

Original Research Article

Determinants of Risky Behaviour Towards HIV in Côte d'Ivoire: The Case of Young People in the Abobo Scrapyard

Gbossou Brigitte KOUDOU^{1*}, Married Name TETCHI²¹Assistant at the National Institute of Youth and Sports in Abidjan²Graduate of Alassane Ouattara University in Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire)

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Abstract: Today, the issue of HIV/AIDS remains of pressing concern. With one of the highest prevalence rates in West Africa, Côte d'Ivoire ranks among the countries most severely affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This study seeks to analyse the sexual practices and risk behaviours associated with HIV/AIDS among young people working and living in the Abobo scrapyard. The research is based on a mixed-methods design, combining questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews conducted with two hundred and nine (209) participants, including one hundred and thirty-two (132) men and seventy-seven (77) women. The findings reveal multiple risk behaviours likely to increase the exposure of young people in the scrapyard environment to HIV infection. Sexual inexperience coupled with heightened curiosity emerges as a major factor in the propagation of the virus. Although the condom is recognised as the most effective means of protection against HIV/AIDS, the study shows that its use is predominantly motivated by the fear of unintended pregnancy rather than by concern for disease prevention. Moreover, a considerable number of respondents perceive HIV/AIDS as a mere illusion or social construct. Qualitative interviews further indicate that commercial sex work is a widespread and structured activity within the Abobo scrapyard, thereby reinforcing the context of vulnerability and risk.

Keywords: Determinants of Risky Behaviour, HIV/AIDS, Côte d'Ivoire, Youth Vulnerability.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for approximately 25.6 million people living with HIV. In West Africa, the majority of countries record prevalence rates below 2 per cent. The prevalence of HIV/AIDS among adults aged 15 to 49 is estimated at 1 per cent in Burkina Faso, 1.1 per cent in Mali, 2.1 per cent in Liberia, 1.7 per cent in Guinea, and 2 per cent in Ghana. In most African contexts, several studies have highlighted a rise in the age of first marriage and a concomitant increase in premarital sexual activity (Antoine, 2002; Delaunay *et al.*, 2001). Côte d'Ivoire, with a prevalence rate of 3.7 per cent in 2001, was among the fifteen most affected countries worldwide at that time.

Recent estimates from *Spectrum* (2021) indicate that new infections declined by 50 per cent between 2010 and 2020, and AIDS-related mortality also decreased significantly. Nonetheless, in 2020, Côte

d'Ivoire ranked 21st globally with a prevalence rate of 2.4 per cent. For nearly two decades, HIV/AIDS infection has posed a formidable public health and socio-political challenge for the country. In response, the government established a dedicated Ministry and a National Council to coordinate prevention, treatment, and awareness efforts. Despite these initiatives, the prevalence rate remains particularly high among young people. Epidemiological data consistently show that individuals aged 15 to 24 constitute one of the most affected population groups. According to WHO, more than half of new infections occur within this age bracket, with over eleven million young people currently living with the virus. Alarming, a majority of them are unaware of their HIV-positive status (Kacou, Elise Amon, 2018), while millions of others have little or no knowledge about the disease (UNICEF *et al.*, 2002).

Throughout the 2010s, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours towards HIV infection among the general

adult population in Africa underwent significant transformation. According to recent UNAIDS (2023) reports, public perception of HIV/AIDS has shifted considerably, accompanied by a noticeable decline in preventive practices. The trivialisation of the virus has led to a weakening of prevention behaviours, particularly among socio-economically vulnerable populations. Poverty and social precarity can thus be identified as key determinants of behavioural relaxation regarding HIV prevention measures in Côte d'Ivoire.

METHOD

This study adopts a cross-sectional descriptive design, conducted in the form of a field survey within the municipality of Abobo. The research site was purposively selected due to its sustained level of activity and constant influx of motorists and traders. Despite its socio-economic precariousness, the Abobo scrapyard remains a vibrant commercial hub where vendors and artisans continue to engage in diverse economic transactions.

The study population comprised individuals encountered within the Abobo scrapyard, whether formally employed or not. Participants included sellers of vehicle spare parts, mobile phones, and clothing, as well as young women engaged in petty trade, casual passers-by, and regular customers. The majority were self-employed traders, while others were clients or visitors to the area. The sample also included both married and single men reporting active sexual relationships.

The research approach adopted was analytical in nature, enabling the identification and examination of causal relationships between two or more variables. In total, two hundred and nine (209) individuals participated in the study, consisting of one hundred and thirty-two (132) men and seventy-seven (77) women. Participants' ages ranged from 16 to 35 years.

With regard to sampling, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. Within this approach, the total size of the study population could not be precisely determined. Consequently, convenience sampling was adopted: any individual present at the time of data collection, regardless of occupational or social status, was eligible to participate. Participants were

selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond to the survey questions.

Data collection combined documentary research and a structured questionnaire administered to young people at the Abobo scrapyard. The documentary research involved identifying, gathering, and analysing relevant secondary data from academic publications, official reports, and institutional documents on HIV/AIDS and youth behaviour. The questionnaire survey, conducted at the Abobo Anador scrapyard, targeted young traders, clients, and passers-by, focusing on their knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding sexual risk-taking.

The data collection instrument consisted of a semi-structured questionnaire specifically designed for this study. Data collection was carried out in two distinct phases. The first phase, conducted from 18 August to 3 September 2023, took place directly within the Abobo Anador scrapyard. The second phase, from 11 March to 13 April 2024, targeted additional respondents in the same locality. Data were gathered on-site, either within participants' shops or along adjacent streets, in order to capture spontaneous and contextually grounded responses.

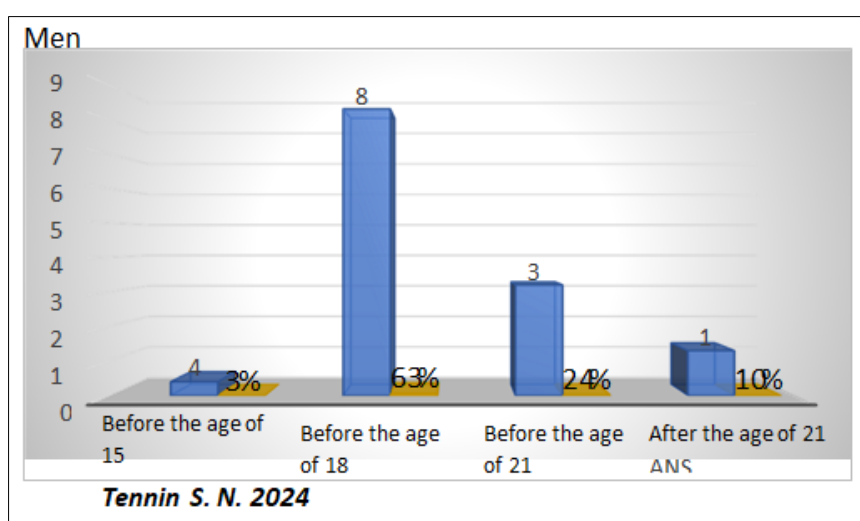
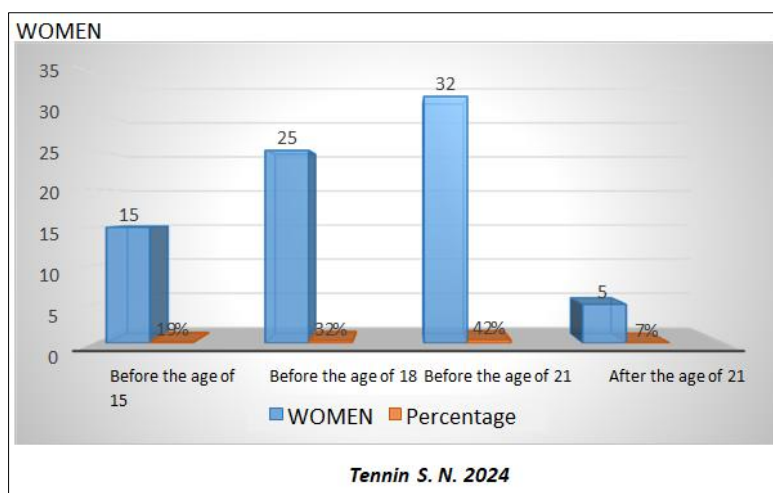
RESULTS

In conducting this research aimed at understanding the determinants of risk behaviours related to HIV in Côte d'Ivoire specifically among the youth of the *casse* in Abobo it is essential to approach the analysis through two main dimensions: first, the sexual practices of young people in the *casse* of Abobo, and second, the consequences of these practices in relation to HIV/AIDS exposure.

Risk Behaviours Potentially Exposing the Youth of the Abobo Casse to HIV/AIDS

The age at first sexual intercourse constitutes a crucial parameter for situating the entry point of respondents into sexual activity. The combination of sexual inexperience and heightened curiosity among young people emerges as a significant factor in the spread of HIV.

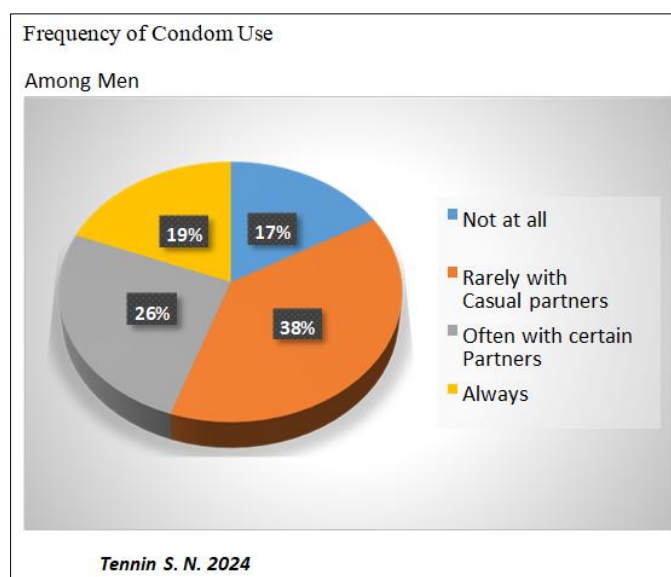
Indeed, according to the information gathered during fieldwork, the majority of respondents reported having their first sexual experience before the age of 21.

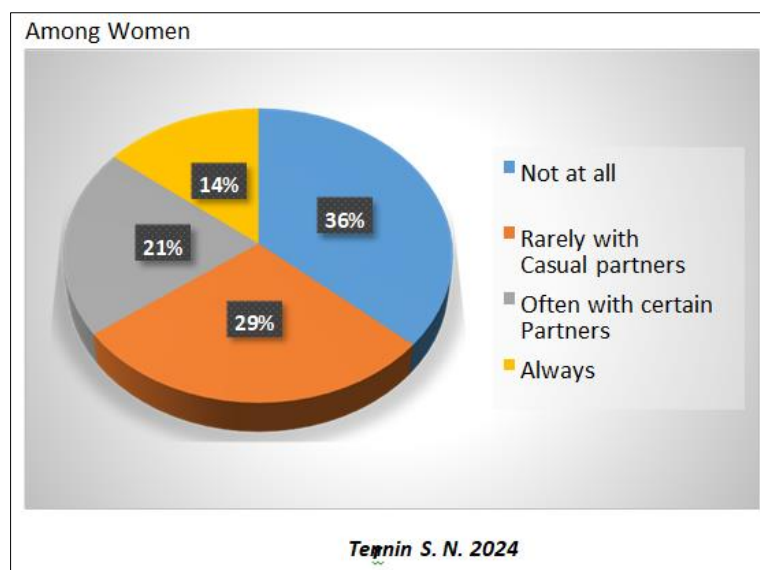


Types of Contraceptives Used by Women

Among the female respondents, several types of contraception were reported, including condoms, implants, injectables, and oral contraceptive pills.

Condoms remain the only contraceptive method effective against HIV/AIDS. However, only a minority of both women and men surveyed reported using condoms.



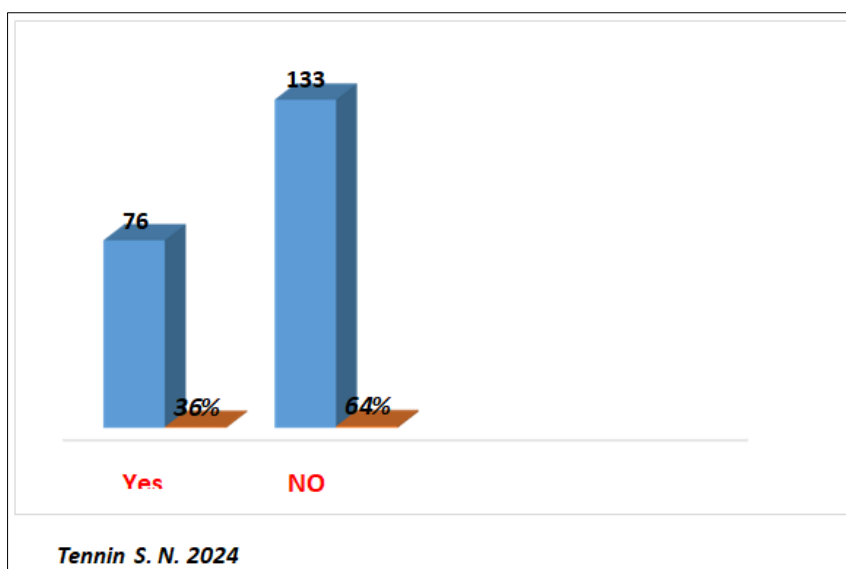


Among women, condoms are used less frequently than among men. This is partly due to the scarcity or lack of awareness of female condoms. Additionally, the decision to use a condom is often reported by some women to rest primarily with the male partner. Furthermore, when women were asked about the types of contraception they use, condoms were mentioned last, following oral contraceptive pills, primarily as a means of preventing unwanted pregnancies.

Among men, condom use is largely motivated by the fear of impregnating their partner rather than by the desire to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections, such as gonorrhoea, also constitutes a reason for condom use among men.

Regarding HIV testing, the majority of respondents have not undergone an HIV/AIDS test.

Bar Chart XII: HIV Testing

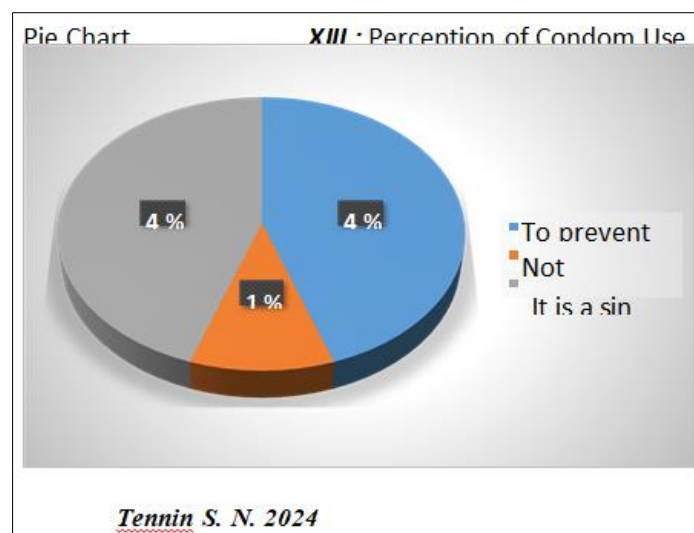


Causes of Sexual Deviance among the Youth of the Casse

The data in this section are analysed using both qualitative and quantitative approaches. We examine the statements of the young respondents alongside a numerical analysis. While some respondents perceive

condom use as a positive habit, others do not recognise its consequences.

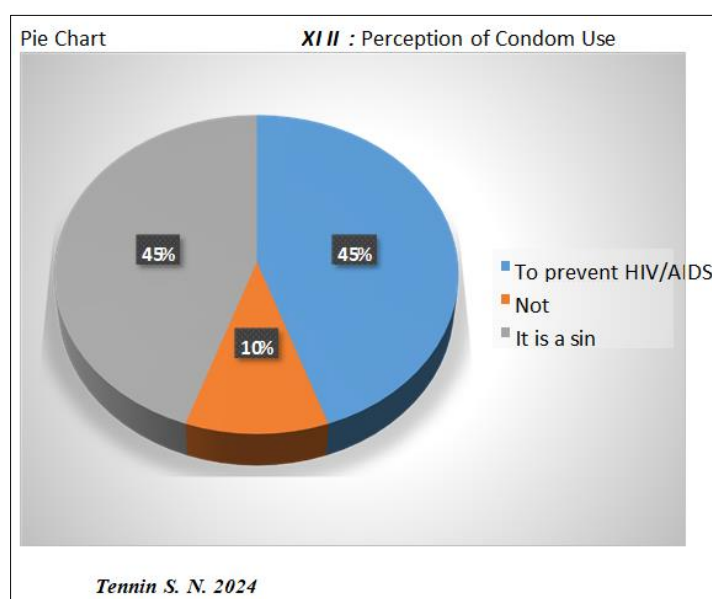
Attitudes towards HIV/AIDS among the youth of the *casse* are mixed. Indeed, some young people are aware of the reality and the dangers posed by AIDS. Conversely, others believe that AIDS is an invention of the West and that the disease does not exist as such.



Perception of the Surveyed Population on HIV/AIDS

The statements of the young respondents were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. While some respondents view condom use as a positive habit, others do not perceive its consequences.

Attitudes towards HIV/AIDS among the youth of the *casse* are mixed. Indeed, some young people are aware of the reality and the dangers posed by AIDS. Conversely, others believe that AIDS is a Western invention and that the disease does not exist as such.



Sexually Oriented Activities in the Abobo Scrapyard

The majority of male respondents reported the existence of prostitution within the Abobo scrapyard. These activities can be categorised into two principal types:

The first category comprises women who come to the scrapyard specifically to engage in sex work. They often present themselves as vendors of cold drinks or various goods, conducting their activities with regular clients.

The second category involves men, particularly traders, who make indecent proposals to young women

unable to afford the desired items. These women may accept to provide sexual services in exchange for goods.

According to our findings, the principal drivers of sexual deviance are poverty and the pursuit of intense sensations. This study has also allowed for an assessment of the sexual tendencies of our respondents. Overall, condom use is not prioritised by female participants. Women tend to favour other contraceptive methods, such as the pill, to prevent unwanted pregnancies rather than using female condoms or insisting on male condom use with their partners. Many respondents, both male and female, report having occasional sexual partners, even if some are in committed relationships or married.

Furthermore, the desire to explore sexuality and seek heightened sensations leads young people to disregard condom use. There is a tangible suspicion of professional or occasional sex work (often poverty-driven) within the Abobo scrapyard. These findings collectively indicate that the site could serve as a locus for HIV transmission, particularly given its prominence among Abidjan residents and passing motorists.

DISCUSSION

Sexual practices are not directly observable (Bozon, 1999); research relies almost exclusively on self-reported data. In African contexts, the collection of reliable data on individual sexual behaviour is particularly challenging due to prevailing social taboos surrounding sexuality. Nevertheless, institutional mechanisms such as the National HIV/AIDS Control Programme (PNLS) provide credible data collected directly in healthcare settings.

Sexual initiation is strongly shaped by social and cultural context, and the age at first sexual intercourse varies across countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, women historically initiate sexual activity earlier than men (UNFPA, 2015). However, our study indicates the reverse: 51% of women reported sexual debut before the age of 18, compared with 66% of men, suggesting that male sexual activity begins earlier in this population.

Additionally, the majority of both male and female respondents reported low condom use, often citing religious and personal beliefs as barriers. HIV prevention programmes generally emphasise abstinence, condom use, and reducing the number of sexual partners. For sexually active single individuals, condoms remain the only reliable method of preventing HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). However, systematic condom use remains limited. In Africa, sexual encounters among young, single people are frequently unprotected, although recent data indicate improvements in preventive behaviours (Rwenge, 2013). Globally, condom use has increased, particularly among young people and sex workers, and Africa participates in this trend.

Elise Amoin Kacou (2018), in her doctoral thesis, also examined condom use in Côte d'Ivoire. Findings indicated that only 45% of sexual encounters were protected. Similarly, in France, Moreau *et al.*, (2008) documented the progressive adoption of condoms as a preventive practice early in sexual life.

Religious beliefs, whether traditional or revealed, strongly influence individual attitudes and behaviours. Mystical interpretations of HIV/AIDS remain widespread in Côte d'Ivoire, with some respondents asserting that AIDS is not a natural disease but rather a curse or a variant of a condition called "coco". Research conducted by ENSEA (École Nationale Supérieure de Statistique et d'Économie

Appliquée) similarly found that many individuals still consider HIV/AIDS to be non-natural, attributing transmission to curses or chance.

Moreover, condoms are often frowned upon by adherents of revealed religions (Christianity, Islam). For instance, some Christians cite Genesis 38:8–10 to justify opposition to condom use. Given that condoms constitute the sole protection against HIV, their rejection in these religious contexts often leads individuals to rely on partner fidelity or abstinence.

This study did not examine the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents or age differences in sexual debut between impoverished and wealthier individuals. However, prior research has produced mixed findings: some studies suggest that risky sexual behaviour is not directly linked to poverty, while others argue that poverty and difficult living conditions incentivise engagement in high-risk sexual behaviour (Anoh *et al.*, 2002; Talnan *et al.*, 2004).

The Abobo scrapyard is recognised as a highly dynamic economic space, attracting sex workers seeking potential clients. Young women, motivated by desire or economic need, may offer sexual services to acquire goods, while young men may engage in sexual activity as a demonstration of virility or for thrill-seeking. These dynamics contribute significantly to HIV transmission risk.

To curb the spread of HIV/AIDS, we recommend revisiting the comprehensive awareness campaigns of the 1990s, regularly publishing updated prevalence data, and addressing underlying poverty.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that early sexual initiation and concurrent multiple partnerships constitute behaviours that expose individuals to HIV risk. Consistent condom use mitigates transmission and is critical for epidemic control (Ferry, 1999). Our findings indicate that the majority of women do not use condoms, instead preferring other contraceptive methods to prevent pregnancy. Among men, condoms are sometimes used to prevent STIs, yet many do not perceive AIDS as a real threat.

The causes of sexual deviance among youth are multifactorial. For women, convenience and poverty may lead to exchanging sexual services for desired goods, while the economic vibrancy of the Abobo scrapyard attracts sex workers operating within closed networks.

Young men, seeking affirmation, may perceive sexual activity as a marker of masculinity. Sensation-seeking is a primary reason for rejecting condom use.

To reduce HIV transmission, expansive awareness campaigns must be revived, and public dissemination of prevalence statistics is essential to educate younger generations who did not experience the peak of the epidemic in the 1990s and 2000s. Regular publication and updating of prevalence data are critical to drawing attention and promoting protective behaviours.

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