

# Botswana Adolescent Sexual Practice and Health

By

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## Introduction

The issue of adolescent sexuality and its consequences is not new in Botswana. For a number of years, there has been considerable concern about high levels of teenage pregnancy and their effects on the individual and society. The emergence and rapid spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) among the country's population has resulted in massive campaigns to sensitise people about the seriousness of sexually transmitted diseases and information on how to minimise the risk of infection.

Prior to the discovery of the first AIDS case in Botswana in 1987, genital herpes simplex was probably the most serious sexually transmitted disease (STD) that sexually active people in the country were exposed to. Still, for a country with less than one million people aged 10 years and over in 1991 (Botswana, 1994a), there is an alarming occurrence of STD cases. The number of outpatients with STDs increased from 126,370 in 1987 to 164,242 in 1990 (an average annual growth rate of 9.1%); and the most common diseases are gonorrhoea and syphilis (Botswana, 1994b). The subsequent decline to 135,343 STD cases in 1993 (Botswana, 1995) may be partly explained by a remarkable rise in condom use due to AIDS awareness campaign throughout the country. With an increase in the number of AIDS cases from 2 in 1987 to 1149 in 1993, AIDS moved from being the eighth to the fourth cause of inpatient deaths between 1991 and 1993 (Botswana, 1995). While improved medical technology has ensured that other STDs (beside genital herpes) can be treated, AIDS still remains fatal and untreatable.

Notwithstanding the social and economic implications of adolescent sexual practices, there has been no investigation into the attitude-behaviour interrelationship of the subject. Much of the statements on this issue are speculative. Realizing that exposure to STDs (including HIV and AIDS) is determined by attitudes toward and practice of sex, the proposed study is designed to throw light on the underlying factors in adolescent sexual behaviour and predict the future sexual behaviour of adolescents. This study began in 2 July, 1997. Primary data for the study was obtained from randomized sample survey in Gaborone (Botswana's capital city) and four villages. The information from this survey is strengthened through in-depth interviews of adolescents in Gaborone and a sample village. It is anticipated that this report will be of interest to academics as well as planners and policy makers. It should also be of service to NGOs in Botswana.