



Cross-generational and transactional sexual relations in Uganda:

Income poverty as a risk factor for adolescents

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Acronyms

ACFODE	Action for Development
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EU	European Union
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KII	Key Informant Interview
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MoFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MoH	Ministry of Health
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NCC	National Council for Children
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OVC	Orphan and Vulnerable Children
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RHU	Reproductive Health Uganda
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNHS	Uganda National Household Survey
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UYDEL	Uganda Youth Development Link

Executive summary

The phenomenon of cross-generational sex – defined as sexual relationships between an adolescent girl and a partner who is older, usually by 10 or more years – can be linked to many life-long consequences. In the case of girls, premature sex can trap them in an adverse poverty and vulnerability cycle as they may become adolescent mothers; may be forced to leave school; are at risk of entering marriage early to preserve the honour of their family and themselves; and, particularly when having sex with older men, are more exposed to contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV and AIDS. From a child protection perspective, the power differential between adolescent girls and older – usually wealthier – men is a particular risk factor for abusive relationships, and can be linked to violence. In most cases, these cross-generational relationships become transactional.

This study is part of a two-year Oak Foundation-funded programme of work that explores the potential for greater linkages between child protection and anti-poverty work in low- and middle-income countries. It seeks to better understand the multiple and intersecting drivers of cross-generational and transactional sex for adolescent girls in Uganda, to explore some of the consequences adolescents experience and to analyse the extent to which policy and programming are currently addressing the drivers and consequences of this phenomenon.

The conceptual framework for the research recognises the drivers of violations of children's rights are multi-layered, complex and interconnected. It also emphasises the key and often-underestimated role of poverty in mediating children's wellbeing outcomes.

The study was exploratory in nature and primarily qualitative in approach. Case studies were held with girls who had experienced the situation – including those who had become pregnant, those who had married as a result and those who had not – exploring the information they had prior to engaging in these relationships, their family, community and school dynamics and whether they received any type of support to reduce their dependency on these relationships as a form of survival. Focus group discussions with communities helped us understand why this phenomenon was widespread, how people understand and engage with this situation, if they provide relevant information to girls or the extent to which they 'allow' this in the hopes of it leading to a better situation for the family. Key informant interviews at national and subnational level unpacked whether prosecuting these cases as defilement had had any impact on reducing the phenomenon, and whether other forms of support, including awareness raising, promotion of other livelihood alternatives for girls or universal secondary education, among other measures, were seen to be improving the situation.

Fieldwork was restricted to two districts – Kamuli and Kampala districts – the former rural and the latter urban. The selection of these sites was based on an extensive review of the existence of programmes supporting adolescent girls in related areas of life such as early pregnancy, capacity building, reproductive health and early marriage. In each of the sites, a sub-county then two parishes were randomly selected for study.

Patterns of gender inequality frequently limit young women's economic options, which makes transactional sex one of the few economic options available to them. Girls themselves may seek out such relationships, or may be pressured into doing so by parents who want them to bring resources into the household. Note that some studies highlight the vulnerability of girls entering these types of relationships; others point towards adolescent girls' agency in seeing this as a means to achieve financial and developmental objectives. During the study in Uganda, researchers spoke to both types of girls, although the sample selection focused on particularly poor girls, which meant more of the former type.

The findings provide evidence of high incidence of cross-generational sexual relationships in the research sites, but also of its severity as a child protection deficit in both rural and urban contexts. Acute income poverty and its stultifying effects, subjecting both boys and girls to a myriad of vulnerabilities, are identified as a key push factor of children into cross-generational sexual relationships. Sociocultural and other challenges, such as peer pressure, discriminatory social norms, lack of and poor-quality services and dysfunctional families also emerge as significant drivers.

The setting influences the nature of the cross-generational sexual relationships adolescents engage in. In rural contexts, impoverished and vulnerable adolescent girls are ‘pulled’ into such relationships in the hope of stable marriage, protection and/or a better economic future. Girls are also ‘pushed’ as a result of inability to meet basic needs, violence and maltreatment in the household, lack of awareness of alternatives and lack of recourse to essential services. In addition, environmental conditions in rural areas – such as the need to travel long distances in isolated environments – heighten dangers for girls of being preyed on by men, and in some cases even compel girls to seek assistance from older men, generally in exchange for sexual favours.

In high-density urban settlements, the relationships adolescents engage in largely take the form of transactional sex, driven by desperation to earn quick cash for daily survival, but also increasingly as a ‘lifestyle choice’, fostered by peer pressure, to gain easy access to ‘luxury’ material items and services that would not be affordable through other income generation options available to adolescents. One distinction that is apparent is the different perceptions held by men and women, both young and old: men and boys have a tendency to perceive that girls seek ‘luxuries’ in cross-generational relationships, whereas girls and women often declare a stronger interest in meeting basic needs.

The consequences adolescents experience as a result of engaging in cross-generational relationships are common across rural and urban contexts. Some of the adverse effects include sexual abuse and exploitation, physical abuse, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, single motherhood, exposure to HIV/AIDS and other STDs and psycho-emotional trauma. These consequences usually overlap, resulting in adolescents being unable to access their rights.

Social sanctions around pregnancy outside marriage mean many girls find themselves estranged by their older partners and their families/households simultaneously, at the specific point in their lives when they are most vulnerable. One particular manifestation of this is the presence – or threat – of violent behaviour on the part of the family and/or the partner. There are also broader and indirect effects, such as compromised individual agency and the relegation of some children to a state of hopelessness. All these factors together eventually lead to premature school dropout (and limited opportunities for reintegration), family rejection and social exclusion. These in turn have intergenerational implications for any newborn children, who are more vulnerable to exposure in risky environments.

Respondents’ attitudes towards the consequences are often focused strongly on health dimensions, including the likelihood of complications during sex or of catching HIV/AIDS or another STD. It is very rare for longer-term implications, such as human capital-related factors or psychosocial wellbeing, to be considered. It appears that respondents have been more exposed to sensitisation about sexual and reproductive health and therefore can more easily relate to this topic. By contrast, few programmatic initiatives deal with the potential medium- to long-term consequences for girls of such relationships.

While poverty is a driver of girls or boys taking part in cross-generational sex, and the negative consequences are well known in both rural and urban contexts, socially sanctioned attitudes and behaviours linked to cross-generational sex, especially that involving men and teenage girls, are not well understood among policymakers and practitioners. For instance, in both contexts there appears to be an element of girl-to-girl ‘peer pressure’ in seeking cross-generational relationships. In rural contexts in particular, intergenerational sex is seen as the norm, and is often socially accommodated (in observed behaviour although not in terms of attitudes). Interestingly, though, in some cases, particularly when girls take part in such relationships it without parental consent or practise them as a lifestyle choice, the attitude in the community can shift from one of acceptance to one of criticism and stigmatisation.

In terms of interventions, the major non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors in Kamuli are Plan International and BRAC. Meanwhile, the police are overburdened with cases of defilement, and there is limited

systematic coordination between organisations and mechanisms – such as a formal referral system. The varied approaches and target groups of NGOs in Kamuli mean there remains significant scope for a more regulated system of communication between actors that would improve prevention of, and responses to, child protection violations.

In Kampala, despite a greater density of actors, the demand for action on specific and broader drivers and ramifications of cross-generational relationships far exceeds capacity to respond. In addition, relatively costly asset-based preventative responses are outnumbered by public health initiatives, mostly notably by the Reproductive Health Unit (RHU) and the Capital City Authority. BRAC is also operational in Kampala, but experiencing the same constraints as it does in Kamuli: insufficient resources for scale-up, given the individualised and intensive focus of the organisation on skills development and access to credit support. There appear to be even fewer coordination activities than in Kamuli to link community child protection structures and formal NGOs.

Ambiguity in the definition of cross-generational sex has negatively affected the framing, structuring and implementation of child protection policies and interventions in both rural and urban contexts. The legal and punitive interventions meant to mitigate child sex violations, for instance, have been turned into lucrative avenues that benefit not the girl victim but her family, the perpetrators and law enforcement officials such as the police and local village counsellors. The end result has been the perpetuation of child protection and other violations with impunity.

In a bid to address this situation, the following policy interventions are recommended.

- Child protection policies and interventions should integrate well-defined poverty reduction and sociocultural components aiming to explicitly address the stultifying effects of income poverty and the regressive effects of discriminatory sociocultural institutions that increase children's risk of suffering protection violations. These interventions should ideally be both short and long term in nature, and preventative and responsive, while taking heed of the positive formal and informal coping mechanisms and limiting the negative coping mechanisms already used by girls. Demand for such pilot programming ventures within NGOs, donors and public services should also be fostered. Parallel public resources, focusing on broader youth employment and vocational training initiatives, could be tapped to ensure the most vulnerable are receiving both material and social awareness support on the core risks concerning cross-generational sex.
- There is a need to strengthen delivery of and access to social services that are deemed to have the most protective functions for children – particularly primary and secondary education, primary health care, information about sexual and reproductive, community sensitisation around sexual abuse and related risks/social norms and judicial facilities. Investments in these areas will ultimately be cost-effective – particularly if instituted using a 'systems strengthening' approach.
- New, locally focused training initiatives based on lessons from integrated programming best practice must be promoted. These initiatives should be constructed to differentiate and respond to the contextual 'pull' and 'push' factors that cause girls to enter into exploitative cross-generational relationships and lead to a variety of 'downwardly spiralling' impacts.
- Child protection policies and programmes should integrate a specific component to address the issue of early sexual relationships, including information about possible exploitative relationships and their risks, using both international and national policy and programme initiatives and the areas of 'early marriage' and HIV/AIDS proliferation as an entry points. Men and boys, as much as girls and women, should be targeted. Key to this will be communication to practitioners and policymakers of the drivers and consequences of cross-generational relationships, as much as the risky social behaviours formally or tacitly promoted at community level. The broader and stronger constituency of HIV/AIDS policymakers and practitioners would be able to amplify this message.
- Formulation of policies and design of programmes should integrate an education and mass sensitisation component targeting both rural and urban communities, and all relevant child protection stakeholders, focusing on the provision of information on the specific risks linked to this situation, and when it is deemed as abusive.
- There is a need to conduct nationally representative research into best practice in integrated programming design and delivery that incorporates sociocultural change and income (livelihood) components – whether

they be at the individual, familial, community or national level. The findings of such research will provide a sound, informed basis for the design of alternative policies and the implementation of programme actions.

1 Introduction

The phenomenon of cross-generational sex – defined as sexual relationships between an adolescent girl¹ and a partner who is older, usually by 10 or more years – can be linked to many life-long consequences. In the case of girls, premature sex can trap them in an adverse poverty and vulnerability cycle as they may become adolescent mothers; may be forced to leave school; are at risk of entering marriage early to preserve the honour of their family and themselves; and, particularly when having sex with older men, are more exposed to contracting sexual diseases, including HIV and AIDS (Kelly et al., 2003; Konde-Lule and Morris, 1997; Luke and Kurz, 2002; Nyanzi et al., 2000). In most cases, these cross-generational relationships become transactional.

A review of the literature on cross-generational sex in Sub-Saharan Africa uncovered that the motivations behind adolescent girls engaging in sexual relationships with older men were varied and overlapping, with gifts and other financial benefits the major incentive for such relationships (Luke and Kurz, 2002). Motivations for financial rewards tend to be complex, ranging from economic survival to desire for status and possessions (ibid.). Some studies have linked economic motives to the level of poverty of the adolescent involved: whereas very poor adolescent girls engage in these relationships to meet their basic needs, others who are less poor might do so in order to gain access to what they see as ‘luxury goods’ or through peer pressure (Hawkins et al., 2009). For example, poorer girls in rural areas might agree to have sex with an older man in exchange for food, whereas girls in urban areas, with more diverse livelihoods, might enter into these transactional relationships to access items they could not otherwise afford, such as certain clothes or perfume. Some of the drivers of these behaviours have been captured in the literature and are explored in the next section.

From a child protection perspective, the power differential between adolescent girls and older – usually wealthier – men is a particular risk factor for abusive relationships, and can be linked to violence; greater exposure to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), as girls are unable to negotiate using a condom; and coercion into sex (Luke and Kurz, 2002). We look at this phenomenon from a child protection perspective in Uganda since sexual relationships between girls or boys under the age of 18 and an adult (over the age of 18) are legally defined as ‘sexual abuse’ under the law, given the legal age of consent.

This study is part of a two-year Oak Foundation-funded programme of work that explores the potential for greater linkages between child protection and anti-poverty work in low- and middle-income countries. It is one of three country case studies (the others being in Ethiopia and Vietnam) and is informed by a systematic review of the literature on four key dimensions of child protection – sexual violence and exploitation, physical violence, early marriage and inadequate care – and their linkages to poverty. This report seeks to better understand the multiple and intersecting drivers of cross-generational and transactional sex for adolescent girls, to explore some of the consequences adolescents experience and to analyse the extent to which policy and programming are currently addressing the drivers and consequences of this phenomenon. As such, it looks at how much income poverty and deprivation in Uganda contribute to this particular form of child protection abuse.

Additionally, it looks at policies and programmes (led by both government and non-governmental organisations (NGO)) in Uganda that aim to tackle child sexual abuse, how they are designed and whether their design considers the important linkages to poverty. In the field, given that there are very few interventions in place to tackle this form of sexual abuse, the study looked at whether two programmes aimed at improving the economic situation of poor adolescents – particularly girls – alongside social sensitisation approaches. This research

¹ Adolescent girls are those aged between 10 and 19 years (Amin et al., 2013), although the focus of this study is on a subset of adolescence, girls aged 14 to 19.

therefore explored in more detail the child protection violations participants have endured, and the degree to which integrated economic and social programme approaches can prevent or respond to these violations.

The report is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual framework, which is followed by a background to the problem in Uganda in Section 3. Section 4 discusses the methodology used for the fieldwork, while Sections 5 and 6 put forward the empirical findings, exploring first the drivers of cross-generational sex and then the consequences. Section 7 looks at policy and programming interventions available to address this issue, and the extent to which they include a poverty focus. Lastly, Section 8 offers conclusions and recommendations.

2 Conceptual framework

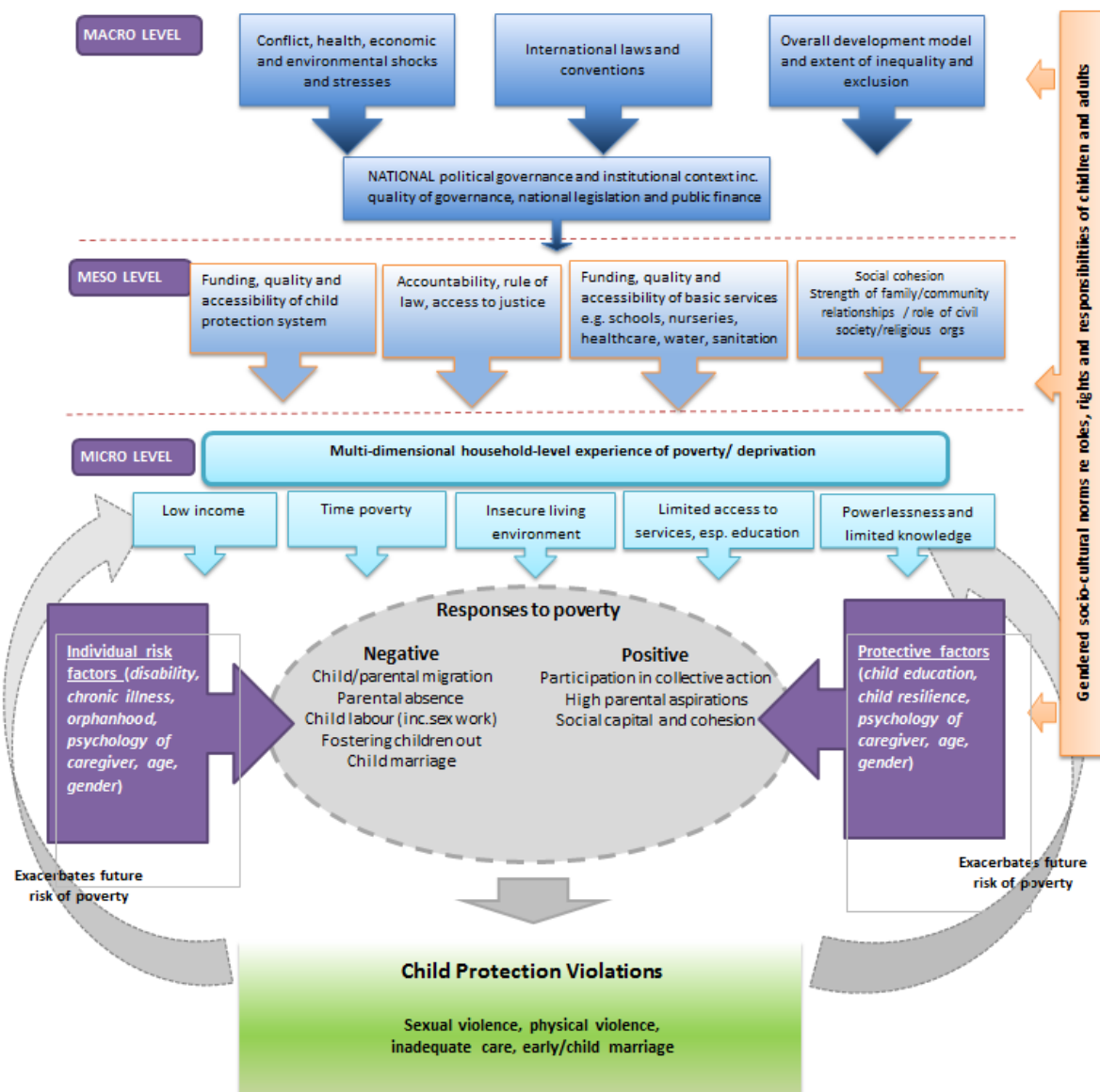
The conceptual framework for the broader programme of work of which this research is a part recognises the drivers of violations of children's rights are multi-layered, complex and interconnected. That said, it also emphasises the key and often underestimated role of poverty in mediating children's wellbeing outcomes, noting that, 'while economic deprivation is never the only factor underlying child protection violations, it is often an important factor exacerbating the risk' (Marcus and Page, 2013: 104). This study analyses the phenomenon of cross-generational sex, particularly in its intersection with transactional sex, that is, the exchange of sex for goods, cash or favours as a means of survival, of enhancing one's economic opportunities or of obtaining status (Luke and Kurz, 2002; MSI, 2008, cited in Marcus, 2013).

Marcus (2013) notes that patterns of gender inequality frequently limit girls and young women's economic options, so that, while some boys may find casual paid work alongside school (portering, farming, cleaning cars etc.), girls are much less likely to find paid work (Leach et al., 2003). This places them in a vulnerable and dependent position, which makes transactional sex one of the few economic options available to them. Additionally, older men's preference for adolescent girls, based on their perceived physical attractiveness and their lower likelihood of having HIV/AIDS, increases the value of their sexuality as an economic asset (Luke and Kurz, 2002). Girls themselves may seek out such relationships, or may be pressured into doing so by parents who want them to bring resources into the household (ibid.).

It is important to note that the literature looks at this phenomenon from different perspectives. Some studies highlight the vulnerability of girls entering these types of relationships; others point towards adolescent girls' agency in seeing this as a means to achieve financial and developmental objectives (Hawkins et al., 2009). During the study in Uganda, researchers spoke to both types of girls, although the sample selection focused on particularly poor girls. As such, there were more interviewees who were in a situation of vulnerability and not really exercising their agency.

In the analysis of our primary research findings in Sections 4-7, we use the macro to micro framework presented in Figure 1 to unpack the structural drivers of poverty and deprivation that are contributing to girls' engagement in cross-generational and transactional sex, with important consequences for their physical and mental health, as well as often leading them into vulnerability and poverty traps through early pregnancy, school dropout and abusive sexual relationships. In Section 8, we return to the framework to consider potential policy and programming entry points that can best capitalise on and strengthen protective factors while mitigating the most serious risk factors.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Marcus (2013).

3 Context and overview of the problem

3.1 Poverty in Uganda

3.1.1 Overview of the poverty situation in Uganda

Incidence of income poverty in Uganda has declined significantly between the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) 1992/93 and UNHS 2005/06 (CPRC Uganda, 2005). The percentage of households living below the poverty line declined from 56% to 31.1% over the period, meaning that in 2005/06 some 8.4 million Ugandans lived in poverty. Children under 18 make up a disproportionate 62% of those classified as poor (ibid.). UNHS 2009/10 data reveal a continuation of this trend, showing 24% of Ugandans living below the poverty line. Moreover, this rate of change signifies Uganda's achievement of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of cutting poverty by half before 2015.

By contrast, Uganda continues to face significant remaining challenges on the remaining 10 (of 17) MDG targets – particularly with respect to health, education and environmental sustainability dimensions (Levine et al., 2012). Moreover, there are concerns that increases in income inequality will put in jeopardy some of the broader developmental gains and increase the vulnerability of the chronically poor (Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2012).

3.1.2 Child and adolescent poverty and vulnerability

In 2010, children constituted about 57% of Uganda's estimated total population, amounting to an estimated 17.1 million children below the age of 18 years, of whom 51% (totaling 8 million) are either critically or moderately vulnerable² (MGLSD, 2010). The situational analysis for children in Uganda conducted in 2009 (Kaliballa and Elson, 2010) suggests children's vulnerability is widespread in all regions of Uganda, but the magnitude of the vulnerability is higher in the post-conflict-affected Northern region and lower in the Central region (see also; MGLSD, 2011; Ochen, 2012; Ochen et al., 2012). It is also higher in rural areas compared with urban areas. Variations in vulnerability also tend to be associated with wealth distribution, with more vulnerability in poorer regions of the north compared with the relatively stable and more affluent regions of the country such as the Central and Western regions (Kalibala and Elson, 2010). This means children's vulnerability is highly linked to poverty and limited opportunities to generate an income and therefore capacity to meet many basic needs (see Perezniето et al., 2011). According to an orphan and vulnerable children (OVC) status report prepared by the Department of Social Work and Social Administration for the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MGLSD, 2010), 7.5 million children in Uganda (46% of the total), were experiencing child poverty.

The Adolescent Girls' Vulnerability Index recently developed by the Population Council (Amin et al., 2013), indicates that adolescent girls generally face vulnerability both at individual and at community level, suggesting that, for girls in the Northern and Eastern regions, vulnerability is heightened by greater deprivation, which exposes them to high levels of early marriage and poverty. Illiteracy (an individual factor) was also noted as a critical factor driving vulnerability in Eastern Uganda.

3.1.3 Adolescent girls sexual and reproductive health

Although the adolescent age-specific fertility rate is dropping, the adolescent pregnancy rate is still at a high of 24% (UDHS, 2011). The HIV/AIDS Indicator Survey 2011 suggests the HIV prevalence rate has recently risen

² Vulnerability here is defined according to the following criteria: children living on their own or in institutional care; children with poor psychosocial status; children in need with inadequate access to food, clothing, shelter and other basic needs including education; orphaned children; chronically ill children; children whose parents cannot be traced or who have been abandoned by parents or caregivers; illiterate children; and children with disability.

to 7.3%, from 6.7% previously. For adolescents (15-19), the prevalence rate among women is 2.6%, whereas it is as low as 0.3% for boys (MoH, 2006). The contraceptive prevalence rate is 29.9%, and the unmet need for family planning stands at 34.3% (UDHS, 2011). Recent figures (see Amin et al., 2013) suggest girls, especially those in their early teens, are at increased risk of their reproductive health rights being violated. The report presenting the Adolescent Girl Vulnerability Index suggests girls at pubertal stages experience significant risk yet have little control over social economic and health outcomes (Amin et al., 2013). In particular, it highlights that risky sexual behaviours such as not using condoms and having multiple partners can put adolescents at greater risk of contracting HIV (ibid.).

3.2 Sexual violence and abuse of children and adolescents in Uganda

In Uganda, like in many other countries, the legal age of consent defines when a child is regarded as mature enough to consent to mutually desired sexual relations. Defilement is defined under Section 123 (1) of the Penal Code Amendments Act (2007) as follows: ‘Any person who performs a sexual act with another person under the age of 18 years commits a felony known as defilement and is liable to life imprisonment.’ As such, amendment of the Age of Consent Law, or Defilement Law, in 1990 to increase the age of consent from 14 to 18 years was also aimed at protecting girls against sexual exploitation (Parikh, 2012). It is under this legal requirement that most reported cases of sexual abuse in Uganda are linked to defilement (Republic of Uganda, 2000). In other words, whether there was consent or not, provided the victim was below the age of 18 an automatic charge of defilement sets in (ibid.). One study reports a 650% increase in the number of cases of defilement reported over 10 years preceding its survey (ACFODE, 2009).

The literature from Uganda attributes child sexual abuse to poverty; orphanhood (UYDEL, 2011; Yiga, 2010); conflict and civil war, where young boys and girls are captured and used as sex slaves and weapons of war (Allen and Schomerus, 2006; ANPCANN, 2009; Lalor 2004; McKay and Mazurana, 2004; MoFPED, 2005; Ochen, 2012; UYDEL 2011); lack of access to school; and family breakdown as a result of the social disruptions brought about by armed conflict and other social upheavals (MoFPED, 2004). Some reports point to families becoming places of insecurity, violence and abuse and exploitation for children (Yiga, 2010). The argument is that children from dysfunctional homes tend to be more susceptible to sexual abuse than those from stable homes (ibid.). There are also reports of children being susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation at the hands of their fathers, uncles, siblings and other close family relations, making some families unsuitable to ensure children’s protection (Naker, 2005; Yiga, 2010).

Despite the dearth of data, the literature indicates an increase in reports of sexual abuse and exploitation of children (Kabogoza Sembatya, 2012; Kasirye, 2012). For example, according to MGLSD (2009), over 54% of women in Uganda experienced sexual violence between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Commercial sexual abuse of children, defined as sexual exploitation of children for remuneration in cash or kind, is a particularly problematic form of abuse, given the physical and psycho-emotional consequences for children, in addition to being a flagrant violation of the rights of children. Commercial sexual exploitation of children includes sexual tourism, sexual exploitation, pornography, child trafficking and prostitution (UYDEL, 2011). Although no academic figures exist, a study from Childhope suggests the number of children involved is around 12,000, with a further 10,000 vulnerable because of being associated with street living (see also Kasirye, 2012; MGLSD, 2011; Walakira, 2002). The number of children becoming embroiled in commercial sex appears to be increasing at a very high rate, confirming the vulnerability of adolescent girls from especially poor communities and regions (see Amin et al., 2013).

A Raising Voice study (2012) indicated that 98% of children interviewed had experienced emotional and physical violence, and 76% had experienced sexual violence; 74% said they had experienced economic violence. A 2009 baseline survey report (ANPPCAN, 2009) indicated that physical violence of children was at a high of 85% of interviewed children; 59% said they had experienced sexual violence (including child sexual exploitation). The Adolescent Girls Vulnerability Index (Amin et al., 2013) suggests girls from disadvantaged families and regions are at greater risk of experiencing violations, including those of a sexual nature.

Sexual abuse against children takes place in homes, school settings, institutions and the wider community and is perpetuated by people known to children such as close relatives, community members, police and teachers, as well as strangers in some cases. Studies indicate that girls suffer more sexual abuse and exploitation than boys

(Amin et al., 2013; MoES, 2009). One in five girls surveyed reported being forced to have sex in 2009 alone (MoES, 2009). Another study found that females of all age groups were at risk of sexual assault, but the most vulnerable were adolescents, children and the physically and mentally handicapped (Neema and Kiguli, 1996).

The challenge remains the paucity of data on the incidence and magnitude of child protection violations, particularly cases of violence against children. Most studies rely on cases reported to the police, which is insufficient, given that many cases of abuse are never reported for reasons that may range from corruption and mistrust of those involved to lack of awareness of the existing structures where cases can be reported (MGLSD, 2009). Meanwhile, in a mapping and analysis of children's rights organisations in Uganda, Walakira (2009) notes that, while the authorities pay less attention to certain forms of violence such as physical violence, especially when it is moderate, sexual abuse is considered a capital offence.

3.3 Cross-generational and transactional sex

In their review of transactional sexual relationships in Sub-Saharan Africa, Luke and Kurz (2002) cite a number of studies that show how older girls and young women frequently seek out relationships with men who can provide the money they need for school fees and supplies or help them secure work or advance professionally. Younger girls often obtain very much less from such relationships: Luke and Kurz cite examples from qualitative studies of 10-11 year olds lured into providing sex in exchange for peanuts, coke or chips. As Kaufman and Stavrou (2002) point out in a review of the literature from Sub-Saharan Africa, same-age adolescent relationships frequently include gift giving, and both boys and girls may seek out multiple partners to maximise resources. These relationships and gift exchanges are strategically negotiated, and generally not seen as abusive by the young people concerned.

Perspectives on transactional sex vary considerably. On the one hand, transactional sex with adults is very common in some social contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, and not considered necessarily abusive or exploitative. However, it may attract some moral censure from adults, and at least some young people argue it is inherently exploitative because adolescents are unable to fully comprehend the potential consequences and risks involved (UNICEF/Save the Children, 2007). Luke and Kurz (2002) show that, while transactional relationships are consensual, they may lead to rape or to physical violence if girls are seen as not keeping their side of the bargain, for example withholding sex after expensive gifts have been made. Furthermore, girls have very little power to negotiate condom use in such relationships, putting them at significant risk of HIV/AIDS and other STDs.

Exchange of sexual favours for material support as a survival strategy has put women more at risk of HIV infection than men, given that the power differential makes it more difficult for girls to negotiate the use of a condom (de Bruyn, 2006). Poverty seems to make women less able to exercise control over their sexual health, reduces ability to bargain for safe sex and shatters self-esteem, making it more difficult for young girls to have productive future lives hence compounding the cycle of sexual abuse and exploitation.

It is important to note that there are distinctions between commercial or transactional sex and intergenerational sex. Intergenerational sex does not 'necessarily' take place for a cash or in-kind remuneration, although in many cases it can be transactional. In rural areas, for instance, it is not an open form of transactional sex, but may be seen by many girls as a way of getting into a more formal relationship (including marriage) with a man who will support them, but this does not often materialise. In urban areas, by contrast, intergenerational relationships may be focused on more temporary and immediate material gains, although they might not be formalised as a commercial transaction (see Hawkins et al., 2009).

Poverty and economic dependence push girls in Uganda into high-risk behaviours such as transactional sex and commercial sex work in exchange for money or other resources (Global Business Coalition, 2007; Kasirye, 2012; UYDEL, 2007). According to these studies, young girls' sexual relationships with older men are a survival strategy: it is not uncommon for girls and young women to engage in sexual relationships with older men in order to finance their schooling and augment household income (Bledsoe, 1991, cited in de Bruyn, 2006).

The literature on child sexual abuse in Uganda indicates a correlation between poverty and child sexual abuse, even if this is not necessarily direct. For instance, poverty is associated with low levels of education and literacy

and generally poor health status (see MoFPED, 2005). Household poverty and the inability of families to meet the basic needs and requirements of their children potentially predispose girls to early marriage and sex in exchange for material support (see Save the Children, 2009; UYDEL, 2011; Yiga, 2010). The literature indicates that poverty increases the likelihood of children's exploitation and sexual abuse in particular (see Kasirye, 2012; UYDEL, 2007).

In Uganda, the phenomenon of cross-generational sex, particularly for transactional purposes, is widespread, because girls are coerced into these relationships by older men with promises of economic support for them or their families, because girls themselves see it as the only way out or even because of family pressure (Amin et al., 2013; Kasirye, 2012; Lubandi, 2008; UYDEL, 2007). It may also of course be a combination of these factors. Discriminatory social and cultural norms and practices also drive or are used to explain economic incentives.

Large age differences between adolescent girls and their partners may mean girls have less power to negotiate sex and condom use with older men. In all regions, males aged 15-24 were more likely than females to have had more than two partners in the past twelve months. Condom use at first sexual encounter varied by region but in the two regions with the highest prevalence rates more males than females had used a condom at last sex. Among girls aged 15-19 who had had sex in the past 12 months, around 13% had a partner who was 10 or more years older (Amin et al., 2013).

The Adolescent Girls Vulnerability Index Report presents the following figures, which indicate how common this situation is in Uganda (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Sexual behaviour among adolescents in Uganda, by % and region

	Percentage of sexually active girls aged 15-19 who had sexual intercourse with a man 10+ years older	Percentage aged 15-24 with 2+ partners in the last 12 months		Percentage aged 15-24 who used a condom at first sex	
		Female	Male	Female	Male
National	12.7	3.1	9.9	35.2	34.1
Central 1	19.7	5.3	13.3	39.2	43.4
Central 2	6.6	4.0	6.7	44.2	35.9
East Central	10.5	4.4	17.1	40.7	26.7
Eastern	12.4	2.5	7.2	27.0	22.2
Kampala	17.9	4.6	8.5	55.7	52.9
Karamoja	9.7	1.1	6.8	37.0	43.2
North	10.4	2.2	4.1	29.7	43.1
Southwest	13.9	1.1	8.2	18.4	21.2
West Nile	5.0	2.1	9.6	31.0	38.5
Western	16.4	3.2	14.2	30.2	26.5

Source: Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey 2011.

Note: Sexually active is defined as having sex within the last 12 months.

Source: Amin et al. (2008).

In the academic literature, the statistics are more conservative. For instance, one study confirms that older Ugandan girls are more likely to engage in cross-generational relationships than younger girls: 11.8% of girls aged 15-19, 18.6% of girls aged 20-24 and 21.4% of girls aged 25-29 (Kelly et al., 2003). Similarly, a study from rural Uganda shows 8.5% of 15-19-year-old girls participating in cross-generational relationships, 90% of whom stated that their previous three relationships involved economic support/transactional components (Konde-Lule et al., 1997). However, another study implies much higher incidences of cross-generational relationships in showing that 85% of secondary school girls (aged between 12 and 20) have been involved in sexual relations for money or gifts (Nyanzi et al., 2000).

A study by Uganda Youth Development Link (UYDEL) (2007) noted that, as a result of poverty, many children join commercial sex activities, including child prostitution, as a means of survival. However, some young girls are also lured into the business in a bid to make quick money. However, it is not just poverty that leads to transactional sex and prostitution, but also peer influence. Peer pressure has been cited in other studies with respect to transactional sexual relationships (Temin, 1999) – and other authors have hypothesised that peer groups have a critical role in articulating sexual information and awareness issues given that school curricula do not include such programmes. In combination with this, adolescent girls identify material gains and sexual relations with adulthood and a sense of personal achievement (Luke and Kurz 2002).

3.4 Methodology

The study was exploratory in nature and primarily qualitative in approach. A backdrop was provided by a review of the literature and interventions taking place at national level. This review was triangulated with a key informant interview (KII) phase with core stakeholders in government, NGOs and civil society organisations (CSOs) to confirm and contrast findings. Case studies were held with girls who had experienced this situation – including those who had become pregnant, those who had married as a result and those who had not. The study explored the information they had prior to engaging in these relationships, their family, community and school dynamics and whether they received any type of support to reduce their dependency on these relationships as a form of survival. Case studies with adolescents, both girls and boys but particularly girls, used in-depth life history interview techniques and small group discussions facilitated with participatory methods.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with communities helped us understand why this phenomenon was widespread, how people understand and engage with this situation, if they provide relevant information to girls or the extent to which they ‘allow’ this in the hopes of it leading to a better situation for the family. KIIs at national and subnational level unpacked whether prosecuting these cases as defilement had had any impact on reducing the phenomenon, and whether other forms of support, including awareness raising, promotion of other livelihood alternatives for girls or universal secondary education, among other measures, were seen to be improving the situation.

3.5 Research locations

The inception report outlined three central pillars informing research location selection: 1) sites should be in districts with high levels of poverty as per 2005/06 income poverty data ; ii) at least one of the sites should be remote (difficult to access and at a significant distance from the closest market, school or health centre), in either the Eastern or the Western region; and iii) in some cases sites might be chosen based on the presence of staff from the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) or other NGOs who might help facilitate the research, although we would need to consider this in the analysis, as this presence might have an impact on children’s perception of poverty.

In practice, these premises were maintained. Fieldwork was restricted to two districts – Kamuli and Kampala districts – with the former representing the rural site and the latter the urban site. The selection of these sites was based on an extensive review of the existence of programmes supporting adolescent girls in related areas of life such as early pregnancy, capacity building, reproductive health and early marriage. In Kamuli, Plan International was the main agency supporting the study; in Kampala it was Reproductive Health Uganda Bwaise Branch. In each of the sites, a sub-county then two parishes were randomly selected for study.

Findings of this study are not, therefore, meant to be representative of adolescent girls in Uganda as a whole, but rather to contribute to the general understanding of girls’ intergenerational experiences and community perceptions and support mechanisms, to provide new ways of looking at factors contributing to the phenomenon in particular settings. Participatory research methods were employed both to encourage adolescent girls and boys to express their views and to allow triangulation among a variety of perspectives.

Study processes included:

- Training of researchers in April 2013, covering both methodological and ethical issues;

- A pilot study in UYDEL on 17 April 2013, to help the team gain experience in the application of the research tools, to more fully adapt the tools to the Ugandan setting and to develop a realistic planning framework for application of the tools in the selected field settings;
- Fieldwork in the two selected study sites of Kamuli district (Kitayunjwa sub-county, Busota and Kijayunjwa-Naminage parishes) and Kampala district (Kawempe division, Bwaise II and Bwaise III parishes).

3.6 Data collection tools and techniques

The study employed a variety of qualitative and participatory research tools

Table 1: Research tools

Table 2: Instrument	Table 3: Purpose of instrument	Table 4: Respondents
Key informant interviews (district level)	Explore the context of and the linkages between child protection and poverty	Departments of justice/police/social welfare/children and women's affairs/poverty reduction and planning/social protection Local NGOs/international NGOs working on child protection issues
Community mapping (adapted)	Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) approach to familiarise on context on relative income levels in the community	Community members, adult men women and youth boys and girls
Focus group discussions	Identify key drivers of vulnerability and what programming responses could help	Adults in communities with high vulnerability to child protection violations in question
Small group discussions– groups of 3 or 4 children (girls and boys separately)	Identify key drivers of vulnerability and what programming responses could help	Adolescents (13-17 years) in communities with high vulnerability to child protection violations in question – 2 groups girls/boys (high/low income; urban/rural) of 3-4 children
In-depth case studies	Understand relative balance of factors leading to their vulnerability and then experiences of programme responses	Adolescents who have experienced the child protection violation in focus and have been 'rehabilitated'
Key informant interviews (national)	Explore the context of and linkages between child protection and poverty	Ministries of justice/police/social welfare/ children and women's affairs/poverty reduction and planning/social protection International organisations: UNICEF, UN Women, Save the Children, Plan

4 Research findings

Evidence from fieldwork in both Kampala and Kamuli districts indicates that cross-generational sexual relationships are common among adolescents, particularly girls, and that most of these have a transactional element, even more so in Kampala. In both the rural and urban settings researched, the drivers of intergenerational sex were broadly similar, and included economic hardships characterised by acute income and subsistence poverty; discriminatory social and cultural norms; a high-risk physical environment; peer pressure; and inadequate care environments at home, characterised by, among other things, parental abuse and neglect. The following sections explore the drivers through findings captured during the fieldwork.

4.1 Economic drivers

Evidence from the field confirmed that economic challenges, manifested in acute income and subsistence poverty and ill being (*embera mbi*), in both rural and urban families in Kamuli and Kampala, were critical in pushing adolescent girls and boys into transactional, cross-generational sexual relationships. Economic challenges in Kamuli are typified by low agricultural income and subsistence poverty, characterised by inability to meet basic needs such as food, clothes, decent shelter, health care and school fees for children. Largely based on subsistence agriculture, poverty in Kamuli is attributed largely to chronic cash shortfalls resulting from meagre household incomes, poor agricultural yields and large families comprising numerous dependent young children. In the high-density slums of Kawempe, Kampala, where the economy is more cash-based and where family size is comparatively smaller, poverty is seen as leading to fewer and riskier livelihood choices. In this case, entrenched poverty and hardship are attributed mainly to limited employment opportunities in both the formal and the informal sector.

Whatever the causes and nature of poverty in both Kampala and Kamuli, its stultifying effects on adolescent boys and girls mean the areas are a breeding ground for the abuse perpetrated by older men and women, who in turn are seen by adolescents as one of the only ways to fulfil their unmet needs. The pivotal role of poverty and ill being as drivers of cross-generational sexual relationships in Kamuli is illustrated in the following quotes by research participants:

'Inability is mainly about lack of money, and land where to dig [farm]. This is where our children's problems originate. If you cannot buy your daughter even a skirt, an old man will offer her one, and entice her into a sexual relationship' (FGD, women, Kamuli).

'If you are poor and unable to give your daughter what she wants, she will be pushed to the old man, who is enticing her with eats and knickers. But if you give her these things she may be contented, and avoid the old man' (FGD, women, Kamuli).

'Because of poverty, the girls are going to look for boda boda [motor cycle taxis] men; because of poverty, there is domestic violence which forces girls out of homes; because of poverty the girls look for alternative means of survival' (FGD, men, Kamuli).

Adolescent girls and boys interviewed also acknowledged the overriding role of poverty as a factor driving them into sexual relationships with older men or women in their communities:

'At home they would give me money and send me to the mill to grind maize. Yet I needed that money for my personal needs. So I befriended the mill attendant, much older than me. We made a deal, where he would grind the maize "freely" in exchange for love. Meanwhile, I would pocket the cash meant for grinding the maize, since

my parents were not aware of this arrangement. To sustain the lucrative deal, I started sleeping with him frequently and eventually got pregnant. However I'm still at home and he is yet to marry me' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

'It is common, a girl aged 17 can get married to a man aged 30 or 40 years. She can love a man of 50 years, even one older than her father. This is because the young men are so poor!' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

'When I was growing up I saw my mother struggling, unable to provide for us, and I was convinced by my peers that I needed a man who had money to provide. At the age of 12 years I got a man of 28 years who used to provide some basic needs' (Case study, 18-year-old female, Kampala).

In the community resources mapping exercise, poverty also emerged as a driver of adolescents taking part in cross-generational sex.

'Poverty is the cause of everything. Poor parents cannot provide their daughters with basic needs. So the girls end up looking for other means to meet their needs. This is when they end up being deceived by men with evil plans' (Community mapping, youth group, Kamuli).

One interesting difference between some of the relationships formed between adolescents (mainly girls) and older men in rural Kamuli and those in Kawempe is that, in the former, some of the girls expect to enter a stable marriage with the hope of a better economic future, rather than having a purely transactional, short-term relationships, as this quote from a case study of a girl who went to Kamuli to live with her aunt illustrates:

'At first, my aunt was receptive and really treated me well. However, she later started forcing me to contribute to buying food and other necessities when I had no job. She would even leave without food and verbally abuse me so that I would buy sugar and other things. Aunt used to send me to buy things, to look for money. Then I met that man –a boda boda rider who promised to marry me. The man first lied me that he was not married but when I became pregnant I discovered that he had a wife and children. All the same I stayed with him for nine months. Before I got pregnant he used to buy me food from hotels, gave me some money, bought me shoes and promised a good life for me. When I became pregnant, he started changing. He abandoned me at the hour of need. When my father knew, he said that I should never go back to him and that even if I died he would not care. I wrote him a letter apologising but he tore it up before reading it' (Case study, 17-year-old female, Kamuli).

However, in the cosmopolitan urban settlements of Kawempe, cross-generational relationships are more often driven by transactional sex between adolescents and older men or women who can afford to give them cash or gifts (those in the same age group are generally not able to afford this transaction). For some girls, such sexual encounters are more akin to commercial sex; for others they remain distinct, since they might be with the same partner for a period of time, and this might not be the result of a strictly commercial transaction.

'Poverty is the origin of every vice, including child prostitution. Since the girls are so needy, lacking all basics, and their male age mates are equally poor, they readily fall for old men who are relatively wealthy. They meet the girls in the bars at kimansulo [striptease shows] where they seduce them with offers of cash, fake promises of jobs, school fees, clothes and good food' (FGD, men, Kampala).

'We youth have no money as we are not employed. We cannot meet the demands of the girls, like school fees, pocket money, good dresses and phones. So the girls avoid us and go with the old men who are financially better off' (FGD, out-of-school adolescent males, Kampala).

The economic drivers were often described as working in synergy with moral decay, characteristic of many dysfunctional families in Kawempe, to exacerbate the incidence of intergenerational sex:

'Household poverty coupled with lack of morals among parents all cause child prostitution. The sleeping quarters are so small, and congested and the shameless parents engage in sex in full view of the children! The girls learn early and have sex with older men as soon as possible' (FGD, men, Kampala).

The fieldwork found that the engagement of adolescent girls in transactional sex with older men, particularly in Kampala, was not always driven by dire income poverty and meeting basic needs such as food, shelter or education. According to many of the adolescent girls and boys interviewed, transactional sex is rather driven by

new ‘needs’ or an aspiration to achieve social mobility as a result of living in an urban environment with more external influences, peer pressure and expectations of access to material goods such as mobile phones, cosmetics, fashionable clothing and the ability to afford services like hair styling in salons, among others. Although for extremely poor girls in the urban setting the initial engagement in transactional sex might be aimed at fulfilling basic needs, this transforms over time to include other material goods. This situation has resulted in a different way of viewing these adolescent girls, more as agents finding a means to achieve their ends than as girls who have limited opportunities and options in a context of peer pressure and external influences, which pressure them to engage in risky sexual relationships where they have limited control and are unable to negotiate their sexual and reproductive health through the use of condoms. This perception is reflected in the following quote by a young female peer educator working for a local NGO:

‘Most girls go with sugar daddies because of greed for money. Their male age mates lack cash, and so play hit and run. With the sugar daddy you don’t have to beg for money. He gives it readily so that you don’t reject him. Then you can go to the salon and change your hair style, buy clothes and cosmetics, pay your school fees or adopt a trendy life style (swagger) and the other girls will envy you’ (Small group discussion, female peer educator, Kampala).

In contrast with the above, some adolescent girls who had engaged in transactional sex with older men had become pregnant and were now adolescent mothers, and blamed their situation on economic hardship and ill being, as they felt these rendered transactional sex their only option for survival, even when it carried the risk of STDs and sometimes violence. Although they described the old men who prey on young girls derogatorily, as *mulya buto* (‘defilers’), at the same time they expressed their preference for cross-generational sex owing its assured financial and material advantages compared with sex with their peers.

‘I’m aged only 18 years, but my life is a tale of poverty, ill being and struggle. I’m now a sex worker, burdened with looking after my sickly mother and all my siblings. Apart from my regular clients, I have a steady lover, an old man, aged over 50 years and married. I fear him. I have no other option as my mother and siblings need my support. All I need is his money. He is apparently rich, and goes to Japan for business. I sleep with him whenever he wants, in lodges. Much as I fear them, I prefer old men to boys who are my age mates. The boys are poor, unpredictable and disrespectful. Unlike the boys, the old men have seen it all. All I need is money’ (Case study, 18-year-old female, Kampala).

4.2 Sociocultural and religious drivers

Culture and traditional practices also emerged as significant in the cause and perpetuation of intergenerational sexual relationships. In predominantly rural Kamuli, where cultural norms and ethos still influence dominant thinking and the functioning of society, the determination of both girls’ sexual maturity, age of sexual debut and marriage is still based mainly on bodily and physiological changes, which are characterised by the onset of puberty and not age *per se*.

‘In this community a girl is seen as mature when she grows breasts and starts menstruating. For a boy once he breaks his voice or grows a beard, he is a man’ (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

While in Kampala social pressures have been eroded because there are few extended families and little sense of community, interviewees did not feel as influenced by ‘sociocultural’ norms as those in Kamuli did. In fact, many said some of the problems of abuse and neglect by families resulted from this loss of ‘social’ values that they had in the villages. Nevertheless, some influential factors, such as the power and authority of men over women and the acceptance of men having multiple partners, affect adolescent girls’ experiences in Kampala as well.

4.2.1 Ambiguity in the definition of cross-generational sex

There was no unanimity on important definitions such as girlhood, adolescence and adulthood/womanhood and related issues such as age of sexual consent and marriage. As such, cross-generational easily becomes normalised, as adolescent girls who are seen as ‘sexually mature’ are perceived as being available for sex, even if legally the age of consent is 18. In fact, most relationships including cohabitation and marriage in the community involve girls or women with much older male partners.

Cross-generational sex is thus not perceived as a child protection violation, but as a normal and socially acceptable phenomenon, not attracting punitive social sanctions. A girl or boy's physiological maturity, characterised by distinct bodily changes, takes precedence over numerical age in the definition of adulthood.

'The significance of cross-generational relationships in Uganda depends on the context of how they are perceived, or approached. For instance when we consider the punitive approach, where the legal age of sexual consent and marriage is set at 18 years, then the incidence, severity and significance of cross-generational relationships increase as there are many victims and perpetrators. In rural areas, however, where traditional marriage or sexual relationships are normally between older men and younger girls, cross-generational relationships, though common, are not seen as a problem, and remain insignificant' (KII, Child Protection Unit, UNICEF Country Office, Kampala).

In both Kamuli and Kampala, incidences of cross-generational sex between boys and older women were less frequently reported, although it was widely acknowledged that they existed. Law enforcement key informants interviewed in Kawempe spoke about increasing numbers of cases of old women 'sugar mummies' enticing teenage boys into relationships for the express purpose of sexual gratification and exploitation.

'Some male adolescent boys do not want to work. They want free things and, that's how they fall prey to rich old women who entice them into sexual relationships for money. Old women are patient and resilient. They are experienced like a used bicycle. The old women often give poor unemployed boys start-up capital for a business, in exchange for a steady sexual relationship' (Community mapping (adolescent male), Kampala).

4.2.2 Discriminatory cultural norms portrayed in oral tradition

The research in rural Kamuli illuminated the existence of a dynamic sub-culture represented in form of oral tradition (norms, mores, attitudes, practices, metaphors, euphemisms and proverbs), which implicitly legitimates, promotes and accommodates cross-generational sexual relationships.

Eito telyengera, literally translated as 'What is immature cannot ripen,' is a popular metaphor that mirrors dominant thinking among the ethnic Basoga; it defines girls' sexual maturity in terms of bodily/physiological changes relating to the transition from girlhood to womanhood. This implies that any consensual sex involving a post-pubescent girl is seen as a culturally acceptable and normal adult relationship. In other words, cross-generational sex is not in any way problematised in the traditional Kamuli sociocultural context. In all the interviews in Kamuli, respondents found it difficult to internalise the study's definition of cross-generational sex, and described it only in terms of marriage of young women to men of an advanced age and the associated gender power imbalances disfavouring girls and women in such relationships. All cohorts of respondents in Kamuli described incidence of such marriages as fairly common.

Omwana omuwala kasukali, kawomera can be translated as 'A girl child is sweet, tasty.' This metaphor equates a young girl's value to the bride wealth (sweet, tasty things) she fetches for her natal family at marriage. A girl's marriage value, as seen from this perspective, diminishes the longer she stays at her natal home, unmarried and growing older. This dominant cultural thinking both condones and promotes early marriage among adolescent girls.

Omuto aba akyalina embuzi ye – translates as 'A young girl has an intact hymen.' This is a proverb for for virginity, or sexual purity, which is traditionally valued as it enhances a girl's marriage value, often in the form of an additional goat (*embuzi*) given as a special gift to the mother-in law in appreciation of the bride's virginity. This thinking encourages girls to marry early in a society where their male counterparts are not under any cultural pressure to do so. The longer a girl stays unmarried, the greater the risk of her losing her virginity, while it is older men who usually have the financial stability and resources to marry and pay related costs.

Further, the language used by respondents to describe intergenerational sex in both Kampala and Kamuli trivialised rather than stigmatised cross-generational relationships. Although promiscuous men who prey on younger girls are nicknamed *mulyabuto* ('men who eat girls') or *sedubuto* ('defilers'), it emerged that the terms are not used in an overtly derogatory sense to shame the men. This is in stark contrast with the term *mugwenywufu*, which is overtly derogatory and reserved for individuals, male or female, who indulge in acts of sexual perversion and immorality such as paedophilia, incestuous adultery, aggravated rape and defilement and bestiality, which are criminalised under Ugandan law.

4.2.3 Unrestrained fertility

In Kamuli, it emerged that young girls often used high fertility as a strategy to initiate and stay in sexual, cohabiting or marital relationships with older men. In FGDs conducted with out-of-school adolescent girls in Busota, there was unanimity among participants that a special reward to a man who treats his woman humanely is to bear him as many children as possible. As such, many of the adolescent girls interviewed had already produced more than one or two children, and took much pride in their fertility. One 17-year-old mother of two sickly children was emphatic that her high fertility, irrespective of the hardships she was experiencing with regard to child care, at least demonstrated her effort to reciprocate her husband's care, with her love and devotion expressed in terms of her unrestrained fertility.

It emerged that this strategy of unrestrained fertility was linked not only to the aim to please these older men, but also to their limited or lack of power to discuss or negotiate safe sexual practices, especially contraception, since men tend to disagree with the use of any birth control method. In rural areas, this is further undermined by limited knowledge of and access to contraception methods among adolescent girls.

In the urban districts of Kampala, the issue of high fertility as a way to please men was less of a factor among all cohorts of respondents, although lack of power to negotiate contraception – particularly condoms for protection against STDs – was a major problem.

4.2.4 Polygamy

When asked to identify and rank recognised forms of marriage in rural Kamuli, polygamy emerged as a norm rather than an exception. Respondents noted that the traditional practice of polygamy favoured males, and that, whereas men have the choice to opt for single or multiple sexual or marriage partners, in the case of girls and young women sociocultural norms regulating sexual or marriage relationships strictly prohibit this. The girls talked about a wide array of pros and cons of polygamy, but what emerged as significant was that, in most polygamous marriages, the age difference between the husband and his successive wives increases progressively, implying that most, if not all, polygamous marriages fall in the cross-generational category. It is thus rational to argue that polygamy as an entrenched traditional practice explicitly promotes and perpetuates cross-generational sexual relationships.

In Kampala polygamy was not much talked about, although it was noted that it was not uncommon for both men and young girls to have multiple ongoing sexual partners.

4.2.5 Gender differentials in expected age at marriage

As noted above, stark gender differences exist *vis-à-vis* expected age of marriage for boys and girls in rural Kamuli. Whereas for a girl it is the onset of puberty and menstruation that determines when she should leave her natal home to get married, a boy can stay at home unmarried for as long as he wishes without risk of social ostracism. Further, a girl is expected to get married early to fetch bride wealth, whereas a boy is seen as the foundation/cornerstone of his natal family – a factor that is implicitly a disincentive to marry early and relocate from the home: *Omwana omuwala kasukali, ate omulenzi kilyowa* ('A girl child brings bride wealth whereas a boy is the cornerstone') is a traditional saying in Busoga.

Gender-based discriminatory cultural expectations such as this drive adolescent girls into early marriage, often with men much older than them, as the boys – their age mates – are not under any pressure, cultural or otherwise, to marry early, nor do they have the resources to do so. Although some unmarried out-of-school adolescent mothers acknowledged that they had been made pregnant by their male age mates, most of those who were married were much younger than their husbands.

On the contrary, in Kawempe, discriminatory sociocultural norms such as the above, driving girls into early sexual debut and/or marriage with older men, was generally not a major issue discussed.

Religious practices play an important role in marriage practices, often despite legal restrictions against this. In Kamuli and Kampala there are various religions, including Christianity of different denominations, Islam and animism, among others. A Muslim leader pointed out that, although cross-generational marriages are a norm rather than an exception among Muslims in the community, statutory law prohibits him to marry girls and boys aged below 18 years, and he has complied strictly with this legislation. It emerged, however, that not all marriages involving Muslim youth are conducted formally in mosques: some are customary, conducted outside

the mosque. In such marriages, brides aged 14 and grooms aged over 60 years are not uncommon. It emerged that such incidences of child protection violations, although common, rarely attract formal litigation because there are no complainants.

Although no other religious leaders were interviewed in either Kamuli or Kampala, it is known that statutory laws on marriage equally prohibit leaders of other religious denominations with respect to conducting marriages involving underage boys and girls. This is aimed at curbing underage marriages, but, since the practice remains, this can result in girls being left in cross-generational relationships but without legal protection.

4.3 Drivers based on family instability, sexual abuse and neglect

In both Kampala and Kamuli, instability, abuse and child neglect, inside the family or household, were reportedly very common and to be driving children into intergenerational sex. The quotes below illustrate this:

‘There are situations where the children are in the hands of stepmothers. There are situations where the girls are badly beaten and even chased away from home at night and unfortunately the only people who can accommodate them are the older men since they have houses or can afford to rent lodges – which their male peers cannot’ (Small group discussion, in-school adolescent males, Kampala).

‘Unfortunately some fathers, especially those who use drugs and alcohol, force their daughters into sex with them. Such girls get frustrated and run away from their fathers’ home only to land in the hands of other men who use them for pay. The girls trust their fathers who betray them. Such an incestuous act begins with a seemingly innocent comment by the father such as, “My daughter you resemble your mother. In fact, it is okay to have sex with me as your mother does”’ (Small group discussion, adolescent females, Kampala).

A: *‘I got a man when my father died. I thought he was going to help me. He promised to marry me and when I became pregnant he kept quiet [...] We stayed together for two months. When I became pregnant he would give me many things. Even when the baby was like one month, he would provide but now he has changed.’*

Q: *‘Why did you like him in the beginning?’*

A: *‘Because I was mistreated by my stepmother and sister he promised to marry me. Now that I have a baby they abuse me that I do not even have a mother’* (Case study, 17-year-old female, Kamuli).

4.4 Peer pressure and lifestyle choices

In addition to economic and sociocultural drivers, youth in Kampala identified peer group pressure as an emerging push factor of both girls and boys into intergenerational sex. Adolescent girls and boys explained that girls, but also some boys, engaged in relationships with older men (or women) even if their basic needs were met, as it was seen as way to gain access to ‘luxury’ goods they would not otherwise have, but for which there is social pressure among peers to obtain – from perfumes to clothing articles. In fact, some respondents mentioned that even those coming from stable well-to-do families were known to engage in cross-generational sexual relationships with older men for various reasons, including sexual gratification and acquisition of luxury items such as smart phones and plasma screen TV sets:

‘Some girls are blessed with everything but still go with the old men. They are influenced by their peers who are doing it. Now it has become a trend, even girls from well-to-do families are going with old men, fit to be their father’ (Community mapping, Kampala).

‘Others are not needy, they see it as a trendy life style’ (Small group discussion, adolescent females, Kampala).

‘I got [the older man] through peer pressure [...] You look at your friend with beautiful attire, and you too want it. Then when you ask how they got it they will tell you that you get a man to provide. Later I wanted to have another man to get more things and I ended up in the sex trade’ (Case study, 18-year-old female, Kampala).

In this sense, discussions with adults and adolescents alike indicated that, although girls and boys’ involvement with old men and women, respectively, was attributed largely to naivety coupled with poverty, some of the boys and girls were actually not materially needy but only psychosocially vulnerable. Peer pressure in Kamuli is

expressed more in terms of the social acceptability of cross-generational sex and the pressure to form relationships from a young age, as discussed earlier, particularly for girls. However, adolescent girls interviewed in small group discussions in Kamuli also noted that it was not uncommon for adolescent girls attending school (who are thus not among the poorest) to desire things their parents cannot afford. This drives them into going with older men who have money, particularly as they see friends with nice things and want to have them too.

4.5 Sexual gratification

In Kampala and to a lesser extent Kamuli, the proliferation of pornography, especially ‘blue films’, was affirmed as a reality in communities. Makeshift video halls (*bibanda*) where pornography is shown are reportedly abundant in Kawempe in Kampala. It was also noted that old men and women show blue films in their homes to lure girls and boys, respectively, into illicit sex. Male youth in Kawempe said girls deliberately opted to have sex with old men to explore the myth or perception of heightened erotic virility and pleasure often associated with having sex with old men but described as lacking in boys.

‘The penetration of an old man is deep, not attainable or comparable with that of a boy’ (Small group discussion, adolescent males, Kampala).

In Kamuli, this perception was echoed by most of the sexually active out-of-school adolescent girls. They agreed that their male peers compared poorly with old men when it came to matters of sexual intimacy.

‘The boys merely play about with you, they lack experience and you have to teach them everything’ (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

It was stressed that issues of sexual virility were viewed seriously in traditional Busoga/Kamuli society, and that girls and young women were often attracted and persist in abusive sexual relationships or marriage with much older men for sexual gratification *per se*.

4.6 Restricted access to community resources and essential services

Restricted or lack of access to community resources such as wells/bore holes and essential services such as health care, education, water and sanitation, child protection and other welfare facilities can combine to complicate and deepen the various risks and vulnerabilities girls and boys are exposed to in terms of cross-generational sex.

For example, in Kamuli, the physical distance to facilities, particularly wells, bore holes, mills and even schools, means adolescent girls can be exposed to sexual abuse by men on their way. When distances are particularly long, places are difficult to access or loads are difficult to carry, girls may be compelled to seek the assistance of older men, with the promise of reciprocating with sexual favours. *Boda boda* drivers were seen as frequent victimisers, luring girls into sex in exchange for ‘free’ rides to school. Meanwhile, adolescent girls spoke about being at risk of sexual abuse by male teachers at school.

5 Consequences of intergenerational sex for young people

The consequences experienced and/or perceived by adolescent girls and boys involved in cross-generational sex or regarding its occurrence in both Kampala and Kamuli can be categorised into positive (leading to improved economic wellbeing) and negative (causing or exacerbating ill being). The analysis below notes when the described consequences are the result of experiences of adolescent boys and girls involved in these types of relationships or of perceptions by others, either adolescents or adults in the community.

5.1 Perceived positive consequences

The study findings show that the consequences of cross-generational sexual relationships, which in rural Kamuli often take the form of cohabitation or marriage, and transactional sex in urban Kawempe in Kampala are largely negative for both the adolescent girls and the adolescent boys involved. It was agreed that positive consequences were scarce. Those that were mentioned included access to more and better food and ability to cover some costs for medical care; psycho-emotional wellbeing when able to cover either basic needs or purchase ‘luxury’ goods that were otherwise unaffordable; the possibility of entering into a stable marriage with an older man; a sexually satisfying life; increased respect for and/or tolerance by husbands; husbands’ acceptance of children from earlier relationships; assurance of material support; and an overall sense of both physical and social protection.

Compared to those respondents in urban Kampala, positive consequences mentioned by respondents in Kamuli focused on adolescents having more immediate material concerns, such as money in the short term either to pay for basic needs or, more commonly, to pay for goods they could not otherwise afford. These respondents nevertheless reported the same protective and security concerns as those in the urban environment.

The following quotes illustrate some of these perceptions:

‘When an old man marries you, he satisfies your needs, because he can afford it. If you ask him for UGX 1,000 for body jelly, he gives you UGX 20,000 instead! When you are tired of eating sweet potatoes he brings rice and meat. You enjoy good health. Above all, he satisfies you sexually’ (FGD, out-of-school adolescent females, Kamuli).

‘Old men are wise and responsible. When he makes you pregnant, he does not deny and abandon you, or the child. He has a home in the village, and cannot simply disappear like the boys. You always know where to find him when you need help’ (FGD, women, Kamuli).

‘I’m aged 18 and cohabiting with a much older man whose exact age I don’t know. He is a Musoga and Muslim like me. Until he made me pregnant when I was in S2, he was paying my school fees, and meeting all my other needs. Although I found him with one wife and two children, I’m his favourite. He provides me with food from the market and shops. Although I dig [farm], often with him, I don’t subsist on home grown food [...] I’m the envy of my co-wife, who subsists on what she grows. My only worry is that he is yet to formalise our relationship, although I’ve borne him one child’ (Case study, 18-year-old female, Kamuli).

5.2 Perceived negative consequences

Negative consequences were widely identified in Kamuli and Kampala, both by both who had experienced cross-generational sex and by others in the community identified for this study.

Some of the negative consequences, lived and perceived, identified in both Kampala and Kamuli included heightened vulnerability to infection with HIV/AIDs and other STDs, which female respondents associated with old men, who tend to be more sexually active and to have had multiple partners; increased vulnerability to unwanted and risky early pregnancies; unsafe abortion and the associated higher risk of maternal morbidity; and injury or trauma of the reproductive system when young, physiologically immature and sexually inexperienced girls are initiated into penetrative sexual intercourse with older and sexually experienced men. Most of these sexual and reproductive risks are attributed to the inability of young, naive and timid girls to demand or negotiate safe sex.

'Whenever an old man approaches me for love, I do not only see silimu [AIDS] but all sorts of STDs! Yes, all old men are sick and deliberately infect young girls. Some lost their wives long ago to silimu, and others have gonorrhoea and syphilis, which they believe can be healed by having sex with a young girl' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

It was reiterated that, despite their high prevalence and trivialisation in both Kamuli and Kampala, cross-generational sex rarely offers tangible and sustainable benefits for the adolescent girls involved. Girls who are abandoned while pregnant or soon after birthing do not only drop out of school but also suffer considerable psychological trauma associated with the pain of rejection not only by their male partners but sometimes by their natal families as well. As a result, these girls suffer a loss in self-confidence and self-worth. Many, after engaging in one transactional sexual relationship with an older man, start to do this more frequently. In Kampala in particular, for many of the girls this tended to lead to commercial sex, particularly for those who had had children at a very early age and needed to find a way to support them.

'I was enrolled in a day school. My parents are extremely poor and I would stay at school without lunch. Yet by the roadside there were many people vending delicious pancakes and other snacks. Oh how I longed for those pancakes! There was this bicycle repairer nearby who seemed to be aware of my problem. He started buying for me pancakes, on top of giving me petty cash. Life suddenly became good. I was in love and didn't see the need to continue schooling. I dropped out, got pregnant and tried to settle down with him as his wife. I couldn't believe it when he chased me away saying he was not ready for marriage!' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

More often than not these girls become destitute, with no place of abode. Some adolescent girls with young children mentioned feeling that their children, particularly girls, would also have to sleep with older men when they got older to survive, particularly as it was what they had witnessed from a young age.

In addition to the above, many interviewees mentioned abuse and physical violence as being common in these relationships. Sometimes, this results from girls trying to negotiate use of contraception; sometimes it is just because some men are violent and feel entitled to be violent with the girls they are with.

'These days are tough. If [the men] give you school fees and you go with men, they can really beat you' (Small group discussion, adolescent females, Kampala).

'When I had just started, I got a man who "fractured" me and I had to go treatment. Others use excessive force and actually rape you. In some cases there are men who do not want to pay so they rape and go away' (Case study, 18-year-old female, Kampala).

In addition to the above, given that in Kamuli cross-generational relationships can result in marriage or cohabitation, other negative consequences identified included increased proneness to premature widowhood as a result of pronounced inter-spouse age differences; insecurity in the matrimonial home owing to potential eviction by hostile in-laws on the demise of the husband; vulnerability to physical abuse or disrespect by grown-up children who deliberately refuse to recognise a girl's new and heightened stepmother status; poor health and premature ageing associated with prolific child bearing, owing to old men's desire and demand for many children; living with the social stigma that marriage to a man of advanced age attracts; and above all abandonment while pregnant as a result of back tracking by the male partner/husband on his earlier promise of marrying the girl and providing her with social security.

'Old men love children. They want to be congratulated every year for having a new child. You have to produce until you fade and your breasts sag and look like sandals or socks. He wants you to look old and unattractive, so

that other men do not look at you. When you delay getting pregnant, after delivery, he wonders why and forcefully takes you to a witch doctor who gives you herbal medicine, and you get pregnant again' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

'I know anybody can die any time, but when you marry an old man it is a licence to early widowhood' (FGD, adolescent females, Kamuli).

In both Kamuli and Kampala, although incidences of intergenerational sex involving boys and older women were less common, their consequences for boys were described as severe. In one cross-generational sex incident initiated in Kamuli and experienced in Kampala, the boy victim suffered persistent psycho-emotional disorientation, was at increased risk of contracting STDs, especially HIV, from his much older partner whose background he did not know, had developed an unsustainable dependency syndrome and was at risk of ostracism from both his natal family and clan. The quotes below illustrate some of the adverse experiences faced by adolescent boys:

'Old women who love boys are already infected with AIDS. They abandon their homes in high-risk places like Masaka, and come to Kampala where their HIV status is not known, to deliberately infect and kill us' (FGD, adolescent males, Kampala).

'Sugar mummy relationships are damaging to the young mind. Some of the boys become emotionally disoriented. Others are disowned by their families and feel like social outcasts. I counsel several youth in such situations here, and some abandon the relationships. Others take to drugs, return to their villages and commit suicide' (KII, Child Protection Officer, Kampala).

Overall, what remains unclear is the extent to which the boys and girls who get involved in cross-generational sex with older partners see the damaging negatives before engaging in these relationships, or whether they realise the damage only once they have experienced it. Given the social acceptance or frequency of these relationships, it can be hypothesised that many young adolescents think only of the very limited positive consequences of these relationships, without actually weighing the long-term negative costs. For others, given their limited options, they might still see it as the only alternative, even when they are aware of the risks. Further research with young adolescents who have not experienced cross-generational sex but who are exposed to it might shed light on this issue.

6 Policy, programme and informal responses

6.1 Access to justice

A number of responses can be noted at the local level within the formal governmental setup. Uganda's Local Government Act (1997) established the Office of the Secretary for Children Affairs as an institutional structure within which child protection issues could be addressed and given visibility. This was followed in the year 2000 by the enactment of the Children Act, transformed from the Children Statute 1996. The Children Act is the primary piece of legislation addressing protection of children from abuse, exploitation and neglect. In April 2009, Parliament passed the Anti-trafficking in Persons Act: trafficking is a problem not only for Uganda but also for many other countries, with the majority of those trafficked being women and young girls who are sold into sexual slavery. In 2011, Parliament passed the Sexual Offences Bill, emphasising the protection of women and children and the punishment and prosecution of perpetrators.

Parliament also passed the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act 2010 to outlaw the traditional harmful practice of female genital cutting as a form of sexual violence against children. Studies point to the prevalence of the practice in many parts of the country, including the Eastern and North-eastern regions. This act therefore outlaws all forms of this tradition.

Chapter XIV of the Penal Code defines the offence of rape as the unlawful carnal knowledge (by a person) of a woman or girl without her consent, or with her consent if consent was obtained by force, threats or intimidation, with the maximum penalty being death. The Penal Code Act is perhaps one of the most pronounced forms of legislation on child sexual abuse and exploitation in Uganda. Unlike other laws in Uganda, it criminalises the sexual exploitation of minors (those below 18 years of age). Penal Code Act 120 states that any person who has sexual intercourse with a girl under the age of 18 years is guilty of an offence and is liable to suffer death. The same act states that any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults a boy under the age of 18 years is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for 14 years. It is noteworthy that the rape of boys is not yet recognized within the law as such, but referred to differently, as indicated above. It is also noteworthy that it carries a much lesser sentence compared with rape of girls/young women.

It should be noted, however, that many studies suggest the existence of this legislation has not had a significant impact in terms of reducing child protection violations, nor has it significantly improved the situation in relation to the prosecution of cases of child abuse, including sexual abuse and exploitation of children and young people (see Kalibala and Elson, 2010; MGLSD, 2010; 2011).

In terms of how the framework is applied across Uganda, there is a concern that the country does not have a clear, comprehensive, harmonised child protection system or a national child protection policy to guide child protection actors towards a common goal. Yiga's (2010) study noted through interviews with key child protection experts that the absence of a clear policy on child protection means interventions for child protection are usually implemented under several parts of the legal and policy framework. Even more critical is that, in the absence of a national child protection system, agencies and other actors involved in child protection have ended up implementing their own individual projects targeting child sexual abuse in the specific communities where they have operations. Most of these interventions are not coordinated, and lessons are not well shared among the key stakeholders. Matters are made worse by the ineffectiveness of key government child agencies such as the National Council for Children (NCC) and MGLSD in terms of coordinating and regulating the activities of

different actors. Moreover, given the limited funding available for government child-related activities or interventions, CSOs are taking on the lion's share of implementation.

The literature indicates that there are over 100 NGOs, international, national and local, that can be classified as child rights agencies operating in different parts of the country. These agencies run different programmes on child protection, including with a specific focus on child sexual abuse. Some partner with government agencies, like the Child and Family Protection Unit of the police, to ensure abused children get the necessary support and perpetrators face the law. It was not possible to see clearly from the literature which agencies are addressing only child sexual abuse. Further studies could undertake a detailed assessment of specific projects selected child rights agencies are implementing to address this issue, and also come with practical measures on how to address the challenges of coordination and harmonisation of interventions.

The recent shift of the focus of UNICEF programming towards systems strengthening will perhaps free up resources and enhance advocacy to strengthen critical departments, components and structures within the child rights delivery mechanism, with the government and all duty bearers, including civil society and the private sector, playing a key role in making sure rights-based programming works. However, there remains much work to be done in defining entry points for effective systems strengthening for child protection and supporting the local administration of justice right from the police to the courts of law. Investments in mapping and data collection are underway, but there is currently debate about transferring and using this information for different systems strengthening goals.

Discussions with a probation and community development officer in Kamuli suggested that the relevant government offices and departments were primed to perform their roles in protecting children from rights violations, but that significant under-funding had limited their capacity to reach children in need effectively (see also Kaliballa and Elson, 2010; MGLSD, 2011). Moreover, cases that should be brought to the attention of the duty bearers many times are rarely reported, for reasons discussed earlier (because of family/community-based negotiated settlements, which may not necessarily work in the best interests of the child).

At community level, child protection committees exist that should link up with community development officers and the police Child and Family Protection Unit. However, other than where NGOs are supportive of these structures, their ability to coordinate referral systems and provide services to children is limited. In Kampala the structure is even less clear than it is in Kamuli, where Plan Uganda seems to have played a key role in keeping the committees operational and effective. Moreover, reporting of child protection violations has allegedly been complicated by police insistence on victims and family parting with money before cases are followed up or registered. Where such material incentive approaches are common within the community, with the local government structure and law enforcement agencies unable to detect, identify such violations or effectively reprimand or hold to account the perpetrators, this can seriously undermine child protection responses. The prosecution of cases of sexual abuse of children thus becomes even more difficult as family members of perpetrators are less likely to give information supporting the prosecution of an offence. A policy and legislative implication is that much needs to be done to enhance law enforcement and community attitudinal change.

In cases of 'sugar daddy' relationships where partners are below the age of consent, which is usually the case, informal arbitration measures such as out-of-court settlements are preferred in incidences where the violation is reported to the authorities. Respondents suggested informal arbitration procedures were not really about the dispensation of justice in respect of the victim, but rather to share out the lucrative 'spoils' levied for this nature of sex offence, especially if the girl is aged below 18, enrolled in school or both. The main beneficiaries include the girl's parents and law enforcement officers. The perpetrator, after paying the hefty informal fine, may be offered the victim for marriage. The girl, despite being the victim, is left to singlehandedly bear the negative consequences of her situation, including the pain, shame and stigma associated with unwanted pregnancy, single motherhood or forced marriage to an undesired older male partner.

The researchers encountered many out-of-school teenage single mothers with harrowing tales of unfulfilled relationship dreams, disillusionment, stoic endurance of poverty and pain of rejection, in both rural Kamuli and urban Kampala. In all the cases, the perpetrators were at large, free to commit similar violations again, as formal litigation had been conveniently avoided by both the victim's and the perpetrator's families.

In both Kamuli and Kampala, ‘sugar mummy’ incidences were not only reportedly few but also short-lived; this may be attributed to both the stigma this type of relationships attracts for the women perpetrators and the risk of shameful exposure in the case of criminal prosecution. It emerged, however, that criminal prosecution of child protection violations of this nature is rare, as there are often no complainants.

‘Poverty is the biggest problem. There is this poor boy who reported a case of sexual abuse by an old woman, a “sugar mummy”. He came from the village to start a business, making and selling chapati. He did not have enough money, let alone a place to stay. He met this sugar mummy who offered him her home to stay in, gave him food and promised to buy him a motorbike, all in exchange for regular sex. Despite this unexpected comfort, the boy was apprehensive. He reported the sex abuse, but immediately returned to the village. When we arrested the woman there was no complainant, and we released her without charge. A similar case but involving a girl and a ‘sugar daddy’ was also reported here, but both the girl and the man declined to cooperate with us, and we could not charge him with any offence’ (KII, Child and Family Protection Unit, Kawempe Police Station, Kampala).

6.2 Preventative and support services

In Kampala, the high population means the small number of available staff are overworked, with concomitant ramifications for quality. In terms of other government services and response, the Capital City Authority runs a clinic that provides health services, including on sexual and reproductive health, but this does not provide non-health-based support. There are therefore no real preventive measures in this area – just responsive measures. Moreover, sex education does not seem to be integrated effectively into the school curriculum.

‘I’ve never seen a project addressing early marriage. If you call an [school] assembly, and you tell them, sensitise them there, they will stop’ (Chief Administrative Officer, Kamuli).

However, information on HIV/AIDS and STDs, including on some life skills issues, is provided in schools. Most interventions come in the form of what is called the ‘talking compound’: posters and messages are placed in strategic locations for students and pupils to utilise. No information is available on the efficacy of the talking compound in providing such information to students or influencing their behaviour and perceptions on sexual matters. A key intervention by the NGO Straight Talk Foundation in schools has been a newsletter providing information on adolescent reproductive health issues, condom utilisation, abstinence and positive living among children living with HIV.

Other government interventions that could be exploited in support of youth include the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), which emphasises agricultural support for rural communities. NAADS provides youth funds, aimed at improving economic opportunities for young people in co-operatives. In practice however, most people consulted were not aware of the access points to NAADS services, and as yet the modality is not very clear: the fund has not yet reached youth organisations put in place to provide the grant. Young people have formed groups and pooled resources to leverage credit, but have been let down by NAADS logistical and implementation inadequacies. Hence, a significant percentage of youth remain majorly under-employed at the community level. Many focus group discussions that included youth members of co-operatives who had been able to access NAADS services revealed that the ultimate benefits in terms of asset accumulation were considered to have negligible impact on livelihood opportunity.

In non-governmental terms, a number of organisations have been providing services and support in both Kampala and Kamuli. In Kampala, the number of community-based organisations and international agencies seems to far outweigh those in rural Kamuli. Within Kamuli, though, albeit in only four sub-counties, Plan Uganda has opened up many community-based centres, mainly addressing adolescent reproductive health issues through a peer-to-peer approach. Within this setting Plan Uganda has attempted to implement integrated programming activities, although this has proved difficult to execute in practice. For example, a four-year programme on economic empowerment funded by the European Union (EU) is now in its final year, as well as a sexual and reproductive health programme funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The programmes will thus end simultaneously. Plan has managed to present findings regarding the importance of integration in relation to Sida’s new programme (2015-2018) and is working to harmonise the implementation of the two programmes – but partnership is not guaranteed. This is not the first time Plan has

attempted integration, having supported such an approach in 2004-2009 in a project to improve livelihoods, psychosocial support, food security and microfinance provision for mothers, with the aim of transforming the situation of children and young people.

Plan is also known for its sensitisation programmes and for developing broad-reaching community referral centres. It has also provided scholastic materials in the past (funding is currently too low) and vocational training. It does not provide credit, transfers or start-up capital, although it used to have a programme in Kamuli supporting sponsored children's families with health care – reimbursing major hospital costs – but this drained funding quickly and Plan is now seeking ways to help families save for such eventualities instead. Ultimately, Plan is having an impact in Kamuli in terms of awareness of child protection violations as the reporting of incidents through its community referral centres far outweighs those in areas in the district where it is not working.

Also in Kamuli, BRAC is working on increasing economic empowerment among girls aged 13-21, and also a sub-group of boys aged 16-22. The Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents programme specifically targets school dropouts with life skills, livelihood training, microfinance, savings clubs and discussion of issues such as early marriage. More recently, BRAC has started implementing sexual and reproductive health interventions. A central part of the intervention involves youth clubs to provide support for youth in and out of school (over 600 girls in Kamuli) and a way to recruit them into BRAC's microfinance scheme. BRAC creates opportunities and spaces for girls to do things that are interesting for them. However, Plan and BRAC (and others) share little, despite a recognised need among all actors for coordination and collaboration. In addition, besides the participation of a number of local NGOs and CSOs in 'quarterly stakeholder meetings', there is as yet no formal referral system; vulnerable youth are referred to BRAC and/or family protection units

In Kamuli, Plan and BRAC have a strong presence in the communities they operate in. Almost all members of FGDs knew of them. Plan's activities are better known and appreciated (largely because BRAC has a smaller portfolio, reaching 654 members). The two agencies work through government structures and theoretically government will take over provision of services in the event of phasing-out. However, given the weakness of such structures and a lack of resources, the likelihood of this is unclear.

Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU) in Kampala focuses on the wider community but has a specific programme for young people. It has a clinic for counselling and testing and operates a community centre as a space to give young people an alternative to risky behaviour, while providing reproductive health services targeting youth. The drop-in centre in the middle of Kawempe provides basic services in addition to outreach activities to the community. RHU also works in community education (on HIV/AIDS, sexuality and STDs, among other issues), because many girls within the project catchment area are involved in transactional sex (estimated at over six out of every ten girls in the vicinity). RHU used to operate a programme to enhance young people's economic opportunities (tailoring, hairdressing, beads, paper art); this is currently not being run because of a shortage of funding, although the organisation remains committed to raising resources to continue the intervention.

Other actors supporting girls at risk of cross-generational relationships include Straight Talk Foundation, Tositukirewamu organisation, ANPPCAN and Makerere Women's Development Association. The latter runs several income-generating activities, training girls in hairdressing, tailoring, making crafts (which they market to the UK) and mushroom growing, and provides HIV sensitisation and outreach through peer educators for in- and out-of-school girls, as well as operating a shelter for victims of domestic violence. Information is provided to the project target group on both life skills and development issues.

Also in Kampala, UYDEL has been very active in Kawempe, and BRAC provides access to credit for community groups engaged in entrepreneurial activities. BRAC interventions aim to address poverty and vulnerability to increase the range of choices available to the community and young people. BRAC focuses on the individual level, providing a space for girls (usually post-natal, vulnerable and isolated) to come and share experiences, learn a vocation and access credit on a cumulative basis. Activities are small in scale, but it seems the focus on asset provision and sensitisation/rehabilitation has had an impact on individual girls' lives. However, impacts on the household level are limited, and BRAC lacks the ability to engage at the community level, where Plan Uganda is very well placed. Many of the programmes focused on sexual and reproductive health are not making linkages to child protection and poverty programming – sensitisation and orientation to

come before they fall into this situation (particularly in the case of RHU). Plan's programming can be considered child protection-based, with interventions at the household and community level to improve the situation of children and to ensure their rights. There are concerns, however, that more isolated and vulnerable individuals will be left out of targeting initiatives given that vocational and complementary skills programmes tend to focus on providing access to adolescent girls in educational settings.

Plan is also building community capacity by supporting young people to form groups registered as local community-based organisations, which should support programme continuity if Plan leaves. Plan Uganda staff also described efforts to scale up activities to cover all thirteen sub-counties in the district. Sustainability as an issue of focus is also built into the project strategy. However, overall it appears that sustainability of programming and development of an effective exit strategy are still issues, constrained by inadequate local ownership and resource mobilisation limitations on the part of local government.

It would be useful to put in place a peer approach in schools to address cross-generational relationship issues, although school-based support structures have not been formed, given an absence of NGOs to support their establishment and operationalisation. Many schools in both Kampala and Kamuli thus remain without a functional child rights clubs and the protection these could afford children. In general, preventative interventions are almost non-existent.

In terms of informal responses, the study did not reveal any organised or structured responses by the community to issues of intergenerational relationships – either in Kamuli or Kampala. However, every household seems to have an accepted code of behaviour in the event that adolescents become involved in such relationships. While this is supposedly done at the influence of socio-cultural institutions, different families interpret these codes of behaviour differently. Moreover, as indicated earlier, the influence of culture on decision making to enhance the protection of children seems to be dependent partly on environmental factors. For example, behavioural codes are stronger in Kamuli than in Kampala, where there is greater cultural diversity and no real homogenous community structure. Some peer educators in the community, trained by NGOs, reach out to young people and provide them with information and support. They have limited reach but are regarded well by those who benefit from them.

6.3 Response at the household level

The response at family level is sporadic, uncoordinated and influenced by a number of factors, including availability of resources and of family support, among other things. Many families try to ensure their children (including girls) remain in school and continue to secondary education, although this may not be possible, given lack of capacity to do so in some cases. For example, 'wealthier' women in an FGD said they made sacrifices to ensure their children stayed at school. In other cases, according to interviewees, families support the option of vocational training.

Some mothers said they advised their daughters against engaging in risky behaviour. A few parents said they had helped daughters after they got pregnant by taking care of the babies to enable the girls to continue in school.

On the other hand, it also emerged that, in many cases, families of victims (particularly in Kamuli) negotiate with perpetrators, often keeping quiet about 'defilement' or abuse in exchange for money. This minimises the responsibility of the perpetrator and provides an incentive for the conduct to be replicated in the community. In other cases, the family keeps quiet about the issue for fear of stigmatisation and soiling of the family reputation in the community. In Kamuli especially, it was reported that, if a teacher abused a girl at school, the family would not report it. Teachers are regarded as powerful and respectable people in the community and thus as not being subject to the law.

Some young girls and boys, particularly in Kampala, were more proactive and therefore more inclined to seek support and information from development agencies, including NGOs. This helps them become more empowered to avoid difficult situations. An example here relates to the many young people who drop into the RHU centre in Bwaise in Kampala, which is open every day, to enquire about certain issues. Plan International has established information centres in Kamuli, staffed by local volunteers; the seemingly better utilisation of

information by urban youth could be related to the proximity of the centre, the proliferation of sources of information and perhaps increased interest.

7 Conclusions and policy recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

This study provides evidence on the high incidence of cross-generational sexual relationships in the research sites visited in Uganda, but also of its severity as a child protection deficit in both rural and urban contexts. Acute income poverty and its stultifying effects, subjecting both boys and girls to a myriad of vulnerabilities, are identified as a key push factor of children into cross-generational sexual relationships. Sociocultural and other challenges, such as peer pressure, discriminatory social norms, lack of and poor-quality services and dysfunctional families also emerge as significant drivers.

The setting influences the nature of the cross-generational sexual relationships adolescents engage in. In rural contexts, impoverished and vulnerable adolescent girls are ‘pulled’ into sexual relationships with older male partners in the hope of stable marriage, protection and/or a better economic future. Girls are also ‘pushed’ into cross-generational relationships as a result of inability to meet basic needs, violence and maltreatment in the household, lack of awareness of alternatives and lack of recourse to essential services. In addition, environmental conditions in rural areas – such as the need to travel long distances in isolated environments – heighten dangers for girls of being targeted by men, and in some cases even compel girls to seek assistance from older men, generally in exchange for sexual favours.

In high-density urban settlements, by contrast, the relationships adolescents engage in have largely taken the form of transactional sex, driven by desperation to earn quick cash for daily survival, but also increasingly as a ‘lifestyle choice’ fostered by peer pressure to gain easy access to ‘luxury’ material items and services that would not otherwise be affordable through other income generation options available to adolescents in these contexts. One distinction that is apparent is the different perceptions held by men and women, both young and old: men and boys have a tendency to perceive that girls seek ‘luxuries’ in cross-generational relationships, whereas girls and women often declare a stronger interest in meeting basic needs.

The consequences adolescents experience as a result of engaging in cross-generational relationships are common across rural and urban contexts. Some of the adverse effects include sexual abuse and exploitation, physical abuse, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, single motherhood, exposure to HIV/AIDS and other STDs and psycho-emotional trauma. These consequences usually overlap, resulting in adolescents being unable to access their rights.

Social sanctions around pregnancy outside marriage mean many girls find themselves estranged by their older partners and their families/households simultaneously, at the specific point in their lives when they are most vulnerable. One particular manifestation of this is the presence – or threat – of violent behaviour on the part of the family and/or the partner. There are also broader and indirect effects, such as compromised individual agency and the relegation of some children to a state of hopelessness. All these factors together eventually lead to premature school dropout (and limited opportunities for reintegration), family rejection and social exclusion. These in turn have inter-generational implications for any newborn children, who are more vulnerable to exposure in risky environments.

Respondents’ attitudes towards the consequences are often focused strongly on health dimensions, including the likelihood of complications during sex or of catching HIV/AIDS or another STD. It is very rare for longer-term

implications, such as human capital-related factors or psychosocial wellbeing, to be considered. It appears that respondents have been more exposed to sensitisation about sexual and reproductive health and therefore can more easily relate to this topic. By contrast, few programmatic initiatives deal with the potential medium- to long-term consequences for girls of such relationships.

In terms of prevalence, a common theme observed in both research sites was the likelihood that focus group discussions with adolescents and youth would reveal higher numbers of inter-generational and transactional sexual relationships than those reported by community leaders, NGO and government personnel. On average, groups of boys and girls would frequently cite occurrences of between 40-60% of relationships being intergenerational or transactional, whereas NGO personnel would consider lower numbers (20-40%), with government actors being the most conservative of all (10-20%).

While poverty is a driver of girls or boys taking part in cross-generational sex, and the negative consequences are well known in both rural and urban contexts, socially sanctioned attitudes and behaviours linked to cross-generational sex, especially that involving men and teenage girls, are not well understood among policymakers and practitioners. For instance, in both contexts there appears to be an element of girl-to-girl 'peer pressure' in seeking cross-generational relationships. In rural contexts in particular, intergenerational sex is seen as the norm, and is often socially accommodated (in observed behaviour although not in terms of attitudes). The gist of the argument is that sex and marital relationships usually involve older male and younger female partners, and the negative effects are not that obvious. Indeed, many of the vulnerable out-of-school adolescent mothers interviewed had actually been impregnated and abandoned by their male school peers and age mates; in the urban setting the transactional sex relationships girls engaged in were not determined by the age of the male client but strictly by his ability to pay. Interestingly, although cross-generational sex is seen as socially acceptable, in some cases, particularly when girls do it without parental consent or practise it as a lifestyle choice, the attitude in the community can shift from one of acceptance to one of criticism and stigmatisation.

In terms of interventions, the major NGO actors in Kamuli are Plan International and BRAC. Meanwhile, the police are overburdened with cases of defilement, and there is limited systematic coordination between organisations and mechanisms – such as a formal referral system. The varied approaches and target groups of NGOs in Kamuli (e.g. Plan's district-level focus on child protection committees and BRAC's individual empowerment approach) mean there remains significant scope for a more regulated system of communication between actors and integrated programming measures that would improve prevention of, and responses to, child protection violations.

In Kampala, despite a greater density of actors, the demand for action on specific and broader drivers and ramifications of cross-generational relationships far exceeds capacity to respond. In addition, relatively costly asset-based preventative responses are outnumbered by public health initiatives, mostly notably by the RHU and the Capital City Authority (although the RHU used to conduct an economic-strengthening initiative until it proved too costly to maintain). BRAC is also operational in Kampala, but experiencing the same constraints as it does in Kamuli: insufficient resources for scale-up, given the individualised and intensive focus of the organisation on skills development and access to credit support. There appear to be even fewer coordination activities than in Kamuli to link community child protection structures and formal NGOs.

Ambiguity in the definition of cross-generational sex has negatively affected the framing, structuring and implementation of child protection policies and interventions in both rural and urban contexts. The legal and punitive interventions meant to mitigate child sex violations, for instance, have been turned into lucrative avenues that benefit not the girl victim but her family, the perpetrators and law enforcement officials such as the police and local village counsellors. The end result has been the perpetuation of child protection and other violations with impunity.

Ultimately, the interplay of socio-cultural and economic poverty drivers of inter-generational and transactional sexual activities in both rural and urban Uganda are considered to be mutually reinforcing and significant. Important distinctions can be made between urban and rural contexts, such as the likelihood of a stronger role of aspirational status amongst girls in urban environments, but such generalisations are to be met with caution given arguments on relative poverty, and the presence of mixed cohorts (e.g. highly economically vulnerable and/or rural migrant girls) in urban settings. Other critical findings include the different in perceptions around

the drivers of inter-generational and transactional sexual activities amongst different intervening stakeholders, as well as within communities themselves.

In a bid to address this situation, the following policy interventions are recommended.

7.2 Policy recommendations

- **Child protection policies and interventions should integrate well-defined poverty reduction and sociocultural components aiming to explicitly address the stultifying effects of income poverty and the regressive effects of discriminatory sociocultural institutions that increase children’s risk of suffering protection violations.** Since family income poverty and sociocultural factors have emerged as key underlying issues creating or exacerbating several forms of child protection violations, including sexual abuse and physical violence, early marriage, unwanted pregnancy and other forms of exploitation, it is important to prioritise poverty reduction policy and programming as a way to reduce the abuse of children and adolescents. These interventions should ideally be both short and long term in nature, and preventative and responsive, while taking heed of the positive formal and informal coping mechanisms and limiting the negative coping mechanisms already used by girls.
- A limited amount of best practice intervention lessons are available for documentation and circulation – given the marginal focus on integrated programming from government and donors. Demand for such pilot programming ventures within NGOs, donors and public services should therefore also be fostered. The long-term value-added in promoting effective integrated programming is an area within which to convince policymakers and donors to adjust strategies and funding support. Parallel public resources, focusing on broader youth employment and vocational training initiatives, could be tapped to ensure the most vulnerable are receiving both material and social awareness support on the core risks concerning cross-generational sex.
- **There is a need to strengthen delivery of and access to social services that are deemed to have the most protective functions for children** – particularly primary and secondary education, primary health care, information about sexual and reproductive, community sensitisation around sexual abuse and related risks/social norms and judicial facilities. Investments in these areas, particularly in the prevention of protection violations, will ultimately be cost-effective – particularly if instituted using a ‘systems strengthening’ approach. However, the use of such approaches and language should be used with care as there is some resistance to relatively complex initiatives at both local and national levels in government, NGOs and development partners alike. In practice, a more strategic approach that balances the advantages of existing interventions and capacity for scale-up will be required.
- Since child protection institutions at all levels have emerged as ineffective avenues of redressing child protection violations, including those linked to sexual abuse, **new, locally focused training initiatives based on lessons from integrated programming best practice must be promoted.** These initiatives must involve elements that address local caseload corruption (fee exploitation) and the basic organisational needs of child protection stakeholders at family, community and institutional levels. They should also be constructed to differentiate and respond to the contextual ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factors that cause girls to enter into exploitative cross-generational relationships and that cause a variety of ‘downwardly spiralling’ impacts.
- **Child protection policies and programmes should integrate a specific component to address the issue of early sexual relationships, including information about possible exploitative relationships and their risks, using both international and national policy and programme initiatives and the areas of ‘early marriage’ and HIV/AIDS proliferation as an entry points.** Such initiatives should emphasise that men and boys, as much as girls and women, should be included in targeting – recognising their different perspectives on inter-generational and transactional relationships in doing so. Key to this will be communication to practitioners and

policymakers of the material (i.e. poverty) drivers and consequences of cross-generational relationships, as much as the risky social behaviours formally or tacitly promoted at community level. A core entry point is the critical importance of cross-generational activities in expanding HIV/AIDS prevalence – particularly for younger cohorts. The broader and stronger constituency of HIV/AIDS policymakers and practitioners would be able to amplify this message. This is a strong entry point for raising the profile of cross-generational sex, particularly given that HIV/AIDS prevalence is increasing in Uganda.

- Ambiguity surrounding the definition and conceptualisation of cross-generational sex in both rural and urban contexts has emerged as an issue of immediate concern. In a bid to address this, **formulation of policies and design of programmes should integrate an education and mass sensitisation component targeting both rural and urban communities, and all relevant child protection stakeholders, focusing on the provision of information on the specific risks linked to this situation, and when it is deemed as abusive.**
- **As the framing, structuring and implementation of current child protection policies, programmes and interventions are rarely informed by evidence-based research, and their effectiveness in preventing child protection violations remains questionable, there is a need to conduct nationally representative research aimed at filling this gap.** In particular, such research may seek best practice on integrated programming design and delivery that incorporates sociocultural change and income (livelihood) components – whether they be at the individual, familial, community or national level. The findings of such research will provide a sound, informed basis for the design of alternative policies and the implementation of programme actions to eliminate all forms of child protection violations in Uganda and elsewhere.

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Appendix: Respondents in Kamuli and Kampala

National KIIs	
Hellen Namulwana	Save the Children
Mr Adupa	Manager of Child Protection, Plan Uganda
Caroline Aloyo Abonyo	Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF
Kenneth Buyinza	Country Health Manager, Plan Uganda
Fred Tabu Muhammad	BRAC Uganda
Kamuli	
KIIs	
Kanku Francis	Manager, Plan Uganda Kamuli
Anthony Olweny	Plan Uganda Kamuli
Nelson Kasada	Child Protection Officer, Plan Uganda Kamuli
Joshua Mbaizi	Probation Officer
Basalirwa John	Vice-chairman LC5
Naomi Abunyo	Eastern Region Coordinator, BRAC
Nassali Josephine	Principal Nursing Officer
Moses Masalwa	Community Liaison Officer, Kamuli Police Station
Aaron Galubaale,	Head-teacher, Bugabula Secondary School
Margaret	Teacher plan mentor Kamuli
Wilfred Kunhuba	Chairman LC3
-----	Christian religious leader
Community mapping	
Youth group discussion	
Adult group discussion	
FGDs – male	
Male low income	
Male high income	
FGDs – female	
Female low income	
Female high income	
Small discussion groups	
Female in school/high income	
Male in school/high income	
Female out of school/low income	
Male out of school/low income	
BRAC mentors	
Kampala, Kawempe	
KIIs	
OC Station Kawempe Police In Charge Child and Family Protection Unit Kawempe	Child and Family Protection Unit, Kawempe Police Station
Iryn	Probation Officer
Miriam Mugambi	In-charge, Bwaise Branch, RH Uganda
Kagulu Elias Amigo	Head-teacherschool
Fred Semakula	RH Mobiliser, Bwaise Branch, RH Uganda
Irene Nakajumba	Counsellor, Bwaise Branch, RH Uganda
Innocent Kayita	Male Counsellors, Bwaise Branch, RH Uganda
Geoffrey Damba	
Haji Med Mugulusi	Muslim religious leader
Irene Nakanjako	Executive Director, Makerere Women's Development Association
Sarah Kanyike	Tusitukirewamu Women's Group, Bwaise
Hellen Namulwana	Save the Children
Caroline Aloyo Obonyo	Child Protection Specialist, UNICEF
Dr O. Jackson	Nutrition Specialist, UNICEF
Community mapping	

Youth group discussion	Bwaise II parish
Adult group discussion	Bwaise II parish
FGDs – male	
FGD male	Bwaise II parish
FGD male	Bwaise III parish
FGDs – female	
FGD female	Bwaise II parish
FGD female	Bwaise III Parish
FGD peer educators (seven females)	RH Uganda Bwaise II Parish
Small group discussions	
Females in school	Bwaise II parish
Males in school	Bwaise II parish
Females out of school	Bwaise III parish
Males out of school	Bwaise III parish



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