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Project Report
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South Africa

***Sexual violence and HIV/AIDS:
executive report on the 2002 national survey***

CIETafrica

Sexual violence & HIV/AIDS: Executive report on the 2002 nationwide youth survey

Sexual violence and HIV/AIDS are well documented global problems, and the connection between them is increasingly apparent: sexual violence makes victims and societies more vulnerable to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

In South Africa, recent research has found that HIV/AIDS affects 11% of the population and 28% of sexually active women aged 15 to 49. Widespread sexual violence and the historical dynamics of apartheid exacerbate this situation, and youth are the victims at the centre of this explosive nexus. Several studies report a high incidence of sexual abuse of (and by) South African youth as well as widespread misconceptions about sexual violence and the risk of HIV infection and AIDS. Responses to programmes targeting behavioural change among youth have been less positive than expected, but this age group remains key to attempts to put an end to the cycle of violence and infection.

The 2002 CIET youth survey in South Africa set out to map the true extent of sexual violence among youth, its social and cultural tendencies, and its links with HIV/AIDS risk across the country. It also sought to identify resilience patterns (what makes some young people *resist* sexually violent behaviour, despite living in a culture that overwhelmingly encourages this behaviour) and to take into account the views and experiences of youth for evidence-based preventive interventions.

Funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and UNICEF, the study covered 283,000 in-school youth across all nine provinces, and 2,909 out-of-school youth between 10 and 22 years in three provinces. The largest enquiry of its kind at the time of initiation, the national survey built on a previous three-cycle CIET survey carried out in southern Johannesburg between 1998 and 2000. Results from this first study revealed that men, women and youth in the region had come to regard sexual violence as an undesirable but inescapable fact of life, developing adaptive behaviours in which the stereotypes of victims and villains no longer seemed to apply.

The national survey confirmed the grim picture of sexualized violence across regions, ethnic groups and social classes, and made youth voices audible on an unprecedented scale.

The CIET youth survey covered:

- 283,500 school-going youth aged 14 years and above
- 1,418 schools
- All nine South African provinces

Methods and fieldwork

From June to September 2002, CIETafrica took part in a series of key stakeholder meetings to discuss the proposal, clarify objectives and cement buy-in. Ethical issues posed an early challenge. Parental consent was deemed inappropriate and prejudicial to a survey examining sexual abuse, so CIET obtained prior consent from the provincial departments of education and the authorities in each school, as well from the young people themselves.

A sample of sentinel communities in each of the provinces was based on the South African 2001 census. The sites were stratified as capital, metropolitan, urban, and rural. Random selection within sites was proportional to the population of the communities.

A self-administered questionnaire based on a pilot national study in January-February 2002 was translated into nine regional languages and tested in several schools. The term “forced sex without consent” was used instead of the word “rape”, which has no equivalent in some regional languages.



Data collection in the schools took place in all nine provinces in October and November 2002. The classrooms were arranged for privacy, and facilitators explained to pupils that the questionnaire was voluntary, that they could stop at any time, and that answers would be anonymous. The rate of response to individual questions ranged from 95% to 100%. Fieldworkers were trained to refer learners who personally disclosed an incident of abuse to accessible national programmes that work with survivors of abuse.

In June and July 2004, field teams interviewed out-of-school youth in sentinel sites, using the same questionnaire as the 2002 survey. The interviews were held in houses, on the streets, in public places and local places of congregation, and at social welfare pay points.



Table 1 Number of learners by province

Province	Number of learners
Eastern Cape	41,765 (15%)
Free State	6,099 (2%)
Gauteng	13,676 (5%)
KwaZulu Natal	95,481 (34%)
Limpopo	104,662 (37%)
Mpumalanga	5,831 (2%)
Northern Cape	4,105 (1%)
North West Province	7,222 (3%)
Western Cape	4,735 (2%)
Total	283,576

Results for in-school pupils

- **Knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about risk of HIV infection**

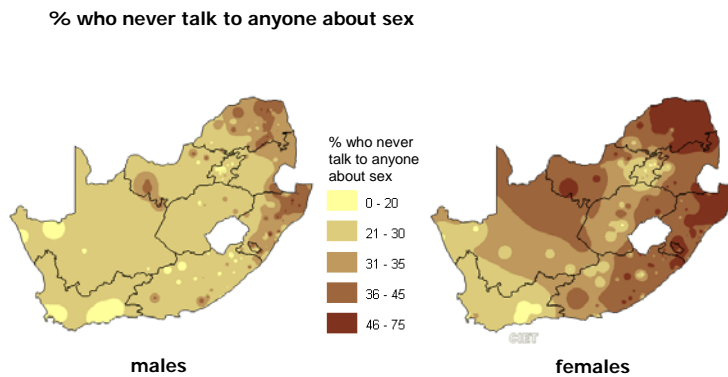
A high proportion of school-going youth showed they lacked knowledge, had misconceptions about and risky attitudes towards HIV/AIDS.

Despite the presence of extended, privately funded educational campaigns throughout the country, many students did not know the preventive value of condoms. Overall, only 57% of respondents said condoms can prevent pregnancy and 50% that they can help avoid the risk of HIV infection. In urban areas, younger females were much less likely than older females to believe that condoms could counter the spread of HIV and AIDS.

On the other hand, education had helped to dispel the misconception that sex with a virgin cures HIV or AIDS: some 13% of pupils believed in this myth, which was more commonly expressed by youth in rural areas.

One third of all learners admitted they never talked to anyone about sex, although girls appeared much more isolated in this regard. When they did talk, it was mostly about the intention of being tested for HIV. This lack of communication on sexual issues was confirmed by the fact that 54% of those who intended to have a test did not have someone to talk to about taking it.

Map 1



- **High risk behaviour related to HIV/AIDS**

Almost 16% of respondents said they would have unprotected sex if they thought they were HIV-positive. To clear up any doubt in this regard, learners were also asked if they would spread HIV intentionally if they knew they were infected. Here again, the same proportion answered yes. These views were expressed mostly by older males (15-19 years) from rural areas.

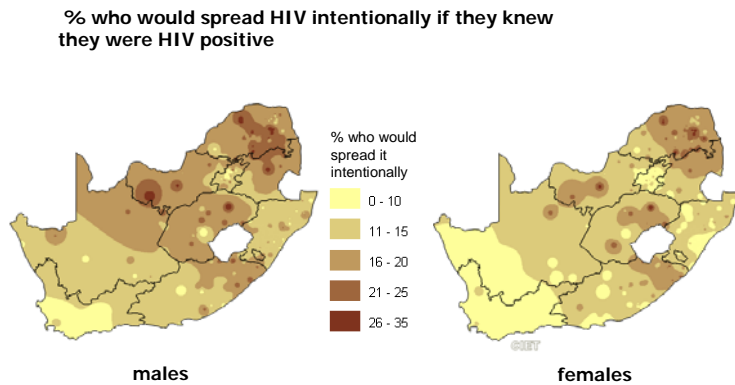
This aggressive stance may express a kind of fatalism bred by the culture of sexual violence, as well as the coping responses of those who believe that being HIV-positive means they have no future to which to look forward. Focus groups held to reflect upon the findings supported this association. Some youth bluntly said things like "It was done to me, so now it is my mission to pass it on. Why must I suffer alone?" or "I am dead anyway... I have got AIDS so why bother. Just have fun... that is my motto."

This first evidence of victims becoming villains should not be taken lightly: one third of learners thought they were HIV-positive. These respondents were *also* more likely to say they would spread the infection, to believe the myth about virgins and to hold views of sexual violence similar to those who had forced someone else to have sex.

However, the actual rate of infection among students is probably much lower, because nearly half of those who said they were HIV-positive *also said that they had never had sex*, and the overwhelming mode of HIV transmission in South Africa is through unprotected sex. Such ignorance of the mechanisms of infection also points to a failure of education. In this regard, CIET found that the views and attitudes of those who had received preventive education on HIV risk from national non-governmental programmes, youth groups, or religious institutions *did not*

differ much from those held by other respondents. The classroom setting seemed to be the only source of education consistently associated with fewer misconceptions.

Map 2



Source: CIET 2003

- **Attitudes and beliefs that impact on sexual violence**

CIET asked learners whether they felt that people have to have sex with their partners to show they love them. The question aimed at seeing how they understood their right to negotiate sex in a relationship. Nationally, about 30% of pupils felt they had to have sex as a proof of love, with males doubling the proportion of girls who held this view. Age also made a difference: 43% of 15-19 year old boys held this belief.

Social pressure on women to have sex at a young age was also confirmed: 30% of all students said that girls do not have the right to refuse sex with a boyfriend. Percentages were similar for both males and females, although slightly higher among 10-14 year olds. Risk is writ large here, too: in relationships where partners do not have the right to refuse sex, they are not likely to be able to negotiate or even casually discuss safe sex.

There were other potentially risky misconceptions:

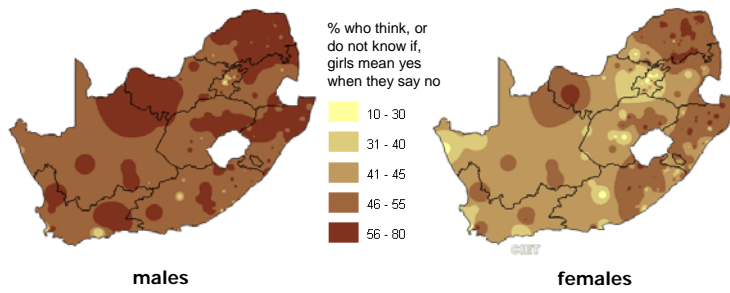
- Overall, half of all learners either believed that a girl means yes when she says no, or were not sure whether "no" in fact means no. Although this belief was more widespread among boys, it was also commonly expressed by girls, particularly in some areas of the country.
- Some 10% of pupils thought that girls who are raped ask for it, while 26% did not think that women hate being raped.
- Seventeen percent of those interviewed believed that girls prefer sexually violent guys.

The full force and scope of these attitudes was underlined by the fact that 60% of all learners, boys and girls alike, said that it is *not* sexual violence to force sex with someone you know. Similarly, half of all students (51%) thought that unwanted touching is not a form of sexual abuse, although this opinion diminished with age.

Those who believed that it is not rape to force sex on someone they know were less likely to say they had actually abused somebody, probably because their definition of rape excluded that kind of behaviour.

Map 3

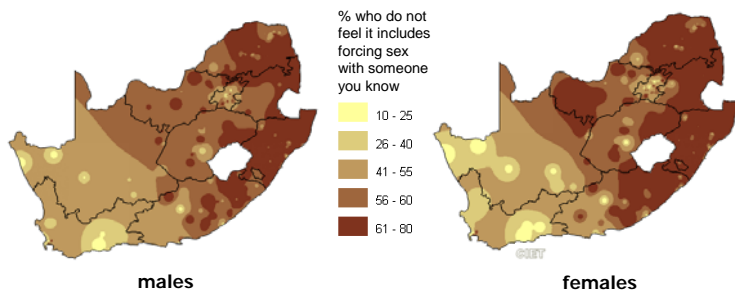
% who think, or do not know if, girls mean yes when they say no



Source: CIET 2003

Map 4

% who do not feel that sexual violence includes forcing sex with someone you know



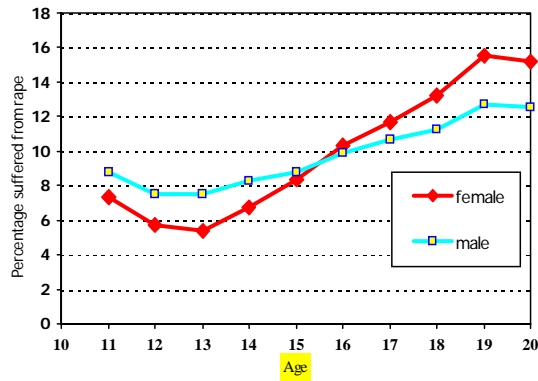
Source: CIET 2003

- **Practices of sexual violence**

Nationally, around nine percent of all respondents said they had been forced to have sex in the past year. Among children in school, this figure was roughly the same for girls and boys before the age of 15, becoming higher among girls than boys in the age group 15 years and older. The proportion of males who admitted forcing sex on someone ranged between six percent in the lower age groups and 25% in the older age groups. A small proportion of females also said they had forced sex on someone without their consent.

Here, again, results revealed that victims tended to turn into villains. No less than 66% of males and 71% of females who had abused someone else had themselves been forced to have sex. Perpetrators were also more likely to have views that paved the way for sexual violence: one has to have sex to show love, girls like violent guys, girls enjoy being raped, girls mean yes when they say no.

**Did you suffer forced sex without consent in the last year?
283,000 youth responses, WEIGHTED**



- **Links between sexual violence and risk of HIV infection**

A personal history of forced sex is a powerful determinant of views that increase the risk of sexual violence and HIV infection and AIDS. This was true for respondents of either sex who had been abused in the past year.

Sexually abused youth were more inclined to believe they were HIV positive, to have no intention of taking an HIV test, to say they would not inform their family if they were HIV positive, and to believe that sex with a virgin could cure HIV or AIDS. They were also more likely to say they would intentionally spread HIV. This attitude did not differ between the sexes.

Although in this study CIET did not assess the impact of educational activities to prevent sexual violence, the study yielded some information on the potential protective effect of some interventions, like life skills classes. Those areas of the country where misconceptions most favoured sexual violence and where forced sex was more common were roughly the same places where fewer learners heard about HIV risk from their life skills class.

Some conclusions

Misconceptions about sexual violence were common among South African youth of both sexes, but more females held views and perceptions that put them at high risk of HIV infection (like believing that condoms cannot protect them and feeling that they do not have anyone to talk about sex). These attitudes and feelings appear to be a maladaptive response to the heightened risk of sexual abuse and HIV infection, which consolidates a culture of sexual violence. In other words, people's reactions reinforce their everyday risk of sexual abuse.

It is also clear from the study that youth who have been forced to have sex are more likely to have abused someone else and more prone to have views that would put them at high risk of

HIV infection—for example, that sex with a virgin can cure HIV or AIDS, condoms do not protect against HIV, and so on.

It is important that those responsible for educating children and teenagers about HIV take into account that they may be changed by their personal experiences and environment, which are likely to condition their reaction to educational messages.

References

- 11% of the population is HIV positive. This comes from the 2002 Nelson Mandela/HSRC study of HIV/AIDS.
- 28% of sexually active women are HIV positive. This is according to the Department of Health's 2003 National HIV and Syphilis Sero-Prevalence Survey of Women Attending Public Antenatal Clinics in South Africa.
- These data can be accessed at <http://www.avert.org/safricastats.htm>