

HIV prevalence is high but sexual risk behaviour is low in young South African women

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BACKGROUND

HIV prevalence in the South African general population is highest among young adults, with a prevalence of 33% among African women aged 20 to 34 years. This study aimed to describe the sexual-risk behaviours in young South African women aged 20 to 34 and to evaluate their contextual determinants.

METHOD

The South African National HIV Communication Survey, a nationally representative triennial survey, recruited 9,728 respondents aged 16-55 years in 2009. For this analysis, the sexual-risk outcomes include multiple sexual partnerships (MSP), transactional sex (TS) and unsafe sex (US), defined as not using a condom with a non-primary sexual partner. Univariate logistic regression was used to assess unadjusted associations between each sexual-risk outcome and 16 contextual variables. Using forward selection, variables with p-value <0.05 and improved model fit were retained in the final models. Analysis was weighted and adjusted for intra-class correlation within clusters. Analyses were performed separately for men and women.

RESULTS

Levels of sexual risky behavior in young South African women is low with less than 5% of young women reporting MSP, TS and US (figure 1).

Age group, marital status, province of residence and frequency of alcohol consumption were independently associated with MSP. Compared to women aged 30 to 34, those aged 20 to 24 were about three times more likely to be engaged in MSP (Adjusted OR [AOR]: 3.3, 95% CI: 1.4-7.9). The odds also increased with frequency of drinking. Marital status was a significant determinant of all three risk behaviours, with married women consistently less likely to report any sexual risk behaviour.

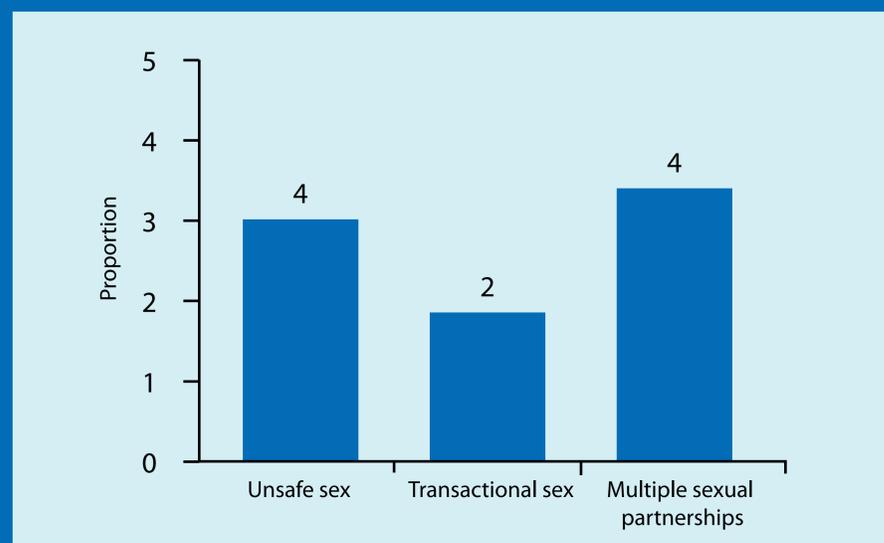


FIGURE 1: PREVALENCE OF SEXUAL RISK BEHAVIOURS IN WOMEN AGED 20 – 34 YEARS

CONCLUSION

The high HIV prevalence and low sexual-risk behaviours in young South African women suggest that the risk of HIV acquisition in this population may be more related to partner characteristics than to women's sexual-risk behaviours. There is a need for alcohol intervention programmes focusing on sexual risks in women.

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