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Abstract

THPE0319 - Farming with your hoe in a sack: condom attitudes, access and use in rural Mwanza, Tanzania

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Background: This study examined condom knowledge, attitudes, access and practices in rural Mwanza, Tanzania, and evaluated the youth condom promoter-distributor (CPD) initiative of the MEMA kwa Vijana (MkV) programme.

Methods: From 1999-2002, participant observation was carried out by young researchers in nine villages for a total of 158 personweeks. Also, seven same-sex group discussions and 12 in-depth interviews on condom beliefs and practices were conducted with youth in three villages.

Results: Many villagers perceived condoms negatively because they were believed to reduce male sexual pleasure; other reasons included the association of condoms with infection or promiscuity, their alien nature, distrust of people associated with their promotion, and cultural values around meaningful, decent, or natural sex or reproduction. Men controlled the terms of sexual encounters, and reported they would only use condoms with risky partners, but few perceived their partners as such. Use of condoms generally appeared to be very low, primarily due to limited demand, although barriers to access also existed. Intervention participants reported learning about condoms in school; they were sometimes confused about them, but they had a better understanding and more positive attitudes than the general public, or pupils in MkV comparison villages. As one component of the intervention, young CPDs (n=228) were trained and supervised for two years, but this component was discontinued due to its costly nature, difficulty monitoring and supplying CPDs, and lack of demand for condoms.

Conclusions: The MkV intervention was introduced into a population that was confused and hostile towards condoms, and for which condom access was very limited. The intervention increased awareness of the potential value of condoms, which may be an important step towards long-term behaviour change, particularly if reinforced by intensive, community-wide condom promotion. Future intervention efforts should focus on improving men's personal risk perception; condom access also needs to be improved.