# Transactional Sex among Adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa amid the HIV Epidemic

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## Introduction

Worldwide, half of all new cases of HIV infection occur among young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years and it is estimated that on each day over 6,000 such people acquire HIV (UNAIDS 2004). Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst-affected region accounting for almost two-thirds of the estimated 6.2 million infected young people in 2003 (UNAIDS 2004). Among the youth who are infected, about 75% are female (UNAIDS 2004). Unintended pregnancy is also a major reproductive health problem among young people in Sub-Saharan Africa (Henry and Fayorsey 2002). Therefore, it is obvious that the sexual behavior of this population is of great public health concern.

To gain insight into the risk and protective factors that either place adolescents at risk of HIV and unprotected sex or provide resiliency to them in a risky environment, it is critical to gain an understanding of the context of adolescents' sexual relationships. One of the more recently identified aspects of adolescents' relationships is transactional sex. Transactional sex is sex either directly or indirectly in exchange for material support, be that support for survival such as food or shelter or support for luxury goods such as cell phones or cosmetics. The financial provider in this type of exchange relationship has frequently been described as a "sugar daddy or mummy." Yet this exchange is also taking place among peers (Moore et al. 2005). Because it is transactional, the voluntariness of the act falls into a grey area.

Transactional sex has increasingly been drawing the attention of reproductive health researchers due to its connection to demographic and health outcomes including exposure to HIV. Using a set of qualitative and quantitative data collected in 2003-2004 in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi, and Uganda with 12-19 year olds, we examine:

- The prevalence of transactional sex experiences at debut and at last sex among males and females;
- The circumstances under which transactional sexual experiences take place; and
- Social vulnerability to transactional intercourse.

# Methodology

Data for the study are derived from three sources involving adolescents: national surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). The data were collected in four countries in Sub-Saharan Africa—Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda—with the objective of collecting information on young people that will contribute to our understanding of adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues.

# Nationally Representative Surveys

A nationally-representative household survey on adolescent sexual and reproductive health was conducted in 2004 among 12-19 year old males and females in each of the four study countries And the number of completed interviews was 5,950 in Burkina Faso, 4,252 in Ghana, 4,012 in Malawi, and 5,065 in Uganda. A two-stage stratified sample design was used: district and household. All 12-19 year old de facto residents in a household were eligible for participation. The instrument was pretested, modified accordingly, and then translated into the appropriate languages for each of the four countries and then the translation was pretested again before the instrument was finalized. On average, each interview lasted approximately 55 minutes.

The dependent variable of interest for the analysis of transactional sex at sexual debut is, "What was the main reason you first had sexual intercourse with this person?" with the relevant response being "Expectation of gifts/money." The dependent variable of interest for the analysis of last sex is, "have you received anything from this person [last sex partner], such as money, gifts or something else, so you would have sexual intercourse with (him/her)?" with the relevant response being "Yes." The key independent variables that describe the context of transactional sex are relationship with first/last sex partner (boyfriend, husband (for first sex only), and casual acquaintance); willingness at sexual debut (for first sex only) (very willing, somewhat willing and not willing at all); use of family planning (condom only, condom and other method, no condom but other method and no method); and age difference with first/last sex partner (partner is 5-9 years older, and partner is 10+ years older than respondent). Control variables are age at time of interview (12-14 years of age, 15-17 years of age and 18-19 years of age); place of residence (urban/rural). Multivariate analyses are conducted separately for each country and sex.

### Focus Group Discussions

A total of 55 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in 2003 with female and male 14-19-year-olds in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda. In Burkina Faso, the urban FGDs took place in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso and the rural FGDs took place in Bazega province. In Ghana, the urban FGDs were conducted in Accra, the capital, for out-of-school youths and in Kumasi for those who were in school. For the rural FGDs, out-of-school youths were recruited from Tolon/Kumbungu, and in-school youths were selected in West Mamprusi. In Malawi, FGDs were conducted in urban Blantyre City and in rural Mchinji district. In Uganda, the FGDs took place in the urban areas of Kampala district, the capital, and Mbarara town, and in rural areas in Mbarara district.

Discussions were conducted with homogenous groups sex and were segregated according to urban or rural residence and school status (in or out of school). In Malawi and Uganda, there were also groups of married or single mothers. In Burkina Faso and Ghana, the discussions were further divided by age (14–16 and 17–19). Each country team used the same discussion guideline, translated into the appropriate language. Each FGD had 8–12 participants and lasted an average of 2–2.5 hours. The discussions were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated from local languages into English and, in the case of Burkina Faso, into French. Each country had research teams who served as moderators, note takers and research assistants.

### In-Depth Interviews

The goals of the in-depth interviews were to collect data that would complement national information and which examine the "whys" that lie behind adolescents' behaviors. Approximately 102 in-depth interviewers were conducted with 12-19-year-olds in each of the four study countries and consisted of the same sub-groups as in the FGDs: in- and

out-of-school adolescents, urban and rural locations. In addition, interviews were conducted among young people in specific groups that were considered to be at higher than average risk: young married women, women with children, refugees (Ghana and Uganda) and petty traders. The interviewers were the same sex as the respondent, they took place in a neutral location, and they lasted between 30 minutes to 2.5 hours. The discussions were tape-recorded, transcribed and translated from local languages into English and, in the case of Burkina Faso, into French.

#### Analysis approach

The FGD and IDI transcripts were coded using N6 qualitative software (QSR International, Doncaster, Australia). Each focus group was treated as a unit of analysis for the FGD component of the study and the individual was treated as a unit of analysis for the IDIs. Analyses were done according to substantive themes by urban or rural residence and school status. The IDIs contained a number of other special groups who were analyzed separately as well: married females, females with children, street children, and petty traders. Summary matrices were used to derive common themes, which were compared by at least two members of the study team with the summary matrices to ensure that any one analyst's subjective biases did not determine the conclusions.

### Findings

### Bivariate Analysis

The survey results show that a small proportion of individuals, predominantly females, were motivated to have sex at sexual debut out of the expectation of gifts or money (Table 1). In Ghana and Uganda, around 11% of females 12-19 said this was the main reason they had sex with their first sex partner. Among males in Burkina Faso and Uganda, the proportions were all less than 0.5% of males saying that expectations of gifts or money was the main reason they had sex with their first sex partner with zero percent of Malawian and Ghanaian males saying that that was their main reason for having sex.

Among unmarried respondents who had had sex in the last 12 months with a partner who was not their first sex partner, with Burkina Faso an outlier, three-fourths of females had received gifts or money for sex from their last sex partners (Table 1). Burkina Faso's sample is unique in that a much larger proportion of the adolescents were married than in the other three countries (data not shown). In addition, there were much lower proportions of transactional sex there compared to the other three countries. In Burkina Faso, one-third of unmarried females had received gifts or money for sex from their last sex partners for having sex. The proportion overall for males is much lower than it is for females with transactional sex at last sex being most common among the male adolescents in Uganda (32%), followed by Ghana (28%), Malawi (8%) and Burkina Faso (5%).

For girls, the most common item to receive in exchange for last sex with the respondents' last sexual partner was money (around 95% across all four countries) followed by clothes (ranging across countries from between 33% and 62%) (see Table 2). Girls in Burkina Faso, Malawi and Uganda were more like to receive jewelry/cosmetics than food. Only in Ghana did more girls receive food than jewelry/cosmetics. The items that boys received

in exchange for sex demonstrate an entirely different pattern. (The responses for Malawi and Ghana should be treated with caution as the total number of males who received money or gifts was between 25-49.) While money was the most common gift received by boys in Ghana and Uganda, a much lower proportion of boys received money for sex compared to girls (39% in Malawi, 47% in Uganda and 53% in Ghana). Food was much more frequently received for sex among boys than among girls: around 40% in Malawi and Ghana and 26% in Uganda. Thirty percent of Ugandan males received other items for sex while 28% of males in Ghana and Malawi received clothes. (In Burkina Faso, fewer than 25 males who had received money or gifts for sex.)

In Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, among sexually active adolescents who said that expectations of gifts or money at first sex was the main reason they had sex, for females, boyfriends were the most common partner (see Table 3). Across these three countries, there is not a consistent relationship between willingness to have sex at sexual debut and the expectation of money/gifts being the primary motivation to have sexual intercourse; i.e. willingness did not decrease if gifts/money were the main reason for having sex. This could be because money/gifts influenced individuals' willingness; i.e. if they had not been expecting money/gifts, they would have been less willing than they were because they were anticipating receiving money/gifts. Use of family planning and the age difference with the respondents' partners also did not seem to be correlated with whether gifts or money were received.

Overall, a much higher proportion of adolescents reported having received money or a gift from their last sexual partner to have sex than had expected gifts/money at sexual debut (see Table 4). This question was only asked if the last sexual partner was not the respondents' spouse. Again, Burkina Faso remains an outlier—which could have to do with the fact that such a large proportion of the adolescents were married in comparison to the other three countries. For 15-17 year old females in Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, over 70% reported having received gifts or money from their last sexual partner to have sexual intercourse. That proportion is over 80% for 18-19 year old females in Malawi and Uganda. Females are more likely to have received money/gifts if they are residing in rural areas. Boyfriends are by far the most common partner to have offered money or gifts in exchange for sex. And lastly, a greater proportion of females using the condom report having received money/gifts from their last sexual partner than females who were not using any method, except in Burkina Faso.

Among males, only a few statistics emerge when the data are broken down according to demographic characteristics as the sample sizes quickly become too small to be able to do any kind of credible analysis. In Uganda, males older than 15 were more likely to have received gifts/money for sex than 12-14 year olds. In Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, girlfriends are the type of partner most likely to have given gifts or money and in Uganda, males who used condoms at last sex were more likely to have received gifts/money than males who did not use any method at last sex.

Yet the qualitative data do not directly mirror the quantitative findings. Drawing on the qualitative data, we found that the transactional element of the sexual interaction was

present both with older partners as well as with age-mates. Gifts were named as a way that romantic relationships start during adolescents. Females in focus groups held in Burkina Faso described that the transaction begins, for example, when the young woman accepts the gift which is treated by both sides, males and females, as a tacit agreement that the gift will be repaid through sex. Specifically when discussing these transactional relations with older partners, the focus group respondents stated that transactional relations with the opposite sex made it more difficult to abstain or use condoms during intercourse(Amuyunzu-Nyamongo et al. 2005).

Moderator: Is it possible for the girl to refuse sexual intercourse if the male proposes to her?

Participant 1: If she refuses, you can flatter her and give her lots of money for her to accept [to have sex].

Participant 2: The girl can refuse if she wants to.

M: But if she refuses, do you think that the boy can force her?

Participant 2: It's possible, if you take her out to eat and drink and she refuses to have sex with you, you can force her because it's not for nothing that you spent your money.

Participant 3: For example, if a boy pays for a girl at every party, afterwards she can't refuse to have sex with him. Or else if the boy pays for something to eat, she can't [refuse].

--urban, out of school males, 14-16 years old, Burkina Faso

Boys from Uganda described that it is not only the female who is bound by the financial expectations that come with accepting a gift. The male is, too:

Moderator: What else leads one into indulging in sexual activities?

[...]

Respondent 1: She comes to you and asks why you can't talk. You find the girl going too far and wanting you to give her money. Then if she takes anything from you, you get forced to follow it up and demand for sex.

Mo: How does she take money from you?

Respondent 2: She asks you, "Can't you give me something to eat?" So you give her [something to eat] and [thereby] lay the groundwork for demanding sex. --rural, out of school males, 15-19 years old, married, Uganda

Partner selection is very strategic among some: Males expressed that having money made it possible to "get women" and females spoke about some females seeking out males with money with whom to get involved.

Respondent 1: There are girls who like money a lot in their life. So if a man gives you UGS10,000 [Ugandan shillings; +/-UGS1,800=US\$1], you do not mind [having sex with him], even old men. [...] Respondent 2: If you have one [boyfriend] who gives you UGS2,000 and another who gives you UGS10,000, you split with one of UGS2,000 and settle with one of UGS10,000.

Respondent 1: Big daddy, if one gives me UGS10,000, I would go there for fun and the money but remain with the other one too. You keep both: You may be liking first one genuinely but want only money from seconds one. So you keep both.

Respondent 4: Some girls do not want money but they go in for real love. Even if they get no money from boyfriend. They just go in for love.

-- urban, out of school, females 15-19 years old, married, Uganda

Therefore, while the strategic aspects of partner maintenance were familiar to the respondents, for some, it is not the only calculation that goes into partner selection.

There was a sense among some of the focus group respondents that transactional sex happens differently for males and for females. This is substantiated, in part, by the fact the distribution of gifts received at last sex look different for males and for females.

Moderator: How about boys, so they like sugar mummies? Respondent 2: They like them too, but for boys it is hard to tell [if they have a sugar mummy]. They are secretive. It takes a long for people to find out. [...] Respondent 3: Okay, the boys do not go for money but girls go in for money. -- *urban, out of school, females 15-19 years old, married, Uganda* 

There is a perception among these females that boys are motivated by more than money to seek out sexual partners who give them gifts/money.

In analyzing the sexual debut narratives in the in-depth interviews (IDIs), two Burkinabé females described being coerced with money to have sex. One Burkinabé female described receiving gifts from her first sexual partner and said that he pressured her, but it is unclear if she felt pressured by the gifts (urban, not in school, 14 year old). One Burkinabé female was lured by money/gifts to put herself in a situation where sexual coercion occurred. The boy in the narrative below had invited the respondent to go to a video club to watch a movie.

R: He charmed me and then we had sex. It was my first time.

[...]

I: How many of you watched the film?

R: Four; two girls and two boys. He encouraged me to go with him to the bedroom so that he could give me a gift; when we went into the bedroom, he shut the door.

I: But when he shut the door, did you try to scream?

R: No, I wanted to scream and he told me not to cry and I shut up (urban, out of school, 19 year old female).

The respondent hasn't spoken to the male since that day. She recounts at the end of this narrative that she has not had sex again because she is scared of boys.

There were no stories of transactional sex in the Ghanaian in-depth interviews.

In the IDIs in Malawi, gifts were not described as having a coercive influence. In comparison, the vast majority of the transactional sex that was described in the IDIs in Uganda was coercive. Four rural, out of school females in Uganda were pressured with money or gifts to engage in sexual intercourse at debut. One of these respondents became pregnant. "The man told me that 'If I have sex with you I will use a condom and nothing will happen to you, I will also give you 2000 shillings' so I accepted because I needed the money" (Uganda, rural, out of school, 15 year old), "We were friends, he would give me money and we also had sex" (Uganda, rural, out of school, 18 year old female) and "He approached me tactfully and he promised some dress and some sun glasses and I gave in" (Uganda, rural, out of school, 16 year old female). For the following Ugandan (rural, out of school, 17 year old female), there was a 15 year age difference between her and her partner:

He would pick me from home secretly and take me for film shows in town. I would always lie to my mother that I had gone to my Auntie's place and would spend nights with him.

At the end of it all he asked me to show him that I loved him by having sex with him and I complied. I could not refuse because I was ashamed of all the things he had done for me.

One rural, out of school Malawian female and two Ugandan females related transactional sex at debut but their narratives related less connotations of coercion. The 16 year old Malawian remembered that "in order for us to do it he coaxed me." "(Laughs) He use to tell me that if I had sex with him he gonna give me something else [money]." The Ugandan females described the following situations: "He would give me money and would say that I should show him that I love him by playing sex with him" (rural, out of school, 16 years old female), and another female spoke about receiving money after sex to buy something to eat, but it was not clear from the interview if the respondent was malnourished. While these sexual experiences did not sound coerced, it is possible that money played a role in these respondents' decisions to have sexual intercourse at debut.

Transactional sex at sexual debut has the potential to be coercive, yet transactional sex isn't necessarily coercive and may in fact be a normal aspect of romantic relationships as can be seen from how this type of exchange was discussed by Ugandan girls: "He would give me money and would say that I should show him that I love him by playing sex with him" (rural, out of school 16 year old female); "We were friends, he would give me money and we also had sex" (rural, out of school 18 year old female); and "When we reached his place, he told me he was going to have sex with me but he would not tear me [damage my private parts] and that he's not a bad person. So I believed him and had sex with him, then he gave me 300 shillings" (rural, out of school 15 year old female).

Analyzing sexual situations which occurred after sexual debut, a few of the respondents reported that they or their partners had received money/gifts in the sexual relationship. Males related being asked for money by their partners even though females did not relate asking for money. Some of females were presented with the money and it is unclear if they were asking for it. Females related receiving money (five Malawian kwacha was the only amount) specifically to buy herself food, soap or clothes. Males related giving money. In an interesting twist on where power resides in the relationship if financial transactions are part of the negotiation, a rural, out-of-school Malawian male 16 years old said that he knew that if he had no money his girlfriend would refuse to have sex with him. He related how he spent all week assembling the money so that he could have sex with her once a week. Yet this is the only respondent who said that his partner would not have sex with him if he did not pay her (Munthali et al. 2006).

#### Discussion

The quantitative data demonstrate that gift giving, primarily money and clothes, is a common practice among adolescents dating in the four countries of this study as over two-thirds of young women and one-third of boys in Ghana and Uganda had received gifts from their last sex partner to have sexual intercourse. Almost all of the reported giftgiving is happening between boyfriends and girlfriends. Interestingly, contraceptive use in situations where money/gifts were given did not look different than in situations where money/gifts had not been given. In fact, in Ghana, Malawi and Uganda, a higher proportion of female respondents who reported condom use at last sex had received money/gifts than the proportion of females who did not use a contraceptive method at last sex. While the qualitative data demonstrate that gift-giving is part of what takes place in relationships, in many cases, it is not clear if money and gifts were the incentive to have sexual intercourse. Offering basic necessities, including money, for sex might be a coercive tactic if the female is in dire need, yet it is hard to make that same argument when gifts such as jewellery and cosmetics are the items received. The qualitative data suggest that money/gifts do in fact make it harder to remain abstinent and also harder to use a condom when sexually active, therefore exposing individuals who are receiving gifts to HIV and unintended pregnancy. Further analysis needs to be done on this rich data sex to get a better grasp of the meaning and uses of transactional sex among adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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	Burkina				
	Faso	Faso Ghana		Uganda	
<u>Female</u>					
Sexual debut	0.04%	11%	6%	11%	
Last sex	35%	73%	79%	75%	
Male					
Sexual debut	0.05%	0%	0%	0.04%	
Last sex	5%	28%	8%	32%	

**Table 1.** Percentage of 12-19 year olds whose main reason for having sex at sexual debut was expectations of giflts/money and percent of 12-19 year olds who received gifts/money from their last partner to have sex, National Survey of Adolescents, 2004

	<u>Burkin</u> a	a Faso	Gha	ina	Mala	awi	Uga	nda
	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
	(N=303)	(N=453)	(N=160)	(N=109)	(N=137)	(N=393)	(N=221)	(N=396)
<u>Female</u>								
Money	95.3		94.0	[52.8]	95.5	[38.9]	92.2	46.7
Food	9.4		20.3	[38.9]	8.2	[40.0]	9.6	25.7
School fees	0.9		6.8	[0.0]	0.0	[0.0]	2.4	0.0
Drugs (including glue)	0.0		5.1	[0.0]	0.0	[0.0]	0.6	0.0
Alcohol	3.8		0.0	[0.0]	0.0	[0.0]	2.4	0.0
Shelter/rent	0.0		0.8	[0.0]	0.9	[0.0]	2.4	0.0
Clothes	32.7		61.9	[27.8]	51.8	[27.8]	54.5	23.0
Transport	0.9		1.7	[0.0]	0.9	[0.0]	3.6	0.0
Jewelry/cosmetics	13.2		16.2	[2.8]	26.4	[16.7]	25.7	21.5
Entertainment (e.g., video								
games)	0.0		2.6	[0.0]	0.0	[0.0]	4.2	1.5
Other	2.8		5.1	[17.1]	1.8	[13.9]	5.4	30.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 2.** Of those who received gifts/money from their last partner to have sex, what they received, National Survey of Adolescents, 2004<sup>+</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Question not asked if most recent partner was the first sex partner ever and had sex only 1 time or if partner was a spouse or cohabiting partner. <sup>‡</sup> Totals may exceed 100 because multiple responses are possible. Question asked only of those who received something in exchange for sex and responses are for up to 3 recent partners in the last 12 months. Sample sizes are: female, 12-19 (N=106); male, 12-19 (N=22). Notes: Ns are weighted. "--" = N is 24 or fewer.

Adolesencts, 2004	D			
	Burkina	<u>.</u>		
E	Faso	Ghana	Malawi	Uganda
Female				
AGE				
12-14				
15-17				[12/0]
18-19		[13%]		[8%]
RESIDENCE				
Urban		·		
Rural		[13%]		12%
REL TO 1ST PARTNER				
Husband		·		
Boyfriend		[16%]		13%
Acquaintance				
WILLINGNESS				
Very willing				[9%]
Somewhat willing				[12%]
Not willing at all				
USE OF FP				_
Condom only				[11%]
Condom & other method				
No condom, other method				
No method		[12%]		[11%]
AGE DIFF W/ PARTNER				
Same age, or partner younger		·		
Partner 1-4 years older		·		[11%]
Partner 5-9 years older		·		
Parnter 10+ years older	·	·		
Male				
AGE				
12-14				
15-17				
18-19				
RESIDENCE				
Urban				
Rural		·		
REL TO 1ST PARTNER				
Wife		·		
Girlfriend		·		
Acquaintance		·		
WILLINGNESS				
Very willing				
Somewhat willing				
Not willing at all				
USE OF FP				
Condom only				
Condom & other method				
No condom, other method				
No method				
AGE DIFF W/ PARTNER				
Same age, or partner younger	·			
Partner 1-4 years older				
Partner 5-9 years older				
Parnter 10+ years older				

**Table 3.** Proportion of 12-19 year olds who said that expectation ofgifts/money was reason for having sex at sexual debut, National Survey ofAdolesencts, 2004

*Notes:* Ns are weighted. "--" = N is 24 or fewer.

Adolesencts, 2004	Durkine			
	Burkina Easa	Chara	Malawi	llaanda
Famala	Faso	Ghana	Malawi	Uganda
Female				
AGE				
12-14				
15-17	45%	76%		
18-19		70%	[83%]	83%
RESIDENCE				
Urban		67%	[73%]	
Rural	42%	78%	83%	75%
REL TO LAST PARTNER				
Boyfriend	36%	74%	80%	77%
Acquaintance				
USE OF FP				
Condom only	32%	[78%]	84%	80%
Condom & other method				
No condom, other method				
No method	41%	67%	79%	67%
AGE DIFF W/ PARTNER	11/0	0170	1070	01/0
Same age, or partner younger				
Partner 1-4 years older				[82%]
Partner 5-9 years older				[02 /0]
-				
Parnter 10+ years older				
Mala				
Male				
AGE				
12-14				
15-17				34%
18-19				31%
RESIDENCE				
Urban				
Rural				31%
REL TO LAST PARTNER				
Girlfriend		36%	10%	35%
Acquaintance				
USE OF FP				
Condom only				39%
Condom & other method				
No condom, other method				
No method			11%	[24%]
AGE DIFF W/ PARTNER				L]
Same age, or partner younger				[29%]
Partner 1-4 years older				[20,0]
Partner 5-9 years older				
Parnter 10+ years older				
Famer 10+ years older				

**Table 4.** Proportion of 12-19 year olds who said that they had receivedgifts/money from their last sexual partner for having sex, National Survey ofAdolesencts, 2004

*Notes*: Ns are weighted. "--" = N is 24 or fewer. [] = N is 25 to 49.