Because of temptations : children, sex and HIV/AIDS in Tanzania
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Citation for published version (APA):

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PART 2

CHILDREN’S EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS
Introduction: “Because of temptations”

This part of the book explores how boys and girls in Tanzania understand and explain their sexual behavior and that of their peers. There is a discussion of the reasons given by Tanzanian boys and girls about their choice to engage in or refrain from sexual activity and the contexts in which this behavior takes place. As explained in Chapter 2, the information about norms, personal experiences, experiences close to the child or assumptions depends on the research setting, the methods used and the relationship between the researchers and the child informants. Initially dominant themes from group consensus that arose during group discussions will be reviewed. These themes play an important role in the children’s decisions about sexual activity, even though the children who were interviewed were not referring to personal experiences per se. From the dominant themes I will give accounts that reflect the children’s personal experiences and opinions. There will be an investigation of social patterns and individual patterns of sexual behavior. In addition, how individual behavior conforms or conflicts with local norms and expectations will be elaborated in Part 3. Unless stated otherwise, quoted conversation is from group interviews in a school setting as described in Chapter 2. I do not specify the children’s names, ages or the location of the school, to enhance readability and because the quotes illustrate the dominant themes and perceptions that arose in many group discussions. I add the composition of the group, gender, age and/or the location only if it is critical information for interpretation. Personal accounts from the children are introduced by a short description of the key informant.

In the introduction of this book some dominant themes are presented that emerged in the many discussions we had with children about the reasons that boys and girls engage in sex:

- Boy: Because of temptations
- Girl: Deception
- Boy: Learning from friends
- […]
- Girl: Maybe they are being deceived, maybe their friends are telling her she should get a boyfriend to get material gains
- Boy: Maybe because of poor backgrounds, if the parents can’t fulfill their needs, girls have to seek for other means, they need money
- Girl: Some are just tempted to have sex…
- Boy: Some want to find out what it is like and then they become addicted
- […]
- Other boy: You feel like there is a need of making love when physical changes occur
- Girl: Some have sex before physical changes take place…
The reason why boys and girls engage in sex, according to children, is “because of temptations” (vishawishi). For boys, ‘temptations’ refer to the feeling of desire (tamaa) described as feeling the need to make love (tamaa ya kunfanya mapenzi) or a ‘pushing’ of the body (kusukuma) in response to a girls’ physique. Most boys describe these feelings as very powerful, sometimes hard to ignore or control, and the general opinion or expectation was that satisfaction of desire is addictive. The temptation of desire starts when they go through what the children called ‘physical changes’ (-badilisho: to change; -balehe: to reach the age of puberty). Both boys and girls described feelings of desire and attraction as ‘natural’ and belonging to the process of physical development: “Sex is something natural and no one can avoid sex”; “Boys chase after girls, that’s just nature”. Yet going through those physical changes is not a prerequisite for some children to engage in sex. As the girl above indicated: “Some have sex before physical changes take place…” Indeed we found that some of our key informants had sex or tried to have sex before the onset of puberty. Curiosity and peer pressure seem to be the main motivators for boys. Tumaini, a 15-year-old boy from Nyahali stated:

I started when I was 13. […] I learned to do sex from my [older] brother and his friends. I learned from the stories of the group, that’s what made me wanted to try. But at that time no hormones yet, but I tried. I wanted to check how it felt, what would happen. But I was not matured at that time. I managed when I was 15.

Tumaini shares a room with his brother who is three years older. Their father built them a hut to sleep in next to the one where he and his wife sleep. One night Tumaini woke up hearing sounds. His brother had smuggled his girlfriend into the hut and was having sex with her:

I saw my brother using a condom because we are sharing a bedroom. He was having sex with his girlfriend. […] I felt stimulated and I felt like I wanted to do it too. So I asked my brother everything about it and I started learning everything about sex and condoms, because I wanted to do it also.

When girls start having sex before the onset of puberty, the consensus was that this is mostly due to poverty. In general, we did not come across personal accounts of girls reporting pre-pubertal sex. An exception was girls living in the street whom we had interviewed in earlier research: “I first had sex when I was ten years old. […] Because I was hungry, I used not to get food from my aunt, so I accepted the 2500 [€1.50] and slept with him”. Hunger and poverty ultimately drove these girls to live in the streets. But as argued earlier, children who

42 See also Zimake in Chapter 1.
live in the street should not be taken as representative of the youth of Tanzania. There could be other factors involved in girl’s pre-pubertal onset of sexual activity. We heard stories from boys who told us they tried to have sex with an equally young girl while playing games like ‘father and mother’, ‘hide and seek’ or ‘the chicken game’. For example ten-year-old Jimmy stated:

[...] When I got back home, I know my sister plays with her friend, I convinced my sister to tell her to believe that I am the father, the friend of my sister can be my wife and then I told my sister: “You are my daughter, you better go to sleep now”. Then I went somewhere with the friend of my sister and had sex.

Games like the chicken game are actually sexual games: “You do like the chicken do, or like the cows and goats” [mating]. Imitation was also mentioned in relation to seeing parents or older siblings having sex as bedrooms are frequently shared or having watched a pornographic movie or images.

Like boys, girls acknowledged having feelings of desire and curiosity as well, but described themselves as better able to control these feelings compared to boys. Feelings of desire in girls were described more in terms of increasing the chance for a girl to give in to a different kind of temptation - money (tamaa za pesa). An important motivator for girls, according to both boys and girls, is the money or gifts boys offer girls during their courtship in their attempt to seduce girls and convince them to agree (-kubali) to have sex. As described in the previous chapter, receiving money or gifts for non-marital sex is the norm in Tanzania and boys quickly learn they will not succeed in seducing a girl if they have nothing to offer. Girls learn to expect the boy to offer something when he is ‘chasing’ and that by accepting his gift or money, a boy will expect to have sex with her. The girls told us that boys and men approach them beginning from a young age and then it is ongoing. When they walk back from school, fetch water or firewood or when they are send to buy something in a shop they are ‘approached’ (kufuata -literally: to follow-) by boys and men who tell them “I like you” or “I love you” (nakupenda) and offer them a bit of money or bring them a gift. In school they are approached by messengers, often a friend or sibling of the pursuer, or receive letters from boys offering them money and making promises like “I will take care of you”, “I’ll get you anything you need” and “After we finish school, I will marry you”. The promises that boys make to girls are often referred to with the term ‘deception’ (danganyo). Girls are of the opinion that the majority of the boys are not sincere and do not live up to their promises. Boys
acknowledge this and easily admit that they use the tactic of lying to persuade girls to have sex with them. Still, children, teachers, parents and caretakers mentioned that money and the prospect of support are the strongest temptations for girls, especially for girls from ‘poor backgrounds’. We were presented with many stories about parents turning a blind eye or encouraging girls to engage in sex because of economic hardship:

Some parents influence their children. For example, they might send the daughter for a fish without money, at the same time telling her “go and bring us fish. You will figure out where to get the money, don’t come back without a fish”. When a mother like this says this to her, the child will go to those who are selling fish and she will tell them to give her fish but she doesn’t have the money. Those selling fish will ask her to go and have sex and after they will give her the fish. If that girl agrees to have sex with them, they give her fish. That girl can get pregnant or [get] HIV and other STD’S.

[Girl during FGD]

So money and desire are important motivators for boys and girls to get involved in sex. But do boys randomly approach girls? Do girls initiate courtship? Is there a role for romance, love and attraction? Why do boys lie? And if all the girls complain about boys’ deceptive words, how do boys still manage to get girlfriends? Although temptations, physical changes, desire and money were often identified as being an important motivations for children to become sexually active, the children explained that these motivators often ‘work’ in combination with other influences, most notably in relation to family members, friends and potential partners. How such influences work within the context of children’s everyday lives will be investigated in the coming chapters.