

## HIV RISK BEHAVIOURS AMONG PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN UGANDA

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### Abstract

It is commonly suggested that teachers are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviour compared to the rest of the adult population. This study set out to establish HIV risk behaviours among teachers in Uganda. This was a cross sectional assessment among primary and secondary school teachers in central Uganda between October and November 2011. A total of 183 teachers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. HIV risk behaviour was defined as either having 2+ sexual partners, having sex with a partner of unknown status without using a condom, engagement in transactional/sex for favours or alcohol use before sex in the last three months preceding the survey. All data analysis was performed using SPSS version 17.0 and EPI Info Version 3.5.1. Forty five per cent of teachers reported having 2+ sexual partners in the last three months. Of these, 24% acknowledged having used a condom at their last sexual encounter while 9.8% knew their partners' HIV status. Young teachers were more likely to have 2+ sexual partners and to engage in sex with partners of unknown HIV status compared to those above 30 years (OR=2.6, 95% CI 1.31-5.34), (OR=2.47, 95% CI 1.10-5.59). Primary school teachers were less likely to engage in sex with partners of unknown HIV status and less likely to have given or received gifts, money or other favours in exchange for sex (OR=0.43, 95% CI 0.19-0.97), (OR=0.24, 95% CI 0.09-0.58). Young teachers are more likely to engage in HIV risk behaviours than old teachers, suggesting a need to promote individual risk perception, condom use and reduction in sexual partners.

**Key words:** Teachers, HIV risk behaviour, HIV

### Introduction

HIV infection is invariably the result of human behaviour, change in behaviour is essential to curbing the spread of infection (Potts M, 2008). In all cases where national epidemics have been reversed, broad-based behaviour changes were central to success. Teachers in Uganda are regularly singled out as being a 'high-risk group' with respect to HIV/AIDS (Bennell, 2005; Clarke, 2008). It is commonly suggested that teachers are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviour compared to the rest of the adult population (World Vision, 2009). Yet the education sector could be a major vehicle for imparting knowledge and skills of avoiding and/or coping with the pandemic.

Teachers are said to be particularly 'prone' or vulnerable to HIV infection because the teaching profession is relatively young, which means that the large majority of teachers are in the highest HIV prevalence age cohorts (MoES, 2011). Also, the teaching profession is female dominated, yet overall HIV prevalence rates among the adult population are generally significantly higher among females (IDC, 2008; MoES, 2011). These reports also revealed that, teachers are relatively well off especially when posted in rural areas (compared to the local population), ,

and in the case of male teachers, it is alleged that sizeable numbers have sexual relations with their students (IDC, 2008; MoES, 2011). The MoES also identifies structural drivers of the epidemic among teachers as high level of stigma and discrimination, teacher transfers which separates teachers from their spouses or regular sexual partners hence increases the likelihood of starting new relationships that may predispose them to HIV infection.

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) reported that school teachers in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) are being and will continue to be particularly badly affected by the AIDS epidemic (Clarke, 2008; UNAIDS, 2006). To date, UNAIDS acknowledges that HIV is having a devastating effect on the already inadequate supply of teachers in African countries. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), teacher turnover and attrition are becoming increasingly chronic problems in SSA as a result of HIV -related illness and death. UNESCO adds that, in SSA alone, the region most affected by the epidemic, 1.6 million additional primary teachers will be required by 2015 if the trend in the spread of the epidemic does not change (UNESCO, 2006).

While the role of education and educators in HIV prevention efforts has been recognized as a key factor in tackling the HIV epidemic, less attention has been paid to mitigating the impact among educators/teachers themselves. The apparent vulnerability of teachers may be due to their status and conditions of service. As a group they are better educated than the general population, their income is higher, and their mobility is greater. The study set out to establish HIV risk behaviours among teachers in Uganda. It was conducted as a rapid assessment to provide a baseline for the design of a Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) strategy for teachers in Uganda for HIV prevention.

## **Results**

### **Background characteristics of respondents**

A total of 183 teachers were interviewed in Kampala and Kalangala districts. 98/183 (53.6%) were from Kampala, 114/183 (62.3%) were primary school teachers. Regarding marital status, sex and age, 71.6% were married, 53.0% were females and 63.4% were more than 30years old. With regard to education level, most of the primary school teachers were diploma holders while the secondary school teachers were mostly graduates. Kalangala had the smallest (20/69) number of secondary school teachers. In terms of sex distribution of the respondents by school category, there were 45 male respondents from primary school compared to 41 males from secondary schools. Most females were from primary schools, a total number of 69 compared to 28 females from secondary schools. Most of the teachers from both primary and secondary schools were aged above 30years (Table 1).

### **Risk behaviours among teachers**

#### **Multiple sexual partners**

In this study, only 6.0% (11/183) reported not having sex in the last three months. Respondents who had had sex in the last three months were asked about their sexual relationships and particularly number of sexual partners. About an equal percentage of primary and secondary school teachers interviewed reported having multiple concurrent sexual partners (46.4%, 44.9%). Teachers aged below 30 years were found to be more likely to have two or more sexual partners compared to those who were 31 years and above (OR 2.64, CI 1.31-5.34) (Table 2).

#### **Limited condom use**

Regarding condom use, all respondents were asked whether they think condom use would prevent one from HIV infection. It was revealed that teachers 59.6% and 55.1 % of primary and secondary school teachers respectively think that condoms prevent HIV infection. Of the

respondents who reported multiple sexual partnerships in the last three months, only 24% acknowledged having used a condom at their last sexual encounter although this was not statistically significant across all categories; age, sex and school category. 24.4%, of males did not use condom with a partner they considered regular or their spouse.

#### **Knowledge of partners' HIV status**

In this study, the respondents were asked whether they knew their partners HIV status. Only 15/172 sexually active respondents, knew their partners' HIV status. Primary school teachers were less likely to involve with partners of unknown HIV status compared to secondary school teachers (OR 0.43, CI 0.19-0.97) and teachers aged below 30 years were also more likely to engage with partners of unknown HIV status compared to those above 30 years (OR 2.47, CI 1.10-5.59) (Table 2).

#### **Transactional sex/ sex for favours**

In all for primary and secondary, 20% of male teachers and 14.4% of female teachers have ever given or received money or favours like transfer, promotion, or gifts in exchange for sex. Primary school teachers were less likely to have involved in transactional sex compared to secondary school teachers (OR 0.24 CI 0.09-0.58) (Table 2).

#### **Alcohol use**

Among primary school teachers, 64% reported taking alcohol and 45% of secondary teachers interviewed reported taking alcohol in the last three months. The respondents were asked whether alcohol use impairs ones judgement and primary teachers were more likely to acknowledge that alcohol impairs one's judgement compared to secondary school teachers (OR 2.18, CI 1.14-4.21)(Table 2).

#### **Discussion and conclusions**

Previous studies have established several behavioural factors which place individuals at a higher risk of contracting HIV. The Uganda HIV Prevention Response and Modes of Transmission Analysis (MOTA) carried out in March 2009 by the Uganda AIDS Commission and UNAIDS evaluated the most prevalent drivers of HIV in Uganda based on data from two population-based longitudinal cohort studies as, multiple sexual partners and discordance, lack of condom use, non disclosure of HIV status, cross generational sex and alcohol and drug use among others (MOTA, 2009). The MoES HIV Prevention sector strategic plan 2011 also points out some of the risky behaviours that put teachers at risk of HIV infection as long distance partnerships which lead to multiple sexual partners, low condom use, sex for favours among others (MoES, 2011). The discussion is built on these findings with the aim of understanding which of these behaviours are most common among teachers.

Studies in multiple Sub-Saharan African countries have shown that married women increasingly have higher rates of HIV infection than sexually active unmarried women (Clark, 2004). Findings are associated with more regular sexual activity, decreased condom use, and the lack of the ability to abstain from sex once married, all exacerbated by women's increased biological susceptibility. A separate study in Uganda showed that men were twice as likely as women to bring HIV infection into a marriage through extra-marital sexual behaviour (Carpenter, 1999). Thus, married women are in a higher risk category for HIV infection. MOTA found that, within the general population, the largest proportion (43%) of new infections occurs within "mutually monogamous" heterosexual couples. In this study, multiple sexual partnerships were significantly more common among men and women living away from their homes. However, it was also found out that primary school teachers were more likely to engage in multiple sexual relations than their counterparts in secondary schools.

Other studies by MoES have also suggested that multiple sexual partnerships are common among teachers involving learners, fellow teachers, workers, communities and education managers for cash, promotion, favours relating to transfers among others (MoES, 2007, 2011).

MoES studies among teachers reveal a very low consistency in condom use with non-regular sexual partners (MoES, 2007). However, teachers do believe that consistent and correct use of condoms is effective in preventing HIV transmission just as was the finding in this assessment. Low consistent condom use especially among teachers with non-regular sexual partners puts them at risk of HIV (MoES, 2007). In this assessment condom use varied with the type of partner and one was more likely not to use a condom if the partner was a consistent partner or a spouse. The SPEAR/RTI follow up study; Assessing Drivers of HIV Infection Among Targeted Public Sector Workers in the Republic of Uganda (SPEAR/RTI, 2011) revealed that, while the acceptability of condom use for single men and women was high at 73 percent and 71 percent respectively, it was low for married people. This finding is consistent with this rapid assessment.

The SPEAR/RTI assessment revealed that among married public sector workers, 50% said infection was very unlikely, while 42% said they were unsure. Among unmarried partners, 27% said their partners were unlikely to be infected, 60% were unsure, and 14% felt it was likely that their partners were infected (SPEAR/RTI, 2011). This study revealed that many of the public sector workers including those from MoES particularly teachers are still ignorant of their partners' HIV status. Through sero-testing, the 2004/05 Uganda HIV Sero Behavioural Survey found that in couples where one or more partner tested positive, almost 50% were discordant and unaware of their partner's HIV status, and often of their own status. In this study, the respondents were asked whether they knew their partners HIV status. Only 15/172 sexually active respondents, knew their partners' HIV status. However, most of the respondents acknowledged that ignorance of partners' HIV status increases the risk of getting HIV.

Studies have shown evidence of reported transaction sex among teachers (MoES, 2007; Sekirime Wilberforce Kigongo, 2001). Although the percentage reported transactional sex seems small at 1.6 percent, it is said to be undesirable in the education sector especially among teachers. Transactional sex, defined as sexual acts that are performed in exchange for money, gifts, or transfer favours, promotional favours among others. According to the UDHS 2006, transactional sex accounted for 22% of new infections in Uganda in 2005 (UBOS/Macro, 2006). Teachers are often transferred and work away from their homes, move without their families, have poor housing facilities and above are poorly paid. It is urged that teachers therefore engage in transactional sex and sex for favours to achieve some of their desires.

Alcohol and drug use during sexual activity is known to affect the decision to engage in higher risk sexual acts, as well as the decision to use a condom (SPEAR/RTI, 2011). Many are also engaged in alcohol consumption that exposes them to unplanned sex with non-regular partners (MoES, 2011)

The rapid assessment revealed that, teachers engage in risky sexual behaviours and the planned intervention to design a BCC strategy for teachers in Uganda is timely. There is need to promote individual risk perception, condom use and reduction in sexual partners. Also to encourage partners to know each other's status, and teachers to avoid risky situations or carefully negotiate such situations.

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## Tables

**Table 1: Social demographic characteristics of respondents**

Characteristics	Primary n=114		Secondary n=69		Total	Percentage
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	45	39.5	41	59.4		
Females	69	60.5	28	40.6	183	100
<b>Marital status</b>						
Married	84	73.7	47	68.1		
Never married	23	20.2	18	26.1		
Separated	4	3.5	3	4.3		
Widowed	3	2.6	1	1.4	183	100
<b>Age</b>						
<=30	38	33.3	29	42.0		
>=31	76	66.7	40	58.0	183	100
<b>Education level</b>						
Grade2	18	15.8	0	0.0		
Grade3	37	32.5	0	0.0		
Grade4	0	0.0	2	2.9		
Diploma	50	43.9	11	15.9		
Graduate	7	6.1	56	81.2	181	98.9
<b>District</b>						
Kampala	49	43.0	49	71.0		
Kalangala	65	57.0	20	29.0	183	100

**Table 2: HIV risk behaviours among teachers by Age, Sex and School category**

Risky behaviour	AGE		OR(CI)	SEX		OR(CI)	SCHOOL CATEGORY		
	<=30 N=67	>=31 N=116		M N=86	F N=97		PRI. N=114	SEC. N=69	OR(CI)
<b>Multiple partnerships</b>									
<b>Have two or more partners (concurrent)</b>									
Yes	29	26	2.64	39	45	0.96	53	31	1.07
No	38	90	(1.31-5.34)*	47	52	(0.51-1.79)	61	38	(0.56-2.03)
<b>Condom use</b>									
<b>Do you think condoms protect one from HIV infection</b>									
Yes	37	69	0.84	48	58	0.85	68	38	1.21
No	30	47	(0.44-1.61)	38	39	(0.45-1.60)	46	31	(0.63-2.31)
<b>Did u use a condom during your last sexual encounter (not with spouse)</b>									
Yes	18	26	1.27	21	23	1.04	31	13	1.61
No	49	90	(0.60-2.69)	65	74	(0.50-2.16)	83	56	(0.73-3.57)
<b>Ignorance of partners' HIV status</b>									
<b>Do you think it is a risky behaviour?</b>									
Yes	20	31	1.17	24	27	1.00	28	23	0.65
No	47	85	(0.51-2.39)	62	70	(0.50-2.02)	86	46	(0.32-1.32)
<b>Knowledge of HIV status of partner</b>									
Know	19	16	2.47	16	19	0.94	16	19	0.43
Don't know	48	100	(1.10-5.59)*	70	78	(0.42-2.09)	98	50	(0.19-0.97)*
<b>Transactional sex</b>									
<b>Do you believe teachers get involved in transactional sex?</b>									
Yes	10	32	0.46	20	22	1.03	24	18	0.76
No	57	84	(0.19-1.07)	66	75	(0.49-2.18)	90	51	(0.35-1.61)
<b>Have you ever either received or given gifts, money or other favours in ex for sex?</b>									
Yes	14	18	1.44	18	14	1.57	10	20	0.24
No	53	98	(0.62-3.33)	68	83	(0.68-3.62)	104	49	(0.09-0.58)*
<b>Alcohol use</b>									
<b>Ever taken alcohol</b>									
Yes	30	67	0.59	47	50	1.13	64	33	1.40
No	37	49	(0.31-1.14)	39	47	(0.61-2.11)	50	36	(0.73-2.66)
<b>Do you believe that alcohol impairs one's judgement</b>									
Yes	36	68	0.82	49	55	1.01	73	31	2.18
No	31	48	(0.43-1.57)	37	42	(0.54-1.90)	41	38	(1.14-4.21)*

\*Statistically significant