

Respondents: Boys on the road
Interviewer: Tarcy
Date: Around 28th June, 1999
District: Balaka

R: Two boys that Eliya and Tarcy met on the road between the [restaurant] and the [motel], around June 28, one is W.P. Tape seems to be lost, so these are from Tarcy's recollections. The interaction started with E, then Tarcy took over because E had to leave.

What happened when you joined them?

We were talking about what they talk about when the two are together. One is married, the other is not married. He is very talkative. We asked him "why you are friends with someone who is married when you are not married?" He said he gets advice from him. He said that he was advised by a man, a Ghanaian, who was living here, that it is better to get married when you are 30 or more, and he is just 27. "He was telling us that that is from the culture of his parents". Then we probed and said "but the Ghanaian wasn't your culture", and he seemed to mean that the man was older, about 40, like an older brother. This Ghanaian died here in Malawi.

We tried to find out whether he has a girlfriend or not. He wasn't "quite straight", said he's still searching, but his friend interrupted and said he actually had somebody with whom he is serious and sooner or later they will be married. The respondent said that is true, what his friend said. So we asked the friend how did he know the woman he intends to marry is the right person for him, because there's a lot of AIDS and you can't tell who has it and who doesn't. The friend said he checked how the woman moved, they even talked to some of the people in the village where he intends to marry, and they found that she doesn't move a lot. I asked him if he ever had sex with her, he was laughing, and eventually said, "well yes, we know each other". Then I asked, "If you know each other do you use any family planning?" He said no, because we are not married. I said, "what about AIDS, how would you know that you are not infecting one another?" He said, "well, I use condoms", he uses condoms so she doesn't get pregnant, that's the main reason. Then we asked him how often he meets with this girlfriend, he said not so often, meaning they didn't sleep together often. His friend said that is true because they are not married yet. And then I said "but you as young people, your body sometimes warms up, what do you do? You know already that there is AIDS. So he said "well, yesterday I heard from the radio that we have to masturbate" (the word comes from borehole, pump up and down, and he made the motion of turning a wheel). I asked his friend if that was true that it was on the radio. The friend said yes it is true, and he also says what is the good of using a condom and throwing your sperm away, this is better. He says that for him, when he used to stay in L and had left his wife here, he stayed there for about three years, and he used to masturbate. He learned from someone else to use Tiger Balm. Tarcy asked what that was, he said it looks like a small tin of Vicks, they use it to smear the penis while masturbating and it does help. Many people use it, he said, they buy it at 10 Kwacha. Then I asked the respondent which program talked about masturbation as a preventive measure, he said it's a program which is called "Straight Talk", and I asked the exact time it is aired but he didn't recall. It's once or twice a week in the evening around 6.

I went back and asked why he doesn't use other family planning methods with his girlfriend, he laughed and said because he is not married and he is afraid that when they get married she might take longer to conceive. And he says normally there is a custom here whereby when young people get married the parents on both sides, they make a fire using a big log of wood, and keep on watching up to the time it is finished, and by the time it is finished they expect to hear that the newly married woman is expecting. If that doesn't happen, they come and start asking "perhaps we should take you to the medicine man, what's the problem?" I asked if it's a special kind of log, and the length, he said he didn't have an idea exactly about this. But he insisted that there is that custom.

And then I asked his friend if he has ever heard of any family planning methods which are local/traditional. He comes from T. He said in his area there is medicine which is used, they ask the couple to take a handful of that medicine (it's a powder) and each one takes a handful and put it in one pot. After putting some liquid in it they use the liquid to prepare porridge to drink, and the rest of the medicine in the pot is covered. The time when the pot remains covered corresponds with the time they want to stay without children. When they want children they uncover the pot. Immediately she conceives. [Amy Kaler heard the same story in Zimbabwe, and was told this comes from Malawi, there's a lot of labor migration from Malawi to Zimbabwe. And trouble if pot gets broken]. I asked him if he ever heard about this, he said that was news to him. But he had heard another traditional method, the one of the string. I asked if that was prepared by the man, he said normally it's the parents of the wife. But he does not believe in it.

Then we went back to the issue of AIDS and how the young people keep from getting it. I asked them if I wanted a girlfriend in this area how would they advise me "that one cannot infect me" or "that one is most likely to infect me". They told me that it is very difficult, but they would tell me that it's by looking at how she moves (moving around with other men). I asked "since you are not sure, what would be the advice you would give to me if I wanted to cool down my temperature". They said "ah, but we would tell you either that you must masturbate or you must use a condom if it doesn't hurt you". So I asked what do you mean when you say, "if it doesn't hurt me?" The married one said that normally condoms give him sores when he uses it with his wife. So he decided that his wife should have pills instead of using condoms. That is why he prefers to masturbate when he is very far away from his wife. And the respondent said the same, that condoms hurt him. There was a day when the Chishango group came to the turnoff for a launching, talking about condoms and how efficient they are, that people should use them against STDs including HIV and as a family planning method. When he asked the Chishango group why the condoms cause sores, one of them answered that most likely it's because they use outdated condoms. But he was not satisfied with the answer, he felt they were dodging, not saying the truth.

And then I asked the respondent the occasions when they talk, sharing all this information, and he talked about the [name] Youth Club. In that club they meet and talk about how they can avoid AIDS, and about family planning issues. These are mostly unmarried young men and women, but there are some young married people who are allowed. Then I asked how the group was founded, they said it was initially founded as a football club. But then the government was identifying youth groups for loans, and many people came to the club, much older people, and it was politicized. So after registering names for the loans, the groups trying to identify groups for loans never came back. So the original young members remained.

And that's when the emphasis started to be on sharing ideas on AIDS, family planning. And also they do drama to teach one another and the village.

I also asked P if they have a term or expression for AIDS. Both simultaneously said *unyeri kete*. I said what does that mean? Then W said this term is used among the youth in this area because it describes the way the disease destroys those who are infected. They develop shingles, sores, lose hair, get thin and you die when you are completely worn out. So *unyeri kete* is the way the disease destroys you; in English, the term has the connotation that you become rubbish, rotten, something to throw away. And then I asked if they distinguish HIV from AIDS, he said they do. Among the youth themselves they know pretty well, and when someone is suspected of having HIV they say he is *tsabora/pepper/Nali* (a kind of bottled pepper sauce [ubiquitous]). I asked him if he knows one of the people they have termed someone *tsabora/pepper*, he said yes, but they don't talk openly because they don't want the person to know. Only when they have quarreled with this kind of person will they tell him straight "you are pepper". It's kind of a way of insulting him instead of physically fighting with him, to make sure that he feels pain, that people know what is going on.

So then I asked if they knew someone who died of AIDS recently, the married friend said yes, in their village. Last month they buried one person. He used to trade/business in L, and he was actually brought back to the village by his friends while he was very sick. I asked what the family members were saying about this person, they said that he had been bewitched in L where he was doing a booming business. But the sources of these young people sources (the network includes L), said he used to womanize a lot, so when he died people said that he had AIDS. And then I asked if they ever went to L to visit him, they said yes, they did, but they never said anything about his disease, it was just when they were returning that they said *unyeri kete*.