

ABSTRACT

The UN conference dealing with issues to do with gender equality in all areas and at all levels were heightened during the fourth UN conference in Beijing in 1995 (Commonwealth Youth Programme, 1997). Several commitments were made by member states and key areas of particular importance to young people such as achieving gender equality for young women and girls were advanced. Whilst, a basic framework for action for member states to follow was drawn up, Zambia seems to be sluggish in attaining these key areas of particular importance especially among the vulnerable subgroups. Statistics obtained from the ZSBS (2009), show that young women and girls still face negative cultural attitudes and practices in their sexual behaviour thereby hindering them reach their full potential.

This study, henceforth, was instigated to examine the reasons responsible for the high levels of unprotected sexual activity among out of school adolescents; to identify the major sources of information on sexual health matters and gender issues among out of school adolescents; to assess the gender related attitudes and beliefs in the risky sexual behaviour among out of school adolescents with a view to recommend appropriate strategies that would help address these sexual health and gender concerns in a culturally relevant and gender sensitive manner.

The aim of the study was accomplished through a cross sectional descriptive survey of 250 respondents among out of school adolescents from Jack and Hellen Kaunda communities in Lusaka District. An interviewer administered questionnaire, focus group discussion guide and in-depth interview were used to collect the data.

The study disclosed that a number of factors are at play for the high levels of unprotected sexual activity among out of school adolescents in the selected communities. It was noted that, high levels of negative gender beliefs and attitudes, restrictive cultural beliefs, impersonal sources of information, ignorance and substance abuse as some of the common factors contributing to the high levels of unprotected sexual activity among out of school adolescents.

Based on the findings of this study, it is highly recommended that the task of improving knowledge and awareness of gender issues and sexual education for out of school adolescents be engaged with. Gender sensitization should be made an integral part of various sexual and reproductive health programmes being carried out by various organizations. The information being given to adolescents in communities must seriously address issues of gender and help young people acquire skills to cope with negative sexual pressure. Community authorities must accentuate on informal education that will focus on sexual and gender education through informal community discussions for young people for them to be able to adopt more positive sexual behaviours. It is also quite cardinal that more complete and accurate disaggregated data on different experiences and conditions of unprotected sex and knowledge of important gender issues among out of school adolescents (15-19 years) is collected if the most vulnerable young people in poorer household and rural areas are to be reached.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late husband, Mr. George M. Sikazwe who continuously imparted words of wisdom, guidance and support especially during my course work. How I wish you were around to see what I have been able to accomplish. Your encouragement has seen me realize great things and view life with a positive mindset. I strongly believe that this is just the beginning of better things to come, may your soul rest in eternal peace. To my dear children, Chimwemwe Kayla Nakazwe and Mulumba Samuel Sikazwe, I thank you for being so loving and supportive. You really were so inspirational and despite my absence you continued to support me. May God bless you and may his grace be with you always.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title of the dissertation.....	
Declaration.....	
Certificate of Approval.....	
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of contents.....	vii
List of tables.....	xi
List of appendices.....	xiii
List of acronyms.....	xiv
CHAPTER ONE:	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	4
1.3 Objectives.....	5
1.3.1 General objective.....	5
1.3.2 Specific objectives.....	5
1.4 Research questions.....	5
1.5 Significance of the study.....	5
1.6 Conceptual and operational definitions.....	6
1.7 Structure of the dissertation.....	8

CHAPTER TWO:	9
LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.0 Introduction.....	9
2.1 Overview of adolescence.....	9
2.2 Sexual risk behavior among adolescents.....	10
2.3 Sources of information on sexual health and gender related issues.....	13
2.4 Gender and power relations.....	14
2.5 Gender role expectations.....	16
2.6 Negative gender attitudes and beliefs.....	18
2.7 Alcohol and drug abuse among adolescents.....	19
2.8 Main factors arising from the literature review.....	21
2.9 Conceptual and Theoretical framework.....	21
CHAPTER THREE:	24
METHODOLOGY	24
3.0 Introduction.....	24
3.1 Study design.....	24
3.2 Study site.....	25
3.3 Study population.....	25
3.4 Sample size.....	25
3.5 Sampling technique.....	26
3.6 Data collection.....	27
3.7 Data collection tools.....	28
3.7.1 Structured Questionnaire.....	28
3.7.2 Focus group discussion guide.....	28

3.7.3 In-depth Interview guide	29
3.8 Data analysis.....	29
3.9 Pre testing of study tools.....	30
3.10 Challenges encountered during field work	30
3.11 Ethical issues.....	31
CHAPTER FOUR:.....	32
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	32
4.0 Introduction.....	32
4.1 Personal Characteristics or the respondents.....	32
4.1.1 Sex of respondents.....	32
4.1.2 Age of respondents.....	33
4.1.3 Religious denomination.....	34
4.1.4 Level of Education of respondents.....	36
4.1.5 Respondent's keepers.....	37
4.2 Sexual history and behavior patterns.....	40
4.2.1 Initiation of first sexual intercourse.....	40
4.2.2 Age at first sexual intercourse.....	41
4.2.3 Number of partners respondents had sexual intercourse with.....	43
4.2.4 Types of sexual partner.....	45
4.2.5 Usage of condoms among adolescents.....	47
4.2.6 Alcohol and drug abuse among respondents in the past 3 months.....	50
4.2.7 Alcohol and drug abuse to set stage for sexual activity.....	52
4.3 Major sources of information on sexual health matters and gender related issues	
Among out of school adolescents.....	54

4.3.1	Major sources of information on sexual health matters	54
4.3.2	Major sources of information on gender related matters.....	56
4.4	Gender related attitudes and beliefs in the sexual behavior among out of school adolescents.....	59
4.4.1	Keepers attitudes towards respondents.....	59
4.4.2	Ever been forced to have sex.....	61
4.4.3	With whom sex was forced.....	62
4.4.4	Being in control or being controlled in a regular relationship.....	64
4.4.5	Negative gender beliefs in the sexual behavior and condom use.....	65
CHAPTER FIVE.....		69
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....		69
5.0	Introduction.....	69
5.1	Conclusions.....	69
5.2	Recommendations.....	73
REFERENCES.....		75
APPENDICES.....		84

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
1. Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents and data collection methods by sex...	33
2. Table 2: Percentage distribution of age of respondents by sex.....	33
3. Table 3: Distribution of respondents religious denomination by sex.....	35
4. Table 4: Percentage distribution of level of education respondents attained by sex.....	36
5. Table 5: Percentage distribution of respondents' keepers by sex.....	37
6. Table 6: Percentage distribution of respondents ever having sexual intercourse by sex.....	40
7. Table 7: Percentage distribution of age of respondents at first sexual debut	42
8. Table 8: Percentage distribution of number of sexual partners respondent had in the past three months.....	44
9. Table 9: Percentage distribution of the type of sexual partners respondents had sex With in the past three months by sex.....	46
10. Table 10: Percentage distribution of how often respondents used condoms by sex.....	48
11. Table 11: Percentage distribution of respondents who reported using condoms the the last time they had sexual intercourse.....	49
12. Table 12: Percentage distribution of respondents who reported using alcohol and drugs in the past 3 months	51
13. Table 13: Percentage distribution of respondents who reported using alcohol and drugs to stage for sexual activity by sex	52
14. Table 14: Percentage distribution of the major sources of information on sexual health issues by sex.....	54

15. Table 15: Percentage distribution of the major sources of information on gender related issues by sex	57
16. Table 16: Percentage distribution of keeper-respondent interaction by sex.....	59
17. Table 17: Percentage distribution of respondents ever been forced to have sex.....	61
18. Table 18: Percentage distribution showing with whom sex was forced on respondents by sex.....	62
19. Table 19: Percentage distribution of the negative gender beliefs among respondents by sex	66

LIST OF APPENDICES

	Page
1. Appendix i: Letter of approval of research proposal.....	85
2. Appendix ii: Letter of consent to respondents.....	86
3. Appendix iii: Questionnaire.....	87
4. Appendix iv: Focus group discussion guide.....	93
5. Appendix v: In-depth Interview guide.....	96

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
C.B.Os	Community based organisations
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
FEMNET	African Women's Development Fund for Women
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GIDD	Gender in Development Division
HTP	Harmful traditional practices
MOH	Ministry of Health
NAC	National HIV and AIDS and Tuberculosis Council of Zambia
NASF	National Strategic Framework
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations AIDS Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZARD	Zambia Association for Research and Development
ZDHS	Zambia Demographic and Health Survey
ZSBS	Zambia Sexual and Behaviour Survey