

Intergenerational / Age-Disparate Sex and Young Women's Vulnerability in Southern Africa



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Social science that makes a difference



Working Definitions

Intergenerational sex: A sexual partnership between a young woman (15-24 yrs) and a man of 10 or more years older.

Because heightened vulnerability is indicated in young women who report partnerships where there is an age gap larger than 5 years, the term **age-disparate sex** is more useful as a conceptual tool.

What is the problem?

Age differences between partners is associated with safe sex practices and risk of HIV

- Gregson et al.,2002 (Zimbabwe): Young women routinely form partnerships with men 5-10 years older, and larger age disparities with most recent partners were a significant predictor of HIV infection status.
- Shisana et al.,2005 (S.A.): Girls 15-24 in relationships with men of 5 yrs.+ older had HIV prevalence of 29.5%, compared to 19.3% among women with a partner within 5 year age range.
- Langeni, 2007(Botswana): 8000 men, odds of having had unprotected sex increased by 28% for every year's increase in age difference.

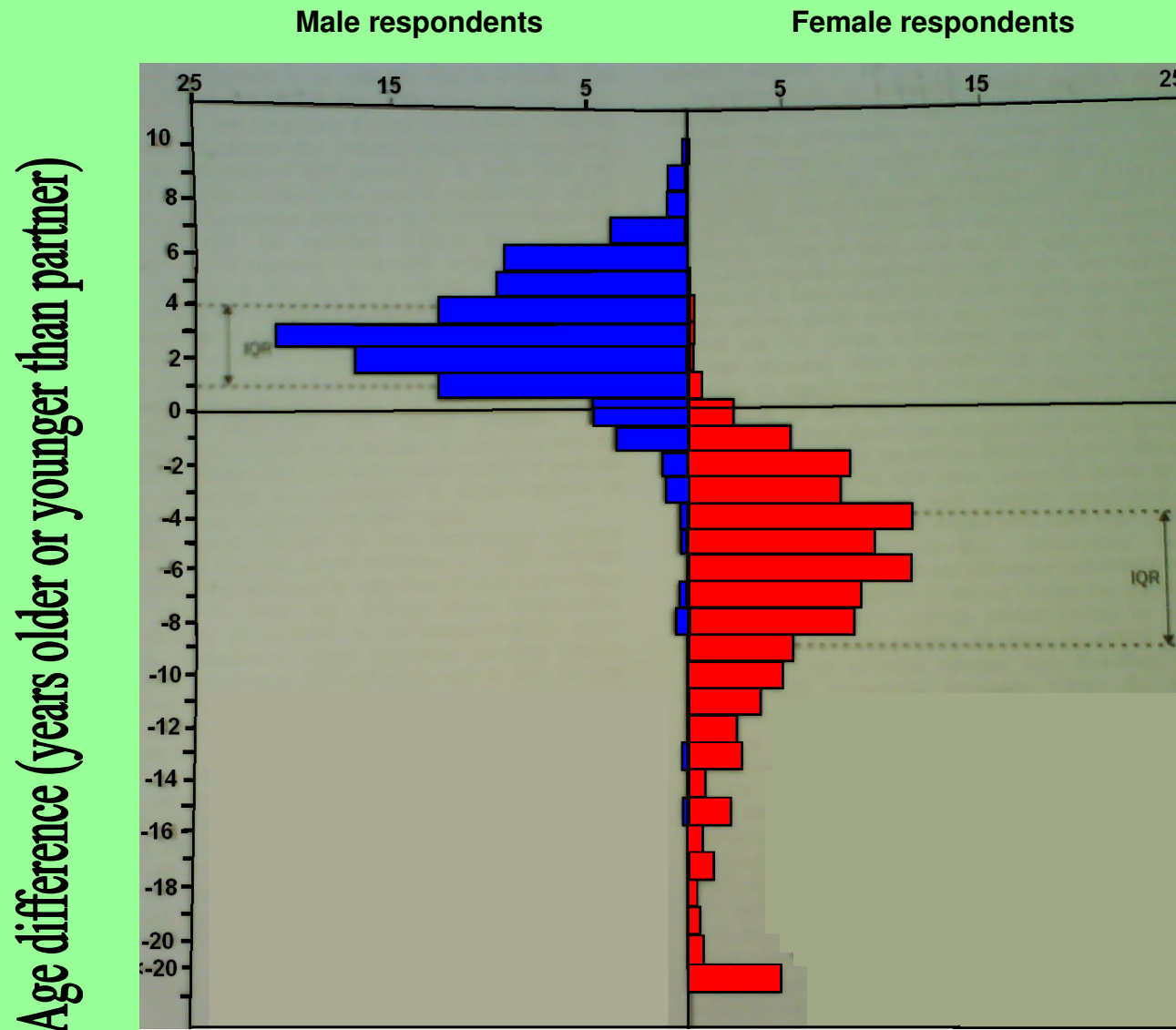
What is the extent of age-disparate sexual relationships in the region?

There is a need for more regional survey studies. Many countries do not have available reliable sex & age-disaggregated national data on sexual behaviour & HIV prevalence

Recent smaller scale studies reveal:

- 10% of Gaborone schoolgirls aged 15-18 yrs (N=600) currently in an intergenerational partnership, and 25% had ever been (Nkosana & Rosenthal 2007).
- 45% of Durban tertiary women 18-25 yrs (N=200) had ever been or were in (Khwela & Leclerc-Madlala forthcoming).

Age difference between respondent (17-24 yrs) and most recent sexual partner N=4429



From Gregson S, et al. (2002) Sexual mixing patterns and sex-differentials in teenage exposure to HIV infection in rural Zimbabwe. *Lancet*, 359:1896-1903

Age-disparate relationships have been the model for marriage throughout southern Africa

They are an institutionalised form of sexual partnering

Within marriage

- Encouraged by family
- Sometimes forced
- Consequence of polygyny
- Consequence of wife inheritance
- Always public, socially accepted

Outside marriage

- Sometimes encouraged by family
- Often coercive
- Often covert and quasi-condoned

Outside marriage these relationships occupy a 'grey zone' of social legitimacy that may reflect competing value systems, but are accepted by many parts of society.

What does the evidence tell us about age-disparate relationships?

1. ADR are part of a sexual system that includes multiple concurrent partnerships, high levels of gender-based violence, & transactional sex.
2. While economic transfer/reciprocity is a normative expectation in most all sexual relationships, financial gain is a dominant feature in ADR and a major motivating factor for young women's involvement.
3. While many young women are prey to the sexual coercions of older men, many are also active in seeking/exploiting partners for gain. The latter do not perceive themselves to be victims and often report being 'in control'.
4. Studies indicate a significant & negative association between the age disparity of partners & likelihood of safer sex.

Continued....

5. Studies indicate a significant & negative association between the value of the transfer and likelihood of safe sex.
6. While there is a significant & negative association between the economic disparity & likelihood of safe sex, wealthier men more likely to use condoms (but also likely to have more partners).
7. Use of the stereotypical term 'sugar daddy' is misleading.
 - * Men in ADR can be rich or poor
 - * 'Sweet mammas' seem to be on the rise
 - * Same-sex ADR are not uncommon & especially high-risk
8. Globalisation, the expansion of economies and urbanisation is influencing young women's aspirations & expectations. For many ADR provide an available & easy way to meet growing desires.
9. Considerable benefits that obtain from ADR often cause young women to disregard the risk of HIV. '*Maximising the moment*' (Mozam. age 17). Major reported fears are pregnancy or being 'found out'.

What are the temptations of age-disparate relationships?

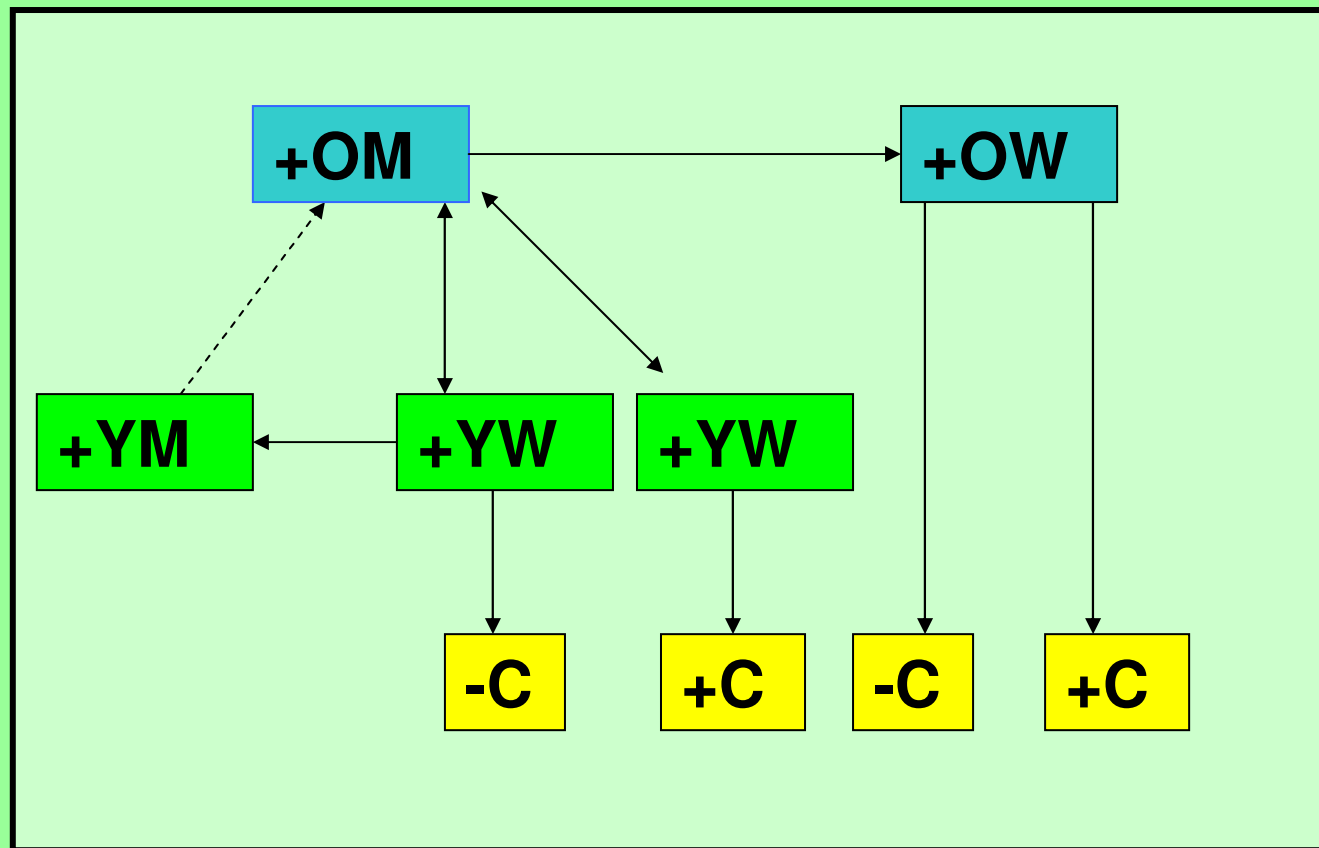
These relationships are often socially & emotionally meaningful:

For a man: a way to affirm his self-worth, restore his pride & manhood, demonstrate generosity, express love/appreciation, socially validates manhood, **asserts and establishes power & authority in relationship.**

For a woman: affirms her value, an expression of love/appreciation, boost self-esteem & social status, builds social networks & capital, gains materially, **promotes dependency and vulnerability.**

(an approach-avoidance conundrum for women)

A common intergenerational HIV transmission cycle in an established epidemic



What is the economic cost of maintaining non-marital sexual relationships?

- Kisumu men's (N=2700) average giving was 9% of monthly wages (Luke 2006).
 - * 7% for relatively wealthy men
 - * 15% for poorer men

What are young women's motivations for age-disparate relationships ?

Financial gain is the # 1 reported motivation. Beyond providing for the possibility of finding love, affection, marriage or companionship...

- **Vulnerable victims--** report hunger, pressure or coercion (by peers, man, family) manipulation, pressure to obey and show 'respect', need for protection, employment.
- **Active agents--** boast of 'taking charge', 'milking the cow', seeking fun, adventure or opportunities to make contacts among 'sponsors'/ 'investors'/ 'ministers' for present or future social mobility.

Urban-Rural distinctions:

- **Urban--** fashion clothing, cellphones, jewelry, desires consistent with urban lifestyle/glamour & entertainment.
Rural-- food, school fees, clothing, cosmetics, needs consistent with rural poverty and ways to escape it.

What are men's motivations for age-disparate partnerships?

Few studies have closely examined men's involvement in these relationships. Those that have report:

- need for variety/entertainment/ relief from stress or boredom
- desire for 'clean' partners
- desire for sexual rejuvenation
- desire to socially demonstrate manhood & social worth
- manipulation/reaction to being challenged
- some see themselves as victims of young women's seductions & social expectations

Communitarian values confer a social/ethical obligation on men with means to help people, including women, in need. Conceding to or offering sex is one way for women to show gratitude for that help (sometimes referred to as 'bottom currency').

"As a man's wealth increases so does his sexual access and social expectations of sexual access increase." (Swidler & Watkins 2007)

Age-disparate relationships can flourish in places where:

- >Men are in positions to assist women*
- >Women are economically disadvantaged*
- >There are no strong social taboos against age-differences in relations*
- >Culture prescribes for reciprocity/exchange in sex*
- >Needs, wants, aspirations & expectations of young women are growing*

What can be done?

- There is little overall awareness of the dangers in age-disparate relationships. Great need for raising awareness of young women's high HIV infection rates, and need for awareness of special risks involved in age-disparate relationships.
- Many young women associate using/exploiting men with being clever. Programmes need to alert girls that their efforts to manipulate gender power imbalances do not change imbalances. It puts them at risk.
- Efforts to keep girls in school & economically empower young women need to be ongoing & expanded.

- Onus of responsibility in sex is largely on women. Men need to become real partners, **ESPECIALLY** in regard to age-disparate relationships.
 - >programmes to cultivate supportive male peer norms & values where men are made to recognise that age-disparate sex represents an abuse of power & status need to be greatly expanded.
- Because relationships with wide age-disparities are largely covert & primarily transactional, when given a public face are apt to be labeled 'prostitution'. Interrogating the covertness may be a step towards challenging these relationships.
- Are there any advantages to safer sex practices? (ie.mutual fidelity/ partner reduction, age-symmetric relationships?) ***Let's hear about them, please!***
 - > less exposure to STIs & HIV,
 - > less costly, less stress due to deception,
 - > more time for other things,
 - > help to building trust & partner fidelity in primary relationships
 - > etc..

The bridge that moved HIV from one generation to the next in the early phases of the regional epidemic has become a two-lane highway moving HIV between generations

Burning this bridge is essential for an “HIV/AIDS-free generation”

In the short-term, we need effective roadblocks at each end

Thank you