



IMPACT CASE STUDY



Questions on transactional sex in the DHS

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Impact

As of [2015], the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) include improved questions to capture the practice of transactional sex for women and men. Similar questions are now included in the Violence against Children surveys (VACS), evaluations of the Transfer project and other cash transfer studies in South Africa and Tanzania and numerous individual studies including at least one surveillance site. As a result, survey data can be expected to shed light on:

- the prevalence and determinants of the practice of transactional sex
- the contribution of the practice to the HIV risk facing adolescent girls and young women
- thinking to inform the design of steps to address such risk within broader programmes for this population

What is the issue?

Adolescent girls and young women in sub-Saharan Africa face a higher risk of HIV infection than any other population worldwide. HIV prevalence here is more than twice as high among young women as it is among young men. In parts of South Africa, it is up to eight times higher. Despite increased efforts, there is limited progress in reducing the burden of new infections in this population. This suggests that important factors, including transactional sex, are still being overlooked or inadequately understood and addressed.

DEFINITION

Transactional sex relationships are non-commercial, non-marital sexual relationships motivated by the implicit assumption that sex is exchanged for material goods or other benefits.

What did STRIVE research find?

From our analysis of in-depth research in sub-Saharan African contexts, systematic reviews and conceptual thinking, STRIVE researchers have produced:

- a clear definition of the practice
- a nuanced understanding of three key motivations underlying the practice
- a crucial distinction between transactional sex and sex work, demonstrated by mathematical modelling
- clear evidence that demonstrates the association between transactional sex and HIV
- improved survey questions
- a technical brief for and with UNAIDS
- a measurement brief
- recommendations to researchers, HIV prevention programme developers and practitioners and funding partners

Survey questions

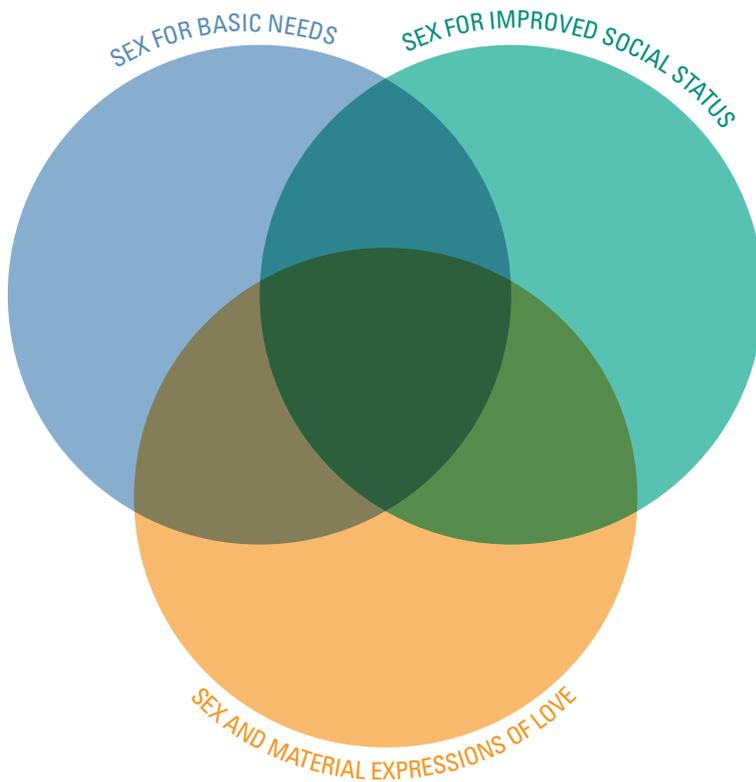
For women

In the last 12 months, have you entered into a sexual relationship with a man mainly in order to get things that you needed, money, gifts or other things that are important to you? ?

For men

In the last 12 months, have you given a woman who is not your wife and is also not a sex worker, any money or gifts or helped her to pay for things mainly in order to start or continue a sexual relationship with her?

Figure 1: Three factors motivating young women to practice transactional sex



Women’s agency

Women’s perceived position in transactional sex relationships can vary from powerless to powerful. Programmes must begin by critically assessing how women see themselves in these relationships.

Context

Transactional sex can take place in contexts ranging from those marked by uniform poverty to high levels of inequality. Programming should be responsive and relevant to the context.

Sex for basic needs

This common description of transactional sex stresses gendered poverty as constraining women’s options and forcing many to rely on transactional sex, as they are understood to have little choice but to exchange sex for food or shelter, as victims of men’s privileged status.

Sex for improved social status

In contrast to ‘basic needs’, this description stresses how in the context of rising economic inequality increasing social importance is placed on the ownership of material goods. This description of transactional sex emphasises women’s agency and use of ‘erotic power’ toward attaining social status.

Sex and material expressions of love

This description emphasizes that transactional sex is rooted in the expectation that men provide financial support and gifts in romantic relationships, and women offer sex in return. In addition, male provision is associated with, and/or deepens, emotional intimacy.

STRIVE PUBLICATIONS

- Prudden, Holly J., et al. “Factors Associated with Variations in Population HIV Prevalence across West Africa: Findings from an Ecological Analysis.” *PLoS one* 10.12 (2015): e0142601.
- Ranganathan, Meghna, et al. “Transactional sex among young women in rural South Africa: prevalence, mediators and association with HIV infection.” *Journal of the international AIDS society* 19.1 (2016).
- Ranganathan, Meghna, et al. “Young women’s perceptions of transactional sex and sexual agency: a qualitative study in the context of rural South Africa.” *BMC public health* 17.1 (2017): 666.
- Stoebenau, Kirsten, et al. “Revisiting the understanding of “transactional sex” in sub-Saharan Africa: A review and synthesis of the literature.” *Social Science & Medicine* 168 (2016): 186-197.
- Wamoyi, Joyce, et al. “Transactional sex and risk for HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review and meta-analysis.” *Journal of the International AIDS Society* 19.1 (2016).
- Wamoyi, Joyce, et al. “A review of interventions addressing structural drivers of adolescents’ sexual and reproductive health vulnerability in sub-Saharan Africa: implications for sexual health programming.” *Reproductive health* 11.1 (2014): 88.
- Ranganathan M, et al. ‘It’s because I like things... it’s a status and he buys me airtime’: Exploring the role of transactional sex in young women’s consumption patterns in rural South Africa (secondary findings from HPTN 068). *Reproductive Health*: 15:102 (2018).

How did STRIVE research achieve impact?

STRIVE's conceptual framework for understanding transactional sex was able to achieve impact for a number of reasons.

- Qualitative work in affected communities (primarily in Tanzania, Madagascar and South Africa) led to significant new insights into the motivations underlying the practice.
- Clear conceptual thinking on transactional sex provided a nuanced model of motivations for the practice and contributed answers to an urgent set of questions.
- STRIVE engaged with peers in the field in refining concepts, inviting others working on transactional sex to an intensive two-day workshop in 2014.
- STRIVE platforms – Learning Lab webinars, high-level meetings, including Greentree II on HIV and gender-based violence – expanded the audience for and potential users of the transactional sex conceptual framework, definition and measures.
- STRIVE knowledge translation (including a measurement brief and a video infographic) make the ideas accessible.
- Presentations at national, regional and international conferences and donor meetings built academic credibility and extended the reach and potential impact of the conceptual model.
- The innovative and timely nature of the work, together with early engagement with stakeholders, led to invitations to present the framework, including to UNAIDS whose prevention team went on to commission STRIVE to produce a technical brief on transactional sex.
- Because the STRIVE consortium examines the intersections between different structural factors,

insights on transactional sex contributed to discussions on (inter alia) models for resource allocation by the Global Fund and others; the potential synergies between HIV prevention and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); sexual and reproductive health and rights; programming for, and new research on, adolescent girls and young women; evidence on cash transfers and other approaches to shifting harmful social norms and risky behaviour including transactional sex.

For potential users of the model in further research and in practice and programmes, DHS data will be invaluable.

What did STRIVE learn about research uptake?

By identifying appropriate end users such as the DHS surveys early on and then by taking advantage of every strategic opportunity to engage with identified end-users, we were able to influence the measurement of transactional sex. These efforts to influence this important source of data in sub-Saharan Africa, along with STRIVE's growing reputation as an expert voice on structural drivers of HIV, resulted in additional opportunities to amplify our messages to additional influential bodies, including UNAIDS.

By engaging from the outset with country policy makers, funders and other relevant stakeholders, STRIVE:

- increased the chances of the uptake of the survey questions
- fuelled funding opportunities for research and action to address the HIV risk of transactional sex
- generated discussion on the need to focus on the structural drivers of HIV risk in adolescent girls

Key moments

STRIVE Learning Lab webinars

- Joyce Wamoyi: Adolescents and Transactional Sex (2011) <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/adolescents-and-transactional-sex-joyce-wamoyi>
- Holly Prudden: Disaggregating 'transactional sex' from 'sex work' (2012). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/disaggregating-transactional-sex-sex-work-holly-prudden>
- Sanyu Majola: Situating transactional sex (2014). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/situating-transactional-sex-comparisons-history-and-theory-sanyu-mojola>
- Kevin Deane: Is fish-for-sex a special case? Local value chains and HIV risk (2014). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/fish-sex-special-case-local-value-chains-and-hiv-risk-kevin-deane>
- Audrey Pettifor: HIV prevention for young South African women – Lessons from Swa-Koteka (2015). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/hiv-prevention-young-south-african-women-lessons-swa-koteka-audrey-pettifor>

- Rebecca Fielding-Miller: What do we mean when we say transactional sex? (2016). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/what-do-we-mean-when-we-say-transactional-sex-rebecca-fielding-miller>
- Kirsten Stoebenau and Joyce Wamoyi: Transactional Sex in Sub-Saharan Africa: Meaning, Measurements and Implications for HIV Prevention (2017). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/transactional-sex-sub-saharan-africa-meaning-measurements-and-implications-hiv-prevention>
- Meghna Ranganathan: Transactional sex and HIV risk among young women in rural South Africa (2017). <http://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/resources/transactional-sex-and-hiv-risk-among-young-women-rural-south-africa-meghna-ranganathan>

Significant meetings

- 3rd Structural Drivers of HIV Conference (Cape Town, December 2013), co-hosted by STRIVE, HEARD at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, HIV and Development Group at the University of East Anglia – presentation by Nambusi Kyegombe

Key moments: Significant meetings (cont.)

- Greentree II – Violence against Women and Girls, and HIV, a high-level consultation on the evidence and implications (Greentree Estate, New York 12–14 May 2015)
- 3rd International Association for the Social Sciences and Humanities in HIV (ASSHH) Conference (Stellenbosch, July 2015) – presentation by Joyce Wamoyi
- 1st Annual Learning Initiative on Norms, Exploitation and Abuse (LINEA) meetings, (Windsor, UK 2015) – presentations by Joyce Wamoyi and Kirsten Stoebenau
- AIDS Impact conference, 13–15 November 2017, Cape Town, South Africa – presentation by Joyce Wamoyi
- The 30th Annual Joint Scientific Conference 2016 (Julius Nyerere International Convention Centre, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 4–6
- October 2016 – presentation by Joyce Wamoyi
- International Conference on Fast-Tracking Social Protection to end AIDS, UNAIDS, Geneva, April 2018 – presentation by Meghna Ranganathan

Engagement

- Two-day STRIVE workshop on transactional sex, London, 2014
- Formal submission to the Demographic and Health Survey Open Forum (April, 2014)
- Requests for input from two groups at the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2015) re: 1) developing DHS-like population-based surveys 2) building surveys on violence against children
- Invitation to present on transactional sex to UNAIDS, Geneva (July, 2015) – presentation by Kirsten Stoebenau to departments of Rights and Gender, Prevention and Communications; UNAIDS request to STRIVE to produce a technical brief for UNAIDS
- Invitation to present to UNAIDS, Geneva (April, 2014) – presentation by Joyce Wamoyi

- Invitation to Gates Foundation meeting on Maximising Impact of New HIV Prevention Technologies in sub-Saharan Africa, 16–19 May 2017 – presentations by Joyce Wamoyi
- Invited panellist to AIDS Impact Conference (November, 2017) – presentation by Joyce Wamoyi
- Invitation to present to the Population Council, in their capacity as technical advisor to DREAMS (May, 2017) – presentation by Kirsten Stoebenau
- Invitation to present at the 2nd Annual Learning Initiative on Norms, Exploitation and Abuse (LINEA) meetings, (De Vere Beaumont Estate, UK 2017) – presentations by Joyce Wamoyi
- Invitation to the Consultation meeting on Adolescents and Young Women in South Africa, organised by University of Maryland and NIH, National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases Division (March 2018, USA) – Joyce Wamoyi participated in expert discussions reflecting on STRIVE transactional sex work
- Invitation to present at the Tanzanian adolescent stakeholder's working group meeting organised by UNICEF Forum on Adolescent Girls in Tanzania, Ministry of Health (MoHCDGEC) and Tanzania Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS) (April 2014)
- Invitation to participate in a technical advisory committee meeting for the DREAMS meeting in Tanzania (May 2018)
- Invitation to roundtable discussion on how to design programmes for uptake of oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in young women, Rethinking HIV prevention in young African women, Boston – panel discussion by Meghna Ranganathan reflecting on PhD research on transactional sex in young women (July 2014)
- Invited discussant in panel on Reflections on Research Methodological and Measurement Challenges. Social Protection and Childhood Violence: Expert Roundtable, UNICEF Innocenti and Know Violence consortium, Florence, May 2016 – presentation by Meghna Ranganathan on challenges of collecting data on transactional sex

Conclusion

STRIVE has had a demonstrated impact on how transactional sex is conceptualised and measured. These efforts carry important implications for intervention efforts, particularly those directed at adolescent girls and young women in sub-

Saharan Africa. Going forward, it will be especially important to ensure that interventions and their evaluations account for this work in the development of intervention approaches, as well as in the understanding of the impacts on transactional sex and HIV risk.

Acknowledgements

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Suggested citation

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STRIVE research consortium

A DFID-funded research programme consortium, STRIVE is led by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, with six key research partners in Tanzania, South Africa, India and the USA. STRIVE provides new insights and evidence into how different structural factors – including gender inequality and violence, poor livelihood options, stigma, and problematic alcohol use – influence HIV vulnerability and undermine the effectiveness of the HIV response.

