

Realities of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Low
Socioeconomic Income Areas of the City of Lilongwe,
Malawi: A Gender and Vulnerability Perspective

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Paper prepared for presentation at the *Minerva at West Point
Workshop, April 16 and 17, 2012* at the Thayer Hotel, West Point,
New York

Introduction

- **Objective of Study:**
 - **Understand the dynamics of gender differences in the perception of risk to HIV among men and women in a low socio-economic income area in the City of Lilongwe**

Malawi Background Information

- **HIV Prevalence Rate – 14%**
 - **The spread of HIV is largely heterosexual**
 - **Women predominate among those living with HIV/AIDS (60%)**
 - **Young people ages 13-24 have the highest rates**
 - **Children have also been heavily affected (120,000 in 2009 were living with HIV)**

- **Prevalence is around 17 percent in urban areas, compared to 11 percent in rural areas.**
- **For the country as a whole: 14%**
- **Certain labor groups experience even higher rates**
 - **sex workers: 71 percent,**
 - **female police officers: 32.1 percent**
 - **male primary school teachers: 24.2 percent**

Theoretical Model

- **Theoretical Model: Gender, Human Security, Vulnerability Approach**
 - **Looks at the economic, political, social, and cultural aspects that make women more vulnerable to HIV in comparison to men**
 - **Gender inequality & poverty is central to this approach**

Hunan Security and Vulnerability Framework for Urban Areas in an Era of HIV/AIDS

- More specifically in our paper we apply the Jonathan Crush et al. (SAMP) conceptualization of the links between migration, HIV/AIDS and urban food security
- The following diagrams summarize Crush's conceptualization of vulnerability of urban and rural areas

Methodology

- **Study area -- Lilongwe – capital city -- 1975**
- **Area 25, Area 49 and Chinsapo – low-income areas**
 - **commute to city center**
 - **sell crafts and household items**
 - **poverty level high–low wages and lack of job stability**
 - **Wide spectrum of occupations and family structures**

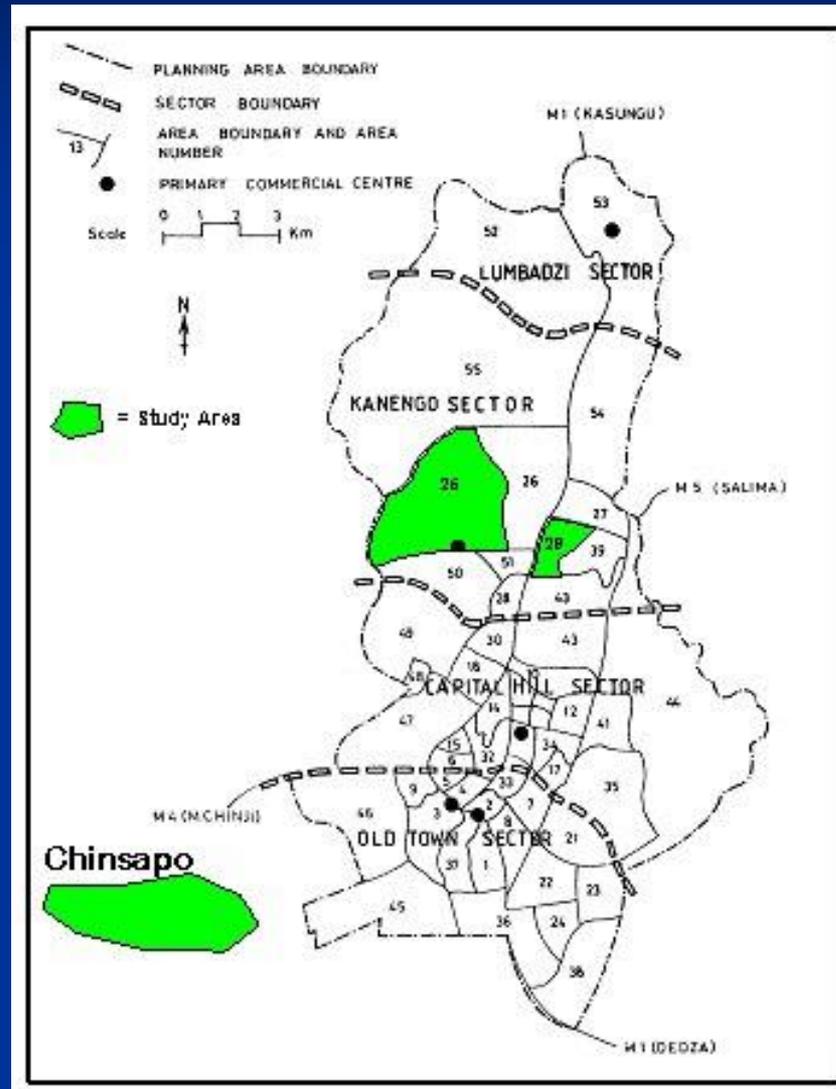
Malawi in Southern Africa



Lilongwe in Malawi



Location of Chinsapo, area 25 and Area 49 in Lilongwe











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- **Interviews –127 women and 98 men**
- **We also conducted focus groups interviews 5 for men and 4 for women (10 men and 10 women per group)**
- **We used the questionnaire developed by Susan Watkins and her group The Malawi Diffusion and Ideational Change Project (MDICP)**

- **The questionnaire had the following themes in it:**
 - **Religion**
 - **Family background**
 - **Economic conditions**
 - **Marriage history**
 - **Family planning and social networks**
 - **Gender Issues**
 - **Sexual partnerships and AIDS**

Results

- **GENDER ISSUES (For Chinsapo area)**
 - **Reasons for leaving husband**
 - **Things a woman can and cannot do without husband's knowledge**
 - **Can a woman use family planning at will**

Gender Related Questions to Women

Table 1. Questions on gender issues: leaving husband or doing things without husband's knowledge

In your opinion, is it proper for a wife to leave her husband if:	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
He does not support her and the children financially?	6.5	88.3	5.2
He beats her frequently?	53.2	40.6	6.2
He is sexually unfaithful?	33.3	65.2	1.5
She thinks he might be infected with AIDS?	18.7	75.9	3.4
He does not allow her to use family planning?	11.0	86.4	2.6
Can you do the following without informing your husband:			
Go to the local market	33.5	66.5	0.0
Go to the local health center	36.3	63.7	0.0

N=60

Gender Related Questions to Women

Table 2. Questions on gender issues: certain actions that can or cannot be taken a woman

Action (State whether you agree, disagree, or have no opinion about the following statements).	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	No Opinion (%)
If your partner does not want to use modern methods of child spacing/ family planning, there is nothing you can do to change his mind	81.3	16.6	2.1
If you decide that you want to delay the next birth, you will be able to have your way	35.6	57.8	6.6
If you decide that you want no more children, you will be able to have your way	44.0	54.1	1.9
Even if your husband does not want you to use family planning, if you want to you will use without his knowledge	57.3	38.6	4.1

N=60

Results (continued)

- **General knowledge: knowledge, perception, attitudes and practice between men and women**

KAP about HIV/AIDS

General knowledge and attitudes about AIDS and condoms

Question	Women			Men		
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Don't Know (%)
Do you think it is acceptable to use a condom with a spouse to protect against AIDS?	20.0	80.0	0.0	52.6	35.1	10.5
Can you get AIDS if you have sex with someone who looks perfectly healthy?	100.0	0.0	0.0	89.5	3.5	3.5
Has your best friend slept with anyone other than her husband in the last 12 months?	66.7	23.3	10.0	63.2	10.5	22.8
Do you suspect or know that your husband (wife) has had sexual relations with other women (men) apart from you since you were married?	67.0	33.0	0.0	14.3	25.0	60.7
Have you yourself slept with anyone other than your husband in the last 12 months?	0.0	100.0	0.0	35.1	58.3	--
Have you ever heard a talk at the clinic/hospital about how people can protect themselves against AIDS?	96.6	3.4	0.0	84.2	14.0	--
Have you ever heard a radio program about how people can protect themselves against AIDS?	96.6	3.4	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
Has someone like a Community Based Distribution agent or a Health Surveillance Assistant ever come to your home to give you information about how people can protect themselves against AIDS?	73.3	26.7	0.0	63.2	31.6	0.0

Focus Group Interviews

- **Results of focus group interviews confirmed the findings in the structured interviews**
- **Many women indicated they worried of contracting HIV from husbands**
- **Economic situations pushed many women into commercial sex work as they had no other avenues to generate income**

- **Typical quote from focus group interviews with women:**

- **“What else can we do! Many of us never went to school, so no jobs for us. When the kids are starving at home and your husband has no income, well one has to do what one has to do to feed the children. So, yes, it happens and I know a few women who do that.”**

■ Another quote from focus group discussions with women

- “Many of our husbands are self employed, selling second hand clothing or fixing *kanyenya* (grilled meat) and selling *zibolibori* (curios) at city centre in Lilongwe, or selling goods by the roadside. You see the minibuses passing by, the drivers and conductors are likely to be our husbands in there. The income they bring home is too little to support the whole family. Many of us are lucky to have two meals a day. Just look at the kids running around, they are all malnourished.”

- From a female respondent in the focus groups on poverty:
- “I am sure you have seen for yourself that there is nothing much. The area is poor, there is no water, a few people can afford electricity for lighting, we have to walk a distance to the standing pipe to draw water, there are no schools here for our children to go to, crime and thievery are on the increase....”

- **Typical quote from Men's Focus Group Interviews:**
 - **“We have heard a lot about the rubber for men (condom) which President Muluzi introduced in 1994. But these rubbers are too thin, they often break during the action, and I don't think they protect you from the virus, they are just too thin, besides as one of us earlier noted, they are already tainted with the virus from the factory abroad. So why use them!”**
- **In Malawi the word AIDS is translated as “American Idea of Discouraging Sex”**

- We had many quotes from men, most of which showed the limited understanding or misunderstanding or misperception of this disease by men due to limited knowledge.
- The previous quote is just an example. We flesh out these quotes and analyze them in the paper in the context of gender and vulnerability

Conclusion

- **The rising epidemic among women is driven in part by poverty which restricts their options.**
- **Gender inequality and asymmetrical sexual relations are key to spreading HIV/AIDS among women by men in urban areas**

- **Women cannot leave husbands even when he does not provide economic support, is unfaithful, and has AIDS**
- **Women can do very little to increase the use of condoms to space or stop having more children or prevent HIV infection from their husbands**

- **Women are worried about being infected and agree that they will be infected by husbands**
- **Women agree that their husbands have sexual relationships with other women**
- **Women reported that they know about AIDS from the radio and hospitals**
- **In spite of their awareness about the disease they are unable to protect themselves which increases their vulnerability**

Opportunities for Action (cont.):

- **Based upon our findings in Malawi, we reiterate UNAIDS recommendations**
- **1) There is need to use a Gender Approach with reference to HIV**
 - **i.e. Emphasize the role of women and women's organizations in HIV/AIDS policy development, programming and implementations at all levels of government**
 - **Key is female empowerment**

- **2) There is great need to empower both men and women:**
 - **Engaging men as partners is a critical component in AIDS prevention and care, as in many contexts they are the decision-makers in matters relating to reproductive and sexual health.**

- **3) There is need for strong advocacy for women's rights as basic human rights.**
 - **This will require strong and unwavering will in instituting structural changes, including the transformation of social norms and practices that do not uphold these rights.**