

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

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***SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR SURVEY OF RESIDENT STUDENTS AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA***

By

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is estimated that over 80% of those currently living with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) worldwide are aged between 15 and 24 and that three quarters of these are in sub-Saharan Africa. In terms of sheer numbers, South Africa ranks first among countries hardest hit by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) with prevalence reports suggesting that 10 - 14% of youth are living with the virus: 15.5% and 4.8% of females and males in this age category respectively (Pettifor, Rees, Kleinschmidt, Steffenson, MacPhail, Hlongwa-Madikizela and Vermaak, 2005; UNAIDS, 2006).

It is well documented that within the indigenous African population in South Africa, there is a significant increase in HIV prevalence with increasing levels of education (Shisana, Rehle, Simbayi, Parker, Zuma, Bhana, Connolly, Jooste, Pillay, Mbelle, Managa, Dana, Ramlagan, Zungu-Dirwayi, Louw, van Wyk, Tamasane, Petros, Freeman, Kelly, Tshose, Letlape, Naidoo, Henda, Nqeketo, Prince, and Shean, 2005). This consequently suggests that although tertiary students have access to information and health facilities at their institutions, there remain influences that make them vulnerable to infection. Such influences may include ready accessibility to drugs and alcohol, social networking events, peer pressure, coerced sex and generally the opportunity to engage in sexual intercourse.

### PROBLEM STATEMENT

HIV/AIDS and the continued spread of the epidemic among students at the University of Venda (UNIVEN) remains a grave concern for university management and the institutions' HIV/AIDS Unit (PETT, 2005). A number of initiatives, such as the Student Representative Assembly (SRA) HIV/AIDS Desk, the Agglomerated Bank of South Africa (ABSA) Peer Helpers and the Peer Education Task Team (PETT) exist to address the spread of the

epidemic within the campus. However, the programmes under these initiatives and the HIV/AIDS Unit have never been evaluated for their effectiveness or researched for appropriateness and relevance to the UNIVEN situation. The absence of previous sexual behaviour studies at the institution has resulted in intervention programmes on the campus being adopted from other institutions and agencies working in HIV/AIDS intervention rather than being developed by the institution to specifically target the risks and vulnerabilities of UNIVEN students.

There exists a need to strive for, develop and implement appropriate interventions to reverse the growing trend in infection rates among the youth and university students. Without adequate intervention programmes, based on sound baseline research, HIV/AIDS prevalence among students of historically disadvantaged universities (HDU's), including the University of Venda, will continue to rise steadily. The situation is worsened by the low level of strategies on these campuses. The results of the studies conducted on HIV/AIDS among students of tertiary institutions in South Africa (Barnes, 2000; Chetty, 2000; Chetty, 2001; Kelly, 2001; Kinghorn, 2000; Stremlau and Nkosi, 2001; Uys, Icharam, Martin and Alexander, 2001) show that the prevalence rate for HIV and AIDS is high (33% and 3.7% respectively).

#### **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

It is generally accepted that in the absence of a vaccine against HIV, behavioural change provides the best opportunity for preventing the spread of the epidemic (Hargreaves, 2002). It is crucial however that prior to designing and setting up HIV-related services and interventions promoting behaviour change, investigations into sexual behaviour, attitudes towards HIV/AIDS, and the knowledge and misconceptions held on Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS are carried out to inform the nature, content and context of such services (Population Council, 2007a; Population Council, 2007b).

Harrison (2006) pointed out that the study of sexual behaviour is key in developing an understanding of patterns of HIV infection and highlighted on the importance of learning

epidemic within the campus. However, the programmes under these initiatives and the HIV/AIDS Unit have never been evaluated for their effectiveness or researched for appropriateness and relevance to the UNIVEN situation. The absence of previous sexual behaviour studies at the institution has resulted in intervention programmes on the campus being adopted from other institutions and agencies working in HIV/AIDS intervention rather than being developed by the institution to specifically target the risks and vulnerabilities of UNIVEN students.

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more about the details of young people's sexual networks and how these develop and change over time. Although the University of Venda established an HIV/AIDS Unit in 2002, intervention strategies employed by this unit to address the HIV epidemic among students are not informed by recent baseline research. With little knowledge about the full range of sexual behaviour of students and the vulnerabilities they face whilst enrolled with the institution, a sexual behaviour survey is crucial to enhance the effectiveness of the unit and the development of appropriate HIV prevention strategies.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is the first extensive survey of sexual behaviour among students of the University of Venda since the inception of the HIV/AIDS Unit. It is intended to inform intervention strategies of the unit and the Peer Education Task Team (PETT).

The results of this study contribute to the knowledge needed to establish whether the common misconceptions and myths from the early phase of the epidemic are still in existence among the youth at the university. It further catalogues the pattern of sexual behaviour among the participants, their levels of awareness on HIV/AIDS, their participation in substance and drug use, and the occurrence and vulnerability of students to forced or coerced sex and other risk factors, which cannot be separated from the current HIV/AIDS threat.

#### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The primary purpose of this study was to survey and describe the sexual behaviour of resident students at the University of Venda.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study were to:

- Determine the experiences of alcohol and drugs among resident students at the

University of Venda;

- Survey and describe the distribution of study participants across various sexual behaviour indicators;
- Determine the pattern and nature of respondents' contact with commercial and non commercial sex partners;
- Survey condom use patterns among study participants;
- Survey self reported history of symptoms and treatment of STIs among respondents;
- Determine the level of knowledge of the study participants on HIV/AIDS and symptoms of STIs;
- Survey the experiences with VCT and perceived threat of contracting HIV among study participants.

#### KEY TERMS

**Resident student:** For the purpose of this research, a resident student is an individual either registered or offered admission and in the process of registration for the 2008 academic year at the University of Venda; s/he had also been allocated accommodation within the campus residences and was already living in the hall of residence.

**Sex:** In the context of this study, 'sex' is limited in reference to only sexual intercourse (vaginal and/or anal) and excludes oral sex and masturbation practices.

**Sexual behaviour:** This term is used in the context of human behaviour to refer to the actions that humans take when seeking sexual or relational partners, gaining approval of possible partners, forming relationships, showing affection, and mating.

**Youth:** This term is used in accordance with the United Nation's (UN) definition that stipulates that it is applicable to all young people between the ages of 15 and 24 years.