

A qualitative analysis of the sexual behavior and HIV risk of older Ugandans

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Background

Little is known about sexual behavior and HIV risk for men and women ages 50+, as data are typically collected only for adults aged 15-49.

The 2004/05 Uganda HIV/AIDS Sero-Behavioural Survey collected data for men and women aged 50-59 and found that adults aged 50-59 were similar to adults aged 15-49 in HIV prevalence and rates of sexual activity.

HIV prevalence in Uganda

	National	Mukono District
Males 15-49	5.1%	5.3%
Males 50-59	6.5%	5.1%
Females 15-49	7.2%	7.4%
Females 50-59	5.2%	6.2%

Sexual behavior among Ugandans

	had sex in past 4 weeks	had 2+ partners in past year
Males 15-49	52.2%	29.3%
Males 50-59	74.7%	17.8%
Females 15-49	52.7%	3.8%
Females 50-59	40.2%	0.8%

Multiple partners, including multiple concurrent partners, are recognized as a risk factor for HIV acquisition. Multiple partnerships among older Ugandans, particularly men, is therefore of concern.

Ugandans aged 50-59 are still at risk of HIV acquisition, and should not be forgotten in HIV prevention efforts.

Far from being in their last years of life, Ugandans who reach the age of 50 years have a remaining life expectancy of **25.6 years** (women) and **23.2 years** (men).

Methods

This study used qualitative methods to explore the sexual behavior and HIV risk of Ugandans aged 50 and above in urban and rural regions of Mukono District. Four single-gender "community conversations", with several dozen participants each, were held to investigate how older Ugandans perceived their health, including their sexual health.

These were followed by in-depth interviews with 12 men and 8 women, in order to explore in a more confidential setting questions of sexual behavior, motivations for sexual relationships (marital and extramarital), gender roles and power within relationships, and HIV risk. Interviews were done in English or local languages.

Results

Many men and women who are still living with spouses or partners report being sexually active, although dissatisfaction with sexual lives is common. Women are more likely to be widowed and to no longer be sexually active.

Lack of sexual satisfaction within marriage is seen as being the primary motivator for seeking additional partners.

Reasons for lack of satisfaction included:

• Boredom or need for variety, especially among men

The reason for getting another partner is lack of satisfaction or the husband is not able to perform the sexual act. (Female, 59)

Main reason for more than one sexual partner is boredom. (Male, 55)

• Lack of privacy, especially due to children or grandchildren living in the home

Would want to have [sex] more often but have to wait for the children to go to bed... sometimes we are too tired to wait! My husband has no problem. We have a good time. (Female, 61)

I would want to have it more often but with grandchildren around, you worry and do not get the urge to do so... cannot enjoy sex in this situation. (Male, 66)

• Women losing interest in sex, or not initiating. Women were divided on whether or not it was appropriate to initiate sex, but all men said that they would like wives to initiate.

I have sex regularly with my wife, twice a week. Would wish it to be more spontaneous and playful and not a routine activity. (Male, 55)

Last had sex over a year ago. Want to have it weekly but spouse says she does not feel like it. Cannot force her. I have stayed faithful. (Male, 65)

[Spouses] sometimes refuse when we are in need. This forces us to go elsewhere. (Male, 64)

• Other problems or discord in the relationship

The need for other sexual partners may arise when you do not look after the husband well... If all attention is diverted to the children instead of the husband, this may drive him away. (Female, 64)

If one's needs are not met, you are encouraged to find comfort outside the marriage. When the man comes back home, the woman is not happy, she quarrels, it takes away the mood. (Male, 75)

The way you perform the sexual act makes a lot of difference to your partner. Even the way you treat her. (Male, 60)

Other motivators for multi-partner or risky sex include:

• Alcohol use

Drinking for both men and women can lead them to get [AIDS]... [you] may not know who you have slept with. (Female, 59)

• "Addiction" to sex. It is believed that certain men and women have an "addiction" to sex with multiple partners. This condition (called "embangalazi" for men and "akasiyi" for women) is well-recognized. Some people are just promiscuous ("benzi")... they cannot be satisfied by one person! (Female, 61)

• Financial interests

Married women with money get other men if not satisfied at home. Women with poor husbands also get enticed by men with money. (Male, 64)

Conclusions

Older Ugandans, particularly men, are at risk of sexual behaviors (such as multiple concurrent partnerships) that can spread HIV. HIV prevention strategies can address these risky behaviors by aiming to increase sexual satisfaction within marriage. Older Ugandans also expressed that they had a role to play in training younger Ugandans.

We all know that sex is the main problem. If the number of women is reduced, we shall stop [AIDS]. (Male, 64)

Older women are too shy... we should improve the sex game by training. We have tactics which can excite a man beyond measure. (Female, 57)

One of the big problems is satisfaction with sexual partner. We should have exchange of older people to talk to the young people. Sengas (aunties) are not enough. Men should be involved. (Male, 64)

Young people will listen to us. First [we must] put our houses in order. (Male, 60)