

Living in a new Culture: The experiences of African migrant and refugee parents in New Zealand related to sexual health education.

**Fungai Mhlanga
MPhil Student Massey University**

Presentation outline

- **Study focus and background**
- **Previous literature**
- **Methods**
- **Findings**
- **Conclusions**

Research questions

- **What is the impact of migration on African family structures and communication patterns on matters of sexuality within Black African community?**
- **What are the attitudes of African parents towards responsibility for sex education to their children in the absence of traditional extended family educators in New Zealand?**

Objectives

- **To investigate the challenges faced when communicating HIV and AIDS information.**
- **To describe the impact migration and culture on sexual health education.**

Study justification

HIV and AIDS is a serious public health issue in New Zealand.

Africans like other population groups need support in HIV prevention especially young people.

Literature Review

Migration

- People migrate for different reasons- economic, political and family reasons and for study purpose ([Sales, 2007](#)).
- Refugees are forced to move by war and conflict
- Migrants choose to move in search of opportunities.
- Migration does affect family stability for both internal and international migration(Yakyi 2011).
- Inter-generational tensions ([Attias-Donfut et al 2012](#)).

Young Black Africans in UK and USA

- HIV prevention need is most acute among younger people([Dodds et al., 2007](#) ,).
- In USA young black MSM are especially hard-hit([CDC, 2014](#)).

Literature Review Cont.....

Family structures

- UK study - Trans-national living arrangements can make communication about HIV problematic between family members ([Katharine Sadler et al., 2005](#))

Literature Cont.....

Intergenerational tensions

- First generation migrants from Africa to have a strong attachment to values such as family dignity, honor, and respect for the authority of men and of elders ([African Issues Group, 1999](#) , [\(NAHIP 2008\)](#)).
- Younger migrants adapt faster than older generation.
- Older wish to keep more of home culture.
- Different perceptions create tensions.
- Parents feel they are losing control([Deng 2011](#))

Literature Review cont.....

HIV Information & Communication

- open discussion of sexuality in public or in mixed social settings is a taboo for most African people ([Department of Health, 2004](#)).
- Many African parents tend not to offer information about sex to their children, with this responsibility passing (formally or informally) to other family adults([Chinouya & O'Keefe, 2008](#)) or to peers.

Literature review cont....

Culture and religion

- **Opposition to prevention messages e.g condom use is “tantamount to condoning immorality and infidelity”([Jackson, 2000, p. 138](#)).**
- **Sergeant (2014) - Australian African communities -taboos, discouraging public talks around sex.**
- **Christianity , African traditional religion and Islam all share common belief of sex only being allowed in marriage([Mbiti, 1991](#)).**

Methods

- **Use of Secondary anonymous data from African Health Research studies completed in 2012 and 2013.**
- **Data sets -quantitative survey (703 usable responses) and Focus Groups (131 participants).**
- **Data was collected with full participation and guidance of African community leaders.**
- **Ethics approval granted.**

Possible study limitation-

- **Africans are very diverse in culture, religion , languages, countries of origin. Not all results apply to all African groups.**

FINDINGS

Guidance missing – lots of freedom for
young people

***“.... Back home at least you have aunties,
uncles, brothers people who easily talk to you
and prompt you back here, you are free, you
are by yourself and so no one else talks to
you, no one tries to prompt you as to what
you are doing and so even the family systems
here compared to what we have there”
(Auckland male)***

Freedom

“Even if your father and mother are here, if you here as a young boy, a young girl, by the time you are sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, you’re aware that from that age you are entitled to a lot of freedom, you start becoming rebellious and that is where it goes and over here, boyfriend, girlfriend and sex is, no one even thinks about it twice, it’s so normal” (Auckland male)

Changes to lifestyles

“Girls can get out of the family, they can live by themselves when they are fourteen or fifteen. In terms of Africa that’s different” (Wellington male)

“I can say, especially as being Africans we are very strict but we should be able to look at it, our children are growing up in a society where when you are seventeen sometimes it can be embarrassing to say you haven’t had sex so we need to prepare our children, tell them the truth about what we value and encourage them but at the same time being open minded” (Auckland female)

Culture changes

“For me it has changed when I came here but before when I was back home I just met someone from my own was the best thing to do but when I came here, then I just started seeing the world differently. Now I’m here I think it’s (relationships with non Africans) okay but before, no, no” (Waikato female).

“In as far as the attitudes of Africans here, I think to a certain extent they have changed and refined, especially when you look at the younger generation, there is a great tendency for them to freely engage in relationships with different races and not see it is an issue” (Christchurch male)

Parents Reactions towards responsibility for sex education?

Parents avoidance of sex Education.

“We don’t talk about it because uhm you think maybe if you call your daughter or your son who is a teenager and sat them down and talk about sex and stuff, you think maybe you influence them to do yeah so I think maybe we need to change that to more.... I don’t know but, we are not very, we don’t we are not very good at all because...” (Auckland male).

Religion and cultural barriers.

- ***“...being Christian does kinda have that effect and having Christian parents and Christian values are the probably the building blocks of our values and core actions yeah”(Auckland female)***
- ***Uh, well, totally we are against that because in our culture or our religion is an except or for a man or a woman to be intimate before marriage and after when that happens, there will they will there will be a punishment and they will go to hell because the religion says that its unacceptable. (Wellington female)***

Religion

Religious institutions promote abstinence. strong messages that discourage sex before marriage. Oppose condoms.

“I don’t want people to come and end up giving our children condoms [in the church], yeah in the church because I’ll be, I don’t accept that even though we are talking about abstinence and sorry we’re talking on abstinence, being faithful and condoms”.

Disparity between religious beliefs and actual practice

“Yeah she made it quite clear, it’s not something [HIV education] she would advocate in the church but it’s something she’d do personally”. (Auckland male)

- Lacking confidence to talk about sexual issues.

Culture and religion

Churches -more than just places of faith, social support.

“What I got from it is like you said the church becomes a central point as for us migrants because even if we know we leave our culture, our faith is still there..... (Auckland male)

Condoms not acceptable

“Condoms, I think they are safe when having sex but if you are married you can’t introduce a condom in the house, especially in our culture, that is a no, no, no. But if someone knows that is just having fun, not married and you just want to have fun, then. (Waikato female)

Conclusions

- **At the onset of this research, one of the assumptions was that low HIV knowledge among African young people is a result of absence of extended family members who are not available to pass on sexual information in line with African culture.**
- **Absence of extended family is not the main barrier to sexuality education.**
- **Other factors such as culture , religion and the avoidance of the sex and HIV topic by parents contribute significantly to the low levels of HIV knowledge among young Africans.**
- **culture and religion rather than family fragmentation is main barrier .**

Conclusions

- **Religion and culture has the greatest influence on attitudes towards HIV and African community responses to prevention programmes.**
- **Absence of extended family though showing a gap in family is not the only factor reducing HIV and sex education in African youth.**
- **Young people adopting host country culture faster than adults.**

- **When traditional African cultures meet new social environments, there develops an increased need for education but the parents would still be looking at things through the lens of their previous experiences and models in Africa. In doing so the parents are constrained by cultural expectations that differ from the new, sexualized societies where their children are growing up.**

Culture ,Religion and life intertwined.

“...as well as I guess maybe how tradition uhm and religion kind of inter-twine in such cultures like African cultures coz I mean people might not necessarily go to church or consider themselves Christians but they sort of follow those values that I guess concern into tradition as well so, uhm they might not specifically go to church or whatever but they would live their lives kind of sort of like in some aspects according to those values....” (Auckland female)

Recommendations

- **Greater engagement with religious leaders in ways sensitive to beliefs around abstinence.**
- **Capacity building of parents on sexual health**
- **A community support Group equipped with skills to advise young people.**
- **Wider community promotion of prevention using culturally appropriate strategies.**
- **Further research on strategies to increase involvement of community & religious leaders.**

There is hope!!!!

- **Africans are resilient**
- **Africans bring strengths to NZ society.**
- **Africans are eager to contribute to success of NZ**
- **Africans are proud to be home away from home.**

Siyabonga

Tatenda

Thank You

Kia Ora

- **Questions/comments**