

Framing Knowledge, Forming Behaviour; Ghanaian Women's AIDS-Protection Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This paper relies on data from face-to-face interviews among Ghanaian (female) Sex Workers, and unmarried women (who are not sex workers) to examine how the promotion of sexual health behaviour, or lack thereof, is related to beliefs about AIDS causation and prevention, and a sense of personal risk. Specifically, the paper focuses on why some women have adopted the use of condoms and others have not. Important in this particular analysis is the economic basis of women's sexual relations, and how this affects their ability to negotiate for 'safer sex' practices. The findings indicate that 'knowledge' has more potency for some women than others, and that this 'potency' is socially defined through asymmetrical relations. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 1998; 2(2):151-174)

RÉSUMÉ

Structurer le savoir et modeler le comportement; les stratégies de protection contre le SIDA utilisées par les femmes Ghanéennes. Ce document se base sur des données obtenues à partir d'entretiens en tête-à-tête avec des prostituées et des femmes célibataires (mais non prostituées) ghanéennes. Ces entretiens avaient pour but d'examiner de quelle façon la popularité, ou au contraire, l'impopularité de certains comportements sexuels, se trouvaient liées à certaines croyances sur les causes ou les moyens de prévention du SIDA. Le document s'est penché plus particulièrement sur les raisons qui ont poussé certaines femmes à utiliser le préservatif et d'autres à ne pas le faire. Un élément d'analyse important fût l'aspect économique dans les rapports sexuels de ces femmes et la façon dont cet aspect affecte leur pouvoir de négociation pour des rapports sexuels protégés. Les résultats montrent que le «savoir» a plus de poids pour certaines femmes que pour d'autres et que ce «poids» est défini dans la société à travers des rapports asymétriques. (*Rev Afr Santé Reprod* 1998; 2(2):151-174)

KEY WORDS: *AIDS-knowledge, AIDS-information, safer sex, condom use, women's HIV-vulnerability, sex workers, single women, male role*

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- v One of the clients of an Accra Roamer blamed the local metropolitan authorities for women's entry into prostitution, explaining that seizure of women's trading goods, and the levying of exorbitant fines, threw women into debt—debts they tried to pay off by engaging in prostitution.
- w The word *ahokyere* was frequently used to describe a respondent's situation. Literally this means to be 'tied up' or 'completely constrained'.
- x For knowledge about contracting AIDS to be considered accurate a woman had to include the sexual mode—without a condom—of transmission; according to the 1993 GDHS, 93 percent of Ghanaian women aged 15–49 express this knowledge, a further 84.4 percent mention not using a condom.
- y Information was unavailable for 13 percent of Free Women and 23.4 percent of prostitutes.
- z The analysis for Free Women excludes eight women who were not sexually active/did not have sexual partners at the time of the interview. Afua is a 28-year-old who describes a sexual relationship with another woman is also excluded since there was no indication of any exchange of vaginal fluids.
- aa The efficacy of condom use may, however, be compromised in some cases by the simultaneous application of lubricants, such as shea butter or petroleum jelly.
- bb At the time of the interview C500 was approximately equivalent to US\$ 1.
- cc The Queenmother, normally an older woman who has retired from active sex work, oversees the Seaters by calling meetings, ensuring that proper work ethics are applied (including condom use) and generally acting as mother to the women under her. She receives no fixed recompense for her work.
- dd Obviously none of the women in my sample had 'escaped'. However, I can say, without empirical support, (i.e., from what they and other tell me) few Roamers escape. High class often generate a business venture, get married, travel abroad, or acquire a job which makes sex work less necessary. Many Seaters expect to be cared for by children. Also, among the Seaters, those who are too old to work still live in the commune and are supported, to some extent, by their colleagues.

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