Victim, Agent or lover? Clarifying the Meaning of Transactional Sex for HIV Prevention in Sub-Saharan Africa

Presented to the Center for Health Risk and Society, American University

Kirsten Stoebenau, ICRW; Lori Heise, LSHTM; Joyce Wamoyi, NIMR; Natalia Bobrova, LSHTM
Outline of Talk

1. Introduction, Justification and Aims of the work
   a) Situating this work within STRIVE
   b) A history of “transactional sex”
2. Review Strategy and Approach
3. Overview of the literature
4. A (brief) review of the determinants of transactional sex (TS)
5. A (long) discussion of discourses on transactional sex
6. Recommendations on Defining TS
7. Future Research, Conclusions
Part 1:

INTRODUCTION, JUSTIFICATION, AIMS
Introduction to STRIVE

Structural Drivers of HIV/AIDS – a DFID funded Research Programme Consortium

– Co-Directed by Lori Heise, Charlotte Watts at LSHTM
– Five partner organizations: LSHTM; WRHI, South Africa; NIMR, Tanzania; KHPT, India; ICRW, India and U.S.
– Organized around thematic issues that intersect with structural drivers of HIV
  • Alcohol and youth
  • Social norms and Gender based violence
  • Transactional Sex
  • Co-financing of health and development interventions
  • Biomedical approaches to HIV prevention
Rates of HIV among young women (15-24) in sub-Saharan Africa are disproportionately high
- Young women have HIV rates 2x that of young men
- Young women (15-24) account for 31% of new infections in SSA

Increasing attention in the literature to role of ‘transactional sex’ in the feminization of HIV in SSA, particularly for young women

Ongoing confusion and disagreement as to what we mean by ‘transactional sex’
- Multiple approaches to measurement/operationalization
  • Inability to account for changes in practice over time
  • Lack of clarity on links/pathways between TS and HIV
- Multiple approaches to meaning/definition of ‘transactional sex’
Aims

- Review State of Knowledge on how transactional sex (TS) is understood or conceptualized in SSA
  - Especially among young women
- Recommend a definition of TS going forward
- Inform at least two other outputs of the working group, and for research and programs addressing ‘transactional sex’
  - A systematic review that assesses the extent to which TS drives HIV transmission or acquisition
  - A ‘measurement brief’ to propose an operationalization of the concept
- Ultimately inform evidence base for role of TS in HIV for young women and how best to intervene
A history of “transactional sex” as a concept

Emerged in context of anthropological research from sub-Saharan Africa

- Within critique of role/meaning of CSW within SSA for HIV (e.g. de Zalduondo, 1991; Day, 1988; White, 1990; Standing, 1992)

“The consumerist nature of sexual relationships at present is generally acceptable in Ghana, but what some Western researchers (Bleek 1976) find difficult to understand is that the transactional element involved is different from prostitution in the classic Western sense.” (page 137) Ankomah, 1992
The overarching problem arises from the tendency to label ‘risk’ populations using ...‘prostitute’ without either questioning the appropriateness ...or providing any definition of the term. It should be noted (a) that much sexual exchange in Africa has a monetary component but it would be quite inappropriate ...to define it as prostitution, (b) that the absence of any definitional criteria in the studies renders it difficult to know whether they are referring to equivalent phenomena, and (c) that simply labelling categories ...without contextualising the behaviour ...contributes nothing to an understanding of the social phenomenon lying behind the label.

Standing, 1992 (page 477)
Some literature also responded to notions of a promiscuous “African sexuality” (Caldwell, 1989)

- Framed exchange-based relationships within modernization, urbanization rather than “tradition” (Ankomah, 1992)
- Emphasized the role of poverty and gender inequality in structuring women’s involvement in exchange-based relationships (Schoepf, 1988; Standing, 1992)

Efforts followed to distinguish ‘prostitution’ from more informal exchange-based relationships → “transactional sex”
...A history of TS (2)

Critique somewhat lost, TS has become conflated with SW in definition and measurement

- E.g. “transactional sex among sex workers”
  - “…the term ‘sex worker’ is used to refer to any woman who engages in transactional sex (the exchange of sex for money, goods, or services)” (Robinson, 2010)
- E.g. DHS- Transactional sex = paid sex
- Our own review: 69 of 676 studies for full text review excluded b/c TS was measured among sex workers

So what?

- Different social practice → different contribution to HIV
- Different risk → Different interventions

Still – we know so much more, TS more complex than ever
On Conflating TS and SW

- **NO**: TS and SW are separate.
- **YES**: TS and SW are conflated.

- **TS exchange or relationship**
  - Married couple
  - SWer and Client
Part 2:

REVIEW STRATEGY AND APPROACH
Approach to the Review

1. Literature Review
   - Informed two research efforts
     - Conceptual review
     - Systematic review of association between TS and HIV
   - Initial focus on youth people in SSA was expanded due to low sample size for systematic review
   - Conceptual review drew from same pool of studies as systematic review

2. Interviews with researchers examining TS in different regions of SSA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search Terms</th>
<th>Portals/Organizations</th>
<th>Data bases</th>
<th>Specific Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For search on TS:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[term(s)] AND Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;survival sex&quot;</td>
<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>EMBASE</td>
<td>African Health Sciences;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;consumption sex&quot;</td>
<td>UNFPA</td>
<td>Global Health</td>
<td>African Journal of AIDS Research;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;intergenerational sex&quot;</td>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>POPline</td>
<td>East African Journal of Public Health;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;commodified sex&quot;</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>Web of Science</td>
<td>East African Medical Journal;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;cross-generational sex&quot;</td>
<td>FHI</td>
<td>ADOLEC</td>
<td>African Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;informal sex&quot;</td>
<td>Population Council</td>
<td>Scopus</td>
<td>Culture, Health and Sexuality;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;sex* exchange&quot;</td>
<td>PSI</td>
<td></td>
<td>Archives of Sexual Behavior;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;sex* trade&quot;</td>
<td>USAID</td>
<td></td>
<td>Gender and Development;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;sugar dadd*&quot;</td>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medical Anthropologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;globalization and sex*&quot;</td>
<td>DFID</td>
<td></td>
<td>American Ethnologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;modernity and sex*&quot;</td>
<td>PEPFAR</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OSI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>HIV/AIDS Alliance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guttmacher Institute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>APHRC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pop’l Reference Bureau</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of the Search Strategy

In total under 12,000 titles of articles and reports were retrieved

- Of these, just under 700 titles were retrieved for further review

- In all, for studies on TS in SSA, we included:
  - 289 studies (not totally mutually exclusive)
    - 162 qualitative or mixed method studies
    - 147 quantitative studies
Analytic Approach

1. Extraction Tables:
   - Qualitative and quantitative literature extraction tables created
     - Summarized main findings, measurement, definition, outcomes and framing of TS

2. Content Analysis
   - Paradigms and findings reviewed in tables
   - Served as basis for thematic codes
   - Articles brought into Atlas-ti(7) and coded with ‘parent’ codes generated in review of tables
Content Analysis: Atlasti

- Organized Articles by
  - Year; Country(ies); youth only
- Used Auto coding to review and code themes/paradigms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes (and Paradigms)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survival (poverty, subsistence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumption (consumer/ mobility)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income Inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love (affect, emotion, caring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peers (pressure)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim (vulnerability, coercion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency (power, agent/agency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Inequality, dynamics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity (power, roles – provider)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part 3

OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
The Literature Review: Over time

The Examination of Transactional Sex in sub-Saharan Africa over time, Results of a comprehensive literature review (n=289)
The review of studies on transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa by Country (n=289)
The examination of transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa by Country setting of study (n=289)
Part 4:

DETERMINANTS OF TRANSACTIONAL SEX
Poverty
Change in Marriage and kinship systems
Women’s Status in society
Economic Inequality
Consumer Culture

Gendered labor markets
Relationship Dynamics; Power
Family and parental Influence
Male Provider Norm
Peer Influence/Pressure

Household Characteristics
Socio-Demographics; SE Endowments
Gendered Beliefs/Expectations
Individual Risk profile, Experience

Socio-Demographic Processes of Globalization

Gender Inequality

Distal
Proximate
Individual

Economic Inequality
Part 5:

CONCEPTUALIZING TRANSACTIONAL SEX
Reducing themes to major Paradigms

Reduced 11 themes into three major “paradigms” or “framings”
- Also could be described as major facets of TS
- Vulnerable victim: Victim, Survival (includes poverty)
- Upwardly mobile sexual agent: Agency, Consumption, Globalization
- Demonstration of Love: Love, masculinity

Other themes cross-cutting: intergenerational sex, peers, gender inequality

Note- victim versus agent not new (Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001 and MANY others)
Paradigms: Vulnerable victim

- **Personification:** Very poor woman with little choice, no power, ‘sex for survival’ as only option

- **Sub-Themes**
  - Gendered poverty- women’s economic dependence on men → survival sex
  - Vulnerability in TS results from dominant or ‘hegemonic masculinity’
  - Women as coerced into sex, and as victims of exploitation
    - Especially girls as victims of older male sexual predation

- **Shift from Academia → Practitioner perspective**
  - Reports from NGOs (Guttmacher, World Fish) or commissioned for Donors, Agencies (DFID, USAID, UNAIDS)
  - Papers assessing association b/t abuse/rape/forced sex and TS
Neema et al, 2007; Uganda (Guttmacher)
“Profile of a Coercive Transactional Relationship”: A rural, out-of-school 17-year-old female related how the financial dependency that she had on her partner, who was 15 years older than she, trapped her in a physically dangerous and emotionally damaging relationship.

Njue, 2011; Kenya (BMC Public Health)
“Young girls are coerced into sexual activities with older men for survival and to access material goods. Sometimes the sexual exchange is to the benefit of the parent or guardian, and not the victim herself.”

Lungu, 2010 - World Fish
While 15% of women reported being coerced for sex by some fishermen in return for fish, 2.5% of women admitted having voluntarily requested sex in return for fish due to poverty and lack of food.
The Vulnerable Victim

Increasingly Contested Discourse:

– Most react to this paradigm to suggest women have at least some agency

“The literature reviewed and presented here suggests that many girls [are] not entirely victims, yet not entirely in control of their sexual relationships. There may be considerable sexual relationship bargaining, yet it occurs within a setting of significant gender power imbalance.” (Nancy Luke, 2003, SFP)

– Acknowledge highly constrained choice/ context of gender inequality

“The activities of flirting, partner selection and managing multiple boyfriends could suggest substantial agency and degrees of freedom that did not in fact exist. Within relationships women’s agency was highly constrained by the structural dimensions of their lives, including an overarching narrative of patriarchy, age hierarchy and the socio-economic context of severe poverty of the Eastern Cape.” (Jewkes and Morell, 2012)
Economic and Socio-Cultural Processes of Globalization

Sexual Agent for Consumption

Distal
- Poverty
- Gendered labor markets
- Change in Marriage and kinship systems
- Women’s Status in society
- Economic Inequality
- Consumer Culture

Proximate
- Household Characteristics
- Relationship Dynamics; Power
- Family and parental Influence
- Male Provider Norm
- Peer Influence/Pressure

Individual
- Socio-Demographics; SE Endowments
- Gendered Beliefs/Expectations
- Individual Risk profile, Experience
- Transactional Sex
Paradigms: Upwardly Mobile Consumer

- Personification: Not so poor, resourceful, young woman seeks relationships to access modern goods toward socio-economic mobility
  - Related terms: consumerism, modernity, aspirations, globalization, relative deprivation, agency, erotic power

- Challenges and Contests Vulnerable Victim Paradigm
  - Not just for survival and ‘basic needs,’ but ‘stuff of modernity’
  - Emphasis on women’s agency, as opposed to victimhood.
  - About social capital as well as economic capital

- More common in more recent studies, but there are exceptions (e.g. Ankomah, 1998; Meekers and Calves, 1997)
... Upwardly Mobile Consumers

Groes-Green, 2012 (urban Mozambique)

“...transactional sexual relationships ...[are] said to be growing, as sexual economies expand in the wake of changing gender structures and deepening social inequality sparked by regional economic reforms (Groes-Green 2010; Cole 2004). Coming from poor backgrounds and entering Maputo’s burgeoning consumer culture, transactional sex ...was also a way for curtidoras to acquire a better standard of living and get access to luxuries like mobile phones, clothes, and accessories.”

Leclerc-Madlala, 2002 (young women, urban South Africa)

“Using their sexuality to access goods and services is construed as a pragmatic adaptation to modern and costly urban life.”

Wamoyi, 2011 (young women, Mwanza, Tanzania)

“Young women perceived themselves as lucky to be created women as they could exploit their sexuality for pleasure and material gain. They felt men were stupid for paying for “goods” (vagina) they could not take away”
... Upwardly Mobile Consumers

 Draws into question morality – paradigm can be shaming

 Fox, 2012 (multiple countries)

 “On the other hand, rising living standards among a few, while many remain desperately poor, can also generate relative deprivation and lead to pressures for transactional sex as upwardly mobile women seek out wealthy male ‘sugar-daddies’ who can provide them with ‘cars, cash and cell phones’, to satisfy their growing consumer urges“

 Kuate-Defo, 2004 (review of literature)

 – “…sugar daddy girls are not necessarily poor, since they sometimes just like to look fashioned and privileged among their peers or pride themselves in sleeping with the most influential (financially or administratively) men of their communities..”

 – Women transformed into consumers (Mojola, 2014)

 – Importance of material symbols to afford social mobility (Cole, 2004; Hunter, 2010)

 Missing – Affect in these relationships
Paradigms: Demonstrations of Love

- Personification: a man bestowing gifts and providing other expected material and financial support to his girlfriend, for whom he cares deeply.
- Re-introduces affect embedded in exchange relationships
- Assesses transactions in romantic relationships
  - Questions ‘exoticism’ of exchange in relationships in SSA
    - “…affection and material support are inseparable (to love is to give, and, without giving, love does not exist)” (Mains, 2013)
      - Everywhere! (Mojola, 2014)
    - Money is a language of love
      - “How would I know he likes me if he does not buy me nice things?” (Hoefnaggel, 2012- University student, Uganda)
      - ‘‘To show her I was the man of real love, I gave her almost K50 every week.’ (from Poulin, 2007 – rural Malawi)
Demonstrations of Love

Patriarchy, Provision and Patronage

- “Patriarchal bargain” basis for exchange in relationships
  - Men provide material and financial support, women provide sexual and domestic services
- Masculinity = Provision
  - Men are expected to provide – how and in what ways has changed
  - Both men and women uphold male provider role: “Girls’ ideals of love are tied to their aspirations towards middle-class consumerism. Upholding provider masculinity is a strategic means to claim money, fashionable clothes and prestige. ...Love is produced by particular sets of economic and social circumstances through which gender inequalities are reproduced.” (Bhana, urban SA, 2011)

- Patronage
  - Alternative discourse – men, often wealthier, are patrons in systems of patronage (Swindler and Watkins, 2007)
... Demonstrations of Love

Limits to love

- Risks of contesting the patriarchal bargain:
  If he ... buys you stuff, he buys, he buys... and you always take it, and then he asks you...to have sex, and you refuse. You are obliged... In the end, he will force you because you always refuse, you spent his money. (Stoebenau et al, 2011)

- ‘Putting men in a bottle’
  Evoking forces of intimacy can make young women and their partners vulnerable to “falling in love,” which threatens their sense of control and shows that neither partner is immune to emotional aspects of sexual–economic liaisons. (Groes-Green, 2013)
UNAIDS, 2004 (South Africa) – Vulnerable Victims

The report provides recommendation "to create awareness campaigns on the inappropriate, abusive and often illegal character of relationships between older men and teenage girls, promoting the shaming of ‘sugar daddies’ while protecting the identities of the girls and reaffirming men who do not engage in such practices..."

Cockcroft, 2010 (Southern Africa)-Consumers/Agents

More promising approaches might include making older men aware of the ridicule they attract from the young women, and helping young women to find alternative ways of financial support and the self-worth needed to resist peer pressure.

Bhana, 2011; (South Africa)- Demonstrations of Love

“Prevention programmes for young people must attend not only to social structures of power, gender norms and material inequalities, but also to young people’s ideologies of love, which are expressive of agency, constraint and enduring gender inequalities.”
Spectrums and Framings

- **Vulnerable victim or Powerful Agent; Victim and Agent**
  - Gender power imbalance, age disparity, victim, powerless
  - Agency, power, manipulation
  - Constrained agency, limited power

- **Poverty and survival or Inequality and relative deprivation; or both**
  - Sex for survival or basic needs, sex b/c there is no choice
  - Sex for social mobility in modern world; sex as powerful resource for social and economic status in unequal world

- **Money or Love; Money and Love; Money IS love**
  - Materiality, consumerism
  - Love, caring in capitalist space
  - Masculinity = provider; Provision = love
Part 7:

DEFINING TRANSACTIONAL SEX
Definitions of TS

UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines, 2011

“Sex Work: The term ‘commercial sex work’ says the same thing twice in different words. Preferred terms are ‘sex work’, ‘commercial sex’, ‘transactional sex’, or ‘the sale of sexual services’. It is also acceptable to say that sex workers are ‘paid for sex’.”

More Thoughtful Definitions of TS

– Transactional sex refers to “non-marital, non-commercial sexual relationships where money and gifts are exchanged, but in which issues of love and trust are sometimes also considered at stake.” (Mojola, 2010)

– (Dunkle, 2004, 2007): “sexual exchange ....motivated by material gain” with different relationship typologies
STRIVE Working Definition

Transactional sex refers to a sexual relationship or act(s), outside of marriage or sex work, structured by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material benefit or status. While driven primarily by instrumental intentions, transactional relationships may also include emotional intimacy.
Part 8:

IMPLICATIONS, NEXT STEPS
Recommendations

- Accurately and adequately conceptualize TS
  - Not SW, yet not simple

- Establish a Unified Definition
  - Can this definition work flexibly enough to be consistent yet allow for contextually specific adaptation?

- Establish more complete, appropriate measures of TS
  - Definition holds implications for how to approach the measurement of TS, as guided by definition
    - Short version for surveys (e.g. DHS)
    - Long version that would start from basis of relationship, allow for more complexity, context specificity, yet keep key questions for comparability

- Intervene in ways that can address the complete picture
  - Combination: structural, behavioral, gender normative, economic, social
Future Research Directions

- For future research
  - Establish pathways that identify when and under which circumstances TS is most risky
    - When is TS a problem, and when is exchange embedded in relationships just that?
  - Understand pathways to risk from each/all paradigms
  - Better understand the contextual nuance (a weakness of this paper)
    - Stigma and TS – does how TS is viewed matter? For prevalence, for intervention?
  - Men’s perceptions, engagement in TS from the male point of view
Acknowledgements

The STRIVE research programme consortium is funded by UKaid from the Department for International Development. However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the department’s official policies.

The authors wish to thank STRIVE members, especially the Working Group on Transactional Sex and HIV; and Dr. Sanyu Mojola, University of Colorado, Boulder, for helpful feedback.