

Depression linked to HIV risk among South African young people, study shows

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University of Alberta research has discovered a strong link between depression and risky sexual behaviours such as improper condom use, transactional sex and relationship violence among young people in South Africa.

The research shows that depression is common among young South Africans, and could be making a significant contribution towards the [HIV](#) epidemic.

As well, the researchers believe that depression could be contributing to risky sexual behaviours around the world, and that preventing or treating it may reduce the global burden of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

Ian Colman and Mzikazi Nduna, researchers from the U of A's School of Public Health, studied 1,002 females and 976 males between the ages of 15 and 26 living in Eastern Cape Province, South Africa. Study participants were surveyed twice, once in 2002, and again 12 months later.

The research found that 21.1 per cent of women and 13.6 per cent of men reported symptoms of depression. [Depressed women](#) were more likely to be in controlling relationships, to have a partner who was several years older, and to have experienced [sexual violence](#). Men with depressed symptoms were more likely to have had three or more lifetime partners, experienced transactional sex and committed rape.

All of these behaviours are considered to put young women and men at risk for sexually transmitted HIV.

The research appears in the newest issue of the Journal of the International Aids Society.

Based on their findings, Colman and Nduna recommend routine screening for prevention, diagnosis and management of depression among youth as a means to reducing risky sexual behaviours and, in turn, HIV risk in South Africa.

"Access to mental-health services for young people remains elusive as resources are directed to more pressing conditions such as teenage pregnancy and [HIV prevention](#)," Nduna said. The researchers see potential for blending depression prevention into current sexual and reproductive health clinic services.

"Clearly we could achieve better success in our prevention efforts if they are delivered to clients who are in a healthy state of psychological well-being," added Colman, an assistant professor of epidemiology.

Provided by University of Alberta

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