

## **Transactional Sex Relationships and HIV Risk among Female University Students in Gauteng Province, South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT** This study explored the psychosocial dynamics of transactional sex relationships and HIV vulnerability among female university students. Using non-probability sampling methods, ten female university students aged 18 to 25 years, who were involved in transactional sex relationships, were recruited from a local medical university. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed data was analysed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that complex psychosocial and economic factors drive transactional sex relationships among university female students. Importantly, the female students' inability to negotiate safe sex practices increases their risk of sexually transmitted illnesses, especially HIV, but this is overshadowed by their desire to have their 'wants and needs' satisfied. This study emphasises the importance of recognising that transactional sex relationships are frequent among university students, with serious psychosocial and health consequences. HIV prevention programmes at higher education institutions should directly address the underlying drivers of transactional sex relationships amongst university students.