

Big House and Small Houses

Cultural specific concepts of sexuality within the context of the transmission of HIV in Botswana

Karin Pfister, M. A.

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The AIDS pandemic as a global problem, has so far cost several million lives. As there doesn't exist a therapy that heals HIV, prevention remains the strongest means to stem the spread of HIV.

Botswana has the the second highest HIV infection rate and has developed over the last twenty years a comprehensive prevention program. That means, that the population knows somehow a lot about how to prevent oneself of getting infected with HIV. However, this knowledge has not led to a significant control of the AIDS pandemic. The research interest of this thesis was therefore to identify why the preventive measures did not lead to an improvement of the situation in Botswana. Since the main mode of

transmission occurs through heterosexual intercourse, the focus of the work was to find out more about cultural specific concepts of sexuality, which seem to be opposed to government strategies such as billboard campaigns like "To avoid AIDS is as easy as A, B, C : abstain, be faithful, condomize".

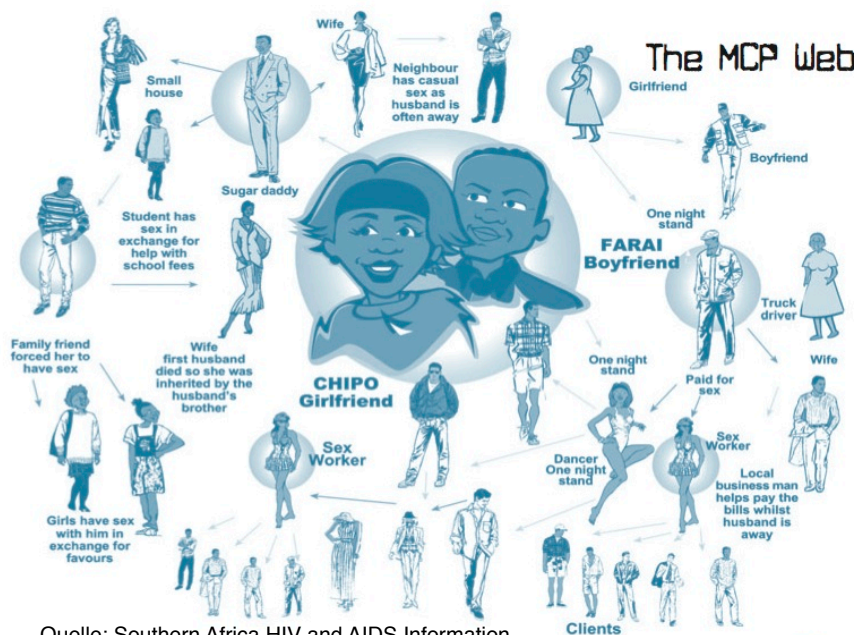
The data of the thesis shows that two main concepts shape the practice of sexuality in Botswana: first, unprotected sex and second, the so-called "Multiple and Concurrent Partnerships" (MCP), a term which means that a person has more than one sexual partner at the same time. Commonly in Botswana, this concept is called "to have a big house and small houses". The "big house" refers to the main girlfriend and the "small house" to the mistress. The concept of multiple and concurrent partnerships is practiced by both men and women. So it is not only men who have multiple sexual partners.

In addition to the reproduction, reciprocity plays an important role in Botswana society.

Sex is considered as reciprocal. That means,

that sex can be seen as a means to get goods and services in exchange. Beyond this materiality this reciprocity connects the different sexual partner with each other in a complex network of relationships. So, to avoid AIDS is not that easy as A, B, C.

This work tried to show that it is necessary to understand cultural concepts of sexuality in order to understand the dynamic of the transmission of HIV.



Quelle: Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Service 2006