

## Transactional Sex Relations among Tertiary Education Students in the Urban-Village of Maun, Botswana

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### Abstract

In southern Africa, multiple factors in given societal contexts motivate transactional sexual relations among women and men. The purpose of this study is to assess socio-economic and cultural factors that influence transactional sexual relations using a case study of students in two tertiary institutions in the urban-village of Maun in northwestern Botswana. To target information-rich cases for maximum variation, 74 (29 female and 45 male) students from two tertiary institutions (1 private and 1 government) were purposively selected. These were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. In addition, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted comprising 10 students from each participating institution. Data from the interviews were thematically analyzed and interpreted. The study findings indicate that intricately interlinked factors influence engagement in, and outcomes of, transactional sexual relations among tertiary students in Maun. These include inadequate educational necessities, poor living standards/limited sources of financial support, family upbringing/role models, parental/child neglect, family pressure regarding marriage, and personal vanity/idiosyncrasies. The study concludes that a comprehensive understanding of the multidimensional nature of the phenomena is needed in order to design appropriate interventions to address underlying drivers of transactional relations among tertiary education students.

**Key words:** Transactional sex, gender, power, HIV and AIDS, tertiary education students, Ngamiland, Botswana

### Introduction

The political economy of sexuality and gender is complex and multi-dimensional. Worldwide, multiple gender systems overlay sexual economy landscapes. Sexual economies include prostitution or sex-work (from streets, brothels, bars, and strip tease, exotic and escort clubs); tourism oriented prostitution (with vacationers); and transactional sex relationships. The latter involves deliberate sex for some form of betterment – material goods, clothes, accommodation, or social status and is not typically based on notions of love and romance (Kempadoo 2009). Transactional sex has also been defined in terms of exchange for money, material gain and or service (Dintwa 2012; Helle-Valle 1999; Chatterji *et al.* 2005). Some authors however argue that it is not always the economic element *per se* that forms the prime motivating factor in transactional relations (Iversen 2005). This is, in part, because men and women who engage in transactional sex do not usually identify themselves as sex workers (Dunkle *et al.* 2004; Iversen 2005) and in part because society generally does not label transactional relations as prostitution (Helle-Valle 1999). Other authors are of the view that exchange of sex for money and services occurs in all kinds of relationships, either casual or committed (including marriage) (Brouard & Crewe 2012), and often include the possibility of having a pleasurable sexual experience or abuse and violence. These relations bring to the fore a complex interplay of numerous social and structural variables (such

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as kinship/family structures, procreation desires/creative pleasures and social identity, expressions of authority/power, and violence (Tamale 2006; Groes-Green 2013). Furthermore, transactional sexual relations commonly take place within heterosexual relations in marriage. Since multiple partnering by women and men in Botswana does occur in and outside marriage, this scenario complicates normative expectations of monogamous marital relations as the only legitimate form of expressions of sexuality (Van Driel 1996). Additionally, other socio-cultural factors which contribute to the fluidity of sexual relations boundaries in contemporary Tswana society which have been observed by a number of authors in the country include a significant increase in the proportion of those never married, a high percentage of de jure women-headed households, unmarried mothers, and high divorce rates (Mokomane 2004). It is not surprising that within the plethora of sexual relations in the country, the government project *Reanyalana* (Let us Marry) is a state concerted effort to encourage cohabiting partners to marry, thereby invariably contain unbounded pluralistic sexual liaisons by enforcing normative heterosexual relations in marriage.

From the above discussion, clearly, a complex interplay of multidimensional social and structural variables undergird semiotics of transactional sex relations in Botswana. Transactional sex therefore is more than straightforward exchange of sex for money or material gain. In this paper, we pay attention to nuances of localized factors attributed to these sexual arrangements and sexual expressions. We conceptualize transactional sexual relation within gender relations as sexual praxis to capture ways in which sexual behaviors, activities, and interactions are made visible and desires/pleasures actualized in a continuum of relations (Kempadoo 2009). Sexual praxis includes, *inter alia*, relational encounters characterized by pain/pleasure/confrontation, friendship/conflict, and supportive/abusive relations of power and control over access to resources, material and non-material goods and services and or security. Language phraseology and meanings of symbolism are deployed by the actors in various contexts to express or frame the pros and cons of a range of experiences.

The paper focuses on transactional sexual relations in the urban village of Maun, the hub of the tourism industry and the gateway to the Okavango Delta in Northwestern Botswana. The overall objective of the paper is to assess socio-economic and cultural factors that influence transactional sex relations among tertiary education students in Maun. The specific objectives are to analyze narratives of transactional sexual relations experiences among tertiary education students in two institutions in Maun and, to analyze perceptions of potential benefits and/ or associated risks in engagement in transactional sexual relations among tertiary education students in Maun.

### Literature review

A distinction is often made between exchange relations categorized as “prostitution” and “marriage”. Whereas prostitution is associated with immorality, dominance, and inequality in sexual–monetary transactions, marriage is associated with morality, safe selfless romance, love, and egalitarianism (Brouard & Crewe 2012). However, in reality, sexual relationships, in committed or casual unions, binary categories of *inter alia* safe/unsafe, good/bad, moral/immoral, pain/pleasure, and egalitarian/submissive, are somewhat simplistic. As already stated in the introduction, in reality, women and men engage in a continuum of overlapping sexual relations ranging from completely committed monogamy to completely non-committed casual, multiple, and /or concurrent partners.

There are similarities between “prostitution” or commercial sex and transactional sex although in practice these relations are somewhat different. Payment to a *client* in prostitution is predetermined. In transactional sex there is no prior negotiation of the price and payment for sex work could include money but not always. In transactional sex the exchange includes a variety of goods and services (such

as basic survival needs including food, transport, accommodation, clothes, make-up, cars, electronic gadgets, smart phones, and personal vanity items such as fashionable designer clothes and accessories (Hunter 2002; Jewkes *et al.* 2012; Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Luke 2003). People who engage in transactional sex refer to each other as “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” not as “client” or “prostitute” (Hunter 2002). In transactional sex, there is no direct exchange of gifts or money in every sexual encounter; rather the exchange of gifts for sex is part of the relationship (Luke 2003). Money in this case tends to be symbolic (Gilmore 2007). ‘Sugar daddies’ for instance, rarely give money but rather provide gifts, clothes, and holidays. As a social group, transactional sex women often distinguish themselves from prostitutes in the streets as they are able to choose who they want to be with in a variety of ways/settings. In Maputo, for example, Groes-Green (2013) found that this social group call themselves ‘class-women’ who love the excitement of nightlife and men who see them for what they do as a lifestyle of choice and not solely as a consequence of need. What this implies is that, in transactional sexual relations, context matters. These relations are a product of intense political, historical, and economic circumstances (Jewkes *et al.* 2012).

#### *Erotica, HIV and AIDS, and women’s agency*

Female power in African societies, and in the context of globalization and consumerism, is part of the broader gendered system of exchange and reciprocity (Tamale 2006; Stoebenau *et al.* 2011; Shefer *et al.* 2012). Amadiume (2005) for example, shows ways in which, in matrifocal settings, mothers, daughters, aunts, nieces, and sisters work together in intergenerational alliances to mobilize resources vis-à-vis men. Eroticism constitutes a significant resource which transforms young women into subjects who actively engage in sexual relations to extract money and material gain from men (Tamale 2006; Arnfred 2011). As such, contrary to seeing women as helpless and oppressed victims without power in these sexual relationships, many studies show that women who exchange sex for goods are active social agents who make conscious choices, and sometimes deliberately exploit their partners (Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Masvawure 2010; Wamoyi *et al.* 2010; Swidler & Watkins 2007; Hunter 2002). Silberschmidt and Rasch (2001) argue that young women engaging in sexual relationships for financial and material gain are active agents and entrepreneurs who deliberately exploit their partner(s). Masvawure’s (2010) study amongst female university students in Zimbabwe, for instance, suggests that, in many cases, students successfully use strategies to avoid having to reciprocate sex for money or gifts with their ‘sugar daddies.’ These sexual relationships go beyond ‘victims and villains’ dichotomy and intricately intertwine love, gender, resource re-distribution, agency and power (Bhana & Pattman 2011; Luke 2005; Masvawure 2010; Stoebenau *et al.* 2011; Wamoyi *et al.* 2010; Poulin 2007).

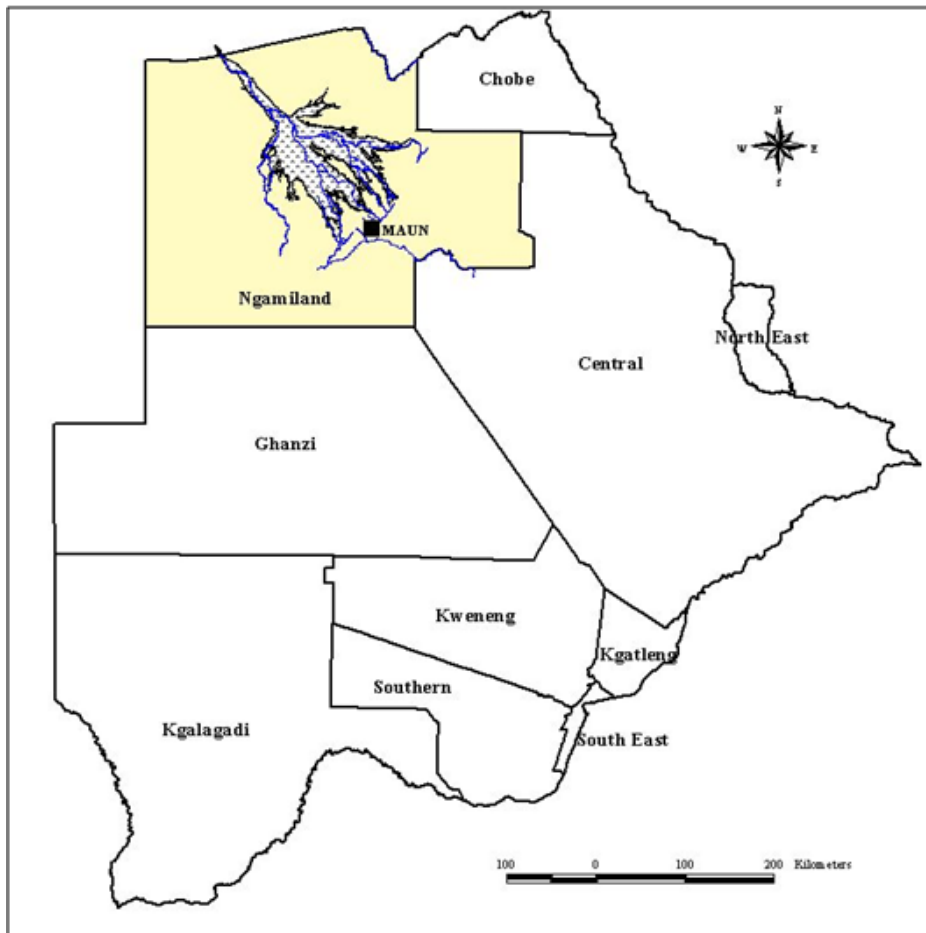
Some authors have argued against HIV and AIDS behavior change campaigns which represent sex and sexuality as a problem rather than an integral part of human experience of pleasure as well as pain (Cornwall & Jolly 2006; Hunter 2011). According to Dunn (2008) by presenting ideals of monogamous heterosexual relationships, these campaigns bolster anxiety and stigma, and fail to acknowledge coercion as well as erotica as underlying factors that drive the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Knerr and Philpott (2006) argue for greater acceptance of positive sex and that denying sexual pleasure in relationships has negative public health outcomes, especially with regard to the ability of women to negotiate safer sex. More nuanced approaches are therefore necessary to capture subtle complexities that underlie issues of intimacy, money, and conflicting moralities of transactional sexual relations in Botswana.

## Methodology

### *Study site*

The study was conducted in Maun, an urban-village in Botswana's Ngamiland District in north western part of Botswana. Maun has a population of 55,784 and annual growth rate of 2.45% (Central Statistics Office 2011) (Map 1). According to Botswana's National Settlement Policy (DTRP, 1996), Maun is considered an urban-village because over 75% of its population is engaged in non-agricultural employment. Maun is the district capital and center of commerce in Ngamiland. Maun is a 'globalized urban-village' often described as a 'gateway' to the Okavango Delta, a 'low volume high cost' tourism hub in north western Botswana (Stevens & Jansen 2002). People's interactions in this rural-urban space are defined by vibrant transnational and nocturnal drama evolving from bars, discothèques or night-clubs, restaurants, cafes, public consumption of fashion, music, subliminal erotica and cultural events.

**Map 1:** Study site – Maun at the base of the Okavango Delta



### *Sampling and selection criteria*

There are six tertiary institutions in Maun (three privately owned and three government aided. The private institutions are Ba Isago University College, Botho University College and Career Dreams Center. Government Aided institutions are Botswana Wildlife and Training Institute (BWTI), Maun Technical College (MTC) and Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning (BOCODOL). The following selection criteria were used:

- private or government aided tertiary institution,

- primary source of funding for the students (self, private and government agency, full or partial)
- availability and access to students enrolled for the winter semester (May – August 2016),
- on or off-campus students resident in Maun
- Ethical clearance and issuance of research permit.

The two institutions that met the above criteria were Career Dreams Center (private institution, hereafter IS-1) and Maun Technical College (MTC) (government Aided institution, hereafter IS-2). The two institutions had students taking classes during the 2016 winter semester.

Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents in both institutions with a particular focus on maximum variation. Ary *et al.* (2006) and Patton (1990) explain that maximum variation purposive sampling aims at capturing differences but may also identify or describe commonalities/or principal outcomes that cut across participants' variations as units of analysis.

Ethical clearance to construct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education in Gaborone and the permission to conduct the study was granted by respective heads of the two institutions. Students were informed about the study through a memorandum from the head of institution to the Students Representative Councils (SRCs), who in turn informed the student body. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity a working room was availed for conducting individual interviews and focus group.

#### *Data collection*

In total, 74 students (29 females and 45 males) from two institutions were purposively selected and interviewed. Criteria for selecting volunteers was based on students appointments (voluntary) for interviews depending on how each student managed his/her class schedule. Appointments were thus either early before class, in-between classes, during tea or lunch breaks, and afternoons before home departure. IS-1 respondents mean age was 23 years and the mean age for IS-2 respondents mean age was 26 years. Thus IS-1 students tended to be younger and IS-2 students slightly older. Each interview lasted between 35 – 45 minutes.

Data was collected using semi-structured interview guide containing open ended-questions. The interview guide was divided into five sections. The first section collected socio-demographic information; the second focused on general knowledge and awareness of transactional sex relations dynamics and nuances; the third was related to socio-economic factors; the fourth focused on cultural factors and the last was related to motivation and perceived risks and benefits of these relationships. Data saturation was reached when no new information was forthcoming from the respondents (Pope *et al.* 2000). In addition, three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in order to gain insight into participants thinking and why they are thinking as they do with regard to transactional sexual relations. The FGD interviews provided direct responses and concrete answers gave detailed accounts of these relations compared to generalized responses from individual interviews. One *gender mixed FGD was constituted from IS-1*, and 2 gender disaggregated (girls or boys separately) FGDs were constituted from IS-2. To ensure representativeness and balance, each group consisted of 5 males and 5 females *from each of participating institution*. The groups were homogeneous in terms of status (Ary *et al.* 2006), in terms of group brackets, academic programs, social status, and off-campus residency and social life experiences. Each FGD lasted an average of one hour. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed thematically.

Data were also obtained from review of relevant published scholarly articles and unpublished grey literature such as government and technical reports.



### *Data processing, analysis and interpretation*

Responses from each interview and each FGD were typed into a Word document. A data reduction process was done partly mechanically and partly interpretive. The process comprised three phases, namely familiarization and organization, coding/recoding and finally summarizing. In the first familiarization phase, each data piece was read and re-read (reflective logic). The coding/recoding included identification of categories and themes focused on events, units of meaning (words and phrases) and interpretation. Thematic categories/patterns emerged from summarized, repeated words/phrases and narratives/comments, which made qualitative links between and among factors influencing engagement in transactional sex-relations and perceived risks.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The following section reports on findings regarding what students in the two tertiary institutions perceived as factors influencing women and men's engagement in transactional sexual relations. The findings reflect a myriad complex and multi-dimensional motivations. The first part of the findings reports on key themes from individual students' interviews with regard to factors influencing women and men's engagement in transactional sexual relations and associated risks. The second part of the report gives a summary of transactional sexual relations issues emerging from FGDs.

### *Respondents' background*

In total, 74 students (29 females and 45 males) were interviewed; of these, 20 females and 25 males were from IS-1 and 9 females and 30 males from IS-2. Both institutions have no boarding facilities, therefore all students from the two institutions lived off-campus. All IS-1 students were mostly from Maun or nearby villages such as Sehitwa, Shorobe and Chanoga. These students either lived at home in Maun with their parents or with extended family members in Maun. About 90% of IS-1 student were self-sponsored, and 10% had their tuition paid for by Maun based private tourist companies. The students' families carried the apparent and hidden costs of education.

IS-2 students were mostly from different parts of the country and were less likely to reside with Maun based relatives. Therefore IS-2 students relied solely on rented accommodation. About 40% of IS-2 students were self-sponsored and 60% had private companies paying for their tuition only. However, even partial funding for IS-2 students was not guaranteed since some companies would terminate tuition sponsorship before the beneficiaries complete their studies. SI-2 students therefore also had to meet living expenses costs (transport, food, accommodation and medical insurance).

It is not surprising therefore that private tertiary institution in Maun prefer to recruit students from their home village of Maun. Conversely, government financed institutions tend to attract and recruit students on a countrywide basis.

### *Factors influencing transactional sexual relations in tertiary institutions*

#### *Erotic fantasies: of 'thigh power', 'ma14' and 'maBen10'*

Students assert that it is commonplace in tertiary institutions for female students to exchange sex with male instructors for higher grades – dubbed 'sexually transmitted grades' and as one male student put it, "*serope mperekela*" ('thigh, work for me'). Male respondents argue that females have sex with the invigilators to get higher grades, especially in 'practicals'. One male student commented disdainfully:

“Just recently, some female students bought a practical [exam] with sex..... to our surprise the girls had the highest possible marks than they [sic] expected” (30 year old male: IS2-003-5)

Furthermore, they allege that new graduates from tertiary institutions struggle to obtain employment and are still many roaming the street desperate for jobs. Students who rely on *serope mperekela* to get higher grades through their tertiary years become problematic when they enter the job market. If they get a job, they are most likely to be incompetent as they did not gain any useful knowledge while training. This can lead to loss of employment. One female student commented:

“Things have a way of coming out; when somebody was employed because of *serope mperekela*, if it comes out, both the one who gave her the job and she can be kicked out, and lose their jobs just like that” (19 year old female IS1-002-5).

Respondents believed that young women in this situation are also likely to resort to ‘*serope mperekela*’ tactic to get and or secure a job. The habit becomes self-perpetuating.

Respondents argued that “sugar mummies and sugar daddies” like the idea of having sex with the younger generation. For older men, it is dating perceived forever young ‘*le14*’ or imaginary forever young ‘*lolita*,’ and for “sugar mummies’ or ‘cougars,’ going after a ‘*Ben10*’ (figuratively a hyper active cartoon character). The ‘*Ma14*’ are said not only to satisfy the sexual desires of older men as compared to older women, but it also gives the men some sense of prestige amongst their peers. As one male student explains:

“Married men, especially those that have been married for a very long time, tend to get used to the sex to the point where they know exactly the spouse’s next move during sex. They know when they put left leg up it means sex from behind, and pajamas on means no sex. The point is *ma14* gives them more satisfaction than their spouses” (25 year old male IS2-001-003)

Erotic fantasies of married man tend to depict the desire to have relations with pre-pubescent and pubescent girls and boys. The processes of eroticizing young girls and boys and/ or adult women as child-like, cumulatively objectify them by portraying them as sexually available. Holland and Haslam (2015) argue that the objectification of pre-pubescent girls as ‘cute little things’ (Read: “*ma14*”) reduces public concerns with regard to child sexual victimization. The sexualization of children through “*ma14*” narrative is seamless in the public domain and is often reinforced; for example, sexualization of pre-pubescent girls in the advertising industry (Merskin 2004)

#### *The “IT” girl of safari night life, the swag and pop-culture*

Maun is a well-known culturally diverse tourism hub with an array of clubs, bars, lodges and hotels with open access every night for business and pleasure. However, there are associated costs such as entrance fees and buying food and drink. Some respondents allude to these diverse entertainment possibilities as a factor that leads students to engage in transactional relations so that they can afford to visit them. One male respondent explained that:

“I think these kind of relationships are very common among girls; they like going out, to parties, guest houses and lodges. So they target married men to give them money for entertainment. Most times they want somebody who will go with them all the time, drive them to the clubs and buy them alcohol throughout the night” (26 year old male IS2-001-2).

The lure of Maun nightlife came out strongly as a factor from S-2 male only FGD. The group felt that

female students are into transactional sexual relations with men who can reliably buy them expensive liquor and to enjoy weekend night life entertainment at high-end hotels/lodges.

However, most respondents think that female students engage in sex for material gain due to pressure from their peers. They aspire to dress more smartly than those who can afford to do so, and to own the same smart phones as them. One female student explained:

“Like girls here we compete with one another with latest trends [sic], like if I see my friend wearing *Vans* (shoe label) I would want to come wearing something better tomorrow like *Air-Max* (a shoe label) “(19 year old female: IS2-003-4).

Female students are said to be obsessed with what other girls think of them, the way they dress, who they spend time, with and what gadgets they possess. If one student has better gadgets that the others cannot afford, transactional relationships are seen as a viable alternative route to their acquisition. Sometimes they compete and ‘show-off’ boyfriends with cars and money and or encourage each other to follow suit. One female student explained:

“Girls like to compete all the time; they like to be seen by their friends as belonging. They like to live way beyond their financial limits, just to be like the other girls on campus. Sometimes when you ask her (your friend) how they able to buy all that, she will tell you I have a sugar daddy, maybe you should get one *chomi* (friend). So ... if you don’t have good morals, you will be tempted to do the same, because you want that iPad either way [sic]” (25 year old female: IS2-003-14).

Tertiary students like to keep up with the latest trends and fashion, to wear the latest clothes, and have up-to-date bags, colognes and cell-phones and to have ‘*swag*’ (a phrase commonly used to mean being up to date with fashion). Respondents admitted that their parents can only afford to provide for their needs and do not have money for a ‘flashy’ lifestyle. One female student said:

“You see the television, it is a problem! The material things we see, we want to try or buy. So the things we see in media, the cars and the makeup...we want them. But they are expensive, and we cannot afford them. Because a commodity is trendy, it’s like.. you are forced to have it ...and sooo....what do you do? You want it ...but you can’t afford it right? And you think... Ok...there is that bank manager who has lots of money who wants you?...Ok...you have no choice but to sleep with him and ... you get the money. Life goes on.” (19 year old female: IS1-001-1).

Reference was also made by respondents to the influence of media images and messages in redefining notions of masculinity and femininity. Hunter (2011) has observed that Hip-Hop, as a popular genre, is not only a multi-billion dollar industry but also focuses on conspicuous consumption in clubs culture to create new gender relations based on transactional sex. The rap-lifestyle and video productions focus on consumption of designer clothes, jewelry and expensive cars as well as sexual performance. Similarly in Kenya, Njue *et al.* (2011) argued that the availability of porn videos in Kisumu fuels transactional sexual relationships.

The female only FGD from IS-2 strongly echoed the sentiments that female student are under peer pressure to compete against each other by wearing expensive clothes in pursuit lavish life styles and pleasure. Respondents referred to this as the “pressures of modern life” when one has to appear in



a certain way to be perceived as a tertiary student, 'civilized' and "fitting in." Consequently students resort to sexual relationships that are perceived to be financially rewarding. That way, they know they can wine and dine in expensive restaurants, buy expensive jewellery, be driven in 'flashy and expensive cars', and wear expensive make up. The common expectation of young women is that men should demonstrate their appreciation for having enjoyed the women's sexual favors by providing the material resources they need.

It is believed that once one gets a partner with a fancy car they become the envy of most girls. The girl becomes the "IT" girl on campus. Everybody wants to associate with her; she becomes the celebrity of the school. The girls interviewed said having men with money somehow increases a person's self-esteem. Below, one of the girls explains how transactional sex can easily make one a celebrity among peers:

"There is this one girl here in our school, everybody knows her, but you won't believe me when I tell you that when she first came here (to this school), she was just a village girl from Rakops [a village 65 km from Maun], wearing sandals and pink tops like everybody. Today *iyoo!* [claps hands] you can't believe it, she is now beautiful, we all envy her. She started sleeping with different men, the who's who in Maun, people who own clubs. They give her money. She had upgraded her position now. She has expensive make up, smells nice, she is a 'white girl' now!" (20 year old female, IS2-003-3)

#### *Family dynamics and pursuance of normative ideals*

The female FGD respondents said the central motive for young women to engage in transactional sex with older, rich men is for material gain or money but not for love. Male respondents argued that young women are too 'focused on material gain rather than love in relationships'. One female student remarked:

"A woman is just never satisfied with what they have, whether they have a man who is caring, who provides everything and loves them. I am telling you they will still find an excuse to find a sugar daddy, and believe me that sugar daddy will provide, and again they think now I need one last one for more money, but then again... we live for money these days" (26 year old female tertiary student: IS2-002-4).

In the male only FGD, some group members disclosed that their steady girl friends are also in transactional sexual relationships. The girlfriend goes out with a man who will help them pay rent, transport and buy food. In this arrangement however, the boyfriend/girlfriend in question may or may not be living with the partner, but is content to receive extra financial subsidy from her transactional sexual arrangement(s).

Other studies have shown that transactional sex does not always occur as sex for subsistence. In other words, it is not only women who live in poverty who engage in sex in exchange for money or material goods (Iversen 2005; Dintwa 2012; Leclerc-Madlala 2003; Swidler & Watkins 2007; Masvawure 2010; Wamoyi et al. 2010). In urban areas of South Africa, Leclerc-Madlala (2003) states that young women often use their sexuality in order to gain access to "lifestyle rewards" and wants rather than for direct basic needs. Masvawure (2010) argues that transactional sex is only sometimes used as a strategy to meet basic survival needs by economically disadvantaged women. This implies that the relatively well-off are often motivated by the yearning for conspicuous consumption rather than subsistence needs.

However, in this study poverty, broadly defined, emerged as one of the major factors influencing girls in tertiary institutions to engage in sexual relations in exchange for money or material gain. The students often find themselves in situations where they have to help their families financially or assist in raising their siblings. Some students reported that they go for rich, older men to help ‘reduce the burden of responsibility’ since their parents rarely have money; students supplement their income to meet basic family needs such as food and personal hygiene supplies. One male student commented thus:

“We are from different families with different financial backgrounds. Some students here have a strong desire to improve their lives despite their poverty. I have a friend who has two younger brothers, but [sic] they recently lost their mother. After her death the girl started seeing sugar daddies. People blame her, but I don’t because she is honestly doing Ok; she buys food and uniforms, and she is here with us in this tertiary institution, paying for herself and doing well at the same time.” (24 year old male tertiary student: IS2-001-10)

Tertiary institutions in Maun have no boarding facilities for students. Therefore students who are not from Maun have to rent houses and use public transport to attend classes. Consequently, earning money for food, rent and transport becomes a common motive for engaging in transactional sexual relations. Female students, in particular, argue that it is easy to survive in transactional sex because men who are desperate for sexual relations tend to easily provide money. One respondent’s personal experience of a young female friend who targets rich married men commented:

“I have a friend who is involved with two boyfriends. They help her pay for rent, food and sometimes school fees. She has one who specifically pays rent and one who buys groceries” (21 year old male: IS1-003-5).

Some male students confirmed the above observation but stated that it was difficult for a young male to find a lavishly spending ‘sugar mummy’. Most male students said that the desperate need to meet educational expenses lures them and their friends to engage in transactional sexual relationships. According to a 19 year old female (IS1-001-6), if one has no family members to live with in Maun and because rental accommodation is exorbitantly expensive, finding a sugar daddy may be ‘the only way out’ [option].

Although some tertiary education students are from affluent backgrounds, other students from low-income neighborhoods, or rural and peri-urban settings are often the first in their family to enter a tertiary institution and find themselves to be the breadwinner and have to support their families from the meager stipends they receive from sponsors. Poverty and pressing family demands came out strongly in the mixed FGD. Participants strongly emphasised that girls are involved in transactional sex relations to help care for siblings, elderly parents, unemployed single parents and other extended family members living with them such as orphans.

In developed countries, university students are able to find off and on-campus employment to supplement their income. These opportunities are not always available in developing countries where there is a high rate of unemployment, especially of university graduates where opportunities for on-campus employment are non-existent. Seloilwe *et al.* (2001) argue that the tertiary education curriculum structure in developing countries tends to be inflexible, and characteristically involves extended timeframes and lecture contact hours which invariably limits students’ ability to engage in part-time on or off-campus employment to supplement their income/stipend. .

Parents are said to sometimes pressurize their children into finding partners who can provide and help support the household. As a 25 year old female (IS1-001-9) put it:

...because there is no food in the house, they tell you to go find a man with money! She lamented that her parents persistently make such remarks each time she asks for food or money to buy the basic necessities of life. In other words, the girl is subtly asked to find a ‘sponsor’ through their remarks, such as:

“I thought you said you had a boyfriend. Why isn’t he buying food for you?”

In the mixed FGD, respondents argued that there is a cultural expectation for a girl to be married when they reach a certain age. In the case of older men with failed marriages, especially those from upper income backgrounds are expected to find younger girls from lower income families. The FGD participants also suggested that sometimes girls are pressurized to find a rich older man to marry and have children even if the man in question already married, that is, for her to be in a polygamous relationship. The pressure is said to mount when such relationships are common in the young girl’s neighborhood and more so if the girls age-mates are in inter-generation, polygamous marriages.

In Maputo, Mozambique, girls refer to their white partners as “patrocinadores” (sponsors) or “ATMs” (*automatic teller machines*) (Groes-Green 2013) and the process is labeled ‘milking a cow’ (Hawkins *et al.* 2009). In Uganda, “girls shake the match box” by insisting that the transactional sex partner is introduced to the family as a sign of commitment. If he refuses it implies the ‘match box is empty’, then she would terminate the relationship (Nyanzi *et al.* 2001). In South Africa, girls “unpluck the chicken” – *uyamcutha* (Stoebenau *et al.* 2011) or find a ‘blesser,’ most likely a rich man who can afford expensive shopping sprees and pay for overseas holidays. Indeed there is a trend of match-making of the ‘blesser’ and ‘blessee’ through a dedicated website where a girl wanting to be ‘blessed’ is connected with the so called ‘blesser’ whose ultimate aim is sex (<http://www.all4women.co.za/> 13/04/16). In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the girls are said to be ‘skinning a goat’ (Maganja *et al.* 2007), whereas in Ghana, they are ‘using what they have to get what [they] want’ (Baba-Djara *et al.* 2013).

Most respondents believed that the manner in which one was raised has an effect on sexual partner choices. The respondents in our study pointed out that students often unconsciously copy commonly displayed sexual behaviors at home. A 23 year old female explains how this works:

“For example, when you are young maybe your family did not have enough money right.... and you had this aunt who was taking care of all the kids in the family although she was just working in a general dealer... as you grow up, aha...you realize that this aunt is being dropped home by different cars. So you learn that you have many “uncles”- *bo malume*... So because these numerous uncles with cars helped you get school uniforms and to have what other kids in school had, you think, having many uncles is just fine. So when it’s your turn to get into relationships, you will, without a doubt, follow the same route as your aunt, because who cares, she gave you a good living at some point in your life (IS1-001-2)”

From the above comments, in the eyes of a young girl growing up in this context, these comings and goings of numerous “*bo malume*” who directly or indirectly ‘sponsored’ family up-keep, becomes a norm. Similarly, in Maputo, young women, known as “*curtidoras*”, who engage in transactional sexual relationships with older white men, receive erotic knowledge and the art of seduction after the

girl's first menstruation and this continues (at least) until she gets married (Groes-Green 2013). In this context, senior female kin are said to be instrumental interlocutors deeply involved in the processes of transmission of erotic knowledge, seduction, and extraction of money.

In Africa, it is believed that at a certain age a man or woman should be married with a family. Parents are said to put pressure on their daughters in this regard not only to get married by comparing them with girls from other families, but to find and marry 'successful partners'. The pressure can be unbearable to some, as one female student in this study put it:

“It can be annoying; whenever you go to the village your grandparents update you about who is married and to whom. They tell you that the girl next door is married to a rich man from Serowe; they came to say ‘Hi’ driving a Mercedes Benz. These kinds of comments will put you under pressure to find not just a husband who loves you, but a rich one.” (27 year old female: IS2-002-9)

### *Transactional sex conundrums*

In southern Africa generally, a man is culturally expected to have as many partners as he can afford. Conforming to this expectation may increase the chances of them contracting sexually transmitted diseases from multiple and concurrent partners. Men are more likely to have the liberty to change partners if and when they want, as one female student pointed out:

“When a big man is rich and he can take care of 5 girls and his wife, he does just that. He has a chain of people he is sleeping with, [and] he doesn't know whether they have their own chains of partners or not. And obviously he is not using a condom for all of them. He will be planting gonorrhoea from one partner to the next or picking HIV from the infected to the other ones...” (26 year old female: IS2-003-4).

All respondents referred to increased risk of contracting STIs and HIV and AIDS as a consequence of transactional sex because of reduced condom use. One female student said:

“I am scared of these kind of relationships, for example, this sugar daddy has lived more than I have, so I don't know what he has been doing or whether he has a disease or not. The next thing he will be telling me is that he doesn't want to use a condom, and that I have no choice because he gives me money; so I agree and high chances are he gives me a disease...” (18 year old female: IS1-002-3).

Nyanzi *et al.* (2001) indicate that both men and women who engage in transactional relations are aware of the health risks, but are reluctant to raise their concerns for fear of losing a partner. Stoebenau *et al.* (2011) argues that women and men engaged in transactional sexual relations tend to 'internalize fatalism' and 'normalize' HIV infection.

Most respondents reported that transactional sexual relationships often lead to young girls falling pregnant against their will. In most cases, they are impregnated by married men with families who often force them to abort, presumably to save face, maintain their marriage, and preserve family dignity in the community. The procedure is illegal in Botswana, consequently students resort to back street abortions to end the unwanted pregnancy. This obviously constitutes a serious health risk which may result in death. If the student decides not to terminate the pregnancy through such methods, once

the baby is born, the man often prohibits the mother from maintaining contact with him. The baby then becomes 'fatherless' as one male student explains:

“...as much as we sometimes envy these girls' lifestyles, the long term consequences are not always pleasurable. First these men impregnate them, thereafter they give them money to force them to abort. It is sad. Sometimes the girl does not even know where to go for an abortion. They go for help to some old lady who operates her business from a *mokhukhu*, (a shack) and they risk more infections.” (27 year male: IS2-003-11)

Some respondents mentioned that leaving a transactional sexual relationship can be difficult, either because the partner who has been providing for material needs does not want to end it yet, or because the male partner has developed real feelings. The respondents viewed this emotional attachment coupled with power imbalance in the relationship as a potentially dangerous mix, because as one student put it:

“Men who pay and pay well want to always call the shots in the relationship. They are the ones who decide whether the relationship has to end or not. This could lead to passion killing [murder-suicide] right... of the girl, or because the girl may be too scared of him, and decides the best way to end the relationship is to hang herself.” (20 year female student IS1-002-4)

The relationship can become abusive (emotionally/physically) for the party that is providing sexual services; the other party can demand sex constantly regardless of how the other partner feels. One student gave an example of her neighbor who had a relationship with an abusive rich man:

“The man would come knocking hard on the doors and windows late at night. Sometimes he would be drunk, and some days I think he would be [sic] sober, but during the day you will see him unloading plastic bags and happy. I have a feeling the girl was just staying in that relationship for the money...” (25 year old female: IS1-001-6).

### *Summary and Conclusions*

Findings from this study show that transactional sex is pervasive in tertiary students in Maun and there are multiple interlocking factors contributing to these relations. These include inter alia, financial need, entertainment and education necessities. The participating students in this study are aware of the risk factors that accompany transactional sex yet continue to put themselves at risk, indicating the complexity of motivation beyond the need to survive. Although there were similarities and difference between mixed FGD and male and female only FGD; both groups suggest that peer pressure and competition, educational costs, desire for conspicuous consumption and an expensive lifestyle plus the desire to complete their education and secure a job are all factors that contribute to participation of tertiary education students in transactional sexual relations. The findings have implications not only for individual and family wellbeing, but also health outcomes of government public health policy interventions. Transactional sexual relations increases the risk of HIV and AIDS transmission especially in situations where there is unequal power relations which makes it difficult for girls to negotiate for safe sex. Consequently, transactional sexual relations may lead to undue morbidity and mortality (emanating from back street abortions, child abuse and or neglect and partner based violence).



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