

Exploring the costs and benefits of age-disparate sexual relationships in Tanzania and Uganda: implications for girls' SRH interventions

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- In SSA epidemiological evidence points to higher incidence of HIV among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) relative to male counterparts
- Difference attributed to intergenerational/cross-generational sex and in part to transactional sex
 - Primarily characterised by relationships between younger women and older men
 - Imbalance of power occasioned by age and gender
 - Economic/transactional drivers in many of these relationships



- Epidemiological link between age-disparate sex and HIV infection among AGYW in SSA
 - Power differential
 - Low condom use owing to constrained agency
 - Higher likelihood that older men already have HIV
- Despite widely held view that AGYW are disadvantaged in age-disparate relationships, AGYW may not necessarily consider the relationship as exploitative
- To better design interventions to reduce the risks associated with age-disparate sexual relationships, more needs to be understood about the motivations of AGYW and adult men in such relationships



To explore perceived motivations and consequences for AGYW and adult men in age-disparate sexual relationships and consider the implications of these motivations for interventions seeking to reduce associated harms

- **Ethnographic research design**
 - FGDs and IDIs
 - Explored: motivations (benefits) for, and consequences (costs) of age-disparate sex; norms and expectations of age-disparate sex; AGYW as targets for male sexual interest; understandings of sexual consent; and sexual exploitation
- **Study population**
 - Young people aged 14-24 years of age in and out of school
 - Community members aged 25-49 years of age
- **Study sites**
 - Uganda and Tanzania
 - Rural and Urban

Sampling



- **Sites and participants sampled to maximise sample heterogeneity**
 - Experiences
 - Socio-demographic characteristics: age, school status, residence
- **Tanzania**
 - Used purposive and snowball sampling (young people and adults)
- **Uganda**
 - Purposive sampling through partner NGO (UYDEL) and local government structure

Sampling summary

	Tanzania				Uganda			
	Focus Group Discussions (n=18)		In-depth Interviews* (n=43)		Focus Group Discussions (n=18)		In-depth Interviews* (n=43)	
Participant Category	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Young women ages 14–24*								
In-school	1	1	4	3	1	1	2	2
Out-of-school	2	2	4	4	3	3	4	6
Young men ages 14–24*								
In-school	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2
Out-of-school	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	4
Adult women(25-49 years)*	2	2	6	6	1	1	4	4
Adult men (25-49 years)*	2	2	4	4	2	1	6	4
Total	9	9	22	21	10	9	22	22

*All AGYW and adult men and women who participated in an IDI previously participated in a FGD.

The majority of FGD participants were sampled from the community or through UYDEL



- **Interviews**
 - 37 FGDs
 - 87 IDIs
- **Tools**
 - Semi-structured topic guides – similar in both countries
- **Interviews**
 - Sex-matched
 - Audio recorded
 - Kiswahili/Luganda
- **Interviewers**
 - Trained social scientists with experience of working on sensitive topics and with vulnerable groups including children



- **Clearance**
 - LSHTM, NIMR, UVRI, UNCST
 - Local government structures
- **Consent**
 - Written informed consent/assent obtained from all participants
 - Written informed parental consent/UYDEL consent
 - Permission from head teachers of sampled schools
- **Referrals**
 - System in place in all sites in order to support any individuals who were identified/self-identified to require support following participation in the interviews

Data analysis



- Regular team debriefs held during data collection
- All interviews transcribed verbatim and then translated into English prior to analysis
- Analysis supported by NVIVO 10
- Coding a combination of a priori and grounded codes
- Drew on techniques described in grounded theory: constant comparison, deviant case analysis
- Representative quotations illustrating the main findings were identified from a varied array of participants across all sites/both countries



Outline

1. Perceptions of AGYW's relationships with older partners
2. Perceptions of older men's relationship with AGYW





Perceived benefits and costs of AGYW engaging in age-disparate sex

Results organized in 4 main themes:

1. Financial motivations
2. Emotional support
3. Meeting social expectations
4. AGYW's reflections on sexual health



1. Financial motivations

- The primary financial motivations AGYW engaged relationship with older partners:
 - Provided better & more reliable resources as compared to younger men
 - Could be trusted to honour their promises of gifts, gave bigger gifts & larger amounts of money compared to same age boyfriends
- AGYW perceived relationships with older partners as an important means by which they met needs
 - Maintained social position within their peer networks



Illustration

“No, the reason why we don’t take on men of our age is that these boys are so mean. When you have sex with him, he only gives you 5000/= (\$1.33) at the end yet you admired a certain dress that your friend Dora has. Dora’s dress does not cost 5000/=... that is why you get a daddy who will tell you that let us go to the shop and you point at the dresses then they pack them for you. When you go to the shop you even ask for the shoe that Prossy has.

[FGD, young women aged 18-24, Uganda]



2. Emotional support

- AGYW interpreted provision of gifts & money as synonymous with “care” & emotional support
 - Experience stress & anxiety in trying to meet their needs
- AGYW emphasized that older partners cared for them more than peers

Illustrations

R1: You find that the older one cares for you... you just decide, “I would rather be with this one who cares for

me... He gives me what I want.”

R2: I think that also contributes because you can't have a relationship with a boy who is just there, and all he wants from you is sex and does not care [provide material needs] for you... You can't continue being with him.

[FGD, adolescent girls aged 14-17, urban Tanzania]

In Uganda, younger women expressed love from older partners as follows:

Girls choose to be in relationships with men who are older because those older men have too much love yet these younger boys jump around with any girl. If he sees a girl who is his age, he wants to initiate a relationship with her as well. The older man has love, the girl knows that he will always be close by, he is responsible enough to buy the things that you need at home because he feels that you are young, if he neglects you, other men will take you away.

[FGD, young women aged 18-24, urban Uganda]



3. Meeting social expectations (1)

- Peer pressure plays a role in AGYW's partner choice, but it comes with social costs
- AGYW with boyfriend who are peers are sometimes ridiculed
 - Not being strategic in the choice of partners with resources



Illustration

Some girls say that I cannot enter into a relationship with mulinya decker [one who sleeps on a decker/bunk bed] or their age mates, the ones that we are at school with, because they know that he will have to ask for money from his parents, yet the girl is also asking for the money from her parents... so what will he be able to provide her with? They want the other men who have already earned their money, one whom you will ask to give you 50,000/= [\$13.30] and he will not hesitate even for a minute.

[FGD, in-schoolgirls, rural Uganda]



Meeting social expectations (2)

- Social expectation that provision of gifts & money in relationships had to be reciprocated
 - Expression “*Eat & you will be eaten*”
 - “*Eat*” refers to receiving gifts, “*You will be eaten*” means having sex with the girl
- Expectation of reciprocity means that receiving gifts or money = implicit agreement of her obligation to provide sex
 - If a girl is not interested in sex after receiving gifts/money, the men appeals to the social expectation of reciprocity
 - Reminds the girl of the gifts/money, ultimately using this as a tool of coercion
 - AGYW deliberately avoiding the expectation of sex referred as “*de-toothing*” a man in Uganda increased their risk of sexual violence



Illustration

“Eat and you will be eaten”... And you have to pay back by labouring through having sex with him whether you like it or not... It means, “Help me and I help you.”

[FGD, young women aged 18–24, rural Tanzania]

...He forces you...you might find that those whom they have sex with, are older than them and give them things [money/gifts]. They will start to remind you, “I always give you this and that, how comes then today you have refused to have sex with me?”, you will have to do it...It is not fair... she agrees to do it but in her heart she is not actually willing to have sex

[IDI, young woman aged 17 years, Tanzania]



Meeting social expectations (3)

- Some school girls valued relationships with age-mates
 - Perceived as emotionally intimate
 - Based on shared life stage e.g. aspirations to finish school & get married
- AGYW engaging in age-disparate sex tarnished their reputation in the community
 - Stigmatizing labels such as *Malaya* (prostitute)
 - To avoid this stigma, AGYW were compelled to handle their relationships discreetly to avoid:
 - Shame & embarrassment of being seen with an older man

Illustration

Reflecting on the social costs associated with that two participants reported:

I have never told anyone I am having sex with an older man...it is embarrassing to tell people...I am not compatible with him because my body is small and he is big...I just keep it to myself.

[IDI, 20 year old girl, Tanzania]

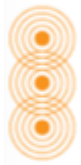
The reason why I say that it is bad is because that man could be in love with you seriously then he asks you to take him to your home and when you get there, your husband is even older than your father; it is embarrassing

[FGD, young women, 18-24, Uganda]



4. Sexual and reproductive health (1)

- Consensus about age-disparate sex being risky
- More costs than benefits to girls in age-disparate relationships
 - Older men perceived as likely to be infected with HIV & STIs & a source of infections to girls





Illustration

I think is it mainly due to lack of knowledge... There is no benefit that they get in relationships with older men, it is mostly problems... She loves him because of his money, now you find that this man has already been infected for a long time... She gets those viruses... She can also become pregnant... thinking about the amount of Tsh 50,000 [\$23], but it is not even enough to treat her of STIs, even though she may think that it is a big benefit, but it's actually a loss.

[FGD, adult men, urban Tanzania]



Sexual and reproductive health (2)

- Older partners remained the overall decision makers
 - E.g. use of protection
- Awareness of older partners being risky didn't prevent AGYW from having relationships with them

Being with that older man has consequences but he thinks about the money he gives you and feels that he is justified to manipulate you... He knows that you can't refuse when he tells you to have sex... He manipulates you the way he wants and at any time that he may desire.
[IDI, young woman aged 18, rural Tanzania]



Sexual and reproductive health (3)

- AGYW perceived unplanned pregnancy with older partner as likely better than one with a younger man
 - Older partners perceived as having access to resources & able to deal with any challenges faced by AGYW

Most of the girls are interested in men who are working, so that in case he makes the girl pregnant or any other problem and her parents ask her to bring the man that made her pregnant so that he can marry you...if it was a fellow student who is in senior three or senior four, he will deny the pregnancy and he will abandon her...yet if it was the older man he will stick with her, that is if he truly loved her, he can take her and marry her...you are secure with the older man

[FGD, in-school girls, FGD-14+]



Perceived benefits and costs for older men engaging in age-disparate sex

- Older men's perceived benefits & costs resulting from engaging in relationships with AGYW were:
 1. The need to satisfy their sexual desires
 2. The social expectations associated with having a young sexual partner
 3. Reflections on sexual health risks



1. Need to satisfy sexual desire

- Older men described having increased sexual desire as they aged
- Had a desire for younger women more than their wives:
 - Perception that AGYW had tight vaginas
 - AGYW perceived as offering more pleasurable sex
 - AGYW were more physically attractive, presentable & pleasant to spend time with
 - Adult women (wives) too busy fending for their families
 - involved in manual work
 - often too tired & thus not active during sex



Illustration

...You might pass through other stages of life quietly, but when you reach old age, you start experiencing temptations; these desires might even double up those you experienced when you were young. You might get money during old age and that increases your desire to get whoever passes by, you see! but during childhood you never experienced such desires...but as you age, you find that you are 'out of control'.

[FGD, adult men, Tanzania]

An older man will handle her well because he wants that small vagina that holds him tight; [laughter] and he also feels good because of that, that's what the man wants

[FGD young men, 18-24, Uganda]



2. Social expectations associated with having a young sexual partner

- Socially acceptable/tolerated for older men to date or marry younger women
 - Older men felt that love does not discriminate & hence no hinderance for men
 - But, social disapproval for older women having younger partners (double standards)



Illustration

In our community, many men do not see this as bad...they see it as just normal, again they boast/praise themselves...“I have a young/little one, chap!” ...but now when an older woman does this, it becomes a big issue that must be heard in newspapers [gossip].

[FGD, adult women, Tanzania]



3. Adult men reflecting on the social costs of age-disparate sex

- Adult men admitted that the long-term costs (reputation) for pursuing a younger woman outweighed the short-term benefits (satisfying sexual desire)
 - Stigma attached to these relationships/equivalent to environmental pollution

There are losses... the number one loss of being in those relationships is the embarrassment due to age differences...you also lose respect...loss number two, is when the girl is made pregnant by that older man, and she mentions a man whom people know has a family, has older children and grandchildren.

[FGD, rural adult men, Tanzania]



Adult men reflecting on the economic, psychological & sexual health costs of age-disparate sex (1)

- Reflecting on the economic & psychological costs of age-disparate sex, adult men reported:

Personally, the benefits for me being in a relationship with her were those short-lived pleasures during the time I was with her. But after leaving her, I always regret about the money I gave her ...you see I use my money for a short time and later I am really worried that “probably my wife will know about the affair but also what if the community knows about this?”. You see, I end up just blaming myself.

[IDI, adult man involved in age-disparate sex, Tanzania]



Adult men reflecting on the economic, psychological & sexual health costs of age-disparate sex (2)

- Adult men considered the health costs of engaging in age-disparate relationships
 - Expressed awareness of risks such as unplanned pregnancy, HIV & other STIs
 - Aware of the fact that larger proportion of AGYW were HIV infected than other age-groups
 - AGYW perceived to be passing on infections to older men
- Weighing the perceived benefits (disease free) versus real costs (AGYW having STIs) adult men reported:

Another problem is that for us men, we believe that those of a young age are safe and hence, we have sex without a condom... because we think this one has no infections she is young...but unfortunately he [adult partner] gets those infections from her
[FGD, adult men, Tanzania]



Conclusions (1)

- Age-disparate sex is common, tolerated privately, but condemned at public level
- AGYW & older partners engage in these relationships for various reasons:
 - AGYW considered them attractive & beneficial than relationships with men in same age-group
 - Immediate economic benefits sometimes outweighed the health & social costs
 - Older men engaged in age-disparate sex for prestige & pleasure
- AGYW & older partners are aware of the health risks of engaging in age-disparate sexual relationships
 - Older partners in control of protection use



Conclusions (2)

- Interventions should acknowledge the perceived benefits of age-disparate sex for AGYW & older men
- Interventions should:
 - Engage AGYW & older men in a critical reflection process on the medium- to long-term consequences of age-disparate sex vs short-term satisfaction of desires & aspirations
 - Tackle the structural constraints facing AGYW:
 - Helping AGYW access resources to become empowered & challenge the expectation of having to depend financially on men
 - Interventions with men should unpack the assumptions that men are naturally hypersexual
 - Consider addressing social norms around relationships, love, gender & power that influence age-disparate sex



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