



# Gender and Multiple and Concurrent Partnerships in Zambia

## FOCUS ON MOBILITY

### BACKGROUND

In 2009, 14.3 per cent of Zambia’s estimated 12.9 million population was infected with HIV (1). Given its unique geographic location – surrounded by eight neighboring countries - Zambia is characterized by high levels of internal and cross-border migration as people move in search of better livelihoods for themselves and their families.

Research undertaken by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has identified the places in which migrant workers live, work, and pass through as high-risk “spaces of vulnerability” (4). The HIV vulnerability of mobile/migrant populations arises from a series of factors, including: transactional sex, multiple concurrent sexual partnerships, unsafe working conditions, non-accommodating living arrangements, and risky sexual networks (4).

The classification of “spaces of vulnerability” is borne out by epidemiologic data from the 2007 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) which shows that HIV prevalence is considerably higher in provinces with border towns, such as Lusaka (22.4%), Western (16.1%) and Copperbelt (21.6%) (2). Additionally, data from the same DHS found that individuals who had slept away from home more than five times in the past twelve months had a higher HIV prevalence than individuals who did not travel (13% vs. 19%) (2).

In 2009, under the guidance of the Cabinet Committee of Ministers on AIDS, the National AIDS Council identified **mobility and labour migration** as one of the key drivers of the epidemic in Zambia (1). Additionally, NAC emphasized the role of mobility and migration in *multiple and concurrent sexual partners (MCP)* and *vulnerability of marginalized groups* which were identified as two other key drivers of the Zambian epidemic (1).

### PURPOSE & METHODS

Between May 2009 and January 2010, a multi-partner team undertook a mixed methods study to explore the social, economic and cultural factors related to engagement in multiple concurrent sexual partnerships. Additionally, the team sought to describe the level of mobility of the study populations and the relationship between mobility and sexual concurrency.

In-depth interviews were conducted at seven geographically diverse sites across Zambia. Interviews were conducted with 301 men and women who perceived themselves to be in stable relationships. Researchers used structured interviews and careful probing to elicit detailed information on all sexual partnerships during the previous 12 months - for those who had engaged in sexual activity - in order to categorize them as follows:

PARTNERSHIP TYPE	MEASUREMENT STRATEGY	UTILITY
Overlapping Concurrency	Overlapping sexual partnerships where sexual intercourse with one partner occurs between two acts of intercourse with another partners.	Distinguishes between concurrency and rapid serial monogamy
Sequential partnerships	Two or more sexual partners in the 12 month recall period with at least 61 days of no sexual activity between any two partners	Captures multiple non-concurrent partnerships
Monogamous partnerships	One, and only one sexual partner in the 12 month recall period	Captures monogamous partnerships

**RESULTS**

**Quantitative Findings**

Overlapping concurrency was frequent among both men (69.6%) and women (45.7%) who identified themselves as being in stable relationships. Men who reported overlapping concurrency averaged 3 partners compared with women who had approximately 2 partners over the 12-month recall period. These findings were consistent with evidence from past studies, that men have more concurrent partners than women (6-9).

Quantitative data indicated that there is a high degree of mobility, with more than three-quarters of the entire sample indicating some degree of travel in their daily lives. Of those participants engaging in overlapping concurrency over half of the men (52.7%) and over one-third of women (34.2) reported that one or more of their partners resides in a different location (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Percentage of participants with different types of relationships in previous 12 months who have one or more partners from a different residence, by sex**

PARTNERSHIP TYPE	Overlapping concurrency	Sequential partnerships	Monogamous partnerships
	(N= 93M, 76F)	(N=23M, 09F)	(N=17M, 80F)
Male	52.7	60.9	0.06
Female	34.2	55.5%	18.7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>59.4</b>	<b>16.5</b>

**Qualitative findings**

Findings from in-depth interviews supported quantitative findings and indicate that explanations of sexual concurrency included nuances related to the movement of individuals across Zambia. However, interviews also revealed that mobile individuals are a heterogeneous group with a variety of factors that impact the decision to engage in concurrent sexual relationships, as highlighted in the outtakes from interviews below.

*“Anyway I am alone here, and I am a field worker. My wife is 50 km. Away. I return from the field tired and lonely. So I need someone to keep me company, to cook for me, to stay with me. So at times I spend nights at their house. Her parents have eventually come to know about it. They even consider her as my second wife” - Male, Kaoma*

*Now it's [having multiple sexual partners] due to current occupation...I 'd leave my wife go very far maybe to =XX= and you are 2to 3 weeks and you feel like having sex what do you do, you get one [a woman] ... locally here I'll be told fat women are sweet o I 'd go for fat ones to join my wife then another tells me that slim ones are warm then I go for slim ones and that short ones are tight so these are things that were causing me to have a long chain of women.” - Male, Nakonde*

*“Ok, the thing which led me to having this boyfriend is that, as I said earlier, my husband is a business man... When he goes to the field he goes for almost two months buying maize. When he comes, he won't even spend a night at home but goes straight to the border to sell the maize. After selling the maize, he comes back and spends two days at home. In that two day, we will just have sex once... So after sometime I started getting rumors that he has an old woman he goes out with. So I was annoyed and thought of having an affair, so that I can get over it. So that's how I have this boyfriend. “ - Female, Solwezi*

Additionally, across all sites more than half of participants who reported overlapping concurrency indicated that one or more of their sexual partners travels more than three times per year (see Graphic 1).

**Graphic 1: Percentage of participants, by site, who indicate one or more sexual partners, travels more than 3 times per year.**



## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Increased understanding of the role of mobility in HIV transmission is needed.

Research is needed to gain a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between mobility, sexual networks and transmission. Research, such as sexual network studies of geographic areas which host large numbers of migrant and mobile populations, would provide critical insight into the size and connectedness of HIV risk networks and the contribution of these populations to sustaining a generalized HIV epidemic.

### 2. Additional surveillance (biological and behavioral) data is needed on mobile and migrant populations in Zambia.

Currently, there is no systematic framework for collecting behavioral or biomedical data from migrant/mobile populations, and numerous gaps exist in data with regard to these groups. Research is needed to supply missing data on their sexual behaviors and services and intervention needs. This data would serve as a basis for informing in-country HIV programming and policy.

### 3. HIV prevention efforts must reflect a better understanding of the social and cultural nuances of mobility and migration that affect decisions to engage in sexual concurrency.

Normative explanations of concurrency indicate that social and cultural factors, such as mobility, are highly nuanced. Mobile populations are not homogenous, and fine distinction regarding the factors which contribute to sexual concurrency of different populations must be addressed when developing HIV prevention programming and messaging.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

**Kathleen M. MacQueen**, PhD, MPH  
Senior Social Scientist, FHI  
P.O. Box 13950  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709 USA  
Tel: +1-919-544-7040  
E-mail: kmacqueen@fhi.org

**Katy Barwise**  
Migration Health Coordinator, IOM Zambia  
Plot 4626 Mwaimwena Road  
Lusaka, Zambia  
Tel: +260 (0) 211 254 055  
E-mail: kbarwise@iom.int

## THIS STUDY WAS COMPLETED WITH FUNDING FROM:

- U.S. Agency for International Development
- The United Nations Zambia Joint Team on HIV/AIDS

## REFERENCES

- (1) Government Republic of Zambia, *Zambia Country Report: Monitoring the Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS and the Universal Access, Biennial Report*. 2010: Lusaka. p. 1-129.
- (2) Central Statistical Office (CSO) and Macro International Inc., *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey, 2007: Key Findings* 2009: Maryland, USA.
- (3) Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *Zambia: HIV Prevention Response and Modes of Transmission Study (MOT)*. UNAIDS, Editor. 2009: Lusaka, Zambia. p. 1-151.
- (4) International Organization for Migration (IOM), *HIV and People on the Move: Risk and vulnerabilities of migrants and mobile populations in Southern Africa*, IOM, Editor. 2005: Pretoria, South Africa.
- (5) National HIV/AIDS/STI/TB Council (NAC), *National AIDS Strategic Framework 2011-2015*, NAC, Editor. 2010: Lusaka, Zambia.
- (6) Mah, T. L. Prevalence and correlates of concurrent sexual partnerships among young people in South Africa. *Sex Transm Dis*. 2009; 37(2): 105-8.
- (7) Mah, T. L. and D. T. Halperin (2008). Concurrent sexual partnerships and the HIV epidemics in Africa: evidence to move forward. *AIDS Behav*. 2008; 14(1): 11-6; discussion 34-7.
- (8) Halperin DT, Epstein H. Concurrent sexual partnerships help to explain Africa's high HIV prevalence: implications for prevention. *Lancet*. 2004; 364:4-6.
- (9) Halperin DT, Epstein H. Why is HIV prevalence so severe in southern Africa? The role of multiple concurrent partnerships and lack of male circumcision: implications for AIDS prevention. *Southern African Journal of HIV Medicine*. 2007;19-23.