

# **Gender differences among youth who have sex with wealthier partners in South Africa**

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## **Introduction**

Sex with a wealthier partner is associated with a material exchange of some sort. Research has recognized the large role transactional sex plays in the sexual behavior dynamics of youth (Maganja et al., 2007, Chatterji et al., 2005, Côté et al., 2004). Both poverty and consumerism are determinants of transactional sex with women exchanging sex for survival purposes as well as material gain (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003, Stoebenau et al., 2011). As such socioeconomic status is related to transactional sex with research showing that females who are of a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to engage in such relationships in the past (Swidler and Watkins, 2007). However, with increased consumerism through the media, research has also found that females, who are not classified as poor, engage in these relationships for additional benefits such as expensive clothing and alcohol (Zembe et al., 2013).

A substantial amount of research has focused on these relationships from the perspective of females being the ones to gain materialistically from wealthier men (Zembe et al., 2013, Dunkle et al., 2004, Hunter, 2002, Luke, 2003, Wojcicki, 2002). This has been for good reason since it has been found that generally females are more affected by poverty than males both in terms of income inequalities and employment opportunities which are skewed toward males (Fox, 2012). Also the health risks of females in transactional relationships are at substantial with them having a limited ability to negotiate safe- sex with their male partners (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003, Pettifor et al., 2004, Choi and Holroyd, 2007). With these noted vulnerabilities it is easy to understand why the research focus has been on females. However, in South Africa, the wealth of males and females is not largely unequal, especially among youth, with young females having unemployment rates of 39.5% and males 33.4% (Statistics SA, 2014). And these young males are exposed to the same bombardment of consumerism ideology as females with a high emphasis being placed on expensive goods such as clothes and cars. Therefore, young males

would also engage in sexual relations with wealthier partners. However, this particular aspect has not been well- researched in the South African setting (Dunkle et al., 2007, Dunkle et al., 2006). If females in these relationships are exposed to violence and a limited ability to negotiate safe sex, then by the same reasoning, young males would arguably be exposed to the same conditions. For this reason the gender differences and determinants of youth who engage in sexual relationships with wealthier partners are here studied.

### **Data and Methods**

The data used in this study is the 2008-2009 *Survey of HIV/AIDS in Higher Education in South Africa*. The purpose of this survey was to enable the higher education sector to understand the threat posed by the epidemic to its core mandate. This was done through determining, the prevalence and distribution of HIV and associated risk factors among the staff and students 21 at public, higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa (HEAIDS, 2010). Field work for the study was conducted between August 2008 and February 2009 (HEAIDS, 2010).

The study, run globally by the Higher Education HIV/AIDS programme (HEAIDS), is an HIV prevalence, knowledge, attitude, behaviour and practices (KABP) and risk assessment in the tertiary education sector of South Africa. The study team working in South Africa include the Department of Health, HEAIDS and Higher Education South Africa, with funding for the study coming from the European Union under the European Programme for Reconstruction Development. An overall sample of more than 25,000 respondents was targeted. To collect demographic, socioeconomic, behavioural and HEI-related data, self-administered surveys were used, and blood spots were obtained by finger prick. The HIV status of participants was determined by laboratory testing of dry blood spots (DBS).

The outcome variable is sex with a wealthier partner. This variable is derived from the question in the survey which asks respondents if their last sexual partner was just as wealthy (same), less wealthy or more wealthy than the respondent. Responses of *same* and *less wealthy* are grouped together (0) while the *more wealthy* responses are of interest to this study and coded as 1.

Control variables selected for the study include age and race of the respondent. Other variables such as the respondents perception of whether or not it is acceptable for students to have sex for money (agree/disagree); condom used at last sexual intercourse (yes/no); whether respondent lives with their parents (yes/no); if their most recent HIV test was positive (yes/no); number of concurrent sexual partners (one/ more than one) and age at first sexual intercourse are also included.

The analysis plan of this study follows the objective which is to examine the gender differences and determinants of youth who have sex with wealthier partners. To begin descriptive statistics of youth by whether or not their last sexual partner was wealthier than them or not is shown. Thereafter the association between gender, wealthier partners and other control variables is tested using a chi-square test for correlation. The work is ongoing and additional variables will still be added and more rigorous inferential tests will be done.

### **Preliminary Results**

By gender, Figure 1 shows that more males have same or less wealthy (93.24%) sexual partners than females (84.72%). However, females report more wealthier sexual partners at 15.28% than males at 6.67%.

The distribution of sexually active youth by the wealth status of their most recent partner is seen in Table 1. To begin, by age 56.14% of adolescents (15-19 years old) and 43.86% of older youth (20-24 years old) have had sexual intercourse with a wealthier partner. By race, more Blacks (74%) than any other racial group reported wealthier partners. Regarding youth perceptions about whether it is acceptable for students to have sex for money, only 2.41% agreed with the statement and of those 18 (N) reported having a wealthier sexual partner. For condom use at last sexual intercourse, 37.11% if those with a wealthier partner reported having used and condom and 62.89% reported not having used a condom. With regard to living arrangement almost 80% of the youth with a wealthier partner do not live with their parents. Further 8.51% of youth who tested HIV positive have wealthier sexual partners, while 20.27% of youth engaged in multiple sexual partnerships (more than one partner) also have wealthier

partners. Finally, age at first sex was categorized around the legal age for consent (16 years old) and Table 1 shows that 75.6% of youth whose first sexual experience was over the legal age ( $\geq 17$  years old) have recently had sexual intercourse with a wealthier partner.

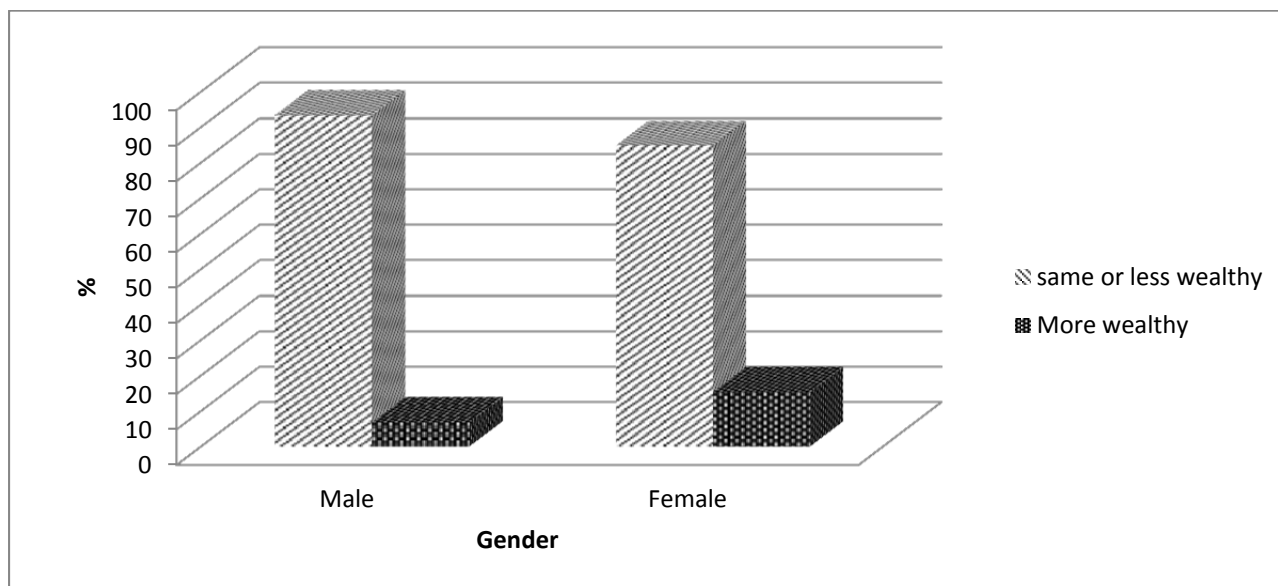
The correlation coefficients for all the variables in the study are seen in Table 2. By wealth status of most recent sexual partner, race, living with parents and HIV status are negatively or indirectly correlated. Sex, condom use at last sex, number of sexual partners, age, the perception of students being okay to have sex for money and age at first sex are all positively or directly correlated but the associations are weak.

### **Moving Forward**

The study is still ongoing. Additional variables to be included are province of institution, marital status and number of living children of the respondent as well as more perception variables about HIV and how it is spread. These additional variables will help to create a more holistic profile of wealthier sex partner practices among youth in South Africa. In addition, inferential statistics will be used to identify if sex, or any other respondent characteristics are determinants of wealthier sex partner practices.

So far the preliminary statistics show that more females have had sexual intercourse with a wealthier partner than males. Most respondents who engaged in sexual intercourse with an older partner did not use a condom and most of the youth who have sex with wealthier partners do not live with their parents.

## Appendix 1: Figures and Tables



**Figure 1: Percentage distribution of sexually active youth by gender and last sexual partner wealth status in South Africa, 2008.**

**Table 1: Distribution of youth population by the wealth status of their last sexual partner, South Africa, 2008**

Characteristics		Wealth status of sexual partner		
		same/less	more	Total
<b>Age group</b>				
15-19	N	15,212	1,553	16,765
	%	65.72	56.14	64.69
20-24	N	7,935	1,214	9,149
	%	34.28	43.86	35.31
Total	N	23,147	2,767	25,914
	%	100	100	100
<b>Race</b>				
Black	N	15,952	2,322	18,274
	%	66.64	74.12	67.51
Indian	N	531	0	531
	%	2.22	0	1.96

Coloured	N	5,321	694	6,016
	%	22.23	22.16	22.22
White	N	2,057	117	2,174
	%	8.6	3.72	8.03
Other	N	25	0	25
	%	0.1	0	0.09
multiple	N	51	0	51
	%	0.21	0	0.19
Total	N	23,938	3,133	27,071
	%	100	100	100
<b>It's okay to have sex for money</b>				
Agree	N	652	18	670
	%	2.64	0.59	2.41
Unsure	N	719	48	766
	%	2.91	1.55	2.76
Disagree	N	23,351	3,012	26,363
	%	94.46	97.86	94.83
Total	N	24,722	3,078	27,800
	%	100	100	100
<b>Condom used at last sex</b>				
Yes	N	12,642	1,154	13,796
	%	50.92	37.11	49.38
No	N	12,149	1,956	14,105
	%	48.93	62.89	50.48
Total	N	24,790	3,111	27,939
	%	100	100	100
<b>Live with parents</b>				
Yes	N	3,508	633	4,141
	%	14.25	20.17	14.92
No	N	21,101	2,506	23,606

	%	85.75	79.83	85.08
Total	N	24,608	3,139	27,747
	%	100	100	100
<b>Last HIV test was positive</b>				
Yes	N	1,865	240	2,105
	%	7.98	8.51	8.03
No	N	21,517	2,422	23,939
	%	92.02	85.9	91.36
Total	N	23,382	2,662	26,044
	%	100	100	100
<b>Number of sexual partners</b>				
1 partner	N	19,287	2,521	21,807
	%	77.59	79.73	77.83
more than 1 partner	N	5,571	641	6,212
	%	22.41	20.27	22.17
Total	N	24,858	3,162	28,020
	%	100	100	100
<b>Age at first sex</b>				
<=16	N	6,736	771	7,508
	%	27.19	24.4	26.87
>=17	N	18,040	2,390	20,430
	%	72.81	75.6	73.13
Total	N	24,776	3,162	27,938
	%	100	100	100

**Table 2: Correlation matrix of youth with engage in sexual intercourse with wealthier partners by youth characteristics, South Africa, 2008**

	Sex	Race	Live with parents	Condom used at last sex	Last HIV test was positive	Number of sexual partners	Age group	It's okay to have sex for money	Age at first sex	Wealth status
<b>Sex</b>	1									
<b>Race</b>	-0.0185	1								
<b>Live with parents</b>	-0.1014	-0.0302	1							
<b>Condom used at last sex</b>	0.0382	0.1987	0.0504	1						
<b>Last HIV test was positive</b>	-0.0225	0.0769	-0.0486	0.1907	1					
<b>Number of sexual partners</b>	-0.3132	-0.0979	0.0331	-0.0648	-0.0164	1				
<b>Age group</b>	-0.0800	0.0784	0.0167	0.0771	-0.0516	0.0233	1			
<b>It's okay to have sex for money</b>	0.0846	-0.0553	0.1518	-0.0787	-0.0059	-0.0778	0.0910	1		
<b>Age at first sex</b>	0.0798	0.0267	0.0841	-0.0636	0.0425	-0.1421	0.0021	0.1229	1	
<b>Wealth status of last sexual partner</b>	<b>0.1283</b>	<b>-0.0303</b>	<b>-0.0559</b>	<b>0.0431</b>	<b>-0.0326</b>	<b>0.0079</b>	<b>0.0165</b>	<b>0.0848</b>	<b>0.0224</b>	1



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