

# ***Adolescents' Sexual Health in Uganda: Abstinence-only and Perceived Autonomy***

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## **Abstract**

Abstinence-only programmes are said to be endangering adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights in Uganda. The Ugandan government has been implementing an ABC strategy, i.e. Abstinence, Be faithful, use Condoms, which has been assigned to a successful drop in HIV prevalence since 1992. However, for unmarried adolescents, the government narrowed down this successful strategy to the criticised Abstinence-only strategy. Nowadays, HIV prevention programmes in schools contain mainly abstinence-until-marriage messages and the promotion of condoms is prohibited in secondary schools. Based on in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions with 15-to-19-year-old adolescents at a mixed secondary school in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, this paper explores adolescents' perceptions on abstaining from sexual intercourse. Using the Reasoned Action Approach (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010), the paper concludes that abundant messages of abstinence, from teachers among others, may lead to a feeling of perceived low autonomy of "bodily urges" to abstain from sexual intercourse.

## **Introduction**

The first cases of HIV/AIDS in Uganda were discovered in the districts of Rakai and Masaka, close to the border of Tanzania, in the early 1980s (Kinsman, 2008). At its peak, an HIV prevalence of over thirty percent was measured among antenatal clinic attendees in Uganda's urban areas in 1990 (UNAIDS and WHO, 2004). In 1992, Uganda was the first country to measure a decrease in HIV prevalence. The 1990s showed a downfall of estimated HIV prevalence in the ages 15-49 from 10.7 percent in 1991 to 6.8 percent in 2002, after which it stabilised around 6.5 percent up to 2009 (UNAIDS, 2010). During the last few years, there have been some 'anecdotal indications' of increasing HIV prevalence and incidence rates (Government of Uganda, 2008, p.3).

Despite little available knowledge at that time regarding the epidemic and its implications, Uganda was one of the first African countries to establish an open national policy response with the founding of the national AIDS Control Programme, right after the civil war in 1986. From the start, heterosexual intercourse was, and still is, believed to be the major transmission route of HIV in Uganda (Kinsman, 2008; Ministry of Health and ORC Macro, 2006).

According to Kinsman (2008, p.91), a lack of substantive evaluations encouraged the use of 'common sense' and moral beliefs in developing adequate policy responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. For instance, condom promotion was believed to be a problem because of cultural beliefs and traditions, whereas "zero-grazing", i.e. faithfulness, was assumed to be a familiar concept to the Ugandan people. The promotion of abstinence was largely promoted by faith-based groups, according to Kinsman (2008). However, increasing HIV infection rates in the early 1990s would have triggered a more open policy towards condom use (Kinsman, 2008).

Consequently, Kinsman (2008) distinguishes three phases regarding Uganda's HIV prevention strategy:

- Faithfulness as the main focus in 1986 to 1992;
- An increasingly open policy towards condom use in 1992 to 2002;
- Increasing foreign funding accompanied with an international debate regarding abstinence versus condom use as most effective HIV risk reduction strategy from 2002 onwards.

Through the years, Uganda has received a lot of foreign assistance in their fight against HIV/AIDS, of which PEPFAR has been an important one: \$ 1,216 million from 2004 to 2009 (Kinsman, 2008; PEPFAR, 2011a). PEPFAR, i.e. the Presidential Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, was introduced by the U.S. government in 2003. It retrospectively interpreted and defined Uganda's successful HIV/AIDS reduction strategy and called it the ABC-strategy: Abstain, Be faithful, and correct and consistent Condom use, whereby young people were encouraged to abstain until marriage and condoms were only promoted among high-risk groups, such as sex workers and discordant couples (Kinsman, 2008; PEPFAR, 2011b). According to Kinsman (2008), PEPFAR's strategy to promote abstinence and discourage condom use was a result of arguments provided by Republicans and the Ugandan First Lady, Janet Museveni, who as a Christian favours abstinence, especially for young people (Kinsman, 2008). PEPFAR's interpretation of the ABC strategy received several critiques, for instance, that social conservatives in the U.S. were using Uganda's ABC strategy as 'an excuse and justification to promote their long-standing agenda regarding people's sexual behaviour and the kind of sex education they should receive' (Cohen, 2004, p.132).

#### *Adolescents' SRHR in Uganda*

In 2007, HIV prevalence was estimated 3.9 percent for girls and 1.3 percent for boys aged 15-24 in Uganda (UNAIDS, 2008). Furthermore, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among adolescents aged 15-19 are widespread: although one percent tested positive for syphilis in 2004-2005, nineteen percent was infected with herpes simplex type 2 and nine percent with hepatitis B, whereby the percentages for young women were slightly higher than for young men (Ministry of Health and ORC Macro, 2006). Although not specified for adolescents, it is estimated that about 1.83 million pregnancies occur in Uganda each year, of which sixteen percent are estimated to end in induced abortions and 26 percent in unplanned births (Singh et al, 2006).

In order to decrease the levels of HIV, other STIs, and unwanted pregnancies, adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights have become a high policy priority in Uganda (e.g. MoES, 2006). Research (UBOS and Macro International Inc, 2007; Nyanzi et al., 2005; Nyanzi et al., 2001; Nobelius et al., 2010) has identified several sexual behaviour patterns, which could be unsafe for Ugandan adolescents, among which early onset of sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse without condom use, cross-generational and transactional sex, having multiple partners at the same time, and high peer pressure to lose virginity at an early age.

#### *Reaction Ugandan government: Abstinence-only prevention programmes*

In order to address adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and rights, but most especially HIV/AIDS, the Ugandan government started implementing the HIV prevention education programme PIASCY at all primary and secondary schools in Uganda in 2003 (Cohen, 2006).

At first, PIASCY, i.e. Presidential Initiative on AIDS Strategy for Communication to the Youth, contained both messages on abstinence and condom use. However, after critiques from evangelical

groups, the materials were revised to abstinence-until-marriage messages without the promotion of condoms in late 2003 (Cohen, 2006). According to Cohen (2006), these local religious groups were influenced by the U.S. government who funded PIASCY and wanted to spend one-third of all HIV prevention PEPFAR money on abstinence-only programmes. The main focus on abstinence-until-marriage without the promotion of condoms in PIASCY and in HIV prevention programmes in general has received many critiques, e.g. Human Rights Watch (2005), Okware et al. (2005). For instance, Kirby (2007) concludes that abstinence-only programmes have not yet been proven to delay onset of sexual intercourse, to increase secondary abstinence, and to reduce the number of partners, and a recent meta analysis of HIV intervention trials from 1985-2008 concludes that HIV interventions for adolescents are more effective when they do not emphasize abstinence (Johnson et al., 2011).

That abstinence still is the main policy for young people in Uganda becomes clear in the “Education and Sports sector national policy guidelines on HIV/AIDS” published by the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports in 2006. It states that primary abstinence from sex will be promoted in primary and secondary schools as the main strategy for HIV prevention, and sexually active students and learners will be supported to adopt secondary abstinence. Condoms will only be promoted at tertiary institutions, according to this policy (MoES, 2006).

Within this specific political, cultural and religious context of Uganda, this paper will explore adolescents’ perceptions on abstaining from sexual intercourse.

### **Theories**

The socio-cognitive Theory of Planned Behaviour has been used as the main theoretical framework in this research. The Theory of Planned Behaviour originates from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and was later adjusted by Ajzen (1991, 2002). It consists of three different determinants of behaviour, i.e. “attitude toward the behavior”, “perceived norm”, and “perceived behavioural control”, that lead to the formation of a person’s intention to perform a particular behaviour. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (2010), “perceived behavioural control”, i.e. ‘people’s perceptions of the degree to which they are capable of, or have control over, performing a given behavior’ (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, p.64), is very similar to Bandura’s (1977, 1997) concept of perceived self-efficacy.

Research on sexual behaviour often use the Theory of Planned Behaviour in a quantitative way to study and predict individual sexual behaviour. Similarly, an evaluation of a comprehensive sexuality education programme targeting adolescents in Uganda (Rijsdijk et al., in press) – related to the present research- applied the Theory of Planned Behaviour using a quantitative questionnaire. In order to obtain a better understanding of the results of this evaluation, and to induce information not asked for in the questionnaire, this study also used the Theory of Planned Behaviour but in a qualitative way. The research studies the different considerations that adolescents have regarding abstaining from sexual intercourse. Furthermore, as the embeddedness of perceived self-efficacy in the socio-cultural context in which people live is rarely studied, extra attention is paid to this concept (WHO, 2006).

### **Methodology**

To obtain a better understanding of adolescents’ perceptions of abstinence from an emic, or insiders, point of view, it was decided to perform in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (Harris, 1980; D’Andrade, 1995). The in-depth interviews could provide more in-depth information into the

participants' perceptions regarding the topic, whereas the Focus Group Discussions could provide a range of different opinions of the topic. The semi-structured interview and discussion guides were based on the theoretical framework, and piloted at a mixed secondary day school just outside the centre of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda.

#### *Setting and selection of participants*

It was decided to study adolescents at a mixed secondary day school in Kampala. A mixed school would give the opportunity to study the interaction between both sexes. Students going to day school were assumed to be more influenced by life outside the school compared to students in boarding schools.

At the mixed secondary day school in Kampala, it was decided to study students in the last three years of secondary school, i.e. Senior 4, Senior 5, and Senior 6, because it was assumed that they would have more experience with relationships and sexual activities compared to students in the first three years. This meant that the study population were boys and girls within the ages 15-19. The participants were randomly selected and identified by a female teacher.

#### *Data collection and methods*

In total, ten in-depth interviews, with four girls and six boys, and six Focus Group Discussions were performed: two with only boys, two with only girls, and two mixed with both boys and girls. It was decided to use both mixed and single groups to see whether the composition of the group would affect the answers of the participants. Each Focus Group Discussion consisted of approximately eight participants, a note taker, and the researcher to ask the questions and guide the discussion. The note taker was a Ugandan male of 22 years old. At the start of the Focus Group Discussions with the girls, it was discussed that the male note taker would leave whenever they wanted to in case they would not feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues with a Ugandan male present. However, they agreed to keep him in. Both in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions were performed in English, the official language in Uganda and spoken in all secondary schools.

In addition to the in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions, the qualitative data included notes comprising attitudes and visual gestures of the participants, which were made during and after each in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion; field notes with impressions of the participants' school; and newspapers and pictures, of for instance bill boards, targeting Ugandan adolescents' sexual health. Lastly, code notes and theoretical notes were made during the data analysis.

#### *Ethical considerations*

This study was part of an evaluation of a sexuality education programme, which was approved by the ethics committee of the University of Maastricht, the Netherlands. The principal of the school and all participants were asked for consent to participate in this study after they had been informed about the contents, the aim of the study, and the role of the researcher. In addition, all participants were informed that they could leave at any time and that they were not obliged to answer questions they did not want to answer. They were told that the study was confidential, their names and the name of the school would not be mentioned in this study, and no one in- or outside the school would be able to know what they had said. A health referral list was established to refer participants to health centres in Kampala in case they would feel affected by the interview or if they would have questions or a problem relating to the topics discussed. Tissues and water were available as well. It was later apparent that the tissues, water, and health referral lists were not needed. All participants were

provided with a snack and a soda after the data collection, of which they were not informed about at forehand. Data collection took place in April and May 2008.

### *Analysis*

All in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions were recorded with a digital voice recorder, transcribed verbatim, and analysed in the programme Atlas.ti 5.5. For analysis, the Grounded Theory method was used, as described by Strauss and Corbin (1990). Grounded theory is a method to analyze texts of qualitative research, whereby it constructs a theory based on relevant information derived from the collected data (Ezzy, 2002; Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.23).

### **Results**

This section will first describe the participants' perceptions on having relationships and performing 'safe' sexual behaviours such as hugging, pecking, and kissing, after which their perceptions on sexual intercourse and abstinence will be discussed.

#### ***Relationships: love and academics do not mix***

At the time of data collection, Universal Secondary Education (USE) had just been introduced, meaning the Ugandan government would cover the school fees of students in secondary school. However, in addition to school fees, students and their families are still expected to cover additional costs, such as a school uniform, books, lunch, travel expenses, and hostel fees. Even though USE had been introduced at time of data collection, several participants still mention family members paying their school fees on which they are depending to go to school. The participants in this study say they have to work hard and make sure they do not get suspended from school because they know school fees should not be wasted, which can put a big pressure on them to perform well at school. They often consider education as a way to find a job and secure their future. Being able to go to University is another reason to perform well in school. Every year, the government sponsors the best 2,000 graduates at A-level to go to Makerere University, the biggest University in Uganda (Kigotho, 1999).

When discussing relationships in school, the participants often remark that love and academics do not mix. They say teachers at school lecture the students that secondary school is not the right time to have relationships because they should be concentrating on their studies. In addition, they say teachers remind them of the school fees their parents are paying for them, and how they should not be wasted by losing focus on their studies.

According to the participants, the main reason that love and academics do not mix is because a person will be thinking about the boy- or girlfriend all the time, which will make one lose focus on his or her study. They say this problem becomes bigger when they are in the same school or even in the same class. In the end of it all, their performances will decline, the participants state. Not everyone agrees that love and academics do not mix. One girl even argues that her friends are the ones who are not able to concentrate because they are not in a relationship but wanting to have one.

Although four of the ten interviewees are in a relationship at the time of the interview, most participants agree that secondary school is not the right time to be having a relationship. Their reasons for not having relationships in secondary school are: they need to focus on their education, which is leaving them no time for relationships; they want to wait until they are eighteen, the adult age in Uganda, when they are mature and no longer under the wings of their parents; and they think being in a relationship can lead to having sex. Furthermore, they say that the boys want to wait until

they are in the financial position to help out their girlfriends and take them out on dates. Some think relationships in secondary school are not serious and a result of peer pressure. Most of the participants want to get a relationship when they are in University because by that time a person will be mature and will know what to do.

### ***“Safe” sexual behaviours***

The participants perceive hugging and holding hands as accepted gestures between friends, although they think this may depend on the home or society someone comes from, and pecking as a less accepted gesture. This shows a link with the behaviours they find acceptable within intra-generational relationships: hugging is accepted but kissing is less common. Most participants agree that they want to wait with sex until marriage. In general, they think before marriage it is okay to be hugging and kissing, or at least to be performing activities where the clothes are still on.

The participants perceive pecking and kissing to be behaviours from the Western world that are not common in the Ugandan and African culture. They say that they were brought up with the idea that kissing is bad. Especially kissing in public is not done and can, therefore, be somehow embarrassing to do, according to them. Furthermore, they say people will think that adolescents who are kissing in public are having sex as well, because those people believe that kissing will lead them into having sex. According to the participants, kissing is something private, which can be done in private places, although it is also possible to kiss in clubs, dark corners, or at night on the streets.

According to a girl, girls do not like it when it comes out in the open that they have kissed. It seems that, because kissing in public is not accepted in the Ugandan culture, girls feel that their reputation becomes harmed when other people find out about it. In this respect, social norms seem to be very important to them. Furthermore, the girl says that a relationship will grow or fall after kissing because both can find it awkward to kiss. This gives the impression that the non-acceptance of kissing in public makes adolescents less able to handle the situation of kissing. One girl declares that she does not want to kiss because of her religion, but she seems rather more concerned about her reputation, about social norms: she wants to be trusted and respected by people in church, teachers, and other people as well.

The participants mention the media several times when discussing different sexual behaviours. Some participants mention Western high school movies as examples for the Ugandan youth to learn how to handle relationships, to kiss, and to have sex. Although they say kissing in public is considered a taboo in Uganda, some participants think that age mates in relationships are being influenced to kiss after watching their age mates kiss in Western movies. One girl thinks people in relationships would not kiss before those movies became popular. These days, she thinks, most people in relationships still not kiss, perhaps only people who are driven by emotions. Not all participants want to imitate what they see on television. For instance, a sixteen-year-old girl in S5 is afraid that hepatitis can be transmitted through saliva during kissing. She does not understand why all these movie stars kiss that often. Furthermore, she would not want to be ‘girl number 25’ in the programme “Bachelor”, i.e. being kissed by this guy after he has kissed 24 other girls before her!

A special kind of movies are the “blue movies”, or pornography. According to some interviewees, blue movies often come from the Western world and are downloaded from the internet or bought in shops in Kampala. In concordance with the high school movies, an interviewee mentions that blue

movies can be a medium for people to learn how to have sex. One of the interviewees thinks that pornography could lead people into fondling, which is according to her not common in Uganda. She thinks that it builds their lust and will make them wish to caress their girlfriends. The participants say that many people watch them, and that some even have friends who have them. Nevertheless, most participants are very negative about the blue movies, or pornography. First of all, they say pornography is worse than sex itself because it triggers masturbation and it might get people addicted. Secondly, they think watching pornography can drive people into having sex. According to them, abstinence becomes a problem when watching pornography, especially when there is a girl in the room.

Several participants fear that physical acts, such as hugging and kissing, can lead people into having sex. One boy fears pecking will lead to kissing, and from kissing one may go out to have sex. He argues that hugging is okay as long as one does not do it in a dark room. The participants think that it is important to lay out principles within a relationship, such as 'we will only hug'. Another important part they perceive is self-control. When discussing hugging and kissing, they often mention that people need to have self-control to make sure they do not go further than that. To the participants, having self-control includes avoiding dark private places where it is almost unavoidable to end up having sex.

### ***Perceptions of sexual intercourse and abstinence***

During the in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions, it becomes apparent that abstaining from sex is an important and abundant topic in the lives of the adolescents. Many participants claim to be abstaining, whereby it is often difficult to judge whether they are speaking the truth or giving socially desired answers. This makes it difficult to obtain an understanding of the prevalence of people having sex in secondary school. Some participants in this study say that many have sex, others say that hardly anyone has sex. A nineteen-year-old girl in Senior 6 says her girlfriends tell her they have sex and that they like it. However, some argue they cannot know whether their friends are having sex, unless they tell them or if the pregnancy shows. One participant explains that most people will keep it private because having sex is illegal at their age.

In 1990, the Penal Code of Uganda, i.e. section 123, cap 106, was amended to increase the number of sexual offenses punishable by law (Parikh, 2007; POPLINE, 1990). This amendment should, amongst others, help to protect young people against sexual abuse and control the spread of disease. Under the new code, unlawful sexual intercourse with a girl under eighteen years old is punishable by death and attempts at such intercourse are punishable by eighteen years imprisonment (POPLINE, 1990). The amendment, or Defilement law, does not discriminate the age of the boy and whether the sex is consensual or not. This means a minor boy, or a boy who is about the same age as the girl, can be sent to prison for having consensual sex with his minor girlfriend. According to Parikh (2007), the Defilement law was initiated to empower girls by protecting them from sexual exploitation and abuse and to prosecute and discourage, amongst others, middle-aged sugar daddies. However, in practice the law was mainly used to arrest young men. In this study, the boy participants often mention fear of being sent to prison as reason to abstain from sexual intercourse.

Of the ten adolescents interviewed for this study, only two boys say they have had sexual intercourse. One eighteen-year-old boy says he only had sex once out of curiosity, the other boy,

who is nineteen-years-old, has had sex three times in his life: once when he was five, playing “mummy and daddy”; once when he was ten, because he was curious after hearing about the reproductive organs; and once recently with his present girlfriend. Some other interviewees, who have never had sex, think they will maybe have sex once before marriage, or perhaps a few times when they are in campus, but still they aim to wait until marriage.

It seems that, to the interviewees, the first time to have sex does not necessarily mean the start of having sex on a regular basis. These findings are confirmed by Darabi et al. (2008): they conclude sex among unmarried Ugandan adolescents is sporadic because a considerable proportion of the adolescents of 15-19 year old in their study were sexually experienced but had not had sex in the previous year. This may be due to the governmental policies that promote abstinence-until-marriage among adolescents. The Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports has defined a difference between “primary abstinence” and “secondary abstinence”, whereby a person can have sex once and afterwards practice “secondary abstinence” (MoES, 2006). The eighteen-year-old boy is an example of this: although he had sex once out of curiosity, he now aims to abstain until he is twenty-four.

#### *Reasons to abstain*

Apart from whether the adolescents are having sex or not, it is apparent that abstinence is a much-discussed theme in their lives. The participants describe how at school, abstinence is discussed by teachers, at school assemblies, and by health counsellors visiting their school. These discussions about abstinence usually involve messages emphasizing the risks of having sex, including pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and other STIs, and how academics and having sex do not mix: if a person starts having sex, it will be difficult for that person to concentrate on his or her studies according to their teachers. On top of that, they say a pregnant girl will be sent away from school, whereas a boy impregnating a girl can risk detention or even prison time. The participants’ parents will emphasize how having sex will risk their children’s sexual health and their academics. They keep reminding their children that school fees are expensive; therefore, they have to take their academics serious if they want their parents to continue paying for their school fees. Furthermore, abstinence-until-marriage is preached in church as well, according to the participants.

The regular requests from teachers, counsellors and parents to abstain make the participants aware of the “dangers” of having sexual intercourse: pregnancies, HIV/AIDS, other STIs, and bad performance in school. The participants mention these dangers often as well as reasons for them to abstain but they mention other considerations too. First of all, they say their religion and the Ugandan and African culture prescribe abstinence-until-marriage and make virginity highly valued in their society. Consequently, having sex before marriage can bring shame and embarrassments on their family. Furthermore, they feel that the societal norm to abstain makes it very hard for young people their age to obtain condoms in health centres because the health counsellors will refuse to give condoms to someone who is not supposed to be having sex yet. One girl says that a girl who has sex before marriage will be cursed in her culture. ‘A family member could fall ill or get into a car accident. If you believe this, it will make you avoid having sex’, she says.

Reputation is very important for the participants, especially for the girls. According to a sixteen-year-old girl in Senior 5, a girl can be popular in two ways. The good way means being respected because, for instance, one is a Christian, humble, smart, and well-preserved. The bad way for a girl means having a guy for money and being popular because of the expensive clothes she can wear. She says it will hurt a girl’s reputation if people in school find out she had sex; boys may make fun of her as if

she is very cheap, and teachers and people in church will not trust and respect her anymore. Some boy participants mention that they do not want to have sex with their girlfriend because they respect her and want to marry her. However, another boy fears that he will lose interest in his girlfriend if he has sex with her.

Many participants fear to have sex because of the perceived consequences. They fear they will get HIV/AIDS, or another STI, or that they will get pregnant or impregnate a girl. Several participants say they have learned at school that condoms are not a hundred percent safe. Consequently, most participants do not trust condoms and other contraceptives, and therefore they think the chance of getting infected with HIV or becoming pregnant is very high. They feel abstinence is the best way for them to stay safe. The Defilement law combined with the fear that a girl will get pregnant after having sex, results in a fear for boys to have sex.

Along with the risk of pregnancy comes the risk of becoming a parent. Many participants feel sex is something for adults, which is above eighteen, and they feel they are not knowledgeable enough to handle the consequences of having sex, such as taking care of a child. Therefore, they feel having sex in campus is a better option than when they are still in secondary school. According to an eighteen-year-old girl, a pregnant girl will be able to continue her studies if she gets pregnant in campus, and perhaps her boyfriend will have found a job and be able to take care of her and the baby.

Participants often mention that peer pressure is the reason their age mates are not able to abstain. They say that they are being told: '*virginity is not dignity but lack of opportunity*'; that a boy is a '*fala*', i.e. half a man, if he does not have sex; and that when a boy does not have multiple girlfriends, he is not styled up. On the other hand, many boy and girl participants say that they often discuss the negative consequences of having sex among each other and that they advise their friends to abstain. For instance, a sixteen-year-old girl in Senior 5 says that she will discuss with her friends that they will lose their future if they get pregnant and that they might even die. She tells them the boys will lie to them and leave them.

#### *Reasons to have sexual intercourse*

Although the participants mention many reasons to abstain, they mention some reasons to have sexual intercourse as well. Relating to peer pressure, they say having sex could be good for a boy's reputation. For girls, it can be a way to receive money and gifts, both from relationships with boys their age and from relationships with sugar daddies. Boys can be having sex with sugar mommies for money as well.

One of the boy interviewees describes how "investing" in a girl can make it easier to ask her for sex. According to him, it becomes very difficult for a girl to refuse sex once she has been accepting gifts from him. The girl will have to show her "appreciation" by having sex with the boy, he says. In contrast, some of the girl participants say accepting gifts from their boyfriends would never be a reason for them to have sex with them.

In general, most participants think people in secondary school are not having sex out of love but out of lust. They say it can be stimulated by watching blue movies and pornography. The participants view lust, blue movies, and pornography as reasons for adolescents to end up having sex. On the other hand, some participants feel that having sex is a way for people in relationships to express their love. One boy even thinks that having sex is the only way for a boy to proof a girl that he loves her.

Most of the reasons to have sex mentioned by the participants are related to physical needs, such as genes, instincts, and nature. They mention: emotions; getting excited, whereby one forgets about cases such as pregnancies; nature, which one cannot control; genes; self-control, e.g. when one sees girls wearing short skirts; high libido, which will give one much lust; feelings of desire; foolishness, e.g. playing “mummy and daddy” when one is a child; upbringing; personality; lack of sex education; and someone’s instincts as reasons for having sex. It seems the participants feel that these “physical” reasons to have sex are difficult to control or even outside their control. For instance, one boy participant explains that sex is a force of life that can make you wake up the next day without remembering what happened. The feelings of sexual urges and desire as reasons to have sex were found in other studies as well, e.g. Darabi et al. (2008), Nobelius et al. (2010) and Njoroge et al. (2010). In Darabi et al.’s (2008) study among Ugandan adolescents in the ages 12-19 year old, adolescents most often mentioned desire to be their main reason to initiate sex.

Other reasons to have sex that the participants seem to be perceiving more control over are: curiosity; boys wanting to experience, after which they will leave the girl; watching pornography together with a girl, which will give the boy the moral and the temptations; not having a thing of abstaining; thinking one has restrained oneself long enough when getting into campus; and girls being talked into having sex by boys. Almost none of the participants discuss the pleasures of having sex. Only a nineteen-year-old boy in Senior 5 mentions ‘some kind of enjoyment’ as a reason for people to have sex. It seems as if many participants are too occupied with the dangers of having sex to realise, or acknowledge, that sex can be pleasurable as well.

#### *How to abstain from sexual intercourse*

When talking to the participants, it seems they often do not show insecurities when it comes to having relationships and performing sexual activities. For instance, a boy participant says: ‘If you really like the girl, you can’t obviously be shy’. In addition, another boy responds to the question whether he will be concerned about how to perform sex: ‘Everybody knows! Everybody. It’s naturally. Everybody!’.

When it comes to avoiding sex, the participants speak with the same confidence. A nineteen-year-old girl in Senior 6, who has a boyfriend in campus, says she makes sure she does not sit too close to her boyfriend because she knows such things can tempt him or put him in the mood. When it comes to other people, she says she makes sure she is never alone with them in a lonely place.

The participants mention several methods to prevent themselves from having sexual intercourse. For instance, there are certain places where people their age can have sex, such as dormitories when they are in boarding school, around campus, near clubs at night time, and in hostels at day time. According to a boy interviewee, these hostels can be rented for about 5,000 Ugandan shillings, which is about 2 Euros (in 2008 resp.), for the whole day. Since having sex in a hostel needs money and some arranging, this can be an obstacle for adolescents to have sex. On the other hand, if someone wants to abstain, some participants explain that people in relationships can agree on certain principles. For instance, to avoid places where they are alone and not to meet in the evening time when it is dark because they feel it is especially difficult to control “nature” when one is alone with a partner in a dark place. Many participants think it is best to meet with a partner at big places with other people around. If one wants privacy, one can have it on the phone, according to two girl participants.

Considering they all aim to abstain until marriage, both boy and girl participants say they will try to advise their future partner if he or she wants to have sex. They will ask him or her why they want to have it. Some say they will consider having sex if their partner gives them a really good reason, others say they will break up with that person because, if the person really loves them, he or she will respect their decision to wait. A sixteen-year-old girl in Senior 5 says she has found her own methods to deal with boys. When a person approaches her and tells her he loves her, she will start to ask him questions, such as ‘How did you love me... how, why did you love me? And how did you know you love me?’ Too many questions will put them off, she says chuckling. Although the participants claim to be confident to refuse and avoid sex, the question remains whether they will respond the same when such a situation actually occurs.

Although most participants say they are confident to abstain or refuse sex, some doubt whether they will be able to “handle” themselves until marriage. For instance, the girl who is in a relationship with a boy in campus says she wants to wait with having sex until marriage, but if the need comes, perhaps she will have sex in campus already. However, as long as she can handle, she will wait, she says.

### **Interpretation of the results**

With regard to the participants’ perceived behavioural control, it seems there are different considerations that make it easier or more difficult for them to abstain. The considerations that make it more difficult to abstain as mentioned by the participants are, among other things, girls seducing boys by wearing short skirts and showing some legs; a physical need for sex; peer pressure and wanting to impress friends; watching blue movies and pornography; presents and money received by boyfriends, sugar mommies and sugar daddies; and dark and lonely places. Considerations that make it easier to abstain as mentioned by the participants are, among other things, the fear of being sent from school because of a pregnancy or because their parents refuse to pay their school fees; the fear to perform bad in academics, which could make them unable to complete school and go to University; difficulties of finding private and affordable places to have sex; fear of pregnancies, prison, being cursed, getting HIV/AIDS or other STIs; and ruining one’s life.

The participants seem to perceive high behavioural control over most of the considerations that make it more difficult to abstain, such as avoiding dark and lonely places, avoiding relationships with sugar daddies and mommies, and resisting peer pressure. In general, their perceived behavioural control regarding condom use seems high as well. However, most participants seem to perceive a low behavioural control when it comes to their “bodily urges”, such as their hormones, desire, high-libido, and nature. They seem concerned that their mind will not be able to control their body to abstain. Many of them aim to abstain until marriage but doubt whether they will be able to prevent themselves from having sexual intercourse. They fear relationships, hugging, kissing, dark private places, and watching blue movies or pornography because they believe it can lead them into having sex.

It is interesting that the participants perceive low behavioural control over their “bodily urges” to have sex, whereas they perceive such high behavioural control over all other considerations that could make it difficult for them to abstain. However, when attention is being paid to the context in which they live, it becomes more understandable. First of all, the governmental policies in Uganda require teachers at secondary schools to promote abstinence-until-marriage and not to promote the use of condoms. Consequently, as indicated by the participants, teachers advise their students to

abstain, very often and at many occasions. To help them abstain, they tell them not to hug and kiss and not to get into relationships. However, indirectly the adolescents seem to be interpreting these messages as if hugging and kissing and having relationships will tempt them to have sex. It is as if they are being told that they have a “bodily urge” to have sex which they need to control.

Furthermore, teachers try to discourage their students from having sex by providing messages of fear, for instance by informing them about the unreliability of condoms and the high chance of becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. However, students may interpret this as if there are no methods to protect themselves in case they are not able to “control” themselves to abstain.

### **Theoretical discussion**

The participants often speak about the importance of self-control when abstaining from sexual intercourse, especially with regard to their “bodily urges”. In this respect, the Reasoned Action Approach, a recent adjustment of the earlier discussed Theory of Planned Behaviour, allows for a better understanding of the results (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). This approach divides the construct of “perceived behavioural control” into two subcomponents:

- “perceived capability”, i.e. ‘the belief that one can, is able to, or is capable of, performing the behavior’
- “perceived autonomy”, which deals ‘mainly with the degree of control over performing the behavior’, including ‘judgments that performance of the behavior is “up to me”’ (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, pp.165-166).

The methods discussed by the participants to help them abstain from sexual intercourse could either be “perceived capability”, such as the perceived capability to refuse presents or money from sugar mommies or daddies, or “perceived autonomy”, such as the perceived autonomy over one’s “bodily urges”. Applying this division shows how the participants generally perceive high capabilities and autonomies to abstain from sexual intercourse, as most of them intend to do until marriage, with the exception of the perceived autonomy over their “bodily urges”.

In this respect, it seems as if the participants feel most capabilities and autonomies are internally controlled, i.e. they believe the methods they use to abstain will actually lead to abstinence until marriage. However, it seems as if they feel their “bodily urges” are externally controlled; even if they apply their methods to abstain, they believe they cannot control their “nature, hormones, and lust”, which could make them have sex, despite their intentions to abstain. This difference between perceived internal and external locus of control has been described by Rotter (1966, p.1).

In their very recent book, Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) discuss how some researchers have criticized the Reasoned Action Approach for being too rational, for failing to take into account powerful causes of behaviour internal to the individual, such as engaging in unprotected sex because of sexual arousal, and for not being applicable in cultures other than the Western culture. They refute that the Reasoned Action Approach is too rational and only applicable in Western cultures. With respect to emotional feelings, such as sexual arousal, Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) state that it is not necessarily the theory’s ability to predict intentions which is questioned but whether intentions in this respect can be a good predictor for behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, p.303). They mention the difficulty for a person to anticipate how they will think and feel in a certain situation as a possible explanation of the gap between intentions and behaviour, especially when the person has never experienced the behaviour before. They expect that people who have experienced the behaviour before will develop

more realistic beliefs and feelings regarding the situation which should make their intentions more predictive of their behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010, p.307).

The findings of this study show that the participants intend to abstain until marriage. With regard to the Theory of Planned Behaviour, or the more recent Reasoned Action Approach, the participants' attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioural control, as described in this paper, would seem to be good predictors of their intentions to abstain. However, their "bodily urges" has been one of the few mentioned considerations which they expect could lead them into having sex despite their intentions to abstain. Fishbein and Ajzen (2010) argue that the Reasoned Action Approach generally is a good predictor of intentions but possibly less of actual behaviours when measuring emotional feelings such as sexual arousal. However, the findings of this qualitative study suggest that the perceived external locus of control of the participants' "bodily urges" leads to a perceived lower autonomy. This perceived low autonomy over their "bodily urges" could possibly help to explain the gap between adolescents' intentions to abstain and their, sporadic, observed sexual behaviours in practice.

### **Conclusion**

It seems that the repeated focus on abstinence and the presumed risks of having sex leads the students to believe that they have a high "bodily urge" to have sex, which is difficult for them to control, and that there are little options left for them to stay safe in case they are not able to control themselves. Additional research is recommended to learn more about perceived autonomy and locus of control and their relation to abstinence and sexual intercourse. At least from this study, it seems that the emphasis on abstinence-only without the promotion of condoms in Uganda indirectly makes adolescents less confident instead of more confident to abstain or practice safe sex.

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