

BRIDGING MIGRATION, HIV/AIDS, AND VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN IN RUSTENBURG, SOUTH AFRICA—A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

South Africa's history and economy is characterized by mobility among the black population. The gradual breakdown of social and cultural institutions in rural communities accompanies the migration of male and female family members. A number of social and economic consequences result, including further impoverishment, a high incidence of violence, and the spread of disease.

With non-Bafokeng comprising almost half of the population of the Royal Bafokeng Nation (RBN), the issue of migration and migrant communities is certainly close to home. Migrants in the RBN live within one of two circumstances: as backyard dwellers, to whom many Bafokeng rent shacks, or within informal settlements near mines. Both types of residences appear to be expanding at a rapid rate as a result of increasing rural-to-urban migration on the parts of both men and women.

Well-documented evidence demonstrates that labor-induced migration patterns, such as those that can be found in the RBN, play a significant role in the spread of HIV/AIDS. Also contributing to the rapidly spreading epidemic in South Africa are the drastic gender inequalities that pervade women's marriages, partnerships, acquaintanceships, and daily encounters. With little power to negotiate condom use or the act of intercourse itself, it is no surprise that women comprise 57% of all HIV infections in this nation.¹

The two risk factors noted above—gender and mobility—converge with the increasing “feminization” of migration, with women moving as laborers, sex workers, and trafficking victims.^{2,3} The migration of women, whether voluntary or forced, often results in marginalization, characterized by poor living conditions, low status and low pay during their transit and at their destinations. These circumstances strengthen women's dependence on others and force them to use techniques including transactional sex, thereby increasing their vulnerability towards HIV/AIDS.

Female mobility also has the potential to impact the economies of the communities from which they come and go. Many female migrants participate in and thereby expand the informal sector, selling produce, clothing, or other items. Moreover, migrant women are more likely than their male counterparts to contribute to their home economies through financial contributions in the form of remittances.⁴ This impacts the cash flow available within the local economy.

Given the ways in which migrant women are rapidly affecting and affected by the economic and health issues of the RBN, this study aimed to investigate the following phenomena:

- 1) The forces and experiences shaping female mobility in this particular mining area.
- 2) Female migrants' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors towards and within the environments in which they live.
- 3) Patterns of high risk sexual encounters within migrant women's sexual networks.
- 4) Female migrants' experiences with violence, both within and outside intimate partner relationships.

METHODS

Data collection for this study took place from November 2005 until August 2006 within the political boundaries of the Royal Bafokeng Nation. Ethnographic methods were employed, comprised of informal conversation, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. Fieldwork was conducted by Chitra Akileswaran, with the help of her research partners, Holiness Thebyane and Molebogeng Miyene.

Criteria for inclusion consisted of being female, between the ages of 15 and 45, and having come from outside the community in which she was currently residing. Women were not excluded on the basis of language or their hometowns' proximity to the Rustenburg area.

We can breakdown the sample of migrant women into two major categories: those who live within Bafokeng villages, and those who live in informal settlements. We sampled from the Bafokeng villages of Phokeng, Luka and Lefaragatlhe, and from the major informal settlement near Kanana known as Freedom Park. Snowball sampling methods were used, where we asked current informants to refer us to other potential study participants. The strength of snowball sampling lies in its ability to transfer a sense of trust for the researchers between informants, especially where study topics are sensitive.

While much of our interaction with informants was informal, we also conducted formal, longitudinal interviews. Interviews were conducted with individuals or groups of two to five women.⁵ During the first session, we began with an introduction that included a verbal informed consent monologue, along with permission to tape the interview. Over a period of one to multiple sessions, we proceeded to inquire about the informants' demographic background, migration chronology, attitudes towards the local community and community members, perceptions of HIV/AIDS, relationships with men, sexual behaviors, and experiences with violence.

Interviews were conducted in Setswana, Sesotho, isiXhosa, Shangaan, and English. Often, interviews required a combination of languages found within and outside of street dialects. Most interviews were taped, translated into English, and transcribed for coding and analysis. We also kept regular fieldnotes recording informal conversation and observations in the field.

FINDINGS

Demographics

A total of 30 migrant women participated in this study, 9 of whom live in the Bafokeng villages and another 21 who reside in Freedom Park. The ages of these women ranged between 18 and 43, with a median age of 30.5 years among them.

The informants' home communities varied drastically. Twenty-four women migrated to this area from within South Africa, mostly from other locales in the Northwest Province, but also from the Northern Cape (Kimberley), Eastern Cape (Transkei), Gauteng, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga. Six identified their home communities as being outside of South Africa, namely Lesotho and Mozambique. All of the Basotho women were illegal immigrants.

Women had arrived in the Rustenburg area anywhere from 6 months to 23 years ago, with the median length of duration in this area being 6 years. Less than half of the women who we asked had completed matric, with most having finished grade 10 or less schooling.

Factors Prompting Mobility

As their reasons for coming to Rustenburg, all women alluded to the hope for better economic opportunity, either for themselves or for their families. They perceived Rustenburg to have “more money” than their home communities as a result of the mining industry in this area. When we asked one woman, a resident of Freedom Park, what she liked better about this place than home, she simply held her hands up and made a gesture signifying money—rubbing her thumb against her fingers.

While the vast majority of women resided in informal housing, or shacks, the standard of living within the Bafokeng villages was reasonably higher than that in Freedom Park, as marked by lesser crime, access to water, and availability of electricity, among other indicators. Interestingly, seven of the nine women who lived in the Bafokeng villages were married and arrived in Rustenburg in order to accompany their husbands, who all work at the mines. The other two women, who lived in Lefaragatlhe and Phokeng, had male relatives (a brother and a father, respectively) who were also employed at the mines. The presence of a financially stable spouse or close male relative thus greatly affected the living conditions and economic status of these women. On the contrary, a majority of the informants who came to Rustenburg unattached, without families or spouses, happened to live in Freedom Park, a destitute informal settlement with little in the way of infrastructure or services.

When asked about the type of community from which they originated, most women stated that they were from poor, rural villages. Moreover, women said it was common for many people in their home communities, both men and women, to leave and search for work. The normalcy of migration among these women's home communities may have validated their decisions to move to Rustenburg. Also, because these women claimed to be from migrant “sending” communities, or communities from which many people move, we can assume that there was an absence of men who could provide financial security for women living in these areas. This, in and of itself, could have been a factor that left women resourceless and prompted to migrate.

Also contributing to the impoverished conditions that caused the women in this study to move to the Rustenburg area was the breakdown of their family networks. Death among siblings, parents, and spouses, at times as a result of what seemed to be HIV/AIDS, left the unmarried women in this study without social and financial security at home. There also appeared to be a high incidence of women whose guardians had abandoned them, mainly fathers. One woman from Eastern Cape remarks about her situation at home, “[It’s] not good, not good at all. My mother passed away and my father doesn’t care about us. My sister, the one that we thought would actually take care of us, also passed away and she left her children.” A Tswana woman living in Freedom Park talks about why she was compelled to move here:

My mother passed away when I was 12 years old and my grandmother was the one who was taking care of me...but things started changing as I got older and nobody was willing to help because they were complaining about who had paid for my school fees and none of them wanted to pay them for more than a year. Then my grandmother passed away and I was then on my own with my aunt who was struggling with her own child, so I started fending for myself and sleeping around for a living...Since 2002, when my brother passed away, it has been worse because the very little money that I get, I send home.

Disconnected from traditional social networks at home and possessing limited education, these women saw, as their option, moving to Rustenburg and attempting to find a means to support themselves and their families.

Channels of Migration

Our informants arrived in the Rustenburg area via one of three major channels of migration. As mentioned, the married women in our study moved to Rustenburg in order to accompany their miner husbands. Usually, this pattern occurred as follows: a miner, the majority of whom are migrants, would go home for seasonal breaks and during this time, courted a potential wife. After traditionally or legally marrying this woman, he would return to the mines for work, while she continued living away from him, perhaps with his family, for a period of time. During this time of separation, he would return home periodically and they might begin a family. Thereafter, the wife and children would join the man in Rustenburg. It is unclear whether it is the husband or the wife who insists on the woman’s move. Some women reported that they intentionally migrated to Rustenburg in order to prevent a common pitfall of spousal separation: their husbands cheating on them.

It is important to note that migrant men working at the mines returned home to marry, as opposed to developing serious commitments with women locally. This signifies men’s strong ties to their home communities, perhaps artifact of the historical culture of migration. It is also correlative with these men’s lack of integration into the receiving community (in this case, Rustenburg and the RBN). The implication is that as long as there are men migrating for mining jobs, there will also be wives migrating to join them. Without access to land, this creates a perpetual and inherent market for squatters.

Another channel characterizing female migration was observed solely among unmarried, unattached women. Unmarried women arrived through networks of migrant women, including their own female relatives, from their home communities. As a conversation with a 20-year old woman from Lesotho illustrates:

Woman: Back home we used to see ladies that looked beautiful and they said that they were in Rustenburg and when they got home they said that they were employed. They used to talk a lot about this place and they said that this place was good and we wished to live that kind of life that they lived because those women could better their families and lives when they were back home.

Interviewer: Do you find that everything they say is true?

Woman: No, truly speaking, they aren't employed, just that they live with men that help them out and give them money....

Thus, those women who had already migrated here from those rural areas appeared to return home and entice other women to join them. But as one woman puts it,

I haven't got a job. The only job I see is living with a man and depending on a man. Most of the ladies are here because they have been misled by other people into false promises of jobs being available here while there is no such thing.

Another Mosotho woman comments about living in Freedom Park,

I didn't know that people had to actually live in these conditions. I asked my sister if people actually live in these shacks. I was even scared that I had to live in this kind of place.

While women reported they were offered hopes of jobs and opportunities, they were often surprised at the squalid living conditions and lack of financial prospects available. Unfortunately, their choices were limited; either they could preserve a sense of hope by staying here, or to return home, where they perceived even less chance of economic viability.

It seemed that there were two primary factors compelling these "courier" women to bring their homegirls to a place like Freedom Park. Firstly, the arrival of women from their home communities built up their own social networks, offering a greater sense of financial and social security. This assumes that there is an underlying solidarity among people from the same locale or region, which indeed plays out in terms of ethnic clustering and even violence between ethnic groups within Freedom Park. Relatedly, we observed a systematic hierarchy among migrant women according to age and newness to Freedom Park. Therefore, when an established woman was responsible for her homegirl's migration to Freedom Park, an automatic sense of superiority took hold. The new woman became dependent on the "courier," which reinforced her loyalty to this woman. This possibly served as a form of insurance later on if the "courier" would need help.

Finally, a second, smaller group of unmarried women residing in Freedom Park moved to this area as a result of involving with men employed at the times. Often, these relationships were extramarital to men's legitimate families and have since dissolved, leaving the women alone and using other means by which to stay in Freedom Park.

Perceived Xenophobia and Feelings of Exclusion

Women who lived in Bafokeng villages felt strongly that the Bafokeng were xenophobic and discriminatory towards them, simply because they were outsiders. From landlords to shopkeepers to health care providers, women felt judged, scrutinized, and mistreated. One Shangaan woman from Limpopo Province reported that she has repeatedly seen shopowners mistreating Shangaans, and that she herself has been yelled at in a shop when the clerk assumed that she was from Mozambique.

A Tswana woman who lives in Luka recounted that her landlady was rude and demanding towards foreign tenants, constantly complaining about her “dirty” children and outwardly jealous at the appliances that she and her husband purchased. In fact, she recounted that when her husband bought a refrigerator for their shack, the *mmastene* became angry and would not allow them to use it. This prompted this particular informant’s family to move to another location in Luka.

The clinic is a place where many women experienced prejudice as well. The Mozambican woman in the study said that when she went to the local clinic, a nurse asked her, “You come all the way from Mozambique and get sick here?”, as if to blame her for burdening them with the excessive work of treating her. Another woman said that she is afraid to attend the clinic. In one instance, she had gone for post-natal care, and believes the nurses manipulated her by giving her false, nonsensical instructions and then yelling her for not being able to follow through. Moreover, she felt that they were withholding treatment from her.

In the community generally, women were upset by the behavior of the Bafokeng people towards non-Bafokeng. Tswana women renting homes in Phokeng said that Bafokeng people have made rude comments towards them. One of these women, from Kuruman, perceives the poorest Bafokeng to be the worst about it and that they have little to show except for their ethnic pride. Another woman living in Lefaragatlhe reported that many Bafokeng men have approached her for sex, and believes because they think it will be easy to seduce her to since she is an outsider. Finally, the husband of a woman in Luka complained that young Bafokeng men victimize mineworkers like him by targeting them for theft when they walk to work through the bush in the morning.

Women living in Freedom Park did not encounter this same sense of discrimination, as they rarely come into contact with local Bafokeng. Furthermore, practically in the settlement everyone is a migrant, eliminating any real grounds for xenophobia. At the same time, these women did experience a sense of exclusion as a result of being associated with Freedom Park. A 24-year old from Nelspruit said the Phokeng and Kanana clinics did not like people from Freedom Park, and therefore she would have to lie about her residence in order to receive services at either of these places.

Another woman spoke of her experiences in Rustenburg:

When I’m in town, even now, I don’t tell them I’m staying in Freedom Park, ‘cause once you tell them, even if only to look for a job, you can’t write the address of the place. The said this place is for sick people, virus people, STD people, or whatever. The more you tell them that you stay here, the more they are going to take you down.

Forces Causing Migrant Women to Stay

There was an overwhelming disapproval among the women in this study of the lifestyle in Rustenburg. One woman from Soweto commented on the superficiality of this community: “Life this side is money. Money, money, money.” Many women openly stated that traditional culture has been lost here, especially when it comes to relationships between men and women, as compared to the sense of culture they believe that has been preserved in their home communities:

...If you go here to the shebeen you will see that girls, even young ones, are selling their bodies...where I am [from] you won't want to be caught with a boyfriend because our parents were very strict.

Most exclaimed that if there was an opportunity to return home, they would.

However, this disapproval and yearning for home in many cases seemed to reflect societal expectations, rather their own attitudes, and more importantly, their actions.

So why don't women return home, if they are as disappointed and dissatisfied as they claim about their material environment, economic opportunities, or discrimination they experience? Actually, many of the married women who had migrated to stay with their husbands either returned home during the course of the research, or had definite plans to return home. They believed that there was more for them at home, in terms of support, and also felt that their duties in developing their families and land must be done at home. A woman from Kuruman living in Luka explains that she must go home at the end of this year: "Everything is back home. My emotions are back home, [and] if it wasn't for the money, I would be home."

Very few of the unmarried women had made plans to move back home, besides temporary visits. There appear to be a number of interrelated reasons causing women to remain in these conditions, the most significant of which is poverty. Because of the destitute and broken conditions from where these women originate, they are expected to remit income to their home communities, to their families, and to their children.

As one Basotho woman describes,

Going home on a full time basis is not possible because I don't have family back home. My father passed away and my mother abandoned us. When I'm here I can see that my child is in school, clothed, fed and the same for me, but back home I can't do those things.

Moreover, there is a pressure for these women to return home with wealth to show, as opposed to being the same or worse off than when they left. A woman from Nelspruit living in Freedom Park explains the status she receives when she goes home: "They think we [live in a nice area] because when we go home we are able to buy groceries and are well-dressed and have clothes for the child and send money back home monthly."

Another problem associated with poverty is the dependency on pensioners for economic support. Like a woman from Kuruman, who said, "Here it is not like home...where we have to wait for our parents' pensions [so] my mother can take care of me and my child," other women also expressed their disinterest in relying on their parents and other elderly relatives for their livelihoods. This leaves no option but to remain as migrants in the Rustenburg area.

We observed a sense of empowerment that women received from establishing themselves and finding a means to live in this new community. Not only did they gain status and recognition from their rural villages as a result of moving to a more urban area, but they felt a new independence. Rural conditions are difficult, and not just because of impoverishment. The traditions in rural communities often dictate women to assume a specific cultural role, stifling their social and sexual independence. Women escaped this by moving to a place where their behaviors wouldn't be questioned or watched.

Moreover, the overarching key to the empowerment women felt was for them to not be economically dependent on the structures that oppress them. As mentioned, women seek economic opportunity so that they may be financially, and thus socially, independent. A colored woman from Kuruman says,

At home I can't do the things that I do here, I mean that here I can *phanda* [sell sex] and be able to clothe myself and eat not like back home where I'm restricted to doing certain things.

Ironically, the next section shall discuss how these women merely enter a new cycle of dependence, on men especially, and how this becomes detrimental to their health and well-being.

Men: The Economic Resource

As mentioned, although many women moved to the Rustenburg area with hopes of work and prosperity, many reported being disappointed with the prospects upon arrival. This applies mainly to women who migrated single and unattached, as women moving to accompany spouses already had some sense of economic security resulting from their husband's employment. Even then, all married women expressed a desire to find work and supplement their husband's income, yet only two succeeded finding work. One procured a temporary job at Sun City in security, while another worked as a domestic helper, and then as a gas station attendant.

Economic options for women in Freedom Park are slim. As a Swazi woman from Gauteng stated,

There is no work for women around here. There are those that sell fruits and vegetables trying to make ends meet. I mean, the one thing that is common around here in order to make money is sex....

Of the 21 women living there, only 2 were employed in the formal sector—a home-based caregiver and an adult education teacher. A few earned money through informal activities, such as selling traditional beer or vegetables, hairdressing, and gambling. The majority had no source of income outside of transactional relationships with men, both inside and outside the context of sex work.

As the quote reflects, women turned to the only regular source of income available—men. As most men living in and around Freedom Park are employed at the mines, there is always an opportunity for women to benefit from their income. In describing men as an economic resource versus a steady job, a woman living in Freedom Park states, "Money talks here. Everyday you can get money....Back home it is only month end." Time and time again, women spoke of how the first task they undertook upon arrival to Freedom Park was to get a "boyfriend." Conventions of male-female relationships in the settlement require men to provide their girlfriends with shelter, food, and spending money. Women, in return, are expected to provide sex. As a result, the term "boyfriend" was only applied in situations where economic transaction was the primary incentive for the woman to establish and remain in the relationship.

It would be erroneous to say that women were aware of these crude relationship expectations in Freedom Park prior to their migration, or even that they engaged in these behaviors in their home communities. A Basotho woman from Eastern Cape remarks,

It is true what they say ‘when you can’t beat them, join them.’ When I came here I was a very quiet person that didn’t want anything to do with men, but Freedom Park made me love men and money.

Similarly, a woman living in Luka describes the plight of one of her friends:

“There was one [woman] from Hammenskraal, she had come here for work but then her behaviour changed. I tried talking to her about it but she didn’t listen so she is gone [dead due to AIDS] now.”

Nevertheless, women agreed that survival mandated them to adapt to the lifestyle:

...When I came here I just built a shack for myself and I couldn’t ask that lady over there to give me pap, sugar, and all that. She would end up asking me, is she supposed to lie down [sell sex] for me?...When you have a lot of boyfriends that was caused by the circumstances of life...”

Yet, we found that being on the brink of survival is ultimately not what traps these women in transactional relationships. In fact, expectations rise, probably as a result of the need for women to keep up with the material status of their neighbors and friends. An 18-year old woman from Eastern Cape remarked, “...[Since] my boyfriend found a job, I might be happier. These clothes are the clothes that I came with from home and nothing new.” Many women like this one defined having “enough money” as being able to purchase new clothes, alcohol, cell phones, and salon visits. Discretionary income was not only important, but expected as part of the duties of a boyfriend.

These expectations often required women to take on “roll-on” boyfriends as a means of supplementing their incomes from their “main” boyfriends. The main boyfriend was usually a man with whom a woman lived and behaved as if she was in a committed relationship. In other words, they were each expected to be (outwardly) faithful, and would each assume traditional gender roles—the man works outside the home to provide financial security, while the woman keeps house and tends to domestic duties. The roll-on, on the other hand, was a man that a woman met with periodically, in which the relationship was purely sex for money. While the relationship with the main boyfriend was a public one, the relationship(s) with roll-ons were private, discreet, and taboo. Two sex workers said the following regarding her roll-ons: “...we pray that they [our boyfriends] don’t see what we do because then they would kill us.”

All of the women living in Freedom Park had main boyfriends, while about three-quarters additionally had roll-ons. Nevertheless, even though these relationships appear, to an outside observer, to be solely transactional in nature (that is, physical pleasure in exchange for financial compensation), only five of the 21 women identified themselves as sex workers, and another four were thought to be sex workers, as we learned through triangulation methods. Even so, it is a nebulous line that separated women who called themselves sex workers and those who did not.

Sex workers treated their clients in a professional manner. They even talked about strategies they used to coerce more payment for less work from their clients. In an interview with four sex workers, one of them offered an anecdote of one of the strategies she used on a client:

There was one time that I found this guy that had a lot of money so I took my baby to go sleep next door so that I could have a good time with that guy. So I seduced him for a while and then we got to the real reason he had come to my

place. We bought beer next door and drank together on my bed and then we had sex and he slept at my place. Then I snuck into his wallet and stole my fee of 250 rand and hid it in my anus. In the morning when he woke up, I demanded my share he said that he didn't have enough money and I locked the door and said that he wasn't going anywhere until I got my money.

Another woman spoke of a trick of her own:

If I see that a man has a lot of money in his wallet and he is not sharing it, I will try by all means to spike his drink at the shebeen and pretend that I'm dozing off until he finally passes out. Then I take his whole wallet for myself find a box somewhere to hide the money away and when he wakes up I will be next to him pretending to sleep, and if he asks where his wallet is I would act surprised.

It was clear that these methods not only empowered these women, but enabled them to survive in such a harsh, desperate environment.

The self-identified sex workers did not express any sentiments of approval, pride, or content with their behaviors. However, they saw it as a necessity, that there was no choice but to "...count the roof and stars to get money." As a Tswana woman said,

This job that we are doing is not easy but we are gonna die working it. There are some men that don't even want to pay for the sex. I don't like it but I have to sell my body for money.

Shebeens are a popular place for sex work to occur, particular because a sex worker could get many clients in one night:

We call it the "pig sale." You meet with a guy at the shebeen and he gives you money you come back to the shack and have sex. After that, you take a quick bath and go back to the shebeen and continue with the scouting.

At a shebeen visit one Friday night, we observed one of our informants, a self-identified sex worker, making the rounds among her clients, negotiations for later on, even though her boyfriend was present.

Relationship Dynamics

The question of whether there is any substance or long-term viability to the relationships between women and their main boyfriends could be answered both through observation and dialogue. For example, many of the women living in Freedom Park agreed that these relationships are not genuine, that they don't contain "true love" and that there is no real sense of commitment among either partner. A woman from Lesotho comments, "Relationships here are not for real because there is no truth in them. There are nothing but lies and expectations." As proof, we see the high prevalence of multiple partnerships among both men and women. In addition, there was no incidence of marriage between the women and their main boyfriends, which is an indicator of the commitment status of these relationships. We encountered very few women for whom men they had met while away from home had paid lobola or that mentioned engagement.

Not only is this due to the fact that these relationships were not originally meant as long-term investments (as mentioned, migrant men usually return home to marry), but also because many of our informants' boyfriends were already married with families. In fact, almost half of the unmarried woman reported that their boyfriends had wives elsewhere. Interestingly, there was little desire among women who were involved

with married men to attempt to break up his marriage or even become a second wife. This confirms that transactional relationships occurring between our unmarried informants and men were not perceived as the basis of long-term commitment.

Besides the women who had migrated to live with their husbands, six of the unmarried women admitted to having been married previously. These women had been either widowed or separated from their husbands. Abuse was sometimes a factor in divorce or separation, as in the case of a 25-year old Xhosa woman:

You know how the marriages are now a days. We are...divorced and I have 2 children. [My] husband would cheat right in front of [my] eyes and at that time [I] had a small child.

Another woman's story reflects the blame associated with HIV/AIDS:

[My boyfriend and I] got married in 2000 but he got sick and his family said that I was bewitching him and they took all his belongings from me, thinking that I might take all his money.

Many women, married and unmarried, expressed an acceptance that their husbands or main boyfriends, respectively, may be unfaithful to them at some point, as if it were a real possibility. At the same time, there was a desire among all women to portray a loving, trusting relationship with their primary partners. Among married women, the rationale for this is obvious. But we saw that even unmarried women, particularly those living in Freedom Park, spoke of their main boyfriends as if they were in serious, substantive relationships. In many cases, women told us how they loved and were committed to their boyfriends, even though they also admitted that money was the primary motivation for the relationship. Often, both these women and their boyfriends had other partners on the side. When we asked a young woman from Lesotho about whether she thought her boyfriend and she would get married, she replied insincerely, "I don't know but we have been together happy and we might talk about it and get married, but the one thing I wish I could get is a baby. We both want a baby." Interestingly, this woman had claimed that she desperately wanted to return to Lesotho. It seems as if she was quick to idealize the relationship that she was in, even though it did not align with her other concerns and behaviors.

We determined two reasons for this. The first is that being in a committed relationship, especially considering the ages of our informants, is socially and culturally normal and expected. Even in Freedom Park, where both men and women seemed aware of rampant infidelity, partners outside of the main partnership were mostly kept discreet. Women also reported that jealousy was a perpetual sentiment among their main boyfriends, the consequences of which will be discussed later. The outward disapproval of infidelity and expressions of jealousy are indicative of sociocultural norms that carried over to the Freedom Park environment.

Secondly, particularly within the Freedom Park context, creating the delusion of a committed relationship is mutually beneficial in fulfilling the basic expectations of both the man and woman—companionship, physical gratification, and material necessities. It is almost as if the dire conditions of migration stripped male-female relationships down to their barest threads.

Although both men and women gain from being involved in (even superficial) relationships with one another, power in these relationships consistently remains on

the side of men. Because men are able to wield economic security over women and at times their children, our informants spoke of being at the whim of men's money. In a group interview, one woman revealed her disdain:

I don't think [life here] is good because we have to live with the help of men. There are no jobs for women. I mean, for example, she [pointing to her friend] wants to fend for her family but due to the lack of jobs she has to depend on a man.

However, even the issue of power is nuanced; while women's relationships with their main boyfriends very clearly showed that the man was in control, their relationships with roll-ons or clients demonstrated differently. With their main boyfriends, women were expected to carry out their duty of providing sex whenever the man desired. This expectation can be traced back to the notion that male-female behavior in these relationships imitates a committed relationship and therefore adheres to traditional gender roles, where a woman's duty is to "serve" her husband.

On the other hand, women reported that their roll-on boyfriends and clients simply could not demand this same duty from them. It seems as if the same cultural and social expectations were not attached to these relationships, since from the start, they were viewed as illegitimate. As a result, there was a certain level of empowerment present in roll-on and client encounters not present in relationships with main boyfriends and husbands.

As economic power translated to relationship power, women who had a steady income outside of what they received from their main boyfriends were more able to be choosy about the presence of men in their lives, to say no to sex, and to hold expectations for their male partners. In particular, we found that women who owned their own homes experienced less dependence on men. By owning their own accommodation, women had a safe space to which they could return if they were having problems with men. Housing also could never be used as a threat or means of coercion by men. When we asked a Xhosa woman living in Freedom Park whether her boyfriend ever persuades her to have sex when she doesn't want to, she replied, "He does but I still say no. I tell him that if he can't sleep next to me then he better go and sleep at the [mine] hostel." In contrast, A 32-year old woman from Mafikeng living in Freedom Park described that she was forced to stay with her abusive, unemployed boyfriend because she simply does not have any other accommodation. It was clear that women who were living in the homes of their main boyfriends perceived themselves to be trapped in their situations.

Two-thirds of our informants had children, and most had only one child. Interestingly, one trend that we identified among unmarried women is that their children born from relationships with men at home tended to live at home under the care of a sibling or parent. Meanwhile, children born from relationships with men living this area stayed with these women here. In other words, children born without approval or knowledge of families and parents may add another layer of illegitimacy to unmarried women's relationships with men away from home.

Condom Use

With the rapid exchange of partners and the acceptance of infidelity as a reality, sexually transmitted infections are of concern. This holds particularly relevance for South Africa, which has a high burden of HIV/AIDS. Thus, we inquired about

women's attitudes and usage of condoms in order to determine the protectedness of sexual encounters with boyfriends, husbands, and clients.

A few women demonstrated ignorance or misinformation about condoms and their effectiveness. As one Ndebele woman explained, "I was afraid of them and I didn't know anything about them, I was scared that it would burst inside of me."

Nevertheless, most women not only aware of, but conscientious about condom use, and believed that condoms were a necessary measure in protecting them from disease. This belief did not always translate into action, but it does demonstrate the changing values and acceptability surrounding condoms, especially for women. In fact, many of our informants perceived themselves to be more aware of the importance of condom use than men, who they thought still held traditional or ignorant attitudes towards condoms.

Moreover, women felt that they were the ones demanding condom use during sex as opposed to their male partners. A sex worker rationalizes this by stating women have more responsibility and therefore are more aware of the importance of condoms:

We women are poor and you sit and think that there are diseases out there and you find that a man doesn't want to use it [a condom] and then you get sick and leave your child behind, so I think there is a lot that a woman has to think about...I mean that a man has no use in the house whatsoever. He can abandon the children....

Nevertheless, reported condom use among women in this study was low to nonexistent among primary partners such as husbands and main boyfriends. Women said that their partners would convince them not to use a condom, as in the case of a 24-year old Tswana woman: "I wanted him to use the condom [and] I told him that I'm not going to risk my life but...he said that he loved me and will not use a condom with me." Similarly, a sex worker describes how the need for money requires her to forego condom use:

...Some of the time you get men that don't want to you use a condom and there is nothing you can do but just have sex without a condom because you need the money and that is what makes it tougher to be a woman. We are in serious trouble and danger.

Other women said that while condoms were used initially in these relationships, condom use was discontinued in time due to the sense of trust that built between the two partners. This might seem logical in the context of marriage among migrant women who stay in this area with their husbands. However, among unmarried women living in Freedom Park, it is unfathomable that they can claim to trust their main boyfriends, knowing that multiple partnerships are a common and accepted occurrence. Again, this is indicative of the way in which these transactional partnerships attempt to portray themselves as long-term committed relationships, where the development of trust over time would be socially expected.

Women in our study reported that among the roll-on and client partners, condom use was a rule. One sex worker was adamant about condom use with her clients:

Don't you see that box [of condoms] over there? Even when I'm out I knock here and tell Kedi [my friend] that she must she pass me some. I don't want any mistakes....[If a man refuses to use a condom,] *laat hy loop* [let him go]. I don't want to risk with my life.

If condoms indicate a lack of trust, the usage of condoms with roll-on boyfriends and clients reinforces the illegitimacy associated with these relationships.

Perceptions and Risks of HIV/AIDS

All women were aware of the threat of HIV and associated the disease with sexual transmission, which makes sense since it is the main form of transmission in this region. An overwhelming theme we found was that HIV is associated with promiscuous behavior and particularly, unfaithfulness to one's main partner. One woman attributed HIV to "bed-hopping," while another woman told us that she could not have a man "...on this side for money," in addition to her husband, for that is how HIV spreads. While monogamy is considered an important HIV prevention tactic, women did not seem to comprehend that their partners could have been infected due to their sexual activities prior to meeting them. This risk is specifically relevant to unmarried women living in Freedom Park, where multiple partnerships were rampant, and it is almost certain that neither men nor women moved from one monogamous relationship to another. As a result, the risks for disease carried by either partner into a new relationship were high.

Women spoke openly about their observation of the high rate at which people around them were dying. Many agreed that HIV/AIDS was worse in their communities here than in their home communities, perhaps signifying the way in which they idealized the "cultural traditions" and other protective factors against the disease. Interestingly, even though women knew that AIDS is claiming many lives, very few admitted that they knew people who had died of AIDS, personally. Some attributed this to the fact that the cause of death will only be publicized after a person has died, even though it is generally obvious and understood.

HIV/AIDS also does not have a precise, identifiable set of symptoms or particular length of time that can be identified with the end stages. Some people die very suddenly, and others appear healthy for years. This seemed to make it more difficult for people to distinguish AIDS-related deaths from other diseases. This disconnect between our informants' cognizance of the widespread nature of this disease, and their lack of personal interaction with people who they know are HIV-positive, says two things: 1) most people do not know their HIV status, which is detrimental since without knowing one's status, a person can't access treatment; and 2) AIDS is not openly talked about in the community. Basically, both of these conclusions point to the entrenched stigma that surrounds HIV, preventing people from getting tested, and preventing conversation by and about individuals who are infected.

Many women alluded to a male phenomenon of not wanting to "die alone." They explained that men often felt angry and resentful when finding out that they were infected, and thus purposefully spread the disease through having sex with many partners and insisting on not using condoms. The origins and truth of this male phenomenon is unclear; on one hand, it could simply be an observation made by women towards the men with whom they engage in sexual relationships. It could also have been created by women in order to help them explain why men, unlike themselves, don't seem to want to use condoms.

In turn, most women, both married and unmarried, expressed an acceptance and awareness of their own risks for HIV infection. They logically considered their

partners' behaviors and knew that their relationships with these men could pose a risk for their own disease statuses. A woman from Lesotho living in Freedom Park offers her concerns about her boyfriend's behaviors:

"I do want to go test [for HIV] because I'm not with him all the time and I'm taking a risk by sleeping with him. I don't know what he does when I'm not there because it's a big risk that I'm taking which means that if he has any sickness so do I."

Nevertheless, this awareness on its own did not seem to prompt behavior change, as a change in behavior (i.e. using condoms) appeared to be linked to larger forces such as cultural norms and economic deprivation. So long as these forces influence the nature of relationships between men and women, HIV will continue to spread.

Based on their partners behaviors and well as their own, women considered HIV/AIDS a reality in their lives, and would accept if they were diagnosed as positive. In fact, there was a pervasive resignation or fatalism among women, that if their partners—husbands or main boyfriends—had the disease, then they certainly did as well, and there was nothing to be done. One woman stated, "I will accept if I had it because I know what kind of man Thomas is." Another went so far as to say, "No [I am not scared of contracting HIV], especially if he [my boyfriend] is the one giving me the virus."

This attitude is vitally important to highlight since most HIV transmission can be traced to consistent, unprotected sexual activity in sustained relationships, as opposed to brief, casual sexual encounters. The rationale for this heightened risk is not only biological (more opportunities for transmission) and behavioral (lack of condom usage), but is clearly also social: it is not a woman's right to isolate her risk for HIV from that of her partner's, and this is part of her commitment to him. Our data reflects a crucial piece of misinformation, in that women attribute HIV to infidelity or "wild" behavior, when in fact they are most at risk in bed with their husbands or main partners.

The vast majority of our informants had not been tested, mostly out of fear or ignorance. Some expressed that they wanted to get tested but that their boyfriends or husbands would not allow them, because these men believed it would also reveal their infection statuses as well. Of the 11 women who admitted to testing for HIV, 7 had tested positive.

Experiences with Violence

Our data suggests that violence—physical, emotional, and sexual—has largely been normalized in the contexts of our informants' lives. This is indicative of a social, cultural, economic, and legal disregard for women's rights and gender inequalities. An overwhelming majority of women had experienced some form of coercion, threat, or violence in their relationships with men and none were able to succeed in receiving any recourse. Some even blamed themselves for provoking their partners' anger or felt that the incident was deserved.

A number of women reported both physical and emotional violence from their main boyfriends or husbands. The specific types of physical violence we found included being slapped, being beaten with fists or other items, hit with a stone, or being strangled. A young woman from Lesotho living in Freedom Park reported the

following of her main boyfriend: “He does hit me and strangle me until I will get unconscious. At times I will call Lindi [my friend] to come and help me.” Another woman said that the man she was living with “...would beat me until I was temporarily blind.” There were certainly other forms of physical violence occurring of which we did not receive details. Women also reported various types of emotional violence, including insults, screaming and shouting, and most of all, threats. The following quote is from a woman who was also experiencing physical violence from her boyfriend: “Yes, [he threatens me] in a number of ways. At times when he tells me to leave and I say “no.” He says that one day I will leave here in a coffin.” Another woman claims that her boyfriend threatens her: “...you find that he screams ‘I’ll kill you bitch!’”

The spectrum of sexual coercion and violence encompasses everything from a woman being persuaded to have sex within the context of a committed relationship to a woman being violently raped. It was very difficult to convince women to be open about this topic, and we observed three main reasons for this. The first and foremost is that socially and culturally, the provision of sex is expected as a woman’s duty to a man. Many women alluded to this as part of their social contract with their primary partners, with a woman from Kuruman stating, “Because I give him, he has to give.” In this conversation, she was specifically referring to her boyfriend providing for her financially, and she providing for him physically. There was an underlying tone signifying that women were aware of the coercion they were under, and felt there was something wrong about this “duty.” In particular, a woman from Lesotho put it well as she remarked,

“As a woman, there is a point where you just submit even if you don’t feel well, want to do it, or if your heart is not in it. You do this because so far, he is your man.”

Related to this first reason is also the idea that because women believe it is their duty to give their main boyfriends and husband physical pleasure, they may not be conscious of pressure they feel. As a result, sexual coercion and violence is more difficult to identify than other types of violence. When we posed the question of whether women found it difficult to say “no” to their partners’ requests for sex, a number said that they didn’t. However, many of these women also stated that they had never refused sex with their partner, which questions the validity of their perceived assertiveness. Either way, even though our informants did not recognize always persuasion or coercion occurring in their relationships does not mean that it is acceptable. If we are to equalize the rights of men and women in society, culture, economy, and legal system, this belief that sex is a woman’s duty or obligation must change.

The notion that women “provide” sex for men also points to the notion that women are not sexual beings who themselves cannot demonstrate any need or desire for sex. This was evident from the number of women, specifically married women in our study that stated that they never initiated sex with their partners, and that they did not feel comfortable or right initiating physical intimacy even if they wanted it.

The final reason we believe sexual coercion and violence were difficult topics on which to gather data is because this form of violence is highly stigmatized as a result of its association with intimate relationship behavior. By admitting that she is being

coerced or even raped by her boyfriend or husband, a woman may believe that this reflects badly on herself, and that somehow, it is her fault. Much of the language surrounding rape blamed women—that this only happened to women who were drunk, or wearing revealing clothing, or walking around alone at night. At the same time, women used language that distanced themselves from rape, as if it could never occur in the context of their own relationships or homes. To be specific, rape was often characterized as a violent act between two strangers. Nevertheless, three women did admit to being forced to have sex, by either by a boyfriend or stranger.

Just as women believe it is their duty to provide sex to their legitimate partners (main boyfriends or husbands), women who had roll-on boyfriends or clients expressed their sense of sexual empowerment with these women. One sex worker explicitly articulated,

Woman: “If you don’t want [to have sex with a client], then you don’t want it.”

Interviewer: “Do clients agree to this?”

Woman: “Yes, because they are not your boyfriend.”

In this conversation, it is clear that neither the man nor the woman in a purely transactional relationship context has the ability to demand or provide sex, respectively. This reinforces the idea that roll-on relationships do not obey social or cultural norms of male-female partnerships. On the other hand, women who had roll-on boyfriends or clients also felt that financial concerns pressured them into sex with men.

Jealousy motivated acts of violence among men. Two women reported that their boyfriends locked them inside their homes repeatedly and would not allow them to go anywhere. There were also reports that women who refused to have sex with their boyfriends would receive threats and questioning regarding whether they had been cheating. This would usually compel these women to oblige to sex. One woman living in Freedom Park spoke of her experience with sexual and physical violence perpetuated by her boyfriend’s jealousy:

When he came back from work he would give me a header [oral sex] to taste if I had slept with other men and if I was to take a bath without him, then there was hell to pay.

In Freedom Park, we also observed many acts of violence outside of the context of our interviews. One on occasion, we spoke with a woman who had approached the police with a huge gash on the side of her head. She said that her husband had beat her with a glass bottle and chased her out of the shack, so she had no where to go. This was not the first time something like this had happened to her, as she described an incident in which her boyfriend had dislocated her collarbone while she was pregnant, and another instance that resulted in a deep scar on her shin. Other incidents of violence include one of our informants’ friends, whose neck was slit at a shebeen one night. Another informant was hit in the face by unknown men while trying to open the door to her shack one night. Yet another woman told us of a time when four men had broken into her place and attempted to rape her friend, who she was staying with. We also heard numerous stories of rape, specifically gang rape. While we cannot verify any of these occurrences, these narrations are symptomatic of the destitute, unstable environment that characterizes Freedom Park.

A Final Concern

One theme that arose from our conversations and observations has to do with the social, health, and law enforcement services available to migrants, particularly those in Freedom Park. There is an utter lack of professionalism, as well as inexcusable prejudice, among the people working to provide services to migrants.

Professionalism, in this context, is defined by a service-provider being able to put aside his/her social, cultural, and other biases in order to deliver the best services available according to the needs of his/her clientele. In numerous instances, police officers and counselors not only violated this code of professionalism, but reinforced the inequalities that create problems in the first place.

In one telling case, which is described above, a woman had arrived at the police station in Freedom Park to get help with an ordeal concerning domestic assault. She had been beaten on the side of a head with a bottle and her boyfriend had chased her away from the house, causing her to trip and hurt her leg as well. When we found this woman, she was sitting alone, next to the locked police station, waiting for the police to return. She had taken them to her home to find her boyfriend, but he was not there. The police merely advised her to stay there until he came back. As soon as she saw him returning to their home, looking angry, she again ran away to the police station. About 10 minutes after we had begun talking to her, the police arrived. When she asked the police officer to help her, he accused her of being drunk and remarked, "I'm not going to be bothered by your drunkenness. If you decide and drink and you guys decide to fight, I'm not going to get in between that." Disgustedly, he allowed her into the passenger side of the car and they drove off, presumably to find her boyfriend, the perpetrator.

In a conversation with a different police officer, this man told us, "The women here [in Freedom Park] are rubbish because they sleep around without a condom. This is what's increasing AIDS here."

We also observed police officers and counselors trying to solve a domestic dispute between a woman from Mozambique who had caught her husband, a miner living here, in a relationship with another Shangaan woman in Freedom Park. The extramarital relationship had resulted in a child, who is now 2 years old. The husband had not revealed any of this to his wife, who somehow found out, came to Freedom Park, and assaulted the mistress. Everyone was gathered at the clinic area, trying to debate and resolve the issue. The women, who were both upset because the man between them had failed to tell either the truth, were advised by police officers and counselors to be grateful that this man is willing to take care of both. Neither of the women were given any forum to express their concerns, but were instead admonished for their anger. Counselors told the women that this is "just the way that men are," and that they shouldn't bother trying to keep track of a man's whereabouts. The legitimate wife, living in Mozambique, was told that she should accept this other woman as her husband's second wife, since he is allowed to take multiple wives. When we interjected to give the wife a chance to speak, she said that she wished her husband had been honest with her from the beginning of this affair; if he had, she could have been more accepting of another wife. Another counselor chastised the mistress for getting pregnant, that if she knew this man was married, she should have taken precautions. The woman replied she had not known this man was married.

These cases are problematic and each point to the way in which women are blamed for social issues, such as domestic violence, the spread of disease, or the breaking of families, on a broader scale. This only serves to reinforce gender inequalities, making it even more difficult for progress to occur. As police officers, counselors, and other social service providers (i.e. health care workers, social workers, etc.) are the personnel directly interacting with people most in need, they must be trained to act professionally; this translates to cultural sensitivity, gender awareness, and possessing the ability to put their own prejudices aside.

IMPLICATIONS

This study reveals the mechanics, structures, and results of female migration, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS, now the number one killer of South Africans between the ages of 15-45. Although many conclusions have been drawn from our analysis in the “Findings” section, there are a few key take home points that must be emphasized, especially for the purposes of policy formation:

The issue of migration and migrant populations must be formally acknowledged within policy discussions and political debate. Migrants comprise a significant population in the make-up of the Royal Bafokeng Nation. To ignore their interactions with Bafokeng, in terms of both social and economic exchange, is to ignore migrants’ large influence in the administration’s ability to effectively deliver services, promote health, maintain political support, and proceed with economic development.

As a result of migrant’s interactions with Bafokeng communities, the issues plaguing migrants (i.e. HIV/AIDS, violence, poverty, etc.) cannot be viewed as “contained.” However, development efforts that serve one population will also benefit the other. For example, economic and human development among Bafokeng will release them from depending on the income of backyard dwellers. On the other hand, this must be accompanied by the affording of proper housing to migrants. Along these lines, uplifting communities such as Freedom Park will serve the Bafokeng by improving the impoverished conditions that engender crime and violence. Proper prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS among both Bafokeng and non-Bafokeng is absolutely necessary, as it would be ignorant to suppose that the two populations do not “mix.”

Ultimately, more and better services are required in informal settlements such as Freedom Park. The Tapologo Mobile Clinic is overburdened, and is not reaching far enough into the Freedom Park community. The lack of access to primary health care is literally killing men, women, and children, resulting in broken families, orphans, the spread of disease, and the reinforcement of poverty. Another major necessity is legal services; women, in particular, have a difficulty in procuring housing, dealing with domestic disputes, and generally, realizing their rights. This again, leads to extremely desperate conditions affecting the entire community.

Development efforts for women in Freedom Park must cater to what they view as their needs, which goes beyond just sustainability. Starting an organic farm or sewing cooperative is not enough; our research has shown that women expect more materially and lifestyle-wise than just having enough money for food and shelter. Therefore, in order to break trends of transactional sex and sex work, education and skill-building initiatives are important in order to help women provide for themselves, without depending on men.

Efforts to organize people in Freedom Park and create social networks among them (are required. There are no formal social outlets for men, women, or children residing in or near Freedom Park. It’s no wonder they turn to alcohol, gambling, and sex. Specifically in the case of women, tighter social networks among them may serve as a social and economic safety net, preventing them from engaging in risky behaviors. In general, activities and groups that orchestrate a better social fabric in the Freedom Park community may eventually regulate violent or unhealthy acts, conserve

protective cultural traditions, and in turn, produce a better environment in which to construct infrastructure and deliver services.

Related to the delivery of services, the issue of professionalism, or lack thereof, among law enforcement, counselors, social workers, health care providers, and other personnel interacting with migrants must be addressed. Both within institutional settings and in the community, these personnel were perceived to be discriminatory, rude, quick to assign blame, and ineffective among our informants. Thus, better training for cultural, gender, and poverty-sensitivity is recommended to adequately serve the migrant population, especially women migrants.

Finally, it is vital to create a comprehensive strategy to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. With a current prevalence of at least 27% (more than one in four), the effects of this disease are sure to reveal themselves in the next 5, 10, and 15 years, and beyond. Women in our study provide prime examples of the fact that AIDS is not just a health issue. For instance, economically, its effects include reducing household economic viability, lowering levels of productivity, and thereby re-entrenching poverty. Socially, the epidemic ruins family and community networks and creates orphans. In the long-term, this generation of orphans, who will grow up without social or educational support, may prove to be a burden on government (needing welfare, health services, etc.), rather than active, contributing citizens. Politically, the most active sector of the population—adults ages 15-45—are dying at a rapid rate. Key factors in good governance, such as accountability and civic participation, will suffer. These are just a few examples of the ways this epidemic, if left alone, will have lasting impacts on the structures and processes of this society. Unfortunately, it is not an issue that will solve itself, as much as we want to believe.

The first step would be to initiate an open dialogue about the subject in order to reduce stigma among community members and lay the foundation for services and programs to be implemented. In addition, it is recommended that these programs be tailored to the sociocultural inclinations of this community. As an example, our data showed that women in intimate partner relationships may not be willing to protect themselves from the risks of their partners, yet these are the circumstances in which HIV transmission occurs the most. Rather than individual prevention messages, those that target partners, families, or communities as a unit may prove more effective.

This study aimed to elucidate the attitudes and behaviors of migrant women, an extremely marginalized group. Although we came to several conclusions regarding their impetus and patterns of migration, relationship and risk behaviors, and interactions with their new communities, further research is necessary in order to grasp the diversity of this population. Moreover, as migration becomes a wider-reaching phenomenon in this region and within South Africa, policy and programming must accept and account for the permanent presence of migrant populations, as opposed to further alienating them. In developing migrant communities along with their own, local governments will recognize the social and economic interdependence of migrants with the communities they were established to serve.

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¹ Human Rights Watch. *Deadly Delay: South Africa's Efforts to Prevent HIV in Survivors of Sexual Violence*. Human Rights Watch, New York: 2004. UNAIDS. Speech, 9 December 2002.

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³ The Synergy Project. "*Room for Change: Preventing HIV Transmission in Brothels*." A research-based field resource supported by the The Synergy Project APDIME Toolkit. www.synergyaids.com.

⁴ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Women and International Migration*. New York: United Nations Publishing Section, 2005.

⁵ Group interviews should not be confused with focus groups, as we asked women specifically about their own individual experiences rather than general attitudes and behaviors found among their population.