

Women Get Infected but We Die.....! Men and Masculinities in the era of HIV/AIDS in Botswana

This paper examines men's construction of their masculinities within the context of HIV/AIDS in Botswana, and how these might impact the country's efforts to control the spread of the epidemic. The current HIV/AIDS epidemic in Botswana has resulted in a multitude of programs and services aimed at stemming the epidemic. Men in Botswana are assumed to enjoy a 'patriarchal dividend' over women, and thus tend to dominate women's decision making, and rendering them vulnerable to HIV infection through multiple sexual partnerships. Consequently, HIV/AIDS intervention programs have aggressively pushed for women's empowerment as one of the ways of stemming the epidemic.

By empowering women to negotiate safe sex, and refuse to have sex with their partners on suspicion of heightened risk of infection due to multiple partnerships, HIV/AIDS programs challenge some of the ideological underpinnings of masculinity, rooted in control over women's sexuality. By discussing publicly what was hitherto negotiated in the private, largely patriarchal sphere of the home or household, HIV programs may have caused a certain level of consternation among men about their masculinity and perceived loss of power

This paper explores men's perceptions of themselves within the context of HIV in Botswana, and how these perceptions might contribute to men's behavior and the direction that the epidemic could take. The paper will also explore the extent to which HIV/AIDS programs have been able to incorporate indigenous knowledge in getting men involved in these programs.

Data sources

This paper triangulates both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to understand the role of masculinities in Botswana's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Quantitative data from the 2004 Botswana AIDS Impact Survey (BAIS II) are used to examine men's knowledge and attitudes towards HIV/AIDS programs, and to discern patterns of men's reported level of use of some of sexual and reproductive health services, and the determinants of such use. BAIS II is the latest of a series of nationally representative demographic surveys of population aged 10-64 years. The surveys, which are Botswana's version of the DHS, documents knowledge, attitudes, behavior and cultural factors that might influence HIV infection; prevention and impact mitigation. The survey also included a component on voluntary HIV testing among population aged 18 months to 64 years, in order to generate a nationally representative population-based estimate of HIV/AIDS prevalence.

Methods

This paper triangulates quantitative and qualitative data to understand the role of men and masculinities in HIV/AIDS in Botswana. Qualitative data were collected via focus group discussions; in-depth interviews with different groups of men and key informants in various parts of the country. Qualitative data are used to provide in-depth understanding of the quantitative observations and to gain more insights into masculinities in Botswana and men's perceptions of HIV/AIDS programs and interventions.

Results

Preliminary results suggest that while most men are supportive of HIV/AIDS programs, these programs have caused a certain level of consternation among men. Men tended to view women's empowerment with suspicion, and blame government for striving to empower women, while neglecting men. This view was especially strong among men of low socio-economic status or those who could not find meaningful employment. To most men being successful entails having adequate income and being able to marry and maintain a family. Most men viewed themselves as failures because they found it hard to live up to the social expectations attached to being a man.