

Masculine Identity and HIV Prevention among Male Youth in Rural South Africa

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ABSTRACT This article explores the construction of masculine identities in relation to sexual behaviours and HIV in the rural Ugu District, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The research was conducted with groups of school-going male youth selected from three rural high schools and three urban high schools. In total, 12 focus group interviews were conducted in which 72 male youth participated. The objectives of the study were to investigate the relationship between health education on HIV and AIDS and sexual risk behaviours. Through the focus group interviews, the research sought to provide insights into the knowledge levels, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the participants and to ascertain how they positioned themselves in relation to the epidemic. More importantly, we sought to understand these attitudes and behaviours against a background of students having been exposed to lifeskills and HIV/AIDS educational programmes, both at school and through the media. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, and the categories that were identified, form the basis for discussion in this article. The discourses of the participants pointed to the need to assert masculinity, largely through sexual intercourse with females being given priority over health and safety. The article concludes with suggestions to address gender inequities as one way to curb the spread of HIV.