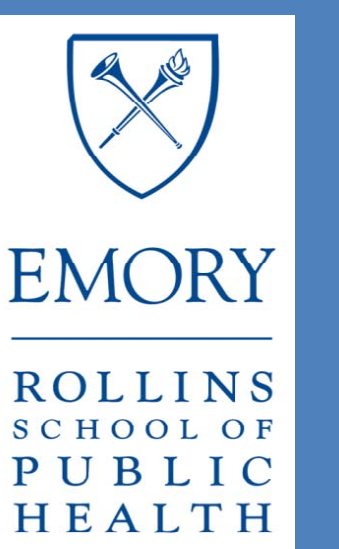


Religion and the Sexual Health of Young People in Potchefstroom and Eldorado Park, South Africa

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Background

- ❖ Adult HIV prevalence of 18% in South Africa in 2007¹
- ❖ Worldwide, HIV incidence among young people aged 15-24 accounts for half of new HIV infections¹
- ❖ About 85% of South Africans claim religious involvement²
- ❖ Researchers assert that religion is protective against risk behavior for HIV³
- ❖ Mechanism by which religion impacts sexual behavior is unknown



ARHAP seeks to align and enhance the work of religious health leaders, public policy decision-makers and other health workers in their collaborative efforts to meet the challenge of disease such as HIV/AIDS, and to promote sustainable health, especially for those who live in poverty or under marginal conditions.⁴

Objective

The project seeks to understand how young people and religious leaders communicate about sexual health in Potchefstroom (Potch) and Eldorado Park (Eldo's), South Africa.

Methods

Four participatory inquiry workshops

- ❖ 19 young people and 16 community leaders in Potch, which is 120 km southwest of Johannesburg
- ❖ 17 young people and 17 community leaders in Eldo's, which is 15 km southwest of Johannesburg
- ❖ Six structured brainstorming activities
- ❖ Small group discussions
- ❖ Topics: sources of information about sex, religious messages, sexual acts, characteristics of a healthy sexual life, and strategies to help young people achieve healthy sexual lives

Results

Top Sources of Information about Sex for Young People

- ❖ Friends
- ❖ Television
- ❖ Clinics

Religious Messages about Sex

- ❖ Sex before marriage is a sin
- ❖ Abstain
- ❖ Be faithful
- ❖ Sex is beautiful
- ❖ Characteristics of God
 - Love
 - Guidance
 - Forgiveness

Young People Are Confused

- ❖ What is sex?
- ❖ Why is marriage relevant?
- ❖ What do religious texts actually say?

Young People Feel Judged

- ❖ Clinic staff
- ❖ Religious leaders

Sexual Continuum

Potch Young People

- LEAST SEXUAL
- Romantic music
 - Dress
 - Cleavage
 - Lingerie
 - Look
 - Hold hands
 - Romantic language
 - Flirt
 - Squeeze
 - Touch
 - Emotional feelings
 - Think
 - Kiss
 - Kiss on the neck
 - Undress while kissing
 - Self-masturbation
 - Phone sex
 - Mutual masturbation
 - Oral sex
 - Anal sex
 - Group sex
 - Intercourse
- MOST SEXUAL

Eldo's Leaders

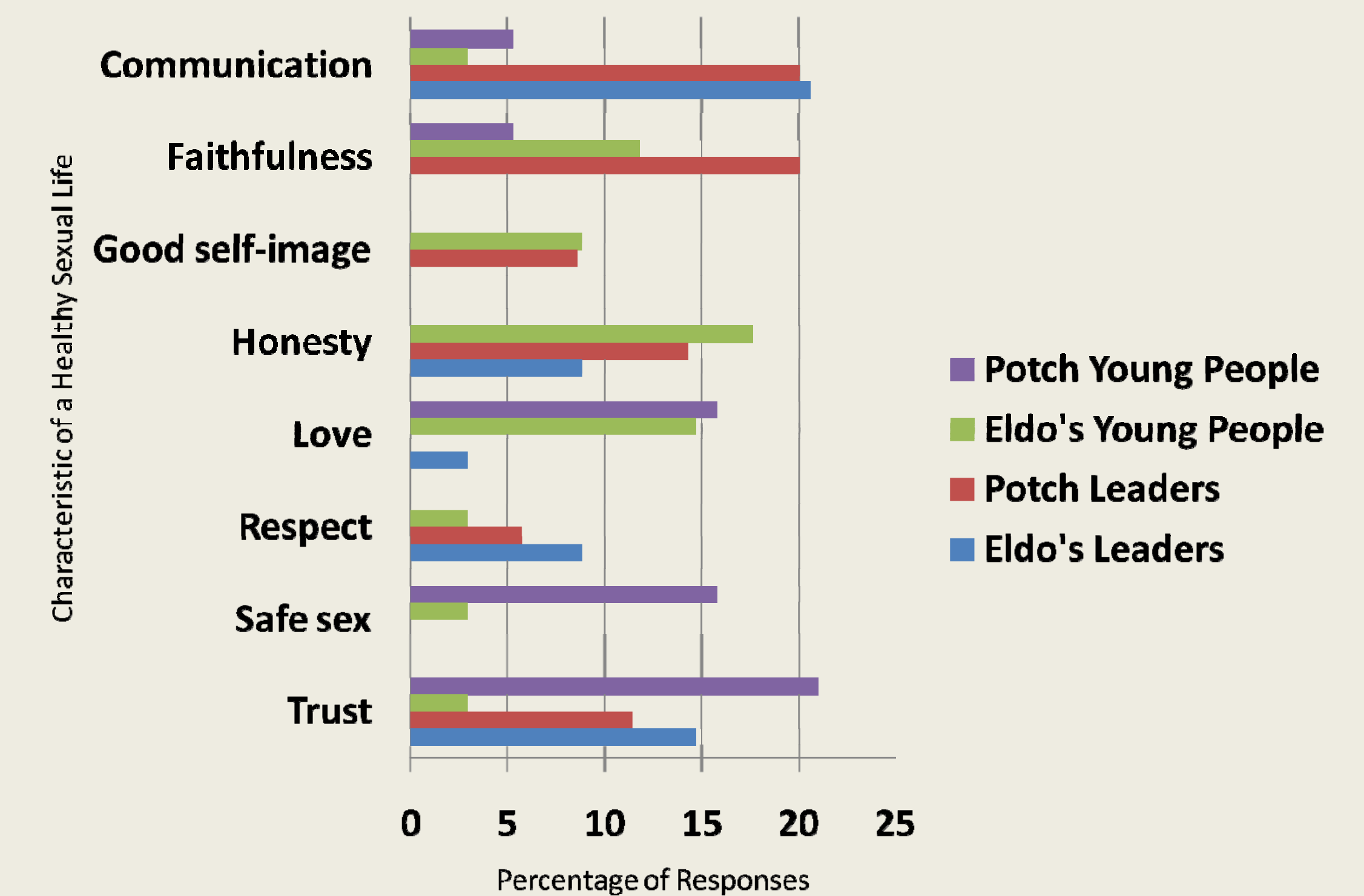
- LEAST SEXUAL
- Conversation
 - Cuddle
 - Kiss
 - Sexual seduction
 - Erotic porn
 - Phone sex
 - Chat rooms
 - Voyeurism
 - Strip shows
 - Touch sexually
 - French kiss
 - Foreplay
 - Touch each other's genitals
 - Masturbation
 - Thigh sex
 - Oral sex
 - Intercourse
 - Threesome
 - Anal sex
 - Orgy
- MOST SEXUAL

Table 1: Young People's Responses to Propositions about Sex

Propositions	% Agree		% Disagree		% Uncertain	
	Potch	Eldo's	Potch	Eldo's	Potch	Eldo's
Sex before marriage is breaking the rules.	58.0	88.2	26	11.8	16	0
Teenagers who belong to your religious group are sexually active.	85.0	100.0	5	0	10	0
A person who never gets married must never have sex.	20	5.9	40	76.5	40	17.6
Religion has unrealistic expectations about sex for teenagers in 2008.	35	5.9	25	29.4	40	64.7
If you are in a loving, committed relationship it is OK to have sex.	65	29.4	35	58.8	0	11.8

Results (continued)

Figure 1: Top Characteristics of a Healthy Sexual Life for Young People and Leaders in Potch and Eldo's



Leaders and young people suggest similar strategies of communication and education to improve the sexual health of young people. Interestingly, leaders reason that young people must be more open and receive additional education about sex while young people think the same of their religious leaders.

Discussion

The relationship between religious leaders and young people must change in order for them to be able to communicate openly about sex. Recommendations focus on an increase in collaboration between NGO leaders and religious leaders to increase the effectiveness of HIV prevention strategies. Future research, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where HIV prevalence is high, should aim to do the following:

- ❖ Identify contexts in which young people feel comfortable asking questions about sex
- ❖ Understand the influence of religion on the sexual behaviors of young people

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Acknowledgements

Paul Germond, Tessa Dooms, & ARHAP Team
 Religion and Public Health Collaborative
 Global Frameworks Fund (NIH)
 Karen Andes
 Deborah McFarland and Mimi Kiser

