

Sugar daddies are dangerous

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CHANGING BEHAVIOUR PROJECT

WESTERN CAPE GOVERNMENT

Healthy Lifestyles

Advisory Packet: Intergenerational Sex

● introduction

A recent survey in South Africa revealed a shocking fact — 28% of schoolgirls were HIV-positive, compared to 4% of boys.¹

Why are rates among girls so much higher? In part because young women are often having sex with older men — and older men are more likely to carry the virus.

Intergenerational sex increases the burden of disease in the Western Cape and South Africa — what can be done to reduce it?

¹ Sibongile Mashaba Mpumalanga. '28% of schoolgirls are HIV positive.' Sowetan. March 14, 2013. <http://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2013/03/14/28-of-schoolgirls-are-hiv-positive>

○ A BEHAVIORAL APPROACH

This pamphlet briefly outlines what previous campaigns to reduce intergenerational sex have attempted. A common feature is that many campaigns have an **explicit message** that discourages intergenerational relationships, but also have an accidental **implicit message** that encourages them.

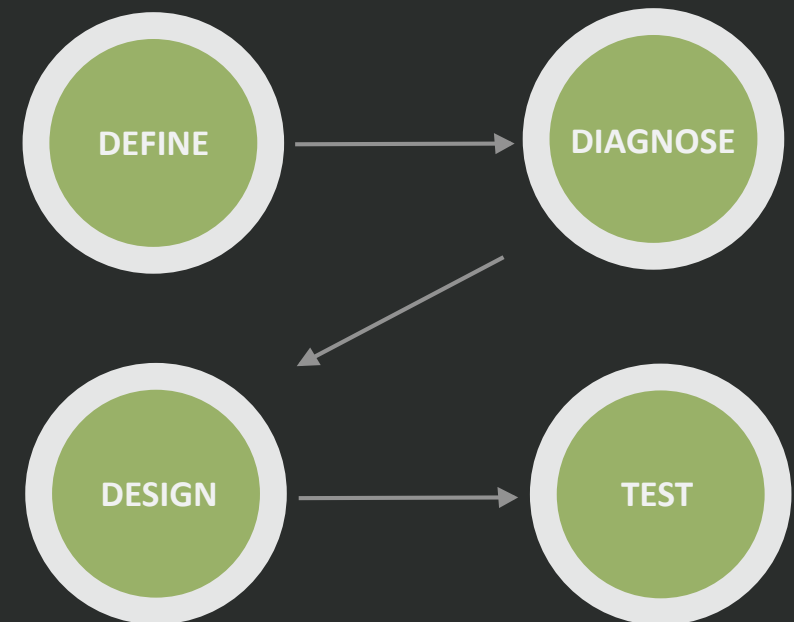
Many of these campaigns stumble because people often do not behave the way we expect. **Behavioral economics** provides a better way to understanding human behavior. Better understanding leads to better diagnosis, which in turn leads to better-designed solutions.

● defining the problem

“If I had an hour to save the world, I would spend 59 minutes defining the problem and one minute finding solutions.”
— attributed to Albert Einstein

Many public health campaigns have been unsuccessful at decreasing the incidence of intergenerational sex. We believe this is because the campaigns did not delve into the psychology of girls who choose to have sex with older men to understand how and why this decision is made.

In order to reduce intergenerational sex, it is important to understand the real underlying problem. This pamphlet will take a look at how some previous media campaigns have failed to do so and have inadvertently made sugar daddies seem more attractive.

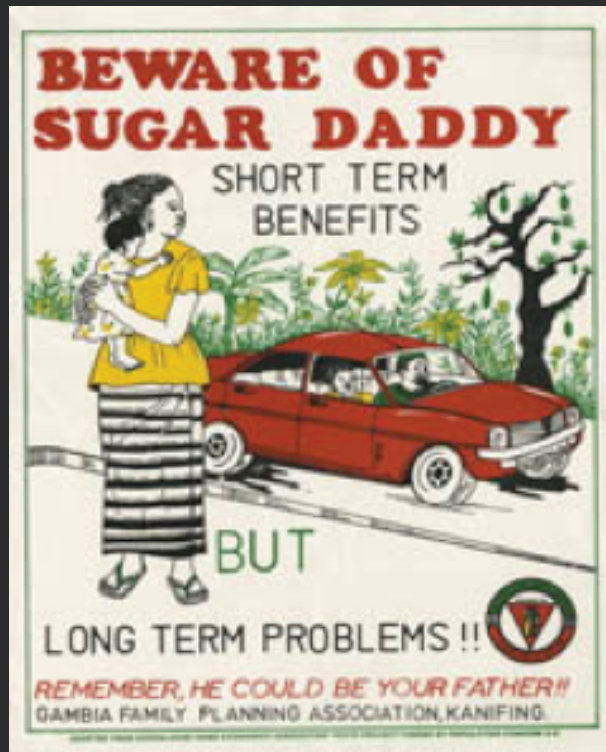


● sugar daddies give you babies

○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

This poster depicts a girl holding a baby and frowning while a woman drives by with an older man. There are “short term benefits” to having a sugar daddy, but also “long term problems.” Published in Gambia in 1994 by the Gambia Family Planning Association (GFPA)

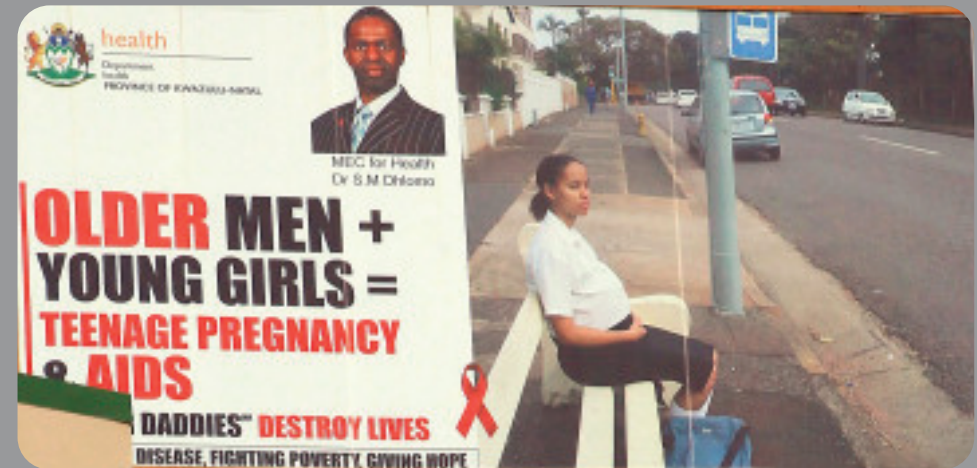
1



○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

This billboard shows a pregnant teen and sends the message that sleeping with older men means teen pregnancy and AIDS.

2



3

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

What if girls think of pregnancy as a good thing?

These posters neglect to consider that perhaps *girls want to become pregnant* because they think that is the way to get into a stable and permanent relationship with their sugar daddy. In fact, studies suggest that “the older the male partner, the more likely pregnancy triggers marriage.”² Girls likely know this. Tying yourself to a sugar daddy means access to someone who has money, a job, status, and other things that teenage boys cannot provide. These posters reinforce the belief that being with a sugar daddy will lead to pregnancy and the desired stability.

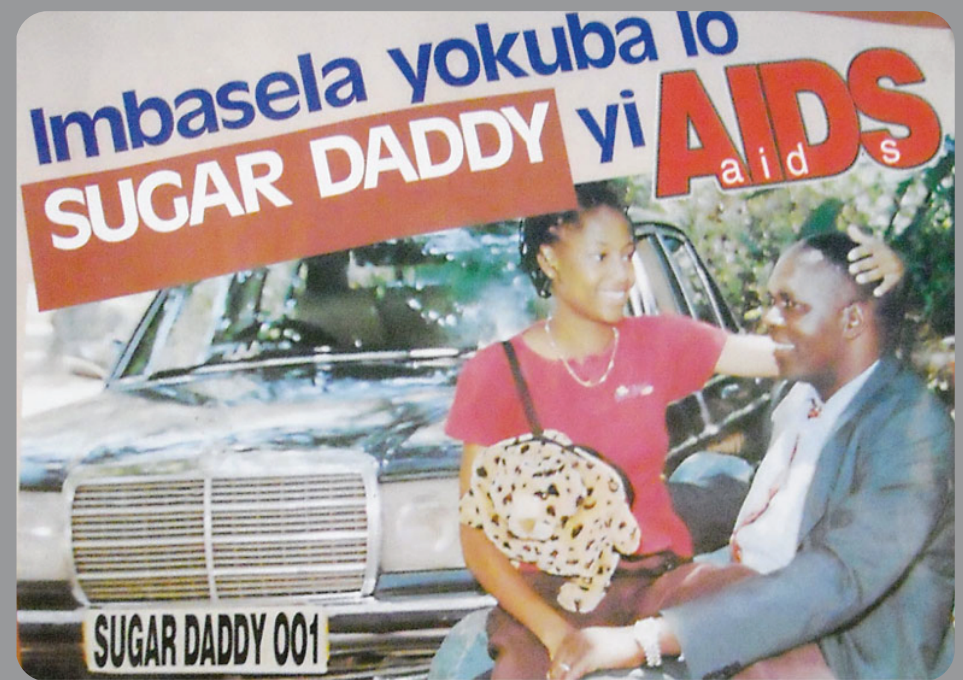
² Dupas, P. (2011). Do Teenagers Respond to HIV Risk Information? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Kenya. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 3: 1–34.

● sugar daddies give you car rides

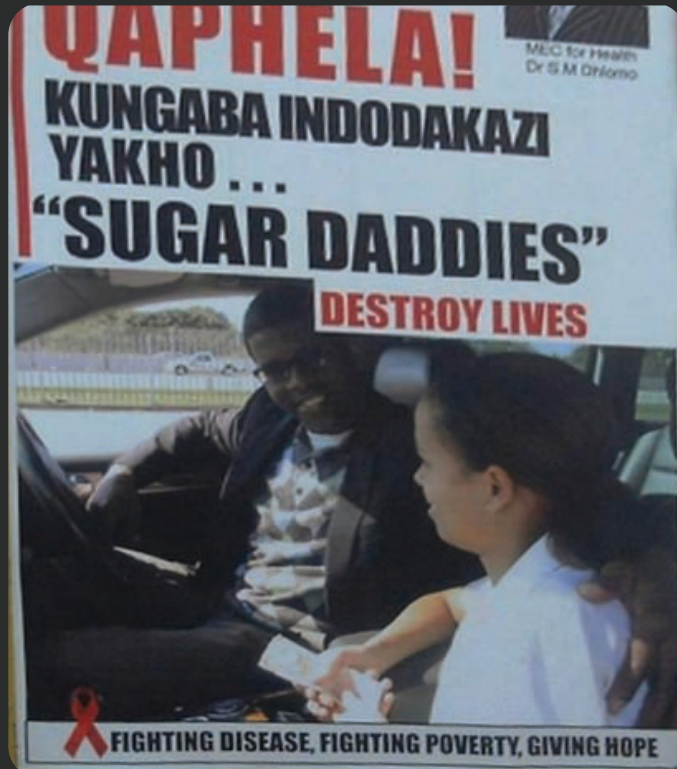
○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

These two posters warn girls against sugar daddies and the danger of AIDS. The teen girls are interacting casually with their sugar daddies near or in their cars. The poster below claims that sugar daddies “destroy lives.”

2



1



3

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

Why make apparent what sugar daddies can provide?

These posters highlight the very reason that girls are drawn to sugar daddies in the first place: *sugar daddies can provide expensive things*. Whether it's cars, an expensive watch, money, or even a nice suit jacket, girls who are poor are looking for these exact signals that indicate the sugar daddy will take care of her. The material possessions and the car rides are what girls can brag about to their friends and classmates. On top of this, the couples look pretty happy. The men look well-dressed, friendly, and non-menacing and the girls are smiling. These posters highlight the pros and ignore the cons — why would you not choose the car ride?

● you want to be with your sugar daddy

○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

The billboard to the right, from Kigali, roughly says, “Say no to sugar daddies.” The poster below shows two girls pulling their friend away from an older man. The poster was created in 1996 by the Uganda Ministry of Health. Both images show the older men waving a wad of money.



3

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

What if the wrong social norm is created — that girls want to be with sugar daddies?

The two posters portray girls who want to be with their sugar daddies despite their friends' wishes, indicating that *having a sugar daddy is desirable* and that it is normal to want to be with him. Girls could interpret the friends' behavior as jealousy, as they obviously do not have sugar daddies of their own. The message is this: you don't have to pay attention to your friends who are trying to prevent you from being happy.

● sugar daddies buy you gifts

1



○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

Still taken from a drama on adolescent pregnancy, sexual responsibility, and sugar daddies that ran in Côte d'Ivoire in 1992.

○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

Poster showing an older man with his arm around a young girl, gesturing towards wares behind a smiling merchant.

2



3

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

Why highlight the immediate benefits?

The posters indicate to girls that there are immediate benefits to having a sugar daddy, such as money and presents. The fact that sugar daddies can provide money to a poor girl for her education or gifts for her enjoyment confirms a girl's initial reasons why **sugar daddies are desirable**. The posters indicate to girls that having a sugar daddy means choosing between pretty clothes and jewelry, not between life and death. Even when the potential costs of having a sugar daddy are highlighted, they are presented as being in the far future.

● sugar daddies are like gum

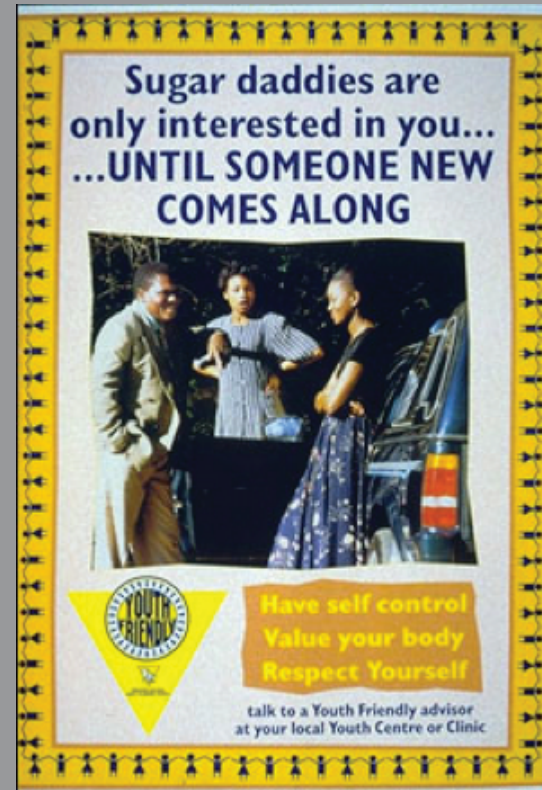
1



○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

This poster compares sugar daddies to bubble gum — because their sweetness only lasts for a short time. Published in Zimbabwe by the Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC)

3



○ EXPLICIT MESSAGE

This poster persuades female adolescents that sugar daddies are only available for a short while. They are “interested in you...until someone new comes along.” Published in Zimbabwe in 1997 by the National Family Planning Council (ZNFPC)

2

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

Sugar daddies *are* sweet?!

This message indicates that the most regrettable aspect of sugar daddies is that your time with them is “too short”. The poster admits that sugar daddies are “sweet”, which implies that **sugar daddies are pleasurable and desirable** for the time that they do last. You will likely never regret the choice to purchase a pack of gum, but a relationship with a sugar daddy can lead to disease and death.

4

○ IMPLICIT MESSAGE

Sugar daddies are in short supply!

Rather than encouraging girls away from sugar daddies, the poster actually indicates that **sugar daddies are in short supply**. It encourages you to view other women as competitors for the sugar daddy’s attention and resources. If so many young women are competing for sugar daddies, you should as well (and if you have one, you should make every effort to keep him).

● best practices

The posters in this pamphlet were attempting to change behaviors regarding intergenerational sex through targeting social norms — widely shared beliefs about correct behavior.

Norms are difficult to change and could potentially backfire completely if done inaccurately. One needs to have a good understanding of social norms in order to effectively change them.

Previous work by ideas42's scientific advisory board has identified several "best practices" for changing social norms.³ These practices (see below and right) can be integrated into current campaigns, or used as the basis of new ones.

³ Paluck, E.L., & Ball, L. (2010). Social Norms Marketing Aimed at Gender Based Violence: A Literature Review and Critical Assessment. New York: International Rescue Committee.

Old norms must be replaced

New norms must be created to replace old norms. Social norms are resilient — if an undesirable norm is weakened, but not replaced by a desirable norm, it may return.

New norms must be credible

New norms can not be too far away from current existing beliefs, or people will reject them.

"Dos" versus "shoulds"

Behavioral scientists distinguish between "prescriptive" and "descriptive" norms. Descriptive norms ("dos") refer the group's current behavior (e.g. "many girls have dated a sugar daddy") while prescriptive norms ("shoulds") are about what behaviors are seen as desirable (e.g. "dating a sugar daddy is gross").

Descriptive norms can backfire

A message saying that "only 15% of girls have dated a sugar daddy" could inadvertently encourage the 85% who do not — perhaps they had thought the rate was lower.

Target the perception of norms

Changing actual behavior is resource intense, but in many cases perceptions can be changed cheaply. Since beliefs can not be directly observed, we can change people's perception of what others around them believe.

Tie norms to actions

New norms should be focused on being relevant at key moments of decision.

Identify key individuals

Identify individuals who will work against undesirable norms. Many individuals may already be publicly against intergenerational sex (e.g. parents, religious figures, and young men). Even more individuals may be against the norm, but only privately. Engaging these populations can assist in both the diagnosis of problems and design of interventions. Provide these groups with microphones!

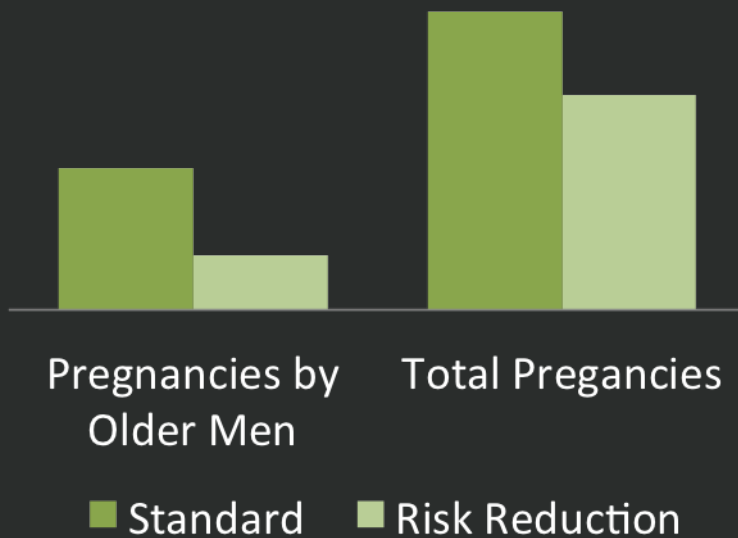
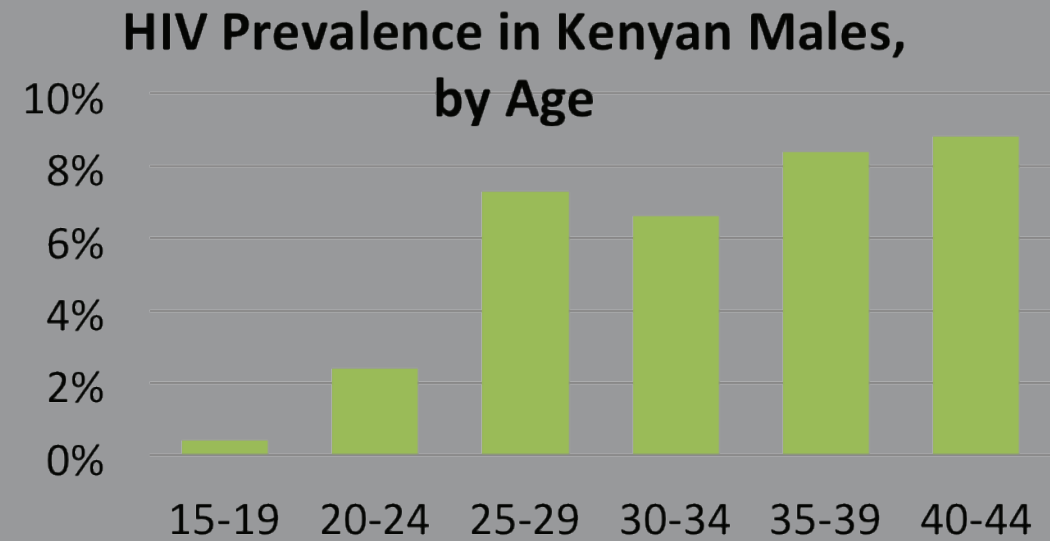
Create opportunities to act

Make it easy to act on the new norm so that behavior change follows belief — and increase the visibility of actions that enhance the norm.

● case study

Providing information and education can change behavior — but it has to be the right information. An experiment in Kenya tested a standard risk avoidance education program (which sought to reduce all sexual activity) versus a risk reduction education program (which specifically outlined the risks of sex with older men).

Male HIV rates in Kenya increase rapidly as men age. Teenagers have a prevalence rate of 0.4%, while adults go to 8.8% — a 2100% increase!



○ EFFECT

The risk reduction education program was provided over the course of a 40 minute period in which students watched a movie, had an open discussion on intergenerational sex, and learned about how HIV prevalence rates differ by age.

A year later, pregnancies by older men had fallen by 65%. Total pregnancies fell by a similar (absolute) amount — indicating that there was not a corresponding increase in sexual activity with younger men.

The education program was inexpensive — only R7 per student, or R840 per childbirth averted. These costs may be driven lower if the information was in a scalable intervention.

● other approaches

The ads in this pamphlet all target young women. However, it is likely that other groups may be equally important targets. Because these groups are not targeted now, interventions may be especially effective:

- The wives of “sugar daddies”
- Young women who reject sugar daddies and can be community leaders
- The parents of young women
- Respected or famous older men who can be examples
- Young men who would like girlfriends their own age
- Those likely to be sugar daddies themselves

○ WHAT'S NEXT?

We are continuing our diagnostic process by directly interfacing with the potential targets of our eventual interventions: young women, older men, and possibly younger men. We hope to begin to design an intervention in May, and target rolling out an intervention in July.

Similarly, all ads in this pamphlet are visual campaign such as billboards and flyers. But interventions can take many other forms:

- “Edutainment” with implicit anti-sugar daddy message
- Text-message based interventions
- Radio and public service announcement
- After school programs
- Job shadowing for girls
- Conditional and unconditional cash transfers
- HIV testing and counselling

Perhaps the most effective interventions will use entirely new mechanisms.

In our diagnosis, we will be seeking answers to the following questions:

- 1 How many young women are currently dating a sugar daddy? How many have ever dated one?
- 2 What do members of the community perceive as the number of young women who are (or have) dated a sugar daddy? How does this compare to the actual rates?
- 3 How do men perceive social norms around intergenerational sex? How do young women? Young men? Parents?
- 4 Who in the community can be leveraged, or given a greater platform to speak against intergenerational sex?

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Contextual differences can change how we interpret messages. On this cover, you can see how the color of the background can make a message stand out, or become invisible. Inside, we show how many campaigns that try to discourage young women from having intergenerational sex may accidentally encourage them to, by making sugar daddies seem more desirable.



ideas42 is a design and research lab that uses behavioral economics to address complex social problems



RUBEN is an interdisciplinary group of researchers who use economic experiments, often together with fMRI imaging techniques, to examine the role that social, cognitive and emotional factors play in economic decision-making