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Factors that affect and influence condom use among young black men during sexual intercourse

January, Sandra Long

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Abstract

HIV/AIDS is a social epidemic that continues to impact the lives of countless young people in Southern Africa and possibly poses one of the biggest threats to adolescent health and sexuality; and is one of the main challenges faced by youth in their transition to adulthood. However, despite the fifteenth year running of the South African government's HIV/AIDS programme, prevalence rates continue to increase annually pointing to disjuncture between government intervention and the causal mechanisms involved in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, literature on men's sexuality in Southern Africa remains embedded within a 'predatory masculinity and female vulnerability' paradigm which results in a gendered analysis of HIV/AIDS and a side-lining of the male perspective which then places young men at a high risk of HIV infection. Therefore, in an attempt to understand the disconnect between literature and high prevalence rates; and to contribute to a better understanding of men's health and sexuality, a qualitative study using focus group discussions and in-depth interviews was conducted amongst young black heterosexual men (19- 25 years old) to discover the factors that determine condom use among young men living in an RDP housing settlement in Daveyton on the East Rand of Johannesburg.

The research findings show that condom use in the sample is predicated upon the young black heterosexual men's definition of masculinity, the nature of the sexual relationship and sexual partner, and – to a lesser extent - the social accessibility of the condom. As they move from adolescence to adulthood, there is a transition of their understanding of masculinity from one characterized by promiscuous sexual behavior where the use of condoms is seen to diminish the degree of one's masculinity, to a masculinity fostered by responsible sexual behaviour and accompanied by condom use. The study also found that young men expressed a distance from the supposedly hegemonic view of violent masculinity and male dominance in sexual relationships and that the search for love and the ability to provide for one's partner was what was most valued in young men's self -conception of masculinity and sexuality. This then negatively impacted condom usage in romantic relationships as such relationships were perceived to contain less risk and it was assumed that they are predicated on trust; positing love as the biggest barrier to condom use. Furthermore, the study found that although condoms are physically and economically accessible, they are not socially accessible due to the stigma attached to sexual activity among adolescents – which results in a barrier to condom usage. Therefore, findings suggest that the

government's condom promotion programmes - based on the tenets of education (on the subject of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases) and physical accessibility of condoms - are largely inconsistent with the factors that determine condom use among young men. This implies that there is a need to develop tailored condom promotion programmes targeted at male sexuality.

Key words: Masculinity, Sexuality, Condom use, HIV/AIDS