

UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO SAFE SEX IN LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIPS IN AN EASTERN CAPE RURAL SETTING

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STUDY BACKGROUND

- Despite a growing awareness of the HIV epidemic and the availability of preventative measures, people continue to get infected.
- People in long-term relationships are at a greater risk of infection because they tend to use condoms less as they become more committed to one another.
- This study set out to understand barriers to safe sex for people in long-term steady relationships, living in a rural area in South Africa.
- This study also investigated whether these barriers to safe sex place these men and women at a higher risk of infection.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the barriers that prevent men and women in a South African rural area from engaging in safe sex practices in steady long-term relationships?
- How does age, gender, or marriage affect the practice of safe sex?
- Do men and women in long-term relationships view themselves as being at a risk of HIV infection or not? And why?

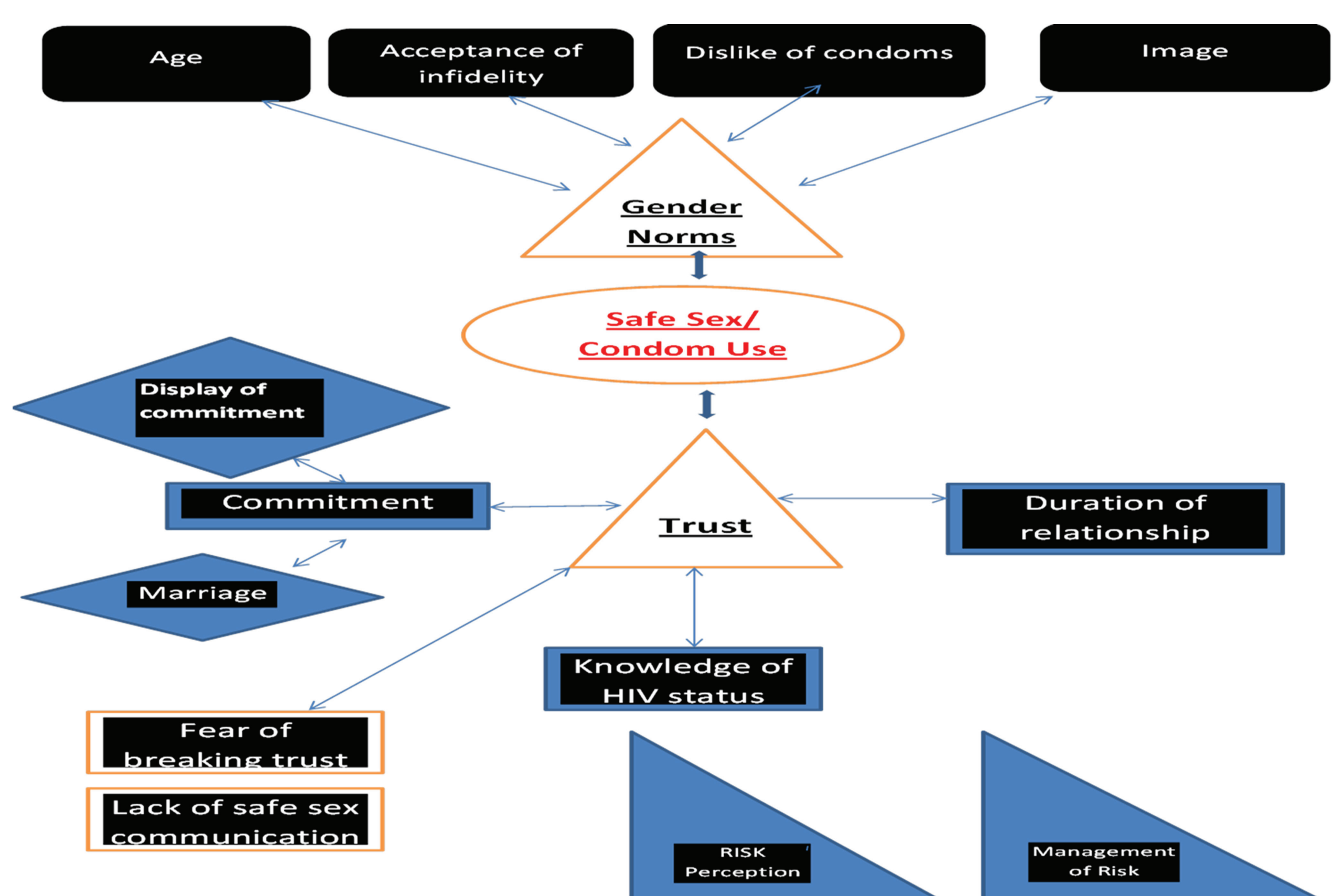
METHODOLOGY

- Qualitative research design.
- 12 female participants and 12 male participants aged between 18 and 60 years were sampled for individual interviews.
- Another 24 participants, 12 females and 12 males aged between 18 and 60, were sampled for FG discussions.

SAMPLE AND DATA ANALYSIS

- Sample:
 - All participants were in long-term relationships.
 - Definition of 'long-term' = 6 months.
- Data analysis techniques
 - Thematic content analysis was performed on all data.
 - We used a sex script theoretical framework and discourse approach for analysis.

PUTTING RESULTS INTO CONTEXT



BARRIERS TO SAFE SEX

Theme	Extract example	Interview type
The duration of the relationship	No at the moment we do not use one [condom] but it is because we have been together for years so I also figured well we can just do it [have sex without a condom]	M, age 38. Individual interview
Marriage and commitment	People who are married must have sex [sex without a condom] because they were allowed to by God, when God was speaking in the book of Genesis telling them to procreate	F, age 45-60. FG
Display of commitment	[He would say] I was not born into using these plastics. I'd say no condoms are number one... You will talk until you give up. It will be like you do not love that person.	F, age 35-45. Individual interview
Knowledge about the couples' HIV status	This one [his current girlfriend] showed me her results as well so I also decided to go[and] I found that I was negative...I figured that I could stop using protection and that we could just do it but when I am with someone else I use protection.	M, age 26-34. Individual interview

Theme	Extract example	Interview type
Lack of safe sex communication	No we don't really talk about it. I [mean we] just speak about it generally, no we do not. When we want to have sex it's a matter of just saying may we please have sex.	F, age 26 -34. Individual interview
Age	Like most in a relationship it's difficult for both of us to be the leaders. If maybe in my character I would like to be a leader, then I want a girl who is going to listen to me. I date older people, so that if I don't know anything she will teach me like the child that I am.	M, age 18 -25. FG
The acceptance of male infidelity	You cannot eat samp all the time, all these years you're eating the same thing; you will never look to one side like you're an axe man.	M, age 18 -25. FG

Theme	Extract example	Interview type
Dislike of condoms/ Responses to condom use	You don't feel the pleasure and you feel him about to climax and you are not yet about to climax. And you get dry, when he puts on a condom. I don't know about that. I was not raised up to that, people using plastics.	F, age 18 -25.FG F, age 45-60. Individual interview
Image	The ones who always carry condoms are the ones who give away with their bodies	F, age 26-34. Individual interview



RISK PERCEPTION

- Perception of risk is tied to suspicion of infidelity.
- **Example: extract from female FG. Ages 46-60.**
"married people today do not trust each other. Now you need to protect yourself. Because we find that even though we say they are married they have other people that they are with, whom they are not married to. So you find that you do need to protect yourself." (73 P4)

SCRIPTS

- **Trust related scripts**
 - Sex shows love and commitment
 - A trusted partner is a safe partner
 - Condom use not a norm in marriage
- **Gender related scripts**
 - Men are biologically programmed to need sex regularly, with more than one woman
 - Men are expected to be sexually active (sexual experts)
 - Sex should be pleasurable

CONCLUSION

- People in long-term relationships are at a risk of HIV infection due to a number of barriers to safe sex. The barriers to safe sex are socially constructed and influenced by dominant discourses.
- The presence or absence of trust mediated whether or not there was a need for additional protective measures such as condom use.
- Negotiating for condom use in these relationships is problematic as it challenges the idea of trust.
- Interventions seeking to promote sexual safety in long-term relationships will have to take into consideration the complexities and diverse nature of these relationships.