

‘Milking the Cow’

Young women’s constructions of identity, gender, power and risk in transactional and cross-generational sexual relationships: Maputo, Mozambique.

The Implications for Behaviour Change Interventions

A PEER Research Study Carried out by

Options Consultancy Services and Population Services International (PSI)
Mozambique

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GLOSSARY

Amante	Lover
Curandeira	Traditional healer
Curtidora	Someone who enjoys life
Fogo cruzado	“Cross-fire” (a structured interpersonal communications strategy developed by PSI in Mozambique)
Guerreira	Fighter (guerrilla)
Sengue	Sugar daddy
Moça	Young woman
Namorado	Boyfriend
Patrocinador	Sponsor
Pensão	Guest-house
Pito	Sex-partner
Prostituta	Prostitute
Prostituição	Prostitution

ACRONYMS

MoH	Ministry of Health
PEER	Participatory Ethnographic Evaluation and Research
PSI	Population Services International
STI	Sexually transmitted infections
TB	Tuberculosis

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study carried out in Maputo, Mozambique, among young women engaged in cross-generational transactional sex. Cross-generational sex is contributing significantly to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Mozambique and as such is a key area for behaviour change interventions, although few organisations are currently addressing the issue. The study reveals that young women engaged in cross-generational and transactional sex have a complex sexual network involving multiple partners, including both transactional and non-transactional relationships.

The study was carried out between October and November 2004, using the PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research) method. PEER is an innovative approach to programme research, evaluation and design, based upon training members of the target group (peer researchers) to carry out in-depth qualitative interviews among their peers. Twenty young women in the age group 16-25 years, living in and around central Maputo were recruited as peer researchers. Each peer researcher interviewed three peers and conducted three separate interviews with each peer, with a total of 180 interviews carried out.

Objectives

PSI's objective in using the PEER approach was to improve the impact of its behaviour change interventions by: 1) generating a more in-depth understanding of behaviour and sexual networking within a high risk group; and 2) creating an entry point for developing a sustained interpersonal communications strategy targeting hard to reach groups. A further objective was to build PSI Mozambique's capacity in using the PEER method so that it can then be replicated among other hard to reach higher risk groups. PSI defines high-risk groups principally in terms number of sexual partners and low or non-use of condoms. PSI Mozambique is already working with a number of groups whom they define as high risk, including sex-workers and the military. However, few agencies in Mozambique are working with hard to identify groups, such as women engaged in transactional sex.

Target Group

Peer researchers recruited for the study were identified by PSI's Communications Department, through an informal network. The initial intention of PSI had been to carry out research among young women engaged in commercial sex-work. During the training, however, it became evident that while transactional sex (including sex in exchange for money) was commonplace amongst the group, peer researchers did not identify their peers as sex-workers. Indeed, the group do not share one fixed social identity, although they share a common life-style sustained through a common economic and social strategy. The life-style is best described as that of a 'modern girl', a young woman who is able to frequent bars, restaurants, discos, who can be seen wearing the latest fashions from Brazil, and who rides in expensive cars and talks on the latest model of cell-phone. The economic strategy used to support this life-style, is that of having sex with older men for money and other material benefits. For the majority of these young women, transactional sex is not perceived as a survival strategy necessary to meet basic needs, but rather a strategy which empowers them as upwardly mobile young women.

Method

The PEER method is derived from the anthropological approach, which holds that building a relationship of trust with the community is essential for researching social life. Peer researchers undergo a short three-day participatory training during which they identify key themes for the research and develop 'prompts' to guide their interviews. Peer researchers do not ask interviewees to talk about their own experiences. Rather they are asked to talk about what other people like them do or say, although care is taken in the training and interviewing to ensure that individuals are not talked about specifically and no names are identified in the stories. The use of 'third person' interviewing, enables respondents to talk about sensitive issues to which they may not feel comfortable giving personal attribution. Data for this study were collected over a five-week period, during which time peer researchers received regular supervision from PSI staff.

Findings

Young women in the study are involved in multiple sexual partnerships, which are classified into a range of different types of relationships: *namorados* (same age boyfriends, with whom there is a perceived relationship of trust); *pitos* (partners for sexual pleasure and with whom there is no economic exchange); *sengue* (older married men) and *amante* (lovers). The *sengue* and *amante* are both transactional relationships. All narratives are explicit that the primary motive for transactional sex is economic, and young women have no emotional attachment or expectations beyond exchange of sex for money and other economic benefits. Transactional relationships are conceived of as distinct from prostitution. Transactional exchange always takes place in the context of a relationship, whereas prostitution is a one-off business encounter with a client.

These young women do not conceive of themselves as passive or coerced victims of relationships with older men. Rather, they are active agents involved in a continuing process of defining their social and sexual identity and making choices about the risks they engage in. Transactional sex is conceptualised as a strategy by which they are able to reverse the existing balance of gender and power relations. Through the power of their sexuality, young women are able to extract financial resources from men in order to access the material goods and life-style that symbolise modernity and success. Young women refer to this strategy as '*to sengue*', derived from the Portuguese adaptation of a local term '*sengar*', meaning 'to milk the cow.'

Aspirations expressed by these young women are to have a home, financial security, freedom, independence, social status and respect. These aspirations are linked to shifting gender expectations and identities through which young women are seeking to forge a new role for themselves in society. Prevailing structural conditions are perceived to militate against the achievement of these goals through socially acceptable means of studying, professional employment and securing a good marriage. Lack of employment opportunities for women; lack of access to education; corruption; low wages in employment sectors in which women predominate (eg service industry, markets, receptionist and secretarial work); and poor communication between parents and children are identified as major factors constraining achievement of future ambitions. Gender norms of sexuality also support a dominant role for men, in which it is considered legitimate for men to experiment sexually while women assume a passive role. Gender stereotypes present an image of women, and particularly girls, as sexual objects and commodities. It is within the context of these structural conditions and perceptions of prevailing gender and power relations that the strategy of transactional sex gains both viability and meaning for young women.

Among their peer group young women express a pride and esteem in having the power to obtain and maintain a *sengue*. The relationship must, however, remain clandestine as with discovery, a young woman runs the risk of her reputation being ruined. She can be labelled a '*puta*' (whore) as well as losing access to her economic resources. The findings show that these young women have high levels of knowledge regarding HIV and AIDS, and high awareness of the risks associated with multi-partner and unprotected sex. Nonetheless, knowledge of HIV/AIDS does not translate into a perception of personal risk and vulnerability. The young women are explicit about their lack of condom negotiation power with their *sengue* and *amante*, and attempts to negotiate condom use may threaten the relationship with the *sengue*. The risk of losing the immediate economic resource of the *sengue* and therefore social status is perceived to far outweigh the longer-term risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.

Risk taking is rationalised through a denial of the reality of AIDS, suggesting that AIDS is a myth or western construct aimed at controlling sexual freedoms, and a fatalism that asserts that if AIDS is real in the overall balance of things the cost of losing immediate social and economic gain is greater than the risk of dying (which is after all an inevitability). Prevention messages, therefore, appear to have little meaning within the context of young women's goals in transactional relationships.

The lack of value placed on planning and risk reduction within sexual relationship is also expressed in the high levels of abortion among the peer group. Abortion is referred to as the main means of pregnancy prevention, despite the majority of stories pertaining to unsafe abortions with severe health consequences. There is, however, a latent concept of prevention that runs through the narratives and is expressed in the idealised notion that condoms should be used in all relationships. There is also a value placed on limiting the number of partners, which is expressed through moral discourses which suggest that if a young woman has too many simultaneous and short-term *sengue*, she runs the risk of crossing a somewhat arbitrary and blurred line into prostitution.

Opportunities for Interventions

The findings from this study suggest a number of opportunities for interventions. A major constraint on developing effective programmatic responses to cross-generational and transactional sex has been a lack of in-depth gender analysis. Many interventions have only targeted young women, and have reinforced existing gender stereotypes. Young women are often presented as passive victims of transactional sex, either being coerced into relationships or entering into them out of necessity to meet subsistence needs.

This study reveals that young women in this target group have a well-constructed identity as upwardly mobile and powerful young women, and that cross-generational transactional sex is perceived by them to be a socially and economically empowering strategy. Interventions, therefore, need to take into account potential loss of power and status which could result from proposed changes in behaviour.

Nonetheless, it is clear that young women are also underestimating the costs of their current behaviour. Low risk perception may also be reinforced by interventions focusing their efforts on risk of HIV/AIDS, which is perceived by the target group as a long-term risk. Interventions may be more effective if they were to focus on more immediate risks such as pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and STIs, which have an acknowledged impact on health and economic status of peers.

Peer researchers could be empowered as change agents or innovators, providing an entry point to stimulating sustained interpersonal communication strategies among their

peers which support positive changes in peer group norms, especially as regards prevention measures and partner reduction.

Focusing interventions on women alone, however, is likely to have limited impact. While it is not possible to change the economic context in which this strategy gains viability for young women, it is possible to use mass media to challenge the social norms which sanction men seeking this type of service, and hence reducing 'demand'. Few interventions have been targeted at men to challenge masculine norms of sexuality and the gender power relations upon which cross-generational sex is predicated. Challenging the covert nature and tacit acceptability of cross-generational transactional sex may be crucial to stimulating behaviour change.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a qualitative study carried out in Maputo, Mozambique, among young women engaged in cross-generational transactional sex. Cross-generational sex is contributing significantly to the spread of HIV/AIDS in Mozambique and as such is a key area for behaviour change interventions, although few organisations are currently addressing the issue. The study reveals that young women engaged in cross-generational and transactional sex have a complex sexual network involving multiple partners including both transactional and non-transactional relationships. The study has highlighted a number of issues related to how young women who are engaged in transactional sex construct their social identity, how they perceive risk and negotiate the different relationships in which they are involved.

Peer researchers recruited for the study were identified by PSI's Communications Department, through an informal network. The initial intention of PSI had been to carry out research among young women engaged in commercial sex-work. During the training it became clear, however, that none of our peer researchers identified their peers as sex-workers. Indeed, the group do not share one fixed social identity, although they share a common life-style and economic strategy on which that life-style is predicated. The life-style is best described as that of a 'modern girl', a young woman who is able to frequent bars, restaurants, discos, who can be seen wearing the latest fashions from Brazil, and who rides in expensive cars and talks on the latest model of cell-phone. As one of the interviewees suggested, they could be anybody: a sister, daughter, friend or neighbour.

The common economic strategy upon which their identity as modern girls depends, is that of having sex with older men for money. Young women do not perceive themselves to be passive victims coerced into relations with older men, but rather as actively pursuing the strategy referred to as to '*sengue*'. The expression is understood to derive from a Portuguese adaptation of a local term '*sengar*', meaning to 'milk the cow'. Through this strategy young women are able to turn the prevailing balance of power in gender relations on its head; presenting older, powerful men as the passive victims, milked for their economic resources through the power of a young woman's sexuality.

2. PSI'S OBJECTIVES

PSI had two main objectives for using the PEER approach in this piece of research: 1) to generate more in-depth understanding of the target group; 2) to use the approach as an entry point for developing an interpersonal communications strategy that reaches higher risk and harder to organise groups.

Since 1994 PSI has been implementing an HIV/AIDS behaviour change programme in partnership with the Mozambican Ministry of Health, and including social marketing of male condoms. Through initial formative research PSI has developed a locally appropriate communications strategy and ensures condom availability nationally through a network of commercial distributors and retail outlets. Behaviour change communication has mainly been directed towards groups considered to be at higher risk of HIV infection, both through interpersonal communication and mass media channels (Karlyn, 2004). PSI defines high-risk groups principally in terms number of sexual partners and low or non-use of condoms.

Interpersonal communications is carried out by community agents at district level and below. One of the main approaches used to deliver HIV prevention messages is the '*fogo cruzado*' (cross-fire); these are structured, participative sessions with small groups (normally 20 people at a time). The approach is best suited to groups who are easily organised through existing social structures and networks (e.g. the military). The network is large and reaches over 200,000 participants each year. However, PSI is concerned that the approach does not work well for higher risk groups whom they would like to target more intensively, such as commercial sex-workers. The '*fogo cruzado*' is often delivered as a 'one-off' session for each group of participants. PSI is in the process of developing a progression of modules that can be delivered over a period of time (by peer or community agents) to the same group of people. This process has moved forward substantially for 'easy to organise' groups such as the military, but still needs to be developed for harder to reach groups.

PSI has identified the need to know more about the appropriate channels through which to reach higher risk groups, such as young women engaged in transactional and cross-generational sex, in order to identify interpersonal communications strategies and content of a behaviour change communications programmes that would be most meaningful to them. The anticipated output of the PEER research was therefore to provide PSI not only with insights into risk behaviour and obstacles to behaviour change, but also the beginnings of a platform from which to develop an effective communications strategy and sustained interaction with the target group.

3. CROSS-GENERATIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL SEX

3.1 A Brief Review of the Literature

There is an increasing body literature which points to widening gender disparities in levels of HIV infections in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa through what is being referred to as the 'feminisation of AIDS'. Young women in the age group 15-24 years are three to four times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male peers (Luke, 2003). Age mixing in sexual relationships between older men and younger women has been offered as a likely explanation for these differences, with older men often having HIV infection rates much higher than those of adolescent boys (Görge *et al* 1993; Konde-Lule *et al* 1997; Meekers and Calves 1997; Glynn *et al* 2001; Laga *et al* 2001; Gregson *et al* 2002; Luke 2003; Hallman 2004; Longfield *et al* 2004). A review of more than 45 quantitative and qualitative studies suggests that relationships between young women and older male partners which involve economic transactions are common in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. These asymmetries are often associated with unsafe sexual behaviour, low condom use and increased risk of HIV infection (Luke, 2003).

Several studies highlight that age and economic asymmetries within a sexual relationship are not simply the outcome of individual behaviour. Sexual activity and risk behaviour do not depend only on the individual attributes of those involved. Rather, sexual behaviour is negotiated within a wider social, cultural and economic context, reinforced by factors such as: family and peer pressures, social and economic institutions, and the overall context of gender-based inequality and power relations (Luke 2003; Karlyn 2004).

The literature suggests that the motivations for adolescent girls engaging in sexual relationships with older men are varied, although a predominant motivation is often financial (Luke 2003). Poverty has been identified as a factor in a number of studies. In times of economic crisis young women may enter into transactional sex in order to meet

basic needs, such as to buy food, provide housing, as well as paying for school fees (Luke 2003). The literature suggests, however, that there is a wide occurrence of transactional sex relationships for purposes of fulfilling adolescent desires of status. Many studies refer to young women being motivated to seek older partners because of the increased social status they gain among their peers through access to status goods, such as clothes, make-up, jewellery and cell phones (Meekers and Calves 1997; Kambou *et al* 1998; Gage 1998). These status rewards are often reaped more successfully by older adolescents as young girls are inexperienced in exchange negotiations (Luke 2003).

A number of studies refer to young women choosing older partners for the longer-term goals of marriage, with older men being perceived as more serious and better potential marriage partners than same-age partners (Nyamnzi *et al* 2000; Luke 2003). Other studies point to the fact that among many young women there appears to be a decreasing value placed on formal unions, with younger women being more committed to future careers than marriage, and therefore trying to maximise the number of sexual partners they have as a means of increasing economic security (Meekers and Calves 1997). In this context, young women often refer to older wealthy men as 'sponsors' or 'sugar daddies'. Young women in these transactional relationships often do not intend to marry their partners; rather they perceive them to be a means to further education or job opportunities. (Gage and Bledsoe 1994; Meekers and Calves 1997; Nyanzi *et al* 2000; Machel 2001; Luke 2003; Hallman 2004). A number of studies have focused on educated single young women who enter into relationships with older wealthy men, in order to achieve their aspirations and goals of security and social mobility (Meekers and Calves 1997; Gage 1998; Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001).

Age and economic asymmetries are significantly associated with unsafe behaviour and increased risk of HIV infection (Luke 2003). Several factors are identified within cross-generational relationships which increase risk of STIs and HIV. Risk perception among young women is often very low, and many men prefer young sexual partners, as they perceive them to be free from HIV and therefore low risk (Longfield *et al* 2004). Young women are often more concerned about the risk of becoming pregnant or of being 'found out' in their relationships with older men than of STIs or HIV (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Longfield *et al* 2004). Studies also suggest that young women's power to negotiate condom use is often compromised by age disparities and economic dependence within such relationships (Longfield *et al* 2004). Adolescent girls often cannot insist on safe sex practices, as doing so would jeopardise their economic goals in the relationship (Luke 2003).

A review of the literature reveals two portrayals of adolescent girls and their sexual experiences (Luke 2003). The first view-point portrays young women as passive 'victims' of wider structural and cultural factors, who are coerced into unsafe sexual practices as a result of imbalances in gender and power relations. The second and much less depicted portrayal is of adolescent girls as active social agents who rationally chose cross-generational sex as an economic strategy. In these contexts it is understood that young women learn that their sexuality is a valued resource (as a result of structural conditions and balance of gender and power relations), and exercise agency to gain financial resources from older men for sexual services, often with multiple partners to maximise the benefits. A study among secondary school students in Uganda refers to a strategy of 'de-toothing' whereby girls talk about extracting as much money as possible out of their partners while avoiding giving sexual favours in exchange (Nyanzi *et al* 2000). While young women are often powerless as regards safer sex negotiation in these relationships, they often have a high degree of control over partnership formation, choosing the number and types of partners with whom they become involved (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Luke 2003).

3.2 The Mozambique Context

In the past 15 years Mozambique has experienced a steady growth in the AIDS epidemic. The most recent prevalence data estimate that as of 2002, 14% of sexually active adults aged 15-49 years are HIV Positive (MoH 2003)¹. In Maputo, the epidemic has accelerated significantly since 1998, with prevalence rates increasing from 10% to the current level of 17% (UNAIDS, 2002)². More women are infected with HIV than men, with women comprising 60% of all HIV infected adults in Mozambique. HIV infection is significantly higher among women in the age range 15-24 years (estimated at between 11% and 19%) than among young men in the same age group (estimated between 4% and 7%).

A number of underlying and proximate factors have contributed to the AIDS epidemic in Mozambique (Karlyn 2004). Underlying factors include poverty, poor health, social dislocation and migration, the latter exacerbated by Mozambique's historic position as a labour reserve and transport conduit for the interior of Southern Africa. Proximate factors that make Mozambique especially vulnerable to the spread of HIV/AIDS include: poor health service delivery, a pre-existing and concurrent STI epidemic, and gender-power relations marked by the physical and emotional subjugation of women (Karlyn 2004).

Rapidly changing economic and social conditions impinge harshly on young people. (Karlyn, 2004). A lengthening period of adolescence is one of the outcomes of modernity that has been noted in many sub-Saharan African countries. In Maputo, as elsewhere, changing social structure and the breakdown of the extended family has placed the responsibility for sex education on parents, despite strong cultural taboos against it. The controversy over how young people express their sexuality in Mozambique masks larger issues of conflict in intergenerational communication, with young people often viewing their parents as anti-modern traditionalists, increasing young people's desire for independence and freedom (Karlyn 2004).

Few data exist on transactional and cross-generational relationships. The research among young people, mainly covers sexual relationships among adolescents in general (Karlyn and Mussá 2000; Bagnol and Chamo 2003). The fragmented information available indicates that sex between adolescent girls and older men in exchange for material and financial benefits is relatively frequent and largely accepted by many parts of society (Bagnol and Chamo 2003).

A recent study of relationships between older men, 'titios' (uncles) and young women 'catorzinhas'³ in Zambézia Province, suggests that cross-generational sex needs to be understood in the context of gender power relations, expressed in terms of access to and control over resources including women's control over their bodies and sexuality (Bagnol and Chamo 2003). The study suggests that young women's increased social vulnerability to HIV infection arises out of a number of structural factors, including: lack of access to information, poor employment opportunities and in rural areas lack of access to land, which place women in a position of less economic power. Inequitable gender and power relations are reinforced through social norms and laws that are prejudicial to women's interests, cultural values which define a sexually dominant role for men and passive role for women and financial and sexual corruption by men in influential positions in society (Bagnol and Chamo 2003). The study suggests that men's preferences for sexual

¹ Cited in Karlyn, A (2004)

² Cited in Karlyn, A (2004)

³ Meaning fourteen year olds, but used in this context to mean young girls who have sex with older men for money

relations with younger women are legitimised through a gender stereotype that affirms the notion that men should be free to 'experiment sexually'. Men in the study also refer to sex with younger women as being 'more pleasurable', and also perceived as being low risk (Bagnol and Chamo 2003). Within these relationships girls have no power to negotiate condom use. Young women interviewed in the study affirmed that they do not enter into relationships with older men for love or pleasure, but simply for economic interest, 'the only objective is money' (Bagnol and Chamo: 2003). A study carried out in Maputo (Machel 2001) also suggests that transactional sex may be class related and linked to poverty. The study found that girls attending a secondary school in a working-class neighbourhood were more likely to accept material support from their partners than those attending school in a middle-class neighbourhood.

In the study carried out by Bagnol and Chamo (2003), girls expressed their economic motive for cross-generational sex both in terms of meeting basic needs such as paying for schooling, as well as to have access to 'luxury' goods such as modern clothes in order to gain status among their peers. With changes in the economic context of Mozambique and the expansion of commercial markets since 1990, cross-generational sex is closely linked to young women's notion of modernity and the importance of gaining social status through possession of luxury goods (Bagnol and Chamo: 2003). The study also suggests that it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between '*catorzinhas*' (young women who have sex with older men for money) and 'prostitution'. While young women did not perceive being a '*catorzinha*' as prostitution, in contradiction they also referred to some '*catorzinhas*' as 'prostitutes.' (Bagnol and Chamo: 2003). Bagnol and Chamo (2003) suggest that age may be a major distinguishing feature with '*catorzinhas*' being categorised as in the age group 15-20 years, while 'prostitutes' are considered to be women in the age range 20-40 years.

A study carried out in 2000 among youth in and out of school in the city of Maputo, suggests that sexual practices identified by young people involve a variation of 'sexual scripts' marked by experimentation. Sex among these young people is identified as being predominantly for pleasure or procreation (Karlyn and Mussá 200). While sex with 'rich men' was as a form of transactional sex referred to in the study, this was not identified as a strategy predominating among the young people interviewed. The main principal sexual partners of the young people participating in the study were identified as "boyfriends/girlfriends" or "husbands/wives" (mainly among out-of-school youth). Secondary relationships were categorised as the '*saca-cena*' (one-night-stand) and the "*pito/a*" (friend). The *pito* may be a lover, but can also be an innocent friend with whom a girl exchanges hugs and kisses.

The '*saca-cena*' is referred to as an occasional partner who is generally met at parties, bars or discotheques, with whom one has a 'one-night-stand'. Karlyn (2004) suggests that the *saca-cena* is a marginal activity reported by only a small section of urban youth, and is bound by a set of implicit rules emphasising anonymity, discretion, verbal and non-verbal cues, and in some cases explicit condom use. Karlyn (2004) contrasts the *saca-cena* with another marginal local category 'the survivor' who is identified as an individual with no concern for his or her actions. Casual sex and non-use of condoms are identified as typical elements of the survivor life-style, which consists of going to discos every night, hanging out with friends, and disrespect for authority (Karlyn 2004:190). A female survivor is perceived to be a young woman who is sexually 'available', but cannot be classed as a 'prostitute', as she does not always want something in exchange for sex. In this respect the female survivor represents a troubling category for young people. While her sexual behaviour crosses accepted norms, she cannot be socially isolated through labelling her, for example, as a prostitute (Karlyn 2004).

The *saca-cena*, while maintaining the same approach to enjoying life as the survivor, chooses to mitigate the risk associated with the survivor life-style by practicing safer sex. Young people are exploring the boundaries of gender roles and power dimensions of safer sex, leading to the incorporation of condom use as part of the *saca-cena* identity. In these young people's discourses, to *saca-cena* is synonymous with using a condom. The identity of the *saca-cena* is facilitated by a moral discourse around what is acceptable and unacceptable risk (Karlyn 2004:190).

The available literature indicates that how young women perceive and define their sexual relationships, including those involving economic transactions is both fluid and rapidly changing. Nonetheless, there is a significant gap in the literature on the nature of cross-generational transactional relationships in Mozambique, and how young women engaged in these relationships construct their social and sexual identity and perceive and negotiate risk.

4. METHOD

4.1 Review of current methods

Data for this study were collected using the PEER (participatory ethnographic evaluation and research) method. PEER is an innovative, rapid, participatory and qualitative approach to programme related research, monitoring and evaluation. PEER is more than a research method; it is also an approach to building active dialogue between programmes and the target community, and to building entry points to working with marginalised and harder to reach social groups.

Surveys and focus group discussions have remained the dominant research methods in the field of sexual and reproductive health. Surveys have provided much of the empirical basis for sexual and reproductive health programme design, monitoring and evaluation, most notably through knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) surveys (Price and Hawkins 2002). While surveys are important for producing quantitative data on trends in social behaviour, they are limited in producing the insights necessary to understand the complexity of social relationships within which sexual and risk behaviour is contextualised.

An assumption often made by surveys is that what people say to an interviewer is the same as what they would say to each other (i.e. to their peers), and that what people say is an accurate reflection of what they do. Luke (2003) has noted a number of limitations to survey methods used to explore cross-generational and transactional sex. While most surveys ask direct questions about receiving or exchanging gifts or money for sex, detailed questions about the context of these exchanges are not usually included. It is often difficult to make a distinction from survey data between transactions that may be an expected part of dating relationships, and those that are inducements for sexual services and may involve a greater degree of coercion (Luke:70). A further limitation of quantitative studies related to cross-generational sex is that they usually collect information asking about sexual practices with the most recent partner. Many surveys therefore have a built-in assumption that people – especially adolescents – have only one current partner and therefore often fail to enquire about multiple partners. If information about only one partner is elicited, adolescent girls may be inclined to report acceptable same-age partners and under-report more risky relationships with older partners (Luke 2003:75).

Qualitative methods are increasingly being used in sexual and reproductive health research, to address some of these limitations of surveys. The value of qualitative methods lies in their potential to explore and probe more deeply into people's accounts of social life. In recent years the focus group has become the method *par excellence* of the sexual and reproductive health field (Price and Hawkins 2002). A review of the literature on cross-generational sex highlights that most qualitative studies rely on the focus-group method for gathering detailed information on sexual experiences of adolescents, rather than other methods such as in-depth interviews. Researchers often select young people whom they consider to be the most knowledgeable adolescents to be focus-group participants (Luke 2003).

While the focus group is a useful method for eliciting discourses on dominant social values, one of its main limitations lies in its tendency to produce normative social responses. Because focus groups take place in the public sphere participants are often reluctant to discuss openly experiences that deviate from accepted norms and values, and hence the method often provides limited insights into how people use and perceive strategies which contradict dominant norms (Price and Hawkins 2002). Longfield et al (2004) note that in a study of cross-generational sex in Kenya, focus-group discussions among young female participants were more likely to reflect social norms than actual behaviour. For example, none of the focus-group participants admitted to being involved in cross-generational relationships, although they were quick to point out that they knew other young women or had friends who engaged in such relationships.

Where researchers have used more innovative methods such as collecting narratives, they often enable researchers to collect valid and reliable details of adolescent's sexual experiences, although these methods often tend to be labour and time intensive (Luke 2003). Gaining trustworthy answers on issues related to sexual activity and cross-generational sex has proven difficult due to the sensitive nature of the issue (Silberschmidt 2001). Using a method which builds trust among participants is essential for research into cross-generational sex, to ensure that participants are free to talk about sensitive and often socially unacceptable issues (Luke 2003).

4.2 Principles of the PEER method

The PEER method is derived from the anthropological approach which holds that building a relationship of trust with the community is essential for researching social life. What people say about social life and behaviour changes according to the level of familiarity between the researcher and researched.

The PEER method is based upon training members of the target community to carry out in-depth conversational interviews with individuals selected by them from their own social networks. They are known as 'peer researchers'. The term peer, as used here, does not refer exclusively to young people, whose peers are often the same age, but to membership of any significant social network.

As peer researchers have established relationships and trust and established entry-points into their community, the interviews can take place over a relatively short period of time. An important aspect of the method, which differs significantly from surveys and focus groups, is that all interviews are carried out in the third person. Peer researchers ask interviewees to talk about "what other people like them" do or say, and are never asked to talk about themselves directly. Using third person interviewing enables people to talk freely about sensitive issues, to which they may not want to give personal attribution. The aim of the interviews is to collect narratives and stories which provide insights into how interviewees conceptualise and give meaning to the experiences and

behaviour of 'others' in their social network. All interviews are confidential and peer researchers do not note down the names or addresses of interviewees or other people in their social network. Interviewees are not asked to identify whom they are talking about, simply to share their experience or story.

One of the key social dynamics that the method draws upon is that of gossip. The contradictions between social norms and the actual experiences that people talk about among their peer group, provides crucial insights into how people understand and negotiate behaviour. Gossip is the local currency of social networks, providing valuable insights into relationships of power and vested interests that operate under the surface (Price and Hawkins 2002). The peer approach seeks to elicit a rich and dynamic social commentary in the form of peer group narratives, which provides insights into how identity is created and how behaviour is given meaning.

4.3 Recruitment and training of peer researchers

Criteria for recruitment of our peer researchers were: that the young women were keen to participate, available for a five-week period to carry out interviews, had a basic level of literacy. Peer researchers were recruited through an informal network, as PSI did not have existing established links with the target group. Peer researchers underwent a short three-day participatory training during which time they were introduced to the concept of peer research, and worked with skilled facilitators (PSI's research and communications staff) to identify key themes for the research and develop 'prompts' to guide their interviews.

4.4 Data collection and analysis

Data collection was carried out over a five-week period. During this time peer researchers received weekly supervision from PSI staff. Supervisors interviewed peer researchers on the interviews they had carried out during the week, and recorded detailed notes of the narratives. Peer researchers were asked to note down key words and phrases to remind themselves of the issues covered in the interviews. During the supervision process PSI staff were able to build up a strong rapport and relationship of trust with the peer researchers, enabling them to probe more deeply into issues raised by the interviews. The relationship of trust built up between PSI staff and peer researchers is essential for building entry points for working with the target group through a sustained programme of interpersonal communication.

Each peer researcher was asked to interview three peers during the data collection period. Three separate conversational interviews were carried with each peer, in consecutive weeks on different themes. The approach of interviewing the same person on several occasions, allows for intensive probing of each interviewee around a number of identified key themes. The main themes of the interviews were: social identity and social life; sexual behaviour and risk perception; health seeking behaviour and sexual and reproductive health. In total 60 young women were interviewed, with a total of 180 interview narratives collected.

The data analysis was carried out on 2 levels. PSI research staff conducted an in-depth analysis of interview narratives. The findings of this analysis are presented in the next section of this report. Peer researchers also carried out a one-day workshop in which they conducted their own analysis of their interviews, and presented their findings to PSI senior management and programme staff. The workshop enabled peer researchers and PSI staff to initiate a dialogue around the issues raised by the research, and establish the beginnings of a platform for sustained interaction with the group.

5. FINDINGS: THEMES FROM THE NARRATIVES

This section provides an over-view of key findings. Issues covered are:

- How the social group is defined and how social identity is constructed.
- How transactional sex is perceived, negotiated and experienced.
- How different categories of relationships are defined
- How risk is perceived and negotiated within different types of relationships.
- Implications of risk perception and balance of gender power relations for condom use.
- Illness perceptions (including perceptions of HIV/AIDS) and health seeking behaviour
- Pregnancy and abortion as a primary pregnancy prevention measure

5.1 Contradiction and difference

One of the main objectives of PEER research is to give voice to socially marginalised groups, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the world view and rationality of the target group. Nonetheless there are inherent difficulties in representing the voices of others. As much as is possible the narratives need to speak for themselves through the words of the interviewees.

An important focus of the analysis is on highlighting contradiction and difference in the discourses of different people within a social network. The contradictions that run throughout the narratives provide important insights into differences between idealised behaviour and actual behaviour, and how young women engaged in transactional sex perceive their social identity and negotiate risk.

5.2 The social group

The narratives collected in this study represent multiple voices. Women participating are not from one clearly defined or homogenous social group. Some live with their parents or other relatives, others live independently, with friends, siblings or alone. Some work, others study, and many are unemployed. Some are from poorer backgrounds and others from higher socio-economic groups, but most have their basic needs met by their families. The majority of narratives express 'socially acceptable' aspirations to study, earn money, marry and have a family. The young women described in the narratives are best defined as modern urban young women.

"Most friends live with their mothers, or their uncles and aunts. Most cannot live alone because they are students. The ones who don't go to work study so that they can satisfy their needs in the future. They want to get married, have children go to college."

"Her friends - live in the city – some with parents, others with uncles and brothers. In their free time they go around and meet new people, go to the beach and go out with friends. They start living alone between 20 and 25 years. They want to have a normal life, to get married and have children."

"They want to conclude school and have a good job, nice money, a family to fulfil that way of living."

"In the future she wants a good job, to be a professional."

“She is 20 years old and lives at home with her parents and younger brother. Her friends don’t work, they live at home with their parents. In the future she wants to be independent.”

“Her dream is to have someone who really likes her and wants a serious thing with her and treats her with respect and affection as a woman, in truth she is just anyone”.

5.3 Identity

The young women participating in this study share an identity which is constructed through a common set of aspirations and a common life-style. Social identity is very closely linked to notions of modernity and access to modern consumer goods. The modern life-style that is aspired to includes being able to frequent bars, restaurants, and night-clubs; being able to wear modern clothes imported from Brazil; being seen riding in expensive cars; and having access to the latest model of cell-phone. Brazilian culture (represented through music and ever-present soap operas on television) has had a significant influence on youth culture and young people’s aspirations for a fashionable, modern life-style.

“She had a friend – her friends didn’t like her because she didn’t have money and she lived in a poor area. Her friends used to go out and they didn’t invite her to go out with them. Now she has money and lives in a high class area, now they invite her to go out with them.”

“Most of her friends live in Maputo. In their free time they like to have lunch at restaurants and go to night-clubs. They like nice clothes, eating in restaurants, and going to bars and night clubs.”

“She wants to be in fashion, dine at a restaurant and go to public places. She wants to study, have a good job and get well paid and have lots of money. In this country now it is the ‘second Brazil’, young people don’t do much; they want to have nice things.”

Social identity is also linked to shifting gender aspirations, expressed through the desire of young women to be able to live independently, have freedom to make their own choices, have the potential to generate a high level of income, and to be socially respected. Terms used in the narratives to construct these new gender identities include: ‘*curtidoras*’, (those who enjoy life); ‘*guerreiras*’ (fighters); ‘*espertas*’, (clever); ‘*ambiciosas*’ (ambitious); and ‘*mulheres de visão*’ (women with vision). The identities of ‘*curtidoras*’ and ‘*guerreiras*’ are similar to the category of ‘survivors’ described by Karlyn (2004). The notion of a young woman as ‘*curtidora*’, someone who enjoys life and lives for the present, runs throughout the narratives and is central to how risk is perceived. The identity of *curtidora* stands in contradiction to the common expressed aspiration to succeed in life through study, work, and securing a good marriage.

“They are ‘curtidoras’ they enjoy themselves, they don’t plan anything for the future.”

“They enjoy life (curtizão) – they have various sexual partners and they don’t think about the future.”

“The future is for rich people; they only think about the present, they just want to enjoy life.”

“They are ‘guerreiras’. To win in life you have to fight. They like freedom and independence. They see that they are young with a great willingness to succeed in life.”

“Guerreiras do not have good behaviour, some are secret guerreiras.”

“They call themselves women with vision – they are clever – they hope to work and get married.”

5.4 Strategy

The identity of the modern young women is predicated upon a shared economic and social strategy. This strategy is referred to in all the narratives by the term ‘*to sengue*’ which translates as ‘to extract money from older men through sex.’ The term is understood to come from the word ‘*sengar*’, a Portuguese adaptation of a local term meaning ‘to milk the cow.’ Other terms used in the narratives to describe the strategy of transactional sex are, ‘*chilar*’ (to extract money), and ‘*escamar*’ (to de-scale the fish). The use of these linguistic constructions suggests that young women perceive themselves to be active agents in employing a strategy which is both socially and economically empowering. The strategy reverses the order of gender relations, into one in which young women perceive themselves to be in control of gaining financial resources from older, wealthy men through the power of their sexuality. Young women are often presented as making the first move in these relationships.

“She has guerreira friends. Guerreiras do sex in exchange for money and ask for material goods. They meet in friend’s houses, discos and nightclubs. – they say they only have a boyfriend, but then you see them out in a car with a white man.”

“When she goes ‘sengueing’ she makes the first move with the man. She likes well-dressed men – they have money. She meets them in night-clubs, and asks for a dance or looks at him and does sexual movement – dancing for him to attract him.”

“She likes to have money, she likes using men’s money – she looks for men who have money in restaurants, bars, - or she gets introduced to a man- she has friends who have contacts with powerful men with money.”

“She likes to go to night-clubs, study and watch movies, she has fans who give her money, she can just leave them, ‘throw them away’ when she wants to, in the future she wants to go to college with their money.”

All the narratives are explicit that the primary motive for ‘*sengueing*’ is purely economic.

“For money – in this way we can sleep with men for money – even if we don’t like the person – for money – we can give sex in exchange.”

5.5 Relationships

A number of distinct relationship categories are identified in the narratives, each type of relationship involving a distinct set of expectations. Not all types of relationships are

necessarily entered into simultaneously, although the narratives suggest that multiple sexual partners are a norm. Non-transactional relationships are those with *namorados* (boyfriends) and *pitos* (sex partners). Those which involve different forms of transactions include the *amante* (lover); the *sengue* (sugar-daddy), and *prostituição* (prostitution). Both *sengue* and *amante* are sometimes referred to as *patrocinadores* (sponsors). Prostitution is perceived as distinct from other forms of transaction and not comparable to having sex in exchange relationships such as with the *sengue* and *amante*.

Namorado (boyfriends)

The *namorado* is usually a same-age boyfriend. The relationship with the *namorado* is open, public and socially acceptable. Many narratives refer to the *namorado* as the person that one can be seen out with in public. In many respects it is a relationship that provides an acceptable social face, behind which the strategy of 'sengueing' can remain hidden. The relationship with the *namorado* is also defined as one in which there is an expectation of affection, love and planning for the future.

"With the namorado everything is 'legal' (open) – there is nothing to be scared of."

"With a namorado it is an open relationship without shyness, they can walk in the street hand-in-hand – they can caress and love – the end is getting married and having children and be happy."

"The namorado is when both love each other and have respect, truthfulness and plans for the future. The namorado wants a family, marry and live with her forever."

While a *namorado* is perceived as someone with whom it is possible to talk about the future and marriage, *namorados* are usually local boys who do not have access to money and therefore unable to meet young women's aspirations of marrying a rich man. For this reason it is necessary to *sengue* at the same time as having a *namorado*. Money from the *sengue* is sometimes used to buy presents for the *namorado*.

"Most youth have a namorado. He may give her everything in terms of love and good relations, but he doesn't have money to pay for clothes and dinner in good restaurants."

"The namorado is the one with whom they share or divide their things."

"She had a boyfriend she liked very much and decided to live with him – as time went on the relationship did not work out - first she went back to living with her parents – she wanted her freedom – she had started going out with older men and had a certain interest – she was used to having a good life."

The relationship with the *namorado* is also defined as one of trust. The *namorado* is assumed to be faithful to his partner and unaware that she has other partners.

"The relationship with the namorado is with faithfulness – they share the needs for happiness and future projects. Before love had a certain value because there was respect between two people. Most of the time they used to end up being married, now they don't use the word 'namora' but they talk about 'curtizão', enjoying life to the fullest."

“The namorado does not know about the sengue. The sengue knows she has a namorado.”

Pito (sex-partner)

The definition of the *pito* has shifted significantly from that identified by Karlyn and Mussá (2000). Whereas in the earlier study a *pito* was defined as a close friend with whom one may or may not have a sexual relationship, in these narratives a *pito* is a relationship which exists solely to give sexual pleasure. It is the one relationship in which no material exchange takes place. The significant feature of the relationship with the *pito* is that the *pito* accepts the woman for who she is, and knows the details of her life-style. It is therefore considered a relationship of trust even though both parties are aware that the other has other partners. There are no expectations beyond sexual pleasure.

With the *pito* a young woman is free to experiment sexually in a way that she cannot with a *namorado*, as the *namorado* expects his girlfriend to be sexually innocent. The *pito* also exists to ‘relieve stress’ from all the other more complex sets of relationships. In some narratives the *pito* is referred as to the person with whom one can ‘saca-cena’ (in this context meaning have a sexual encounter without expectations).

“With the pito they get involved for attraction, it is a relationship without any promises – he can have other girlfriends and she can have other boyfriends. With a pito they do not ask for money. It is different to a namorado – with a namorado when she has sex she cannot ask for different positions – with a pito she can do whatever she wants – because he will enjoy it – the pito thinks it is excellent! The pito calls her a ‘vagabonda’ - but they say the more the better.”

“She asks someone to introduce her to a pito – then they saca-cena (kiss and talk without promises) – they talk, dance together and she charms him.”

“Pitos they are without promises – they like the way he has sex – pitos are good in bed – not that boyfriends are not – but pitos like to fantasise. Namorados they treat them until they make them sick – they want to be nice and straight – sometimes the woman wants a bit more action. The pito does not care about that – they are more comfortable in bed with the pito than the namorado.”

“The pito is the one who satisfies her and takes out the stress when she has problems with the namorado.”

Sengue

The *sengue* is an exchange relationship, in which there is no expectation beyond money being given for sex. *Sengue* are usually older married men. The best *sengue* are those who are wealthy and powerful. Relationships with *sengue* may be short-lived or continue for some time. There are fixed times for meeting with the *sengue*, usually during business hours between 2pm and 5pm so that the *sengue*’s wife cannot suspect that her husband is with another woman. Most *moças* (young women) meet their *sengue* at a hotel or *pensão* (guest-house). A *moça* may have more than one *sengue* at any one time, clever girls are considered to be the ones who have several *sengue*. The clandestine nature of the relationship highlights ambiguities around the social identity of young women engaged in the strategy. If a *moça* is found out to have many *sengue* she runs the risk of being called a prostitute and ruining her social reputation. At the same time, a young woman gains social status through the materially ostentatious life-style which is supported by money from the *sengue*.

“People look down on moças because they go out with sengue – so they keep it a secret. She meets her sengue only from Mondays to Friday, between 12.00 and 14.00 – they meet in a pensão.”

“They can meet a sengue in the street, in a night-club. The sengue calls her ‘daughter’. Normally with the sengue, if she needs money she phones him and says she needs something.”

“Good relationships are with the sengue, because he gives pleasure and well-being with the money he gives her. The sengue gives money. It is the amante (lover) who gives her goods.”

“The sengue is just for money. They meet sengues at hotels or on the street. They do different types of thing with the sengue; oral and anal sex. Sengue give girls money when they treat them well.”

Sengue are often talked about in derogatory terms as a resource to be tapped into for as long as possible, with no expectation of affection in the relationship. The *sengue* perceives the young woman to be his *pita*, there to provide him with sexual pleasure. The *moça* will do whatever the *sengue* asks to please him sexually, in order to achieve her financial goals. Young women in this study take pride in their strategy of having a *sengue* as a financial resource.

“There are good and bad sengue. Bad sengue are those who go out with young girls and don’t give money and make the girls do what they want. Good ones are those who give money.”

“They do everything the wife does not do – anal sex, oral sex – he tells her how the wife does not do that. They accept all positions with the sengue. When she needs money she phones him, or after they have gone to bed she may tell him a story about how she really needs money for something.”

“Sometimes the sengue can like the moça. But the moça doesn’t like him, she is only in it for the money. With the sengue she doesn’t take anything seriously it is just to sengar – get money out of him.”

“Sengue are good when they want to sponsor the moça and give them what they need. They go with the sengue to ‘chilar’ (get money out of them). It is bad when the sengue wants to get involved and know too much about her.”

Relationships with the *sengue* can become problematic if the *sengue* decides he wants to turn the relationship into something more serious, thereby altering the rules of the exchange.

“Sometimes a sengue wants to take a relationship seriously and live with us. Then there is a big problem.”

“The sengue most of the time they have their wives – and sometimes they lose their mind and say they want to live with the moça – then a great confusion starts.”

“Good relations with the sengue are when each plays their role well – nobody goes to the other side – so they don’t interfere in each other’s lives. If the

sengue says he wants to live with her or she goes after him at his home, then it is complicated and there is a lot of confusion.”

Amante (lover)

The *amante* or lover is a somewhat ambiguous relationship, situated somewhere between that of a *sengue* and that of a husband. The ambiguous nature of the relationship makes it highly problematic. *Amante* are usually married men (who may have been a *sengue*) and who support the *moça* like a second wife, usually renting a flat or a house for her, paying the bills and providing her with a monthly allowance.

“Amante give material goods, they are the one who provide homes and pay a monthly allowance, sometimes they pay college fees and buy her a car.”

“The amante gives the girl a home like a wife, when he has an argument with his wife he goes and lives with her. The amante sees the moça as an instrument of pleasure.”

“He is the one who pays for everything. In exchange he wants love and for her to make him feel good. The amante wants to meet her in a home. Sengue just want to use hotels.”

The *amante* has expectations of the relationship, controlling the *moça* like a second wife so that she cannot have a *namorado* or a *sengue*. If the *amante* finds out about other partners he may stop supporting her, ‘closing the tap’ on the flow of resources. On the other hand *amante* are not considered trustworthy because they tell lies, making promises to leave their wife and yet never fulfilling the promise.

“Many married men – amantes – they promise to leave their wives – but stay with them.”

“The amantes tell lies, but they (moças) benefit from them from the goods they give them, they gain from them and take advantage.”

“The amante wants a serious thing. At home he has a wife, but he wants another wife outside – so that the first wife will not know.”

“The amante or patricianador is the same thing – because he sponsors her – rents a house, buys groceries, gives her everything. If he is married, has a family – he does everything – but hidden – sometimes she is not happy with that and looks for pitos and sengue.”

“Bad relationships are with the amante because they promise to leave their wives, but they never do, they never keep their promises. The big problem is that they are married – and they behave like they own the moça, and she can become uncontrollable.”

“Sometimes there are problems when the sengue becomes an amante. He wants to control her like a wife, then there are problems. The amante gives to the girl what he gives to the wife. When you are with the amante he does not want her to have a namorado. He controls her.”

“There was a man, he was well-off in life. He met a moça. He rented a house for her and bought her a car and a cell-phone and gave her all the conditions to live. In addition to personal expenses he paid her bills. As time went on she got

pregnant to another man so he left her and stopped paying the bills. He turned off the tap – so she had to sell the car.”

The expectations of relationships with *sengue* and *amante* appear to stand in contradiction to aspirations of marriage and security. The relationship with the *sengue* becomes problematic only when he tries to change the order things and crosses the boundary from a relationship based on exchange to one in which there are expectations. While the *amante* may treat his lover as if she is a second wife, the relationship remains ambiguous and based on mistrust. Through being a second wife, the *moça* stands to lose social and economic freedom, leading her to often terminate the relationship by turning the *amante* back into a *sengue*.

Prostituição (Prostitution)

To *sengar* is not the same as being a “prostitute”. Exchange with a *sengue* is always perceived to take place within the context of a relationship. Even if the relationship with the *sengue* is short-lived, the code of exchange between the two parties assumes that they are engaged in a form of relationship. For this reason, financial exchange usually does not take place immediately after sex.

Whereas ‘*sengueing*’ is perceived to be an empowering strategy; prostitution is conceptualised as socially unacceptable, a ‘last resort’ for women in desperate circumstances when they are unable to meet their basic needs.

“She lives by sleeping with men from Monday to Monday to survive. She is a prostitute. A good client is one who does not ask her for much, bad clients are those that make her do things she does not want to do. She sleeps with men to satisfy her needs. Her destiny is that her life is like this, she had no alternative but to start prostitution because she is poor.”

“Before she used to live with her boyfriend. He abandoned her with a daughter – she was only 3 months old. She had nowhere to live – she couldn’t work and had no one to support her – her family lives far away. She didn’t know what to do – now with the money from prostitution she can support her child – even rent a two room house.”

“Before this life she suffered a lot. Many men do not give money – it is obvious they must give money after having sex with her. Now she makes them agree on a price before having sex – for each part of the body he wants and what positions he wants. One of these positions, for examples anal sex she charges 400,000 meticaís it varies according to the prostitute. They do not give her anything apart from the price they agreed.”

“She had a friend, she suffered in life a lot. She was a prostitute because she had to meet all the expenses in her aunt’s house. She never liked that life – being a prostitute – she suffered a lot.”

A sex-worker is understood to have many different clients in a day. She does not define clients as a relationship category; they are simply men off the street who buy her services. Nonetheless there is some ambiguity as to where the line is drawn between ‘*sengueing*’ and prostitution. The ambiguity arises in the moral discourses of young women. Whereas to have one or two *sengue* over a period of time is considered to be a viable economic strategy, young women also refer to peers who have many *sengue* at one time as ‘prostitutes.’

“They say the prostitutes are the ones that stay on the streets and sleep with anyone that appears on the street, because they have to live. A prostitute has many clients, while they have one or two sengue to have a nice life. If she has many sengue, say 7 or 8 sengue, that is prostitution.”

5.6 Rationale and motivation

Some narratives refer “ to ‘sengueing’ ” as a necessary survival strategy. In this context surviving does not refer to meeting basic needs. Rather, it refers to survival in the sense of maintaining a social identity, linked to freedom, independence, access to material goods and aspirations to achieve success and power.

“They can sengue around to fulfil their needs – these days they like to sengue with guys from Nigeria, who sell clothes from Brazil. They are not so vulnerable that they need a lot of money – with money from the sengue they can dress up and go out.”

“She gets involved with men to fulfil her capricious needs – her fancy.”

“When they meet a sengue they say they don’t have money, even if they do – and they say they have problems at home, so that they will rent a flat for them. He may pay the bills or even buy her a car.”

“Most of the money is given in exchange of something directly or indirectly. At the end she asks for money for a drink or for clothes, they give what is convenient for the moment – normally they give things like a car, cell, domestic appliances and other goods.”

“Her friend wants to be a judge in the future. She will do anything — do everything – sleep with every kind of man – so that she can be that in the future.”

Narratives also refer to motivations of securing a marriage partner.

“She is a woman for what reason? She has to marry a powerful man to fulfil her needs.”

“It is clear that every day they have to go out with men with lots of money – powerful men – to survive. They all go out with powerful men – in the future they hope to get married.”

“All of us want to live well – she wants to be rich and marry a man she loves – she wants to marry a white man.”

Lack of viable employment is also perceived to be a major motivation for young women using the strategy of ‘sengueing’ to achieve their aspirations. The amount of money that young women can gain from a ‘sengue’ is set in sharp contrast to the amount that could be gained through available employment such as working as a receptionist or as a kiosk seller. Once a *moça* has achieved a certain life-style through ‘sengueing’, it would be impossible to maintain it through the types of employment that are most available to young women.

“She would like to work – people proposed to her that she could work in a kiosk or in the market – or as a domestic servant. She did not do that because she

was already involved, she used to come out of really good cars – so she wouldn't like people to see her in a job like that.”

Some of the narratives also refer to parents encouraging daughters to *sengue* and using traditional measures such as visiting the *curandeira* (traditional healer) to secure a relationship with a wealthy man. The *curandeira* is called upon to assist the young woman in altering the balance of power in gender relations through measures such as ‘putting the boyfriend in the bottle’, i.e. securing control over him.

“Some parents want their daughters to go with rich men. Some take them to the curandeira – they call it ‘a bath of luck’ – or ‘putting the boyfriend in the bottle’, especially when he is rich.”

“Sometimes they take them to the curandeira, that way they try to turn men into slaves – if she wants money she asks the curandeira to ‘put him in the bottle’.”

“She goes to the curandeira with her mother – she does that so that the guy will give her money and support her mother.”

Others refer to being introduced to older, wealthy men through their father’s colleagues and friends.

“Parents do not accept a boyfriend unless he is rich – they want a daughter to get involved with a man who has money. If they have a boyfriend who is at school, parents say ‘why are you doing this?’. Fathers say if you want a cell phone I cannot give it to you – so they call their colleagues and introduce them to their daughters.”

“Sometimes men are friends of her father –sometimes they look for uncles and friends of their fathers. Sometimes fathers invite their daughters to a party with their colleagues to introduce them.”

Lack of communication with parents and conflict between traditional values and the desired ‘modern life-style’, is identified as a major problem confronting young people. Alcohol and drugs are also commonly referred to as major problems experienced by peers.

“They don't have parents' attention, they don't say what is right and wrong – not like parents long ago – parents say children are not like they used to be – they don't have respect – this is why many young people are on drugs or become alcoholics.”

“Her friend had a problem with her family, she thought she needed more independence because her parents did not agree with how she lived, they thought she did prostitution for pleasure because she had nice things. She couldn't stand the situation at home any longer so she left.”

“In relation to life, there is unemployment, that is why in families there are problems, drugs, alcohol, illness, lack of money and more..”

“I know a family – they had three children – one finished secondary school because she bothered to study. She tried to get a job but couldn't manage it - she was very ambitious. She doesn't have good friends – they go to bars and discos like ‘Luso’ where they find white men. They don't work but they have

cars, cells, money and houses, because she wanted to change her life she ended up getting involved with white men.”

“There is no employment – people want money to give you a job – there is great corruption – so they can’t get a job. Life is difficult. I have a friend on drugs – she used to have an independent life and she started on drugs at parties and night-clubs.”

“Parents make daughters go with men for money – her mother does not have good living conditions – she said her daughter needs to find other ways – she doesn’t give her attention – she doesn’t care if her daughter is at home or not.”

5.7 Risk perception

The greatest risk identified is not related to sexual health, but that of loss of social and economic status if the *moça* is ‘found out.’ Discovery by the wife of the *sengue* or *amante* is the greatest risk and can both destroy a *moça*’s reputation and take away her source of economic support.

“They are scared the wife of the sengue will talk to other people and spoil her reputation.”

“Risky relationships are with the amante because if the wife finds out - he will do everything to get her out of the way.”

“There is always risk in relationships- they can suffer blackmail – or the man can say if you leave me I can make a scandal – or if his wife finds out – because most of them are married and his wife can make a scandal.”

If a *namorado* discovers that his girlfriend has a *sengue* or an *amante* he may become violent or abusive, calling her a ‘*puta*’, and possibly even blackmailing her.

“If her boy (namorado) finds out that she is going out with a ‘korta’ (older man) he can leave her and create a big confusion, then she loses the man she likes to go out with and the one who gives her money.”

“If the namorado knows about the sengue it is dangerous because he may blackmail her.”

Narratives are very contradictory in relation to how risk of HIV and STIs are conceptualised. Despite high knowledge levels, young women’s narratives do not incorporate an explicit acknowledgement of vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in relation to the strategy of transactional sex. Nonetheless, all relationships are perceived to be risky as regards HIV and AIDS, although some are more risky than others. Those that are most risky are considered to be with the *sengue* and *amante*, as these are relationship based on exchange rather than trust. The relationship with the *pito* is ambiguous, considered risky at times, as they are ‘occasional’ relationships and the *pito* is understood to have many partners. At the same time the *pito* is someone who is often trusted emotionally and therefore may be perceived to be low risk. The *namorado* is considered to be low risk, as this is a relationship of trust and presumed faithfulness.

“All relationships are risky these days, relationships without risk do not exist.”

“There is risk with everyone. The most risky is with those who give her money – then there is a high risk.”

Certain types of sex are also considered to be risky. Anal sex is risky because it is painful and may hurt the uterus, and oral sex is risky if the partner has sores on his mouth. Vaginal sex is not considered to be risky as long as it is done in relationships in which there is affection and trust, such as with the *namorado* or *pito*.

“All relationships are risky. From anal sex you can get HIV and from a blow-job you can get a tongue infection and syphilis.”

5.8 Condom use and power relations

It is clear that young women have been exposed to many health education and HIV prevention messages promoting abstinence, faithfulness and condom use. These messages are repeated back as idealised behaviour in which the couple makes a joint, responsible decision regarding condom use.

“To prevent STIs and pregnancy they must use a condom, they must avoid having more than one partner.”

“In all relationships a condom must be used, to prevent STIs and unwanted pregnancy. Both of them decide about using a condom because to wear a condom is good for both of them.”

These statements are contradicted in narratives describing actual sexual behaviour and experience of condom negotiation. Despite references to the importance of only having one partner, abstinence is not perceived as a viable or socially acceptable option. While faithfulness may be an idealised behaviour, faithfulness to one partner does not resonate with the reality of the economic strategies described. HIV and AIDS prevention messages are, therefore, generally considered to have limited meaning in the context of the reality of young women’s sexual experience.

“To prevent STIs she can use a condom, or she can stay a virgin. She knows the right way to take care of herself so as not to get infected. They ignore the information – the information exists – they see, hear and read it – they just ignore it.”

Condom use is low in most relationships. Condoms are seldom used with the *namorado*, as to negotiate condom use would be to imply lack of trust on the part of one of the partners. Condoms can be negotiated with the *pitos*, and condoms are most likely to be used in non-exchange relationships which are classified as ‘occasional’ such as the ‘saca-cena’ (see Karlyn and Mussá 2000).

“They use the condom in relationships in which there is no trust. With the namorado it is without a condom.”

“With the namorado there is no need. Because each thinks the other is faithful. They use condoms in occasional relationships.”

It is in relation to condom use and sexual negotiation that young women’s construction of the balance of gender and power in exchange relationships is overtly challenged. Young

women have no power to negotiate condom use or sexual activity in their relationships with older men. In many narratives contradictory statements are made implying that the woman is in control of making the decision about using condoms, while at the same time recognising the unequivocal balance of power that if the *sengue* refuses to use a condom she cannot negotiate. To refuse sex with a *sengue* runs counter to the explicit economic goal of the relationship.

“They use a condom in all relationships –and also not in all relationships. She decides about using the condom – and when he refuses she accepts without a condom.”

“It is the girl who decides – when the sengue refuses to use a condom she accepts.”

“We use condoms in occasional relationships. With the amante and the sengue they do not use a condom, because they depend on them for money. – in the case that he says no- she cannot refuse to have sex with him.”

“We use condoms with the patricianador – she decides about using them – but if he refuses she says OK.”

“She uses a condom in all relationships – she decides- but when her amante refuses she accepts it because he pays for the house.”

“These days the men they do not like to use condoms, so they go up to certain point and then stop. If the man does not want to talk about condoms, she does not, because he says he trusts her. With a sengue they never use a condom, because he does not want to use it and he is the one who is paying.”

“They are scared of AIDS, but what will they do – they want the money – they want to sengue – the sengue does not want to use a condom – and they want a sengue with a four-by-four, if he doesn’t want to use a condom, she does not use one.”

5.9 Illness perceptions and health seeking behaviour

HIV/AIDS is considered a major cause for concern, although many narratives refer to malaria and cholera as being the illnesses young people are most worried about because they are very prevalent, visible and kill quickly. Interviews also refer to AIDS as no longer being such a concern due to the availability of anti-retrovirals, as people can live longer without any problems. Many interviews also refer to tuberculosis (TB) being a prevalent disease, although no apparent connection is made between TB and AIDS.

“They are worried about malaria, cancer, TB, cholera, STIs and AIDS. The worst is malaria because you can die of that in less than 48 hours.”

“Malaria is worst- she has seen people die of malaria, she lost someone she loved from malaria – that is why she thinks it is the worst. Malaria doesn’t kill in months or years like AIDS – it kills in just three to seven days.”

There are many contradictions in narratives talking about AIDS. On the one hand there are many stories about people who have died of AIDS. Some refer to a perception of changing social attitudes, and a decrease in stigmatisation of people living with HIV and AIDS. Several stories refer to the benefits of seeking voluntary counselling and testing.

"I had a neighbour with AIDS. She went with a guy who was HIV+ve. She didn't believe it because he was good-looking and looked healthy – she said people were jealous of her life. As time went on the mother found out and asked her daughter to do a test. She found out that she was positive and she tried to kill herself. She suffered a lot. She was helped by her mother to live with the virus - she left the boyfriend and she goes to school – her life is normal, and when she gets sick she goes to the doctor."

"AIDS is killing in the cities. She has friends that have this illness. In the beginning people didn't relate to people with AIDS – they were scared – it is different now – people are aware it is happening now."

"Someone with AIDS in the family – she started getting thin and had no appetite – she went to the hospital and did tests for HIV – the test was positive –at first she was very scared. She started with treatment – and she goes to the doctor if there is a problem – she has had a good experience with the doctor and she goes for check-ups."

"Once she got sick, she had an infection. She went to the hospital and had a test and it was positive. At first she didn't want to live anymore – then later she started to live like a normal person. Everyone is talking about HIV/AIDS these days. We lose beloved people because of AIDS. It is the disease of the century."

Nonetheless, the response to many of the health education efforts is to dismiss AIDS as a myth, a western construct intended to stop behaviour that is seen as socially unacceptable or immoral. AIDS is also dismissed through a fatalism which states that as it is inevitable that we will all die, it is more important to live for the present and gain as much as you can from the moment. This fatalism is closely linked to the *curtidora* identity of living life to the full and living for the present.

"AIDS kills it makes us suffer, it changes families and makes us not think of the future – when we think that we have AIDS and that we are going to die the future does not exist."

"About AIDS – they say it is an illness that came because people should diminish sex – but they do the opposite."

"AIDS is increasing everyday. Some say that it doesn't exist and that it comes from the international system of decreasing lovers. Others say it is an invention of the condom factories – so that they can sell more. The owner of the condom factory used to stay with boxes of condoms – because nobody bought them."

"AIDS doesn't exist, it is there to eliminate sex and unfaithfulness – most don't use a condom – they let everything happen – they live for the present, the future they will see."

"AIDS does not exist – it is just to make you scared – to finish with abortion and unwanted pregnancies. But if it does exist tough luck! In the end all of us will die one way or the other we will die – so let everyone enjoy life while we are alive- so most do not use the condom."

"With HIV and AIDS most say they will die when the day comes, so they do not use a condom."

STIs are very prevalent and a major cause for concern. Washing after sex is used as a prevention measure. Interviews refer to young women having multiple infections and seeking treatment once symptoms are apparent. One of the reasons that STIs are such a cause for concern is that they can produce bad smelling discharge and irritation, which affects sexual relationships. Interviews refer to self-treatment, only seeking treatment from a doctor at a hospital or health centre when symptoms become severe.

“STIs worry her – as a woman with an STI we lose trust with our boyfriends and partners, the good thing is it can be treated. When they have an STI they prefer to treat themselves, they take antibiotics. But each antibiotic has its own side-effects.”

“I had a friend who suffered from syphilis – she used to feel pain when she urinated. Symptoms include a bad discharge and itchiness, she thought she had a urine infection. She was worried so she went to the doctor he said it was an STI and prescribed medicine for her. She took the medicine and got better. Now if she gets an STI she goes to the doctor.”

“When we have an STI we go to the hospital. Although some say they do not like to go to the doctor – so they go to the chemist. They go to the hospital when it gets really bad.”

“Nearly all her friends have had an STI. They get treated at home – or go to the chemist to buy medicine – her friend gives her the name of the medicine. If she does not see good results she goes to the hospital.”

5.10 Pregnancy and abortion

Contraceptive use is very low and there is little perception of planned pregnancy. Pregnancy is simply perceived as ‘something that happens’. If it occurs under good circumstances, that is, in conditions where the man takes responsibility then it is a positive thing. In bad circumstances, when there is no support, it is a problem and often results in abortion. Many interviews refer to using abortion for pregnancy prevention and there are many stories of multiple abortions resulting in infertility and inability to maintain a pregnancy.

“Pregnancy is good in good conditions, and bad in bad conditions if the father does not want to take responsibility.”

“To prevent pregnancy her friends say they use abortion.”

“Many moças they make abortions many times – they use abortion to prevent pregnancy – then the womb becomes unprotected and weak then they have spontaneous abortions at 6 or 7 months and they can’t have children.”

Abortions are sought from a range of sources. Many seek the services of hospital cleaners or nurses who have access to medicines, which they insert into the vagina. Others try to self-abort using concoctions such as milk stout or strong coffee, or insertion of objects such as forks and crochet needles. The vast majority of stories are about unsafe abortions which have resulted in young women being hospitalised or dying.

“They take 3 to 4 pills, or they put hot water in a plastic cup and 4-5 spoons of coffee with a little sugar – and then wait for the bleeding to start.”

“Most of the girls if they get pregnant they go to the cleaners in the hospital. A friend got pregnant. She went to the house of the cleaner and talked to her and explained the situation. She wanted to have an abortion – the cleaner said it was no problem and that she would put a root into her vagina, the cleaner told her the foetus would then come out. She had pains for two days afterwards, her parents took her to the hospital, she would not tell them what she had done. The doctor found the root inside her – she couldn’t say it was the cleaner so she told the doctor she did it herself.”

“She got pregnant by her boyfriend and didn’t know what to do. She told her boyfriend and he said she should get an abortion. Her friend said it is best to go to the hospital before it is too late. They went to the hospital – they were very worried – they found a cleaner and asked him if he knew a nurse who would do an abortion. The cleaner said anyone could do it, even he could do it – so the cleaner made the abortion by putting some pills in her vagina. Then she was very ill – eventually her mother took her to the hospital to get treatment – and then they treated her.”

“ A friend got pregnant – she found out when she was three months – she decided to ‘take it out’ because she couldn’t afford a child. She talked with friends – the friend knew someone and told her to prepare 500,000 meticais. She went to a nurse in her house, the nurse introduced some pills and told her that at a certain time the pregnancy would come out. After an hour she started feeling pain – she felt a big thing come out – there was a lot of blood – after three days it was very painful – she phoned the nurse but she could not reach her – she went to the pharmacy to get medicine – but she kept on haemorrhaging – in the end she had to go to the hospital.”

6. CONCLUSIONS: IDENTITY, GENDER AND POWER IN TRANSACTIONAL SEXUAL RELATIONS

It is clear from these narratives that the young women in this study do not perceive themselves to be passive victims of transactional relationships with older men. Rather, they are active agents involved in a continuing process of defining their social and sexual identity and making choices about the risks they engage in.

The goals and aspirations of these young women are contextualised within changing social and economic conditions, mediated by gender ideologies and relations of power and control within which sexual choices are made. For many, aspirations of financial security, freedom and independence are linked to shifting gender expectations and identities through which young women are seeking to forge a new role for themselves in society.

Nonetheless, prevailing structural conditions are perceived to militate against the achievement of these aspirations through socially acceptable means of studying, professional employment and securing a good marriage. Young women identify lack of employment opportunities for women; lack of access to education; corruption; low wages in employment sectors in which women predominate (eg service industry, markets, receptionist and secretarial work); and poor communication between parents and children, as major factors constraining their future goals.

Gender norms of sexuality also support a dominant role for men, in which, it is considered legitimate for men to experiment sexually and in which women assume a passive role. These gender stereotypes, present an image of women, and particularly girls as sexual objects and commodities. As one young woman in the study expressed it:

“Most women do not have a good life - men think women are merchandise – they have many girlfriends – and they keep it from their wife.”

It is within the context of these structural conditions and perceptions of prevailing gender and power relations that the strategy of transactional sex gains both viability and meaning for young women. Through entering into transactional relationships young women are able to gain access to resources necessary to achieve social status, through the means that is most within their control, the power of their sexuality. Young women perceive their relationships with older men as one in which the woman is ultimately in control. It is the woman who is perceived to have the power to exploit a man’s wealth under the guise of a relationship. Young women have no emotional attachment to, or expectations of their *sengue*. It is the *sengue* who sometimes becomes confused as to their role in the relationship and wishes to turn it into that an *amante* (lover), a highly problematic relationship as the man tries to shift the balance of power and ‘control the *moça* like a wife’.

Nonetheless, young women tacitly recognise the ambiguous and tenuous nature of a social identity predicated on a strategy of transactional sex. In order to maintain her identity, the strategy must remain clandestine. With discovery, a young woman runs the risk of her reputation being ruined. She can be labelled a ‘*puta*’ (whore) or a ‘*prostituta*’, and lose access to her economic resources and social status. There is no room within this construction of the balance of power for young women to express a sense of vulnerability or risk. To do so would be to make explicit the central contradiction; that in order to achieve their aspirations, the strategy places them in relationships in which they are economically dependent upon men and with no power to negotiate. It is in relation to negotiation of safer-sex that the true balance of gender power is made explicit.

Young women have high levels of knowledge regarding HIV and AIDS, and high awareness of the risks associated with multi-partner and unprotected sex. While narratives express an idealised behaviour that condoms should be used with all partners, the balance of economic power in transactional relationships means that women will accept sex without a condom. Risk-taking is rationalised through narratives which suggest that AIDS is both controlling sexual freedoms, and that in the overall balance of things the cost of losing immediate social and economic gain is greater than the risk of dying (which is after all an inevitability). Prevention messages appear to have little meaning within the context of young women’s goals in transactional relationships.

The lack of value placed on planning and risk reduction within sexual relationship is expressed starkly in the use of abortion. Abortion is referred to as the main means of pregnancy prevention, despite the majority of stories pertaining to unsafe abortions with severe health consequences. There is, however, a concept of prevention that runs through the narratives and is expressed in measures such as washing after sex to prevent STIs and the idealised notion that condoms should be used in all relationships. There is also a value placed on limiting the number of partners, which is expressed through moral discourses on the difference between transactional sex and prostitution. While to *sengue* is a strategy in which young women take pride, ‘prostitution’ is considered socially unacceptable. The covert moral discourse in the narratives, suggests that if a woman has too many short-term *sengue* then she crosses a somewhat arbitrary and blurred line into prostitution.

7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTIONS

One of the questions raised by this study is what are the practical implications of adding nuance to the understanding of how young women perceive cross-generational transactional sex, in terms of developing effective behaviour change interventions? In order for interventions to have meaning they need to start from an understanding of how those engaged in risky behaviour perceive their relationships, and conceptualise the choices they make and strategies they use.

The findings from this study suggest a number of opportunities for interventions. Challenging the covert nature of transactional sex may be one of the key approaches to stimulating behaviour change. While many young women refer to parents being aware that daughters are gaining access to financial resources through relationships with older men, it remains a largely hidden practice which is not talked about openly, and when given a public face becomes labelled as 'prostitution'.

One of the main constraints on developing effective programmatic responses has been a lack of gender analysis in relation to HIV transmission, which has resulted in most efforts being directed towards women, reinforcing existing gender stereotypes. Interventions have often taken the approach of assuming that young women engaged in transactional sex perceive themselves to be passive victims of coerced relationships, and have focused on advising young women to 'avoid' these relationships. Many communications approaches have been based on an assumption that young women are 'reduced' to engaging in transactional sex due to low esteem, risking HIV infection in order to access luxury goods.

The findings of this study suggest that for communications strategies to be effective some of the above assumptions need to be challenged. The study has shown that these young women perceive themselves as empowered entrepreneurs with significant self-esteem attached to this social identity. These young women also appear to have a high degree of control over partnership formation and the extent to which they are able to choose the number and type of partners.

The study suggests that an approach is required that challenges the existing gender and power relations upon which cross-generational transactional sex is predicated. While young women construe their relationship in terms of exploiting the economic power of men, this is by no means a one-way exploitation. The balance of power in these relationships is based upon men using their economic power to obtain sexual gratification from younger women whom they perceive to be 'safe', and whom they place at risk of HIV infection.

The following recommendations suggest a dual pronged approach to behaviour change interventions which challenge both the social norms which support and sanction men's behaviour in cross-generational relationships, and increase risk perception among young women. While the answer to how to reduce risky behaviour ultimately lies with these young women themselves, the structural conditions of gender and power relations which legitimise men's power and constrain negotiation of safer sex practices by women needs to be challenged through approaches which directly address men and masculine norms of sexual behaviour.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *Targeting social norms that sanction men's behaviour in cross-generational relationships*

A range of approaches could be used which target men directly and target those in society who can influence change through generating a public dialogue which challenges the social acceptability of men engaging in cross-generational transactional relationships.

Challenging social norms:

Approaches could include using a range of media including TV and radio spots; drama on TV and radio; and live shows followed by discussions, which address the social consequences of men's risk behaviour in cross-generational relationships. For example, developing a TV series in which stories highlight the impact of men's risk behaviour on a whole cast of characters.

An important aspect of the study has been to show that while young women engaged in transactional sex see their sexuality as a source of power they are powerless to use condoms. Nonetheless, they are very open to adopting 'responsible' sexual behaviour and using condoms if the partner is compliant. Media and drama spots could draw on this finding, highlighting that older men are responsible for fuelling the epidemic by their refusal to use condoms, thereby infecting younger women. These spots could also increase risk perception through raising public awareness that younger women are becoming infected and now have high HIV prevalence rates.

Challenging gender roles and men's self-esteem

A potentially powerful approach would be to reverse the conventional wisdom on how cross-generational relationships are portrayed through aiming to decrease the sense of worth or self-esteem of men engaged in cross-generational sex. Messages could draw on the language and perceptions of the young women in this study which portray men involved in cross-generational sex as foolish, weak, and vulnerable. In other words, drawing on the very powerful image of men as 'cows to be milked' as a result of their sexual needs.

2 *Increasing risk perception of young women*

Messages

This study suggests that the message of abstinence currently has little or no meaning for the young women involved in this study. While abstinence messages have an important role to play in increasing young women's awareness of their options, strategies targeting young women need to be made more relevant to their reality by having a greater focus on partner reduction and increasing condom use.

One of the important findings of this study is that despite high levels of knowledge related to HIV/AIDS young women have a low risk perception. The risk of losing immediate economic and social status outweighs the longer-term risk of contracting HIV and AIDS. Messages could be targeted at young women to increase risk perception, through focusing on their more immediate concerns in particular, risk of STIs, pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

The peer approach as a platform for inter-personal communications

Behaviour change interventions have often taken a top-down approach in their design and evaluation. The PEER method has provided a platform from which it is possible to build upward accountability, through actively engaging with the target group in the research process. The peer group with whom this research was undertaken are difficult to reach through formal means, due to the unorganised and ill-defined nature of the social group. Trained peer researchers provide important links into peer networks, which could be further developed to sustain interpersonal communications strategies.

Through the research process, peer researchers have developed a rapport with PSI programme staff, and an increased commitment in participating in communications and behaviour change strategies. It is recommended that PSI should build upon the momentum created through the peer research to work with peer researchers to become innovators of change. Such innovators can contribute to positive changes in norms and the adoption of less risky sexual practices among their peer group.

Activities could include, formation of support groups among their peers to address key issues raised by the research. Interpersonal communication could draw on some of the values asserted by the peer group, in particular, that of partner reduction, the value of prevention (especially in relation to pregnancy prevention), and strategies to further empower young women through being able to negotiate condom use with all partners.

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