

"She may not have been infected through sex but rather by the traditional healer. Traditional healers use blades and afterwards used it on her. She could also have been infected at the hospital, in another way, like through an injection, because of a lack of sterilization. If she had been infected through sex, her husband could also have it."

(DG, 13/02/08, men, Boane, Maputo)

Gender norms associated with men's perception of being biologically strong, not being easily infected.

Women seem to be aware that their husbands may transmit the infection to them, however the pressure of gender norms makes self-protection difficult.

"Because there are men who are aggressive who say 'we don't want to use a condom because when we use a condom we don't feel good, we don't get the taste' (laughing), that's the problem and women don't always like it like that because they know that there is a lot of disease, and the woman is the one who always demands those things but the man is always "they are like that maybe and also they can accept it the first time but the second time " after getting used to it they say we are already used to it, it is better to leave that there, if you don't want, stay, but you want him or you want to have him, what do you have to do? You have to go give in (laughing)."

(DG, 05/12/07, women, Quelimane, Zambézia)

"In the case where a husband is positive and the wife is not, the wife continues to take care of the husband... but in many cases the husband forces the wife to have sex without a condom, alleging 'we are married', but if he is very sick he doesn't stand a chance, he has to accept what the wife says."

(DG, 21/03/08, women, Beira, Sofala)

"They are husband and wife, you cannot tell your husband to use a condom, even knowing that he goes around with other women, you cannot say that."

(DG, 14/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)



"He can say 'why do you want me to use a condom? Why are you thinking this of me, what have you got to want me to use a condom?' Instead of questioning himself about what he has, he will ask you what you have, and so he will immediately think that you have other men."

(DG, 14/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)



Added to the perception observed between men and women is the idea that not everyone is vulnerable to HIV, because some people are stronger than others, and that the disease does not affect men as easily, or even that HIV shows up sooner in women because their organism is more fragile than men's. It is possible that this idea makes sense to them, when trying to understand the existence of discordant couples.



"It may be that some don't have it because in some people the blood is very weak, but in others it is very resistant. There are those who can sleep with a person with AIDS and not become infected."

(DG, 13/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)

"Because men believe that they cannot get it, and the disease hides itself in them."

(DG, 13/02/08, men, Boane, Maputo)

"It may happen that the husband is not positive, only the wife is positive. Since it is not possible, it can only be that they have different bodies and the husband is stronger and has still not begun to react."

(DG, 15/02/08, men, Guava/Marracuene, Maputo)



This perception of the fragility of a woman's organism, associated with the gender disadvantage, combined, results in men blaming the transmission of the virus on the partner's infidelity as a first reaction, when the disease appears in the family, directly contradicting the acknowledgement that men are more prone to multiple relationships than women. In this manner, in all group discussions with men, emphasis was placed on the possibility of the woman infecting him. Only a few times did one or other participant raise the possibility of the opposite happening. The following is a typical statement given in response to the question of what women can do to protect themselves against infection:

"... married women should stop sleeping with other men or if they do, because it is difficult to control a grown person, she must remember that the person she is getting involved with is not her husband and should use a condom ..."

(DG, 06/12/07, men, Quelimane, Zambézia)

"...In my opinion it could be that he was working in the Republic of South Africa and the wife was having unprotected sex."

(DG, 15/02/08, men, Guava/Marracuene, Maputo)

Occasionally, some women had the same reaction:

"She got it because she went and slept with another man who had AIDS and he infected her, when she gets it, then if she sleeps with her husband he also becomes infected, and if the husband goes and sleeps with another woman who has AIDS he also gets it."

(DG, 29/11/07, women, Mocuba, Zambézia)

Appearance and trust as criteria to reduce the risks associated with gender conditionings

The participants acknowledged that the use of condoms may prevent infection; however, the use of condoms conflicts with the argument of "trust" as a kind of non-discussable "convention" in medium, long-term or marital affective relationships.

"That is difficult to answer; a man who does not have lovers, who does not get involved with anyone outside... it is complicated. Every day he comes home to sleep, but only he knows where he is coming from. Another may receive his salary and bring it home, but only he knows how he lives. So it is difficult to know if this one does play around or not, he may do everything he has to at home, but before you realize it he already has others, when you realize he has already brought diseases. So she thinks, but my husband does not play around, we trusted each other, but how did this disease appear, where did he get it?"

(DG, 13/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)

When questioned by the facilitator on a “case” of multiple partnerships, where one of the people involved became infected, normally the participants answered that those people did not use a condom because they loved each other. This is exemplified in the dialogue below:



“He did not have a condom so that is why he is sick”

(DG, 14/02/08, men, Boane, Maputo)

Facilitator: But did Samuel know that this could happen?

“No way” (chorus response by participants)

Facilitator: Why did he not know?

“Because he loved that woman without knowing that she was dating that one over there.”



This aspect has already been explored in existing literature, and will not be considered further here. However, the element of “trust” also appears in our study, associated with the physical appearance of a person, minimizing concern on the risk of infection.



“Women... gain trust, they gain trust because a man has been married for a long time and is still healthy, but she thinks that perhaps he doesn't play around, but he plays around, only, well...”

(DG, 06/12/07, men, Quelimane, Zambézia)

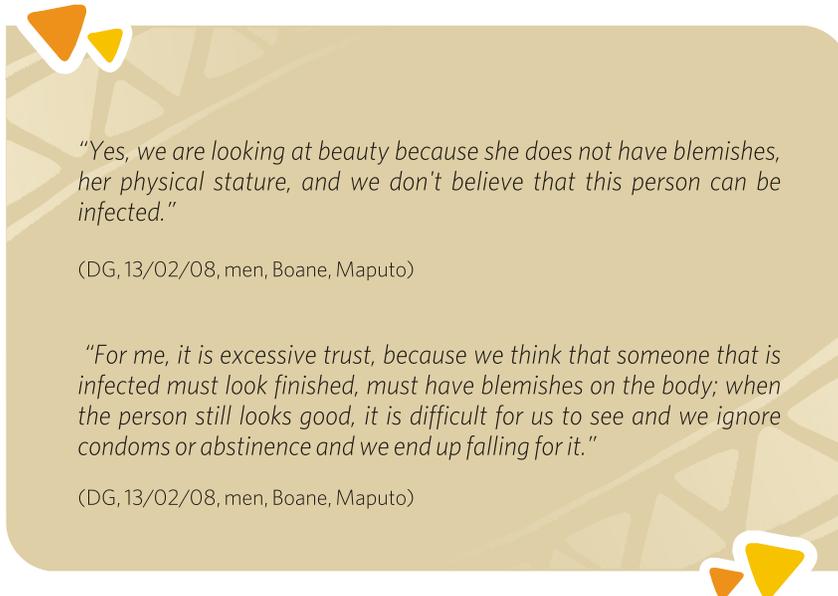
“They trust the other when they see he/she is healthy.”

(Idem)

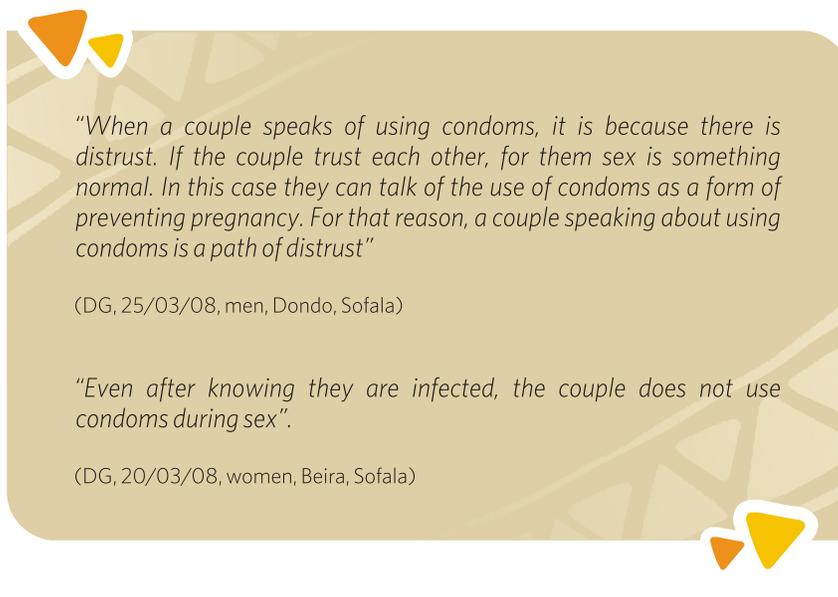
“Others say ‘that woman, just by looking at her you can see she is not infected with the virus’”

(DG, 28/11/07, men, Mocuba, Zambézia)





With trust between couples being "unconditional", it suggests that the use of condoms is a sign of this pact being broken, in other words, it causes "distrust." Furthermore, associated with the prevention of pregnancy, more than with the transmission of STDs, the use of condoms in marital relationships goes against a fundamental aspect of gender construction in Mozambique, which is to produce children as an affirmation of masculinity and to bear children as inherent to the female condition.



Another aspect to highlight, confirming the literature, is that men accept the use of condoms at the beginning of a relationship, and then a little later on refuse to use them because they feel that a relationship of trust has been established.



"Because (pause, laughter) because there are men who are aggressive who say 'we don't want to use a condom because when we use a condom we don't feel good, we don't get the taste'. That's the problem and women don't always like it like that because they know that there is a lot of disease, and the woman is the one who always demands those things but the man is always they are like that maybe and also they can accept it the first time but the second time after getting used to it they say we are already used to it, it is better to leave that there, if you don't want, stay, but you want him or you want to have him, what do you have to do? You have to go give in."

(DG, 05/12/07, women, Quelimane, Zambézia)



This context explains why the female participants in the study, in general married, stated they were impotent to handle the risk of transmission by their partners, considering that it is almost impossible to demand the use of condoms. "The owner's house is the owner's house". This is the expression used, mostly by women from the rural areas, and corroborated at several points in time by women from urban areas, to say that they cannot refuse to have sex with their husbands, even if they have suspicions regarding their state of health, since he owns the house and they are subject to his orders and needs.



"In the owner's house it is the owner's house. Because the husband can say 'why are you refusing to let me have sex with you, why are you making me use a condom? So you are the clever one and are playing around. While you haven't done that, you are only suspecting that he is doing that. You have to accept because it is his house."

(DG, 06/12/07, women, Quelimane, Zambézia)



Furthermore, as is seen in other studies in Mozambique and in African countries (Luke, 2005, Fórum Mulher, 2006), women do not think it very "natural" to have condoms at hand, either for the prevention of HIV in casual relations or in stable relationships. The statement below illustrates clearly the restriction of condom use to transactional or commercial sexual relations, not being applicable to married women:



"I have heard of prevention through condom use, as I explained earlier, but because I am not a wayward woman, I never have a mind to keep condoms with me. And it is not easy to tell our husbands, normally African, explain to them that when they go out they should use condoms."

(DG, 06/12/07, women, Quelimane, Zambézia)

"Women prostitutes talk more about condom use with their clients or among themselves".

(DG, 24/03/08, men, Dondo, Sofala)



Other obstacles to the use of condoms

Despite the male condom being known to the public in general and relatively easy to access, as shown in some studies (Hawkins, 2005; UNAIDS, 2007), there are still many negative condom beliefs, contributing to resistance to and/or inconsistent use of condoms.



"Yes, we think like that, because, firstly due to the variety of condoms, it creates a threat for us, we begin to think ok, the discrimination already begins here, there are condoms of 300, others that smell of fruits, others smell of I don't know what, ihh, with variety. You can find a white (man) who comes from Europe, but that white, I believe he does not use those condoms that we receive in the hospital. He does not use that condom from here, and so from there we begin to have a threat, why can he not use it if he is a human being? Right here we have diversity. Secondly, we don't know if the condom itself offers good protection, there are times when they have expired, but they begin to spread, to be used in the community, so, this is a big threat to us and some neighbors have already caught sexually transmitted diseases but using a condom, so this causes us much fear".

(Interview, 07/12/07, sponsor, Quelimane, Zambézia)



2. Perception of risk in transactional sex

As can be seen from the statements, with the exception of marital relationships, where “trust” between partners is stipulated, when it comes to risks it does not make any difference whether an extramarital relationship is transactional or not (here we are speaking of statements given by adults, mostly married). Both men and women acknowledged that they run the risk of being infected with HIV or other STDs in casual relations, because neither knows the respective sexual history of the other partner. The same is applicable to cases of “concubinage.” This term was used to refer to relationships that are more or less long-lasting, where the man spends money on his partners. It must be highlighted that most of the comments on transactional sex were linked to cross-generational sex. Hardly any mention was made of transactional sex between older women and boys.

The risk of contracting a disease, with emphasis on AIDS, was pointed out by both men and women.



“Perhaps that man had many partners before he even reached the age of 45, and now he is coming on to that girl; perhaps he will be her first and there she will be, open to being infected with HIV, or maybe not HIV but another sexually transmitted disease.”

(DG, 04/12/07, men, Quelimane, Zambézia)

“Yes, he also runs some risk because he can contract diseases. Those that we already spoke of, AIDS.”

(DG, 14/02/08, men, Boane, Maputo)



The risk of the young girl falling pregnant and causing problems for the man's family was also widely mentioned.

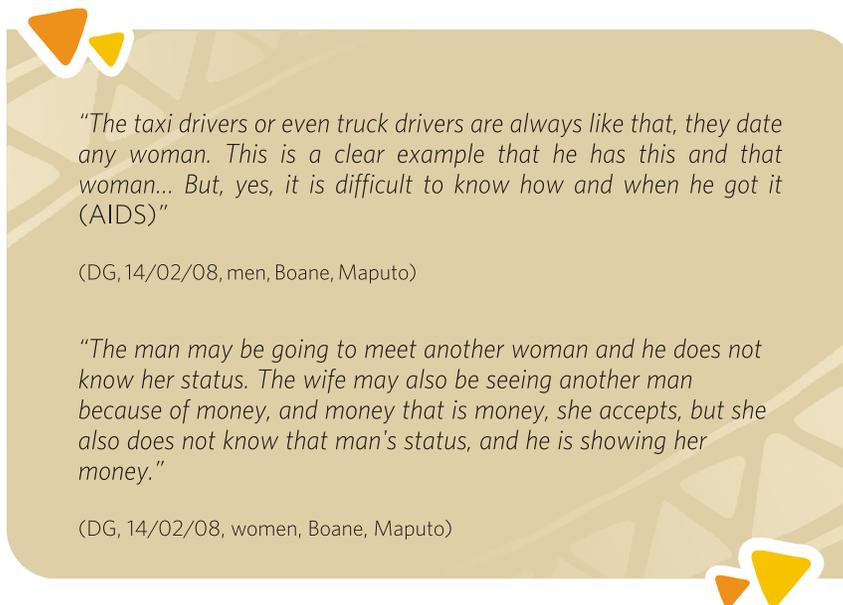


“This girl can fall pregnant and this man's wife can find out, and then there will be problems at home, and then he will lose his head, not take proper care of his wife and children because he has to take care of that girl who is pregnant”

(DG, 28/11/07, men, Morrumbala, Zambézia)



The statements below are from the discussion on transactional sex, but they are not that different from other statements when the topic broached was multiple concurrent partnerships.



3. Perception of risk in cross-generational sex

Age as a risk factor was confirmed in the analysis of the group discussions on cross-generational sex. Statements by men and women suggested that young women run greater risk of infection, due to the fact that the adult man has already had many sexual experiences throughout his life. In the opinion of the participants in the study, many men feel that they are risk-free because they think that the adolescent girls are disease-free. In this case, appearance counts, as was previously mentioned. Another interesting finding is the belief that sperm is good for a woman's health. The study did not go into detail on this aspect, but it is possibly an excuse/rationalization used by adult men to take more advantage of a relationship with a young woman (feel more intensely).

Age of the young girl is a risk to her; however, it is protection for the man

The perception of risk that runs throughout all statements is directed at the female, in other words, it is the young women who are running the risk in that type of partnership. Apparently, the men think they run less risk by going out with girls than with adult women, for a simple reason: they think that because the girls are not sexually experienced, their organism is free from sexually transmissible diseases.

The idea is that the older a person is, the greater the probability of the person carrying sexually transmissible germs, as a result of the exposure factor. For this reason, in the women's perspective, men seek out young girls because they think their health can be improved through sexual contact. They consider that adolescents or young girls have not yet been "contaminated", and therefore they have "fresh" blood, i.e., "pure." Because blood and sperm are

bodily fluids they are associated or, rather, symbolically equal. The metaphor used by a participant explains what could be happening when an adult becomes involved with an adolescent:



"The child's blood is very fresh and when it joins with the already spoiled blood it re-feeds it, becoming new. We can compare this to the case of fish, when you put a spoiled fish together with other fresh ones, they all become fresh, but if you put a small quantity of fresh fish with a large quantity of spoiled fish, it all becomes spoiled, do you see?!"

(DG, 14/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)

"Because João is an older person, his blood is already tired, so he can contaminate her."

(DG, 28/11/07, men, Morrumbala, Zambézia)

"She can become anemic, weak, have health problems, she can have AIDS, anemia and others."

(DG, 29/11/07, men, Morrumbala, Zambézia)



In addition, the participants in the study felt that adolescents run the risk of unplanned pregnancies and of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including STDs/HIV, as a result of the incompatibility between the organism/blood of an adult man and that of a child.



"Yes, because the age does not match, she is still a child, having sex will cause some infections or lesions to her genital organs and may even result in an unnecessary pregnancy."

(DG, 26/03/08, men, Dondo, Sofala)

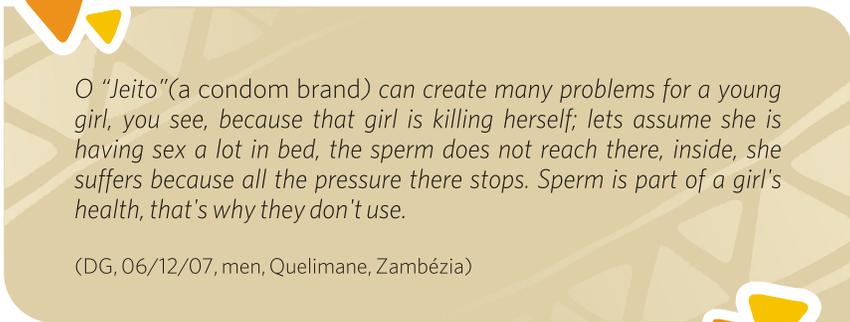
"Don't know, I don't know, I do not know this disease AIDS. The child's whole body hurts, because the adult person discharges all his filth in her, and so her body gets tired, she is always sore. Her legs hurt, her bones, her ribs, everything hurts because the adult comes and discharges a blood that is not compatible with that of the child, discharges filth while the child's blood has to combine with the blood of young ones. Children cannot stand up to the adult's movements; that is what I wanted to say."

(DG, 14/02/08, women, Boane, Maputo)



Sperm is good for a woman's health

An explanation put forward by a participant for why some adults refuse to use condoms in those relationships is the belief that sperm is good for a woman's health. They report that, for this reason, some men advise against the use of condoms in sexual relations with young women.



O "Jeito" (a condom brand) can create many problems for a young girl, you see, because that girl is killing herself; lets assume she is having sex a lot in bed, the sperm does not reach there, inside, she suffers because all the pressure there stops. Sperm is part of a girl's health, that's why they don't use.

(DG, 06/12/07, men, Quelimane, Zambézia)

The main findings in this item, which should be capitalized on by communication programs, are highlighted below:

Unfavorable Aspects

- The perception of risk in sexual relations appears to be more present in women than in men. However, a woman's unequal social position forces her to abide by the man's wishes, even when she wants to protect herself by using a condom;
- Because of the belief that a woman's organism is more fragile, men tend to think that women are more easily infected than they are;
- For the reason given above, women are seen as vehicles of transmission and accused of infidelity when one of the partners is infected;
- Appearance and trust are criteria that still determine personal assessment of risk with regard to HIV; and,
- Men and women attribute the same level of importance to all methods of HIV transmission. Because they have no control over the transmission of HIV through sharp objects, injections and/or razor blades, they tend to think that it is not worthwhile to control their sexual activities or use condoms to protect themselves against HIV.

Favorable Aspects

- Men and women from urban and rural areas acknowledge that a person may become infected with HIV in multiple and unprotected sexual partnerships and transmit the virus to other partners;
- The older man is perceived as being a potential transmitter of HIV to a young woman, due to his accumulated sexual experience; and,
- Men and women consider that cross-generational sex with very young girls is, in general, carried out without protection and tends to result in unwanted pregnancies and/or some form of STDs.

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In this publication you will encounter real life themes for reflection on the way men and women relate to each other in Mozambican society, as well as on the social norms that dictate this behavior and its relation to HIV/AIDS risk behaviors.

This publication suggests ways to develop mass media and interpersonal communication activities and messages, in a new approach that analyzes, not risk practices, but rather the causes, through which it is possible to develop away to overcome individual, social, and gender norms. Social norms indicating the changes Mozambican society would like to see happen were identified through this research and these norms can be reinforced and validated through media.

This publication presents the main results of research carried out by the Maputo office of the Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (JHUCCP) in from November 2007 to March 2008 in the provinces of Zambezia, Sofala, and Maputo.