



# **“Funa igazi lo mfana” – why older women have sex with younger men**

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*Social science that makes a difference*



# Acknowledgement: Co-authors

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# Outline of the presentation



- Background to the focus group discussions
- Key objectives of the overall study
- Overall study population
- Research methodology
- Procedures
- Ethical considerations
- Focus group discussions on sugar mommy practices



## **Background to the focus group discussions**

- The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) conducted the third South African National HIV Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey in 2008
- There was a need for focus group discussions (FGDs) to investigate social values and norms influencing sexual practices, to inform parts of the survey.
- FGDs sought to help understand the social contexts that promote or inhibit safe sex practices.
- Publication of consolidated papers from all FGDs in a special issue of a journal focusing on qualitative research, for wider dissemination



# Key objectives of the overall FGD study

- To identify and understand the social values and cultural norms that influence sexual behaviour in various settings or situations (sugar mommy practices, etc.)
- To determine the acceptability of male circumcision
- To understand the decision-making processes of teenagers in sexual risk taking
- To determine HIV risk perception

# Overall study population

- ❑ 51 focus groups each consisting of between 8 and 14 people was obtained using convenience sampling.
- ❑ Approximately 615 participants were involved in the study.
- ❑ Nine issues were investigated in various combinations in each target group:
  - Teenage pregnancy
  - Sugar daddy practices
  - **Sugar mommy practices**
  - Concurrent multiple sexual partnerships
  - Sexual practices and behaviour as well as socio-economic factors in informal settlements
  - Sexual debut
  - Sexual practice
  - Child sexual abuse
  - Male circumcision



# Research methodology

- A qualitative approach was used as it presents an environment in which participants influence each other as happens in life in relation to their perceptions, feelings, and thinking about particular issues.
- Focus group guides on the various topics were developed for targeting specific groups and issues to be investigated.
- Sessions were digitally audio recorded; data translated and transcribed.
- *Limitation in using focus groups:* Focus groups do not allow for generalization of the findings.



# Procedures

## *Training:*

- HSRC research staff and a few external facilitators attended a training/refresher course on conducting focus group discussions.

## *In the field:*

- Permission was sought from relevant gate keepers for each target group
- Once the groups were constituted, informed consent and informed assent were obtained prior to the start of the actual focus group discussions



## Procedures (continued)

- The groups were run for up to 2 hours, using the language most commonly used in that particular area of the country.
- Sessions were digitally audio recorded. During the groups, a co-facilitator kept session notes, which were used to check transcripts for accuracy
- Some light refreshments were served during the focus group sessions, but were not an inducement to participate.
- The audio recordings of each focus group conducted were saved in a specified file for transcription purposes.
- Thematic content analysis was used to identify key themes from the focus group discussions



# Ethical considerations

- Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the HSRC's Research Ethics Committee (REC) and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- An information sheet was made available to all participants
- Informed Consent Form was available for youths and adults as well as parents/guardians of children aged 14-17 years
- An Informed Assent Form was available for children aged 14-17 years
- The original consent or assent forms in English were both professionally translated and back-translated

## FGDs on sugar mommy practices

- Age mixing, cross-generational sex and intergenerational sex refer to sexual relationships where there is a ten or more years age difference between sexual partners
- ‘Cougars’ and their ‘cougar cubs’ are raved about in ‘celebrity’ circles
- A more common focus in literature is on sugar daddies, with comparatively limited literature on sugar mommies
- Where studies on sugar mommies are available, there is very little detail on the social values and norms that underlie these practices.
- Whereas sugar daddies may be motivated by physical pleasure, ‘sugar mommies’ may be motivated a myriad of completely different age-dependent reasons

## **FGDs on sugar mommy practices (continued)**

- Eight focus groups were tasked to discuss sugar mommy practices
- These included women having sex with women (WSW), adult men, adult women, a mixed group of adult men and women, male teenagers and a mixed group of male and female teenagers
- In total there were 102 participants across six provinces
- The guiding question was “What causes women to engage in sugar mommy practices?”



## Results from FGDs on sugar mommies

- Eight categories of reasons why older women have sex with younger men were identified during the FGDs.
- Similarities in the statements within and across focus groups were used to identify these themes
- These categories were:
  - Sexual fulfillment
  - Domination
  - Procreation
  - Stress relief
  - Physical attraction
  - Lack of self control
  - Youthful feeling
  - Migrancy

# Sexual fulfillment

- *“Funa igazi lo mfana”, (want the blood of the young boy). If the man at home does not service well at home, so the woman goes and looks for a young boy and pay him something. This happens visa versa”- **Adult men, Gauteng***
- *“According to my views, I think that these older women want young men because their husbands are no longer highly sexual(ly) active compares to young men, so they go for these young men.” - **Adult men, Limpopo***
- *“Because a younger man can have better sex than an older man; he still has that energy - **Male teenagers, Northern Cape***
- *“They think that their male counterparts are no longer sexually strong to satisfy them so they decide to go for young men. They sometimes do not want the young guys for producing, it is for good sex only.” - **Women who have sex with women, Gauteng***

# Domination

- *“He also needs to take sugar mommy for groceries and sometimes to the hair salon and the sugar son does not have room enough to refuse. It is more of instructing them than requesting them to do that.” - **Women who have sex with women, Gauteng***
- *“The woman wants the man to do what she wants him to do ... the woman wants to sit on his head. The man does things the woman wants him to do. Maybe it’s sometimes like- what do they call it now - black ... blackmail” - **Male teenagers, Northern Cape***
- *“It is when I have a good job and I find a young man even though I am married and I make (him) leave his girlfriend so that I can have him whenever I want” - **Mixed male and female teenagers, Free State***
- *“There is reciprocity in all relationships, for young man to get money and clothe themselves, (they) should satisfy the older women sexually and follow some instruction” - **Women who have sex with women, Gauteng***



# Procreation

- *“For a baby ... to want a baby” - Male teenagers, Northern Cape*
- *“Maybe she’s never had a child ...now ... she really wants one” - Male teenagers, Northern Cape*
- *“Yes, she really wants one, she knows maybe not going to want to adopt someone else’s child, or so - now she feels, “no, okay, I’m then just (going to fall pregnant) ” - Male teenagers, Northern Cape*

# Stress relief

- *“Sometimes the cause of all this could be a situation a woman finds herself in, you’ll find a man cheating and the woman start behaving like that too” - **Mixed adult men and women, Mpumalanga***
- *“...Sugar mommies want to be loved because their husbands are beating them and undermine them or their men left them for younger girls” - **Mixed male and female teenagers, Free State***
- *“...If you take a closer look most women who occupy high government posts are the ones who form part of a bigger statistic...” - **Adult men, Limpopo***
- *“If the man with a car moves around with young girls and they become tired and cannot service at home. Then the woman decides to do the same, which means they get an active young man. We should talk about sexual issues at home. But you know how other men are? They think the problem will vanish automatically”- **Adult men, Gauteng***

# Physical attraction

- “The muscles are maybe nicer there” - ***Male teenagers, Northern Cape***
- “One other thing is that as men grow older they get out of shape; they get big belly and they look older than women” - ***Adult women, North West***

## Lack of self control

- *“In the shebeen, sometimes these older women want these young boys to buy liquor for them and later in the evening they invite them to accompany them to their houses. Sometimes they help themselves (urinate) not far from these young men and this make them to have sex with them” - **Adult men, Limpopo***
- *“...older women do not respect themselves to these young men ...”- **Adult men, Limpopo***

# Youthful feeling

- *“They believe that young men keep them young” - **Women who have sex with women, Gauteng***
- *“Like I have said it earlier on that older women think that having sex with young men keeps them young and they get sexual satisfaction. They do not take orders from older men they only give what they can afford to young men and the young man get satisfied” - **Women who have sex with women, Gauteng***
- *They say they feel young and loved again because when you are in a marriage for a long time you grow apart and there is no more love but only tolerance. Younger men call them with all the romantic loving words and they feel loved again. In such relationship they think the young guys listen to them and follow the instruction unlike in when you are in a relationship with someone of your age you are always in the receiving end” - **Adult women, North West***

# Migrancy

- *“Sometimes it is caused by when man of the family is working far from his family - places like Gauteng and his wife (is) shy to go for men of her age and go to young man” ...* - **Adult men, Limpopo**



## Discussion

- Whereas sugar daddies may mostly be motivated by physical pleasure, ‘sugar mommies’ are deemed to have more emotional and other considerations
- The stamina and spontaneity of the younger partner is a recurring consideration in the FGDs

## Discussion [continued - (i)]

- Women want a man with a less-developed career who could follow her lead and be the dominant partner in the relationship
- Younger men are deemed as more suitable partners for women who want children at a more advanced age





## Discussion [continued - (ii)]

- Older women in stressful jobs are deemed to view sex with a younger partner as a form of stress relief
- Younger men are deemed sexually more attractive
- Their courting skills and sexual eagerness can help to recapture a youthful feeling in older women
- Older women are deemed to have no self control when in the company of younger men – role of alcohol

## Discussion [continued - (iii)]

- Where migrancy is an issue, younger male sex partners are deemed more suitable than those of similar age; varied reasons perhaps - availability, no social ties, etc.
- These findings have significant implications as to how HIV prevention policies are created for older, sexually active women
- This is especially relevant, given different HIV prevalence 'pools' between youth and adults 25 and older

**Thank you for your attention!**





## **HSRC resources**

For more information on the activities of HSRC and SAHA in particular, see:

**[www.hsric.ac.za/SAHA.phtml](http://www.hsric.ac.za/SAHA.phtml)**

Useful source of 'Open access' HSRC publications, see:

**[www.hsricpress.ac.za](http://www.hsricpress.ac.za)**