

TRANSACTIONAL SEX AND POLITICS OF THE BELLY AT TERTIARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN THE ERA OF HIV AND AIDS: A CASE STUDY OF GREAT ZIMBABWE UNIVERSITY AND MASVINGO POLYTECHNICAL COLLEGE

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ABSTRACT

Transactional relationships in most African countries have been rapidly increasing and have tended to be cross – generational in nature. The fundamental objective of this study was to investigate the factors behind student involvement in transactional sexual relationships. The study also sought to assess perceptions of people on this practice of transactional sex as well as examining the challenges that people in these relationships encounter especially the young partners. The researcher noted with concern the marked disparities in HIV and AIDS infection rates that come with transactional sex as well as the bias riddled in previous researchers’ conceptualization of this practice. This study thus demystifies this gender bias surrounding transactional sexual relationships. Research findings point to the fact that although the reasons behind students’ involvement in transactional relationships with older partners are varied and overlapping, money and other material benefits was the fundamental factor. Findings also point to the fact that women in such relationships are active agentic entrepreneurs who are not merely victims of their older partners. They exercised their agency by using their valued sexuality (erotic capital) to access commodities that conferred a certain status as well as for survival. The study adopted a purely qualitative methodology. Giddens Structuration thesis provided theoretical insights in understanding the phenomenon of transactional sex.

Keywords: Transactional Sex, Adolescence, HIV and AIDS, Livelihood Strategies

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Zimbabwe has been going through an economic downward spiral for the past decade owing to a multiplicity of reasons. Students at institutions of higher learning have likewise been caught up in this economic conundrum and their educational and livelihood endeavors have been trapped in a quagmire as a consequence of this socio–political and economic quandary. Masvawure (2010) and Bhatasara (2006) gave detailed accounts of how the privatization of education that ensued the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAP) impacted on the livelihood of University of Zimbabwe (UZ) students. They noted that such stance ushered in a plethora of challenges to the UZ students to such an extent that most of the students either dropped out of school or were reduced to lives of paupers and vagabonds on University campus. As a response to such myriad of livelihood and educational limitations, students adopted strategies that range from orthodox to unorthodox dealings for them to cope with such livelihood cataclysm. In light of the aforementioned argument, transactional sex relationships have gained momentum. Thus, due to economic adversities transactional sex has emerged as an alternative livelihood or

survival strategy among University and College students. These Universities and Colleges have thus been labeled as “hot spots” for transactional sex and by extension incubators for the spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. According to Moore, Biddlecam & Zulu (2004) the HIV and AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa has motivated, in large part, studies of the role of money and material gifts in sexual relationships because these exchanges may pressure young women, in particular, into sexual relationships with risky partners and into having sex without condoms. Transactional sex has been defined by Castle (1999) as the exchange of gifts, resources or money for sex and related sexual favors. Definitions of transactional sex have tended to be fluid, complex and amorphous, largely because transactional exchanges are customary between spouses. Schoepf (2004) noted that anecdotal evidence suggests that transactional sex is common among adolescents throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. Castle (1999) asserts that to begin protecting these young men and women from this heightened risk of HIV and AIDS; it is paramount that policy makers gain a better understanding of transactional sex among the youths. This is largely because the nature of the sex for money market has remained poorly understood, yet exchanging sex for money, goods and other services is a way of life and survival for many poor people in developing countries especially women. In light of studies reviewed, the researcher noted that in most literature pertaining to the subject matter there is a gender bias (Bhatasara, 2006; Masvawure, 2010; Wojcicki, 2002; Swidler & Watkins, 2007; Mensch, Bruce & Greene, 1998; Hunter, 2002) in the conceptualization of transactional sex relations. This research in contrast seeks to demystify and deconstruct such biased “*Meta analysis*” pertaining to transactional sex by adopting a holistic approach in understanding this practice and the experiences of those involved. Transactional sex is prevalent within many types of sexual relationships including long-term partnerships and even marriage (Swidler & Watkins, 2007; Luke, 2006; Hunter, 2002). According to Luke (2006), the underlying assumption supported by emerging empirical study is that sex with older men increases the female students’ risk of becoming infected with HIV. Thus transactional sex has been observed to have adverse ramifications on the spread of HIV and AIDS in the country in general and among students in particular. Although these students tend to provide sex less frequently, such a practice can actually be viewed as informal prostitution or subsistence sex work. According to Bhatasara (2006), poverty is the driving force, which compels these young women into the sex industry where they are exposed to HIV due to unprotected sexual encounters with older men. To her cross – generational unprotected sex is an indicator to the unequal power relations between economically insecure young women and rich older men. Madlala (2004) also noted that contemporary forms of sexual exchange are often inter-generational and are a means used by an increasing number of women to pursue images and ideals glorified by the media and globalization. In her arguments she portrays women as powerful and agentic as seen by how they assert themselves in order to exploit sexual relationships in the interests of new ‘needs’ like commodities of modernity. The researcher has observed that in the contemporary era there has been the emergence of a dialectic of ‘*commoditization of sex and sexification of commodities*’ leading to consumerism and hence such consumerist philosophy or ethic has compelled especially female students to engage in transactional sexual activities as a strategy of attaining such fancied and glorified commodities.

De Zalduando (1991) argued that the terms prostitution and commercial sex have commonly been used to describe sexual exchange that involves a pre-determined contract, usually a cash payment to a woman in most cases who then provide sex on a more or less professional basis. Transaction is associated with greater wealth of the older partner and a need or desire for monetary resources by the younger partners. According to Luke & Kurz (2004), female students in transactional relations are

less likely to insist on condom and contraceptive use because of tradition, lack of self – perceived risk of HIV while the other reason may be fear of disappointing their sponsors, since insisting on condom use may actually jeopardize their receipt of money and other related benefits. Several researches conducted in Sub – Saharan Africa unearthed the intricate interrelationship between risky sexual behavior, HIV and AIDS and cross – generational transactional sex (Swidler & Watkins, 2007; Luke, 2006; Hunter, 2002; Bhatasara, 2006). In this era of HIV and AIDS transactional sex has dire consequences for these young students since in most instances they are the weaker partners in these relationships. This is so because as highlighted by Luke & Kurz (2004) that in transactional relations, old age and economic status are resources held by older partners especially men that allow them more power in reproductive and sexual decision–making. Worse still, owing to the traditional cultural taboos that silence women and young people pertaining to discussion of sexuality and reproductive issues. It should also be noted that traditionally sexual potency has been regarded as a status marker, which ensued from the traditional desire for many wives and children. Thus as men become older, they continue to take pride in continuing to attract and marry younger wives, resulting in substantial age, power and economic asymmetries between partners (Gage & Bledsoe, 1994; Vos, 1994). Such trend has serious repercussions for the transmission and spread of HIV and AIDS. Moore, Biddlecam & Zulu (2004) noted that bride wealth was a way that gifts or money for sexual access changed hands in traditional African cultures, and with the disassociation of sex from marriage, even when sex occurs surreptitiously, gifts or money for sex may be the modern version of the financial validation of women’s sexual, and perhaps, personal worth.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many researchers who studied transactional sexual relationships (Masvawure, 2010; Machel, 2001; Hunter, 2002; Worjicki, 2002; & Bhatasara 2006) have tended to portray women in transactional relations as mere recipients of material benefits. It has also been noted that they conceptualized such sexual relations as merely the preserve of young women and old married men. This however turns a blind eye on the complex nature of transactional relations for example older women “*sugar mummies*” who are in the same practice with younger men. Thus, rather than focusing on the experiences of either women or men exclusively, this study adopts a holistic approach in understanding the lived experiences of young women and men in such relationships. The assumption that most of these researchers had like Masvawure (2010) was that material resources flow from the “*sugar daddy*”/men to their young girlfriends. This is however a problematic, and rather narrow conceptualization of transactional sex relations, since in some instances the reverse may actually be true. In this paper, the researcher therefore argues that the “*transactions*” that constitute transactional sex are amorphous and convoluted and hence involve much more than just a uni–directional flow of resources and benefits or merely being the preserve of older men and young women. The researcher further noted with great concern the marked increase of transactional sexual relations, especially by tertiary institutions students. With the skyrocketing infection rates of HIV and AIDS, these students become more vulnerable to the pandemic. It has also been noted that tertiary institution students are the most infected people in the country. This scenario thus poses a major development threat to the country since these teenagers are the prospective professionals who should actively participate in the development of the country, thus their being infected means they will become a liability rather than assets to the country. They are reduced to being merely consumers rather than producers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of this study are to explore factors that force students to enter into transactional sex relationships. The study also assessed peoples' perceptions on transactional sexual relationships (both those involved and others not involved). Moreover, the study also sought to examine challenges faced by people involved in such kind of relationships.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is mainly informed by the Structuration thesis of Anthony Giddens (1987), as well as the Livelihood Framework. Giddens (1987) conceptualizes individuals as knowledgeable reflexive agents who can justify their action and have the capability to act and react rationally to the problems confronting them. Agency involves the notion of 'practical consciousness' that is, "all the things that people know as social actors ..." (Giddens, 1987). Giddens (1987) views actors as reflexive strategically, calculating and innovative due to stimulus from external forces. In the process individuals possess the ability to change, influence and manipulate structures that hinder their livelihoods. Within the context of this research structure refers to the economic conditions that are constraining individuals from getting basic needs and wants such as food, tuition fees and modern gadgets respectively. HIV and AIDS can also be viewed as a structure since in some instances it shapes the behavior of actors involved in transactional sexual relations. These structures are outside the individual, hence they are considered as external forces that exert pressure on individuals to act. Agency refers to the ability in individual to manipulate and transcend these constraining structures. Thus, structures can be considered as both enabling and constraining to individuals, meaning that, the same mechanisms that prevent individuals from achieving some of their goals provide loopholes through which individuals can ultimately get what they desire. Sexual transactions thus become one of such loopholes that are manipulated by individuals for livelihood.

As Giddens, in Cassell (1993) notes, political, economic and social structures can constrain individuals from attaining '*ontological security*' (a psychological state that oneself needs to maintain which is equivalent to feeling at home with oneself and the world). Henceforth, ontological security is the attainment of those things, which guarantees the existence of an individual. Giddens (1984) argues that there is a duality and dialectical relationship between structure and agency, that is, while there are structural constraints that impose themselves over individuals; those very same individuals are capable of manipulating structures to get what they want. People are not passive victims of circumstances or their poverty, but they strategize to overcome such limitations posed by the structure. People engage in transactional sex for a multiplicity of reasons and only through interviewing them can one establish the reasons why they have entered into such relationships. Giddens (1984) notes that the capacity to express reasons for one's action is one aspect of agency, this entails what Giddens (1987) called '*discursive consciousness*', that conscious reason which people give to explain their behavior and motivation for engaging in such practices. This is useful in trying to solicit the exact reasons behind an increasing number of people entering into transactional relationships.

Livelihood Conceptual Framework was also utilized to complement the Structuration thesis in this study. Carney (1998) defines livelihood as comprising 'the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living'. To Long (2001)

livelihoods entails ‘ practices by which individuals and groups strive to make a living, meet their consumption necessities, cope with adversities and uncertainties, and engage in new opportunities.’ Transactional relations thus have enabled most students to eke out a living and complete their education, which they could have otherwise not done. In constructing their livelihoods people’s behavior is not merely determined by cultural and social structures, instead people actively engage as social actors constantly seeking to improve their lives (Long; 2001). It should be noted that people must not be seen as passive victims of adverse circumstance, but instead as strategists in the quest of preserving a certain livelihood level (Chambers; 1993). The livelihoods approach acknowledges the fact that people may respond differently to similar structural constrain, hence it becomes useful to establish reasons behind why certain students engage in transactional relations because social action is context specific. The strength of Structuration and Livelihoods approach lies in that both approaches link social practice of human agency with structural constrains. According to Muzvidziwa (2005), livelihoods are both individually and collectively constructed, issues of social networks of social actors are of paramount significance in understanding how people mediate access to partners.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology adopted in this study is purely qualitative in nature, with unstructured interviews being used as the major data collection technique. This methodology was ideal since the researcher’s desire was to capture voices, attitudes, perceptions and narratives of respondents’ experiences of economic and political constraints to their livelihoods and how they react to such constraints with particular emphasis being on transactional sexual relations. In this study prominence was given to qualitative research methodology due to its exploratory nature and its capacity to penetrate the frames of meaning with which transactional relationships are perceived. It should be noted that qualitative research embraces descriptions, which are consistent with the perspectives of the participants in that social activity, and has the ability to capture processual activities. Secondary sources of data were also important in this study in corroborating the data obtained through in–depth interviews. A total of fifteen female students were chosen for interviews, of which ten of them were said to be involved in transactional sex relationships when the study was carried out. The remaining five had close friends who had transactional sex relationships; actually one of these played a significant role in introducing the researcher to the first informant who had this kind of relationship. Eight male students were also interviewed, of which three of them were said to be in transactional relationships while the other five were facilitating and mediating these relationships, especially between female students and wealthy old men. Seven other informants were selected for interviews, although they never had transactional relationships but had something to say pertaining to the subject under study. Having been introduced by their close friends, the researcher managed to establish rapport and trust of the informants. Informants were drawn from Great Zimbabwe University students and Masvingo Polytechnic College. Students were assured the confidence and privacy of their responses and identity. Thus, pseudonyms are used instead of actual names. Participation in this study was purely voluntary. In selecting actual respondents snowball sampling technique was used by the researcher. This technique entails a situation whereby the researcher was introduced to one student who had a transactional sex relationship. That first informant then introduced the researcher to the next interviewee in an accumulating manner. Snowballing was chosen since it was very difficult to identify informants who were involved in transactional relationships. Thus more informants could only be obtained through the use of snowball sampling technique.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section serves to present and discuss the findings obtained from the ethnographic fieldwork done by the researcher, thus data presentation and analysis is done simultaneously in this section. Findings of this study are also related to previous research done pertaining to the subject under study, noting areas of continuities or similarities and disjuncture in conclusions arrived at by previous researchers vis-a-vis those of this research.

Politics of gift – giving and power dynamics in Transactional sex relationships

It emerged from the research that by and large “*sugar daddies*” are overwhelmingly in control of the conditions of sexual encounters, including condom and contraceptive use as well as the threat of violence. Most female students noted that they are living in fear of violence from their elder partners. This is mainly because most of the sugar daddies tended to be extremely possessive and hence do not tolerate seeing their girlfriends with anyone of the opposite sex, even if he is a classmate or friend. This concurs with Luke & Kurz (2004) who argued that age and economic asymmetries between older partners and younger ones on top of the gender power differences limit especially female students’ power to negotiate safer sexual behaviors. The fact that older partners in most cases provide material resources and gifts, young partners tend to have depleted bargaining and negotiating power with regards to sexuality and reproduction. Thus the power relations between actors in transactional sex are fundamentally imbalanced, with the one bringing resources being the patron, while the recipient becomes the client in some kind of patron–clientship relationship. In this study the flow of resources was not always as uni-directional as Masvawure (2010) purports. In fact, some female students admitted that they have at some point in time been providing their boyfriends with material benefits in times of shocks and adversities.

Due to power dynamics in these transactional relationships, young women and men admitted to being less able to decide the timing and conditions of sex. One respondent argued that it becomes extremely challenging for these young and vulnerable students to negotiate for condom use in sexual encounters because of their relatively powerless position as compared to their older partners. It is thus from such unprotected sexual encounters that these young students are exposed or even infected with the deadly HIV and AIDS. This concurs with Longfield’s (2002) arguments that women tend to have little if any negotiating power, hence they tend to experience a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as HIV and AIDS. As Selikow, Zulu & Cedras (2002) argued, there is a need to go beyond the pervasive understanding that strongly links gender power relations to the near-total oppression of woman, a shortcoming of most scholarly deliberations on gender and HIV and AIDS. Thus in such a scenario Foucault’s (1979) theory of power as being more nuanced than a one-way hierarchical relationship between dominant and subordinate is a more helpful approach when analyzing women’s agency in sexual exchange practices (Madlala, 2004). From the interviews conducted most female informants argued that some of their partners are exploitative and hence sometimes they are beaten on top of being exposed to STIs and other related diseases such as HIV and AIDS. Young women in “*survival sex*” are disempowered during sexual encounters because of their desperate situation and lack of economic capital. Luke’s & Kurz (2004) study of an economic threshold for engaging in sex without a condom is evidence that girls are active agents in this sexual negotiation. In a further testament to girls’ voluntary participation in unions that provide gifts and money, girls have been found to terminate the relationship if gift-giving ends,

although most of them acknowledged that this is very difficult. Evidence also shows that receiving a gift does not guarantee a man sexual access. Nyanzi, Pool & Kinsman (2001) found out that girls in Uganda are able to delay relations and thereby increase the size and frequency of gifts, possibly never coming through with the expected sexual intercourse. In Uganda “*Detoothing*” was very prevalent. “*Detoothing*” is a Ugandan term used by girls to mean getting as much financial reward from a man while successfully eluding sex. In this study this strategy was also very much prevalent and this could be seen as the capacity of girls to exercise their rationally calculative agency. Such a situation led the researcher to appreciate what he termed “*erotic capital*”, where female students accrued benefits from their valued sexuality. In this case female sexuality was thus used as a resource for attaining gifts, money and other material benefits. Owing to that, it was observed that there emerged what the researcher termed “*pure relationships*” where the ties that bind partners in such transactional relationships are solely the product of gifts and material benefits brought to the relationship. This concurs with Meekers & Calves (1997) who argued that sexual connections are a strategy women use in Cameroon to increase their access to resources. However, the underlying fact is that as long as students accept gifts from their older partners they are more likely to succumb to their sexual demands. One female informant said; “*If he asks me to have sex with him I would surely comply, I can not refuse because I would be ashamed of all the things he has done for me*”. This kind of scenario meant that sex can be viewed in quid pro quo terms: something was given and so the gift must be repaid, in this case with exclusive sexual favors from the young partner.

The transactional sex – HIV and AIDS nexus

Basing on accounts narrated by informants during interviews, all the respondents were very much aware and knowledgeable about the potential risks of transactional sex. Despite their knowledge about the risks of being involved in transactional sex, most of the informants noted that were not willing to give up their relationships because they are deriving a lot on material benefits from such relationships. Madlala (2004) noted that in the case where the relationship was more lucrative to the woman involved, she would be more inclined to ‘*take a chance*’ for the sake of maintaining the relationship. In this study it also emerged that some female students may actually be more likely to have unprotected sex with their wealthy “*sugar daddies*” so that they can get pregnant or because such partners are more attractive and responsible. One of my female respondents said; “*Madhara anochengeta uye havanetsi*” (these old men takes good care of us and are more responsible)

Bhatasara (2006) argued that at the University of Zimbabwe, young women were not able to negotiate condom use in sexual encounters with sugar daddies despite the fact that these young women are relatively highly educated and are expected to make sexual decisions based on their knowledge of HIV and AIDS. These young women constrained by economic hardships, engage in transactional sex, and it is from these unprotected sexual encounters that they are exposed to HIV. This is a dialectic, whereby young and educated women and men are rendered powerless. It has also been observed that most of the old partners do not prefer using protection during sexual encounters with young female students, the arguments here being that condom use reduces the pleasure of sexual encounters.

One young female respondent said: “*Madhara acho anonetsera kuti haadi kushandisa protection vanotoda nyoro chaiyo*” (the problem with these old men is that they do not want to use protection).

Given such a scenario, the final decision pertaining to condom use rested in the hands of the old male partner. Owing to the fact that traditionally condom use has been associated with lack of trust between partners, most young students do not even insist on use of condoms due to the fear that they may disappoint their partners and thus jeopardize the flow of resources accruing to them. It also emerged from the study that most young students were extremely afraid of contracting the deadly HIV and AIDS. It is however paradoxical to note that to some female students multiple relationships with wealthy older men was not seen as an engine driving the spread of the disease but instead they viewed it as a way of adding some flair and value to their lives. This kind of attitude however is fatal in this era of HIV and AIDS since these multiple-partnership sexual encounters increases their vulnerability to the disease. Luke & Kurz (2004) argued that age-mixing in sexual relationships between older men and young girls accounts for the marked disparities of HIV infection rates between adolescent boys and girls. This is so because older men often have higher rates of HIV infection than adolescent university boys. One respondent noted that if a girl was to accept a gift just before sex in transactional relationships, then that is tantamount to the fact that she has just denied herself the right to ask for condom use in that sexual encounter. Thus gifts and money exchanges is more of a barrier to safe sexual practices. These findings are consistent with Luke & Kurz (2004) who argued that for young women in transactional relationships, financial rewards take precedence over fears of pregnancy or infection with STIs including HIV.

Unintended Consequences of Intended Actions

Giddens (1984) argued that human history is created by intentional activities even though it may not be an intended project. Henceforth, it has been observed that all intended actions tend to have unintended consequences what can be termed a “backlash” that emerges in the production and reproduction of any social system. In this case students confronted with livelihood limitations strategize by engaging in transactional sex relationships for them to deal with their problems. However, such practices may actually come with unintended consequences, for example, transactional sex is supposed to ameliorate these students’ problems but in some instances it has exacerbated these problems. This can be seen when students are infected with STIs and HIV, having unwanted pregnancies, abortion, and exposure to violence and abortion. Thus despite the fact that the intention of most students entering into such relationships is survival, subsistence and consumption, most of these students have actually found themselves on the receiving end of the backlash of their own livelihood strategies. Some students gave examples of colleagues who entered into transactional relationships with the belief that it was only temporary but ended up being hired as second or third wives. In this study it also emerged that some female students in transactional relationships have been attacked by wives of their old married boyfriends. Some female informants acknowledged that they enter into transactional relationships with no intention of getting married or impregnated by these married old partners. This was because most of them knew fully well that the old guys they are dating are married, thus they tended to consider immediate benefits of such a relationship rather than the future. It is paradoxical that most female students were skeptical about entering into polygamous marriages or being second wives, yet they continued to date these married old partners. This may point to the fact that most of them will not even be willing to be pregnant, hence in the event of pregnancy or being infected by HIV to the research this becomes more of unintended consequences riddled in this practice. This was evident in one female respondent’s statement that: *“not in a million years will I ever want to be a second wife, this is just short term and*

if I get pregnant I will abort and there are no two ways about that, if I get infected then tuff luck but I need money for me to survive and look good”.

This clearly shows that most students are caught in between a hard surface and a rock when it comes to the consequences that come with being involved in transactional relationships. This is so because some of them derive a lot of benefits from such relationships yet they are afraid of being infected with HIV and AIDS or being impregnated.

Grappling with factors influencing transactional sex among students in tertiary Institutions

It was observed through interviews and narratives given by informants that although the reasons and factors behind students’ engaging in transactional sexual relationships with older men and women are varied and overlapping, money and other material benefits formed fundamental reasons. Selikow, Zulu & Cedras (2002) noted that a combination of poverty with the current materialist and or consumerist culture underpinned the wide prevalence of women’s engagement in transactional relationships for conspicuous consumption.

One female informant said: *“I cannot date my fellow male students at University because they can not afford the things I want”*

It is thus salient to note that the stiff competition typical of modern lifestyles characteristic of University life is pushing many young students both male and female into some kind of transactional relationships. It has been observed that young university students have appropriated the Western images of lifestyle where womanliness and manliness is constructed by exuding *“bling bling”* on campus - an element of being flashy. One female student blatantly highlighted this by saying; *“It is very difficult to maintain the type of lifestyle being imbibed by university students with just one boyfriend, thus maintaining relationships with more than one partner becomes an ideal fashionable norm”*

Madlala (2004) argued that it was the expectation of women for their boyfriends to demonstrate their appreciation for having enjoyed the women’s sexual favors by sharing their material resources. It is from such a scenario that the researcher argues that with the commoditization of sex emerged the belief that sex is an expensive resource which should not be given free of charge. In this case students can thus be seen to be exercising their agency in that they have realized that their sexuality is such a valued resource hence they utilize this resource to extract money and other material benefits from older partners in exchange of sexual favors. It also emerged that as a quest of maximizing benefits accruing to them from such relationships, most students would simultaneously engage multiple partners. One female informant actually summed up this argument by saying: *“Gone are the days when sex used to be offered for free and this is why we prefer these old buddies who can pay us handsomely”*

Female students unanimously concurred that older men are ideal because of their better ability to provide material gifts and resources to their young girlfriends. These female students noted that they expect high-prestige food items like trendy clothes, being taken out for lunch at five star hotels and restaurants, expensive jewelry and other gadgets linked to modern lifestyle. The researcher observed that such commodities are actually symbolic to the girl’s worthy at university. Young girls

likewise would also quench men's interests hence there is some element of reciprocity in these transactional relationships. Narrating her story, one female student argued that she had totally different kind of clothes. Those clothes that she wears at college are not taken back home on vacation because of the Christian background of her family. She said: *"My parents do not know that I dress like this but you how it is these days, so when we close for vacation I leave these clothes at a friend's place so that I will not be in trouble with my parents"*.

She further noted that it's all about moving on with fashion and standing up to your peers on campus. Most male respondents argued that university students, especially female students are so obsessed with these so – called *"labels"* and luxuries and because of the stiff competition and peer pressure among them they can do anything to access these glorified modern gadgets, even if it means having unprotected sex with a wealthy HIV positive men. Thus, it emerged from the interviews that peer pressure to obtain luxury goods and items such as expensive clothing, fashionable hairstyles and accessories like jewelry and latest cellphones motivates these young students to engage in transactional sexual relationships with older people who tend to shower them with such items. This gives credence conclusions made by Moris & Mirjam (1997) that pressure from fellow female students compel most young girls to partake in transactional sexual relationships with older men who shower them with a plethora of goodies.

It has also been observed that while poverty may not be the overriding factor leading young male and female university students into exchanging sexual favors for money and other gifts. Adverse economic challenges have been one of the leading factors forcing these students into engaging in transactional sex. One male respondent argued that the dollarization of the economy has not helped the situation either since most students at Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo Polytechnic are children of peasant farmers and civil servants who are currently getting meager salaries as compared to the money needed to adequately fund university education. It was observed that currently both Great Zimbabwe and Polytechnic students are required to pay US \$100 for accommodation and are required to purchase meals for US \$1 per meal on a daily basis. It is even worse for Great Zimbabwe university students who are also required to pay US \$420 for tuition, yet most of their parents are earning a paltry US \$150 per month. Thus, such a predicament has precipitated a situation whereby many students struggle to cater for their subsistence needs for the whole semester. In this case engaging in transactional relationships becomes one lucrative option for these students. However, due to their economic insecurity, these young students tended to have no control over their bodies and negotiating for safer sexual encounters with their old partners. Such a situation further exposes them to several sexually transmitted infections including HIV and AIDS. Given such challenges, most students enter into transactional relationships to get funds to cover education related expenses and also to gain connections in social networks as well as complimenting their pocket money. There were also isolated cases where some informants argued that parental pressure has also been one of the factors behind some of their colleagues' engagement in transactional relationships. One respondent argued that sometimes when parents seek to obtain funds and other luxuries as well as household necessities they may indirectly compel their children to engage in transactional relationships. This was however found to be more prevalent in female headed or single parent headed households. This line of argument concurs with conclusions made by (Ankomah, 1998; Bledsoe, 1990; as well as Nyanzi, Pool & Kinsman, 2001). It also emerged that some students engage in these relationships as a strategy to enhance their life chances through education or work opportunities. Luke & Kurz (2004)

argued that motivations for financial rewards tend to be complex, ranging from economic survival to desire for status and possessions. Thus it is extremely difficult to clearly pin down the real reasons or forces behind students' involvement in transactional relationships since most of the reasons and factors tend to overlap. However, there seems to be a direct and positive correlation between students' socio – economic status and the probability of them engaging in transactional relationships. This trend has serious ramifications for transmission and spread of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe. Hunter (2002) also concurred that the association between sex and gifts is a central factor driving multiple – partnered sexual transactions and supporting a particular masculine and feminine construction that drove the HIV and AIDS pandemic in most African countries.

Great Zimbabwe University female students and Masvingo Polytechnic apprenticeship male students

The relationship between Great Zimbabwe University and Masvingo polytechnic male students is characterized by fierce competition and conflicts. This animosity and conflicts largely emanate from competition for dating female students. Some elements of transactional sex have also been observed even between the students themselves, especially between male Polytechnic apprentice students and female Great Zimbabwe students. These apprenticeship students are well resourced because they receive monthly allowances from their companies whilst at school. Thus; these male apprenticeship students are more from attractive to female students. In this case some male informants argued that apprentice students have an edge over their University male counterparts who are not receiving any grants and allowances. One male student from Great Zimbabwe University stated; *“These Polytechnic apprentice guys take advantage of their cash allowances to date University girls, but we also date their Polytechnic girls because we can not just sit back and watch them take all the girls”*

It was observed that Polytechnic apprentice male students had a tendency of spoiling both their girlfriends and prospective girlfriends by buying them luxuries, taking them to trendy restaurants such as *“Chicken Inn”* and *“Food Express”* as well as buying them other presents in clothing and cosmetics. Such a stance made them ideal boyfriends for these female students. The researcher also observed that most male students with resources affirm their masculinities by dating the most beautiful female students on campus as well as dating as many girls as possible. To them this was an indication that they have adequate resources to splash out to the highly-demanding beautiful girls. Beautiful female students were on high demand both in and outside campus; hence boys would compete with each other for sexual favors from these girls even if it means having to give them almost all their pocket money or monthly allowances. Likewise, female students would also compete to date the well – resourced guys on campus and hence would affirm their femininities by having latest post – modern gadgets like latest hairstyles, latest cellphones, trendy clothing and expensive cosmetics. In this study it was observed that a real woman would embrace all these post-modern commodities, date the richest guys in and outside campus, wear expensive clothes and hairstyles as well as not eating campus food especially from the dining hall. Some female students would take pride in spending the whole semester without eating on campus or changing their hairstyle on weekly basis. One female student cemented this by noting that; *“Ever since I came here I have never eaten anything on campus, my friends and I normally go out for lunch and supper because I can not eat such junk, I would rather eat my cereals if I am broke”*

Some students however questioned the sustainability of relationships between Polytechnic guys and University girls, highlighting that University girls just want money from these apprenticeship students. To them most relationships between Polytechnic boys and University girls were not long lasting and normally end when female university students graduate and leave university. This is not however always the case, since the researcher observed from narratives given by informants that some University girls got married to Polytechnic male apprenticeship students. Henceforth, this dismisses the assumption that transactional sexual interactions are the preserve of older partners with younger ones since in this study transactional sex was seen to be also prevalent within age-mates as long as one partner had the capacity to cater for the needs of the other. In this case most Polytechnic apprenticeship students would date girls in and outside campus because they were well – resourced with monthly allowances being paid to them. With this money, apprentice students could afford to do as much as the old “*sugar daddies*” do to their girlfriends. Most informants were largely negative in their perceptions towards especially cross-generational transactional sex. Female students were described as being strategic about sex and money in the relationships they entered into with both older men and age-mates although love was understood to obfuscate an interest in money (Moore, Biddlecam & Zulu, 2004). Some female students were said to be having at least two sexual partners, one at campus and another one outside. Normally the outsider would cater for almost all the expenses of the female student since most of them were old and well – resourced. It also emerged that the campus boyfriend would also indirectly benefit from the resources provided by the old off-campus boyfriend, although obviously so sometimes.

Critical Positionality of research findings Vis-a-vis existing literature

In this study it was observed that a number of male students were said to have some kind of transactional relationships with relatively older women although such cases were not as pronounced as those of young female students and older men. Voluminous literature pertaining to this subject matter in Africa has tended to adopt a simplistic approach of conceptualizing the practice of transactional sex. Masvawure (2010) concurs that this practice has been solely linked to economic survival. Masvawure noted that transactional sex is the preserve of older men and younger women. The point that she missed however is that not only young female students enter into transactional relations with older men, in fact even older women can and have also entered into such relationships with younger men for a plethora of reasons, survival and subsistence being some of the many reasons. Paradoxically, while Masvawure (2010) refutes the brutal fact that young women enter into transactional relationships for subsistence and survival, she went on to acknowledge that female students from lower-middle class background used transactional sex to attain elusive modern lifestyles, while those from upper – middle class background used it to maintain an already privileged class position. Her analysis thus seems to be inherently self-contradictory because her finding blatantly collapses with what she purports to refute and run away from. This is because maintaining one’s class position through engaging in transactional sex is tantamount to a survival strategy. The assumption here is that without getting into such a relationship the young woman’s security is tumultuous and thus would be thrown into tatters. It should also be noted that in her analysis of transactional sex, implicitly she portrayed it as a ladder for upward mobility, where she argued; “lower – middle class women manipulated transactional sex to attain an otherwise elusive modern lifestyle”. How then does Masvawure (2010) claim that survival and subsistence are insignificant reasons behind peoples’ engaging in transactional sex? The researcher thus is of the view that Masvawure (2010) is merely refuting the position upon which her analysis of transactional sex is built. In this study several of the informants gave economic challenges as the fundamental

reason behind their involvement in transactional sex. One respondent actually stated that; *“It is better to be infected with AIDS and take ARVs from now than to starve to death at the moment”*.

The point that she was making was that she is mainly concerned with daily survival not what the future holds. Thus, it is against this background that poverty can be portrayed as one of the fundamental factors that compel students to enter into transactional relations. One Great Zimbabwe University female student argued that it is very difficult to raise enough money for tuition, accommodation and food in just one month because of the short vacations as a result of the *“crush semester programmes”*, she further noted that in most cases she and many other students have no choice but to come back to college without any pocket money. Given such a precarious financial position, most female students are compelled to engage in transactional sex due to such economic hardships. Thus the researchers’ conclusion concurs with Hunter (2002) and Schoepf (2004) who noted that young women and men may have transactional sex relations with multiple partners or develop a sexual network for financial support and income security. It also emerged in this study that social networks (*social capital*), which *encapsulates linkages between various actors regardless of the nature of their motivations*, is of paramount significance. In this study, social networks of social actors, be it students or the older partners, was the engine in as far as creating and recreating transactional relationships is concerned over time and space. Machel (2001) noted that money and sex are the fundamental objects that are exchanged in transactional sex. The researcher observed that the inherent problematic assumption riddled in Masvawure (2010) (Hunter 2002 & Worjicki 2002) is that the transfer of material benefits and gifts flow exclusively from men to younger women. Henceforth, from the researchers’ view point this kind of analysis is as porous as it is general, in that reality has it that sometimes resources may actually flow from women to men in such transactional relationships. Swidler & Watkins (2006) argued that these relationships are actually part of broader systems of interdependence that characterize African societies. Thus, rather than portraying women as merely *“clients”* and men as *“patrons”* in transactional relationships is a mystification of reality. While it is common knowledge that due to power dynamics riddled within these relationships, most men always seek dominance by showering their girlfriends with gifts but it is not always the case. This relates to one of the researchers’ female informant who noted that she has been providing resources and gifts to her relatively older partner because she comes from an affluent family. This gives credence to the arguments made by Caldwell, Caldwell & Quiggin (1989) who noted that young girls from affluent families sometimes shower their older partners with gifts as opposed to being passive recipients of material and non – material benefits from older men.

Hunter (2002) separated sex that was linked to subsistence for which poverty was portrayed as the key factor and sex linked to consumption for which poverty was said not to be a key factor. While this may be true, the brutal fact that Hunters (2002) and Masvawure obfuscate and miss is that poverty is a fiercely complex phenomenon, which exists in some form of continuum ranging from absolute to relative. Thus, sex linked to subsistence maybe adopted by those in absolute poverty, while sex linked to consumption maybe adopted by those in transitory or relative poverty. The naked truth here is that transactional sex is adopted for survival since the motivation driving these people into transactional sex is some kind of inadequacy or poverty, which may be either absolute or relative. Masvawure (2010) and Bhatasara (2006) assert that women in transactional sex are motivated by the desire for conspicuous consumption. The truth of the matter however is that

conspicuous consumption and subsistence consumption tend to overlap and are thus difficult to separate. Thus, what maybe conspicuous consumption to one person may actually be subsistence for the next person. Hence, what maybe conspicuous consumption for Masvawure (2010) and Bhatasara (2006) may actually be subsistence to other people depending on class, context and consumption levels of the people concerned. Moreso, Bhatasara was biased in her analysis of transactional sex in portraying women as passive victims or recipients of the HIV virus from their male counterparts. Findings in this study contradict her conclusions that men infect their female partners (wives), in fact men, both young and old, in some cases have also been victims of their promiscuous female partners. Thus, these scholars provided a half-baked and narrow analysis of transactional sex as well as experiences of actors involved in such relationships. While it is true that male and female students who are mere recipients of gifts and material benefits from their older partners are relatively vulnerable, it is equally important to acknowledge that these students are not passive victims of the dictates of their older sponsors. In this study these young students have been observed to be rationally calculative and agentic since they negotiate relationship formation and continuance, for instance, they can choose the types and number of partners they have and can even pull out of the relationship if the costs outweigh the benefits or in the event of gifts being ceased, although this may be a difficult stance. This confirms the arguments made by Silberschmidt & Rasch (2001) who argued that sugar daddies are not always on top of the situation in transactional relationships but can actually dance to the tune of their young partners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion respondents highlighted that most students enter into transactional relationships for both basics such as food or clothes as well as luxuries such as jewelry and cosmetics. This study also unearthed that money, gifts and other material benefits place young students at a higher risk of being infected with HIV as well as unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortions by lowering their likelihood of using protection in such sexual relationships. Traditionally, transactional sex has frequently been conflated with having sex with “*sugar daddies*”, with gifts flowing uni-directionally from these sugar daddies to young women. Findings from this study however observed that transactional sex is more complex than it has been portrayed since “*sugar mummies*” are also involved in these transactions and the flow of gifts and resources is more reciprocal even though women tend to receive more material benefits than men. In this research it also emerged that being a recipient of money and gifts in these relationships is not as disempowering as it has traditionally been portrayed, instead young students were seen to be exercising their agency by accruing benefits from their valued sexuality. There was a disjuncture between male and female students perceptions with regards to their transactional sex and the gifts that come with this practice. Most male students argued that girls have become so material and obsessed with luxuries and hence they are motivated to enter into transactional relationships for material benefits and money. Female students on the other hand noted that gifts are just a demonstration of their partners love and commitment to them as well as appreciating their worth. Most male students noted that girls always ask for money if you are dating them, while female students acknowledged receiving money from their boyfriends albeit asking for it. It was also observed that transactional relationships also existed between the students themselves rather than being merely the preserve of older partners and younger ones, it also occurred among age-mates. Transactional relationships have been seen to be the engine driving the spread of HIV and AIDS.

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