

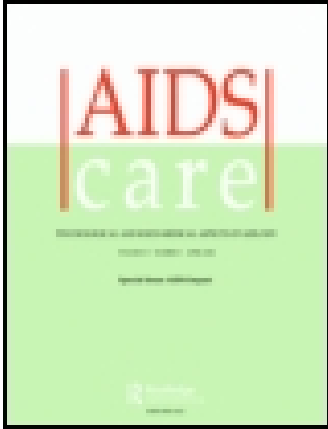
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The negotiation of sexual relationships among school pupils in south-western Uganda

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Abstract *The objective of the study was to explore how school-going adolescents in south-western Uganda negotiate sexual relationships. Qualitative data were obtained from 15 boys and 15 girls (14–18 years old), during a series of role plays, focus group discussions and one-to-one interviews. A questionnaire was administered to 80 pupils (12–20 years old) from the same school. Most of the pupils were sexually active. Sexual relationships between boys and girls were mediated by peers. Boys initiated relationships. Exchange played an important role in the negotiation of sexual relationships. Money or gifts were given and received in exchange for sexual favours and to strengthen the relationship. To maximize gains, some adolescents had sexual relationships with adults. Sexual relationships were characterized by ambiguity. Love is intertwined with sexual desire, money and prestige. Girls have to be explicit enough to get a good deal; if they are too explicit they will be stigmatized as 'loose' but if they are not interested in money they may be suspected of wanting to spread HIV. Boys try to persuade girls that they have money, but do not want to emphasize this too much. In sexual negotiations a boy must persuade a girl that although he is modern and sophisticated (i.e. experienced) he does not chase after every girl; the girl does not want to come over as an unsophisticated virgin, but does not want to give the impression that she is loose either. There is a tension between the traditional ideal of female chastity and submissiveness and the modern image of sexual freedom. Multiple partnerships were highly valued as a sign of sophistication. Condoms were not considered important. Interventions aimed at reducing the spread of HIV do not seem to be having an effect on the behaviour of this group of adolescents. On the contrary, risky attitudes and behaviour are part of an adolescent ideal of modernity and sophistication. New approaches are needed to persuade this group of the need for change. Shifting the source of interventions from adults to the adolescents themselves, encouraging girls to try other means of earning money and debunking the idea that having many partners is sophisticated may be productive alternatives.*

Introduction

Studies carried out in Uganda reveal high levels of sexual activity among adolescents (Ankrah & Rwabukwali, 1987; Bagarukayo *et al.*, 1993; Kaijuka, 1989; Kisekka, 1976; Twa-Twa, 1995). Epidemiological data show high levels of HIV infection among the 15–24 age group

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(Kengeya-Kayondo *et al.*, 1989; Konde-Lule *et al.*, 1989; Musagara *et al.*, 1989). Initial findings from a large qualitative study on sexual behaviour and behaviour change in rural Masaka District, south-western Uganda suggested that adolescents who have grown up since the advent of AIDS had developed a complacent attitude towards AIDS and were engaging in behaviour that put them at risk (Pool *et al.*, 1997). It was therefore decided to carry out an in-depth study specifically focused on adolescents.

Setting

The study was carried out among pupils attending a community-based secondary school in rural Masaka District, Uganda, 16 kilometres east of Masaka town, the district administrative headquarters. The population is mainly composed of peasant farmers, with a few petty traders and small service providers. The Baganda are the predominant ethnic group.

In this area, while women are not expected to be virgins at marriage—and indeed being sexually experienced may be viewed as a positive characteristic of a future wife—once married women are expected to be faithful. Men, on the other hand, are generally considered to be ‘naturally promiscuous’ and polygyny (including formal marriage to more than one wife, ‘outside wives’ and casual extra-marital partners) is the norm. Explicit discussion of sexual matters within relationships is not common and such discussion between parents and children is taboo.

Methods

Studying sexual behaviour is problematic. It is largely hidden and all we have to go on is what informants tell us about their behaviour. However, people do not talk about sex easily in formal research settings, particularly when older researchers are interviewing adolescents. We therefore wanted a methodology that would generate stretches of discourse in which young people discussed their sexual behaviour and attitudes as freely and spontaneously as possible. In order to facilitate this, the development of the methodology was participatory. In choosing this approach we took our cue from two WHO documents (1992; 1993) describing a ‘narrative research method’ in which youth leaders from various African countries enacted important events in the lives of young people in their cultures, after which they, together with the facilitators, developed these into a questionnaire. The study methodology had been previously piloted in Tanzania (Nnko & Pool, 1995; 1997).

We initially recruited 15 girls and 15 boys (14–18 years old), based on their ability to express themselves and willingness to participate in the study. This part of the study was carried out during four sessions, each lasting between one and three days, over a four-month period. We asked the participants to write scripts on four themes: (1) negotiating sexual relationships; (2) a girl gets pregnant and tells her family; (3) discovering you are infected with HIV; and (4) contraception and condom use. There were both single sex and mixed sessions. The facilitators did not interfere during preparation of the role plays, which allowed participants to develop their story lines and characterization in their own way.

Fourteen role plays were video-taped and played back to all the participants. The students then split into groups of between five and ten and discussed the plays in a focus group discussion (FGD) format. There were ten such discussions, all in the vernacular, Luganda, which were supervised by three trained and experienced local facilitators. Three FGDs involved only girls, four only boys, and three were mixed. All the FGDs were audio-taped.

The role plays acted as a catalyst, stimulating the students to debate a variety of topics

associated both directly and indirectly with the themes. Questions by facilitators were general, with the students themselves largely controlling the discussion. We encouraged the pupils to be particularly critical about the extent to which the performances reflected how they actually experienced relationships rather than reflecting the ideal or the socially acceptable norm.

The video-taped role plays and the tape-recorded discussions were all transcribed verbatim from Luganda and then translated into English. They were entered in *Alas-ti* (Scientific Software Development, Berlin), a qualitative data analysis software program, and coded. A preliminary analysis (which involved identifying major themes and issues) was then carried out. Various questions emerged from this (relating to the role of exchange in sexual relationships, for example) and so, four months after the initial role-play workshops, two individual in-depth interviews were carried out for each student and four more FGDs were carried out among the girls.

Finally, in order to widen the generalizability of the findings, a questionnaire was administered to 80 students (49 girls and 31 boys; 12–20 years old) selected randomly from the same school.

All qualitative data were analyzed using *Atlas.ti* (Scientific Software Development, Berlin). *Epi Info 5* (Epidemiology Program Office CDC, Atlanta) was used for analyzing the questionnaire data. Qualitative and quantitative data were triangulated to provide a check on validity.

This paper reports on the results pertaining to the negotiation of sexual relationships.

Results

Of the 30 pupils who participated in the workshops, most (nine girls and 12 boys) were sexually active. In the questionnaire 20/49 girls and 17/31 boys reported ever having sex.

Dealing

Most of the boys were reluctant to approach a girl in person because of shyness, fear of ridicule or immediate rejection by the girl. To get around this, some first sent her a letter, though the majority shunned that method because ‘she may misunderstand you, if she does not like you she could use it as evidence when she reports you to her parents or the teachers, it could get lost, or she could show it to her friends’.

Boys therefore rely on mediators, commonly called ‘dealers’, ‘catalysts’ or ‘go-betweens’. When a boy is attracted to a girl and wants to have sex with her he shares his ‘problem’ with a dealer, who will convince him that it is easy to ‘conquer’ the girl. Thus the popularity of the ‘go-between’.

Some dealers are renowned for their skill in successfully interacting with girls, a practice that most of the schoolboys admit they find very difficult. The skilled use of rhetoric, flattery and deception characterize the bargaining that the dealers employ to persuade the girl to have sex with their friend. This mainly entails presenting the boy as having money or material possessions from which the girl will benefit if she responds positively. The dealer’s main role is to quicken the girl’s positive response. Employment of the dealer by both adolescents and adult men is akin to the role of the paternal aunt (*senga*) in mediating the marital process in traditional Ganda culture.

The dealer goes back and forth with messages of undying love, gifts and money from the boy, and the girl’s reaction to them. This cycle is broken only after the girl and boy have established their sexual relationship or the dealer has failed to secure the girl for the boy. When the deal succeeds, the ‘boss’ pays the dealer.

In spite of the advantages of dealers, some of the boys expressed anxiety about employing them. The dealer sometimes decides he would like to have the girl's 'goods' himself. He might therefore pretend that the money and gifts his 'boss' gives him to take to the girl are his own.

The mediation of sexual relationships and the related delaying by girls are characterized by ambiguity. Dealing is related to from traditional cultural practices such as the role of a girl's paternal aunt (*senga*) in finding a suitable husband. According to these norms it is only a *malaya* (loose woman, prostitute) or an 'over-sexed' girl who would suggest sex to a boy. In the context of the AIDS epidemic, boys said that only a girl who is infected with HIV and out to spread it because she 'does not want to die alone' would initiate such negotiations.

On the other hand, there was general agreement among participants that town girls, who have been exposed to Western culture, can take the initiative. The town girl was the role model for the rural secondary school girls in this group, setting the standard for sophistication and modernity.

However, it was not clear how explicit this initiative could be before it was considered 'loose', and even the rural girls in this study did have various indirect ways of letting boys know that they were willing to have sex with them. These included sending the boy a photo, offering to copy his notes in class, keeping his books in her school bag, sitting next to him in class and bringing him food. Both sexes agreed that boys picked up these signals and interpreted them accurately.

Custom does not allow girls to immediately consent when boys propose, even if they want to, lest they appear 'cheap' or a 'prostitute'. Boys accept this refusal as the natural course of events. It is feminine and adds flavour to the negotiation process. No boy wants a girl who is easy to 'conquer'. So girls resist boys' advances, and play innocent and hard to get. The resistance 'only makes the end products sweeter' said the boys. The girls delay for various reasons: to make inquiries about the boy's character, to find out whether he has had many other girlfriends, to check whether there are rumours that he is HIV-positive. They may also delay because they do not want to appear to be 'loose' (a *malaya*), to increase money or gifts received from the boy, or to show the boy that they are not 'cheap'. The dealer's biggest role is to soften the girl so that she eventually agrees to have sex with the 'boss'. Some boys claim that after she has been 'softened', roles are changed and she starts chasing after the boy.

However when a girl says she is postponing having sex with a boy because she is assessing his character, she may also mean that she is looking for signs that he feels something more for her. If this is the case, then the giving of money and gifts is interpreted not merely as a transaction but as a symbol of the shared affection and a seal of the relationship as something serious that could develop into marriage or pregnancy at the end of school. It is in the context of such relationships that girls also give boys gifts or do small favours for them.

Sex for money

Money plays an important role in the negotiation of sexual relationships among these adolescents. The boys have higher bargaining power when they have more money; they claimed that there was no chance of succeeding without the use of money.

John: If you don't have [money], you just have to abstain.

Ali: You could borrow the money.

Fred: You really need money, so if you are broke, you must suppress the urge. You can't go to a shop and get free goods (FGD with boys).

Eric: It is better to have no voice [rhetorical skill] but be very rich. You may be very poor and yet have a voice. It does not matter what you tell her. She will know that you are deceiving, that there is nothing to get from you (FGD with boys).

Paul: Another thing that draws them is the fact that we deceive them saying, 'At home there is money.' She doesn't know what is in your pockets: that they are empty [laughs]. So you say: 'I have got 30,000 shillings (US\$ 21) here,' yet you do not even have a coin.

Isa: You deceive her with your school fees.

Kiza: Sometimes you deceive her with a part of your school fees that you have managed to bring to school. You say: 'Do you see it? I have 40,000 here.' Yet none of it is yours (FGD with boys).

In the questionnaire, 11/17 of the boys who reported having had sex said they had given money or a gift to a girl in exchange for sex. Of the girls, 17/20 who admitted having sex had received money or a gift from the boy in exchange for sex.

Boys admitted they had to do all sorts of odd jobs (digging, growing crops, rearing poultry and animals, fetching water and firewood for people in the village, transporting goods on their heads and bicycles), outside school hours, to earn money to maintain their relationships. Twice the proportion of boys to girls said they often work to get money. Unlike the boys, girls are rarely allowed by parents to seek employed labour. They stay home and do domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning, digging and child care.

There was, however, consensus among the boys about who had more money: girls, because they earn quick money in exchange for sex.

David: The girls have more money than us. Their money is easy to earn.

Adrie: They earn it within two minutes.

Simon: Once a girl disappears for a while in the evening, you can be sure that she's got 5,000 shillings (US\$3.4) (FGD with boys).

Rashid: A girl might have three boyfriends. When she goes to one she asks for 2,000 shillings (US\$1.4). When she goes to the next she asks for some more. She gets money from them in a continuous sequence (FGD with boys).

In the girls' perception of their sexual relationships with boys, there must be some form of material gain, especially a monetary one. In addition, boys may give gifts such as hankies, sweets, cards, photos, or provide small favours such as bicycle lifts, academic assistance, giving her a jacket when it's cold or sponsoring her to watch films at school. The girl may also reciprocate in kind. She can help carry the boy's books, copy his notes, lend him a pen or help him with his school chores as an indication of willingness on her part.

The adolescents in the study judged a relationship to be sexual or non-sexual depending on whether the boy had begun putting money into it. In the case of platonic relationships, boys give girls any other gifts but money. Money is an indicator of sexual interest on the boy's part.

Initially the boy sends a small amount of money to the girl through a dealer. She will either reject it outright or accept it but turn the boy down. He may then send her a bigger amount. As the relationship develops, and they start having sex, the girl can take the initiative

and ask for specific amounts. Both boys and girls agreed that with more sexual experience comes the boldness on the girl's part to bargain for higher amounts. Amounts of money given were said to range from 500 shillings (US\$ 0.3) to more than 25,000 shillings (US\$ 17.2).

Do girls sell sex because of poverty?

Results from the questionnaire reveal that most of the students come from relatively low income families which, according to the adolescents, do not provide adequate clothing, food and pocket money. Incomes have to be divided between several children and the mean number of children presently living in a household was eight.

In both the FGDs and the individual interviews the girls reported that as they grew older a rift developed between them and their parents. Discussion of sexual matters is taboo between parents and children and this seems to also affect issues only very indirectly related to sex. Girls said that they were afraid or embarrassed to ask their parents to provide articles such as clothes, shoes, underwear, creams and soap because the need for such products might suggest that they are making themselves attractive in order to seduce men. Due to relative poverty and the presence of several younger children, parents are often unable to provide adequately for adolescent girls' felt needs. As a result many girls use sex as a supplementary source of income. Indeed some consider sex as a 'solution to their problems'. Boys have a problem: they want sex. Girls solve it, and thereby solve their own problem of inadequate pocket money. In the questionnaire 19/30 of the boys and 27/49 of the girls said that sex was the major source of income for girls.

Girls use the money received in exchange for sex to buy clothes, shoes, underwear, food, cosmetics, and to buy gifts to send to boys. It is also used to pay school fees and transport. Money obtained in exchange for sex is therefore used partly to satisfy the felt needs that parents do not consider important, and partly to pay for necessities that parents cannot afford. Instead of walking to school like the boys, girls would rather get a bicycle taxi. Although the school provides porridge for lunch (which the boys seem happy to eat), the girls would rather buy snacks.

The girls' greater need for extra money is heightened by the fact that parents generally give boys more pocket money. In the survey the boys reported receiving an average of 17,000 shillings (US\$11.7) pocket money per term (three months), whereas the girls only reported receiving 8,000 shillings (US\$5.5).

There is evidence that not all the girls who ask for money do so only out of economic necessity. In the questionnaire 51% (25/49) of the girls said that even if they had sufficient money, they would still refuse to have free sex.¹ They gave various reasons for this: 'nothing is free, "I can't allow it to be done free of charge", "he would not take me seriously if I just gave in", "he would despise me afterwards", "I want to buy some thing to remember him by" and "I can never have enough money". A girl would be humiliated if she had sex and received nothing in return. The gift received "rubs off the cheapness of being used". Though the younger boys said they would have sex without giving the girl a thing, the majority of the boys argued that "only an HIV-infected girl can give you free sex".

Detoothing

For those girls who consider sex as a source of economic gain, a practice that ensures increased gains prevails. Known as *kukuula binnyo* in Luganda and translated by the adolescents as 'detoothing', it is likened to a dentist pulling teeth. Girls said that men willingly part with money and gifts in the hope of receiving sex. Therefore the scheme is to

milk as much money as possible from them and yet not give any sexual favour in return. After spending whatever is provided, some girls said they hid, disappeared, evaded or became indifferent and cold so that they did not have to give the expected 'goods'.

Jane: If I only want to solve my problem and my boyfriend has no money, I just take the money from another boy who can give it. Then I dodge him.

Harriet: Yes. You detooth him [*omukuula ebimyo*], but your heart loves the other one (FGD with girls).

While the girls applauded detoothing, the boys, not surprisingly, disapproved.

Michael: Why embrace a boy if you won't sleep with him? Unless she is a detoother [*mukuuzi wa binnyo*]. Even if she is not going to have sex with him, she will embrace him deceptively. He expects her to sleep with him, so she'll get money from him.

Lisa: Michael, I want you to think seriously about this. If I never came to your place, or asked you for your money or things, why should you complain? You gave them to me without my asking; I never got them forcefully from you. Why get bitter? (mixed FGD).

Patrick: Each time I give girls money, I am certain that I will get what I want. After all, when you go to the shop, if the shopkeeper doesn't have what you want, he won't take your money (individual interview).

Susan: Supposing you bought a lottery ticket that was not lucky, would you beat up the person who sold it to you? No! It is just bad luck. Try again.

Dennis: You girls have to either refuse or allow. It is better you say, 'No, take back your money' (mixed FGD).

Jane: If you are sure you will not accept, there is no reason as to why you should take his money.

Sara: Ah ah, I take the money. After all, he gives it to me. It is not that I pull it from his pockets with my own hands. If I do not take such free things, what will I ever take?

Mary: Haven't you heard of detoothers? These girls just spend men's money and never accept their suggestion.

Sara: Yes, take the money.

Helen: I would also take it.

Aida: If I am sure that he can never find me anywhere after I break contact with him, I chew his money (FGD with girls).

The point here is that girls try to get as much (money) as possible from boys who they are not planning to have sex with by not explicitly rejecting their advances from the start. The girls were aware that problems could result from this practice. Rape was mentioned as a common means of vengeance. Interestingly, even the female advocates of detoothing believed that rape is justified in the event of detoothing. They said they would not report the rapist under such circumstances.

Although some girls admitted they detooth their peers, the majority of the participants agreed that it is usually adult men or sugar daddies who are targeted by detoothers. Sugar

daddies from towns were described as *ab'ebibuto ebinene* (big bellied, indicating wealth), *n'ebiwalaata ebinyereketa* (bald headed, indicating experience), mischievous and usually flaunt a business and 'outside wives' in the villages. They are relatively wealthy and usually flaunt it. Therefore the adolescents enjoy detoothing them. The most common categories mentioned were taxi drivers, *boda-boda* (motorbike-taxi) drivers and businessmen. Sugar daddies from the villages include teachers, out of school youths, married men and widowers.

In the questionnaire 54% of the students mentioned teachers among the three most common types of sugar daddy. In heated discussions about sugar daddies, the adolescents claimed that teachers seduced, intimidated and sometimes forced students to have sex with them. They said that teachers used ploys ranging from sweet words of praise, the promise of marriage and a secure future and undeserved high marks to threats of manual labour and corporal punishment. The headmaster of this particular school gave the example of a teacher who had recently been expelled from the school for making a pupil pregnant. The students said that sugar daddies pick on schoolgirls because they are believed to be 'disease free'.

There was some mention of boy students having sexual relationships with sugar mummies as well, but this was reported to be relatively uncommon. Sugar mummies include local brew sellers, teachers, widows and divorced women. Two students quoted examples of female teachers suggesting sexual relationships with their students. When it does happen, the boy is either seeking economic gain, material support, deeper experience or a mother figure, according to the pupils. These women are said to be widows who have difficulty finding sexual partners (often because their husbands have died of AIDS). Boys tend to keep such relationships secret from their peers, probably because they would be teased about having a relationship with a much older woman. Usually such a boy has additional sexual relationships with his peers, but maintains the sugar mummy relationship because of the benefits.

Some of the girls said that they secretly cherished the idea of sexual relationships with sugar daddies because of their experience, financial support and material benefits, and the image of sophistication it earns them among peers, even though adult society generally condemns such relationships. Most of the boys were bitter at the fact that if an adolescent girl had to choose between a student and a sugar daddy, chances were that she would choose the latter or she would have sex with both of them.

Sexual pleasure, peer pressure and experimentation

Boys explained that sexual relations begin with curiosity and an overwhelming desire to experiment with sex, boosted by 'natural manly demands' and peer pressure.

Brian: It is a natural thing, because even a bird that does not speak does it. [all laugh]

Adrie: The urge overtakes you because it is a natural thing. A girl might walk past you. You look at her and your thoughts run wild. From that moment, you want her. You feel within yourself, you love her. So you begin to plan: where will you find her? How will you get her? That is when the catalysts come in (FGD with boys).

Richard: It's in the blood; it's natural.

Emmanuel: This thing is right in our blood system!

[laughter]

Ian: Yes, it is in our veins. When we grow older, we cannot run from it.

Ali: You might be sitting there and you suddenly feel the urge. It hurts. It demands. You feel it demanding (FGD with boys).

Schoolgirls do not have sex only for money. The proceeds from sex are relatively insubstantial and some of the girls strongly argued that they had sex because they enjoyed it. In the questionnaire 21% of the girls said the most important reason they had sex was because 'it is natural and I enjoy it'. It is in such relationships that girls also give the boys gifts. The girls said that when they are attracted by qualities other than money—appearance, voice, academic brilliance, good behaviour—these relationships lasted longer than those based on money.

During discussions these adolescents attributed the high rates of premarital sexual relations to increased exposure to Western values through soft porn magazines, novels and videos, and to peer pressure and a lack of parental control (see Kinsman *et al.*, 2000). They have specific reasons for entering sexual relationships: to gain sexual experience, sexual satisfaction, financial or other economic benefits, to gain an image of 'sophistication' and 'score more points' among peers.

In spite of the ambiguity caused by the influence of traditional values of chastity (as discussed earlier), these students generally attached high value to sexual experience. There appeared to be substantial pressure from peers to lose virginity as early as possible. Both sexes said it was prestigious to have many partners. Boys believed 'the way to prove you are a man is to love many girls'. This, they said, brings one honour and prestige among peers.

Paul: Now, when a girl knows that Jim has many girls, when he tells her, she will not refuse. She says, 'Let me be the third one.' She thinks that there is a special reason why the others have stuck to him. He must be giving them some special things. So as soon as he approaches her, she can't refuse.

[all laugh]

Isa: Even if she is the third one, when he approaches a fourth, she also says yes. Women like men with many women.

Kiza: Yes. Women prefer such men.

James: I also think that having a lot of women is prestigious. When you have many you are above other men. You are more respected than the others. You can see this in the village; a man with many wives gains more respect than a man with one wife (FGD with boys).

Derrick: Some girls prefer boys with many girlfriends.

Ahmed: Either a boy or girl with many lovers gains prestige.

Adrie: He gains prestige and fame.

Facilitator: What about the one without or with only one? Doesn't he gain respect?

Emmanuel: The boy with many lovers is a star because everyone wonders what they like about him. So some girls accept him, to find out what is so special about him.

Simon: Girls even fight for the boy (FGD with boys).

Ian: Another fault that girls have is that if you approached them for sex, they never tell you they already have someone else. If they gave that as a reason for refusing, maybe you would get discouraged and put off. But they never say anything.

Kiza: Often by the time one guy is confident enough to approach a girl, Paul who is fast, has already netted her. And yet there is nothing you can do. The lady has totally consumed you and entered your system. Although Paul's deal has gone through, you still have to pursue her yourself.

Susan: Is that why you say it is better to fight and find out who is more deserving?

Sam: Do you think that simply because he is eating *matooke* [bananas] I can say I will not eat it too? If it looks nice to me, I will go and get some.

Simon: Yeah, if he's eating *matooke*, let me go for it as well.

Jane: Must you have it on one plate?

Sandra: If you have realized she is adding several of you together, jump off the bandwagon.

Adrie: I may never realize (mixed FGD).

The girls explained that they tried out different partners to find one who is suitable for marriage, and because it gave them more sexual experience—which is good when they marry. Multiple partners also mean that the profits are multiplied. Though the students claimed to be cautious about having partners who might be infected with STDs or HIV, they liked having sex with those who had a record of many partners.

In the discussions the adolescents said that girls who have concurrent multiple relationships sometimes maintain an adult partner and keep changing the peers with whom they have sex. Adult partners provide economic and material support, they offer wider sexual experience and satisfaction, provide a better social life, seem more secure because they can offer marriage, facilitate an abortion, or maintain the child in the event of one, and they are not as possessive as the peers who may be jealous when their partner gets another.

Paul: So she will love the guy who gives her money. And for you who has no money, what will she do?

Derrick: She loves you.

Ian: She can even get money from the other guy and give you some.

Ali: Now, for that kind of girl, rest assured that she just loves you for the way you look. Your appearance attracted her. So she loves both the guy who is employed, and you who are not. She loves the other one for his money (FGD with boys).

Flora: Since we are grown-up, there is no crime in loving an older man. We are mature people who would know what we are doing.

Irene: Eh, if we decide to have sex at this age, you can't blame us because we are mature.

Jalia: What do you want from a man of 30 years? He can marry you and look after you, unlike schoolboys.

Cissy: Some parents get old men for their daughters. If the old man is wealthy and a widower, the father can give his daughter.

Mary: The man might be 90 years old, but because he has loads of money, that is all the parents think about. And the poor girl may only be 16 years old.

Betty: But for sex, mature men are more experienced than students. They can even teach you new skills and strokes of playing sex (FGD with girls).

The girls were not unanimous on these issues, however. A few of the girls expressed dismay at the idea of exchanging sex for money or sex being pleasurable at all. Two girls in the focus group discussions strongly argued for virginity and its advantages. Another girl complained that 'sex is painful'.

Negotiating condom use

In the questionnaire 81% (30/37) of the students who had had sex at least once said they had seen a condom, and 49% (18/37) said that they had used one. Condoms figured in the role plays about contraception and condoms and the participants discussed their use in the subsequent discussions of those role plays. However, they did not mention condoms spontaneously in the role plays about the negotiation of sexual relationships. It seemed as though they were not an important part of sexual negotiations. During the group discussions following the 'negotiation' role plays, the facilitator attempted to turn the discussion to the issue of negotiating condom use.

Facilitator: How do you prevent pregnancy?

Sylvia: Some use condoms.

Facilitator: Is it the boy who brings the condom or is it you?

Sylvia: The boy brings it.

Lucy: He brings it because he is the one in need [of sex].

Facilitator: What does he say?

Robinah: When he asks for sex you ask him: 'What if I get pregnant?' Then he says: 'If that is your problem, I will bring the Protector [brand of socially marketed condom]'.

Facilitator: Are there no girls who say: 'If that is the case here is a condom,' or 'If you want sex with me, we must use a condom'?

Sylvia: It is impossible.

Lucy: It is the boy who wants sex, so he should bring a condom.

Namanda: Boys most times are in need [of sex] but they hate condoms (FGD with girls).

Facilitator: If you boys suggest [sex] to the girl and she agrees, who brings the condom?

All: The boy.

David: Some girls keep condoms themselves. A girl might give you one to test whether you know how to use it. If she finds out that you are not wearing it, she refuses to have sex with you. She wants you to use it.

Facilitator: How would you regard a girl who brought you a condom and asked you to wear it? What do you think of her?

John: I'd throw it down and leave it there.

Facilitator: You'd throw it away?

[all laugh]

Facilitator: So, if you plan and agree on the meeting place, and the girl brings you a condom what would your response be?

Simon: I suppose she suspects that I am infected with disease and does not want to catch it. Or on the other hand, she is infected and does not want me to catch her disease. So she is trying to protect me.

Ali: There are girls who think you are shy, so they bring it to you to test and see whether you dare to even touch it. It is like an exam she sets for you.

David: It is better that you buy it yourself.

Laston: The best thing would be not to use one at all.

[all laugh]

Isaac: If you are used to using one, okay. But if you have never used one, you could suggest to her to do without it.

Laston: She might refuse.

Isaac: If she refuses, you think of an alternative, or you convince her to have sex without it (FGD with boys).

In these discussions both boys and girls were unanimous that if a condom was to be used then it was the boy who was to take the initiative and provide one. The boys claimed that girls do sometimes provide condoms, but this might be just to test his experience. The boys generally said that they did not like condoms and would prefer not to use them; the girls thought that because it was the boys' 'need' to have sex, they should bring the condom. Both the general dislike of condoms and the assumption that if they are to be used then the man should take the initiative are widespread in this area.

Love and sex

In Luganda the word *mwagala* could mean: I love her, I need her, I want her, I admire her, I like her, I want to see her, I'm relating with her, I'm close to her, I have sex with her, I'm attracted to her, I care about her, I'm interested in her, I have feelings for her, I'm fond of her, I desire her, I fancy her, I enjoy her company, I approve of her. This word, whose root is *kwagala*, was used in the boys' discussions to mean both 'love' and 'sex' in the English sense. In their discussions the boys made no explicit distinction between love and sex. They told girls, 'I want to share love/sex with you'. They said 'I want to love/have sex with you', 'I loved/had sex with that girl four times'. After serious probing during in-depth interviews, it became clear that these boys use the same word to mean lustful demands, deep feelings or

sexual intercourse. When asked how they differentiated between these meanings, girls said, 'You ask him what kind of love/sex he is referring to.' However the boys mainly used that word to refer to sex in the English sense. As one boy said, 'You don't ask a girl to share love/sex with you just to be friends with her. You want the real thing [sex].'

Similarly, the English word 'sex' can be translated into Luganda as *okwegatta, okwerigomba, okuzina, okwagalana, okusinsimula, okukabala, okutomba, okwegadanga, okwekola, okukola ebyobusirusiru, okwefumitta, okulinyira, okwebakako*. While the younger adolescents frequently referred to sex using the childish reference *okukola ebyobusirusiru*, the older adolescents used the more informal and general reference *okwagalana*, or directly used English expressions within their Luganda discussion.

Contemporary Luganda speakers, especially when they have received some education, tend to intersperse their Luganda with English. For example: '*Oyinza okusaba omuwala* love.' (You can ask a girl for love). Or '*Mpulira love mungi eri omuwala oyo. Nja kugamba catalyst afunire connection kubanga omuwala ali beautiful nnyo. Njagala tu sharinge love*' (I love that girl very much. I will ask a catalyst to get me a connection with her. I want us to have sex).

The girls distinguished between romantic love and pure sexual desire. While explaining the existence of simultaneous multiple partner relationships, sexual desire was given as the reason for having sex with different partners, and romantic love as the 'fuel that keeps you loving (having sex with) one boy even when your parents beat you and tell you to leave him alone. Sometimes if you do not see him for a week, you can fail to concentrate in class, your food is no longer tasty.' The boys, on the other hand, did not mention romantic love.

The possibility of platonic relationships was generally recognized. These friendships, which were based on school work, or mutual interests, were mentioned mostly by girls, however. Although boys talked about the possibility of such friendship, most of them, particularly the older boys, did not think they could last very long before the issue of sex arose, and if the girl persistently showed no interest in sex then the friendship would not last.

Discussion

This paper has focused on school pupils in a rural secondary school. It has attempted to provide some insight into how sexual relationships are negotiated among a specific group of adolescents. While not wanting to exaggerate the generalizability of our results, we do feel that they have some importance in increasing our general understanding of adolescent relationships in this part of the world. Sixteen per cent of Ugandan 15–19-year-olds have some secondary education (Uganda DHS, 1995) and although this is a relatively small proportion, it is likely that this group will act as opinion leaders and so have a disproportionate influence on peers' attitudes.

This group of adolescents discussed sex as if frequent sexual intercourse and multiple partners were commonplace, and in this they were similar to adolescents in other parts of Uganda (Serwadda *et al.*, 1992; Sewankambo *et al.*, 1987; Twa-Twa, 1997). Adolescents also used go-betweens to initiate sexual relationships. Similar mediation has been reported in other adolescent cultures in Africa (Nnko & Pool, 1997; WHO, 1992). Social norms dictate that boys should initiate this process; for a girl to do so (at least if this is too explicit) suggests loose morality or prostitution. In the context of the AIDS epidemic, female initiative might also give rise to the suspicion that the girl is HIV-positive and trying to deliberately infect others. The system is sustained by peer pressure; peers seem to have more direct influence

on adolescent norms and on each other's decisions about sexual behaviour than parents, teachers, traditional institutions or public health campaigns.

Exchange plays an important role in the negotiation of sexual relationships. Money or gifts are given and received in exchange for sexual favours and to strengthen the relationship. This has also been reported elsewhere in Africa (see also Akuffo, 1987, pp. 159–161; Dinan, 1983, p. 353; Nnko & Pool, 1997; Nzyuko *et al.*, 1997, p. 25; Obbo, 1987, p. 265). These adolescents considered exchange to be a normal aspect of sexual relationships. To maximize gains from sexual relationships, adolescents also have sex with adults (see also Dinan, 1983; Gage & Bledsoe, 1994, pp. 150–151; Oruboloye *et al.*, 1994, p. 40).

However, sexual relationships and the negotiations through which they are established are characterized by ambiguity (see also Huygens, 1999). Love is intertwined with sexual desire, financial transaction and prestige. For girls, material reward (receiving gifts) is an important aspect of relationships and they have to be explicit enough to get as good a deal as possible; but if they are too interested in money they may be stigmatized as 'loose'. On the other hand, if they are not interested in money at all they may be suspected of being infected and wanting to spread HIV. Boys try to persuade girls that they have money, but they do not want to place too much emphasis on money because they are concerned that the girl may no longer see them, only their money. On the other hand, a boy who courts a girl but never gives her anything would not be taken seriously at all.

In practice, however, boys usually do not have much money to give and girls do not need much money (their demand is mainly for extras rather than essentials). Consequently, the suggestion of money is largely, though not exclusively, a rhetorical device, just as the gifts are primarily symbolic, their actual value often being insignificant. Negotiations therefore constitute, to a large extent, a ritual performance in which sex, money and prestige are intertwined. A boy must persuade a girl that although he is modern and sophisticated (i.e. experienced) he does not chase after every girl: that it is only her in whom he is interested. The girl does not want to come over as an unsophisticated virgin, but does not want to give the impression that she disappears into the *matooke* plantation with every boy who smooth talks her (i.e. she is modern and sophisticated but not loose). Each wants a partner who is sophisticated, but not too experienced, because this increases the risk that they might be infected and would lead to criticism by peers that the partner is promiscuous. For the same reason boys want girls to agree, but not too easily. There is a clear tension between the traditional ideal of female chastity and submissiveness and the modern image of sexual freedom. This image is partly due to exposure to certain genres of Western magazines, films, television programmes, etc. in which sexual license and promiscuity are emphasized rather than the romantic monogamous ideal. In this context, virginity and abstinence were not only held in low esteem but actually stigmatized by the majority of participants (see also Kinsman *et al.*, 2000).

This system of ideas, attitudes, norms and practices has much in common with the dominant adult sexual system, but there are also aspects which are different. Both marriage and adult sexual relationships are often mediated and taking the initiative is generally seen as the man's responsibility. Similarly, negotiation and exchange (and even detoothing to an extent) are also central in adult sexual relationships. However, there are also important differences, due largely to the fact that adolescents are young and relatively inexperienced. First, middlemen are more important for adolescents because adolescents still have to learn how to negotiate themselves, and also because relationships often need to be kept hidden from parents and teachers. Second, whereas gifts and payments for sex are generally relatively insignificant for adolescent girls, for adult women they often constitute a livelihood. Third, whereas some adolescent girls might achieve higher status among their peers because they

have many partners, the opposite applies to adult women, particularly once they are married. Finally, the importance of keeping or losing virginity is no longer an issue among adults.

So while the adolescent sexual system is supported on a general level by the norms and practices of the wider adult system of which it is ultimately part, various adolescent-specific aspects are maintained by peer pressure: the importance of mediators, the high status and sophisticated image related to having many partners, the importance of losing virginity and the centrality of detoothering.

Although in the questionnaire almost half of the sexually active adolescents claimed to have used a condom at least once, condom use was not a topic in the role plays depicting negotiation of sexual relationships, and it was not spontaneously mentioned in the discussions of these role plays. When it was raised, after prompting by the facilitator, girls took on a passive role, assuming that it was up to the boys to take the initiative, since they were the ones with the sexual 'needs'. This was part of a more general discourse according to which men pursue women for sex because of natural sexual drives which they cannot resist, whereas women consent to have sex largely for reasons other than sexual fulfilment. In this context, for a woman to take the initiative in establishing a sexual relationship, or in the use of condoms, would be considered 'loose' and therefore unacceptable.

Interventions aimed at reducing the spread of HIV by delaying first sex and partner reduction do not seem to be having an effect on the attitudes and behaviour of this group of adolescents. On the contrary, attitudes and forms of behaviour that are risky are part of an adolescent ideal of modernity and sophistication. For example, in spite of ten years of HIV/AIDS-related IEC activities focusing on partner reduction, this group of adolescents (a few exceptions notwithstanding) places high value on having sexual experience and multiple partners. Also, even though almost half reported ever using a condom in the questionnaire, this was probably mostly a result of experimentation rather than systematic use, and most of the qualitative data suggest that condoms are generally not acceptable in this group.

As a result new approaches are needed to persuade this group of the need for change. There are various possibilities. First, given the importance of peer pressure, shifting the source of interventions from adults to the adolescents themselves may be productive. One possibility might be to focus on the mediators. These appear to be popular and gifted individuals who are asked to mediate because of their social and rhetorical skills. They are easy to identify and would be ideal candidates for some sort of opinion leader intervention which could be aimed, at the very least, at emphasizing condom use. Second, because girls receive less pocket money than boys, have less opportunities for earning money and want to be able to buy their own clothes and toilet products, setting up small income-generating projects for rural adolescent girls might be a feasible intervention that would mitigate the economic necessity for sex. Finally, the importance of the notions of modernity and sophistication could be addressed. The idea that having many partners is a sign of being modern and sophisticated comes largely from exposure to Western low budget videos and locally produced soft pornographic magazines. HIV-relevant IEC messages could be built into the magazines. These could either debunk the idea of multiple partners as a sign of sophistication or at least emphasize the importance of condom use in such relationships.

Notes

- [1] They were asked: 'If you were rich and you had enough money to do anything you wanted, would you still want the boy to give you money in exchange for sex?'

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