

# **Factors Influencing STIs/HIV Risk among Higher Education Institution Students (A University Of Botswana Main Campus Case Study)**

*E-mail: [neo.nkwe@mopipi.ub.bw](mailto:neo.nkwe@mopipi.ub.bw)  
Lecturer, Population Studies, University of Botswana  
Plot 4775, Notwane and Mobuto Road,  
Pvt Bag UB 00705 Gaborone,  
Botswana*

## **Introduction**

Botswana is one of the countries in the world hard hit by HIV and AIDS. One of the key populations at risk of HIV infection in the country is young men and women (including students in higher education institutions). While over the years there has been an observed increase in the prevalence of HIV among the youth, general information on STIs among the youth has been lacking, this is despite the fact that STIs are a co-factor in the transmission of HIV. It seems though the government of Botswana has made efforts to roll out STI prevention as one of the core technical strategies for preventing further transmission of HIV in the population such efforts have often lacked emphasis.

## **Justification**

Although research on HIV risk factors has been conducted among university students in the past, not much was done in the area of STIs. The purpose of this study therefore was to identify factors influencing STIs/HIV risk among university of Botswana students based on qualitative data from a larger university study on 'Incidence and Prevalence of non-HIV Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youth in Botswana: A case study'. Identifying STI/HIV risk factors among young people in higher education institutions can be viewed as a key factor towards adopting positive sexual behaviour and ultimately the key to the Botswana's zero new infections target by the year 2016 thus leading to a healthy and productive nation.

## **Methodology**

The 'Incidence and Prevalence of non-HIV Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youth in Botswana: A case study' study sought to analyze data on the prevalence of non-HIV STIs among sexually active adolescents and young adults 18-24\* years old in Botswana. The study employed a mix of qualitative and quantitative research approaches to understand the issues involved in non-HIV STIs among University of Botswana students. Qualitative methods were used to explore adolescents and young adults' knowledge and attitudes towards non-HIV STIs, beliefs and practices about reproductive health, condom use/non-use, pregnancy, and abortion while quantitative methods were used to collect information on the student's background characteristics, knowledge and experience with Non-HIV STIs, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practices about reproductive health, condom use/non-use, pregnancy, and abortion. The current study utilizes only the qualitative aspect of the above mentioned study.

## Qualitative Sampling

The university of Botswana main campus was conveniently sampled for the study while discussants were selected purposively. A recruitment form was used to screen and identify focus group discussants for the study. The eligibility criteria for the study was as follows; participants had to be; 1) adolescents (18-19 years old) and young adults (20-24\* years old) who reside in the main campus of University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana and 2) sexually active (have had vaginal, oral, and/or anal sex). The above process was utilised to ensure recruitment of well-informed participants in relation to issues of sexuality. Participants for the FGDs were recruited through the help of members of the research team and class managers via announcements in classes comprising students from various faculties.

## Data collection methods

The study utilizes secondary data from the study 'Prevalence of Non-Sexually Transmitted Infections among Youth in Botswana: Case Study of University of Botswana Campus Students'. The study was conducted among University of Botswana students aged 18-28 years in 2013 with regard to young adults' knowledge and attitudes towards non-HIV STIs, beliefs and practices about reproductive health, condom use/non-use, pregnancy, and abortion.

## Quantitative sampling and recruitment

A multi-stage probability proportional to size sampling design was adopted for the 2013 study. First on campus students were stratified by sex, upon which a simple random sample was then used to select halls of residence and a Kish grid was used to identify eligible students for the survey. A total of 592 students were identified for the survey.

## Qualitative sampling and recruitment

A non-probability sampling method (purposive) was also used to access FGD respondents who were aged 20-28 (18-24\*) years. Respondents were recruited through announcements in various classes by members of the research team and other instructors to take part in the study taking into consideration the class program mix and availability of students at scheduled times (as per the screening/ recruitment form). The eligibility criteria for the study was that respondents should be; 1) adolescents (18-19 years old) and young adults (20-24 years old) who reside in the main campus of University of Botswana and 2) sexually active (have had vaginal, oral, and/or anal sex). The above process was utilised to ensure recruitment of well-informed respondents in relation to issues of sexuality. A total of six (6) focus groups translating to 43 respondents (20 females and 23 males) between the ages of 20 and 28 years old were convened for the survey. The current study utilizes only the qualitative aspect of the above mentioned study and the table below summarizes the composition of the FGDs and the dates on which the FGDs were conducted.

Data collection method	Respondents	Number of respondents	Age range	Date of Interview
Focus group 1	Females	7	20-24	25/02/13
Focus group 2	Males	8	21-28	26/02/13
Focus group 3	Mixed Group	9	21-24	27/02/13
Focus group 4	Females	4*	20-23	19/03/13
Focus group 5	Males	6	21-27	20/03/13

Focus group 6	Mixed Group	9	20-28	21/03/13
Total number of respondents		43		

## Data analysis

Computer-aided analysis using (Atlas.ti) was utilised for the study. Each transcript was coded and categorized into themes and sub-themes. Findings of the research were then placed under the headings of the ecological model in order to identify factors influencing risk factors to STI/HIV at each risk level (individual, social and sexual networks, community and public policy) of the society.

## Findings

Preliminary findings of the study show that knowledge of HIV/AIDS and its prevention is good among the students however, knowledge on some STIs and how to prevent them is still lacking. Discussants expressed concern that they are given a lot of information on HIV excluding other STIs, a factor that leads them to lack of knowledge in that area. Findings of the study also show that young people engage in risky sexual behaviour such as inconsistent condom use or non-condom use due to various factors such as trust issues (where the couple stops using condoms after being together for roughly more than 6 months); have to give something in return for the presents that they get (transactional sex). Other risky behaviours include having multiple and concurrent sexual partners; engaging in relationships with sugar daddies and mummies; exchange of partners; and substance use before or during sexual encounters even though such behaviour puts them and others at risk of contracting STIs including HIV/AIDS. From the results it is apparent that the school environment sometimes makes it difficult for young people to access crucial products such as condoms either due to; lack of knowledge on where to access the condoms; shortage of condoms within the campus; and not being allowed to move around within campus during certain times, thus leading to students engaging in unprotected sex. Peer pressure and the fact that students do not have parental control within the school environment were also cited as factors contributing towards engaging in risky behaviour.

## Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing STIs/HIV risk among university students. The study found that young people engage in risky sexual behaviour such as inconsistent condom use or non-condom use; transactional sex; having multiple and concurrent sexual partners; engaging in relationships with sugar daddies and mummies; exchange of partners; and substance use before or during sexual encounters even though such behaviour puts them and others at risk of contracting STIs including HIV/AIDS. Some of these findings are similar to research findings by (UNDP, 2000; UNICEF, 2001 and CSO, 2004; and Seloilwe, 2005) who also found out that young people engage in risky behaviour that predisposes them to STI and/or HIV infection. Lack of knowledge on STIs due to the fact that there are no STIs programmes within the school environment seems to have a negative impact on student decision making when it comes to STI prevention and management as students might not know some of the STI symptoms and risks involved thus this predisposes them to STI infection.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the preliminary findings, there is need to;

- Intensify target-specific interventions; encourage condom education among males and sensitize them that it is okay for females to carry condoms while females need life skills to negotiate condom use under all circumstances.
- Increase condom supply within the university as these seem to be in short supply, and also information on how to easily access condoms should be availed students through different mediums.
- Increase or introduce STI education or programmes within the university to cater for the lack of knowledge in prevention and management of such infections.
- A bigger survey to assess the impact of interventions on risky behaviour among the university of Botswana students should be conducted in order to continue or discontinue some of the programmes and maybe tweak existing ones.
- Prevention programmes for both STs and HIV/AIDS should be emphasized at all times through different modes of communication (including drama)