

Sexual Desire and Expression among Girls in a Traditional Shona Context

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ABSTRACT The study explored sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, girl fertility awareness, and *mubobobo* among girls in a traditional Shona context. The study used snowballing technique to recruit participants. Inclusion in the study was voluntary. Teenage girls were asked about their sexuality in the era of HIV and AIDS. The study was qualitative in nature and used thematic content analysis to analyse the data. The girls described their experiences growing up following Shona traditions about puberty, sexual beliefs and practices. The results showed that girls in this study experienced sexual desire, sexual fantasy, sexual expression and some experienced unconscious sexual expression in their sleep. The girls explained how cultural teachings interfered with free sexual expression in adulthood. The findings of this study can be used in the advancement of girl child rights, reproductive health rights and sexual rights activism. Health educators could use the findings of this study in the advocacy for change in legislation on sexual beliefs and the promotion of adolescent sexual health. Further research can focus on sexual expression advocacy in culturally restrictive environments in Africa.

INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of HIV and AIDS among girls in Sub-Saharan Africa is alarming even though national statistics now show a declining trend in AIDS-related deaths in the general population (Bateman 2011; Bongaart et al. 2011). The incidence and prevalence of HIV among teenage girls is still high in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bongaart et al. 2011). Epidemiological statistics show that Africa has the greatest number of women living with HIV and AIDS in the world (Abdool Karim and Abdool Karim 2010). The 15 to 24 age group is the worst affected (Steffenson et al. 2011). It is reported that HIV is mainly spread through heterosexual sex in Africa (Townsend et al. 2010). Statistics show that men in Africa largely target younger women for marriage or sex. In this context, women in Africa are reported to date men who are much older than them for various reasons (Nobelius et al. 2011). Most of the studies on sexual health and HIV risk in Africa do not report girls and women as actively seeking sexual satisfaction in their relationship with men. Women are mostly portrayed as victims of sexu-

al violence, sexual coercion, relationship power imbalance, transactional sex or rape (Steffenson et al. 2011; Townsend et al. 2010). They are portrayed as passive and not interested in sex. This approach towards girls' and women's sexuality is likely to perpetuate stereotypes of women as subservient to men and playing a secondary role in sexual relationships. Although most of the studies on adolescents' sexuality and HIV risk in Africa tend to portray teenage girls as victims of sexual coercion, it has now become apparent that teenage girls like boys, have sexual fantasies that can lead to risk sexual practices that sometimes result in the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection (Gwandure and Maseko 2012). In a traditional African context, there is a myth that teenage girls are fertile, sexually healthy and free from sexually transmitted infections (Gwandure 2009). Sexual desire and sexual fantasy even if expressed passively among girls, can lead to HIV risk sexual practices (Gwandure and Maseko 2012). In this study, the traditional Shona perspectives of sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, girl fertility concerns and unconscious sexual expression among girls were investigated.

Sexual Fantasy among Girls

The Shona people of Zimbabwe have a culture that portrays sexual desire and fantasy in a subtle manner (Gwandure 2009). Sexual fantasy in Shona culture involves thoughts about sex,

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wild imaginations about sex and obsession with sexual ideas (Gwandure 2009). Thoughts about sex in a traditional Shona context are discouraged among boys and girls until such time society encourages them to think about marriage. Novel ideas about sex are discouraged because sex is construed as serving the function of procreation and not recreation (Allison 2011). However, the culture encourages the development of sexual fantasy in girls and boys indirectly (Fortune 1974). There are people in society whose role is to develop sexual fantasy in children and adolescents. The category of relatives that can foster wild forms of sexual fantasy or influence the girl to think about sex in a culturally relevant manner are the father's sisters, married or not, called *vana vatete*, and their husbands, called *vana babamukuru* and the mother's brothers, *vana sekuru* (Gwandure 2009). The girls are told at a very young age that they have "husbands" referring to *vana babamukuru* and *vana sekuru* (Gwandure 2009). This cultural orientation is meant to develop sexual fantasy in girls. Sometimes the girl becomes anxious or cries when she imagines going to bed with an old man with grey hair as her "husband". This teasing of young girls by boys and men who are said to have traditional "sexual rights" over the girl is called "*chiramu*" in Shona culture (Gwandure 2009). With time, the girl understands the cultural meaning of the practice and enjoys the company of *babamukuru* and *sekuru* who would pamper her with praise, admiration and gifts. The girl is called a "younger wife" "*muramu*" who replaces the "senior wife", her sister or father's sister, in case of death. The age of the girl does not matter, the newly born baby girl becomes a "wife" or "second wife" to both the *sekuru* and *babamukuru* (Gwandure 2009). The sister's husband and his brothers are all regarded as the girl's "husbands". She gives them food, washes their clothes, and she respects them as close relatives. The role of the *babamukuru* as a traditional model of a good husband is to instill confidence in the young girl to love herself as beautiful. He teaches her to be a good woman that every man will aspire to marry (Gwandure 2009). He exaggerates the girl's attractiveness as it is culturally inappropriate for a *babamukuru* or *sekuru* to say that the girl is not attractive. The *babamukuru* teases the girl that if he sees any man near her without his permission he will chase that man away because he is jealous of her. The girl only renounces the status of being a "wife" of the

"traditional husbands" when she gets married and her new husband becomes a "younger brother", *babamunini* (Gwandure 2009). As the big brother, *babamukuru*, now takes the new role of advisor to the married couple. The mother's brother, *sekuru* teaches the girl about marriage and sex. On the other hand, the *babamukuru*'s younger brothers who could be of the same age as the girl are expected to make love proposals to the girl as a way of appreciating her (Allison 2011). The girl should be able to build her own sexual fantasy as she grows up, comparing the "traditional husbands" to her own selected suitors. In a traditional Shona context, parents are not supposed to comment on the girl's sexuality or attractiveness. People who are sanctioned to do that are *tete*, *bamukuru*, *babamunini* and *sekuru* (Gwandure 2009).

Sexual fantasy could be enhanced in girls through traditional folklores, songs, dance and games. The fairy tales or *ngano* look at courtship behaviour as characterised by strict scrutiny of suitors (Zvarevashe 1990). The courtship is depicted as long and witty. In folktales, the man can deceive the girl, so it is up to the girl to have an elaborate imagination of the man she intends to marry (Fortune 1974). In the fables, there are flamboyant marriage suitors who lure girls and deceive them in the end. The girl follows the suitor thinking that the suitor is a real person; only to discover that he changes from being a human being to a lion (Fortune 1974). Girls are expected to show flirtation and coyness that indirectly keep the man motivated and interested in marrying the girl. Among the traditional Shona people, girls are taught sex songs and poetry that are sung or recited as poems (Zimbabwe Literature Bureau 1976). Poetry is a girl's powerful tool in delivering a sexual message to her boyfriend in a culturally restrictive society (Gwandure 2009). Traditional Shona people have totems that replace surnames in romantic discourse. These are names of animals that people are identified with. The girl recites the man's totem poetry and that builds a sexual drive in the man; he feels greatly honoured (Gwandure 2009). In a traditional Shona marriage, totem poems "cool down" the man or woman when there is disagreement between the husband and wife. Totem poetry can be a powerful sexual drive when recited by the husband or wife in praise of each other in bed (Gwandure 2009). Some traditional games boost sexual fantasy in girls (Gwandure 2009). Girls and boys can make a circle during

the full moon outside and play games that foster partner selection. The girl indicates in her singing the physical appearance of the boy she is looking for and she goes round and round until she picks one (Gwandure 2009). The boys who are not selected by girls and girls who are not chosen by boys work hard to get the attention of suitors. One of the games is called *Sarura wako kadeya deya* which means, “chose the one you love” (Gwandure 2009).

Sexual Desire among Girls

In the traditional Shona context, sexual desire “*hoshha*” or “*zemo*” refers to the physiological drive to have sex (Gwandure 2009). The term is used to describe sexual drive which is literally regarded as a form of disease within the individual that makes them unable to control themselves (Gwandure 2009). For example, *wakabatwa nehosha*, can be literally translated to mean that the individual was “overwhelmed with raging lust” or “besieged by lust”. Being a sex maniac or being obsessed with sex or having uncontrolled sexual urges (*rukwezengwe*) is regarded as undesirable because it distracts people from work or engaging in constructive ideas (Gwandure 2009). This sexual drive is characterised by physiological and psychological motivation to have sex (Gwandure 2009). Both men and women are taught to guard against this emotion as it is regarded as a disease that should be prevented from affecting unmarried people. The desire to have sex in males is evident through an erection that is hidden or suppressed and the restlessness of the man. The girl does not have to see that the man is sexually aroused or tense otherwise she could be frightened and leave the man (Gwandure 2009). The girl is taught that her boyfriend is not allowed to touch her and she must always give him very little time, otherwise the man could get fed up with the girl or think that she is loose. The man is deprived of having intimacy with his girlfriend and the girl is deprived of time enough to see her boyfriend. The sexual deprivation is considered to increase the chances of marriage between the girl and the boyfriend in the Shona culture (Gwandure 2009). When a man fondles a girl, she is taught to feel nothing, be steady and walk away. She is taught to watch out for arousal signs such as lubrication that could make her sexually vulnerable. The relatives who are regarded as “husbands” could tease the girl and sexually stimulate her. In the

traditional Shona culture, the sister’s husband, the husband of the father’s sister *babamukuru* or the younger brothers to the sister’s husband *vana babamunini* could sexually arouse the girl (Gwandure 2009). This teasing practice is socially sanctioned among the traditional Shona people even though it is against the law and regarded as indecent assault. Such practices are not reported to the police because the traditional Shona culture regards it as a way of training the girl to fight off rapists and to train her to endure long foreplay without being overwhelmed. In the traditional Shona culture, the girl is not expected to be overwhelmed and succumb to unwanted sex (Gwandure 2009). She should be sexually assertive and be able to push off the man, wrestle the man to the ground, scratch the man’s face or bite hard until she is released (Gwandure and Maseko 2012). There are cultural limits that are observed by both the girl and the boy or man as both of them have kinship ties (Gwandure 2009). The *babamukuru* or *babamunini* is traditionally educated to exercise restraint and not to have sex with the girl or *muramu* who fails to control herself in *chiramu*; the sexually arousing sex play (Power et al. 2007). In a traditional Shona context, the sex play is meant to tease the girl only and not to rape or have forced sex with the girl (Gwandure 2009). The *babamunini* could be younger than the girl and he might not have reached puberty but he could sexually harass the girl, *muramu*, as a way of testing her resistance to unwanted sexual advances (Gwandure 2009). If the father’s sister *vatete* gets information from her husband that the girl is not able to control her sexual urges and is suggestive, the girl would be required to go through a series of traditional training sessions on how to manage sexual desire, sexual arousal, sexual fantasy and self-control (Gwandure 2009). In the traditional Shona context, a girl cannot tell her boyfriend that she was looking for him because she wanted to have sex with him or that she would look for any other man to have sex because her body is sending sex signals (Gwandure 2009). Due to cultural constraints, the sexual desire is denied and repressed to such an extent that the man might not know if the girl is interested in having sex or not (Masvaure et al. 2009).

Sexual Expression among Girls

Boys and girls are not taught to look for sexual partners to satisfy their sexual drive. The bio-

logical drive to have sex is repressed through various traditional methods (Gwandure 2009). However, sexual expression can be manifested in forms that are regarded as deviant in the Shona traditional culture (Gwandure 2009). One form of sexual expression is when girls fondle or grope each other in a sex play. These are usually girls who have not yet reached puberty or teenage friends, who tease each other in privacy. They might want to show off or they can challenge each other about the size of their breasts. They can tease each other to see if both breasts are growing evenly. Teenage girls can talk about how powerful they are in arousing their boyfriends, admirers and the potential to arouse their future husbands (Gwandure 2009). The friends can display their hidden beauty to each other. The exhibition among girls can be about breasts, stretch marks, thighs, and the waist (Gwandure 2009). Erotic sexual dances among girls can be performed to display the girl's hidden beauty that will only be revealed to the future husband (Gwandure 2009). A girl can stimulate herself in privacy through masturbation but the Shona culture strongly condemns the practice (Gwandure 2009). She can persuade a boy who has not yet reached puberty, especially boys below ten years of age to penetrate her. She can bribe the boy with gifts and stories that justify that what they did was a fun game. One such fun game is called *n'ombe n'gombe* which means "let's play the cow and bull game". The boy is told that if he tells his mother or friends, then he will not grow as a man. Girls can justify the practice as a way of enlarging their vaginal entrance so that when they get married the husband will not experience pain entering her. In modern day, this practice is typical sexual assault of boy children by girls and women. This exposes boys and girls to HIV infection.

Girl Fertility and Sexual Awareness

The girl's aunt or *vatete* is sanctioned with educating the girl about her sexuality and fertility. She is taught how to keep her future husband sexually satisfied (Gwandure 2009). Any abnormal development of secondary sex characteristics and psychosexual problems are reported to the *vatete*. The girl expects normal physical development and the development of secondary sex characteristics to occur at the same time as her peers. Early development is liked while late

development is associated with infertility. To mitigate distress in adolescent girls, the traditional Shona cultural teachings indicate that the onset of puberty is dependent on the fertility of the girl's mother, that is, *musana wamai vake* (Gwandure 2009). The development of secondary sex characteristics, called *kuputudza*, is a developmental milestone that can come with various rituals in African societies (Gwandure 2009). Menarche is eagerly awaited among teenage girls as it is an indication that the girl can have children. Pubic hair will give the girl pride and she will be expected by society to show mature behaviour that distinguishes her from younger girls who have not reached puberty. She is now regarded literally as a "big woman", *mukadzi mukuru*, and not a child, because adulthood for both girls and boys in the traditional Shona context is determined by the development of secondary sex characteristics or simply the ability to have a child, that is, to "mother a child" or "father a child" (Gwandure 2011).

The girl can "accelerate" the development of secondary sex characteristics through traditional practices that are socially approved (Gwandure 2009). The girl can get a *nyungurwi*, a water beetle that swims fast in water. The girl would dive into the water to catch them. She gets one to bite her breasts. It is expected that the breasts will develop in no time. The water beetles are found in rivers and pools. If she wants to have large breasts, she makes little cuts on both breasts and puts juice from a wild fruit called *mveve*. She does not cut the growing fruit off the branch. The belief is that, as the young fruit grows on the tree, so grows her breasts, at the same time. She will cut off the fruit from the tree when her breasts reach the size she wants. Boys do the same. The girl can take the teasing from her friends or *vatete* seriously and works on improving her body image. The sexual awareness in girls prepares them for sex in adulthood (Gwandure 2009). A girl with traditional Shona beliefs knows that her future husband will need to play with her vagina before sex or in foreplay and she would ensure that the vagina will stimulate him. If the sexual fantasy is high in the girl or that she intends to comply with traditional values, the girl can pull her labia minora, called *matinji*. Whereas in other African cultures there is genital mutilation, the Shona culture enlarges the vagina to increase the surface area for sexual excitement (Gwandure 2009). The girl works hard to make

sure that her man will derive greater pleasure and not leave her (Gwandure 2009). The boys will be following a different curriculum though, but the traditional teachings emphasise the attainment of sexual pleasure for the wife. The girl can improve her body image by making marks on her abdomen, *nyora* and tattoos, *zvibhayana*. The exaggerated idea of sex in the traditional context is that when the girl gets married and bride price, or *roora*, is paid, the husband “will die on her” having sex (Gwandure 2009). The traditional ideas about sex can heighten a girl’s fantasy about marriage, sex and having children although this will be repressed by the girl in her social life and interaction with boys. Infertility is feared among girls as it can lead to divorce (Runganga et al. 2001).

Unconscious Sexual Expression among Girls

Boys experience wet dreams in their teenagehood. They dream having sex and ejaculate in their sleep. This is considered as normal reproductive behaviour that shows sexual deprivation among boys and men in the Shona culture (Gwandure 2009). Girls can have sex dreams but the Shona culture does not recognise that females can have wet dreams (Gwandure 2009). These “undesirable” wet dreams in girls and women are caused by *mubobobo* according to Shona beliefs. *Mubobobo* is an evil practice in which a wizard or man with magical powers can have sex with a woman in her sleep (Gwandure 2009). The way in which nocturnal emission, *mubobobo*, is construed in the Shona culture is that an evil man will have sex with a woman in her sleep until she reaches orgasm (Gwandure 2009). The woman falls into a trance in her sleep and enjoys sex with the unwanted suitor or stranger (Gwandure 2009). She will realise that she had unwanted sex, *mubobobo* in her sleep by noticing unusual vaginal discharge in the morning (Gwandure 2009). The vaginal lubrication or discharge is the same as the one produced by a woman during normal sexual intercourse. According to traditional Shona beliefs about *mubobobo*, this experience is misinterpreted as a real sexual experience (Gwandure 2009). This sexual experience is common among sexually active women who are not in regular sexual contact with their partners (Gwandure 2009). *Mubobobo* is commonly experienced by single women who are separated from their partners or

husbands or young women with deceased husbands (Gwandure 2009). It is a common belief among traditional Shona people that a deceased husband can come back as a spirit and “have sex” with his wife (Gwandure 2009). This is not regarded as *mubobobo* but “a deceased husband who returns to be intimate with his wife” (Gwandure 2009). The woman experiences orgasm in her sleep. She informs elders in case the deceased husband could be impersonated by an evil man with *mubobobo* who could sexually exploit her (Gwandure 2009). Rituals are performed in all cases of *mubobobo* to scare away the evil spirits. *Mubobobo* is feared and not talked about openly among the traditional Shona people because it is associated with witchcraft (Chavunduka 1980).

Aim of the Study

The study sought to investigate experiences of sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, girl fertility concerns and *mubobobo* among Shona teenage girls. This study is part of an ongoing study on women’s sexuality in the context of HIV and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Research Question

Do girls who grew up in the traditional Shona culture experience sexual desire, sexual fantasy, sexual expression, fertility concerns and *mubobobo* ?

METHOD

Research Design

The survey method was used to collect data. The study explored the sexuality of teenage girls who grew up in the traditional Shona culture. A qualitative approach was used to explore the teenage girls’ views about sexual desire and expression within the traditional Shona context.

Participants and Setting

The study sample was made up of ten teenage girls who agreed to participate in the study. This sample size was considered adequate for the nature of this study. Participants were aged between 18 and 19 years old. This age group is considered as “adults” in Zimbabwe because the

legal age of majority is 18 years. The females who participated in this study were not in high school; some dropped out of school. Participants lived and worked in Johannesburg as casual workers in restaurants, hair salons, and other general duties. The study chose this age group because it is the group that experiences a rapid growth of secondary sexual characteristics and it is characterised by a higher incidence of wet dreams in males.

Instrument

An interview schedule containing questions on sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, girl fertility concerns and *mubobobo* was used. The questions were written in Shona language and the language used in the interviews was Shona.

Procedure

Participants were invited to participate in the study through the snowballing technique. This method of recruiting participants requires that participants refer the researcher to people with similar interests to participate in the study. This sampling method was relevant to this study because the concepts under investigation were peculiar to the Shona culture (Browne 2005). For the purpose of this study, only Shona-speaking girls who grew up in the Shona culture were included in the study. Participants who were included in the study indicated that they believed and participated in Shona traditions as a way of life. Shona girls who did not believe in traditional Shona beliefs and values were excluded from the study. Participants were asked questions about their sexuality in the traditional Shona context. Participants gave narratives of their own experiences growing up as girls in the Shona culture. Their accounts included girl practices before puberty, during puberty, after puberty and girl preparation for adulthood and related courtship behaviours. Notes about the interview were handwritten.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse participants' responses in relation to their experiences of sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sex-

ual expression, fertility concerns and *mubobobo*. These five themes were investigated and elaborated in this study. The themes were analysed qualitatively.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was sought from participants before the study began. Inclusion in the study was based on personal interest of participants. The study did not use incentives or coercion to recruit participants (Browne 2005).

RESULTS

Information obtained from the interviews showed that girls who believed in traditional Shona values followed the provisions of the culture in their interaction with men. Culture influenced their sexual behaviours. They were aware of practices that were regarded as taboo in their culture but at times they adopted urban lifestyles to keep pace with modern life. Some of them were sitting on the fence, believing in both worlds, that is, traditional values and modernity. However, all of them agreed that they went home and joined the extended family in carrying out traditional rituals. They found the traditional values and practices to be a source of inspiration in times of difficulty and visited their families in Zimbabwe for kinship or family support. Elaborate responses of participants are described in the five themes below.

Sexual Fantasy

Participants reported that they experienced sexual fantasy in their childhood and teenagehood. They fancied relationships with boys of their age in their lives. The girls expected the relationship to be non-sexual but they expected the boys to cuddle them. They did not like boys who would carelessly sexually stimulate them and leave or boys who tried to have forced sex. The responses of the girls indicated that they were comfortable with a sexual relationship that had a promise of marriage and not what they called "hit and run", *mutema rege wembada* which means having sex for its own sake and the relationship is terminated. For example, one girl said: "It is every girl's wish to have sex with the one she loves in marriage". They consulted *vatete*, *sekuru* and *babamukuru* for advice on marriage and relationships.

Sexual Desire

The girls agreed that they experienced sexual desire in their interaction with men. One girl indicated that: "When I experience sexual desire with my boyfriend, I start lubricating or having *derere*, this is an indicator that the love play should stop". Most of the girls said they used the traditional Shona techniques of dealing with sexual arousal. They would not allow a man to arouse them at will or willy-nilly. There has to be a love relationship first for that to happen or else they would report the perpetrator to the police. They needed to be prepared for sex and use condoms if they did not trust their boyfriend. The man they had a sexual relationship with had to be introduced to relatives or close friends so that the relationship would be approved and the message is conveyed to the extended family in Zimbabwe.

Sexual Expression

It was reported by girls in this study that it was difficult for a girl to tell her boyfriend that she wanted to have sex with him. One girl remarked: "If you say so you are seen as loose". A girl could initiate it indirectly but the man should not get the impression that the girl is not steady or that she is a girl of loose morals. Participants reported that in the traditional Shona context, a girl who is considered to be free to have sex with anyone she feels like choosing is regarded as not good for marriage. Participants reported that at the age of 18 the girls were not expected to engage in traditional sex play in which girls fondled each other. This was perceived as improper and childish. They were against masturbation and the idea of using sex toys. The girls were looking for relationships that resulted in marriage.

Girl Fertility

All the participants reported that they expected to get married and have children. They were concerned about their fertility and age at which they would get married. Although the Shona traditional culture values girl fertility, a successful marriage is not centred on children only. The following statement by one girl underlines the importance of a woman's fertility in a traditional Shona marriage: "Children bless the marriage"

or "*Mbereko ndiwo musha*". The girls in this study were aware that sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDS, and abortions could affect their fertility and chances of having healthy babies.

Mubobobo

The girls were aware of *mubobobo* and some had experienced it. The girls regarded it as witchcraft. One girl said: "*Mubobobo* is evil, a wizard will have sex with you while you are asleep". The girls said they used traditional methods of preventing *mubobobo*. Traditional healers could help them deal with it. Some changed residential areas and moved house. Some of the girls consulted faith healers when they experienced unwanted sex dreams or encountered mysterious men who approached them for sex in their dreams. In most cases the culprits were identifiable. The girls pointed out that it was unheard of for girls to have wet dreams like boys.

DISCUSSION

The survey of girls' sexual desire and expression in a traditional Shona context revealed that cultural constraints limited their ideas about sex and exploration of their sexuality. Some of the cultural beliefs and practices go against human rights and laws that govern human sexuality in contemporary societies. Even though the culture is restrictive, girls in this study showed motivated behaviours towards the satisfaction of their sexual fantasies (Gwandure 2009). It was evident in this study that the girls were interested in their sexuality and not passive or uninterested in sex as generally believed. The findings of this study showed that the teenage girls who participated in this study had sexual fantasies that resulted in sexual desire and sexual practices. However, the sexual experience had to be confined to the parameters of the traditional Shona culture. The girls' responses are discussed under the themes of sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, girl fertility and *mubobobo* in the traditional Shona context.

Sexual fantasy was reported to influence the sexual behaviour of participants in this study. The roles of *vatete*, *sekuru* and *babamukuru* were still relevant to the motivation of the young woman to get married (Gwandure 2009). Participants reported that traditional marriage counsel-

lors discouraged them from placing too much emphasis on sexual pleasure when they get married even though they went through rituals and teachings that prepared them for sex (Gwandure 2009). The girl as a *muramu* still sought advice from her *babamukuru* on her relationships and getting him involved in the assessment of her boyfriend's trustworthiness. The mother's brother, *sekuru* was found to play an instrumental role in the development of the girl's sexual relationships. The mother's brother or *sekuru* as a man himself taught his sister's child about men's sexual tactics. The *sekuru* uses the "no holds barre" approach to sex when he educates his sister's child. The girl treats him as her "husband" according to traditional Shona kinship system and she tells it all to the *sekuru* (Zvarevashe 1990). He is her pillar of support in her sexual relations and fantasies.

The girls in this study reported that they experienced sexual desire that led them to look for partners or have sex with their boyfriends. They knew that the traditional Shona culture expected them not to have sex before marriage but they fulfilled that requirement by asking the boyfriend to commit himself before the girl's relatives that he promises to marry the girl. Sexual desire and the fantasy about starting a family and having children were reported as factors that influenced girls to get married (Levine 2003).

Participants in this study reported that they could not directly express their sexual fantasies to their boyfriends. They said it in a subtle way that persuaded the man to have sex with them (Masvaure et al. 2009). This sexual behaviour is problematic in the sense that if the man is reported to the police he will be charged with rape. There should be explicit consent by the girl before sex and not the "no" means "yes" type of sexual behaviour (Masvaure et al. 2009). This indifference or ambiguous sexual behaviour is common among women in Africa (Hindin and Muntifering 2011).

All the participants expected to get married and have children. Their belief was *zvikone wawanikwa*, which means "You should get married first even if the marriage could fail later". In the traditional Shona culture, it is considered unusual for a man or woman to avoid marriage until old age. Some of the girls in this study consulted traditional healers and medical doctors about their fertility. If the medical doctor found nothing wrong with their reproductive health,

they would then consult traditional healers. Infertility is associated with evil spirits among the traditional Shona people (Runganga et al. 2001). Misfortunes such as failing to have trustworthy and lasting relationships were indicated as other reasons for consulting traditional healers.

All the girls in this study associated wet dreams among girls with *mubobobo*. They were firm that an evil man using magic could have sex with them in their sleep. They would wake up in the morning feeling tired and showing signs of vaginal discharge as a result of the unwanted sex. Those who did not experience *mubobobo* believed that their ancestral spirits protected them. The girls believed that *mubobobo* would not make them pregnant or contract HIV because the perpetrator comes as a spirit. There was concurrence among participants that witchcraft could cause diseases that could be diagnosed as HIV and AIDS by western methods of disease diagnosis (Thomas 2007). They believed that modern ideas about witchcraft and diseases were inadequate (Petrus 2011). Their ideas about witchcraft were reinforced by the amendment made to the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 in 2006 to allow people to sue each other for witchcraft in Zimbabwe. Now, the change made to the law in July 2006 criminalises witchcraft; a person who is convicted of being a wizard or witch in a criminal court will be liable to pay a fine as stipulated by the competent court or the penalty could be five years in jail (Witchcraft Suppression Act 2006). If a man were accused of practising *mubobobo*, causing a girl or woman to have wet dreams in her sleep, he will be brought before a court of law for trial in Zimbabwe.

Implications for Advocacy and Activism

Advocacy aimed at amending laws on sexual offences, children's laws, and witchcraft is required in Zimbabwe. Girl sexual rights activism to raise awareness in the public about sexual desire and expression should be initiated in Zimbabwe. Researchers should not regard girls as people without sexual desire or fantasy that can lead them to engage in sexual relationships. The public needs to be made aware of Zimbabwean laws on statutory rape and sexual offences. The police needs to be educated about sexual acts for which offenders should be prosecuted and sexual behaviours that do not exceed cultural limits. Sexual exploitation of girls or abuse of girls

under the guise of traditional practices should be exposed as a distortion of traditional values. Girls and women can take the lead in educating men, boys and the public in general about girls' sexual fantasy, sexual desire, sexual expression, fertility concerns and unconscious sexual expression called nocturnal emission or *mubobobo*.

CONCLUSION

The study explored girls' experiences of their sexuality in a traditional Shona context. The study revealed that girls had sexual fantasies like boys but the means of sexual expression were guided by the teachings and values the Shona culture. Even though the girls in this study were aware of modern ways of life, they felt that love, sex and marriage had to be guided and sanctioned by the values of the Shona culture. Future studies could focus on gender, sexuality and HIV and AIDS risk reduction among the traditional Shona people of Zimbabwe.

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