‘I trap her with a CD, then tomorrow you find her with a big old man who bought her a smartphone’

Constructions of masculinities and transactional sex: a qualitative study from North-Western Tanzania

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“Non-commercial, non-marital sexual relationships motivated by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or other benefits” (Stoebenau et al., 2016, p.23)
Introduction: Aims

• Gain clarity on men’s behaviours within, and perspectives of, transactional sex

• Unpack homogenous view of the role of men and adolescent boys in transactional sex

• Strengthen initiatives working with men and boys to shift social norms and for greater gender equity
Methods

- Focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews
- Transcripts translated verbatim from Kiswahili into English
- Thematic analysis and grounded analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IDIs</th>
<th>FGDs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Young men (14-24 years)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult men (&gt;24 years)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
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Results: Masculinities and Transactional Sex

Men are expected to provide material items to their sexual partners.

Men should demonstrate their masculinity through heightened sexuality and sexual prowess.
Results: Performing and Questioning the Provider Norm

• Young men had to ‘work very hard’ to provide in relationships

• Older men used the ‘gift method’ to ‘trick and trap’ girls, including those having a ‘money emergency’

• Some men were outcompeted for TS partners by others better able to provide
Results: Performing and Questioning the Heightened Sexuality Norm

- Men express a bodily desire for sex: ‘the body is harassing you’
- Monogamy unlikely to satisfy men’s sexual desire
- Men gain ‘swag’ by boasting about the number and young age of their sexual partners
Results: Questioning Transactional Sex

He has lost his self-awareness that he has responsibility for a family [...] he forgets that when he has more than one partner, his expenses will be too high, and there are important things that his family is going to miss.

(IDI, Older man)

I think that somebody that gives out money to get sex [...] his muscles are small [...] when you don't have money, [sex] stops there.

(FGD, young men)

[My friends] always come [and say] “the wife at home is tiresome my friend, escort me here” [...] I don’t need to embarrass myself, to lose my dignity and respect.

(IDI, older man)
Discussion

• Transactional sex presents an opportunity for men to enact provider norms and heightened sexuality norms and align themselves with a hegemonic masculinity

• Perpetuating women’s and girls’ economic dependence on men,

• Sexual coercion and control – differentiate men from ‘easily manipulated girls’
Discussion

• Men’s participation in and perspectives of transactional sex are influenced by reference groups of other men
  
  • Non-conforming individuals are sanctioned (outcompeted, ridiculed)

  • Men mitigate threat of social sanctions by preemptive behaviours and narratives – directly influence participation in TS
Discussion

• Men who question transactional sex do not necessarily challenge harmful hegemonic masculine ideals

  • Older men discredited men TS participants for risking ability to provide for their families and protect children

  • Younger men discredited older men using narratives of their sexual prowess, or love and trust
Limitations

• Strong ecological validity, but limited generalisability to a wider population
• Limited understanding of views and behaviours of older men non-participants in transactional sex
• Did not track changes in the same men over time
Conclusion

• Transactional sex provides men with an opportunity to adhere to gendered expectations

• Men are influenced by sanctions exerted within reference groups of other men

• Age and access to resources has an important influence on men’s participation in and attitudes toward TS
Thank you

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