

Gender Differences in Correlates of Multiple Concurrent Sexual Partnerships in Namibia

Introduction

Southern African countries are still facing among the highest levels of HIV infection in the world. The prevalence rate in Namibia in 2008 was 17.8%¹ compared to 1% in most countries in the world. According to the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC)², multiple and concurrent sexual partnerships (MCP) between men and women along with inconsistent use of condoms are the key drivers of the rapid spread of HIV. Although nationally representative data on concurrency in Namibia have not been available until recently, several local studies have recorded high levels of concurrent partnerships. This study analyzes survey data from Namibia to identify gender differences in attitudinal factors and perceived norms associated with multiple sexual partnerships.

Objectives

The aims of this study is identify 1) the attitudinal factors and perceived norms that are associated with multiple sexual partnerships, and 2) to assess how these factors vary by gender.

Data and Methods

We use data from the 2011-2012 External Evaluation Survey of the Southern African Regional Social and Behavior Change Communication Programme in Namibia, which contains data on a nationally representative sample of 4,326 respondents aged 15-49. The survey was implemented by SIAPAC, under the auspices of Tulane University, Soul City and SAfAIDS.

We use bivariate and multivariate analyses to assess the extent to which attitudes toward multiple partnerships and perceived norms affect the likelihood that males and females report having multiple concurrent partners. Attitudes and perceived

¹ Sentinel Surveillance, Ministry of Health and Social Services, Republic of Namibia , 2008
<http://www.healthnet.org.na/statistics/2008%20HIV%20Sentinel%20brochure.pdf>

² Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partnerships in Southern Africa, Soul City Regional Program, 2008
<http://www.onelovesouthernafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/01/mcp-reportwith-cover-final.pdf>

norms are measured by means a series of questions that ask respondents to state their level of agreement with statements about sexual practices. For example, attitudes toward transactional sex are measured by asking respondents if they agreed that men can expect to receive sex in exchange for gifts. Similarly, perceived norms are measured by asking whether most married men are faithful to their wives, and whether community leaders discourage men from having multiple sexual partners.

Preliminary Bivariate Results

Overall, 27.9% of men and 5.9% of women reported currently practicing multiple sexual partnerships.

Among men, multiple sexual partnerships associated with cultural norms regarding monetary and material benefits from sexual relationships, social norms and self-efficacy about having more than one partner, risk-perception about getting infected with HIV, social support from the community about having/not having multiple partners, and level of satisfaction in sexual relationships. Risk perception has a strong association with multiple partnerships. Men who are worried about becoming infected with HIV are substantially more likely than other men to report having multiple partners (41.2% vs. 12.2%). It is also noteworthy that men who report being sexually dissatisfied with their spouse or regular partner are more likely than other men to report having multiple partners (29.3% vs. 13.6%). Men who believe multiple partnerships help fill the sexual gap in case of a relationship breakup are also much more likely to engage in multiple partnerships (34.6% vs. 24.3%).

By contrast, the analyses for females identified only one factor that had a significant association with multiple partnerships. That is, women who worry about HIV infection are less likely than other women to report having multiple partnerships (4.0% vs. 7.3%).

Conclusions

Multiple and Concurrent Sexual Partnership highly contributes to the spread of HIV in Namibia. As anticipated, men are much more likely than women to report having multiple sexual partners. Our preliminary analysis shows that the factors that affect multiple partnerships vary by gender. Consequently, there is a need for HIV prevention programs to design messages that address male attitudes and perceived norms toward multiple partnerships.

Table1. Correlates of multiple partnerships

Attitudes and Perceived Norms		Percentage who report having multiple partners			
		Males		Females	
		%	n	%	N
“Men can have sex for a gift”	yes	32.1*	611	6.9	641
	no	26.2*	1552	5.4	1507
“I can resist being unfaithful to a main sexual partner”	yes	24.9*	1379	5.9	1600
	no	33.4*	742	5.6	549
“Most married men are faithful to their wives”	yes	24.7*	648	5.1	771
	no	29.3*	1475	6.3	1381
“Men who have sex with many women are ‘real men’”	yes	21.5	214	8.0	187
	no	28.6	1908	5.7	1964
“I need someone else to fill the ‘sexual gap’ in case I break up with my main partner	yes	24.3*	1389	5.5	1401
	no	34.6*	734	6.5	750
“Worried about becoming infected with HIV”	yes	41.2*	1102	4.0*	897
	no	12.2*	951	7.3*	1185
“Likely to be infected with HIV”	yes	32.3*	353	5.1	1340
	no	27.3*	1721	7.0	625
“People in the community openly discuss about HIV risk if having multiple partners”	yes	28.2	1243	6.2	1185
	no	27.3	879	5.4	962
“Community leaders discourage married men from having multiple partners”	yes	31.1*	864	6.3	713
	no	25.5*	1248	5.7	1432
“Discussed HIV with spouses, kids and/or others in the community”	yes	27.3	1585	5.8	1759
	no	29.4	534	6.3	383
“Dissatisfied when having sex with spouse/regular partner”	yes	29.3*	41	3.1	160
	no	13.6*	485	2.4	410
Total		27.9	2124	5.9	2151

* statistically significant at $p < .05$