

Societal Constructions of Multiple Concurrent Partnerships and its Implications on the Efficacy of HIV Communication Campaigns in Homabay County, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper explores how multiple concurrent partnerships is socially constructed in Homabay County and whether communication campaigns have addressed the contextual factors driving this practice. Twelve focus group discussions were conducted with 116 respondents that included married men and women, as well as male and female youth. Two in-depth interviews were also conducted with managers of two communication campaigns. The research explored how the community made sense of multiple concurrent partnerships and the design, implementation, and efficacy of the attendant communication campaigns. Study findings show that multiple concurrent partnerships was a normative practice that is mainly driven by financial needs, sexual satisfaction, emotional neglect, cultural practices, gender norms, revenge, escapism, separation from spouses, and the search for marriage partners. The study further established that the communication campaigns failed to address these factors underpinning multiple concurrent partnerships. This study indicates the need for communication campaigns to prioritize factors that contribute to multiple concurrent partnerships through increased community dialogue in order to be more efficacious.

Introduction

HIV was first diagnosed in Kenya in 1984 and since then, the epidemic has spread at an unprecedented rate despite massive HIV prevention campaigns (NASCO, 2010). At the height of the epidemic in 1997, the country recorded prevalence rates as high as 41% in selected regions (NASCO, 2006). It is this state of affairs that prompted the former president of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi, to declare HIV a national disaster in 1999. Subsequently, the National AIDS Control Council (NACC) was established to coordinate a countrywide and multi sectorial HIV prevention, care, and treatment program to respond to the epidemic (NACC, 2009). Emanating from these responses, the UNAIDS report of the global HIV epidemic 2010, indicates that Kenya is one of the twenty five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that have recorded a significant decline in HIV prevalence over the past decade (UNAIDS, 2010). National statistics further paint a rosy picture with several studies (NASCO, 2014; KNBS & ICF Macro, 2010; Gelmon *et al.*, 2009; NASCO, 2009) denoting a steady decline in national

HIV prevalence over the past decade.

While this should be a cause for celebration, a look at the region specific HIV transmission dynamics paints a worrying picture. Kenya's HIV epidemic is largely concentrated around the Lake Victoria region. Results of the "Kenya HIV Prevention Revolution Roadmap 2014" indicate that out of the forty seven Counties, Homabay County is leading with an HIV prevalence of 25.7%, which is almost five times the national average of 5.6% (NASCO & NACC; 2014). In addition, a comparison of the 2012 and the preceding 2007 "Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey" results reveals that while the country recorded a remarkable decline in HIV prevalence from 7.2% to 5.6%, the most significant declines were witnessed in Nairobi, Coast and Rift Valley, provinces with the 2nd, 3rd and 4th highest HIV prevalence rates respectively. On the contrary, Nyanza province recorded an increase in HIV prevalence from 14.9% to 15.1% (NASCO, 2014; NASCO, 2009).

According to UNAIDS (2010) the bulk of new HIV infections in Sub-Saharan Africa are transmitted heterosexually. While several advances have been recorded in care and treatment programs, it is becoming increasingly evident that the world cannot treat itself out of this pandemic. In fact for every person put on treatment, two more get newly infected with HIV (UNAIDS, 2010). Therefore, in the absence of a cure for HIV, appropriate sexual behavior change is the only viable strategy that can alter the course of the epidemic by preventing new infections (Gregson, Todd & Zaba, 2009). Communication plays a critical role in this dispensation and it offers the only promising alternative in preventing new infections (Scalway, 2003). It is in this regard that over the past

two decades, Kenya has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in communication campaigns to promote sexual behavior change (Gelmon *et al.*, 2009). However, the rise in prevalence in the Nyanza region could be an indication that the many communication campaigns are not having a significant effect on sexual behavior change.

Available research shows that despite universal awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS in Kenya, there is minimal or no change in behaviours that put individuals at the risk of infection and cultural values that sanction such risky sexual practices (Schueller *et al.*, 2006; Muturi, 2005). A growing body of studies has attributed the lack of sexual behavior change to the failure by many communication campaigns to appropriately address the contextual and socio cultural factors that influence the transmission of HIV (Gelmon *et al.*, 2009; Gupta *et al.*, 2008). Apparently, the bulk of HIV prevention interventions have been modelled on cognitive theories that have advocated for individual level behavior change. The underlying assumption has been that individuals determine their sexual behavior through conscious and rational decision making (Singhal, 2003). As a result, cognitive models have been credited with raising knowledge and awareness. However, a lot of criticisms have been levelled against cognitive based models of behavior change. Evidence points to the fact that increasing knowledge alone is insufficient for behavior change (Dias *et al.*, 2006; Schueller *et al.*, 2006).

Recently, studies have increasingly pointed out that sexuality is a socially constructed phenomenon and hence sexual behavior is largely influenced by cultural and contextual variables (Auerbach, Parkhurst & Caceres, 2011; Kalipeni & Mbugua, 2005; Scalway, 2003). Individual behavior is therefore influenced by the environmental context which includes cultural, social, political and economic factors (Ruger, 2004). As such the social experiences, values and norms that individuals draw from the environment shape their health, define their behavior and influence their susceptibility to HIV infection (Schiavo, 2007). Emanating from the above, it has become critical for communication interventions to focus on the specific contexts and drivers of the epidemic. Consequently, this has prompted scholars to investigate the contextual factors that influence the transmission of HIV.

In recent years, studies have demonstrated that the societal acceptance of multiple concurrent partnerships when coupled with low condom use and low levels of male circumcision are primarily accountable for the high rates of HIV transmission in Nyanza province, and Homabay County in particular (Xu *et al.*, 2010; Gelmon *et al.*, 2009; PSI, 2009). But despite this, few studies have explored the reasons and context of such relationships in Kenya. Furthermore, although numerous communication campaigns have been implemented, there is a paucity of research demonstrating whether the HIV prevention communication campaigns are responsive to the cultural context, their appropriateness and efficacy in addressing contextual factors that influence the practice of multiple and concurrent partnerships in Homabay County, Kenya.

Methods

This was a qualitative study that was conducted in Homabay County, Kenya, between January and July 2013. Using the socio-constructionism theory, this study investigated how the community in Homabay County made sense of multiple concurrent partnerships. The study further utilized the communication for social change model to analyse the efficacy of selected communication campaigns in addressing social norms that underpin the practice of multiple concurrent partnerships. The study purposively sampled two communication campaigns, one conducted by an international non-governmental organization (NGO), and the second conducted by a local non-governmental organization. The study participants were purposively sampled from Homabay, Mbita and Rachuonyo sub-counties. These are the sites that had been proliferated by the two communication campaigns.

A total of 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 116 respondents who included homogeneous groups of married men, married women, as well as male and female youth. The recruitment of FGD participants was similar across all the sub-counties with marital status, gender, and sexual relationships being the main filters. A total of 27 married men, 31 married women, 28 male youth, and 30 female youth took part in the FGDs. The participants were recruited through community based resource persons that were linked to organizations conducting communication campaigns in Homabay County. Informed written consent was obtained from all the respondents before they participated in the FGDs. Each of the focus groups had between 8-12 participants and lasted an average of between one to two hours. The discussions which were conducted in Kiswahili and the local language Dholuo were recorded and later transcribed and translated into English. The interview guide for the FGD used semi structured questions to derive how the community made sense of multiple concurrent partnerships and the factors underlying this practice. It also explored the community's participation, appropriateness and impact of the communication campaigns.

Two in-depth interviews were also conducted with the campaign managers from the international and local non-governmental organizations respectively. The campaign managers were responsible for designing and guiding the implementation of the communication campaigns. The semi structured interviews lasted averagely one hour each and were recorded. The questions explored the design, implementation and efficacy of the communication campaigns in addressing the social norms underpinning multiple concurrent partnerships. Data was analysed thematically with the aid of the qualitative data analysis package QSR N-VIVO 10 (www.qsrinternational.com). The data analysis by NVIVO involved creating tree nodes and assigning themes to the nodes based on the research questions, interview guide and the themes that emerged from the data. Through this, patterns and linkages were established between these different sources and data sets. The findings contribute to the discussions in this paper on how the community in Homabay County constructs multiple concurrent partnerships, and the efficacy of the attendant communication campaigns.

Results

Constructions of multiple concurrent partnerships

The findings from this study reveals that multiple concurrent partnerships is a normative behavior in Homabay County. Both married men and women as well as male and female youth had normalised concurrency as part and parcel of their life. Multiple concurrent partnerships was constructed as a negative practise on the one hand and a beneficial practice on the other. Concurrency was blamed for contributing to new HIV infections, sexually transmitted infections, conflicts and relationship break ups. Nonetheless, this public disavowal of multiple concurrent partnerships did not impede this practise. Instead, the community condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public, but overwhelmingly practised albeit secretly:

Multiple concurrent partnerships are not acceptable in this community but they are there. There is no woman who can accept the husband to have a side dish. Even me if I hear my girlfriend has a side dish I will feel very bad. Multiple concurrent partnerships are not accepted and that is why they are doing it secretly. It is mostly very secretive so that it is not discovered (26 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

Most of the concurrent relationships involved at least two to three sexual partners. Men constructed concurrency as an expression of masculinity hence the number of sexual partners was based on their financial ability and sexual libido. For women however, the number of sexual partners was influenced by the necessity of maintaining the secrecy of the relationship from their spouses. As such while men had numerous sexual partners, women preferred limiting the number of sexual partners to avoid detection:

A married woman cannot have more than two. Because if she has three, the information will get out and the husband can discover which will lead to conflicts (29 year old, married woman, Mbita).

Furthermore, most of the concurrent relationships were short lived and often lasted between one and six months, with a few extending for a year. A common fear was that retaining them for long would lead to their exposure. Therefore, many relationships were often terminated when participants felt they had met their objectives, which were mostly financial. However, a few relationships lasted longer than a year. However, these were exceptional cases. Below I explore some of the key reasons that emerged from the focus group discussions on why individuals engage in multiple concurrent partnerships.

Transactional Sex

Although a number of social and cultural beliefs have perpetuated norms that promote the practice of multiple and concurrent partnerships, the study findings revealed that majority of the multiple concurrent partnerships were transactional in nature. Therefore, the reason why many people engaged in relationships was primarily for the fulfilment of their basic needs. As the findings revealed:

Women are vulnerable. They engage in multiple concurrent partnerships because the husband leaves in the morning and leaves me just Kshs.

And when he gets back in the evening from work he expects to get dinner and everything ready. And you know here we are in town, water and all small things need money. This makes me go an extra mile and be involved in these extramarital affairs until I get money. At times I will have sex with someone and I am given just Kshs. 200 (26 year old, married female, Homabay).

In this regard, concurrent relationships were constructed as positive and beneficial on the basis of the benefits they accrued. One observation was that while multiple concurrent partnerships was condemned in the public domain, relationships with greater financial benefits were often admired and gained wider acceptance among peers and in some cases even among parents. On the other hand, relationships that came with financial expectations were shunned:

It also depends with the concurrent partner you get. If you get a lady who for instance gives you her car to use, your friends praise you for succeeding (25 year old, married male, Homabay).

Apart from basic needs, consumerism which was denoted by the desire to live a flashy and expensive lifestyle was also prevalent among the study participants. Married women complained that their husbands only provided for the most basic needs but failed to meet the additional demands such as good dressing, shoes, beauty products and attractive lifestyles. Consumerism was also rampant among the youth who engaged in concurrency to gain money for buying the latest and most expensive most expensive phones, dress in fashionable clothes and don the latest hairstyles. As the findings depicted:

The money is for personal needs and beauty because the husband is not giving you money. A husband at times does not know how the wife dresses, lives and buys shoes. A woman can admire looking good so she goes to look for it herself (36 year old, married female, Mbita).

Sexual and Emotional Fulfilment

The push for many of the respondents to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships was unmet sexual needs on the one hand and emotional needs on the other. Sexual starvation and the lack of sexual satisfaction was an overriding issue among both the married couples as well as the youth. Married women felt that their husbands did not prepare them both psychologically and physically for sex. Instead sex was used as a tool for the benefit and satisfaction of the man:

There are some men who don't know how to treat the lady. When he reaches the door he starts quarrelling you. Then when he gets to bed he says "...you woman remove these clothes..." He has not prepared you for sex. That makes some women have concurrent relationships. You know when he is in the house and he wants you, he should show you that love from the dinner table, preparing you in advance for sex. At times when you complain he is not preparing you he resorts to violence (29 year old, married female, Mbita).

On the other hand, men felt that their wives and girlfriends were not adventurous in experimenting with different sex styles:

There are some who tell you "...do and when you finish cover me". When someone tells you that even the morale for sex goes and that makes you to go and look for another one.....(29 year old, male youth, Homabay).

Nonetheless, married women countered this accusation stating that when they attempted to make sex exciting by experimenting with new sexual experiences, their husbands questioned their fidelity to the relationship. Apart from sex, both men and women cited emotional neglect as a key challenge in their relationships. As one respondent noted:

There are some men who are ever busy. Be it daytime or at night they are ever busy. So you can't find time to share with him your stuff. At times when he leaves in the morning he will come back at 2am and find you are already asleep. So he is ever busy from week to week. You will find at times he does not bother with you so you will find someone who will take care of your needs (32 year old, married female, Homabay).

Masculinity and Male Hegemony

The findings of the research revealed a strong patriarchal tradition and deeply entrenched masculinity norms in Homabay County. Arising from these norms, most men constructed multiple concurrent partnerships as an acceptable practice. Engaging in multiple concurrent partnerships was seen as a way of proving their manhood and hence it attracted praise and admiration from peers. In fact some of the men noted that concurrency was an admission that you are a "*ruoth moth*" (real man), confirming deeply entrenched notions of masculinity:

For you to prove you are handsome you must have more than one girl. It is always said that the key that can open even ten different locks will always be called a master key. Many men want to become like a master key and hence they get pride in engaging in multiple concurrent relationships (22 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

This was cemented through a common belief that multiple concurrent partnerships is a genetic trait. Participants believed that men engage in multiple concurrent relationships because they are born promiscuous and that they inherited such traits from their parents:

It is something that runs in the blood. My grandfather had four wives, my father had three wives, and I have a brother that has two wives (19 year old, male youth, Homabay).

These gendered constructions were also expressed by some of the women who were apologetic and resigned to the fact that their men had a right to engage in concurrency. Most of the female respondents constructed male sexuality as uncontrollable and hence normalised that men cannot control their sexual urges because they are naturally polygamous. As a result, women were more accepting of their partners engaging in concurrent relationships as a way of affirming their manhood:

For men it is accepted because they say that is their nature. Without having another person outside their marriage they see you are not a man (19 year old, female youth, Homabay).

Legitimate Cultural Practice

Some of the factors that legitimated multiple concurrent partnerships included cultural norms surrounding polygamy. Polygamy is a deeply entrenched and legitimate cultural practice in Homabay County. The cultural acceptance of polygamy was compounded with the prevailing patriarchal norms where some of the respondents believed that it was an inherited trait. Therefore, many of the male respondents attributed practising concurrency due to the cultural acceptance of polygamy:

I want to talk like a typical Luo man. We were born polygamous in nature and polygamy is our mode of life. It is our nature as men and we are proud when we stay with two or three women. So as Luo's we just feel multiple concurrent partnerships for us youth is like polygamy in the olden days (23 year old, male youth, Homabay).

Polygamy is closely intertwined with the custom of wife inheritance, which is another acceptable cultural practice in Homabay County. Often when married men inherited widows, they ended up in polygamous unions which invoked jealousy among their wives. This coupled with the fact that some men paid more attention to the widow at the expense of their wives cultivated a fertile ground for concurrency:

If a man marries more than one wife, you as a woman will not feel very good. Yes I see that I am the first wife and my husband has married a second wife. When they marry another wife most of their time they spent in the other house. So you it is like you are neglected. So you too will feel like getting another person so that your love life does not die (32 year old, married female, Homabay).

Similarly, early marriage was rife in Homabay County with many young girls getting married at a tender age of up to 12 years. Most of the married women cited early marriage led to boredom in relationships which was a recipe for multiple concurrent partnerships:

Many girls got into marriage when they are underage and therefore they don't satisfy themselves in marriage. They look for that satisfaction in extra marital relationships when they are already married (28 year old, married female, Oyugis).

Revenge and Escapism

Conflicts in relationships mainly drove married men and women to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships. Participants who faced conflicts and other problems in their relationships resorted to multiple concurrent partnerships as a coping mechanism. On many occasions, participants did not confront and sort

out their issues with their spouses but rather resorted to concurrency as an escape strategy:

You find a husband is so harsh that when he comes home it is quarrels Every time he comes to the house it is noise. With time you find you don't love him, you don't want to be close to him. So you decide to look for another man who can pamper you. You know we women we like being pampered (26 year old, married female, Homabay)

Similarly, mistrust, jealousy and suspicion among couples also contributed to multiple concurrent partnerships. In relationships where couples mistrusted each other, there was a common tendency to engage in extra marital relationships even out of perceived infidelity. Others engaged in multiple concurrent partnerships out of revenge because of a cheating partner:

The major cause of multiple concurrent partnerships is suspicion. You are suspecting your partner. There are people who say if you see your lady talking to another man then that man is her lover. That makes some individuals to have multiple concurrent partnerships because of suspicion (37 year old, married male, Oyugis).

Other reasons that emerged for practising multiple concurrent partnerships included separation from spouses over long periods of time because of work and alcoholism. For the youth, they engaged in concurrency in search for the right marriage partner.

Communication for Social Change Campaigns

The research revealed that multiple concurrent partnerships was not addressed as a focal theme in the communication campaigns. This is despite the fact that this practice is deeply entrenched within the community. Instead, multiple concurrent partnerships was only addressed as a rider to other thematic issues. The findings further revealed that the communication campaigns did not address the contextual factors that drive multiple concurrent partnerships. None of the two campaigns had put in place measures to adequately address these norms in their communication campaigns. For instance whereas the issue of '*jaboya*' (sex for fish) was deeply entrenched among the fisher folk, the sessions conducted with this target group did not address the norms surrounding it. In fact both campaign managers admitted that they had not adequately tackled contextual factors that contribute to multiple concurrent partnerships:

Social norms are very difficult to change and I cannot attest to it now that we have been able to change any social norms. For instance we cannot be able to say that the *jaboya* issue has been well addressed. And the issue about calling everyone who is next to you an in-law and that means you can freely have sex with that person, you cannot be sure that we have adequately addressed that. So I cannot be confident enough to say we have been able to change social norms (Campaign Manager, Local Organization).

Instead, the communication campaigns focused on the dissemination of general HIV prevention messages on abstinence, fidelity, male circumcision, condom

...use and HIV testing and counselling. As one respondent stated:

I have been going to those places where they do the campaigns. Those people what they talk about is how HIV is spread. They talk about sexual intercourse, about blood transfusion and things like that. And the key issue they talk about in preventive measures is the condom. They show you practically how to use a condom and they are even ready to provide you with those condoms. But there is no any one day they have talked about multiple concurrent partnerships. If you ask many people if they have ever received any information on multiple concurrent partnerships they will say no (27 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

Another major finding was that the community was not involved in designing the communication campaigns. Because of this, there was limited ownership of the campaign activities by the community members. This was attested in Mbita where some community members noted that they only attended the sessions when they are enticed by monetary or other material benefits such as food.

However, the community members were recruited as peer educators and trained by the non-governmental organizations to disseminate messages:

The people who drive those campaigns are locals. You can't pick a peer educator who doesn't come from that community. So the community participates in delivering these messages with technical support from our team but the actual channel is individuals from that community who have gone through capacity building that enable them to deliver (Campaign Manager, International Organization).

The peer educators used a defined peer education manual for conducting the peer education sessions. However, one limitation with this approach is that the peer educators largely focused on delivering the content as prescribed in the curriculum which was mainly factual knowledge about HIV. As a result the sessions focused a lot on the health risks of multiple concurrent partnerships to the exclusion of the broader contextual issues that contribute to this practise.

Emanating from the above, majority of the respondents felt that the campaigns were ineffective in changing sexual behavior. The study findings revealed that the community was aware of the risks posed by HIV and the steps they needed to undertake to prevent HIV transmission such as practicing fidelity, using condoms, undergoing male circumcision. As one respondent, a 27 year old married female from Oyugis stated *"Nobody does not know about HIV, it is now like a song which non-governmental organizations use. Everybody knows about it and its consequences"*. But despite this knowledge, it was not translating into practise. Rather, participants felt that multiple concurrent partnerships was a normative behavior that could not easily change.

Discussion

In this paper, we set out to find out how the community in Homabay County constructs the concept of multiple concurrent partnerships, which has been linked to the burgeoning HIV epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa. From the study findings, multiple concurrent partnerships is a normative behavior in Homabay County. As a result there was widespread indulgence in concurrent sexual partnerships by both married men and women as well as male and female youth. These findings are consistent with studies conducted in Southern Africa where concurrency is institutionalized as a social norm (Soul City Institute, 2008; Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, the research found out that the community condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public but overwhelmingly practised it, albeit secretly. Similar to findings from other studies which affirm the secrecy of concurrent relationships (Sigamoney, 2009; Soul City Institute, 2008), the findings above denote a contradiction between the injunctive norms (what ought to be done) and descriptive norms (what is happening) (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). As such multiple concurrent partnerships was both condoned and sanctioned in different social contexts.

The findings above indicate the contradictions that community member's face in their attempt to conform to what is morally acceptable. Hence individuals have resorted to double standards where they condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public but practised it secretly. This push mainly arises from the fact that the decision to engage in multiple concurrent relationships is largely driven by a host of contextual factors, some beyond the control of the individual (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009; Soul City Institute, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2007; Jana *et al.*, 2007). This study found out that factors such as financial gain, sexual satisfaction, cultural practices, gender and masculinity, revenge and escapism, separation from spouses and the search for marriage partners greatly influenced the decision by individuals to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships.

In lieu of the above, we sought to find out whether communication campaigns had addressed the contextual factors that contribute to multiple concurrent partnerships. Considering that multiple concurrent partnerships is the key driver of the HIV epidemic in Southern Africa and parts of Eastern Africa (Halperin & Epstein, 2007), there are intensified calls to make partner reduction focal in HIV prevention campaigns (Wilson & Halperin, 2008). This is based on evidence which shows that in many countries which have reported a reduction in HIV prevalence in Africa, there is a strong correlation with partner reduction (Merson *et al.*, 2008). For instance Uganda's much celebrated successes in containing the HIV epidemic has been attributed to a change in societal norms surrounding partner reduction, popularly referred to as the zero grazing campaign (Slutkin *et al.*, 2006; Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004; Cohen, 2003). Similarly Zimbabwe which is one of the first countries in Southern Africa to record an almost 50% decline in HIV

prevalence, reduction in multiple sexual partnerships is attributed to this decline (Halperin *et al.*, 2011).

However, such efforts will have limited success unless the cultural context within which these relationships occur is poorly understood and not adequately addressed in prevention measures (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009). As such for HIV communication campaigns to be successful, it is imperative that they are designed to resonate with the cultural context of the community where they are to be implemented and also to address the deeper societal norms that influence the behavior of individual community members (Kreuter *et al.*, 2003). As Cialdini *et al.*, (2006) have pointed out, social norms are more likely to change if they are made salient and hence given focal attention. On the contrary, the findings from this study show that the communication campaigns did not explicitly address the predisposing factors that underlie the practice of multiple concurrent partnerships. Instead, the communication campaigns focused more on the dissemination of messages on abstinence, fidelity, condom use, male circumcision and HIV counseling and testing.

These messages are more in tune with the ABC (abstinence, be faithful, condoms) mantra upon which many HIV prevention campaigns have been anchored. Uganda is one such example where some scholars have argued that Uganda's much celebrated success in reducing the country's HIV prevalence is attributable to the robust implementation of the ABC model (Cohen, 2003; Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004). However, this group of scholars fail to account for many other contextual factors which made the ABC messages effective. It is in this regard that subsequent scholars have questioned the ABC hypothesis for its insensitivity to cultural contexts (Murphy *et al.*, 2006; Merson *et al.*, 2008). As some later day scholars have noted, Uganda's decline in HIV prevalence goes beyond the ABC model and is attributed to strong political support and grassroots community mobilization through horizontal communication approaches (Murphy *et al.*, 2006; Slutkin *et al.*, 2006)

Another revelation from this study was that respondents depicted significantly high levels of awareness and knowledge about HIV. However, this knowledge

was not translating to practice. This is because historically, many communication campaigns have focused on knowledge dissemination with the assumption that correct knowledge will automatically translate into behavior change (Gupta *et al.* 2008). But whilst cognitive models have been credited with raising knowledge and awareness, this success has not been matched with significant changes in behavior due to the narrow conceptualization of behavior change as a by-product of knowledge increase alone (Coates, Richter, & Caceres, 2008). Furthermore, this approach assumes that individuals possess full and volitional control over their behaviour and hence they are capable of moderating their risk to HIV infection. Unfortunately, this view is ignorant of the fact that individuals exist within a social environment and the social context largely shapes individual behavior (Parker, 2004). As a result, this assumption has been blamed for the failure of a myriad communication campaigns to translate into behavior change.

As was evident from the research, peer educators were recruited and trained to disseminate messages in the community. However, the community was excluded from decision making on the design and implementation of the campaign. In lieu of this, the findings depicted limited ownership of the communication campaign by the beneficiary community. This is in tandem with a top down approach which according to Muturi (2005) is ineffective in catalyzing behavior change. Campbell (2003) concurs observing that HIV prevention programs fail because they are designed by public health and communication experts who are alien to that community and with limited involvement of local communities. As Figueroa *et al.*, (2002) have pointed out, communication campaigns should shift from disseminating persuasion messages towards dialogue on issues that are appropriate and relevant to that community. Emphasis should be on increasing ownership through horizontal communication approaches that empower the beneficiary communities. As Scalway (2003) sums it up, there is need to target social change in order to effect individual change.

Conclusion

This study found that communication campaigns did not address the predisposing factors that influence individuals to indulge in multiple concurrent partnerships in Homabay County. In this regard, it is critical for communication campaigns to foster ownership and dialogue around social norms that lead to multiple concurrent partnerships in order to impact on individual sexual behaviors.

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HIV prevalence over the past decade.

While this should be a cause for celebration, a look at the region specific HIV transmission dynamics paints a worrying picture. Kenya's HIV epidemic is largely concentrated around the Lake Victoria region. Results of the "Kenya HIV Prevention Revolution Roadmap 2014" indicate that out of the forty seven Counties, Homabay County is leading with an HIV prevalence of 25.7%, which is almost five times the national average of 5.6% (NASCOPI & NACC; 2014). In addition, a comparison of the 2012 and the preceding 2007 "Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey" results reveals that while the country recorded a remarkable decline in HIV prevalence from 7.2% to 5.6%, the most significant declines were witnessed in Nairobi, Coast and Rift Valley, provinces with the 2nd, 3rd and 4th highest HIV prevalence rates respectively. On the contrary, Nyanza province recorded an increase in HIV prevalence from 14.9% to 15.1% (NASCOPI, 2014; NASCOPI, 2009).

According to UNAIDS (2010) the bulk of new HIV infections in Sub-Saharan Africa are transmitted heterosexually. While several advances have been recorded in care and treatment programs, it is becoming increasingly evident that the world cannot treat itself out of this pandemic. In fact for every person put on treatment, two more get newly infected with HIV (UNAIDS, 2010). Therefore, in the absence of a cure for HIV, appropriate sexual behavior change is the only viable strategy that can alter the course of the epidemic by preventing new infections (Gregson, Todd & Zaba, 2009). Communication plays a critical role in this dispensation and it offers the only promising alternative in preventing new infections (Scalway, 2003). It is in this regard that over the past two decades, Kenya has witnessed an unprecedented upsurge in communication campaigns to promote sexual behavior change (Gelmon *et al.*, 2009). However, the rise in prevalence in the Nyanza region could be an indication that the many

communication campaigns are not having a significant effect on sexual behavior change.

Available research shows that despite universal awareness and knowledge about HIV/AIDS in Kenya, there is minimal or no change in behaviours that put individuals at the risk of infection and cultural values that sanction such risky sexual practices (Schueller *et al.*, 2006; Muturi, 2005). A growing body of studies has attributed the lack of sexual behavior change to the failure by many communication campaigns to appropriately address the contextual and socio cultural factors that influence the transmission of HIV (Gelmon *et al.*, 2009; Gupta *et al.*, 2008). Apparently, the bulk of HIV prevention interventions have been modelled on cognitive theories that have advocated for individual

level behavior change. The underlying assumption has been that individuals determine their sexual behavior through conscious and rational decision making (Singhal, 2003). As a result, cognitive models have been credited with raising knowledge and awareness. However, a lot of criticisms have been levelled against cognitive based models of behavior change. Evidence points to the fact that increasing knowledge alone is insufficient for behavior change (Dias *et al.*, 2006; Schueller *et al.*, 2006).

Recently, studies have increasingly pointed out that sexuality is a socially constructed phenomenon and hence sexual behavior is largely influenced by cultural and contextual variables (Auerbach, Parkhurst & Caceres, 2011; Kalipeni & Mbugua, 2005; Scalway, 2003). Individual behavior is therefore influenced by the environmental context which includes cultural, social, political and economic factors (Ruger, 2004). As such the social experiences, values and norms that individuals draw from the environment shape their health, define their behavior and influence their susceptibility to HIV infection (Schiavo, 2007). Emanating from the above, it has become critical for communication interventions to focus on the specific contexts and drivers of the epidemic. Consequently, this has prompted scholars to investigate the contextual factors that influence the transmission of HIV.

In recent years, studies have demonstrated that the societal acceptance of multiple concurrent partnerships when coupled with low condom use and low levels of male circumcision are primarily accountable for the high rates of HIV transmission in Nyanza province, and Homabay County in particular (Xu *et al.*, 2010; Gelmon *et al.*, 2009; PSI, 2009). But despite this, few studies have explored the reasons and context of such relationships in Kenya. Furthermore, although numerous communication campaigns have been implemented, there is a paucity of research demonstrating whether the HIV prevention communication campaigns are responsive to the cultural context, their appropriateness and efficacy in addressing contextual factors that influence the practice of multiple and concurrent partnerships in Homabay County, Kenya.

Methods

This was a qualitative study that was conducted in Homabay County, Kenya, between January and July 2013. Using the socio-constructionism theory, this study investigated how the community in Homabay County made sense of multiple concurrent partnerships. The study further utilized the communication for social change model to analyse the efficacy of selected communication

campaigns in addressing social norms that underpin the practice of multiple concurrent partnerships. The study purposively sampled two communication campaigns, one conducted by an international non-governmental organization (NGO), and the second conducted by a local non-governmental organization. The study participants were purposively sampled from Homabay, Mbita and Rachuonyo sub-counties. These are the sites that had been proliferated by the two communication campaigns.

A total of 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with 116 respondents who included homogeneous groups of married men, married women, as well as male and female youth. The recruitment of FGD participants was similar across all the sub-counties with marital status, gender, and sexual relationships being the main filters. A total of 27 married men, 31 married women, 28 male youth, and 30 female youth took part in the FGDs. The participants were recruited through community based resource persons that were linked to organizations conducting communication campaigns in Homabay County. Informed written consent was obtained from all the respondents before they participated in the FGDs. Each of the focus groups had between 8-12 participants and lasted an average of between one to two hours. The discussions which were conducted in Kiswahili and the local language Dholuo were recorded and later transcribed and translated into English. The interview guide for the FGD used semi structured questions to derive how the community made sense of multiple concurrent partnerships and the factors underlying this practice. It also explored the community's participation, appropriateness and impact of the communication campaigns.

Two in-depth interviews were also conducted with the campaign managers from the international and local non-governmental organizations respectively. The campaign managers were responsible for designing and guiding the implementation of the communication campaigns. The semi structured interviews lasted averagely one hour

each and were recorded. The questions explored the design, implementation and efficacy of the communication campaigns in addressing the social norms underpinning multiple concurrent partnerships. Data was analysed thematically with the aid of the qualitative data analysis package QSR N-VIVO 10 (www.qsrinternational.com). The data analysis by NVIVO involved creating tree nodes and assigning themes to the nodes based on the research questions, interview guide and the themes that emerged from the data. Through this, patterns and linkages were established between these different sources and data sets. The findings contribute to the discussions in this paper on how the community in Homabay County constructs multiple concurrent partnerships, and the efficacy of the attendant

communication campaigns.

Results

Constructions of multiple concurrent partnerships

The findings from this study reveals that multiple concurrent partnerships is a normative behavior in Homabay County. Both married men and women as well as male and female youth had normalised concurrency as part and parcel of their life. Multiple concurrent partnerships was constructed as a negative practise on the one hand and a beneficial practice on the other. Concurrency was blamed for contributing to new HIV infections, sexually transmitted infections, conflicts and relationship break ups. Nonetheless, this public disavowal of multiple concurrent partnerships did not impede this practise. Instead, the community condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public, but overwhelmingly practised albeit secretly:

Multiple concurrent partnerships are not acceptable in this community but they are there. There is no woman who can accept the husband to have a side dish. Even me if I hear my girlfriend has a side dish I will feel very bad. Multiple concurrent partnerships are not accepted and that is why they are doing it secretly. It is mostly very secretive so that it is not discovered (26 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

Most of the concurrent relationships involved at least two to three sexual partners. Men constructed concurrency as an expression of masculinity hence the number of sexual partners was based on their financial ability and sexual libido. For women however, the number of sexual partners was influenced by the necessity of maintaining the secrecy of the relationship from their spouses. As such while men had numerous sexual partners, women preferred limiting the number of sexual partners to avoid detection:

A married woman cannot have more than two. Because if she has three, the information will get out

and the husband can discover which will lead to conflicts (29 year old, married woman, Mbita).

Furthermore, most of the concurrent relationships were short lived and often lasted between one and six months, with a few extending for a year. A common fear was that retaining them for long would lead to their exposure. Therefore, many relationships were often terminated when participants felt they had met their objectives, which were mostly financial. However, a few relationships lasted longer than a year. However, these were exceptional cases. Below I

explore some of the key reasons that emerged from the focus group discussions on why individuals engage in multiple concurrent partnerships.

Transactional Sex

Although a number of social and cultural beliefs have perpetuated norms that promote the practice of multiple and concurrent partnerships, the study findings revealed that majority of the multiple concurrent partnerships were transactional in nature. Therefore, the reason why many people engaged in relationships was primarily for the fulfilment of their basic needs. As the findings revealed:

Women are vulnerable. They engage in multiple concurrent partnerships because the husband leaves in the morning and leaves me just Kshs.

40. And when he gets back in the evening from work he expects to get dinner and everything ready. And you know here we are in town, water and all small things need money. This makes me go an extra mile and be involved in these extramarital affairs until I get money. At times I will have sex with someone and I am given just Kshs. 200 (26 year old, married female, Homabay).

In this regard, concurrent relationships were constructed as positive and beneficial on the basis of the benefits they accrued. One observation was that while multiple concurrent partnerships was condemned in the public domain, relationships with greater financial benefits were often admired and gained wider acceptance among peers and in some cases even among parents. On the other hand, relationships that came with financial expectations were shunned:

It also depends with the concurrent partner you get. If you get a lady who for instance gives you her car to use, your friends praise you for succeeding (25 year old, married male, Homabay).

Apart from basic needs, consumerism which was denoted by the desire to live a flashy and expensive lifestyle was

also prevalent among the study participants. Married women complained that their husbands only provided for the most basic needs but failed to meet the additional demands such as good dressing, shoes, beauty products and attractive lifestyles. Consumerism was also rampant among the youth who engaged in concurrency to gain money for buying the latest and most expensive most expensive phones, dress in fashionable clothes and don the latest hairstyles. As the findings depicted:

The money is for personal needs and beauty because the husband is not giving you money. A husband at times does not know how the wife

dresses, lives and buys shoes. A woman can admire looking good so she goes to look for it herself (36 year old, married female, Mbita).

Sexual and Emotional Fulfilment

The push for many of the respondents to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships was unmet sexual needs on the one hand and emotional needs on the other. Sexual starvation and the lack of sexual satisfaction was an overriding issue among both the married couples as well as the youth. Married women felt that their husbands did not prepare them both psychologically and physically for sex. Instead sex was used as a tool for the benefit and satisfaction of the man:

There are some men who don't know how to treat the lady. When he reaches the door he starts quarrelling you. Then when he gets to bed he says "...you woman remove these clothes..." He has not prepared

you for sex. That makes some women have concurrent relationships. You know when he is in the house and he wants you, he should show you that love from the dinner table, preparing you in advance for sex. At times when you complain he is not preparing you he resorts to violence (29 year old, married female, Mbita).

On the other hand, men felt that their wives and girlfriends were not adventurous in experimenting with different sex styles:

There are some who tell you "...do and when you finish cover me". When someone tells you that even the morale for sex goes and that makes you to go and look for another one.....(29 year old, male youth, Homabay).

Nonetheless, married women countered this accusation stating that when they attempted to make sex exciting by experimenting with new sexual experiences, their husbands questioned their fidelity to the relationship. Apart from sex, both men and women cited emotional neglect as a key challenge in their relationships. As one respondent noted:

There are some men who are ever busy. Be it daytime or at night they are ever busy. So you can't find time to share with him your stuff. At times when he leaves in the morning he will come back at 2am and find you are already asleep. So he is ever busy from week to week. You will find at times he does not bother with you so you will find someone who will take care of your needs (32 year old, married female, Homabay).

Masculinity and Male Hegemony

The findings of the research revealed a strong patriarchal tradition and deeply

entrenched masculinity norms in Homabay County. Arising from these norms, most men constructed multiple concurrent partnerships as an acceptable practice. Engaging in multiple concurrent partnerships was seen as a way of proving their manhood and hence it attracted praise and admiration from peers. In fact some of the men noted that concurrency was an admission that you are a “*ruoth moth*” (real man), confirming deeply entrenched notions of masculinity:

For you to prove you are handsome you must have more than one girl. It is always said that the key that can open even ten different locks will always be called a master key. Many men want to become like a master key and hence they get pride in engaging in multiple concurrent relationships (22 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

This was cemented through a common belief that multiple concurrent partnerships is a genetic trait. Participants believed that men engage in multiple concurrent relationships because they are born promiscuous and that they inherited such traits from their parents:

It is something that runs in the blood. My grandfather had four wives, my father had three wives, and I have a brother that has two wives (19 year old, male youth, Homabay).

These gendered constructions were also expressed by some of the women who were apologetic and resigned to the fact that their men had a right to engage in concurrency. Most of the female respondents constructed male sexuality as uncontrollable and hence normalised that men cannot control their sexual urges because they are naturally polygamous. As a result, women were more accepting of their partners engaging in concurrent relationships as a way of affirming their manhood:

For men it is accepted because they say that is their nature. Without having another person outside their marriage they see you are not a man (19 year old, female youth, Homabay).

Legitimate Cultural Practice

Some of the factors that legitimated multiple concurrent partnerships included cultural norms surrounding polygamy. Polygamy is a deeply entrenched and legitimate cultural practice in Homabay County. The cultural acceptance of polygamy was compounded with the prevailing patriarchal norms where some of the respondents believed that it was an inherited trait. Therefore, many of the male respondents attributed practising concurrency due to the cultural acceptance of polygamy:

I want to talk like a typical Luo man. We were born polygamous in nature and polygamy is our mode of life. It is our nature as men and we are proud when we stay with two or three women. So as Luo's we just feel multiple concurrent partnerships for us youth is like polygamy in the olden days (23 year old, male youth, Homabay).

Polygamy is closely intertwined with the custom of wife inheritance, which is another acceptable cultural practice in Homabay County. Often when married men inherited widows, they ended up in polygamous unions which invoked jealousy among their wives. This coupled with the fact that some men paid more attention to the widow at the expense of their wives cultivated a fertile ground for concurrency:

If a man marries more than one wife, you as a woman will not feel very good. Yes I see that I am the first wife and my husband has married a second wife. When they marry another wife most of their time they spent in the other house. So you it is like you are neglected. So you too will feel like getting another person so that your love life does not die (32 year old, married female, Homabay).

Similarly, early marriage was rife in Homabay County with many young girls getting married at a tender age of up to 12 years. Most of the married women cited early marriage led to boredom in relationships which was a recipe for multiple concurrent partnerships:

Many girls got into marriage when they are underage and therefore they don't satisfy themselves in marriage. They look for that satisfaction in extra marital relationships when they are already married (28 year old, married female, Oyugis).

Revenge and Escapism

Conflicts in relationships mainly drove married men and women to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships. Participants who faced conflicts and other problems in

their relationships resorted to multiple concurrent partnerships as a coping mechanism. On many occasions, participants did not confront and sort out their issues with their spouses but rather resorted to concurrency as an escape strategy:

You find a husband is so harsh that when he comes home it is quarrels. Every time he comes to the house it is noise. With time you find you don't love him, you don't want to be close to him. So you decide to look for another man who can pamper you. You know we women we like

being pampered (26 year old, married female, Homabay)

Similarly, mistrust, jealousy and suspicion among couples also contributed to multiple concurrent partnerships. In relationships where couples mistrusted each other, there was a common tendency to engage in extra marital relationships even out of perceived infidelity. Others engaged in multiple concurrent partnerships out of revenge because of a cheating partner:

The major cause of multiple concurrent partnerships is suspicion. You are suspecting your partner. There are people who say if you see your lady talking to another man then that man is her lover. That makes some individuals to have multiple concurrent partnerships because of suspicion (37 year old, married male, Oyugis).

Other reasons that emerged for practising multiple concurrent partnerships included separation from spouses over long periods of time because of work and alcoholism. For the youth, they engaged in concurrency in search for the right marriage partner.

Communication for Social Change Campaigns

The research revealed that multiple concurrent partnerships was not addressed as a focal theme in the communication campaigns. This is despite the fact that this practice is deeply entrenched within the community. Instead, multiple concurrent partnerships was only addressed as a rider to other thematic issues. The findings further revealed that the communication campaigns did not address the contextual factors that drive multiple concurrent partnerships. None of the two campaigns had put in place measures to adequately address these norms in their communication campaigns. For instance whereas the issue of '*jaboya*' (sex for fish) was deeply entrenched among the fisher folk, the sessions conducted with this target group did not address the norms surrounding it. In fact both campaign managers admitted that they had not adequately tackled contextual factors that contribute to multiple concurrent partnerships:

Social norms are very difficult to change and I cannot attest to it now that we have been able to change any social norms. For instance we cannot be able to say that

the *jabo* issue has been well addressed. And the issue about calling everyone who is next to you an in-law and that means you can freely have sex with that person, you cannot be sure that we have adequately addressed that. So I cannot be confident enough to say we have been able to change social norms (Campaign Manager, Local Organization).

Instead, the communication campaigns focused on the dissemination of general HIV prevention messages on abstinence, fidelity, male circumcision, condom

use and HIV testing and counselling. As one respondent stated:

I have been going to those places where they do the campaigns. Those people what they talk about is how HIV is spread. They talk about sexual intercourse, about blood transfusion and things like that. And the key issue they talk about in preventive measures is the condom. They show you practically how to use a condom and they are even ready to provide you with those condoms. But there is no any one day they have talked about multiple concurrent partnerships. If you ask many people if they have ever received any information on multiple concurrent partnerships they will say no (27 year old, male youth, Oyugis).

Another major finding was that the community was not involved in designing the communication campaigns. Because of this, there was limited ownership of the campaign activities by the community members. This was attested in Mbita where some community members noted that they only attended the sessions when they are enticed by monetary or other material benefits such as food. However, the community members were recruited as peer educators and trained by the non-governmental organizations to disseminate messages:

The people who drive those campaigns are locals. You can't pick a peer educator who doesn't come from that community. So the community participates in delivering these messages with technical support from our team but the actual channel is individuals from that community who have gone through capacity building that enable them to deliver (Campaign Manager, International Organization).

The peer educators used a defined peer education manual for conducting the peer education sessions. However, one limitation with this approach is that the peer educators largely focused on delivering the content as prescribed in the curriculum which was mainly factual knowledge about HIV. As a result the sessions focused a lot on the health risks of multiple concurrent partnerships to the exclusion of the broader contextual issues that contribute to this practise.

Emanating from the above, majority of the respondents felt that the campaigns were ineffective in changing sexual behavior. The study findings revealed that the community was aware of the risks posed by HIV and the

steps they needed to undertake to prevent HIV transmission such as practicing fidelity, using condoms, undergoing male circumcision. As one respondent, a 27 year old married female from Oyugis stated *“Nobody does not know about HIV, it is now like a song which non-governmental organizations use. Everybody knows about it and its consequences”*. But despite this knowledge, it was not translating into practise. Rather, participants felt that multiple concurrent partnerships was a

normative behavior that could not easily change.

Discussion

In this paper, we set out to find out how the community in Homabay County constructs the concept of multiple concurrent partnerships, which has been linked to the burgeoning HIV epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa. From the study findings, multiple concurrent partnerships is a normative behavior in Homabay County. As a result there was widespread indulgence in concurrent sexual partnerships by both married men and women as well as male and female youth. These findings are consistent with studies conducted in Southern Africa where concurrency is institutionalized as a social norm (Soul City Institute, 2008; Leclerc-Madlala, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, the research found out that the community condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public but overwhelmingly practised it, albeit secretly. Similar to findings from other studies which affirm the secrecy of concurrent relationships (Sigamoney, 2009; Soul City Institute, 2008), the findings above denote a contradiction between the injunctive norms (what ought to be done) and descriptive norms (what is happening) (Lapinski & Rimal, 2005). As such multiple concurrent partnerships was both condoned and sanctioned in different social contexts.

The findings above indicate the contradictions that community member's face in their attempt to conform to what is morally acceptable. Hence individuals have resorted to double standards where they condemned multiple concurrent partnerships in public but practised it secretly. This push mainly arises from the fact that the decision to engage in multiple concurrent relationships is largely driven by a host of contextual factors, some beyond the control of the individual (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009; Soul City Institute, 2008; Parker *et al.*, 2007; Jana *et al.*, 2007). This study found out that factors such as financial gain, sexual satisfaction, cultural practices, gender and masculinity, revenge and escapism, separation from spouses and the search for marriage partners greatly influenced the decision by individuals to engage in multiple concurrent partnerships.

In lieu of the above, we sought to find out whether communication campaigns had addressed the contextual factors that contribute to multiple concurrent partnerships. Considering that multiple concurrent partnerships is the key driver of the HIV epidemic in Southern Africa and parts of Eastern Africa (Halperin & Epstein, 2007), there are intensified calls to make partner reduction focal in HIV prevention campaigns (Wilson & Halperin, 2008). This is based on

evidence which shows that in many countries which have reported a reduction in HIV prevalence in Africa, there is a strong correlation with partner reduction (Merson *et al.*, 2008). For instance Uganda's much celebrated successes in containing the HIV epidemic has been attributed to a change in societal norms surrounding partner reduction, popularly referred to as the zero grazing campaign (Slutkin *et al.*, 2006; Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004; Cohen, 2003). Similarly Zimbabwe which is one of the first countries in Southern Africa to record an almost 50% decline in HIV prevalence, reduction in multiple sexual partnerships is attributed to this decline (Halperin *et al.*, 2011).

However, such efforts will have limited success unless the cultural context within which these relationships occur is poorly understood and not adequately addressed in prevention measures (Leclerc-Madlala, 2009). As such for HIV communication campaigns to be successful, it is imperative that they are designed to resonate with the cultural context of the community where they are to be implemented and also to address the deeper societal norms that influence the behavior of individual community members (Kreuter *et al.*, 2003). As Cialdini *et al.*, (2006) have pointed out, social norms are more likely to change if they are made salient and hence given focal attention. On the contrary, the findings from this study show that the communication campaigns did not explicitly address the predisposing factors that underlie the practice of multiple concurrent partnerships. Instead, the communication campaigns focused more on the dissemination of messages on abstinence, fidelity, condom use, male circumcision and HIV counseling and testing.

These messages are more in tune with the ABC (abstinence, be faithful, condoms) mantra upon which many HIV prevention campaigns have been anchored. Uganda is one such example where some scholars have argued that Uganda's much celebrated success in reducing the country's HIV prevalence is attributable to the robust implementation of the ABC model (Cohen, 2003; Low-Beer & Stoneburner, 2004). However, this group of scholars fail to account for many other contextual factors which made the ABC messages effective. It is in this regard that subsequent scholars

have questioned the ABC hypothesis for its insensitivity to cultural contexts (Murphy *et al.*, 2006; Merson *et al.*, 2008). As some later day scholars have noted, Uganda's decline in HIV prevalence goes beyond the ABC model and is attributed to strong political support and grassroots community mobilization through horizontal communication approaches (Murphy *et al.*, 2006; Slutkin *et al.*, 2006)

Another revelation from this study was that respondents depicted significantly high levels of awareness and knowledge about HIV. However, this knowledge

was not translating to practice. This is because historically, many communication campaigns have focused on knowledge dissemination with the assumption that correct knowledge will automatically translate into behavior change (Gupta *et al.* 2008). But whilst cognitive models have been credited with raising knowledge and awareness, this success has not been matched with significant changes in behavior due to the narrow conceptualization of behavior change as a by-product of knowledge increase alone (Coates, Richter, & Caceres, 2008). Furthermore, this approach assumes that individuals possess full and volitional control over their behaviour and hence they are capable of moderating their risk to HIV infection. Unfortunately, this view is ignorant of the fact that individuals exist within a social environment and the social context largely shapes individual behavior (Parker, 2004). As a result, this assumption has been blamed for the failure of a myriad communication campaigns to translate into behavior change.

As was evident from the research, peer educators were recruited and trained to disseminate messages in the community. However, the community was excluded from decision making on the design and implementation of the campaign. In lieu of this, the findings depicted limited ownership of the communication campaign by the beneficiary community. This is in tandem with a top down approach which according to Muturi (2005) is ineffective in catalyzing behavior change. Campbell (2003) concurs observing that HIV prevention programs fail because they are designed by public health and communication experts who are alien to that community and with limited involvement of local communities. As Figueroa *et al.*, (2002) have pointed out, communication campaigns should shift from disseminating persuasion messages towards dialogue on issues that are appropriate and relevant to that community. Emphasis should be on increasing ownership through horizontal communication approaches that empower the beneficiary communities. As Scalway (2003) sums it up, there is need to target social change in order to effect individual change.

Conclusion

This study found that communication campaigns did not address the predisposing factors that influence individuals to indulge in multiple

concurrent partnerships in Homabay County. In this regard, it is critical for communication campaigns

to foster ownership and dialogue around social norms that lead to multiple concurrent partnerships in order to impact on individual sexual behaviors.

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