

Reasons for undergoing virginity testing: A study of young people in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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DECLARATION

Submitted in fulfillment / partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Population Studies, in the Graduate Programme in Faculty of
Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Durban, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters in Population Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Science, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The practice of virginity testing was done from the early twentieth century in KwaZulu-Natal. Many regard virginity testing as the only way to revitalize what they view as lost cultural values. The aim of the study is to understand the reasons for undergoing virginity testing from the perspective of adolescent girls and boys. The study will explore the importance attached to virginity testing by adolescent girls and boys.

Methods: The study draws on 10 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups discussions with adolescent girls and boys conducted in Nongoma.

Results: The study found widespread support of virginity by adolescent girls and boys. The majority of adolescents associate virginity testing with self-respect and dignity and an important part of their culture. It has been reported by some that there has been an increase in the number of rapes since the revival of virginity testing. Interestingly it was also found out that virginity testing can be used as a pregnancy prevention strategy since young women who undergo virginity testing have a fear of engaging in sexual intercourse.

Conclusion: In dealing with virginity testing, the emphasis should be on providing young women with skills that empower them to be assertive in situations where they are vulnerable. The practice currently emphasizes the value of virginity testing and not the process that women undergo in order to maintain their virginity.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The traditional Zulu custom of virginity testing fell into disuse over the past decades. However, it has been revived by communities in order to prevent young girls from becoming sexually active. There is often social pressure to participate in virginity testing although such testing has been opposed as ineffective, unhygienic and a violation of human rights (Taylor, 2004). *“As the AIDS epidemic has been transformed from one of increasing HIV infection rates during the 1980’s to one of increasing AIDs morbidity and death since the mid 1990s, the call for regular virginity testing of girls has made concurrent public appearance”* (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001: 534).

1.2 Background of the study

Virginity testing is defined as *“a practice and process of inspecting the genitalia of unmarried girls and women to determine if they are sexually chaste”* (Wickstrom 2008:1). Virginity testing is common in some sub-Saharan African countries including Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Africa (Win, 2004.) In Zimbabwe, virginity testing is performed in order to curb the further spread of HIV/AIDS (Southern Africa Report, 2008). According to the Southern African Report, about 11.5 million people are estimated to be infected with HIV/AIDS (Southern African Report, 2008). In some countries, there is a myth that if an HIV positive man has sex with a virgin he will be cured. Zimbabwe is one of the countries where polygamy and patriarchy is practised. Decision-making authority is vested in men and society has control over women’s sexuality. Virginity testing prevents women from controlling their own bodies and increases their vulnerability to HIV infection (Southern African Report, 2008).

Win (2004) argues that in Kenya virginity testing helps to delay the age at first sex among rural Kenyan youth and it reduces vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections

and HIV infections. In Kenya premarital sex is taboo and there is pressure on young women to maintain their virginity until marriage. Families and communities try and keep young women and girls ignorant about sexual matters. Studies conducted in Kenya report that older men seek out young girls in the belief that virgins are free from HIV infection (Win, 2004). The belief that virgins are free from HIV discourages the use of condoms during sexual activity. It is considered very shameful for parents if their daughter is discovered to have lost her virginity. A girl is expected to remain a virgin until marriage. In Kenya virginity testing is also conducted in order to curb the further spread of HIV/AIDS (Win, 2004).

Well (2004) observes that in Turkey there are allegations that sexual penetration occur without women's consent; that they are forced by boyfriends or family members to engage in sexual intercourse. Young women are therefore subjected to hymenal examinations performed by nurses and forensic physicians. These hymenal examinations are conducted for a range of social reasons including suspicions of pre-marital intercourse and prostitution. It is argued that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is the result of sexually promiscuous women. Women in Turkey are expected to have sex only with their husbands so virginity testing is conducted in order to check whether or not the woman has had sexual intercourse with another man.

The practice of virginity testing has been done from the early twentieth century in KwaZulu-Natal (Le Roux 2006). The verification of a girl's virginity enables her family to demand a larger lobola than normal bride wealth at marriage; an additional cow to be given to the girl's mother. If the girl is found not to be a virgin, her father has to pay a cow to the chief because the girl has shown disrespect not only to her parents but also to the whole nation. In South Africa, the practice of virginity testing is mostly common among the Zulu, and to a lesser extent by the Xhosa. In practice, it requires the physical examination of a girl in order to determine if her hymen is intact (Scorgie, 2002). The testing always takes place at the residence of the local chief, where all the girls of the community are tested by old respected women of the village. In South Africa in the past virginity testing was conducted by the king's wives or other nominated women qualified

to do so. Usually it is an older woman who has already reached menopause. In addition, it should also be an older person who is no longer sexually active and who has herself undergone virginity testing (Scorgie, 2002).

In South Africa, according to Kaarsholm (2006) virginity testing is seen as part of Zulu cultural identity and is strongly associated with self-respect, modesty, and pride. One of the key missions of virginity testing is to keep a record of how many virgins there are in a particular society and also to identify the young girls who are no longer virgins. In addition, virginity testing is seen as a means of safeguarding fertility.

Many regard virginity testing as the “only way to instill what they view as the lost cultural values of chastity before marriage, modesty, self-respect and pride” (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001: p535). As the number of people dying of AIDS has increased, community leaders have shown interest in reviving the old cultural tradition of virginity testing as a way to safeguard against HIV/AIDS. Kinoti (2005) argues that virginity testing is used as one method to check the onslaught of the pandemic in order to encourage abstinence, which is one of the ABC strategies for preventing the further spread of the virus. Often those in favour of virginity testing claim that the benefits include not only the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS, but also teenage pregnancy and the detection of children who are sexually abused, and that it relieves the burden on pensioners who are forced to take care of unplanned babies (Le Roux, 2006). The practice of virginity testing has come under heavy criticism. Some researchers argue that virginity testing is used as a means of exerting control over women and their sexuality. Moreover, it draws attention away from the role of men and their abuse of sexual power and privilege (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001).

According to a national survey in South Africa, among young people aged 15-24 years, the HIV prevalence is estimated to be 8.6 percent in 2005 (HSRC, 2009). The rate of new infection is also higher among young women than young men, and this is associated with various factors such as greater biological susceptibility, gender inequalities, socio-cultural norms, lack of financial security, forced and early marriage, sexual abuse and human trafficking of young women (HSRC, 2009). Concurrent partnerships, where

sexual relationships overlap in time are noted to be the major risk factor contributing to the rapid growth of HIV infections (Ibid). It is risky to have concurrent sexual partners as this creates multiple pathways for HIV transmission to occur. If an individual has a sexual partner who practises concurrency then their risk of acquiring sexually transmitted infections is increased and it may present an added risk by linking individuals in varying degrees to larger sexual networks (Ibid).

According to Kinoti (2005) in KwaZulu-Natal virginity testing is a practice in which girls aged seven to twenty six are examined to determine whether their hymen (commonly known as 'eye') is intact. Girls who pass the examination receive a white star pasted on their forehead and a certificate confirming their virginity.

Hunter (1936) argues that virginity testing is done in order to ensure that girls who are virgins have much broader significance. Virgins are seen as morally pure and more important because they are able to maintain their virginity up until marriage. Engaging in sexual intercourse before marriage is not acceptable.

According to Scorgie (2002) the association of female virginity with the notion of pride and dignity are commonplace in marriage, and indeed central to understanding what is at stake for the abahloli (testers). A girl who becomes pregnant before marriage is ostracised by girls who have passed the test for she has brought shame and disgrace both upon herself and her peers. Nowadays the dignity and pride that virginity is believed to bestow on the individual girl continues to be linked with the avoidance of premarital motherhood. Sexual abstinence is constructed as an end in itself, quite separate from its role in enabling fertility control and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV transmission. *"Adolescents who have sex are seen as people who have lost the vitality of youth and become old"* (Scorgie, 2002:10). Normally what people say is that you have skipped some of the growing stages. The logic of the practice of virginity testing rests on the assumption that the responsibility for avoiding sex rest with girls alone.

Adolescent fertility in South Africa is high with about 30 percent of girls giving birth before age 20 (International Women's Coalition 2008). Childbearing often occurs before school completion. This pattern of childbearing adds to a girl's vulnerability to HIV. Adolescent pregnancy is attributed to the low utilisation of contraceptives especially at first intercourse. It has been reported that adolescents regard family planning services principally for families and not for young people (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999).

1.3 Statement of the problem

Most studies tend to focus on the ongoing debate about whether virginity testing should be banned or not. Scorgie (2002) argues that there are some who favour virginity testing and believe that if young girls are tested they will be fearful of engaging in sexual activity. According to William (2005), those who are against virginity testing argue that the procedure is unconstitutional, unhygienic, and violates the human rights of the young women being tested. They believe that the practice undermines the principles of equality, freedom, and human dignity. It is also gender discriminatory and impairs the dignity and well-being of the girl child. Virginity testing exposes vulnerable girl children to the invasion of privacy, stigmatisation, and sexual abuse. George (2007) argues that there is a tension between the right of women and girls to equality, privacy, and sexual autonomy.

Some of the studies focus on virginity testing as a way to prevent teenage pregnancy. Kaufman et al (2001) argue that teenage pregnancy is high in South Africa. More than 30 percent of 19 year old girls are reported to have given birth at least once. Makiwane and Udjo (2006) also report a high rate of teenage pregnancy in South Africa. About half of young people between 15-19 years have been reported to have had sex and 37 percent have been pregnant. The increase in teenage pregnancy is a worrying factor because it is proof that young people are engaging in unprotected sex which puts them at risk of HIV infection. Teenage pregnancy is associated with high levels of poverty and low socio-economic status. Some girls drop out of school and depend on their mothers to support their children (Scorgie, 2002). Leclerc-Madlala (2001: 535) argue that it is therefore not

surprising that “*the most vociferous voices advocating the back to virginity testing tradition are those of older women who themselves are heads of households supporting a number of young children.*” In her study, Scorgie (2002) found that some of the girls who get pregnant live with their grandmothers. Often the grandmother’s pension is the main source of income. The emphasis that older women place on the importance of virginity testing has much to do with concern about economic survival (Scorgie 2002).

There are a growing number of studies on virginity testing but more attention is paid to the *abahloli* (testers) and the elders of the society and in particular what they think about virginity testing. However, the views of those who actually undergo virginity testing have thus far been largely neglected. To date, little is known about how adolescents view virginity testing. Are young people undergoing virginity testing voluntarily? Are they being forced by their parents and the wider society to undergo virginity testing?

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

The overall objective of the study is to explore perceptions of virginity testing among young people. In particular, the study looks at the reasons for undergoing virginity testing among young people in a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal. The study draws on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted with girls and boys aged 13 to 19 years.

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

Is virginity testing voluntary?

What are the main reasons for undergoing virginity testing?

What importance is attached to virginity testing?

What are some of the problems with virginity testing from the perspectives of adolescent girls?

For those who undergo virginity testing, what are the implications?

The study was conducted in a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal because virginity testing is practised by Zulu speaking people. The study draws on qualitative data, using mixed methods of data collection: in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In total, three focus group discussions were conducted and in-depth interviews were used to complement the information received from these discussions.

The study will be significant in the following ways. Firstly, the study will provide a deeper understanding of virginity testing from the perspective of young adolescents and draw on different arguments put forward by the people who think that virginity testing should continue and people who feel that it should be banned. Secondly, the study will expand the literature on virginity testing. The study looks at both the importance and implications of this practice.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The study tries to link gender socialisation and culture. From the theory one will be able to understand why adolescent girls undergo virginity testing. *“Culture is the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It also includes value systems, traditional beliefs and practices which are linked with tradition or religion”* (Schalkwyk, 2002: 1). Culture shapes the way things are done and our understanding of why this should be.

Schalkwyk (2002) states that gender functions are an organizing principle for society because of the cultural meanings given to being male or female. In most societies there are clear patterns of women’s work and men’s work both in the household and in the wider community. While the specific nature of gender relations varies among societies, the general pattern is that women have less personal autonomy, fewer resources at their disposal, and limited influence over the decision-making processes that shape societies and their own lives. Gender represents the meanings attached to the sexual differences between women and men.

Through socialisation, individuals take on gendered qualities and characteristics and acquire a sense of self. Through socialization people learn what their societies expect of them as males or females. Differential treatment of female and male children by parents and other socialisation agents creates gender differences in behavior (Gupta, 2002).

According to Gupta (2002) gender relations are essential components of the socio-cultural fabric of a society. From the earliest age, socio-cultural norms dictate that boys and girls adopt specific ideas of masculinity and femininity, which will impact on their sexual behavior, their respective sexual responsibilities, their sexual education and ability to access information about sex and their ability to access resources, including sexual health care.

Gupta (2000) argues that the imbalance of power in sexual relationships, together with socio-cultural and economic factors, restricts a woman's sexual autonomy, expands male sexual freedom and thereby increases risk taking behavior. In the socio-cultural African context, women or girls are expected to be passive in sexual interactions and observe silence on issues pertaining to sex.

Leclerc-Madlala (2001) argue that virginity testing is a denial of the need to explore, speak about, and do something with regard to what some people (testers) openly condemn as a lack of male sexual responsibility. It is a traditional practice which is associated with gender differences and young girls are socialised to believe that they should undergo virginity testing. Young girls are socialized at an early age to view their genitals as their mother's cow (Ibid).

Gender norms cast women as being primarily responsible for productive activities within the home, in contrast to men who are cast as primary economic actors and producers outside the home. Even if a woman is informed or has accurate information about sex and HIV prevention, the societal expectation that a woman should be sexually inexperienced, makes it difficult for her to be an active agent in negotiating safer sex (WHO, 2003).

Virginity testing restricts young women's ability to ask for information about sex or reproductive health for fear that they will be thought to be sexually active (Gupta, 2000).

1.6 Organisation of the dissertation

The first chapter provides a brief background of the study. It looks at the main motivation, aims and objectives of the study, statement of the problem, and also significance of the study. Chapter two looks at the existing literature on virginity testing. The focus is on the key findings of research on virginity testing. Chapter three outlines the research methodology. It looks at the sampling method, data collection method, techniques of data analysis, as well as the limitations of the study. Chapter four presents the findings of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews which were conducted with young adolescents residing in Nongoma. A thematic analysis method was used to analyze data. Chapter five summarises the main findings of the study compared to findings of previous studies, and gives recommendations for future research on virginity testing.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the existing literature on virginity testing. It considers some of the arguments for and against virginity testing and reviews studies on virginity testing. The first section provides a brief history. It looks at how virginity testing is conducted and it also tracks its revival. The second section looks at virginity testing as a pregnancy prevention strategy. The third section looks at virginity testing in the context of high levels of rape, violence and HIV/AIDS. The final section looks at gender and human rights. It also considers the literature on virginity testing in relation to gender and the constitutional rights of children

2.2 The history and importance of virginity testing

In the last two decades, virginity testing has emerged as an important traditional cultural practice, although its roots go back much further. Historically virginity testing was used to determine the suitability of women for marriage but it also reflected societal stress on abstinence from sexual activity on the part of girls and young women.

In a study of high school pupils, Taylor (2004) found that young adolescents support virginity testing and participate voluntarily in the practice. Young adolescents accept the practice as beneficial because it is a cultural practice. Many girls feel that it gives them reason to be proud of themselves. Gumede (2000) argues that the responsibility of preserving virginity in younger girls rested on the older girls. Older girls (*amaqhikiza*) are the ones who teach younger girls how to protect their virginity. Sex education focuses on preserving virginity until marriage. Girls are taught and encouraged to engage in *ukusoma* (a non-penetrative form of sex).

According to Kaarsholm (2006:4), “*virginity testing restores what is known as ancient Zulu respect for Zulu girls, literally, the womb of the nation, to reinvest aspects of Zulu tradition which were eclipsed by colonialism and christianization and to contribute to the development of self respect, self esteem and pride in the Zulu people, particularly the youth in the modern environment*”. Virginity testing was also conducted at marriage and this is a particularly crucial test because if a woman proves to be a virgin, her family retains its honor, but if she fails her family is shamed and she is treated as an outcast. Strong emphasis was therefore placed on ensuring virginity until marriage and it was socially regulated. Even on the wedding eve, virginity testing was done to ensure that the groom had not paid lobola for someone who is no longer a virgin. Preserving virginity was important because it increased a woman’s value especially in marriage and the bride’s family would be in a position to negotiate a high bride price or lobola. If a woman was found not to be a virgin her mother would be given a white sheet with a big hole in the centre signifying that the girl is no longer a virgin (Win, 2004).

A study of attitudes, beliefs and practices of the Vhavenda by Mulaudzi (2004) found that during the virginity testing preparation week, girls were warned against being deflowered before marriage and taught how to engage in sexual activities without losing their virginity. Girls were expected to stay virgins until their marriage. Chastity was highly valued as young adolescents were taught to abstain from sexual intercourse. The girl child knew if she lost her virginity before going to a ceremony called Vhukomba (teenagehood) she would be an embarrassment to her family when virginity testing was conducted.

A study exploring adolescents’ attitudes to virginity by the Kaizer Foundation (2003) noted that adolescents who reported abstaining from sexual activity in high school resulted in them having respect for themselves and enjoying the respect of their family. In addition, adolescents reported that it leads to them feeling that they are in control of their relationships and they are behaving in a manner consistent with their morals or religious beliefs. Manh La (2005:50) found that the “*moral aspect of virginity plays a crucial role in how young adolescents define a virgin woman*”. Young men defined a virgin woman

as displaying faithfulness, purity, self control, and respectfulness. However, it is worth noting that men only value virginity in women whom they consider potential wives; but for other relationships virginity is not a concern. In Vietnam, a study found men felt that marrying a non-virgin would harm their own and their family's social reputation. Community members would not respect their family and the man would lose the respect of his peers. In addition, their concerns would not be taken seriously in community gatherings (Manh La, 2005).

In a study conducted in Tanzania by Longfield, Klein and Berman (2002) the majority of male participants thought that many young men seek female partners who are virgins because they believe that they can be trusted. They reported that virginity is the only indicator of female trustworthiness that they felt they could verify. Some male participants added young men believe that they cannot trust females who submit to their sexual advances. Females who engage in sexual relations without protest are perceived as promiscuous and are also seen as more likely to engage in sexual relations with other partners.

According to Kinoti (2005), virginity testing is done in different ways depending upon the country of origin. In most cases, the vagina is examined to see whether or not the girl's hymen is intact. The hymen is defined as the thin membrane of skin that may stretch across part of the vaginal opening. An opening in the hymen allows the menstrual flow to pass out of the body. However, some health professionals claim that the hymen is not a good indicator of sexual virginity for several reasons.

1. *A girl may have been born without a hymen*
2. *The hymen can easily be ruptured during normal physical activities and sport*
3. *The hymen can be stretched open by the use of tampons (Le Roux, 2006:14).*

According to Scorgie (2002) there are other strategies applied to find out whether or not a woman is still a virgin. She observed that traditionalist claim virginity can be determined by whether or not muscle tone is physically strong (not flabby), buttocks and breast firm,

and abdomen flat and strong. The Izangoma (diviners) further claim they can even determine virginity by looking at the way a girl walks.

Kinoti (2005) does not agree that a virgin should bleed during her first sexual intercourse. A woman may be a virgin and yet not bleed during her first sexual intercourse. Hunter (1936) believes that for a marriage to be enjoyable and an institution of companionship as the Bible requires, women should lose her virginity on the first day of her marriage as this will help to sustain the marriage, meaning they will not have problems in their marriage because the husband will respect the woman. Virginity testing instills pride and ensures the dignity of a woman. In traditional African culture, virginity was always highly regarded and a girl whose virginity was broken before marriage was considered an outcast to be married to an old man, who could set the bride price at his own will and often paid a smaller amount.

According to Ndlovu (2005), various groups (including tribes, churches and families) claim that virginity testing preserves their African identity and their culture, in countries such as Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, and other African countries. For example in South Africa, the Shembe church believes that virginity testing preserves their African identity and that the Shembe church is the only church which still maintains traditional and African culture. Young adolescents who attend the Shembe church cover their faces in church to show that they are virgins and anyone who wants to have a relationship with these girls must first pay bride price (*lobola*). Virginity testing is also conducted in the church by the elders.

George (2007) states that the amount of the bride price (*lobola*) that is exchanged demonstrates the importance placed on girl's virginity at marriage. In the past the main form of exchange in the *lobola* transactions was cattle, however nowadays it is money. The additional cow known as mother's cow (*inkomo kamama*) was given to the girl's mother as a token of gratitude from the future groom's family for providing them with a chaste bride. For example, talking to girls about the importance of maintaining virginity before marriage forms parts of the traditional puberty ritual known as *umhlonyane*. When

a girl has reached 21 years and is found to still be a virgin the father of the girl conducts a traditional ceremony known as *umemulo* in which he thanks his daughter for conducting herself with modesty and dignity.

According to George (2007) the testing tradition among the Zulus was originally intended to assure the purity of young brides who were required to prove their chastity before their parents and future in laws and thereafter they settled on an amount to be transferred by the groom's family to the bride's family. While there is a general consensus that virginity testing was rather widely conducted in the past, presently there is uncertainty regarding its frequency and the manner in which the tests are conducted.

According to Leclerc-Madlala (2001), rural women, the most marginalised of South Africa's population, see virginity testing as the only way to reinstate what they view as the lost cultural values of chastity before marriage: self-respect and pride. For them, inculcating girls with these lost values represent the surest way to repair the lost morals of society that has led to ever increasing problems of teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV and AIDS.

2.3 Virginity testing as a pregnancy prevention strategy

According to Taylor (2004) the high rate of teenage pregnancy among 15-19 year olds shows lack of contraception and condom use and also that adolescents are engaging in sexual activities. Virginity testing is one of the strategies that aim to delay sexual initiation.

According to Scorgie (2002), concerns about the need for fertility control are accorded at least as much importance, in terms of providing a rationale for the revival, as are concerns about AIDS. She observes that young adolescents are undergoing virginity testing in order to prevent pregnancy. It is believed that if young girls undergo virginity testing they will have a fear of engaging in sexual intercourse. In the study of moral panic and cultural mobilisation conducted by Kaarsholom (2005) it was found that respect can

be ensured; boys and girls can be proud of themselves and their good behaviour. This will help young people to honour their culture and respect their bodies as a gift from God.

Gumede (2000) argues that virginity testing prevents teenage pregnancy, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and eases the burden on pensioners, who have to raise unplanned children. In addition, virginity testing is safer than using contraceptives or resorting to abortion. As already mentioned, virginity was directly linked to socialisation as girls were taught at an early age to view their genitals as their mother's cow (*inkomo kamama*) which made them a valuable asset. Another study conducted by George (2008) found that the AIDS epidemic places tremendous pressure on grandparents to provide social support for a growing number of grandchildren whose parents have died so it is in their best interest to regulate fertility and prevent pregnancy.

Risk factors that contribute to early childbearing are cultural issues, non-use of contraceptives, and early sexual debut as well as abuse of alcohol. The International Women's Health Coalition (2008) states that alcohol use is often associated with early sexual activity. Alcohol impairs judgment which can result in failure to use condoms, thus increasing the risk of unwanted pregnancy. Condom use is low in South Africa, and is often dependent on the type of relationship (International Women's Health Coalition). Condoms are more likely to be used in casual or non-regular partnerships (Maharaj, 2006). Barriers to condom use include the widespread perception of condoms representing high risk sexual partners. In addition, men and women complain that wearing condoms makes sexual intercourse less pleasurable (Maharaj, 2006).

In the study of barriers to adolescents' contraceptive use in South Africa, conducted by Jewkes (2006), it was found that nurses' attitudes were major barriers to teenagers accessing contraceptives. Therefore nurses' attitudes contribute to high levels of unwanted teenage pregnancies. The study also found that social pressures prevented young women from using contraception. Young people feel that they would only be accepted as women once they prove their fertility and men put pressure on their girlfriends to fall pregnant.

2.4 Virginitv testing as an HIV prevention strategy

Young people have multiple partners, placing them at increased risk of HIV infection. One of the advocates of virginitv testing, Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa, was reported as having encouraged girls to take the tests as a way of curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS and reducing the prevalence of early pregnancies. He refers to virginitv as a girl's family treasure, saying that traditionally girls would only have sex when permitted to do so by their families (Kinoti, 2005). According to George (2007) virginitv testing was a traditional custom previously associated with marriage; and strong emphasis was placed on total abstinence from sexual intercourse by girls but nowadays virginitv testing is associated with HIV/AIDS prevention. The practice is being revived to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, Nadera (2006) states that the traditional norm of virginitv testing for unmarried girls in many societies increases young women's risk of infection because it restricts their ability to ask for information about sex out of fear that they will be thought to be sexually active, already mentioned earlier by Gupta (2000).

A study by George (2008) reveals that some young adolescents undergo virginitv testing to protect themselves against the risk of HIV infection. Often young people who are sexually active do not use condoms. It is for this reason that virginitv testing is conducted because it is believed that virginitv testing will discourage adolescents from engaging in sexual relationships. Testers claim that the revival of the practice of virginitv testing promotes the lost African cultural values and traditions while preventing unprotected sexual intercourse and the risk of HIV infection. This was also earlier mentioned by Kinoti (2005).

Another study on virginitv testing found that girls reported they were willing participants in virginitv testing and were proud of their cultural heritage (Law, 2005). They stated that virginitv testing protected them from sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies and affirmed their self- respect. They pointed out that the practice has socio-economic advantages in that it contributes to a decreased risk of HIV/AIDS because it keeps girls attending school and reduces the need for social grants. They regarded

virginity testing as empowering and urged that it must continue, subject to the participation being voluntary and conducted under hygienic conditions.

For some women, marriage increases the risk of HIV infection (International Women's Coalition, 2008: 1). More than fourth-fifths of new infections in women occur in marriage or in long-term relationships with primary partners. Some women who are living with HIV/AIDS were virgins when they got married and had remained faithful to their husbands, (International Women's Coalition, 2008). In the study of sexual power and HIV risk, conducted by Pettifor, Measham, Rees and Padian (2004) it was reported that women are: not obtaining HIV tests; not disclosing test results; not requesting that their partners be tested; not using condoms or remaining faithful because of the fear of being beaten or abandoned by their partners. Fearing violence or rejection, 58 percent of South African girls avoid discussing condom use with their partners. Yet in couples where one partner is infected with HIV, consistent and correct condom use provides the HIV negative person with a near zero risk of infection (International Women's Health Coalition, 2008).

Gender power inequities play a big role in the HIV epidemic through their effect on sexual relations. In the context of poverty, young women see money as the driving force for sex and relationship formation. Partnerships with men who can provide financially are essential and relationships with older men are the norm (International Women's Health Coalition, 2008). A report by the HSRC (2009) noted that unprotected sex with a large number of sexual partners increases the risk of contracting HIV, with the risk being greater in the context of a generalised epidemic. The HIV viral load is high during the early stages of infection and is likely to lead to increased transmission by partner change among infected people. In addition, the transmission of HIV is also facilitated by the presence of other sexually transmitted diseases and therefore the increased risk of these infections from multiple partners further increases the spread of HIV (HSRC, 2009).

2.5 Consequences of virginity testing

According to Bower (2003) the rate of rape in South Africa is high and still rising. The rape of young children is a particular problem. Government has done much in combating the sexual abuse of children and non-governmental organisations play a vital role in this regard. Much of the work being done focuses on recognising, rejecting, and reporting touching of genitals even if the person doing the touching is stronger and more powerful than the child. *“Virginity testing flies in the face of this strategy and the contradiction of the instructions to children for their protection can and will confuse them. It renders children more vulnerable to sexual abuse”* (Bower, 2003:4). George (2007) stated that virginity testing also puts young girls at risk of rape and sexual coercion in high HIV prevalence countries because of the belief that sex with a virgin can cleanse a man of infection.

As mentioned earlier, Gupta (2000) observes that in South Africa, a myth has arisen that an HIV positive man can be cured by having sex with a virgin. This is one of the factors that has led to the rape of many girls and resulted in them acquiring the virus (Gupta, 2000). Virginity testing confirms which girls are virgins and exposes them to the risk of being raped and contracting HIV/AIDS. Many people attend the ceremony not because they are happy for the girls who are virgins but because they can identify which girls are virgins and will run after them asking for marriage. George (2008) argues that men who are HIV positive may be more likely to target virgins. The study reported that young girls are *“sought as sexual partners by older men”* in an attempt to avoid contracting HIV/AIDS from older sexually active women who may be infected (George, 2008: 1462).

As already stated, Zungu (2000) also noted that virginity testing plays a positive role in identifying cases and incidences of child abuse in communities. In the study conducted by Kaarshalom (2005) the respondents argue that the prospect of virginity testing will help to encourage young girls to abstain from sexual relations. Also virginity testing will

assist in bringing early attention to cases of rape by family members, which were seen by these respondents as a major problem.

Some studies look at the implications involved in virginity testing. George (2007) argues that children who are found to be non-virgins are exposed to physical and emotional danger. Shaulhoub-Kevorkian (2004) found out that some women in the Middle East who had undergone virginity testing and found not to be virgins had committed suicide. Wickstrom (2008) in her study in KwaZulu-Natal found that one young girl who was found not to be a virgin did not want to go home; she sat in the classroom disappointedly. Lichtenstein (2000) argues that economic and cultural factors weigh heavily on a young woman's ability to maintain her virginity. Some young girls engage in sexual relationships in exchange for money, clothes and accessories. Virginity is often thought of as a state of sexual innocence attributed to young unmarried females rather than males.

Children who have been sexually abused face the risk of abandonment, rejection, and violence. Bower (2005: pp 4) also observes that *“young girls who are at risk of not passing the virginity test have been known to take steps which endanger their health to convince the testers that they are virgins. This measure includes the insertion of meat into the vagina”*. Gupta (2000) stated that in cultures where virginity is highly valued, research has shown that some young women practise alternative sexual behaviors, such as anal sex in order to preserve their virginity. In areas where virginity testing has become common doctors report a rise in physical traumas associated with anal sex among young women. Doctors suspect that the rise in HIV infection rates in girls of a particular age group are directly related to increased participation in anal sex. Afraid of failing their virginity tests, girls might be agreeing to or perhaps suggesting anal sex to their partners as an alternative to vaginal penetration. (Shaulhoub-Kevorkian, 2004: 5)

Ndlovu (2005) argues that women are encouraged to maintain their virginity while their partners are being encouraged to acts as 'real' men. A 'real' man has many sexual partners. The girls who have passed the test will contract the disease from their HIV infected husbands with whom the idea of abstinence is never discussed. Because of the

strong norms of virginity and the culture of silence that surrounds sex accessing treatment services for sexually transmitted diseases can be highly stigmatising for adolescents and adult women.

Attitudes towards virginity testing in the Middle East are tied to larger views about women's status in general and political attempts to control women and their sexuality. According to Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2004) the Middle East is one of the countries that perform virginity testing as a cultural practice. Women's sexuality is perceived as something that must be controlled by society and the state. Some of the social reasons given for performing the test are certification that intercourse has not taken place prior to marriage and that the girl child has not experienced rape before marriage. Loss of virginity and evidence of premarital sex are important taboos. Medical doctors are bribed to confirm virginity if a woman has had sex before marriage. Women who are found not to be virgins experience stigmatisation and undergo emotional abuse by their husbands. In Muslim culture, women should lose her virginity on her wedding night.

2.6 Virginity testing and human rights

Although virginity testing in South Africa enjoys popular support at the grassroots it is widely opposed by some African feminists, AIDS activists, and medical experts. According to Gupta (2000) gender norms and expectations keep women uninformed about their bodies and sexual health. They are often denied health services especially reproductive health care, which prevents them from accessing treatment and information about HIV risks. As mentioned earlier, cultural mores however may encourage men to have many sexual partners; they are often encouraged to have multiple partners to be regarded as real men in society, which places women at even greater risk of HIV. Women receive no education about sexual issues and if a woman is seen to have information about sexual issues; she is regarded as being promiscuous.

George (2007) explores the tensions between the rights of women and girls to equality, privacy, and sexual autonomy, and the politics of culture in the context of the AIDS

pandemic. He argues that the current debate on virginity testing which focus on abolition or accommodation of the practice is misguided and polarising. Virginity testing is not a cure to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. As mentioned earlier, some people argue that virginity testing is often involuntary and discriminatory; there is often social pressure to participate and the testing has been opposed as unhygienic and a violation of human rights. There are reports of young women and girls being forced to participate in virginity testing. Shaulhoub Kevorkian (2004) found that some women in the Middle East refuse to sit on the examination chair, often crying, screaming, and pushing.

George (2007) suggests that rather than focusing on the assumed inherent conflict between gender equality and cultural autonomy there should be an engaged public discourse on the right to health, and an ethical obligation from the government to provide health information and adequate health services. The author further states that such a shift will cause the government and civil society to recognise that legal and medical approaches cannot in isolation sufficiently improve public health, it is necessary to acknowledge and embrace cultural norms while at the same time recognising that such norms evolve over time to accommodate contemporary lifestyle and trends.

According to George (2008) the expansion of virginity testing, a cultural practice that impacts on young unmarried women and girls presents a dilemma for South Africa's pluralistic society. The South African government is a new constitutional democracy committed to both equality and the preservation of the customs and traditional practices of its many different cultures. South Africa has the difficult task of balancing cultural rights with other human rights. The struggle over virginity testing promotes a return to traditional culture as a public health prevention measure.

Kinoti (2005) argues that virginity testing relies on shame and fear of stigmatisation rather than free choice, to encourage girls to abstain from sex before marriage. Virginity testing fails to take into account involuntary sexual encounters such as rape, meaning that a girl who has been raped may experience trauma if she has to undergo virginity testing.

According to William (2005) virginity testing for children will fail to heal the gender inequality of the past and will make the girl child even more vulnerable. Virginity testing discriminates against women and impairs the dignity and well-being of the girl child. The certificate awarded to girls who has passed the test creates fear of isolation and stigmatisation for the young girls who failed the test. This discriminates against girls, as their male partners are free to do what they wish while girls have the responsibility of ensuring that their hymens remain intact.

Zungu (2000) states that society is facing the challenge of having to establish whether or not the practice discriminates against women. The practice of virginity testing places the entire responsibility for safe sex, abstinence, and the spread of sexually transmitted disease on the shoulders of women, who are often victims of gender inequality, this was also earlier mentioned by William (2005) Women are expected to maintain a high level of morality so that they can get married to men who might have impregnated other girls and who could already be HIV positive.

Well (2004) argue that virginity testing in Turkey is discriminatory, highly invasive and often involuntary, underlying the practice of virginity testing as cultural norms, which dictate that women who are not virgins may not be considered eligible for marriage and could dishonour their families. Some people argue that such practice contradicts South Africa's Bill of Rights which promotes gender equity (RAPCAN, 2006).

Pamela (2007) believes that this test might seem the right way to go to stop the spread of the disease but upon critically analysing the issue it is quite clear that virginity testing does not really aid in controlling the spread.

Pamela (2007) argues that women's sexuality is nobody's business but their own and it is up to them if they decide to maintain or lose their virginity. It should be a decision that is logical and not based on fear of societal repercussions. Win (2004) also argues that maintaining one's virginity should be a matter of individual choice. Telling a young woman to maintain her virginity is not giving her the autonomy to decide and feel good

about herself. Women need to be empowered but in order for them to be empowered it is important to eradicate particular myths about women's sexuality, reproduction, and culture.

Virginity testing discriminates on the grounds of gender and impairs the dignity and well being of the girl child. In addition, only girls, not boys, are subject to virginity testing and therefore they are more likely to suffer trauma if they fail to pass the test. There is a double standard that exists in society which disadvantages girls. Girls are often encouraged to remain virgins up until marriage while boys are encouraged to demonstrate their 'manhood' by having many sexual partners.

2.7 Summary

This chapter has examined the existing literature on virginity testing. It has covered different arguments written by researchers, as well as their findings and reports. Virginity testing is a cultural practice associated with respect, purity, self control, honour, pride, modesty, and chastity before marriage. A woman is expected to have her first sexual intercourse in marriage. The amount of the bride price that is exchanged demonstrates the importance placed on a girl's virginity at marriage. It is believed that virginity testing protects young people from sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and HIV/AIDS. However some researchers argue that virginity testing renders children more vulnerable to sexual abuse and rape.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods used in the study. The study was largely qualitative in nature and the researcher used mixed qualitative methods: focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. The chapter will start by describing the study sites, the qualitative methods used, as well as the methods used to analyse the data. It also explores some of the limitations of the study.

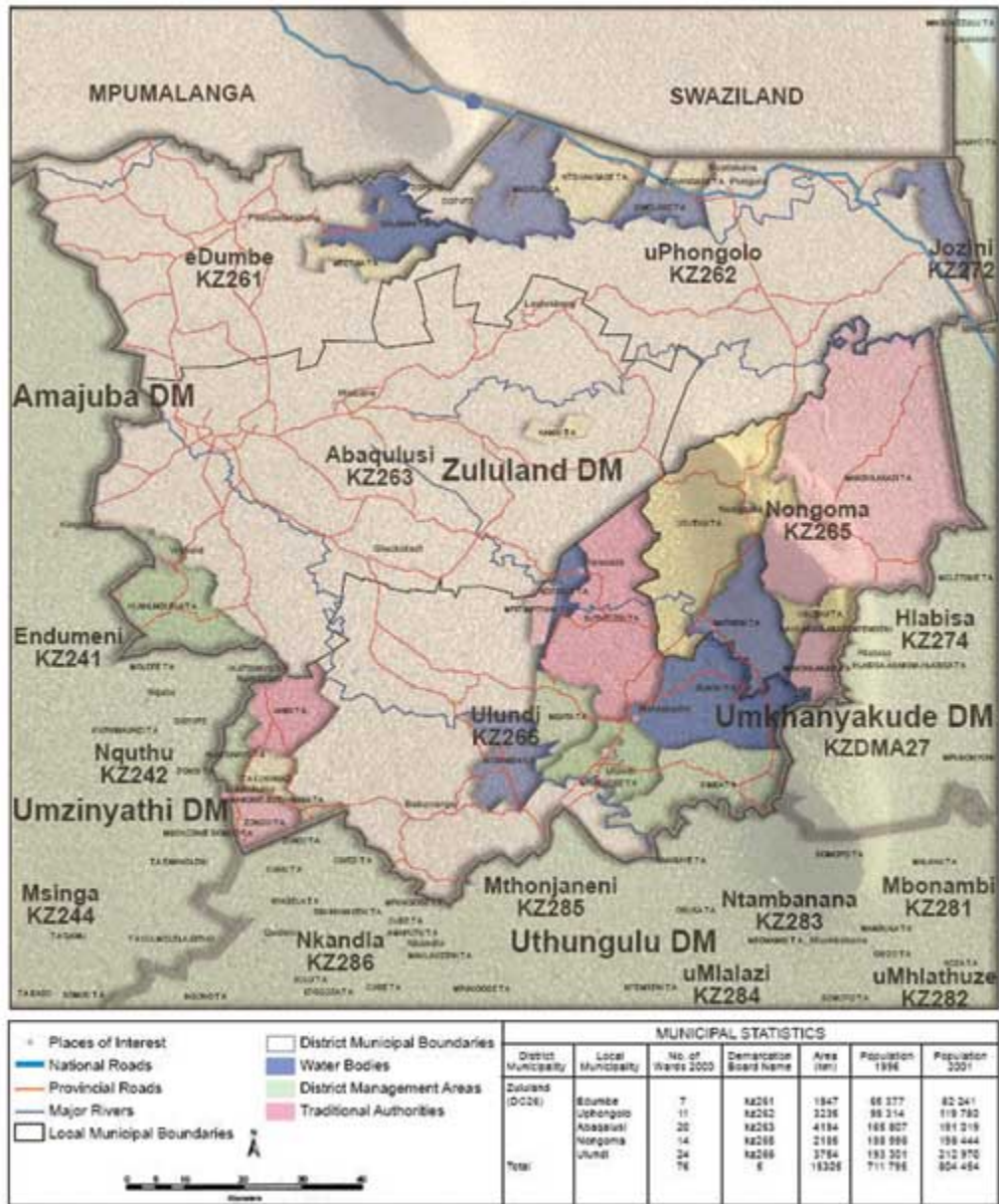
3.2. Study Setting

3.2.1 KwaZulu-Natal

KwaZulu-Natal has a population of 9.8 million constituting 21 percent of the total population of South Africa (McCord, 2004), and has a larger proportion of females than males. Almost 53 percent of the population of KwaZulu-Natal constitutes women. It is one of the poorest provinces in South Africa with a high unemployment rate. Almost 36 percent of the population is unemployed (McCord, 2004). Most of the population is dependent on agricultural employment (May, 2000). According to May (2000) most of the economic activities in KwaZulu-Natal are concentrated in Durban, Pinetown, Pietermaritzburg, Empangeni, and Newcastle. The poverty line of KwaZulu-Natal is R322 per month.

The poverty level in KwaZulu-Natal has remained high since 1994 with 21 percent of South Africa's population falling below the poverty line (Department of Welfare, 1998). Social factors like education, unemployment, poor health and housing quality are closely linked to poverty. The poverty rate is higher in the rural than the urban area (Department of Welfare, 1998).

Figure 3.1



Source: Mabaso, 2006

3.2.2. Nongoma

Nongoma is situated in the North Eastern part of KwaZulu-Natal with a population of about 230 762 (Mabaso, 2006). The majority of the population is Africans, with 55 percent females and 45 percent males. The majority (98%) of the population is rural. Nongoma is characterised by a high unemployment rate. Mabaso (2006) further states that 63 percent of the population in Nongoma is not economically active but depend on those who are economically active. Almost two thirds of the population depends on government grants for support. Nongoma is not very different from other rural areas in South Africa. The level of education is relatively low and the area is characterised by a lack of facilities which brings health problems in the form of diseases such as cholera (Pamela, 2007).

Nongoma is the traditional home of the Zulu. It is a place rich in history and culture. One of the most colorful and vibrant festivals on the Zulu cultural calendar is the annual Reed Dance which is presided over by King Goodwill Zwelithini. It is done during September when the reed has matured and become greenish in colour. Fifteen thousand Zulu virgins from different places gather at the traditional residence of the Zulu King Enyokeni for the colorful and meaningful ceremony (Chennels et al., 2008).

According to Pamela (2007) most of the traditional leaders reside in Nongoma. King Goodwill Zwelithini is referred to as the reed of the nation (Uhlanga lwezwe). The Zulu reed dance is an educational experience and an opportunity for young maidens to learn how to behave in front of the King. The Zulu reed constitutes a significant part of Zulu heritage in reflecting diverse African customs. It portrays and instills a sense of pride, belonging, and identity among the youth. Most of the traditional ceremonies are performed at Nongoma such as the uMkhosi wokweshama or the First Fruit Ceremony. The Zulu kraals in Nongoma display the traditional Zulu way of life (Chennels et al., 1998).

3.3. Qualitative Methodology

According to O'Neil (2006) qualitative research means any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures. Qualitative research is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena (O'Neil, 2006). That is to say it aims to help us understand the world in which we live in and why things are the way they are. It is concerned with social aspects of our world and seeks to answer questions about why people behave the way they do (Creswell, 1994). *How are opinions and attitudes formed? How are people affected by the events that go on around them? How and why have cultures developed in the way they have? What are the differences between the various social groups?* (Creswell, 1994: 50).

O'Neil (2006) further states that qualitative research is used to help us understand how people feel and why they feel as they do. It is concerned with collecting in-depth information, asking question such as why do you say that? Samples tend to be small. In-depth interviews or focus group discussions are two common methods used for collecting qualitative information. Another method of qualitative research is action research, where the emphasis is placed on the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting in which they are located. Detailed data is captured through open-ended questions using techniques such as focus groups and in-depth interviews.

Morgan (1998) states that qualitative research usually achieves a greater level of depth and detail than quantitative techniques. Qualitative methods are preferred when researching sensitive subjects. Rather than being constrained by preset answers, they allow personal issues to be approached in a sensitive way by allowing the researcher to employ personal skills to help lessen the difficulties of the subject matter. Morgan (1998) further states that qualitative methods create openness between all parties and can help generate new theories. Participating subjects can discuss issues that are important to them, rather than only responding to closed questions, and can clarify ambiguities or confusion over concepts.

According to Morgan (1998) qualitative methods are appropriate in situations where one needs to first identify the variables that might later be tested quantitatively. According to Lewis (1995) fewer subjects tend to be studied, resulting in the study findings being more difficult to generalise. Openness and greater interaction with the researcher can in some cases be counter-productive. Some subjects can feel uncomfortable in the presence of an interviewer and give inaccurate answers under duress. Additionally elements like gender and ethnicity of the researcher can impact on some of the answers given by participating subjects.

Lewis (1995) further states that qualitative results are more difficult to analyse. It can also be extremely difficult to repeat research due to a lack of structured design or standardised procedures. It is very difficult to prevent or detect researcher induced bias. The scope of qualitative research is limited due to the in-depth or comprehensive data gathering approaches required. Qualitative interviews are usually fairly informal. Interviewees feel as though they are participating in a conversation or discussion rather than a formal question and answer situation. However achieving this informal style is dependent on careful planning and skills in conducting the interview.

3.4. Mixed Methods

The concept of a mixed method approach to research is often discussed in the context of combining qualitative and quantitative methods, but it also applies to when using more than one qualitative method to carry out an investigation (Lewis, 1995). The mixed method approach is based on the idea that a combination of data collection methods provides a better understanding of research problems than one method of data collection (Lewis, 1995).

Mixed methods enable the strengths of some methods to compensate for the limitations of others. A mixed method also gives the investigator additional perspectives and insights that can go beyond the scope of single technique (Lewis, 1995). Mixed methods provide valuable opportunities for data triangulation, transformation, and instrument

design. The design has great potential for exploring new topics or familiarising research teams with a new area. A mixed method can also assist in theory building (Creswell, 1998), and help to focus or deal with the research process or research problem from all sides. This approach of gathering and evaluating information can increase the validity and accuracy of the information (Morgan, 1998). A mixed method can answer a broader and more complete range of researcher's questions and can be used to increase the generalizability of the results (Creswell, 1998).

The mixed method design requires training in more than one method and the researcher therefore has to understand how to appropriately mix them. It may require researchers to work in multiple teams. Mixed methods are more expensive and time consuming. Some of the details of mix method research remain to be fully worked out by research methodologist (Morgan, 1998). This study made use of mixed methods including focus group discussions and in-depth interviews.

3.5. Focus Group Discussions

According to Patton (1990), focus groups interviews are essential in the evaluation process as part of needs assessment, during, or at the end of a programme, or some months after the completion of a programme, to formulate perceptions on the outcome. During group discussions, individuals may shift due to the influence of other members of the group (Patton, 1990).

Lewis (1995) suggests that the purpose is to obtain information of a qualitative nature from a limited number of people. Most focus group consists of between 6 – 12 people. Some studies require that several groups are convened. Morgan (1998) believes that one group is never enough as you may be observing the dynamics of that group and little else.

For the present study, three focus group discussions were conducted: girls who had undergone virginity testing, girls and boys mixed and boys only. The age of the

participants ranged from 13 to 19 years. Each focus group consisted of about six people and the emphasis was on understanding their perceptions of virginity testing.

All the discussions were tape recorded with the permission of the participants. According to Kreuger (1988) tape recorders are invaluable for focus group discussions however they are prone to pick up background noises. As a result, the researcher made field notes after each session to facilitate data analysis.

3.6. In-Depth Interviews

According to Creswell (1994) an in-depth interview is an open ended discovery oriented method that is well suited for describing both programme processes and outcomes for the perspectives of the target audience. The goal of the interview is to deeply explore the respondent's point of view, feelings, and perspectives. In-depth interviews occur with one individual at a time to provide detailed information of their experiences.

Hancock (1998) states that in-depth interviews involve a series of open ended questions based on the topic areas the researcher wants to cover. The open ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation but also provides opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewee to discuss some topics in more detail. If the interviewee has difficulty answering a question or provides only a brief response, the interviewer can use cues or prompts to encourage the interviewee to consider the question further. In-depth interviews tend to work well when the interviewer has already identified a number of aspects he or she wants to address.

According to Creswell (1994), in-depth interviews are ideal for investigating personal, sensitive, or confidential information which is unsuitable in a group format. They are also the best method when seeking individual interpretations and responses. In-depth interviews are valuable for researching people with busy lifestyles who would be unlikely to attend focus groups.

In-depth interview questions were used so that participants could discuss issues that are important to them and also feel free to express their views on virginity testing. The reasons for using in-depth interview questions were to provide opportunities for interviewees to discuss virginity testing in detail. In total, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted and the researcher used the same criteria for selecting respondents as the focus group discussions. The researcher selected 5 girls and 5 boys to interview.

3.7. Data Collection

The researcher used a snowball sample to find girls who had undergone virginity testing. According to Cresswell (1994) snowball sampling is when you identify one respondent and ask that respondent to nominate other individuals who could be asked to give information on the topic. The researcher interviews these individuals until getting no new information from the new person. The reason for using snowball sampling is because it is a good method for selecting from a population that is not well delimited.

It was not easy to find participants for the study, because the study is sensitive and involves discussion of cultural issues. Some participants cannot talk freely about virginity testing because of the stigma and the fear that they will be perceived as sexually active. The research study was conducted in a remote rural area that involved large traveling expenses which was a limiting factor, as was the age of participants. Permission to interview young people was obtained from the headman and also parents. Permission to tape record and signatures of informed consent was obtained from the participants. The researcher first went to see the headman and explain the reasons for conducting the study to obtain permission to interview young adolescents.

The respondents participated voluntarily and were given the assurance that the information they have given will remain confidential between them and the researcher. Anonymity and privacy were strictly observed as no names were used to identify respondents; numbers were used as a form of identification. Actual names of respondents

were also not used in the dissertation to ensure anonymity of the respondents. All the participants agreed to sign the informed consent form given to them as part of the ethics requirements. The informed consent form follows the informed consent principle, that is, it gives information about the project, purpose of the study, selection criteria, as well as the researcher's identity (Creswell, 1994). Informed consent is crucial as it ensures that people's freedom and rights are not infringed by the research, and participants are granted the liberty to choose to be involved in the research. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in the local language (Zulu), in September 2008. The interviews were transcribed and then translated into English.

Ethical considerations were at all times used to guide the conduct of the study. In particular, three basic ethical considerations (voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality) were at all times respected by the researcher during the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal higher degrees committee. The interview schedule was prepared and submitted to the supervisor before the researcher commenced fieldwork.

3.8. Data Analysis

The researcher used thematic analysis to analyse data. According to Creswell (1994) thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data. Hayes (2000:56) defines themes as "*recurrent ideas or topics which are detected in the scripts being analysed, they usually come up in more than one occasion in a particular set of data*". Thematic analysis helps the researcher to explore the depth of qualitative data. From the transcribed interviews, the researcher listed common ideas and then developed a theme. The researcher identified all the data that relate to the above mentioned pattern or theme and entered the data appropriately.

3.9. Summary

This chapter provided an overview of study sites, the qualitative methods used in the study, as well as some of the limitations of the study. The researcher used mixed methods for data collection: in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. A mixed method approach of gathering and evaluating information helped the researcher to increase the validity and accuracy of the information. By using a mixed method approach, the researcher managed to answer a broader and more complete range of questions because the researcher was not confined to single method approach.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details findings from a study conducted in rural KwaZulu-Natal to gather perceptions of and attitudes towards virginity testing. The findings presented have emerged from the data obtained through in-depth interviews and focus groups with adolescents. The themes to be discussed in this chapter are based on recurrent ideas which emerged in the interviews.

4.2 Findings

4.21 Definition of virginity testing

Young adolescents were able to define virginity testing. They define virginity testing as: *“it is when you lay down and the elders insert the finger to check whether the hymen is still intact, if the hymen is intact you are declared a virgin and when the hymen is not intact then you are declared a non-virgin.”* They also define virginity testing as *“it is when you lie down on your back and the testers insert their fingers in the vagina to check if a girl has been sexually active or not. If you are a virgin you will receive a white dot pasted on your forehead, if you are no longer a virgin then they will not paste a white dot on your forehead”*.

Both male and female participants were able to identify the procedures involved in virginity testing. Inserting fingers into a vagina is a method that is being used to check whether or not a girl is a virgin. They all reported that a girl who is no longer a virgin will not receive a white dot on her forehead. Both female and male participants reported that an intact hymen is seen as an indicator of virginity. Participants referred to the ‘hymen’ as the ‘eye’.

4.2.2 How is virginity testing conducted?

Participants were asked to explain how virginity testing is conducted. Female respondents reported that there are two different ways of determining whether a girl is a virgin or not. In the first method the girl would lie down and the tester inserts a finger into the vagina to check whether or not the hymen is still intact. The second method requires the tester to use a jug of water: the girl will lie down on the floor and the tester will pour the jug of water into her vagina, if the whole jug of water enters her vagina then she is viewed as no longer a virgin.

“You lie down on your back and then the testers will insert the finger to check whether the hymen is still there or not”. [IDI#3, Female]

“You lie down with your back and the testers will pour a jug of water into your vagina and if the whole jug goes into your vagina then you are no longer a virgin but if half of it goes into your vagina then you are a virgin.” [IDI#1, Female]

The female respondents reported that there has been a change in the way virginity testing has been conducted in the past few years. They reported that some testers now use a machine. They reported that a girl will lie down and the tester will place a machine in the vagina. If the light on the machine turns green then the girls is a virgin, but if the light turns red then the girl is not a virgin.

“The testers no longer use their hands, they now use a machine because when they put their fingers in the vagina, sometimes they break the hymen, and when we go there the following year they will find out that we are no longer virgins, even if we did not engage in sexual relationships”. [FGD#1, Females]

All the female participants reported they are now happy that the testers are using a machine to determine virginity. They reported that the hymen may break when fingers

are used to determine virginity and this traumatises young girls. In addition, the elders are unlikely to believe that the girl lost her virginity during the testing process.

In the interviews, participants failed to point out that sometimes a virgin does not bleed during her first sexual intercourse. This may be due to a number of reasons. As earlier mentioned by Le Roux (2006), many doctors claim a hymen is not a good indicator of virginity because the hymen can easily break through sports and physical activities or even as a result of tampon use. Boys and girls strongly believe that a virgin should bleed on her first sexual intercourse. Interestingly, it was found that some girls do indeed lose their virginity when the testers insert their fingers in the vagina. It was reported that the finger should be gently inserted to avoid the tearing of the hymen during the virginity testing process.

“In the past few years when the testers used their fingers to check whether a girl is still a virgin or not, the insertion of the finger broke the virginity of the girl and when the girl goes for virginity testing the following year she was declared as a non-virgin. However this happened to a few girls, not all the girls and that is why we are now using a machine.” [IDI#4, Female]

From the interviews it emerged that a girl who lost her virginity before marriage suffers discrimination and is not allowed to perform activities that are meant for virgins. Safeguarding fertility before marriage was offered as one of the most important reasons for virginity testing.

4.2.3 Difference between a virgin and non-virgin

Girls showed much knowledge when discussing the difference between someone who is a virgin and someone who is no longer a virgin. A virgin's breast should point upwards and a virgin's body should be firm with no veins. Others reported that older people can tell if you are no longer a virgin just by looking at the eyes of girls. Some of the participants reported that when the virgin urinates in the sand, her urine will break the sand. There

will be a mark on the sand that shows it was a virgin who urinated in the sand. They reported that there will be a small hole in the sand.

“The legs of someone who is not a virgin becomes loose, the veins of someone who is a virgin are firm, the whole body is firm and the breast pointing upward look strong and firm. When she is walking, you can see from her walk that she is a virgin. When a virgin is urinating in the sands, the urine of the virgin breaks the sand”. [IDI# 1, female]

“People say that older people can even tell just by looking at your eyes, they say your eyes are not full like the one of the virgin. When a virgin is urinating in the sand, the sand breaks and it will have holes. You can see the thighs of someone who is a virgin even if she is facing backwards.” [FGD#1, Females]

“If you are a virgin your breast points upwards and the body becomes tight and firm, when you are urinating on the soil, the soil breaks and the urine comes faster.” [IDI# 5, Female]

4.2.4 Age at which a girl is expected to lose her virginity

Respondents were asked to give their opinion of the age at which a girl is expected to lose her virginity. Most female respondents felt that a girl should lose her virginity at the age of 21 when the traditional ceremony known as ‘umemulo’ or the 21st party has been performed by the girl’s father to show his appreciation and gratitude to his daughter for behaving in a culturally acceptable manner.

By conducting this ceremony the father is giving permission to his daughter to now engage in sexual relation for she has reached the age of maturity. When a girl reaches the age of 21 without losing her virginity she is respected by her peers and also the elderly. Even though many respondents reported that it is acceptable for a girl to lose her virginity at the age of 21, a few respondents believed that a girl should still remain a virgin until marriage.

Some of the respondents observed that there are families who do not perform the traditional ceremonies for young girls. Instead the parents choose to arrange a 21st party for the girl and she will be given a key as a token of gratitude that she has behaved appropriately. It was observed that those who celebrate a 21st party are usually Christians as opposed to Zulu's who uphold traditional culture

“She must remain a virgin up until lobola is paid and she has married. A girl should lose her virginity in her marriage” [IDI#2, Female]

“Up until you reach 21 and your father has done the traditional ceremony known as ‘umemulo’ or the 21st party then only you may engage in sexual activity” [FGD#3, Mixed]

“The bible says that a couple should engage in sexual activity once the couple have married.” [IDI#7, male]

“Normally people who comes from families who are Christians, they do not have the traditional ceremony known as ‘umemulo’, they usually have the 21 party” [IDI#5, Female]

Some respondents hold a different view about the age at first sexual intercourse. One respondent stated that the girl should make the decision. The decision should not be influenced by others in the community. She felt that the decision to engage in sexual intercourse should be made by the girl herself and the girl should have sexual intercourse when she feels ready for the act.

“A girl should decide when to lose her virginity and she should not be influenced by culture or adults. Let me give you an example, if a girl feels that she is ready to have sexual intercourse even though she has not reached 21, she must do so regardless of whether she has reached 21 or not” .[IDI#4, Female]

4.2.5 Young people's view on the importance of virginity testing

Participants were asked to give their views on the importance of virginity testing. Both male and female participants saw virginity testing as an integral part of Zulu cultural identity; as a result, young girls are supposed to be proud of themselves. Virginity testing is associated with self respect, modesty, and pride. A girl child is expected to be proud that she is a virgin and the society should also respect her. If she is no longer a virgin she does not deserve social respect and her peers will discriminate against her. The parents of a girl who has been found to be a virgin will be respected and honoured for they have brought up the girl child in a culturally acceptable manner.

Girls who are virgins also bring pride to their future in-laws. Girls who remain virgins until marriage will receive the respect of their in-laws. The in-laws will be happy that the bride is a virgin and they will treat her with respect and honour. It is believed that virginity testing is likely to lead to a happy marriage. If a girl lost her virginity before marriage she will suffer the consequences of being a non-virgin in the marriage. Respondents explained that girls who are not virgins will always be reminded that they lost their virginity before marriage. In order for a girl to enjoy a happy and fulfilling marriage she has to maintain her virginity until after her wedding.

“Virginity testing is associated with pride and self respect. A girl should be proud of herself that she has conducted herself in a culturally acceptable manner. The elders will respect her and also her peers.” [IDI#3, Female]

“When a non-virgin gets married, she will never enjoy her marriage because whenever problems arises, she will always be reminded that she got married after she lost her virginity and it causes her pain and suffering.” [IDI#1, Female]

A girl who has lost her virginity before marriage will have to undergo cleansing, as she has brought shame to her parents. Respondents were asked to provide details of the cleansing ceremony. They reported that girls who are virgins demand money (silver

coins) from girls who have lost their virginity before marriage; half of the money is thrown away while bathing in a river and the other half will be used to buy items such as soaps and towels. The respondents reported that they are not allowed to buy food with the money because it is believed to come from dirty work.

“If you lost your virginity before marriage, we will go and demand money (silver coins) for cleansing and virgins together with the girl who has lost her virginity will go to the river where we will throw away these coins and bath in the river.” [IDI#5, Female]

“A girl who has lost her virginity should go for cleansing and she should give us coins, we should use that money for buying things like soaps or bath towels. We do not use that money to buy food because it is believed that it is the money that comes out of dirty work.” [IDI#2, Female]

One of the purposes of virginity testing is to keep a record of the number of virgins in a society and also to identify the number of girls who are no longer virgins. Some girls do not report when they have been raped, so conducting virginity testing helps in trying to identify girls who have been sexually abused. It was reported that those who have been raped by family members fear reporting the abuse.

“I think virginity testing is conducted in order to keep a record of how many girls are still virgins and to know who is no longer a virgin, and also to know when someone has been raped. It is a way of ensuring virginity and makes young girls abstain from sexual intercourse. The status of being a virgin is important.” [IDI# 4, Female]

“Some girls have a fear of reporting rape, especially those who are raped by family members like uncles, they do not report the rape, but when they go for virginity testing and are found to be no longer a virgin that is when they will start speaking up.” [IDI#10, Male]

Still on the young people's view on the importance of virginity testing, many young men and women were against the banning of virginity testing. Most respondents reported that it should not be banned, because a Zulu nation is nothing without its culture and it is important for them to identify themselves as Zulus. What worries them is that the Xhosa still practice their culture (circumcision) but the government wants to ban an integral part of Zulu culture. If the government decides to ban virginity testing, the government must also ban circumcision. Just as circumcision is an important part of Xhosa culture, virginity testing is an important part of the Zulu culture.

Virginity testing is also seen as giving girls higher status in the community. Young adolescents believe that virginity testing empowers them as young girls. They reported that they gain respect not only from elders but also from young boys who see them as potential wives, not girls whom they can have sex with and afterwards not marry.

“As I have said earlier, they want to keep young girls virgins before marriage and their parents will also gain something if they are still virgins before marriage because the groom will pay 12 cows for a virgin and if found not to be a virgin the girl will be forced to marry an older man and society will discriminate against her. What I can say here is that if you are a virgin you hold a much higher value.” [IDI# 8, Male]

“They want to ensure that young girls do not engage in sexual activities before marriage and since AIDS is high I think it is the way they want to curb it. It is part of African culture to undergo virginity testing, it is culturally based. Virginity testing is associated with the bride's value and lobola. One thing I know is that if you are a virgin, the price is high and if not, it is low. As a virgin, you gain respect from the family and the whole nation. The groom's family will respect you and you will enjoy your marriage. A girl should break her virginity on the first day of her marriage.” [IDI# 1, Female]

In the face of the high HIV prevalence in KwaZulu-Natal, virginity testing is identified as one method that will curb HIV/AIDS and it is also believed that it will reduce the teenage

pregnancy rate in KwaZulu-Natal: young girls will not engage in sexual activity before marriage and the number of children who are born outside of wedlock will decrease.

One of the most notable aspects from all the focus group discussions is the association of virginity testing with the payment of lobola. Most of the participants, especially boys, believed that virginity testing is associated with the payment of lobola. Even though most of the respondents shared the same view, there were some who thought that virginity testing is associated with pride and respect, not the payment of lobola.

“I think it is associated with self dignity; a girl should demonstrate her virginity. Self dignity, even if lobola is not paid boys should respect her and she must be proud of her virginity.” [FGD#1, Females]

4.2.6 Virginity testing is associated with the payment of lobola and marriage

In the interviews with young people, it emerged that the majority of young people associate virginity testing with the payment of lobola and marriage. Most participants, especially male participants, argued that in order to get married and ensure that lobola is paid in full, a girl needs to protect her virginity until marriage so that she will gain the respect not only of her husband but also from society in general. Female respondents believe that even if a girl does not find someone who can pay lobola for her, she must maintain her pride as she will gain respect from her peers and also from the elders. Participants believed that a virgin should bleed on the night of her marriage. They reported that the elders should remove the sheet after the couple has been together for the first time after their marriage, and the bloodied sheet kept as proof that the girl was a virgin. If found not to be a virgin then the girl's father has to pay a cow to the king as an apology that his daughter has not conducted herself in a culturally acceptable manner. It is then believed that the girl has shamed and sullied the nation.

“They want to keep young girls being virgins, in the olden days if you got pregnant while you were a teenager it was a shame and no one will want to marry you. Virgins had

much higher value than non virgins. People had a belief that you should bleed on the first day of your marriage. In my culture the older people will be the ones who remove the bed sheet on the first day of sexual intercourse. If the girl was found not to be a virgin her father has to pay a cow to the king, because she has brought shame to the community. The girls who are of the same age will discriminate against you.” [IDI# 3, Female]

In the interviews with young adolescents it was found that young girls who undergo virginity testing are being taught by the queen and the older maidens that they should not engage in sexual relationships. It was also reported that when a girl loses her virginity, she should report it to the elders so that the boy who took away her virginity can make reparation. The payment of lobola for a virgin is high; a groom is expected to pay approximately 12 cows as part of the bride price whereas for a girl who is no longer a virgin the price is much lower.

Older girls (aged 18-21) are taught how to be a good wife and how to behave in the bridegroom’s family. They are also taught to respect the elders in their husband’s family and to treat their mother in-law as their own mother.

“During the virginity testing week, all the virgins will practice the Zulu dance and afterwards the queen will teach the virgins how virgins should behave, like if a girl wants to have sexual intercourse she must engage in thigh sex (ukusoma).” [IDI#5, Female]

All the girls reported that those who are older are being taught how to engage in a non-penetrative form of sex called ‘thigh sex’ or *ukusoma*. The girls explained that a girl should not allow a boy to penetrate her vagina, instead the boy must place his penis on her thighs and when he wants to ejaculate the girl should fold her thighs tight and close to each other.

“The virgins will sit in the groups, those who are younger will sit on one side and those who are older will sit on the other side of the hut, and the queen will first speak with the

younger ones on how to conduct themselves as virgins and then afterwards the queen together with the older maidens (amaqhikiza) will speak to the older virgins about how they should conduct themselves in the groom's family." [FGD#1, Females]

Participants were asked who the 'older maidens' or the "amaqhikiza" were, and they replied that they are girls who have chosen their marriage partners but were not yet married. They are in the process of getting married, but their lobola has not been paid in full.

Some of the boys reported that it is a shame to marry someone who is no longer a virgin, if you are young. They reported that their peers will laugh at them and when there is a gathering their peers will never listen to their views. The influence of peer pressure to marry virgins is clear.

"I think it is associated with both pride and lobola; a young girl should be proud of her virginity and even the husband will be proud and pay the full price for lobola happily with no doubts. It is so sad when someone is paying lobola to someone who is no longer a virgin because people will be saying things like a groom should pay lobola at his own will and not full price. The queen used to tell us that the first person you engage in sexual intercourse with must pay inkomo kamama (mother's cow)". [IDI# 5, female]

" Myself I think virginity testing is associated with lobola, if a man is clever enough he will not marry someone who has been sleeping around, even within my family my parents would not allow such thing, we can ask for lobola back if the girl is no longer a virgin, I don't want to lie if you are no longer a virgin you don't stand a chance of getting married. If I marry a non-virgin my peers will laugh at me. I will not be seen as a real man and I will not have a say if there was gatherings. They will think that I cannot propose love to woman that is why I married someone who is no longer a virgin."

[FGD#3, Mixed]

In addition male participants reported that virginity testing is associated with trust. They reported that girls who are able to maintain their virginity until marriage are regarded as potential marriage partners because they can be trusted. Non-virgins are believed to have betrayed cultural values and norms and as a result they cannot be trusted. Male participants believed that they cannot trust someone who has lost their virginity at an early age.

“I will marry someone who is a virgin, because I can trust her, that she does not give sex easily to boys”. [IDI#8, Male]

“If someone is a virgin it shows an element of trust, you can trust that person even if you can find a job in Gauteng, you will trust that your wife will not have sexual relationships with other men” [FDG#2, Males]

While some participants thought that virginity testing is associated with lobola and marriage, other participants, especially female participants, were against this idea; they believed that virginity testing is associated with pride, respect, and self-dignity only. A girl who remains a virgin demonstrates that she has not been promiscuous. During the reed dance ceremony young girls are taught to have confidence in themselves and walk with pride because they have maintained their virginity. Virginity is a sign of innocence and suggests that the girl has shown respect to her parents.

“Yes, it is associated with pride, a girl who is a virgin should be proud of her virginity. No one will pay lobola to a person who has been sleeping around with boys. Your virginity is your mother’s cow. Where will your mother get her cow if you are no longer a virgin.” [IDI# 1, Female]

“Virginity testing is about gaining self respect, pride and dignity, a person who is no longer a virgin is not treated as an equal to someone who is still a virgin. When it comes to lobola , payments are not the same, lobola becomes cheaper when you are no longer a

virgin, so for me I think that one of the benefits of virginity testing is to keep young girls virgins up until marriage so that full lobola will be paid.” [FGD#2, Males]

All respondents reported that the full lobola payment is paid for someone who is a virgin; a bridegroom will pay 12 cows as recognition of the girl’s virginity. After marriage, the bridegroom is expected to also perform the traditional ceremony known as ‘*umembeso*’ where he gives his in-laws a gift as a token of appreciation that the girl is a virgin. Normally the gift should be blankets and pots.

“After marriage a groom is expected to buy a gift for the in-laws, thanking them that their child was a virgin.” [IDI# 4, Female]

In the interviews some adolescents reported that the queen teaches them why they should maintain their virginity. The queen always teaches them to maintain their virginity so that lobola will be paid. The role of the queen is to ensure that young girls maintain their virginity up until marriage.

“Yes, queen Thandi educated us on how we should behave and even those who are raped should behave themselves because they do not want to lose their virginity. The queen says our virginity is our mother’s cow, when you were sleeping with boys your mother will not get her cow and the virgin should be proud of herself. No one will pay lobola to someone who is no longer a virgin. At school we are always told to keep our virginity because if we do not then we will get married to an older man.” [IDI# 2, Female]

In addition it is not only the queen who teaches young girls not to engage in sexual activity but also school teachers. Girls who engage in sexual activity are at risk of falling pregnant and will eventually have to drop out of school to take care of their babies at home. One of the respondents expressed concern that if a school boy impregnates a girl he may not be in a financial situation to take responsibility for the child.

“At school we are being taught not to engage in sexual activity, if a girl gets pregnant she is expected to go home and look after the baby” [IDI#1, Female]

Girls felt that young people should maintain their virginity in order to ensure respect. Girls who are no longer virgins become the subject of gossip even among boys of their own age.

“I just want to add on what my brother has been saying, not only the elders will not approve of that marriage but even the peers, I can imagine sitting with my friends and they tell me, you cannot say anything because your wife has slept with so and so and it is degrading your status as a man, you do not feel man enough” [FGD#3, Mixed]

4.2.7 Society’s attitudes towards non-virgin and girls who do not undergo virginity testing

In the interviews young people were asked about society’s attitudes and behaviour toward girls who are found not to be virgins and also attitudes towards those who do not undergo virginity testing. Most reported that once found not to be a virgin, girls suffer discrimination. They are often discriminated against by their friends and left in isolation. Someone who is no longer a virgin is seen as a disgrace and is treated as an outcast. Most of them reported that if a girl had previously undergone virginity testing and if she decides not to go for the test again then society suspects she is hiding something; perhaps she is no longer a virgin. In addition, it was observed that when attending traditional ceremonies non-virgins are grouped with older women. People will not treat a non-virgin as a young girl (intombi) but as an older woman (umfazi) who is sexually active. People believe that if you are not a virgin, you have betrayed the trust of your mother.

“You become afraid of people because they laugh at you and even your friends laugh at you and they will not be friends with you and you are not allowed to be with virgins in traditional ceremonies. There is a belief that if you go with virgins and you not a virgin

maybe we are in a bus that is going to a place where virginity testing takes place the bus will roll.” [IDI# 4, Female]

Even though virginity testing was reported to be voluntary there are certain circumstances which forces young adolescents to undergo virginity testing. Peer and society pressure were reported to be some of the factors that encourage young girls to undergo virginity testing.

“ If you did not undergo virginity testing, your peers will start asking you, why you did not, sometimes others undergo virginity testing because their friends undergo it not because they want to and when they feel they do not want society to start asking questions.” [FGD#1, Females]

Girls reported that the loss of virginity at an early age is not culturally acceptable but boys shared a different view. Boys held the view that they are still human and they should not be discriminated against for their behaviour. Girls truly believe the myth that when someone who is no longer a virgin participates in traditional ceremonies; something bad is likely to happen to them. One of the respondents reported that non-virgins should not participate in traditional ceremonies that are meant for virgins. One of the things that came up is that when you are no longer a virgin and you go and take reed, the reed will bend. However boys challenged this belief. They thought that nothing happens and it is just a myth. They reported that they know girls who are no longer virgins but who take the reed and nothing happens. They think that when the reed bends down it is because it is too long and not very strong.

“Even though I do not have much knowledge of it I know that you are not allowed to wear traditional attire that is meant for girls who are virgins. You are not even allowed to participate in traditional ceremonies that are meant for girls like umemulo. But myself I think there is nothing wrong when you are no longer a virgin; everyone will end up not being a virgin”. [IDI# 6, Male]

“Okay, I am not too sure about this, but I have heard that if you undergo virginity testing and you are no longer a virgin when it is time to pick up the reed, the reed will bend downwards and when you are travelling by bus it [the bus] will roll over, however some of the girls I know that are no longer virgins have travelled with the ones who are virgins but nothing has ever happened to them. I think this is just a rumour and it is not true.”
[IDI# 9, Male]

4.2.8 Young people’s views on virginity testing as a pregnancy prevention strategy

Virginity testing in KwaZulu-Natal has been conducted in order to discourage girls from engaging in sexual activities and is seen as the best way to control fertility among unmarried women. Most respondents reported that if virginity testing is not conducted young girls will behave as they please without fear of the consequences and they will have babies at an earlier age. One of the respondents observed that the reason why there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy is that young people are no longer undergoing virginity testing in some areas. Some respondents truly believe that virginity testing can prevent pregnancy.

“It will not prevent all pregnancies, it will only prevent pregnancy for those who undergo virginity testing because they know that they will undergo virginity testing but for those who do not undergo virginity testing it will not prevent it.” [IDI# 8, Male]

“If every girl can undergo virginity testing, the teenage pregnancy rate can drop; one of the reasons why there is a high rate of teenage pregnancy is because not every girl undergoes virginity testing. When girls do not undergo virginity testing, they do as they please and they get pregnant at an earlier age. They are not afraid of anything. I think every girl should undergo it”. [IDI# 3, Female]

“It can prevent it because if you have started undergoing virginity testing, you will not be able to go out and have sex with boys, because once you started undergoing virginity testing you should not stop, you should always undergo it because if you stop undergoing

virginity testing you should give a reason why you are not undergoing it anymore.” [FGD#1, Females]

The respondents believe that if young girls are tested for virginity, they will feel afraid of engaging in sexual activity and in that way teenage pregnancy will be reduced. Young girls felt that if girls do not undergo virginity testing, they are not afraid of engaging in sexual relationships because they know that no one will find out that they are no longer virgins. They believe that virginity testing can be used as a strategy for pregnancy prevention. Both female and male respondents felt that if all the girls in South Africa were encouraged to undergo virginity testing, the teenage pregnancy rate will decrease.

4.2.9 Young people’s view on whether virginity testing can lead to rape

In the interviews young adolescents were asked if they felt that virginity testing can lead to rape. Boys and girls seem to share a different view on whether virginity testing can lead to rape. Most of the girls reported that virginity testing can lead to rape. One of the reasons they say so is because virginity testing is done openly and boys are able to see which girls are virgins and which are not. Virginity testing is not conducted in private places; they are usually conducted on sport grounds and at the king’s palace. Respondents felt that those places are not secure enough. The girls walk naked in front of thousands of people; showing their buttocks and breasts. They also reported that journalists take photographs while they are naked. They felt that walking naked in front of thousands of people makes them vulnerable to rape because people can identify girls who are virgins and those who are not.

“It can lead to rape because when virginity testing is conducted, journalists come and take photos, in that way people are able to identify who is a virgin and then they rape her.” [IDI# 1, Female]

“Yes, it does lead to rape. When virginity testing is conducted everyone is allowed to watch us naked, only the front is covered. Boys get sexually aroused just by seeing us

with our breasts and buttocks not covered and they want to have sex with us. Some of the girls are raped after the reed dance ceremony. Also the journalists come and take photos so people knows exactly that so and so is a virgin". [IDI# 5, Female]

While girls felt that virginity testing makes them more vulnerable to rape, boys were against the idea. They reported that their presence is one of support and to show how much they love and respect their culture. They felt that those who rape the virgins should receive severe punishment as they do not respect their own culture.

"You know it is our culture and we respect it, when we go there we show support to young girls and the fact that their buttocks and breasts are not covered doesn't mean that we will want to have sex with them. We truly respect our culture. Those people who rape young girls don't show respect and they don't deserve to be called Zulus." [IDI# 10, Male]

Boys shared the view that they truly respect their culture, and that they only go to the reed dance ceremony to show support for the virgins, not to look at who qualified. They understand that some of the girls are raped while coming from the reed dance ceremony but they emphasised that the rapists are criminals who should be arrested. They call upon the government to work together with the community to ensure the safety and security of the young girls. They showed love and interest in their culture.

Virgins are more vulnerable to rape due to the myth that sex with a virgin will cure AIDS. Some respondents reported that not only virgins are being raped because of the myth but also old grannies whose husbands died a long time ago. There are usually one or two girls who are raped after the reed dance ceremony but rape is something that is not common in the community. They argued that men who rape girls are arrested but that the community sometimes also takes responsibility for punishing these criminals. Some girls were well informed about the myth that if a man has sexual intercourse with a virgin he will be cured of AIDS, and therefore felt vulnerable to rape. Some of the girls argued that not only people who are living with AIDS rape virgins; girls reported that even

young boys of the same age rape virgins. A boy who has been proposing to a girl who has been a virgin for a long time may rape her so that at the next reed dance she will not participate and her peers will discriminate against her and make fun of her. The boy will rape the girl in order to make her feel ashamed and embarrassed; rape is used as a weapon of revenge.

“Some of us got raped because people believe that if you are HIV positive and have sex with a virgin you will be cured. My friend’s grandmother was raped due to the myth that if you have sex with a grandmother whose husband has died a long time ago you will be cured, but fortunately they caught the man. But I do not believe in such a thing instead you will infect the one who is not HIV positive.” [IDI# 2, Female]

“A girl can be raped because if you had a fight with a boy and then he sees you at the reed dance ceremony, he will want to disappoint you so that the society will think that you are nothing, he will then rape you”. [FGD#1, Females]

Some of the boys denied that virginity testing can lead to rape. They believe that virginity testing is an integral part of their culture which everyone respects and they believe that men who rape virgins have other reasons that motivate their behaviour. They explain that if a boy has a problem with a girl he may rape her to show her his anger and believed that some rape cases are not related to virginity testing.

In the interviews with young people, it emerged that not only virgins get raped due to some of the existing myths. Some respondents reported that if you have sex with a widow whose husband died many years ago, you will also be cured. There is a belief that someone who has not been sexually active for a long time can cure a man who is living with the virus. Young adolescents were against this prevailing myth. They believe that if you are HIV positive and have sex with a virgin or widow you will certainly infect that person and will not be cured; instead the number of people who are HIV positive will increase.

4.2.10 Virginitv testing as a way to fight against HIV/AIDS

KwaZulu-Natal is the province the hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Respondents believe that virginitv testing will help to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS, and delaying the onset of sexual activity among young women will help to curb the number of people infected with HIV/AIDS. Some girls believe that virginitv testing empowers them as young women and reduces their risk of HIV/AIDS and teenage pregnancy. Most respondents reported that virginitv testing helps to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS because young adolescents will not engage in sexual relationships. They will have a fear of engaging in sexual relationships because they know that when they have to undergo virginitv testing, the testers will find out that they are no longer virgins.

“Virginitv testing can help in reducing HIV/AIDS in the sense that if every girl is tested they will remain virgins and they will only engage in sexual activity after marriage.”
[IDI#8, Male]

“Virginitv testing will help in reducing HIV/AIDS, because adolescents will not engage in sexual activity, they will have the fear that the testers will find out that they are no longer virgins.” [IDI#2, Female]

All the respondents were aware of HIV/AIDS, and thought that if every girl were to undergo virginitv testing, the level of new infections will decrease. However they also acknowledge that even though boys are not tested they must practice monogamy and remain faithful to their partners, and before the marriage ceremony both partners should go for an HIV test. One of the girls reported that community leaders should also encourage boys to abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage.

“I think it should not only be the girls who are tested but also boys so that when they get married both partners are HIV negative. Community leaders should also encourage boys to also abstain from sex before marriage.” [FGD#3, Mixed]

Most respondents felt that if everyone is tested for virginity there will be a decrease in the level of new HIV infections. However some respondents acknowledged that it is important to test for HIV before marriage so that if one partner is infected the other partner will know their status and take preventative measures to protect themselves. They are also aware that HIV/AIDS is not only contracted through sexual activity but also through blood transmission, but that this rarely happens.

“No, it will not prevent it. If young girls undergo virginity testing they will be afraid to engage in sexual relationships before marriage, and I believe even when they are about to get married, their partners should go for HIV testing.” [IDI# 10, Male]

“ I certainly believe that we, as part of the Zulu nation, should work together in the fight against AIDS, if girls are being tested for virginity testing I mean all girls, the disease will decrease, and also teach those who are already HIV positive to live with the virus without infecting others, that can help, but for me I think virginity testing does help in the fight against AIDS.” [FGD#3, Mixed]

In addition both girls and boys felt that it is important to educate those who have the virus to live a positive life without infecting their partners. Information on HIV/AIDS is very important for people to make informed decisions about their lives and also to have access to health services. They felt there is a need for more awareness campaigns on how to remain HIV negative. People should be given information on condom use. However, none of the respondents talked about condom use before marriage. They advocated abstaining from sexual intercourse. They also acknowledged that it was important for both partners to go for HIV testing before marriage. It might happen that a girl is HIV negative but her partner is HIV positive. All young people, even those who are not sexually active, should be encouraged to go for voluntary counseling and testing. They should be taught how to use condoms correctly and consistently and married partners should be faithful to each other. Young people should have exposure to the ABC strategy (Abstain, Be Faithful and Use a Condom) as this will help to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

4.2.11 Views on the banning of virginity testing

According to the Bill of Rights, the practice of virginity testing affects various rights of young girls and women. Virginity testing infringes fundamental rights such as the right to equality, dignity, and privacy. Children have the right to be protected from abuse, neglect, and degradation. The Children's Bill prohibits virginity testing and provides that anyone who practises virginity testing is guilty of an offence and liable to pay the penalty of a fine. The banning of virginity testing has caused a great deal of controversy and traditional leaders in KwaZulu-Natal have protested against the banning as a violation of cultural rights.

Young adolescents were asked to give their views on the banning of virginity testing. All of them did not like the idea of banning virginity testing. Respondents believe that it should continue given the fact that young women participate voluntarily, and that it is an important part of their culture. Young adolescents showed much interest in virginity testing and did not want it banned. Respondents reported that they would be pleased to see virginity testing conducted in the future and recommended that every young girl should undergo the test. They support virginity testing from every human being in South Africa.

“No it should not be banned, the Zulu nation can die if it is banned, girls will do whatever they wish to do when they know that they are not tested. When they undergo virginity testing they have a fear of sleeping with boys.” [IDI# 2, Female]

“Myself, I think it should not be banned; it is our culture and we as virgins like being tested.” [IDI#3, Female]

“No, it must not be banned, this is our culture as a Zulu nation, and how are we going to be proud of ourselves as the Zulu nation if it is banned? The Zulu nation will die. The government is being unfair towards the Zulu nation because other nations still practice their culture, like Xhosa they still practice circumcision.” [IDI# 9, Male]

Young adolescents reported that they undergo virginity testing voluntarily; no one forces them even though some of them undergo virginity testing when they see their peers undergoing it but they like it. Young adolescents wish that government would support the practice so that secure places can be built for the testing and also urge that the practice must not be banned. They believe that virginity testing is a cultural practice with no harmful effects just like other cultural practices so they want it to be supported.

4.2.12 Counseling for non-virgins

Respondents were asked whether counseling is provided to girls who are no longer virgins. Female respondents reported that counseling is only provided to virgins who have been raped; not to someone who lost her virginity by choice. They reported that someone who has been raped is still regarded as a virgin because she did not lose her virginity by choice. Virgins who have been raped continue to participate in traditional ceremonies and they are taught on how to prevent further sexual intercourse.

“ No, no counseling for you, except when you lost virginity through rape because the queen Thandi says you are still a virgin when you was raped because you did not agree to lose your virginity and you continue to participate in the virginity testing ceremony as well as every ceremony that virgins undergo such as umemulo”. [IDI#5, Female]

Respondents reported that the queen teaches them not to discriminate against someone who has been raped but that they should provide emotional support because the victims did not choose to be raped. While girls showed much knowledge about whether people who have lost their virginity receive counseling, boys seemed to be clueless about it. Interestingly they pointed out that girls who are non-virgins should receive counseling because when they find out that they are no longer virgins, they are isolated and discriminated against. Boys felt that girls who are no longer virgins suffer negative consequences which results in them not performing well in school.

“A girl who loses her virginity should get some kind of support and counseling and should be treated just like the virgins. One thing I want to point out is that non-virgins become isolated and discriminated, even in school they will not have any friends which affect their performance at school”. [FGD#2, Males]

While male respondents felt that it is important that non-virgins receive counseling and emotional support, female respondents felt that non-virgins do not need any counseling and emotional support. They reported that they lose their virginity by choice; they know what they are doing.

“I don’t think it is necessary to support people who made a choice of losing their virginity, we are always being told that we should keep our virginity, and sometimes some of the girls undergoes virginity testing just to fool the testers, sometimes they know that they have lost their virginity, they want to see if the testers are doing their work.”

[FGD#1, Females]

4.2.13 Alternative forms of sexual activity

Respondents were asked if they knew of any other types of sexual activities adolescents engage in order to preserve their virginity. Male respondents reported that they use non-penetrative forms of sex (ukusoma). While male respondents reported they use thigh sex, female respondents reported that they do not know of alternative forms of sexual activity that young people use in order to preserve their virginity.

“When we want to enjoy sexual pleasure, we engage in thigh sex (Ukusoma), we lay the penis in the thighs, we don’t penetrate and when we are about to ejaculate we remove the penis from the thighs and ejaculate on the towel. We kiss and touch each other. We enjoy it without penetration.” [FGD#2, Males]

4.2.14. Recommendations about virginity testing

At the end of the interview, participants were asked to provide recommendations on virginity testing. Most female respondents reported that they would like to see virginity testing being financially supported in order to build private and secure places where it could be conducted rather than public places such as sport grounds or in the royal residence where everyone is allowed to watch.

“I think it is important that secure places are built and that virginity testing should not be conducted where everyone watches.” [IDI#4, Female]

“There is only one thing I want to say, I wish that virginity testing can be conducted in secure places where journalist should not come and take photos of us without our consent.” [IDI#2, Female]

In addition, female respondents felt it is important that young girls are protected from rape. They suggested that in the future studies should look at how young girls who undergo virginity testing can be protected from rape. They reported that they are raising this issue because it is becoming common for a few girls to be raped after the reed dance ceremony.

Almost every respondent reported that there is a need for more campaigns to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. They pointed out that the population living in Nongoma has limited access to health services.

“Some of the people do not have better knowledge on issues pertaining HIV/AIDS, Nongoma only has one clinic and sometimes it difficult to go there and ask for information because sometimes a person may not have money to go to the clinic because it is far, maybe if there will be continuous awareness campaign closer to our homes, people will feel free to ask for information.” [FDG#2, Males]

“I just want to say that if awareness campaign are done in our area maybe HIV/AIDS can decrease, not only in this area but also in schools, target places where youth normally spend time together, places like sport grounds because most of us spend time playing and watching soccer. Some of us are not schooling nor working, sometimes we get bored during the day not doing anything and end up engaging in unprotected sex. Maybe if there are awareness campaigns we will know that at this time of the day we should attend an awareness campaign and it will help me a lot in protecting myself.”
[IDI#7, Male]

Some respondents recommended that there should be clinics built not far from where people live and also there should also be greater emphasis on improving access to condoms. Condoms should be distributed in schools and in tuck shops and also on the playgrounds. Respondents reported that even though young girls should participate in virginity testing it is important for them to know about condoms. When girls get married they should also know about condoms and where to access health related information, because it might happen that a man who is married to a virgin could be involved in multiple sexual partnerships and not be practising safe sex.

“There should be more clinics built around as we only rely on one clinic which is far from us.” [IDI#8, Male]

“Myself what I want to say is that I would like to see more condom access points, maybe in schools and tuck shops, sometimes we do want to use condoms but they are not easy to access.” [IDI#10, Male]

All respondents reported that the government should not ban virginity testing; instead should support virginity testing financially. Respondents recommended that virginity testing should be more widely publicised in the mass media and not only just before the reed dance ceremony. It is believed that if virginity testing is publicised, in coming years there will be more young girls who participate.

“On a closing note, I would like to say that government should not ban virginity testing because virginity testing identifies who we are, instead government should support it financially and publicize it.” [IDI#6, Male]

“All I want to say, is that it will hurt me if in the coming years if virginity testing is banned, I really want government to reconsider the issue of banning virginity testing.” [IDI#9, Male]

“I would like to see virginity testing being conducted in the coming years, I simply do not go with the idea of banning it but rather support virginity testing financially and make sure everyone knows and understands why there is a need for virginity testing. On television they only talk about virginity testing when the reed dance is approaching in September after that they are quiet.” [IDI#5, Female]

It is believed that there are more teenagers than adults accessing child support grants. If all girls participate in virginity testing there will be a decrease in the number of people who access child support grants simply because virginity testing reduces teenage pregnancy.

“Myself I just want to say that if all the girls can undergo virginity testing, there will be a decrease in teenage pregnancy, because if girls do not undergo virginity testing they will engage in sexual activity and end up falling pregnant.” [IDI#1, Female]

“I recommend that the government should make virginity testing compulsory to every young girl, so that there will be a decrease in teenage pregnancy in that way there will be less people accessing the child support grant.” [FGD#1, Girls]

4.3 Summary

This chapter summarised the key findings of the study undertaken at Nongoma in KwaZulu-Natal. The female and male adolescents sampled presented varying

perceptions, attitudes, and opinions about virginity testing. It was found that virginity testing is done voluntarily and some respondents felt that virginity testing could lead to a reduction in the levels of HIV/AIDS. It was reported that not only virgins experience rape but also older women whose husbands have died a long time ago. There has been a change in the way virginity testing is conducted and participants would like to see government intervention so that secure places are established to ensure privacy as they reported that virginity testing is conducted in public places. Concerns about journalists taking photographs during virginity testing were raised by participants. It was found that virginity testing is seen as a pregnancy prevention strategy as it is believed to delay the onset of sexual activity. Young girls who undergo virginity testing have a fear of engaging in sexual relations because the testers will find out that they are no longer virgins. The study also suggests that virgins hold much higher status in society than non-virgins.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The goal of this study was to gain more insights into the reasons for virginity testing in rural KwaZulu-Natal. It draws on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with young boys and girls in Nongoma, KwaZulu-Natal. The findings of the study have been organised into particular themes.

5.2 Discussion

Relatively little is known about young people's perceptions of virginity testing and the main reasons for undergoing it from the perspective of young people. Most studies have tended to focus on the testers (*abahloli*) and the elders of the society to determine the relevance of the custom (Kaarsholm, 2005; Leclerc-Madlala, 2001). In addition, there are studies that have focused on virginity testing as a strategy to safeguard against HIV/AIDS and early pregnancy (Kinoti, 2005; Leclerc-Madlala, 2001). This study sought to fill the gap that exists in the research by focusing on the perceptions and attitudes of young boys and girls.

The results from this qualitative study indicate that young adolescents identify virginity testing as a strategy to determine whether or not the hymen (*ihlo*) is intact. All the female respondents had undergone virginity testing and reported that the procedure is voluntary. Their understanding and definitions of virginity testing are consistent with the views in the literature. For example virginity testing is described by Scorgie (2002: 1): "*virginity testing is when the elders (abahloli) examine ihlo (eye), sometimes translated as the hymen, how this is said to be covered by a piece of flesh (the umhlubi), the presence indicates that the girl is still a virgin. She is then described as being ugcwele (full)*"

The findings of this study concerning the reasons for undergoing virginity testing in rural KwaZulu-Natal are also consistent with evidence which indicates that the custom is associated with lobola and marriage. Most adolescents make this association. If a girl loses her virginity before marriage, the groom does not pay the full bride price. A study conducted by Daniel (2005) observes that virginity testing was originally intended to prove the purity of the bride before marriage. The reason why the mother or other adults in the community encourage the girl to remain a virgin up until marriage is to ensure that the mother gets full lobola payment if the daughter is a virgin in marriage. The study reveals that girls who are virgins are in a much better position to command a higher bride price, that there is strong support for virginity testing, and that it is widely respected as a traditional practice.

The present study also found that some girls felt virginity testing is important for self respect and dignity. If a girl is no longer a virgin she holds no value; boys of the same age as her do not show her the same respect as virgins, and they do not view her as a prospective marriage partner. They are not allowed to attend traditional ceremonies that are meant for virgins and are treated the same as older women who are sexually active (umfazi). This discriminates against young women because there is no expectation for boys to remain virgins until marriage. In addition, boys who are not virgins are expected to marry virgins.

Although girls who undergo virginity testing like to be tested they also realize that it has some problems. Some of the adolescent girls who are no longer virgins undergo virginity testing just to fool the testers, to check whether the testers are in a position to carry out their job or if they are just taking chances. If the testers report that the non-virgin is a virgin then they know that a tester did not conduct the test properly.

The present study reveals that another implication of virginity testing is the breakage of hymen. It was found that the insertion of a finger in the vagina can break the hymen. However the study also revealed that there has been a change in how virginity testing is conducted: some testers are no longer inserting fingers but use virginity testing machines.

While human rights activists feel that virginity testing is unhygienic, Leclerc-Madlala (2001) reports that the Department of Health is actively involved in assuring that proper health measures are taken during genital inspection by providing rubber gloves and facilitating workshops to educate testers about the female reproductive anatomy. According to Inwit (2008), it is possible for the hymen to get damaged during a number of activities including sporting activities, and pelvic examinations. It is also possible to damage the hymen through physical activities such as horse riding and biking. Contrary to popular belief, the breaking of the hymen is not necessarily an indicator of the loss of virginity. Some women are born without a hymen.

Although boys do not undergo virginity testing, they had strong opinions on virginity testing. They associate virginity testing with marriage and the payment of lobola. Some of the boys said that they will not pay lobola to someone who is no longer a virgin, because they do not know how their peers and family would react. They maintained that their teachers educate them at school about virginity testing and its importance. This is consistent with findings from research done by Leclerc-Madlala (2001) and Seneke, Zondo and Leclerc-Madlala (2007), namely that traditionally bride wealth practices reflect the importance placed on a girl's virginity. *"Cattle were the principal commodity in a bride wealth transaction known as ilobola. The standard ten head of cattle could be supplemented by an additional head, the eleventh cow, if a girl was found to be virgin"* (Leclerc-Madlala, 2001: 544). This cow was known as (inkomo kamama), mother's cow, and was given to the girl's mother as a token of appreciation from the in-laws for providing them with a pure daughter-in-law. The present study found that a girl who is able to maintain her virginity until marriage will gain the trust of her husband who feels she has shown that she does not succumb to sexual temptations. A girl who engages in sexually activity before marriage is seen as sexually available, promiscuous, and not trustworthy. Male participants reported that they would not consider marrying a girl who was not a virgin. The study also reveals that many young people believe that virgins live a much happier marital life. Girls who are no longer virgins are blamed for marital problems because young men believe that they cannot trust females who give in too easily to sexual advances.

Chigwenye and Shumba (2009) state that boys are not subjected to virginity examinations. Boys and men are not even expected to remain abstinent before marriage or faithful during marriage. Their sexual purity is not questioned. In Zimbabwe, the sexual indulgence of boys is condoned and even celebrated (Chigwenye and Shumba 2009). Male adolescent sexual activities are regarded as normal and worth celebrating, while those of female adolescents are regarded as taboo. In their study of adolescent sexual relations in South Africa, Wood and Jewkes (2002) found that there is a sexual double standard. It is acceptable for boys to have multiple sexual partners while disallowing their regular girlfriends from even speaking to other boys.

Young girls feel that there is a need to gain more information on virginity testing. They recognise that the queen and older maidens (amaqhikiza) are there to give the virgins support and educate them. This is supported by the study conducted by Buthelezi (2006) which found that the elders and older maidens are important because they are responsible for preserving the virginity of younger girls. The queen and older girls (amaqhikiza) are supposed to teach younger girls how to protect their virginity. Sex education often emphasises preserving virginity until marriage. Girls are taught and encouraged to engage in non-penetrative sex to protect their virginity. In addition, fathers also warn young women not to lose their virginity as this will harm the family's reputation.

The present study reveals that adolescents engage in alternative sexual practices like non-penetrative sex in order to keep their virginity. Other studies found that adolescents practice anal sex to protect their virginity (Gupta, 2000; Chigwenye and Shumba, 2009). Women practicing anal intercourse are less likely to use condoms and more likely to engage in risky behaviour (Gupta, 2000).

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa is defined by UNAIDS (2008) as being a hyper-endemic as a result of the country having more than 15% of the population aged 15-49 living with HIV/AIDS. It is estimated that 5.54 million people are living with HIV in South Africa, and 18.8% of the adult population are affected. Women are

disproportionately affected, accounting for about 55% of the population living with HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS 2008). Some view virginity testing as a response by the Zulu community to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

In the context of HIV/AIDS, studies indicate that young people are amongst the most affected groups. However there is a fear that virginity testing will increase the rate of HIV infections as young girls who undergo the test are at risk of being raped (Gupta, 2000: 6). There are reported cases of girls being raped after the reed dance ceremony. Most of the girls were not happy that the reed dance ceremony was attended by boys and journalists. Rape also emerges as a concern in the literature. As mentioned earlier, Win (2004) and Gupta (2000) state that in Sub-Saharan African countries a myth has arisen that an HIV positive man can be cured by having sex with a virgin. This has led to the rape of many girls and this has also resulted in them acquiring the virus. Virginity testing confirms which girls are virgins and exposes them to the risk of being raped and contracting HIV. Win (2004) further states that older men seek relationships with younger girls who are virgins with the view that they are not sexually active and therefore not HIV positive. Some of the girls noted that boys attend the reed dance ceremony just to confirm which girls are virgins and if a girl is no longer a virgin; boys laugh at her.

In the present study it was found that boys who rape virgins often do so for other reasons. It was reported that boys sometimes rape girls who are virgins in order to show their anger and reduce the girl's pride. This is consistent with a study conducted by Chigwenye and Shumba (2009), whose findings suggest that having sex with a girl can be used to reduce the pride of a girl. Such abuse takes place if a boy manages to have sex with a proud girl and then boasts about it among his peers to undermine the girl and boost his own social status and self esteem.

In the present study, young people who are no longer virgins and who had undergone virginity testing before and decide not to undergo it again may face stigmatisation and are sometimes treated as outcasts even by their own peers. The research reveals that it is not only young girls who face trauma and stigmatisation but also their parents as they are

expected to pay a cow to the chief for a cleansing ceremony. This is supported by the literature. George (2007) argues that girls who are no longer virgins are exposed to physical and emotional trauma. Young girls who are declared non-virgins sometimes commit suicide.

The literature has revealed that there is a direct link between teenage pregnancy, poverty, and HIV/AIDS (Buthelezi 2006). The link stems from the fact that pregnant young females often miss educational and work opportunities and end up having little or no income. The findings of this study also indicate that adolescents who fall pregnant normally drop out of school in order to take care of their children and in some cases responsibility for the child falls on the grandmothers who assume financial support. This is consistent with Scorgie's (2002) findings that most teenagers who fall pregnant live with their grandmothers and their main source of income is her pension. Therefore grandmothers often assume responsibility for caring for their grandchildren (Scorgie, 2002).

Buthelezi (2006) states that virginity testing promotes abstinence but while abstinence is a guaranteed way of preventing HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases, abstinence before marriage has not been able to adequately respond to the questions and concerns relating to sexual matters which trouble young people in their everyday lives. Many married women who were virgins on their wedding day are at risk of HIV infection from their partners (Buthelezi, 2006:6). This study suggests that boys should also abstain from sexual activities so that both partners are protected from sexually transmitted diseases (including HIV/AIDS).

The present study indicates that boys should abstain from sexual intercourse before marriage but several studies indicate that boys face the challenge of acting as 'real' men (Varga 1997). As mentioned earlier, traditions and cultural norms encourage boys to have multiple sexual partners in order to be recognised as 'real' men. According to UNAIDS (2001), for most young men, having many sexual partners is perceived as manliness and

in most cases boys grow up under pressure to have sex which is seen as a formal expression of their entry into adulthood.

In the present study young adolescents perceive having sex at an earlier age as inappropriate and culturally unacceptable for girls. The study indicates that some participants believe it is acceptable for girls to enter into sexual relationship after the age of 21. It is believed that at this age the girl has reached maturity and is able to handle sexual relationships and make decisions related to sexual matters. The responsibility of preserving virginity rests with girls alone. Virginity testing fails to take into account that women also have sexual feelings and desires just like boys.

In the present study, participants felt that it was easy to determine virginity. This is consistent with another study conducted in KwaZulu-Natal by Leclerc-Madlala (2001: 539-540) which found that older people claimed virginity can be determined by the *“color of the labia, it should be very light pink, the size of the vaginal opening should be very small, the vagina should be very dry and tight and the white dot or white lacy veil should be clearly evident and intact. In addition a girl’s eyes should reflect virginity in that they look innocent. Her breast and abdomen should be firm and taut and the muscles behind her knees should be tight and straight.”*

Participants were opposed to the idea of banning virginity testing. They felt that if it is banned it will encourage promiscuity among young girls because they may engage in sexual intercourse without fear of the consequences. They also feel that virginity testing is an important part of their culture.

According to George (2007) opponents of virginity testing argue that girls rarely exercise their right to refuse because of pressure from their families. RAPCAN (2006) stated that the Bill of Rights clearly states children have the right to be protected from potentially harmful cultural, religious, and social practices. Virginity practices can be harmful in the sense that the testers usually do not wear gloves or wash their hands and if gloves are worn it is often the case that the same gloves are used on every girl. As a result diseases

may be passed to previously uninfected girls. RAPCAN (2006) further argue that virginity testing stigmatises and ostracises girls who do not pass the test. As already mentioned, some girls who do not pass the test may sometimes commit suicide. Young adolescents report that virginity testing is done voluntarily and do not voice any concerns about human rights issues. They believe they have a right to participate in virginity testing; therefore it must not be banned.

5.3 Conclusion

The study managed to shed light on the views and perspectives held by adolescents with regard to virginity testing. From the study one is able to understand the importance of the custom and why there has been a revival of the practice. While it is seen by some young people as an effective tool for pregnancy prevention in rural areas, rape also has become a big problem. While promoting virginity testing one should also look and think about issues related to the safety and security of the young girls. How do we protect them from rape? Prevention programmes should also play a big role and young boys should also be encouraged to abstain from sex.

Given the fact that there is high support for virginity testing and that young girls report they undergo the test voluntarily, human rights activists should reconsider the banning of the custom and work together with supporters of virginity testing in trying to come up with a solution of how best to conduct the test without infringing the rights of children.

At a time when HIV/AIDS in South Africa is causing a great deal of devastation, delaying the age of sexual debut can contribute to the prevention of the spread of HIV/AIDS. South Africa will also experience a decline in teenage pregnancy, which will lead to increase in female education. Virginity testing is a strategy that delays the age of sexual debut but should be accompanied by abstinence awareness campaigns which not only focus on female but also male abstinence.

South Africa faces the challenge of publicising virginity testing and giving the correct information about why people should undergo the test and why boys should also undergo the test. There should not be a bias. Kinoti (2005) argues that virginity testing relies on shame and fear of stigmatisation rather than freedom of choice. Presently the responsibility of preserving virginity rests with girls only. We should look at why boys are not undergoing the test and try and come up with ways of testing males. Also, more emphasis should be placed on encouraging male abstinence before marriage.

5.4 Recommendations

It is recommended that government and sponsors support virginity testing financially, so that secure places for conducting virginity testing will be built. A common complaint was raised by young girls about young maidens showing their buttocks and breasts. Young girls feel that it increases their chances of being raped. Future research should focus on security and privacy when conducting the testing. In addition, female respondents feel it is important that young girls are protected from rape and suggested that future studies should look at how to ensure that young girls are protected from rape. Studies should examine factors that contribute to the rape of virgins after virginity testing ceremonies and try and come up with solutions of how to deal with the rape perpetrators.

Another problem that still needs to be addressed is the issue of accuracy when conducting virginity testing. Young adolescents reported that some young girls who have lost their virginity undergo the test just to fool the testers. Proper training of the testers is important.

It is also recommended that there be educational programmes in schools and media (television and radio) to teach about the importance of virginity testing, and correct and consistent condom use for those who are sexually active or those who are no longer virgins. Counseling for those who have lost their virginity is also crucial. There is a need for facilities that offer voluntary counseling and testing, and greater access to health services so that community members will make more informed decisions about their

lives. It is recommended that more clinics are built not far from where people live and that there should be greater access to condoms.

It is also recommended that parents discuss sexual matters with their children. However, the researcher has noted that discussing sexual issues with young people in a traditional society is not possible. Parent child communication is important because adolescents regard their parents as role models and adolescents take matters that they discuss with their parents seriously. Therefore the researcher encourages parent child communication.

Encouraging youth to talk about abuse and rape is very important. Giving them information about support networks (such as ChildLine) and encouraging them to report any kind of abuse is important since there are instances where young people do not report rape especially when they are raped by family members.

It is recommended that there should be abstinence awareness programmes. For males interventions should include skills to resist pressure not to abstain, and changing and creating positive attitudes towards sexual abstinence since traditions and particular notions of masculinity encourage men to have multiple sexual partners. Varga (1997) states that for young men having many sexual partners is a 'yardstick' used to measure masculinity, intelligence, and success among peers. Strategies used to gain multiple sexual partners are regarded as proof of male intelligence, cunning, and wit.

It is recommended that there should be policies and programmes that promote greater equality between men and women. The main focus should be on promoting equality in terms of sexual decision-making, especially in traditional societies where women are expected to be silent and ignorant about sexual matters. Gupta (2000) states that men often do not go to health care professionals to seek information relating to sexual health; they rely on their peers who are also not knowledgeable just like them.

Last but not least, the debate surrounding virginity testing has highlighted the vulnerability of girl children and virginity testing is seen as a human rights issue that

needs to be addressed. Future research should include supporting structures such as “Take a girl child to work”, where young girls will be provided with life skills training programmes aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women and girl children and fostering their well-being, self respect, and dignity. I feel that virginity testing alone cannot empower young girls, and also foster self respect and dignity, but it requires some support.

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APPENDIX 1

Reasons for undergoing virginity testing: A study of young people in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

FOCUS GROUP AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Topics Discussed

1. How do you define virginity testing?
2. Describe the procedures involved in conducting virginity testing. Where is virginity testing conducted? Who conducts virginity testing?
3. Discuss the difference between someone who is a virgin and someone who is no longer a virgin
4. At which age is a girl expected to lose her virginity and why at that particular age?
5. Do you receive education or information on how a woman should maintain her virginity? Explain in detail. What do you think can help to maintain girl's virginity besides virginity testing?
6. What importance is attached to virginity testing?
7. Some people believe that virginity testing is associated with lobola, marriage, self dignity and pride. What do you think?
8. What is society's attitude towards non-virgin and girls who do not undergo virginity testing? What are society's perceptions about non-virgins?
9. Some people argue that virginity testing prevents pregnancy among teenage girls. What do you think?
10. Some people believe that virginity testing can lead to rape. What is your view regarding this matter?
11. Some people argue that virginity testing prevents the further spread of HIV/AIDS. What do you think?
12. The myth has arisen that if an HIV positive person has sex with a virgin, a positive man will be cured. What is your opinion regarding this myth?
13. Some people argue that virginity testing should be banned. What are your views regarding this matter?
14. What are some of the problems or implications of virginity testing?
15. Do non-virgins receive counseling? If it is found that a girl is no longer a virgin, what happens to her? If she is found to be a virgin, what do you get?
16. Does the government or any non-governmental organisation fund virginity testing?
17. What are other types of sexual activities teenagers engage in when trying to preserve their virginity?
18. Is there anything you would like to say or recommend relating to the topic that has been discussed?

Thank you.
End of Interview

APPENDIX 2

FOCUS GROUP AND IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Zulu Version

1. Ukuchaza kanjani ukuhlolwa kwezintombi
2. Chaza indlela yokuhlolwa kwezintombi. Ubuntombi buhlolwa kuyiphi indawo? Ubani ohlola ubuntombi?
3. Chaza umahluko phakathi komuntu oyintombi nomuntu ongaseyona intombi?
4. Intombazane kulindeleke ukuthi iphelelwe ubuntombi bayo ngamuphi unyaka, kungani imele iphelelwe ubuntombi ngalowo munyaka?
5. Engabe niyathola ukufundiswa noma ulwazi mayelana nokugcina ubuntombi, chaza kabanzi? Yini enye ocabanga ukuthi ingasiza ukugcina ubuntombi ngaphandle kokuhlolwa kwezintombi?
6. Kubaluleke ngani ukuhlolwa kwezintombi?
7. Abanye abantu bacabanga ukuthi ukuhlolwa kwezintombi kumayelana nokulobola, umshado, isizotha, kanye nokuziqhenya, wena ucabangani?
8. Umphakathi ubaphatha kanjani abantu abangasezona izintombi namantombazane angayi kohlolwa ubuntombi. Umphakathi ucabanga kanjani ngabantu abangezona izintombi?
9. Abanye abantu bathi ukuhlolwa kwezintombi kungavikela ukukhulelwa ezintombini, wena ucabangani?
10. Abanye abantu bakholelwa ukuthi ukuhlolwa kwezintombi kungaholela ekutheni zidlwengulwe izintombi, yimuphi umbono wakho mayelana nalokhu?
11. Abanye abantu bathi ukuhlolwa kwezintombi kungavikela ukusabalala kwengculazi, wena ucabangani?
12. Kunenkolelo yokuthi uma umuntu onengculazi eya ocansini nomuntu oyintombi, lowomuntu onengculazi angalapheka, yimuphi umubono wakho ngalokhu?
13. Abanye abantu bathi ukuhlolwa kwezintombi kumele kuvalwe, uthini umbono wakho ngalokhu?
14. Yiziphi izinkinga ngokuhlolwa kwezintombi?
15. Abantu abangasezona izintombi bayathola yini ukukhanselwa? Uma utholakala ukuthi awuseyona intombi kwenzakalani ngawe, uma utholwa ukuthi useyintombi utholani?
16. Ingabe uhulumeni noma izinhlangotho ezingawona uhulumeni ziyakuxhasa ukuhlolwa kwezintombi?
17. Yiziphi ezinye izindlela zokuya ocansini ezisetshenziswa abantu abangakakhulu, uma befuna ukuvikela ubuntombi?
18. Kukhona ongathanda ukukusho noma unikeze izinto ezingenziwa mayelana nesikade sikhuluma ngakho?

Ngiyabonga
Ukuphela kocwaningo