

# Can Coital Diaries Provide Reliable Data on Sexual Behaviours in Mwanza, Tanzania?

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## Objectives

To assess the:

1. reliability of coital diaries (CDs) compared to recall questionnaires in measuring sexual behaviour
2. level of support necessary to achieve reliable data on sexual behaviour

## Methods

As part of a feasibility study exploring whether women working in recreational facilities are a suitable population for clinical trials of vaginal microbicides, 150 women of the 1573 cohort were selected for a CD study. Over four weeks, the women were given weekly CDs with pictures depicting different sexual behaviours. Women were asked to record these sexual behaviours daily up to four times.

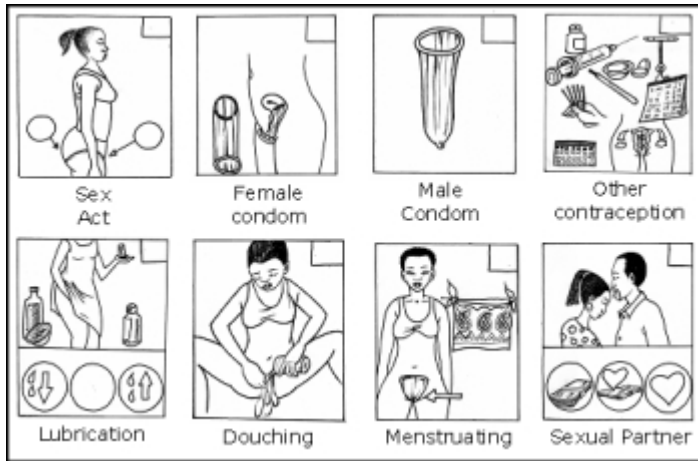
Women were randomly allocated to three groups with different levels of support. All women received a weekly visit, where the completed CD was collected and the next CD was delivered. At these visits women with medium and intensive support could discuss any concerns and were administered a weekly recall questionnaire. Those with intensive support received an extra unscheduled visit each week during which further support was provided. After four weeks all women were administered a four-weekly recall questionnaire.

## Results

Significantly higher numbers of vaginal sex acts were reported in CDs than either questionnaire. Less socially acceptable behaviours (male condom use, sex with irregular partners) were reported more in the CDs than at the four-weekly questionnaire. Those with intensive support were more likely to report having sex. For vaginal sex and sex in exchange for money/gifts, the disparity in frequencies between CDs and exit interviews fell as level of support increased.

## Conclusion

Based on our a priori assumption that higher reported frequencies of socially stigmatised activities are more accurate we conclude that CDs are more accurate than recall methods for collecting sexual behaviour, particularly when participants are provided with intensive support from researchers. Higher support enhances inter-method consistency and thus reliability.



*Sexual behaviour choices with tick boxes*