

...produce such healthy behavior as abstinence, delay of sexual activity, and correct and consistent condom use. Our goal is to...
...entered into a 10-year cooperative agreement with USAID to manage...
...ject that uses social marketing to **prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS** a...
...itted infections. AIDSMark collaborates with USAID missions and other...
...partners, as well as with host governments, nongovernmental organizations, and...
...enterprises. The effectiveness of many large projects risks being weakened by...
...and red tape. AIDSMark is designed to be flexible and to respond quickly and...
...alized basis to **reach people with the products, services, and information** to...
...protect themselves from AIDS. PSI was the first organization in the world to make...
...social marketing overseas in the fight against AIDS, and has continued...
...ator in the field since the mid-1980s, introducing a range of...
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REPORT SERIES

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Cross-Generational Relationships in Kenya: Couples' Motivations, Risk Perception for STIs/HIV and Condom Use

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Abstract

Cross-Generational Relationships in Kenya

Objectives: To understand women's and men's motivations for entering into cross-generational relationships and to examine how their risk perception for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) affects sexual decision-making and condom use.

Methods: A total of eight focus groups were conducted with women aged 15–19 and 28 in-depth interviews were carried out with men aged 30 years and older in Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and Meru. Participants discussed motivations for entering into non-marital, cross-generational relationships, perceived risks, relationship dynamics, and circumstances under which older men and younger women meet. Data analysis highlighted common and divergent themes on cross-generational relationships and the risks associated with them.

Results: According to study participants, Kenyan men who pursue younger women do not fit a “sugar daddy” stereotype; rather they come from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. Young women actively seek partners who are willing to spend money on them whereas men look for partners who are well mannered, need money and have certain physical attributes. Women's primary incentive for engaging in cross-generational relationships is financial and material gain while men seek younger partners for sexual gratification. Pressure from peers to fit in and some family members to secure financial assistance from older partners can compel women to engage in cross-generational relationships. Although some peer groups support and encourage such

relationships, other groups, especially wives, same-aged boyfriends and parents, disapprove of them. As a result, cross-generational couples are often preoccupied by the threat of discovery. Risk perception for STIs/HIV is low and couples rarely use condoms.

Conclusions: Most cross-generational couples underestimate their risk for infection from STIs/HIV. Young women believe that older men are low-risk partners because they are less likely to be promiscuous and more likely to remain faithful to younger partners and wives. Men believe that young partners are innocent and sexually inexperienced. Material gain, emotional factors, sexual gratification, and recognition from peers override the risk for STIs and HIV infection. Condom use is low and young women's ability to negotiate use is compromised by age disparities and economic dependence.

Study findings suggest several programmatic strategies for targeting young women and older men. Behavior change communication campaigns should educate women and men about the increased risk of STIs/HIV associated with cross-generational relationships. Programs should also promote safer sexual practices, such as consistent condom use, within relationships. Campaigns could employ positive role models to encourage young women to seek safer alternatives to cross-generational relationships and decrease peer pressure among men to pursue such relationships. Long-term interventions include improving young women's access to educational and career opportunities, and working with communities to determine the best approach for changing social norms and the acceptability of cross-generational relationships.



Introduction

The spread of HIV/AIDS and STIs is growing worldwide, but sub-Saharan Africa is disproportionately affected, with an estimated 28.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2002). Globally, young people aged 15–24 have the highest rates of infection and more than 9 million youth in sub-Saharan Africa are thought to be infected with HIV (UNAIDS 2002; Kaiser Family Foundation 2002). Kenya is one of nine African countries hit hardest by the epidemic and according to UNAIDS (2002), HIV prevalence among 15–49 year olds is 15%. Sexual activity is the major mode of HIV transmission in Kenya and accounts for approximately 80% of infections (Mulindi et al. 1998).

Because of their high levels of sexual activity, transitory sexual relationships, and insufficient rates of condom use, youth throughout sub-Saharan Africa are at increased risk for STIs and HIV infection (Meekers, Klein, and Foyet 2001; Mehryar 1995; National Research Council 1996; Meekers and Calvès 1997b; Williams et al. 2001). Researchers have found that Kenyan youth participate in similar risk behavior and harbor misinformation about HIV/AIDS transmission, further increasing their risk for infection (Buvé et al. 2001; Kekovole et al. 1997). Data from the last Kenyan Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) reveal that 56% of males and 32% of females aged 15–24 reported engaging in sexual activity during the past year (Stat Compiler 2002). Despite high levels of sexual activity, condom use among Kenyan youth remains low. A 2001 study found that only 10% of youth aged 15–19 and 6% of youth aged 20–

24 reported using a condom during their last sex act (Waithaka and Bessinger 2001).

HIV disproportionately affects young women in sub-Saharan Africa. Studies have found that HIV prevalence in women aged 15–24 is significantly higher than that for men in the same age group (Gregson and Garnett 2002; Barongo et al. 1992). A study in Kisumu Kenya revealed that HIV prevalence in women was six times that in men among sexually active 15–19 year olds and three times greater among 20–24 year olds (Glynn et al. 2001). According to UNAIDS, by the end of 2001, between 12% and 19% of Kenyan females aged 15–24 were living with HIV; for males in the same cohort, prevalence was substantially lower, with estimates between 5% and 7%. Researchers believe that young women's physiological susceptibility and sexual relationships with older partners contribute to their increased risk for infection (UNAIDS 2002; MAP 2002).

Age asymmetries between marital partners in sub-Saharan Africa are the traditional norm; however, modern patterns of sexual mixing between older men and younger women may account for differences in STI/HIV infection rates in the region (Gregson et al. 2002; MacPhail, Williams and Campbell 2002; Kelly 2001; Laga et al. 2001; Konde-Lule, Sewankambo and Morris 1997). In situations where economic conditions are difficult, young women engage in relationships with “sugar daddies,” older men who provide money or gifts in exchange for sex (UNICEF, UNAIDS and WHO 2002; Bledsoe and Cohen 1993).

Similar relationships have also been documented between young men and older women; however liaisons with “sugar mommies” do not appear to be as common (Calvès, Cornwell and Enyegue 1996; Barker and Rich 1992). The literature provides no established definition of a sugar daddy or a standard age difference between partners that constitutes sexual mixing. Several researchers, however, have used a margin of 10 years between older men and younger women to investigate the effects of age asymmetry in non-marital partnerships on risk for STIs/HIV (Gregson et al 2002; Luke 2002; UNAIDS 2000; Laga et al. 2001; Kekovole et al. 1997).¹

Several studies have found that young women seek older “sponsors” who can help pay for school fees, luxuries, or other needs (Dunbar 2001; Mensch et al. 2001, Gage 1998). Peer pressure to obtain gifts from sexual partners is great and researchers report that some young women feel humiliated or disrespected if they receive nothing in exchange for engaging in sex (Gorgen, Maier, and Diesfeld 1993; Caldwell, Caldwell, and Quiggin 1989). Families sometimes encourage young women to participate in sexual exchange as a means of obtaining money for household necessities (Ankomah 1998). Men may also provide gifts and money to sexual partners as a way of showing affection in relationships and elevating their social status among peers (McLean 1995; Dinan 1983).

Cross-generational relationships are reportedly common. A comprehensive literature review of quantitative studies in sub-Saharan Africa revealed that 12% to 25% of young women’s partners were 10 or more years older (Luke and Kurz 2002). A study in Kenya found that among men over age 30 who reported having

nonmarital partners, 25% of them had a partner at least 10 years younger than themselves (Luke 2002).

There are several reasons that cross-generational relationships pose an increased risk for STIs and HIV infection. Risk perception for STIs/HIV is generally low among cross-generational couples. Researchers have noted that men prefer young sexual partners because they are thought to be free from HIV (Chinake et al. 2002; Summers, Kate, and Murphy 2002). Young women appear to be more worried about pregnancy or outsiders discovering cross-generational relationships than they are concerned about STIs/HIV (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001; Ankomah 1998). Low risk perception contributes to inconsistent condom use, and men are often unwilling to use condoms with younger partners (Sturdevant et al. 2001).

Likewise, young women’s power to negotiate condom use is compromised by age disparities and economic dependence within such relationships (Rao Gupta 2000; Mensch and Lloyd 1998; Heise and Elias 1995). Researchers have found that, similar to other types of relationships, when cross-generational couples use condoms, use diminishes over time or as relationships become more serious (Stavrou and Kaufman 2000; Ku, Sonenstein and Pleck 1994). Overall, men who engage in relationships with younger women are more likely to be infected with STIs or HIV compared to young women’s age-mate cohort because of their longer periods of sexual activity (Kelly 2001; Laga et al. 2001; Gorgen et al. 1998).

Finally, cross-generational relationships increase young men’s risk for infection when young women maintain multiple relationships with

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¹ The same 10-year age difference will be used throughout this paper to describe cross-generational relationships.



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older partners and boyfriends of the same age (Gregson and Garnett 2002; Calvès, Cornwell and Enyegue 1996).

Researchers have called for additional study of cross-generational relationships and highlighted the need for increased STI/HIV prevention efforts targeting such relationships (Silberschmidt and Rasch 2001). This study briefly describes cross-generational relationships in Kenya,

examines women's and men's motivations for entering into relationships, explores their risk perceptions for STIs/HIV, and identifies how risk perception affects sexual decision-making and condom use. Based on study findings, the authors recommend programmatic strategies for reducing young women's risk of STIs/HIV, specifically that which accompanies cross-generational relationships.



Methods

Data were collected in June 2000 as part of a behavior change communication strategy for young women in Kenya that addresses cross-generational relationships and their risk for STIs and HIV/AIDS. Staff from Population Services International (PSI) in Kenya collected study data along with students from local universities. A total of eight focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with sexually active women aged 15–19, both in- and out-of-school. Street mobilizers recruited participants and assessed their eligibility with a screening tool. Two focus groups were held in each of the following four locations, representing both urban and rural locales: Nairobi (urban), Mombasa (urban), Kisumu (rural), and Meru (rural). Female moderators conducted FGDs in the lingua franca, and a note-taker and mobilizer were present for each group.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 men aged 30 years and older in the same regions. Researchers decided to conduct interviews with men rather than FGDs to maintain their confidentiality and increase the likelihood of capturing men who participate in cross-generational relationships. Male interviewers screened and recruited participants at venues FGD participants identified as popular among men seeking younger female partners. Inter-

views were conducted in the lingua franca. Different discussion guides were used for FGDs and interviews; however, both guides covered the same study themes. Discussions covered motivations for entering into cross-generational relationships, perceived risks, relationship dynamics, and circumstances under which older men and younger women meet. All FGDs and interviews were audiotaped, translated, and transcribed into English. The authors completed data analysis in Ethnograph 5.0 to highlight common and divergent themes in study transcripts.

As with all research, this study faced some limitations that must be taken into account when analyzing data and drawing conclusions from results. Recruiters may not have adequately screened males for participation, rendering them ill prepared to discuss cross-generational relationships. Different methodologies were used to obtain information from female and male participants and may result in data that are not fully comparable. Transcriptions were sometimes incomplete or varied in quality. Since FGDs were used to obtain data from young women, information about participants' personal experiences is limited. Finally, like any study reliant upon self-reported data, there is potential for information bias.



Results

Description of cross-generational relationships

Study participants spoke about the prevalence of cross-generational relationships and relationship dynamics. Participant comments reveal that young women actively seek partners who are willing to spend money on them and often initiate relationships with older men. Men who pursue younger women do not appear to fit a sugar daddy stereotype but come from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. They look for partners who are well mannered, need money, and possess certain physical attributes. Sexual relationships between cross-generational partners are usually hidden from wives, same-aged boyfriends, and disapproving parents and may last a month or a lifetime. Participants explained that relationships usually end when men's financial resources run out or when wives and parents discover affairs.

Prevalence of cross-generational relationships

Females in FGDs stated that relationships between younger women and older men are very common in their localities. Although none of the participants admitted to being involved in such relationships, most were quick to point out that they have friends or know other young women who engage in cross-generational sex.

"In my opinion, (these relationships) are still common. If you go into town, you'll find many sugar daddies" (female, 15–19 years, Mombasa).

Most male participants confirmed this view and said that cross-generational relationships are common, especially in urban areas.

"Urban areas offer a very favorable environment for such affairs to flourish. In rural areas, these affairs are short lived because the community soon discovers them" (male consultant, 46 years, Nairobi).

The majority of men said that they had had a relationship outside of marriage at some point. Most denied ever having relationships with teenagers but admitted that they had been involved with young women in their early twenties. Only one participant said that he was having an affair with a teenage girl at the time of the interview.

"Sometimes you're forced into it and you can't resist. These ladies are beautiful. I'm involved with one. She's 16 years old, but it's very difficult to know these days. (Sometimes) you'll find a 14-year-old girl as developed as her mother" (male, profession unknown, 38 years, Meru).

Male and female participants explained that, consistent with cultural expectations, men are expected to initiate encounters with partners. However, several participants described methods young women use to meet older men. One strategy is to ask men for lifts in their car and hope that they seduce them. Other participants described more active methods for pursuing partners.

“If the man dresses well, then she knows he’s got money...So she says to herself, ‘This one, I’ll pursue until we meet. The girl will ensure that she talks to him and starts a relationship” (female, 15-19 years, Nairobi).

During the study, it became apparent that men in cross-generational relationships do not fit a traditional sugar daddy stereotype; that is, not all men are married, wealthy, 35-50 years of age, nor do they work in white-collar jobs. Females in FGDs listed police officers, matatu touts, truck drivers, doctors, clerks, bankers, airport workers, and business executives as potential partners. Others noted that ordinary men in their neighborhoods or men whose wives live elsewhere could be partners. The majority of female participants said that older partners come in “all shapes and sizes,” but the most important criterion is that they have some money to spend on their partners.

“You see, you don’t care about what he has in the bank. It’s what he gives you that matters” (female, 15-19 years, Nairobi).

Male participants listed several traits men seek in younger partners. For the most part they described women who were those likely to need money to pay for school fees or supplement their income. Many participants said that men prefer young women in college or their final year of secondary school. If employed, young women usually work in low-paying jobs as maids, receptionists, secretaries, or telephone operators. Several participants said that men prefer young women who appear innocent, are well mannered, and can keep relationships secret. They also described preferred physical attributes such as light skin, a nice figure, firm breasts, large buttocks, and large hips.

“She should have a nice figure, ‘figure eight.’ A person with a well-defined waistline

and endowed with hips” (male farmer, 48 years, Meru).

Relationship dynamics

Participants explained how older men’s gift giving is usually accompanied by the expectation that young women will have sex with them. The period of time between initiating contact with partners and engaging in sex may range from 1 day to 3 months.

“It happens often, they meet the first day and that same day they’re in bed. There are other (situations) where it’ll take some time before the girl’s willing” (male marketing manager, 34 years, Nairobi).

Female participants described how some young women feel obliged to sleep with men who provide them with gifts and money.

“For around 3 months he doesn’t demand anything....He keeps giving you things. Therefore, when he asks you to return the favor you end up with a guilty conscience and you give him sex in return because you can’t return the money” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

When asked about the duration of cross-generational relationships, participants said that they could last as little as 1 month or as long as a lifetime. Nevertheless, most agreed that these types of relationships do not last long. Some participants explained that although cross-generational relationships may contain an emotional component, many are experimental affairs where men pursue a number of young women.

“These things only go on for months (at a time). You know — it’s to satisfy a kind of curiosity. After you’ve gone with her twice, three times at most, you want to dispose of

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her fast. You don't keep these girls for long. After all, you're married" (male administrator, 36 years, Nairobi).

Several female and male participants explained that relationships end when men's wives or young women's parents discover them. Female participants noted other reasons for the termination of cross-generational relationships, including men's failure to honor their financial obligations or making too many demands for sex.

"Sometimes he can be dumped if he's too demanding...if he always wants sex, like Mondays when you're in class" (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Motivations for engaging in cross-generational relationships

Young women's motivations

Female participants discussed young women's motivations for entering into cross-generational relationships. Participants identified financial gain as the biggest incentive for engaging in cross-generational relationships. They explained that, for the most part, women seek financial support to buy luxury goods, but sometimes they need money for school fees, household items, and other essential needs.

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Pressure from peers to "fit in" and from family members to secure financial assistance from older partners can compel women to engage in relationships. Men appear to pressure young women into relationships by "bribing" them with gifts and pursuing them until they concede. Participants also identified emotional motivations for engaging in cross-generational relationships, namely a desire to find surrogate parents, mature partners, emotional fulfillment, and supportive mentors.

Financial motivations

Female participants explained that most young women pursue older partners who can provide them with money and gifts that are unavailable from partners their own age. According to them, the amount of money expected could be as little as Kshs 20 (US \$.25) or as much as Kshs 5000 (US \$63). Because young men are usually in school and have difficulty obtaining money themselves, many young women have concurrent relationships with older and same-age partners.

"With a young man, it depends on his ability. If he can give you money, fine, but most of them usually don't have money. So, you are forced to look for someone who has the ability to give you what you want" (female, 15–19 years, Mombasa).

Most participants remarked that young women use money from older partners to obtain essential items for themselves or their family. Young women may participate in cross-generational relationships to secure funds to cover education-related expenses that parents cannot pay, such as school uniforms, fees, and books.

"Maybe the girl doesn't have the money for school fees. She'll, therefore, get herself a mature man. If he promises to pay fees, won't she agree to have a relationship with him" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi)?

Some participants said that women hide the origins of money from their families. A common explanation is that they took a "casual" job to make ends meet. Participants said that even if family members do not believe them, most will not question them but remain silent and continue to benefit from the assistance. Several female participants believed that parents encourage cross-generational relationships by not actively discouraging young women from dating older men and accepting gifts.

“You’ll pretend that you got a casual job and you’re using your pay to help them buy flour. Now if you buy flour one day, even tomorrow, you tell her that you’re going to work...so even if you go out all night, she’ll be quiet” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Participants explained that although some young women have legitimate financial needs and seek assistance from older partners, most want luxuries such as trendy clothing, body lotion, or outings to expensive restaurants that they cannot otherwise afford or that their parents refuse to provide. Some participants noted that “special treats” such as chips, biscuits, ice cream, or chicken are sometimes enough to entice young women into encounters with older men.

“She’ll be given money to go to a hair-dresser, she’ll eat, she’ll be given everything” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Many female participants reported that young women feel a great deal of peer pressure to keep up with fashion trends and seek financial support from cross-generational relationships to pay for clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, and hairstyles. One respondent noted that some women may use money from partners to purchase clothing essential for job searches and other special occasions after high school.

“Clothes...you want trousers, body suits, things that parents can’t afford. Parents don’t buy exactly what you need. For example, you want trousers (that cost) Kshs 800, and they say they’ll buy you clothes for Kshs 40” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

A few participants said that some young women exploit their partners by misrepresenting their financial need. They explained that women are sometimes dishonest with their partners because

they wish to receive additional funds for luxury items or pocket money.

“Some girls are tough. They can be given the money to pay school fees (by their partners), but instead they pocket it for their own personal use” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several participants pointed out that older partners frequently “bribe” young women with money and luxury items to lure them into relationships. They explained that men are aware of young women’s desire for money and goods, and use their financial stability to secure sexual relations.

“When she’s given money everyday, she won’t refuse (sex). Even if the man’s 50 years old and the girl’s 15 — you know it’s money she’s looking for” (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Participants explained that women sometimes assume that, unlike younger partners, older men are a form of “insurance” for the future. They believe that older partners can provide new job contacts or financing for businesses and advanced studies. They also believe that men will accept financial responsibility for them and provide housing and money for health care. However, participants differed on the practicality of finding long-term relationships with older partners. A few said that young women pursue cross-generational relationships as avenues to long-term relationships or marriage, but others thought it unlikely that women would eventually marry their older partners.

Social motivations

All female FGD participants mentioned peer pressure as a significant motivating factor for engaging in cross-generational relationships. Participants noted that young women who have

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older partners brag to their friends about partners' generosity with money, gifts, and outings. As a result, women can feel excluded from social circles and pursue older partners to "fit in."

"If all of your friends have (an older) boyfriend, you feel left out if you don't. Then you realize you need one" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several female participants described how young women serve as brokers for cross-generational relationships and find older partners for their friends. Men sometimes instigate such arrangements and network with younger women to find partners. Women may ask friends to solicit older partners, knowing the potential benefits of such relationships.

"If it's a friend who trusts you and she has a problem similar to yours, maybe a lack of money because her parents are poor. Now she'll try and get into a relationship like yours" (female, 15–19 years, Kisumu).

Sometimes family members place pressure on women by organizing encounters with older men without explaining the arrangement to women. Family members expect to benefit financially, either through money given to young women or through men's direct payments to the family without the young women's consent or knowledge.

"After making the connection, your sister-in-law will tell you where you'll meet the old man. She'll take you there and go back home....She tells you she'll be back later but she doesn't come back. Whatever this man tells you to do, you do. If he tells you to go to bed with him you have no choice because you don't even know your way home" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several female participants explained how older men pressure women to participate in cross-generational relationships. They noted that even though young women may not be interested initially, some men pressure them until they concede.

"Even if the girl had no intention of agreeing, the old man will insist (on a relationship) and convince her until she agrees" (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Emotional motivations

Some female participants thought that young women who are orphans or who live in households that do not provide sufficient emotional support are more likely than other women to seek older partners. They explained that, in some cases, parents are neglectful, and young women believe they have no alternative but to find partners who can provide the emotional support they need.

"The girls want to be 'spoiled' [pampered] by these men. You want him to treat you like a baby — pay constant attention to you" (female, 15–19 years, Mombasa).

Parents' level of involvement in young women's lives may also be related to participation in cross-generational relationships. Many female participants noted that parents are sometimes uninvolved in women's lives, leaving them to do what they please, including participation in cross-generational relationships. They also stated that women who date older partners frequently have strict parents or guardians pressuring them to leave home.

"Some parents are too harsh....So, a girl runs away from home and has to earn a living. If anyone approaches her, she considers herself very lucky and looks at them like they're God-sent angels" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Some female participants believed that young women become involved with older partners to find mentors who can help them work through problems and provide advice about life. They often turn to men for help solving problems, making them important, trusted confidants. Likewise, participants explained that many young women prefer older partners because they are perceived to be more “mature” than younger partners. Some participants observed that because they have wives, older men know how to take care of women and make them feel important and needed.

“Maybe they’re married, so they know how to treat ladies nicely” (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Older men’s motivations

Male participants discussed older men’s motivations for entering into cross-generational relationships. According to the majority of participants, sexual gratification is men’s primary incentive for pursuing younger partners. Many men believe that young women can satisfy their sexual needs better than older women can. Participants also identified emotional motivations for engaging in cross-generational relationships, such as regaining a sense of youth, escaping household pressures, and relieving stress. They identified increased status among peers as a powerful social reward and explained that cultural tolerance allows men to pursue younger partners. Finally, participants explained that men’s economic power allows them to cultivate relationships with young women. They noted that without money, older men would be unable to attract such partners.

Sexual gratification

Male participants stated that sexual gratification is men’s primary and sometimes only motivation for pursuing cross-generational relationships. Most participants explained that men believe that sex and happiness are synonymous. They

also feel that younger women are able to satisfy a men’s needs better than older partners, such as wives, can.

“...If you’re married and moving around [having sex] with a woman who’s 15 or 10 years younger than you, what is your expectation? You won’t get married to her. She’s just there to satisfy you sexually” (male consultant, 44 years, Nairobi).

Most participants noted physical characteristics specific to young women that men find more attractive and believe are uncommon in older women. Some said that young women are considered “hot-blooded” and “fresh,” their bodies young and firm.

“Young girls have nice pointed breasts, and they have fresh blood, and they’re more entertaining and exciting. They have tender bodies that are nice to touch and, you see, that’s part of the fun” (male primary school teacher, 30 years, Kisumu).

Some participants explained that men perceive cross-generational relationships as “conquests.” By engaging in sex with younger partners older men assure themselves that they are still desirable and can enjoy sex as they did when they were younger.

“It’s for the thrill and also to conquer. You know, it’s nice to conquer and assure yourself that you can still do what you used to do when you were a young man” (male lawyer, 38 years, Nairobi).

Emotional motivations

Some participants believe that men who married young are likely to pursue cross-generational relationships because they feel “cheated” out of sexual experiences they should have had when they were younger. In their opinion, engaging in sex with young partners

can compensate for lost opportunities from youth. Likewise, participants said that men want to go out and have fun like they did when they were young, but their wives prefer to stay at home. As a result, men may look for younger partners who will go to clubs and out dancing.

A few participants suggested that some men are dissatisfied with their marriages because their wives do not dote on them as they did before experiencing the demands of family life.

“...The wife is committed to bringing up the child and looking after other family members, leaving her less or very little time to spend with the husband. In this case, the husband may think that he needs something more” (male banker, 36 years, Nairobi).

Some participants explained that men look for partners who will sympathize with their frustrations and stress. One participant joked about how men refer to their younger partners as “ISPs” (independent sex providers) or “stress managers.” A few participants pointed out that younger women can help men through midlife crises or difficult marriages.

“It’s just to escape from stress. Like your wife can be giving you stress and, as you know, when there’s stress, sex (with her) is no longer attractive” (male, profession unknown, 38 years, Meru).

Men also appear to enjoy being the older, more experienced partner in relationships because young women often revere and admire them. Participants explained that such a dominant position can provide men with a much-desired ego boost.

“(Men) also need to show their experience in handling women and that experience can only be shown to some of these younger (women)...and also for their ego — for

men, the ego dominates” (male lawyer, 38 years, Nairobi).

Social motivations

Most participants felt that men increase their social status among peers when they are seen with younger, attractive women. Consequently, they experience a sense of increased pride and continue pursuing cross-generational relationships.

“If you’re seen with a young girl, your friends say, ‘This guy, you know, he has such a good babe.’ It’s for identification. It’s for status” (male supervisor, 38 years, Mombasa).

Some participants argued that older men use their money to live vicariously through younger partners. By selecting the right type of partner, they can experience youth, beauty, and intellectual stimulation. They also discussed how some men select women based on their levels of education. In their opinion, some men prefer better-educated partners who can enhance their status among peers. One respondent described a relatively uneducated man he knows who pursues educated young women as partners because he enjoys being seen with them.

“If an old man isn’t formally educated per se but has the money, he’d very much like to move around [have sex] with an educated girl, and he’ll be very proud of that” (male hotelier, 40 years, Meru).

Several participants also noted cultural tolerance for cross-generational relationships. They pointed out that tradition permits older men to use their finances for pursuing younger women if they so choose.

“They get into this (type of) relationship because they want social status (and) recognition because society approves of that kind of behavior” (male consultant, 46 years, Nairobi).

Financial ability

Study participants stressed the strong economic component of cross-generational relationships. Several male participants explained how men's economic advantage over women allows them to use their finances to pursue young partners and entice them with money, gifts, and outings

“Money and influence make older men capitalize on power to take advantage of younger women” (male consultant, 46 years, Nairobi).

Several male participants argued that men recognize young women's financial vulnerability and intentionally pursue them because they are less expensive to maintain than older partners and make fewer financial demands. Some participants noted that young women are satisfied with simple gifts, such as dinner in a restaurant or a new lipstick, whereas older women may expect money for rent or other more expensive items.

Several participants explained the phenomenon of cross-generational relationships very simply: when men have money, they pursue young partners; when they have no money, young women are unattainable.

“It's riches that make men become strong, and the strength comes from the property they own” (male businessman, 46 years, Meru).

Risks associated with cross-generational relationships

Young women's perceived risks

Despite the advantages young women associate with cross-generational relationships, female participants admitted that there are substantial risks associated with becoming involved with older partners. The majority agreed that the risk

of discovery and subsequent violence from wives is the most significant risk. Disapproving parents and same-aged boyfriends may also be prone to violence when they uncover clandestine relationships between older men and young women. Participants mentioned pregnancy and emotional abandonment by older partners, same-aged boyfriends, or family members as additional risks. Of the risks mentioned, STIs and HIV were given the lowest priority. Participants believed that women do not acknowledge the increased risk older partners pose, assuming they present little STI/HIV risk because they are not promiscuous and remain faithful to younger partners and wives.

Discovery of relationship and violence

Female participants in all FGDs spoke about women's preoccupation with being discovered in cross-generational relationships. They explained that even though some peer groups encourage such relationships, many groups, especially wives, parents and same-aged boyfriends usually disapprove of them. Young women often lie about their outings and the source of pocket money and gifts. Couples generally have sex in discreet locations, such as hotels, guesthouses, or in cars and “green lodges” (bushes). Some participants reported that young women skip school to meet partners. Participants in a few FGDs said that young women use funerals as an excuse to meet with older partners.

“...You may leave your home as if going to a funeral, to keep the bereaved person company while in reality you're going to meet the man. This way your parents will give you permission to go to the funeral” (female, 15–19 years, Kisumu).

Female participants explained that wives are the most frequent perpetrators of violence against young women who have relationships with their husbands. Violence may ensue when wives

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become jealous over husbands' emotional involvement with young partners or threatened by the financial resources these women take away from families. Several participants told stories of wives stalking, threatening, and attacking young women. Attacks can include beatings, knife attacks, poisonings, or being burned by hot water.

"Some (wives) can beat you up. You meet somewhere and she tells you, 'You're the one who stole my husband. Today I've got you.' So you start fighting on the streets" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

According to participants, boyfriends and disapproving parents may also become violent when they discover cross-generational relationships. Both young women and older partners can become victims of attack.

Pregnancy

The majority of female participants spoke about the risk of pregnancy associated with cross-generational relationships. They noted that when young women become pregnant in Kenya, they can be expelled from school, kicked out of parents' homes, and jeopardize marital prospects with same-aged partners.

Some participants believed that, despite young women's hopes for future financial support from older partners, many men deny their responsibility for pregnancies.

"A man can pursue her, but when the girl gets pregnant, he's cheated her by telling her lies like he'll marry her. So (at first) she might think, 'This man's good, he's accepted responsibility for me.' Then, later, when he's satisfied his (sexual) needs, he dumps her" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several participants thought it common for men who acknowledge responsibility for pregnancies

to pay for young women's abortions. Others, however, explained that when women are left to resolve pregnancies alone, they may have unsafe abortions or become suicidal rather than face their families and communities.

"When a girl gets pregnant and the man denies responsibility, she's left wondering what to do...so she decides it's better to have an abortion. That's why some girls die in the process of getting an abortion" (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Some participants described methods young women use to mitigate the risk of pregnancy, such as using oral contraceptives or Norplant. Others described how women avoid sex with older partners during their "fertile periods"; however it is unclear how many women understand the correct method for determining days when they are most likely to conceive.

"(You should) avoid sex on unsafe days...14 days after your period. If the man comes along (for sex), tell him you're going to visit your uncle or something to avoid sex" (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Abandonment

Participants described young women's fear of abandonment by older partners. They explained that women sometimes grow emotionally or financially dependent upon older partners and suffer severe hardship when relationships end. However, several participants were cynical about men's emotional commitment to cross-generational relationships and said that older men "dump" young partners once their sexual needs are satisfied.

Some young women appear to adopt a strategy of multi-partnering with older partners and same-aged boyfriends. Several participants explained that some young women keep boyfriends just in case older partners abandon them.

“You think you’re the only one who loves this (older) man, but you forget that he can give presents and a good time to someone else. So, even if you have an old boyfriend, you must have a young boyfriend, too” (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Nevertheless, many participants described young women’s fear of emotional abandonment by same-aged boyfriends or family members if cross-generational relationships are discovered. They explained that when boyfriends find out about older partners, they usually terminate relationships. Likewise, young women may jeopardize relationships with family members who disapprove of older partners.

STIs and HIV

Most female participants believed that young women give little consideration to their risk for STIs and HIV from cross-generational relationships. Older men are believed to be less risky than age-mates because they are married and do not “move around” (have multiple sexual partners) often. Few women make the connection between the increased risk of contracting STIs/HIV and their older partners’ pursuit of younger women and infidelity to their wives. Some participants also noted that young women do not understand older men’s sexual histories and inaccurately assess the risk that accompanies such relationships.

“They know that the older men aren’t HIV-positive because they have wives” (female, 15–19 years, Kisumu).

Other participants stated that young women’s emotional attachment to older partners can obscure their risk for STIs and HIV.

“...You get attached, you fall in love, and, therefore, you don’t think about diseases. You consider yourself to be in love, and if he

loves you, obviously he wouldn’t infect you” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several participants pointed out that young women may rank other needs above the risk for STIs and HIV infection.

“You think that there’s nothing you can do because you need money for cosmetics and shoes, so (shrugs)” (female, 15–19 years, Nairobi).

Several participants stated that young women deny their risk for infection or maintain a fatalistic attitude, arguing that there is nothing they can do to prevent infection with STIs/HIV.

“There are some who say, ‘Even if I die (of AIDS), I won’t be the first’” (female, 15–19 years, Meru).

Older men’s perceived risks

The majority of male participants agreed that of the risks associated with cross-generational relationships, men are most fearful of their wives discovering affairs, particularly if there is threat of divorce or separation. Other general risks included financial costs, pregnancy, and the moral decline of young women. Of the risks mentioned, STIs and HIV were given the lowest priority. Despite high levels of knowledge, some men still perceive young women to be less risky sexual partners than older women. Others continue pursuing young partners to satisfy sexual urges, while denying their risk or maintaining a fatalistic attitude about becoming infected.

Risk of discovery and disintegration of family

Most male participants agreed that when engaging in cross-generational relationships, men are most fearful of their wives discovering affairs. Once discovered, wives may leave, take children with them, and dissolve the family unit.

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When asked how men can mitigate risks associated with discovery of cross-generational relationships, many participants recommended that men end affairs and return to their family responsibilities. Others suggested that men give more attention to families while better hiding cross-generational relationships.

“(Men should) try and balance both sides — their family and the outside relationship” (male primary school teacher, 30 years, Kisumu).

A couple participants said that men can threaten wives with the possibility of taking younger partners as second wives if they make carrying on extramarital relationships too difficult.

“When the wife discovers (an affair), the man silences her by issuing threats, such as telling the wife that he’s taking the (young) lady as a co-wife” (male accountant, 34 years, Meru).

Financial constraints

Many participants spoke of financial costs associated with cross-generational relationships. Some participants explained that young partners may demand more finances than initially expected, causing men to finance extra expenditures through cuts in household budgets. These measures can affect the amount of money available to spend on children’s education, health care, food, and household goods.

“Relationships are expensive. They take away from the man’s family, making the spouse suffer” (male primary school teacher, 30 years, Kisumu).

Some participants reported that having insufficient funds to support young partners and families can be humiliating for men, placing a great deal of social pressure on them to demon-

strate their ability to provide for multiple partners. In addition, financial stress on families may aggravate men’s relationships with their wives and increase the likelihood of divorce or separation.

Pregnancy

Most participants spoke about the risk of unwanted pregnancy in cross-generational relationships. Despite some women’s assumption that older men are more likely than younger partners to provide financial support for children, many do not. Participants agreed that the burden of pregnancy rests primarily on women since men usually have children with their wives and are unwilling to support others. A couple participants mentioned that men may help pay for abortions, but that is the extent of their assistance.

“Men may help pregnant girls abort. They foot the medical bills” (male mechanic, 46 years, Meru).

Several participants reported that men try to avoid the risk of pregnancy by seeking moderately educated women who understand methods of prevention. According to them, some men believe that educated women are less likely than uneducated women to entrap men with unexpected pregnancies.

Moral decline

Some participants saw the participation of men in cross-generational relationships as contributing to the moral decline of young women and jeopardizing their future opportunities. They noted that if women are seen with married men or dating several older partners, it could ruin their reputation and compromise their chances of getting married. In addition, they believed that some women become disinterested in marriage following a series of cross-generational interests.

Other participants argued that women's educational and career opportunities can be jeopardized when they participate in cross-generational relationships. They stated that some young women become so accustomed to finances they receive from older partners that they lose interest in their studies, stop attending school, and forgo career opportunities. Some participants recognized that when cross-generational relationships end, some women might be left with few skills or resources to support themselves.

Some participants believed that cross-generational relationships have long-term ramifications and are responsible for a decline in family values and an increased number of children living in the streets.

"The (other) problem we have is family breakups and unwanted pregnancies, that sort of thing...not to mention how single parenthood contributes to society stresses. There are street children out there who were fathered by big shots" (male lawyer, 38 years, Nairobi).

STIs and HIV

Several participants stated that despite knowing about STIs and HIV, some men believe that young women pose less risk for infection than do older women. Men sometimes argue that young women are a low-risk group because they are "innocent," sexually inexperienced, or have not had many sexual partners.

"They believe they're the first person to have sexual activities with these ladies....(They believe) they're very tender [sexually inexperienced], and they can't transmit diseases" (male matatu tout, 35 years, Nairobi).

Some participants believed that many men deny their risk for infection and continue to

pursue young partners to satisfy their sexual urges. Others said that men are so anxious to have sex with young partners that they do not consider their risk for infection.

"They don't want to know (about risk for infection)...When you have a young lady there, when you see her and she starts talking sexily, then such thoughts don't cross your mind" (male, profession unknown, 38 years, Meru).

Several male participants noted that men with higher levels of education better understand risks for STIs and HIV infection. Some participants explained transmission flows between older men, young women, and their age-mates. Others spoke about the risk of infecting wives with infections acquired from younger partners, noting how this can serve as a deterrent for participating in cross-generational relationships.

"You could get venereal diseases. You could get AIDS, which is incurable...and you could transmit it back to your wife, and the chain (of infection) goes on and on" (male consultant, 44 years, Nairobi).

Participants pointed out that some men maintain a fatalistic attitude about the risk of STIs and HIV despite understanding the risk posed by cross-generational relationships. Several thought that men also resign themselves to becoming infected, believing that they have already led a full life and it is natural to die when you are older, even from AIDS.

"There are men who've made it in life. They've made a shilling and what they want is to spend (their money) and relieve some stress...so even if they die now, it doesn't matter because they have had the better part of their lives" (male journalist, 40 years, Nairobi).

Condom use

When asked about condom use, female and male participants agreed that use is low among cross-generational partners, largely due to low perception of risk for STIs/HIV. Several female and male participants spoke about the difficulty young women have negotiating condom use with older partners and men's reluctance to use condoms. Other comments reflected general obstacles surrounding use, such as the stigma associated with females buying and carrying condoms and men's and women's skepticism about the effectiveness of condoms in protecting individuals from STIs and HIV.

Most male and female participants agreed that condom use remains low in cross-generational relationships. For the most part, they attributed low levels of use to couples' misperception that cross-generational partners are at low risk for STIs and HIV infection. Other participants noted that even if condoms are used at the beginning of relationships, they are often abandoned after some time, usually after a few sexual encounters.

Several female and male participants explained that even if young women recognize the risk of participating in cross-generational relationships, they are often unable to negotiate condoms with their older partners. They reported that men are reluctant to wear condoms, often using their dominant position in relationships to insist on not using them. Some female participants explained that men sometimes accuse younger partners of not trusting them and threaten to abandon relationships if they insist on condom use. Rather than lose financial and social rewards accompanying cross-generational relationships, most women acquiesce and forgo use.

"The man sometimes doesn't want to use condoms...and if you don't want him to

send you away, you go without a condom" (female 15–19 years, Mombasa).

Most female and male participants said that men dislike condoms and believe that they reduce sexual pleasure. In their opinion, even if men acknowledged the risks associated with cross-generational relationships, they would most likely forgo use in order to sustain pleasure.

"I've heard about some (men) using condoms, but most of them don't use condoms because they say they can't 'chew a sweet in its wrapping' [obtain sexual pleasure]" (male banker, 38 years, Mombasa).

Some female participants spoke about the stigma associated with buying and carrying condoms. They explained that many young women are reluctant to buy condoms because it is difficult to be discreet, and shopkeepers sometimes berate them for being promiscuous. Female participants explained that condoms are associated with prostitution and carrying them can jeopardize young women's reputations. As a result, many women in FGDs believed men should carry and provide condoms.

"If you're a decent person, (shopkeepers) start asking you why you're buying (condoms) and then they go around talking about it" (female, 15–19 years, Mombasa).

Finally, several female and male participants reported that another reason that couples are reluctant to use condoms is their disbelief in condoms as an effective means of protection from STIs and HIV infection. They cited bursting and tearing as problems commonly related to condom use.



Conclusions

This study provides insight into cross-generational relationships in Kenya, men's and women's motivations for entering into relationships, their low levels of risk perception for STIs/HIV, and their reluctance to use condoms. Our study contributes new findings about young women's pursuit of older partners, how older partners do not fit a sugar daddy stereotype, peer group support for relationships, and men's emotional motivations for pursuing younger partners. Several programmatic strategies are offered for targeting young women and older men, including increasing their risk perception for STIs/HIV, and finding alternatives to participation in cross-generational relationships.

Cross-generational relationships are reportedly common in Kenya. When looking for partners, young women seek men who are willing to spend money on them, and men look for partners who are well mannered, need money, and possess certain physical attributes. Similar to Luke (2002), our research found that Kenyan men who pursue younger women do not fit a sugar daddy stereotype; rather, they come from a variety of social and professional backgrounds. This study demonstrated that young women do not perceive themselves as victims of older men but actively seek older partners who can provide them with luxuries and financial support. Even though some peer groups encourage cross-generational relationships, couples go to great lengths to ensure that wives, same-aged boyfriends, and disapproving parents do not discover them.

We found that young women's primary incentive for dating older partners is financial and material gain, whereas men seek younger partners for sexual gratification. Pressure from peers to "fit in" and from family members to secure financial assistance from older partners can compel women to engage in relationships. Like other studies, our research identified emotional motivations for young women's participation in cross-generational relationships, namely a desire to find surrogate parents, emotional fulfillment, mature partners, and supportive mentors (Meekers and Calvès 1997a). Moreover, we found that men, too, have emotional motivations for pursuing younger partners, such as regaining a sense of youth, escaping household pressures, and relieving stress. In addition, increased status among peers is a powerful social reward for participating in cross-generational relationships, and men use cultural tolerance to justify their pursuit of young women.

Cross-generational couples are preoccupied with generalized risks such as fear of discovery, pregnancy, economic hardship, and emotional abandonment rather than their personal risk for STIs and HIV infection. In general, young women perceive older men to be low-risk partners because they are not promiscuous and remain faithful to younger partners and wives. Men believe that young partners are low-risk because they are "innocent," lack sexual experience, and have not had many sexual partners.



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Our study, like others, revealed that low levels of risk perception are associated with little condom use among cross-generational couples (Sturdevant et al. 2001). Even when young women acknowledge the risk older partners pose for STIs and HIV infection, they have difficulty negotiating condom use, especially when partners use their dominant position in relationships to insist on not using them. Older men are reluctant to use condoms, citing such reasons as decreased pleasure and a general dislike for condoms. Other barriers to use are the stigma attached to young women buying and carrying condoms, and the perception that condoms are an ineffective form of protection against STIs/HIV.

The findings from this study suggest several programmatic opportunities for targeting young women and older men. Near-term options include developing behavior-change communication programs that educate women and men about the increased risk of

STIs/HIV associated with cross-generational relationships. Campaigns should encourage condom use and safer sexual practices within cross-generational relationships and teach young women condom negotiation skills with all types of partners. Programs could also use positive role models to encourage young women to seek safer alternatives to cross-generational relationships, discuss problems among peers, and increase their sense of self worth (PSI/Kenya). Role models for men could discourage them from pursuing younger partners and enticing them with money and gifts for sexual relationships. Role models could also suggest more appropriate methods for earning social rewards among peers than cultivating relationships with young partners. Long-term interventions include improving young women's access to educational and career opportunities, and working with communities to determine the best approach for changing social norms and the acceptability of cross-generational relationships.



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