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## Factors Determining Media-based Partner/Spouse Seeking in the Era of HIV and AIDS Pandemic

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### Abstract

Marrying or looking for a lifetime soul mate or partner in the era of HIV and AIDS pandemic is problematic, worrying and a nightmare. Dating has to a number of people been elevated media platform recently. HIV and AIDS is a reality among partners and spouse seekers but little research has been done to understand this spouse/partner seeking behavior. The present study evaluated factors influencing the choices of partners and/or spouses in Kenya dating through media. The study obtained data from the information provided by individuals seeking spouses and/or partners from the soul mate section of the Saturday Nation Newspaper. The data obtained from four hundred and eleven persons from different educational and social backgrounds was entered in Microsoft excel spreadsheet and thereafter analyzed by SPSS version 20. The Chi-squared test was performed to test for statistical differences among groups. Information obtained from this study is important as an advocacy tool for building commitment to HIV and AIDS prevention and control from multisectoral fronts.

**Keywords:** Human immunodeficiency virus; Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome; Spouse

### Introduction

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) is one of the most complex health problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that threatens the world population (UNAIDS 2014; WHO, 2014). With no treatment or cure in sight, the disease continues to spread. Globally, an estimated 36.9 million people are living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2014) [1,2]. Over 90% of these individuals are concentrated in the developing countries, mostly in countries least able to afford care for infected people. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most heavily affected by HIV worldwide, accounting for over two thirds of all people living with HIV and for nearly three quarters of AIDS-related deaths (WHO, 2013).

The number of people living with HIV in Kenya is about 1.5 million people (NACC, 2013). Urban populations have higher adult HIV prevalence (10%) compared with rural populations (NACC, 2013). Since HIV weakens the host's immune system, associated opportunistic diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria have had to put a strain on health sector in terms of their treatment and management (KDHS, 2014). The Kenya government has employed public education to prevent new HIV infections and provision of anti-retroviral (ARV) drugs to the infected persons to increase their lifespan and improve the quality of lives. The government has also increased access to education through provision of free basic education, increase in academic institutions among others since education in itself is an important tool in combating HIV and AIDS [3-6].

Media-based dating and spouse/sexual partner seeking has picked up in Kenya just like in many parts of the world. Persons involved post on public media their desired partner/spouse qualities with a number

silent on HIV status. Data from media is purely a unique and indeed reliable primary data from human beings on a very sensitive private life. The person voluntarily makes a personal decision without pressure and or influence of any kinds to have a partner and indeed describes what kind of partner he/she will like to have and goes ahead to pay for this information to be advertised.

Although a number of studies have explored various aspects of HIV and AIDS, there is no systematic study carried out to evaluate factors influencing the choices of partners and/or spouses in Kenya in the era of HIV and AIDS pandemic [7-10]. This is the premise of the current study. Whether the preventive measures/policies are practiced or not, this demographic analysis is crucial, because the views, beliefs and practices of the 18-55 year-old population are the most appropriate guideline for directing the next course of action and planning the most suitable preventive and educational measures.

### Materials and Methods

The present study obtained information provided by individuals seeking spouses and/or partners for all kinds of relationships from the soul mate section of Saturday Nation Newspaper from January to December. This was a very important source of data already paid for and put in public domain for consumption which reflects the authenticity, seriousness, reliability, truthfulness and unbiasedness of the information being sought. Data was obtained as key indicators for factors influencing choice of partner/spouse seekers from the information given out by clients of Nation Media Group to help look for partners and/or spouses for the following types of relationship: Relationships built towards marriage, long term relationship with no strings attached of marriage, short-term relationship, holiday partners/friends, weekend partners/friends, one day relationships, and overnight partners/friends [10-15].

## Statistical analysis

The data obtained was recorded and tabulated on Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and thereafter transformed into percentages before being analyzed by SPSS statistical software version 20.0. The Chi-squared test was performed to test for differences between groups. Values of  $p \leq 0.05$  were regarded as significant.

## Results

Among the 411 respondents, 45.5% (187 respondents) were male while 54.5% (224 respondents) were female. The following were captured from the print media as factors influencing choice of a partner in Kenya in the era of HIV and AIDS.

### HIV status

There was significant difference in the respondents who were willing to carry out a HIV and AIDS test and respondents who were not interested to be tested ( $\chi^2=161.78$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The majority of the respondents were looking for partners who were willing to carry out HIV and AIDS test at 72.3%. Among the respondents willing to go for HIV and AIDS test, 44.9% were male, while 55.1% were female. Of respondents who were not interested in HIV and AIDS test, 52.7% were male, while 47.3% were female. Among the male respondents, 65.7% were willing to know their HIV and AIDS status, while 34.3% were not interested. The female respondents, 75.3% were willing to have HIV and AIDS test, while 24.7% were not interested in HIV and AIDS test. There was significant difference ( $\chi^2=3.956$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.05$ ) among the men and women willing to have a HIV and AIDS test and those who were not interested in HIV and AIDS test. The level of education did not inform HIV and AIDS testing among the respondents ( $\chi^2=2.894$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.235$ ).

### Level of education

There was significant difference between the respondents looking for a non-graduate partner, a graduate partner and a postgraduate partner ( $\chi^2=215.314$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The respondents who were looking for a non-graduate partner were the majority with 65.7%, followed by a graduate at 26.5% and a postgraduate at 7.8%. Among the male respondents, 73.8% were looking for a non-graduate partner, 21.4% were looking for a graduate partner and 4.8% were looking for a postgraduate partner. Among the female respondents, 58.9% were looking for a non-graduate partner, followed by graduate partner at 30.8%, while 10.3% were looking for a postgraduate partner. Among the respondents who were looking for a non-graduate partner, 51.1% were male respondents, while 48.9% were female. In addition, among the respondents who were looking for a graduate partner, 63.3% were female, while 36.7% were male. Of those looking for postgraduate partners 71.9% were female, while 28.1% male. There was significant difference between men and women looking non-graduate, graduate or postgraduate partner ( $\chi^2=10.704$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.001$ ).

### Economic status

There was significant difference between respondents who were looking for an economically stable and unstable partners partner ( $\chi^2=49.754$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The respondents who were looking for the economically stable partners were at 67.4%, while 32.6% of the respondents were looking for the economically unstable partners. The male respondents looking for an economically unstable partner were at

73.3%, while the male respondents looking for the economically stable partner constituted 26.7%. Among all the female respondents, 62.5% were looking for an economically stable partner, while 37.5% were looking for economically unstable partners. Of the respondents looking for an economically stable partner, 37.5% were male, while 62.7% were female. Among the respondents who were looking for economically unstable partner, 49.5% were female, while 50.5% were male. There was significant difference between men and woman looking for an economically stable or an economically unstable partner ( $\chi^2=5.359$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.021$ ).

### Marital status

There was significant difference between respondents who were looking for a single or a divorced/widowed partner ( $\chi^2=88.020$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The majority of respondents were looking for a single partner at 82.8%, while 17.2% were looking for either a divorced or widowed partner. Among the male respondents, 97.6% were looking for single partners, while 2.4% were looking for either divorced or widowed partner. The female respondents were looking for a single partner at 72.3%, while 27.7% were looking for either divorced or widowed partner. Of the respondents looking for a single partner, 49.1% were male, while 50.9% were female. Among the respondents looking for a divorced or widowed partner, 94.3% were female, while 5.7% were male. There was significant difference in respondents who were looking for single partner and divorced/widowed partner in Kenya ( $\chi^2=22.358$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ).

### Possession of children

There was significant difference between respondents looking for partners with or without children ( $\chi^2=114.427$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The majority of the respondents at 62.5% were looking for partners without children, 27.3% with or without children, while 10.2% were looking for partners with children. Of the male respondents, 62.9% were looking for partner without children, 26.6% without or with children and 10.5% with children. Among the female respondents, 62.2% were looking partners without children, 28% with or without children and partners with children at 9.8%. Among the respondents looking for partners without children, 53.3% were female, while 46.7% were male. Of the respondents looking for partners with or without children 54.8% were female, while 45.2% were male. Of the respondents looking for a partner with children, 51.9% were female, while 48.1% were male. There was no significant difference between men and women looking for partners with children, without children and with or without children ( $\chi^2=0.003$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.960$ ).

### Type of relationship

There was significant difference between the respondents looking for different types of relationships ( $\chi^2=49.754$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). The majority of the respondents at 91.5% were looking for partners to marry, followed by partners for companion at 5.0% and partners for long-term friendship at 3.5%. Of the male respondents, 91.8% were looking for a partner to marry, followed by partners for friendship at 4.4% and finally partners for companion at 3.8%. Of the female respondents, 91.3% were looking for partners to marry, followed by partners for companion at 6.0% and finally partners for friendship at 2.7%. Of those seeking for partners to marry, 53.7% were female, while 46.3% were male. Among the respondents looking partners for long-term friendship, 58.3% were male, while 41.7% were female. Of the respondents looking for companion partner, 53.8% were female, while

46.2% were male. There was no significant difference in terms of the type of relationship men and women were looking for when seeking a partner in the era of HIV and AIDS ( $\chi^2=0.960$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.835$ ).

### Honesty

There was significant difference between respondents who were looking for honest partner and respondents who were not interested in honest partners ( $\chi^2=9.657$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.002$ ). The respondents were looking for honest partners were at 42.3%. Of the respondents looking for the honest partner, 42.5% were male, while 57.5% were female. Among the respondents who were not interested in honest partners, 47.4% were male, while 52.6% were female. The choice of honest or dishonest partner was not significantly different between men and women looking for a partner ( $\chi^2=1.071$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.301$ ).

### Open-minded

There was significant difference among the respondents who were looking for an open-minded partner and those who were not interested in an open-minded partner ( $\chi^2=23.3474$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). Thirty eight percent of the respondents were looking an open-minded partner. Of the respondents looking for open-minded partner, 48.7% were male, while 51.3% were female. Among those who were not interested in an open-minded partner, 43.5% were male, while 56.5% were female. There was no significant difference between men and women looking for an open-minded partner and those who were not interested in an open-minded partner when seeking for a partner ( $\chi^2=1.048$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.306$ ).

### Loving

There was significant difference among the respondents who were looking for a loving partner and those who were not interested in loving partners ( $\chi^2=6.328$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.012$ ). The respondents were looking for a loving partner at 43.8%. Of the respondents looking for a loving partner, 49.4% were male, while 50.6% were female. Among those not interested in loving partners, 42.4% were male, while 57.6% were female. There was no significant difference between men and women looking for loving partners and those who were not interested in loving partners when seeking for a partner ( $\chi^2=2.006$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.157$ ).

### Discussion

This study evaluated factors influencing choice of partners or spouse in the era of HIV and AIDS in Kenya. The HIV and AIDS test was also an important factor in choice of partner during the era of HIV and AIDS in Kenya. Majority of the respondents were seeking for a partner willing to have HIV and AIDS test. HIV testing reduces chances of HIV and AIDS transmission through unprotected sex as only partners with the same HIV status will engage in a relationship [16-20].

The level of education was as an important factor in the choice of a partner in Kenya. The majority of the respondents were looking for a non-graduate partner. This could be due to the higher number of non-graduates individuals compared to graduates and postgraduate individuals in Kenya. The highest proportions of male and female respondents were seeking for a non-graduate partner. This implies that respondents were seeking partners with their level of education. It has been reported that graduates who marry partners of lower educational qualification find it difficult to introduce their spouses in public

functions [21]. This can thus result into marriage problems. College graduates also prefer to marry college graduates like themselves [22]. The majority of female respondents were seeking graduate and postgraduate partners compared to male respondents. This is consistent with a study carried out by Buss and Schmitt (2008), reported that women consistently express a preference for partners who have high status profession and therefore, this lead to majority of women seeking partners with higher level of education [23].

The economic status was a factor that influences choice of partner. The reason as to why most of the respondents were seeking for economically stable could be due to the hard economic times today. Female respondents had the highest proportion seeking for economically stable partners compared from the male respondents [24-26]. This can be explained by the tendency of most women valuing men who are industrious, ambitious and who possess a promising career orientation. This supported by a study by Betzig [24], which revealed that women are significantly more likely to discontinue relationships with men who are economically unstable or unemployed. Partners who are economically stable may help in reduction of HIV and AIDS transmission as they can have a good access to HIV and AIDS control and preventive measures [27].

Marital status of a partner was considered as a factor that influences choice of a partner in Kenya. The majority of male and female respondents were seeking for a single partner compared from widowed/divorced partner [28,29]. This implies that many of the respondents avoid widowed/divorced partners because they could be more HIV and AIDS victims compared from single partners. A study carried out in Kisumu County Kenya reported that a tendency for young women to have old widowed/divorced partners both within and outside marriage is likely to increase their risk of HIV [30-35]. Besides, Possession of children was well related with choice of partner. The majority of the respondents were seeking partners without children. This is probably because individuals with children may have high HIV and AIDS prevalence compared from individuals without children due to greater exposure via unprotected sex with partners who may have higher rates of infection [36,37].

Type of a relationship also contributed to the choice of partner as majority of the respondents were seeking for a partner to marry. Marriage is a key institution in many, if not all societies and usually marks a transition of childhood to adulthood [38,39]. Married individuals are less likely than single individuals to have multiple partners; this may reduce chances of HIV and AIDS exposure [40-42].

Honesty contributes to the choice of a partner. Honesty is an important emotional need which trigger a feeling of love in a relationship and the only way spouses can understand each and solve their problems together [43]. Therefore, honest partners can reduce the chances of HIV and AIDS transmission. Related to honesty does the attribute of God fear which also related well with the choice of partner. Majority of the female respondents were looking for God fearing partners. Love also can be a factor that influences choice of a partner in Kenya. Love is an emotion of a strong attraction and personal attachment and therefore, for any relationship to be strong each and every partner should show love to each other. Love among partners may therefore reduce chance of HIV and AIDS transmission. These findings were in agreement with other findings carried out by Levi-Strauss [44], which reported that most of individuals seek for a God fearing partner and partners within the same religious belief since differences in religious belief may be a disruptive force in their



marriage life, while religion could be a binding force to hold marriage together for those with the same religious belief [45].

Open-mindedness also could be considered as a factor that influences choice of a partner. The majority of female respondents were looking for open-minded partners. This implies that many females seek for partners who approach the views and knowledge of others and incorporate the beliefs that others should be free to express their views and that the value of others' knowledge should be recognized. Open-mindedness therefore, may help reducing chances of partner transmitting HIV and AIDS from one partner to another. This also influences the ease with which partners can use protection during sexual activity in case one of them is or maybe exposed to HIV.

## Conclusion

HIV status is an important factor in choice of spouse/partner through media. Since this is the same with the conventional dating and mate choices, the two methods are therefore similar in terms of HIV and AIDS prevention and control. Choice of partner/spouses in Kenya is also influenced by level of education, economic status, marital status, possession of children and type of relationship. Other factors which influenced choice of partner included honesty, open-mindedness, loving, organized, and respectful. Results also indicate that HIV/AIDS is manageable, controllable and preventable even through media-based choice of partners/spouse.

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