

# **A qualitative analysis of adolescent girls' views on relationships with influential men**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Adolescent girls bear disproportionate vulnerabilities due to GBV, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse. Some asset building programs for adolescent girls have focused on girls' wellbeing without taking an ecological approach to consider other spheres of influence in the lives of girls. This paper analyzes key segments of males that influence adolescent girls lives and how, and describes changes that adolescent girls would like to see in these males. The main male influencers were male family members (father, uncles, brothers), friends and neighbours, boyfriends, classmates, motorbike-taxi operators, thieves and drug dealers, and sugar daddies. The negative influences outweighed the positive ones, with most influences propagated due to lack of role models, poverty, and peer pressure among other issues. These findings will be used to design a program whose overall goal will be to improve relationship dynamics, and improve gender norms among young women and men to reduce GBV.

## **BACKGROUND**

Adolescence (10 to 19 years) is a critical and dramatic developmental stage due to extensive biological, psychological, emotional and social changes (Sun, A. 2009, Scherf SK. et al., 2012). In low income countries, adolescents constitute a sizeable proportion of the population, but face considerable vulnerabilities due to household poverty, violence, limited education opportunities, and lack of economic opportunities and independence. These vulnerabilities hamper their transition into early adulthood (Austrian, K. et al 2016). These result in negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes such as school dropout, early sexual initiation, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV, unintended pregnancy, and early marriage. Further, adolescent girls bear disproportionate risks and vulnerabilities due to gender based violence, including rape and other forms of sexual abuse (UNICEF 2014). Therefore, investments in their wellbeing is critical for the present and future generations.

Many girl-centered programs focus on asset-building for adolescent girls and place less emphasis on the other spheres of influence in their lives – such as school, households and communities (Hewett PC. et al., 2017). Additionally, literature gaps exist on how to engage adolescent boys and young men to have a positive impact on boys' and girls' outcomes. This paper will identify key segments of males that

influence adolescent girls lives and how, and describe changes that adolescent girls would like to see in the key segments.

## **METHODS**

Data was collected through 16 focus group discussions with 98 participants who were in-school adolescent girls, out of school adolescent girls with kids and without kids, mothers of adolescent girls and female program mentors selected from locations in two low income urban sites in Nairobi and Nakuru, Kenya. In both locations, participants were purposively selected using a predefined recruitment schedule (Table I below shows the characteristics of the study participants). All interviews were conducted in Swahili and facilitated by trained qualitative research assistants and a note-taker. The discussion guide included questions on the boys and men that adolescent girls interact with and who have an influence in their life, the activities they engage in together, how they make her life easy and difficult, if they are at risk of being harassed or experiencing violence from this type of male, how they would want the behaviours of the type of male to change to improve things for adolescent girls in the community and the programs and activities that the male should engage in to change their behaviour towards adolescent girls.

FGDs were transcribed verbatim into English and the translation was validated by an external translator. Qualitative data were analyzed using an integrated approach, employing both a deductive organizing framework for code types (start list), as determined by the content of the interview guides, combined with an inductive (ground-up) development of codes as they emerged from the data (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). A codebook was iteratively developed reflecting the key research questions, and the topics covered in the interview guides. Qualitative data were coded and thematically analyzed using the Atlas.ti software package by two data analysts concurrently. The data analysts double-coded >20% of the transcripts to ensure consistency in coding application. Inter-coder reliability rates were run using the Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT) and an acceptably high ICR rate with a kappa of 0.8 or above was obtained for key codes (Hruschka et al., 2004).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study protocol was approved by the Population Council Institutional Review Board and the AMREF Ethical and Scientific Review Committee. In addition, the protocol was reviewed by the Kenyan National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation to obtain research permits for study investigators.

**Table 1: Characteristics of the respondents**

	<b>Girls 10-13 years In school</b>	<b>Girls 14-17 years In school</b>	<b>Girls 14-17 years Out of school No kids</b>	<b>Girls 14-17 years Out of School with kids</b>	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>Female Mentors</b>	<b>Number</b>
<b>Location</b>							
Kariobangi	12	13	7	7	8	6	<b>53</b>
Nakuru	11	8	4	8	6	8	<b>45</b>
<b>Education</b>							
Higher	0	0	1	0	1	7	<b>9</b>
None	0	0	0	0	5	3	<b>8</b>
Primary	23	8	6	8	5	0	<b>50</b>
Secondary	0	13	4	7	3	4	<b>31</b>
<b>Religion</b>							
Catholic	11	7	6	6	4	5	<b>39</b>
Protestant	12	14	4	7	10	9	<b>56</b>
None	0	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Other	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Marital status</b>							
Married	0	0	2	3	11	7	<b>23</b>
Never Married	23	21	9	11	0	5	<b>69</b>
Separated	0	0	0	1	2	1	<b>4</b>
Widowed	0	0	0	0	1	1	<b>2</b>
<b>Living arrangement</b>							
Alone	0	0	0	2	0	0	<b>2</b>
Both Parents	14	12	1	3	0	0	<b>30</b>
Father Only	1	1	0	1	0	0	<b>3</b>
Mother Only	6	6	6	3	0	0	<b>21</b>
Not Applicable	0	0	1	0	14	14	<b>29</b>
Other Relatives	2	2	3	3	0	0	<b>10</b>
Spouse	0	0	0	3	0	0	<b>3</b>
<b>Number of children</b>							
None	23	21	10	0	0	3	<b>57</b>
1-2 children	0	0	1	15	4	6	<b>26</b>
3-9 children	0	0	0	0	10	5	<b>15</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>98</b>

## **RESULTS**

### ***Who are the male Influencers in the lives of adolescent girls?***

Adolescent girls provided their insights on and experiences with a range of boys and men whom they interacted with and how the men influenced their lives. Male influencers included male family members (father, brothers and uncles), friends and neighbours, boyfriends, classmates, boda boda (motorbike-taxi) operators, thieves and drug dealers, and sugar daddies. The narratives show that these males had both positive and negative influence, although the negative influences outweighed the positive ones. Most of

these influences were propagated due to lack of role models, poverty, and peer pressure among other issues.

#### *Fathers/uncles/brothers*

This group of men, particularly fathers, were reported to play an important role of providing support to the family through the provision of food, money for other basic necessities, school fees and also providing general security for the wellbeing of the family. However, most of the time, adolescent girls described fathers as being absent in their lives, leaving a gap in their development. Fathers, uncles and brothers were reported to have dual roles in the lives of the girls, in that while they made their lives easier by providing the needs of the family, they were also reported to expose the girls to sexual violence and encourage them to go to places where they were in harm's way.

*INT: Ok, thank you so much and what do you think that [her] father does to make her life easy or comfortable?*

*RES5: By encouraging her to take her education, and the importance of the girl child education.*

*INT: What else?*

*RES1: Providing her with the things that she needs in school to make her comfortable, like paying for her school fees [FGD, In-school adolescent 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: What are some of the things that you think of her father?*

*RES5: He is not a great guy, he tells [her] to quit her education and that there was nowhere she was going with her education [FGD, In-school adolescent 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: What could be some of the activities that [her] brother could be doing to make [her] life easy?*

*RES1: By paying for her school fees*

*RES5: Encouraging her to work hard in school to have a better life in future [FGD, In-school adolescent 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

*RES1: The brother can be living with [her] and tells her to sleep with her and in case she refuses she beats her or chases her away future*

*INT: How often do these acts occur?*

*RES1: Frequently [FGD, In-school adolescent 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

*RES 8: Her life becomes hard if her father takes alcohol and he gives her little money to go for shopping and he want change. When she is chased outside, she will go to anybody who will give her money [FGD, In-school adolescent 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: Okay let's sit down. We will now talk about [her] uncle. Who will tell us how old, where he stays and the work [her] uncle does*

*RES 5: He can be twenty-two years but yet to marry then he calls [her] to his house and he have sex with her. It can be bad since he calls [her] every day, maybe he can entice her with money and when [she] sleeps he rape her without her knowing [FGD, In-school adolescent 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: How about father? How do they influence her life?*

*RES1: They pay for her school fees, provide her with her needs. But nowadays they have turned against their daughters; they even eat them*

*RES5: He is the one who has given birth to [her] and they have turned to animals, they eat their children*

*INT: Kindly explain what you mean by saying they eat them?*

*RES3: They sleep with them, defile them (Very high tone) [FGD, Mothers of adolescent girls, Nakuru]*

*RES3: He [Father] comes, and after he gets home maybe he doesn't have even a shilling so it forces [her] to go to boys so that they can give her money [FGD, In-school adolescent 10-13 years, Nairobi]*

### *Friends and neighbours*

Majority of the adolescent girls described friends and neighbours as having a negative influence on their lives. Most of the time, they were characterized as thieves, drug sellers and boda boda drivers or school drop outs idling within the community. Sex and transactions were common in these relationships. The out of school boys, commonly referred to as 'small boys' did not however have a lot of benefits but acted as a link between the adolescent girls and their sexual partners sent to take messages on behalf of the girl. The small boys would sometimes be used for protection or to negotiate on with older men on behalf of the adolescent girl.

*INT: So, I would like to talk about her friends, what type of friends does she have, I would like us to talk about both the good and the bad friends?*

*RES4: Her friends are both boys and girls*

*INT: Can you expound more?*

*RES5: She has some good friends that when she goes to visit them she tells her parents, and when she gets there, they tell her that instead of playing, they should take books and revise. But for the bad ones she will hardly tell her parents and when they meet they will go roaming and they may end up going to the wrong places*

*INT: And who are these bad people, and which kind of places do they go to?*

*RES5: It could be a boyfriend and when they meet they will go for recreational activities such as swimming and thereafter the boy would suggest that they get headed somewhere and relax after the day long swimming and that is where they will misuse themselves*

*INT: Misuse them in which way?*

*RES1: They might get themselves indulging in sexual activities [FGD, In-school adolescent 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

### *Boyfriends*

These are described as slightly older than the adolescent girl and most of the time had a bad influence. Although sometimes described as having a positive influence in the lives of the adolescent girls, most of the time they engaged the girls in activities which eventually led to sexual activity. Boyfriends were also accused of having multiple sex partners which led to emotional torture and could eventually expose the girl to diseases. On the other hand, the girls also reported having multiple boyfriends

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INT: Yes, can you tell me the age of this boyfriend and the nature of work that he does

RES5: He could be either 17 or 18 years, he could be in school or out of school, if the boyfriend uses alcohol then they are using it together, and he gives her money too [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]

INT: R4 you had said boys; do you want to expound on it a bit? Who can help her? Who?

RES4: She said boys because...maybe, this her boyfriend, has someone else. Now this one calls saying she is coming at that moment, the other one also calls at the same time saying she is coming at that moment. Now that is what gives her problems...on her mind [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]

INT: Ok, and what activities does [she] engage in with this boyfriend? Like what things, when they are together what things do they do?

RES1: [she] goes to help clean the clothes, clean the house

INT: Hhmmm

RES1: Then he helps her with little money [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]

INT: Ok, why do think these boyfriends use her for some time then they leave her?

RES1: Maybe they get better girls than [her]

INT: Oohh

RES2: Mostly boyfriends do not have one girl friend, maybe [she] trusts him but the boyfriend does not trust [her] [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]

### Classmates

The in-school adolescent girls reported mixed roles of studying together and could go to for advice but sometimes they could tease and harass them

INT: Just add anything in your views

RESPI: RES1: With her desk mates and classmates they come to visit each other and play [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 10-13 years, Nakuru]

INT: They help, elaborate for us a bit

RES: Maybe if she did not come with a biro pen or pencil and another person has them and s/he is using others and has kept the others in his/her bag, s/he can have mercy and help her [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 10-13 years, Nairobi]

INT: And are there decisions that classmates can make that will affect Lina's life negatively?

RES6: You know the way classmates are very close, there are times when you will give your class mate all your secrets, and then she decides to tell the whole class something that you had told her in

*confidence, so these makes Lina demoralized by the class mates to the extent that she loses concentration in class. Then another thing is that Lina will be pained as she will lack confidence in the rest of the class and even if she has a burning issue that she is supposed to share she will not and that adds to Lina's pain [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nairobi]*

#### *Boda boda operators*

Boda boda operators are men who operate motorbike services for transport within the community. Majority of the girls described their influence as being negative since they encouraged girls to either drop out of school or lured them with money and free rides in exchange for sex. The boda boda operators were entrusted with the safety of the girls by their parents and guardians to offer a ride to and back from school, but in the process, they turned and took advantage of the girls, sometimes taking them into their homes for sexual abuse instead of taking them to school. Other times two boda boda operators competing for a girl's attention could turn against her and gang rape her should she turn down their requests.

*INT: Their relationship or activities together?*

*RES: Being ferried to school and back home every day and the girl will be lured to have sex with the boda boda guy*

*INT: Is she at risk of being harassed/abused?*

*RES: Yes, because the guy knows what time [she] goes to school and when she returns home so she can be ambushed along the way*

*RES: If two or more guys offer the same service to [her] they might gang up and violate her, since she does want to return favours or they will fight for her*

*RES: She might be lured to have sex with them to return the favour of being carried [FGD, Mothers of adolescent, Nairobi]*

#### *Thieves and drug sellers*

Thieves and drug sellers mainly recruited the girls in their drug network and used them to traffic drugs. They also introduced them to drugs. Once the girls were under the influence of drugs, they took advantage of them sexually. Most of the time, they were reported to lure the in-school girls with money which led to school dropout. Thieves on the other hand put the lives of adolescent girls in danger by engaging them in crime, the girls who associated with thieves were reported to do so due to financial gains and improved status in the community.

*RES: The drug users get [her] to escort them when they are going to buy the drugs, and after they have bought they give [her] bit by bit until she becomes an addict and afterwards they become happy that they have been able to recruit [her] in to their drug circle [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

*RES: When they get [her] to using drugs, she will get addicted and eventually drop out of school and then drug abuse will come with other health related issues*

*RES: They will tell [her] that there is no need for to continue with her education as it is stressful and for her to get the rid of stress that has been brought about by education, it is drugs that will help her cool down [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

### *Sponsors/sugar daddies*

Sugar daddies, commonly known as sponsors were the most aspired to have category of influential men in the lives of adolescent girls. These are older men, mostly married and who took care of the adolescent girls by paying their bills, giving money and gifts in exchange for sex. Some girls got into relationships with this group of men out of peer pressure of wanting to maintain certain social status.

*RES5: this is someone who most of the time satisfies your needs. For example, you tell him you need money for the salon, and other needs. That is not a boyfriend. Just someone to give you money*

*INT: What are some of the needs?*

*RES2: clothing, anytime you have money problems you to go to him*

*INT: how old can they be?*

*RES4: EEEE! They are usually old like over 30 years [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nairobi]*

*INT: and what activities does this sugar daddy and [she] do when they are together.*

*RES1: Shopping*

*INT: Mmmh*

*RES2: Then he takes her for lunch... after finishing eating then he takes her for shopping... then he will give her fare then tell her which day they will meet.*

*INT: Mmm. Ok, RES3?*

*RES3: Taking her out*

*INT: When they go out what do they go to do?*

*RES3: To see wildlife...*

*INT: Ok...*

*RES1: They can have sex [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: Ok, previously we had a log discussion about sugar daddy and small boys and you had also said ok mostly sugar daddy but we can see here that they are both good and bad, I don't know if there is anyone who wants to explain*

*RES1: The good thing about a sugar daddy, is that he can help [her] with money, pays for her shopping and house, I mean he helps her in life [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

### **Desired changes in male influencers**

Adolescent girls described changes they would wish to see in the key segments of males that influenced their lives. Since the study was conducted in two low income urban sites, the majority of the male influencers were jobless and their engagement in vices were associated with being idle. The girls recommended creation of employment opportunities to engage these males to keep them busy. Additionally, several girls proposed the introduction of guidance and counseling sessions to correct negative influences these men had on their lives.



*INT: Now if you are asked, what would you want these boys to change? What should they change so that [her] life will be easier?*

*RES1: I think they should be assisted to find a place to work, some like school drop outs, to be convinced to accept to go back to school, they will not stay close to [girls] [FGD, Out-of-school adolescent girls 14-17 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: As we continue with these behaviours from her brother that makes her life difficult, what can be done to help the brother leave some of the behaviours*

*RES2: Get someone who can counsel him on discipline*

*RES1: His friend can counsel him on importance of educating her siblings who can help him in future*

*RES5: If [she] has no help she can seek help from the government be given a letter, so that the brother can change her behaviour [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

*INT: What can be done to his brother to stop those bad things he does to [her]?*

*RESP 6: He be caught and be taken to prison*

*INT: Aha...*

*RESP 4: Maybe her neighbours have known what he is doing to [her]; they can report him to police [FGD, In-school adolescent girls 10-13 years, Nakuru]*

Creating business opportunities for male influencers to earn income was proposed to help stop them from engaging in illegal activities such as theft as a means of getting money. Other girls proposed seminars and vocational trainings to equip the boys and young men with relevant skills. However, just a few girls recommended medical intervention for girls who had been violated sexually. Another suggestion that received the least recommendation was improving security in the area to ensure safety of girls.

## **DISCUSSION**

The information collected from the adolescent girls was used to identify male segments for a second round of qualitative data collection. All the qualitative data is currently being used to design a program whose overall goal will be to improve relationship dynamics between young men and women, as well as improve gender norms among young women and men with a goal of reducing gender based violence. Further analysis will be conducted and the process of program design discussed in detail.