

Men with Money and the Persistence of AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa

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Since the onset of the AIDS epidemics in sub-Saharan Africa more than two decades ago, HIV prevention and intervention campaigns have ebbed and flowed regarding which strategies are most heavily promoted. Yet, the populations of people targeted as “at risk” over this time are remarkably consistent—again and again, international and national AIDS organizations pinpoint sex workers, truck drivers, and young women. Workshops and trainings are conducted with the twin goals of empowering and educating these “high-risk” groups. Despite the numerous studies that show that prevalence is higher for the relatively wealthier men, workshops and trainings rarely focus on men with money and power—such as those who have senior positions in government ministries, and INGOs and NGOs in the capitals and their district-level counterparts. The closest that programs come to identifying men with money are sporadic posters of Sugar Daddies, depicted as men leering at schoolgirls in uniforms, or in bed with buxom prostitutes, and not as men respectably outfitted with suits and briefcases. In this paper, we document the significance of men with money for the persistence of the HIV epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa and offer an explanation of the silence surrounding their activities. We focus on two quite different countries, Botswana and Malawi, and use evidence that policy and program documents, survey data linked to HIV status, ethnographic reports, and historical accounts. We conclude with a call for a concerted focus on men with money.