (When you wonder why); you look and you find (he is circumcised).

Urban Commercial Sex Worker

On...some radio station on Saturday; they were promoting this circumcision using doctors. There is the circumcision they are doing in the hospitals now...Why do they want people to be circumcised first of all? That should be our question...Why do they want people to be circumcised? It...means that obviously, they are not talking about condoms. People want to be doing it (having sex) without condoms.

Urban Single Male

Contrary to the above, some participants believed that a person who undergoes circumcision was more exposed to infection as a result of the removal of the foreskin.

Some people have been following it but it's not good because when the penis is left open, it can easily be infected. So the government should quickly come in. Although, it's traditional, it has to be stopped.

Int. Urban Traditional Leader

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicate that there is little available research on MCP in Zambia at present. Therefore, discussion of the findings will be based on the major themes that emerged from the research and will make reference to related literature/research where such is available.

Forms of MCP

Research shows that there are many different forms of multiple concurrent partnerships in Zambian society. The research questions did not explicitly ask participants for a definition of MCP, but instead sought to understand the experiences of the research participants.

Extent of MCP

This study reveals that Multiple Concurrent Partnerships are pervasive across wide sectors of society. In agreement with a similar study¹⁰, findings in this research reveal that MCP is more common among economically empowered men and economically disempowered women, and also that MCP is more common among unmarried than married people. This poses a challenge for the designing of appropriate interventions aimed at addressing MCP for all these and other diverse segments of people involved in MCP.

Factors Encouraging MCP

This research seems to indicate that there are many reasons why people engage in MCP and some of these drivers, such as poverty, are beyond individual's immediate control. Because of this any intervention to reduce MCP would need to be made up of more than a partner reduction campaign. Reference is often made to Uganda's 'Zero Grazing' campaign which focused successfully on partner reduction to reduce the incidence of HIV.¹¹ Studies following this campaign have indicated a drop in the incidence of HIV during the active span of the campaign and an increase in the incidence after the campaign.¹² It may be important to gain more understanding of why the incidence of HIV increased after the conclusion of the 'Zero Grazing' campaign. This information could assist in appropriately aligning the messages for programming, and targeting the focus of interventions in order to increase the efficacy of a campaign against MCP.

¹⁰ Health Communication Partnership, Zambia 2008

¹¹ Shelton et al 2006; Stoneburner & Low-Beer 2004; Green et al 2006; Slutkin et al 2006 in Halperin & Epstein 2007.

¹² Epstein 2005; Epstein 2007; Timberg 2007 in Halperin & Epstein 2007.

Dynamics within Partnerships as Drivers of MCP

Research¹³ indicates that people who have sexual problems are more likely to be engaged in MCP. It would be pertinent to design interventions that would deal with issues of reduced intimacy in primary relationships in order to enhance healthy sexual relationships and consequently dissuade partners from believing that sexual satisfaction can be found only in secondary sexual partnerships.

Social and Cultural Influences

The practice of MCP in Zambian society is an example of how individual's choices are shaped by personal as well as social and cultural influences. Thus a campaign to reduce MCP will need to focus not only on individuals, but also on families, communities and policy. This may mean challenging social and cultural norms that have existed for several generations. Such norms include those that see involvement in MCP as acceptable for men and that see a woman who is sexually proactive as likely to be having a relationship with other men. It is also a common misconception in Zambian society that the woman is responsible if a couple is unable to conceive a child.

This research and other studies have shown that the assimilation of foreign cultures has a significant influence on many health attitudes and behaviours including alcohol consumption¹⁴, attitudes towards HIV and other STIs¹⁵, and the number of sexual partners¹⁶. This study reveals that some aspects of Western influence such as the movie industry have had negative impact on behaviour, including on sexual practices, which have contributed to MCP. Similarly, some positive teachings of traditional culture that could reduce MCP are brushed aside as archaic.

¹³ The significance of this is illustrated by research that shows that a woman who desired or intended pregnancy was 3.03 times more likely to engage in high risk sexual behaviour compared to someone who had no desire or intention for pregnancy. (Robinson et al 2004).

¹⁴ Caetano & Kaskutas 1995 in Robinson et al 2004.

¹⁵ Freske et al 1999 in Robinson et.al 2004.

¹⁶ (Sabogal et al 1995, Robinson et al 2004) and condom use (Ford & Norris, 1993 Robinson et al 2004)

MCP and HIV and AIDS

Participants in this study recognised that MCP put people at risk of HIV infection. However, it was shown that this knowledge does not necessarily lead to a change in high-risk behaviour. It is not clear whether providing accurate information about how concurrency in sexual relationships relates to HIV infection would help to dissuade target populations from engaging in MCP. The benefits of doing so would, however, have to be weighed against the possibility that target populations will continue to engage in risky behaviour if partners believe that they are beyond the most infectious period. In addition, for populations where perception of risk is low and/or fatalism is pervasive, there is a need to consider means other than possible risk of HIV infection to dissuade people from having MCP.

Gender and MCP

There has been growing acknowledgement that HIV is a feminised epidemic. Not only are more women infected but more women carry the burden of care for people infected with HIV and more women suffer the economic and social deprivations that follow the occurrence of HIV in families. This research indicates that culture, social norms, and financial dependence are some of the factors that put women in contact with MCP either as partners or as passive observers when their partners engage in MCP.

Circumcision

The findings in this research indicate that the research participants had many misconceptions around circumcision. Care needs to be taken in promoting circumcision as a means of HIV prevention as promoting circumcision may be misconstrued to imply that it removes risk, rather than reduces risk of HIV infection.

Conclusion

Mathematical models have demonstrated that MCP can amplify the incidence of HIV as much as ten times.¹⁷ Indeed, the pervasive practice of MCP has been proposed as an explanation for the higher prevalence of HIV in sub-Saharan Africa compared with other third-world nations such as Sri Lanka.

People in high HIV and low HIV prevalence areas generally have the same number of partners over the course of a lifetime. However, it has been noted that the difference lies in whether these partnerships are predominantly monogamous or multiple and concurrent. Areas with high HIV prevalence also present with high levels of multiple concurrency and this builds a strong case for positive correlation between multiple concurrent partnerships and HIV prevalence.

However, dealing with the issue of multiple concurrent partnerships in an effort to reduce HIV prevalence is not an easy task owing to the many factors that drive the existence of this type of partnerships. Therefore, programmes designed to address MCP must take into account the fact that MCP has personal, community, social, political, cultural, economic and medical dynamics. As such, there is a need to consider ways of linking initiatives to other interventions addressing the problem of MCP.

¹⁷ Morris & Kretzcher, 1995, 1997; Watts and May 1992 in Robinson et.al 2004.

Recommendations

As a health and development communication initiative seeking to play a part in the fight against HIV through addressing MCP, we would recommend the following:

Strategic communication

Communication around MCP will need to be well researched in terms of content so that it addresses the needs of people engaged in MCP in a realistic way. In addition, more work may need to be done in order to segment the population of people that engage in MCP so that communication is not generalised but targeted at people who are more likely to respond to it.

Strategic alliances

Communication alone is not enough to address MCP. Strategic alliances with governments, social and medical providers as well as other NGOs are needed in order to foster a holistic approach to MCP. This is especially so since MCP, in the context of HIV infection, is a new subject and there are other stakeholders that are in the process of tackling the problem.

Sustained interventions

Both communication and other interventions developed to address MCP need to be sustained over time to be effective. Communication initiatives particularly, will need to be sustained because behaviour change is a long term, iterative process. Sustained communication will thus help in the development of new attitudes and behaviours towards all the factors that influence MCP while challenging long-established attitudes and practices.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: General Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introduction

My name is _____ from Zambia Centre for Communication Programmes. We are developing new material dealing with HIV prevention and relationships and would like to get your views about these issues in order to produce material that would be relevant and useful to people like you. I hope you will allow me to conduct the interview, and further more record the interview on tape. Whatever will be discussed in here is strictly confidential and your names will not be included in the report. The information that will be gathered is for the sole purpose of research. There is no right or wrong answer. You may have different views from those of your other friends in here but that is perfectly normal. However, you must also tolerate views that come from other people that may be different to yours. I urge you to be open and feel very free to express your opinions. I would like to request your permission to record our discussion so that we do not lose any of the important information that we are going to gather here.

General Focus Group Questions

1. What kinds of sexual relationships exist in our communities?
2. What do you think of having more than one sexual partner in the same period of time?
3. What kind of people have more than one sexual partner at the same time? Why?
 - a. Why do husbands?
 - b. Why do wives?
 - c. Why do widows/widowers?
 - d. Why do single people?
 - e. Why do mobile people?
 - f. Why do business people?
4. How does your community view someone who is having more than one relationship at the same time?
5. How does a person's profession/business affect their sexual relationships?
6. What do you think of multiple concurrent partnerships in relation to HIV infection?
 - a. Why do you think people continue to behave in a risky way despite knowing the risks?

7. What facilitates multiple concurrent partnerships in your community?
 - a. Culture
 - b. Gender imbalances
 - c. Poverty

8. What do you think of male circumcision in relation to HIV infection?

Appendix 2: General In-depth Interview Guide

Introduction

My name is _____ from Zambia Centre for Communication Programmes. We are developing new material dealing with HIV prevention and relationships and would like to get your views about these issues in order to produce material that would be relevant and useful to people like you. I hope you will allow me to conduct the interview, and further more record the interview on tape. Whatever will be discussed in here is strictly confidential and your names will not be included in the report. The information that will be gathered is for the sole purpose of research. There is no right or wrong answer. I urge you to be open and feel very free to express your opinions. I would like to request your permission to record our discussion so that we do not lose any of the important information that we are going to gather here.

General Focus Group Questions

1. . What kinds of sexual relationships exist in the communities?
2. What do you think of having more than one sexual partner in the same period of time?
3. What kind of people have more than one sexual partner at the same time?
 - a. Why do husbands?
 - b. Why do wives?
 - c. Why do business people?
 - d. Why do widows/widowers?
 - e. Why do single people?
4. How does your community view someone who is having more than one sexual relationship at the same time?
5. How does a person's profession/business affect their sexual relationships?
6. What do you think of multiple concurrent partnerships in relation to HIV infection?
 - a. Why do you think people continue to behave in a risky way despite knowing the risks?
7. What facilitates multiple concurrent partnerships in your community?

Probe for:

 1. Culture
 2. Gender imbalances
 3. Poverty
8. What do you think of male circumcision in relation to HIV infection?

Appendix 3: In-Depth Interview Guide for People Involved in MCP

Introduction

My name is _____ from Zambia Centre for Communication Programmes. We are developing new material dealing with HIV prevention and relationships and would like to get your views and experiences about these issues in order to produce material that would be relevant and useful to people like you. I hope you will allow me to conduct the interview, and further more record the interview on tape. Whatever will be discussed in here is strictly confidential and your names will not be included in the report. The information that will be gathered is for the sole purpose of research. There is no right or wrong answer. I urge you to be open and feel very free to express your opinions. I would like to request your permission to record our discussion so that we do not lose any of the important information that we are going to gather here.

1. What kinds of sexual relationships exist in the communities?
2. How does your community view someone who is having more than one sexual relationship at the same time?
 - a. How did your community view you?
 - b. What did you do about it?
3. What kind of people have more than one sexual partner at the same time? Why?
 - a. Why do husbands?
 - b. Why do wives?
 - c. Why do business people?
 - d. Why do widows/widowers?
 - e. Why do single people?
 - f. Why did you?
4. What do you think of multiple concurrent partnerships in relation to HIV infection?
 - a. Why do you think people continue to have more than one sexual partner despite knowing the risks?
 - b. Why have you continued to have more than one sexual partner despite knowing the risks?
5. What do you think of male circumcision in relation to HIV infection?