

# TOUGH CHOICES IN TOUGH TIMES: A STORY ABOUT TRANSACTIONAL SEX

Sexual health  
Transactional sex  
Intergenerational relationships  
Concurrent partners  
Protected sex  
Risk / at risk  
HIV  
Intimate partner violence  
Sex  
Aggressive  
Gender based violence  
Domestic violence  
Violence  
Women  
Power  
Control

- ✓ 1. To understand **transactional sex** as the product of social and economic inequality.
- ✓ 2. To create awareness and empathy about the gendered nature of social and economic inequality.
- ✓ 3. To understand the risks associated with inter-generational and transactional sex.

🕒 1 Hour

★ Worksheet: 'Tough Choices in Tough Times' (provided)

## PROCEDURE

- 1 Begin the lesson by explaining the following concepts linked to transactional sex from the **Glossary**:

**TRANSACTIONAL SEX:** Engaging in **sex** (any sexual activities) for financial or other material rewards. Many young girls engage in transactional sex because they lack resources, and the money or material goods they receive in exchange for transactional sex may assist them in meeting their daily needs, or in getting things that they want. Transactional sex is extremely risky, and can make girls and **women** vulnerable to **abuse**, **violence**, and put them **at risk** of pregnancy, **STIs** and **HIV/AIDS**. Also see **sugar daddy**.

**INTER-GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS:** Relationships between people of different age groups or generations. These relationships are not necessarily sexual (although they can be). Inter-generational relationships tend to have a **power imbalance** where the older person holds more power than the younger person, such as in the relationship between a parent and a child.

**CONCURRENT PARTNER:** When a man or a **woman** has more than one sexual partner at the same time. In these overlapping sexual partnerships, sex with one partner occurs between two episodes of sex with another partner.

**RISK:** A factor, situation or course of action involving exposure to danger or hazard. **Unprotected sex**, for example, puts people at risk of contracting **HIV/AIDS** or becoming pregnant.

- 2 Hand out the worksheet. Ask learners to read the story carefully and then complete the questions. This should take 30 minutes.

- 3 Once learners have completed the questions ask them to share their answers. Facilitate a discussion about each question. Issues that you should cover under each question should include:

**a.** Why do you think someone would choose to engage in such a relationship? (What are the benefits?)

### Elicit answers like:

- Financial need, family responsibility.
- Emotional needs. Tuto does not have her parents around, and does not have a good relationship with her grandmother. She enjoys the attention and affection of an older person who is interested in her thoughts and feelings.
- Wanting to fit in or look like everyone else. Being different or being seen as disadvantaged can be very hard for young people who want the approval of their peers.

**b.** Can you identify some of the risks that Tuto faces?

### Some answers may include:

- **HIV/AIDS**, because they do not always use a condom, and especially given that Jake has **concurrent relationships** (is married), and is much older than her. Tell them that older men have a much higher prevalence of **HIV** than teenage boys for instance.
- Pregnancy.
- **Intimate partner violence**. Due to the uneven power dynamics caused by their disparate age, Tuto may be more susceptible to being controlled or abused by Jake than if she were dating a boy her own age.



c. What could Tuto do to decrease the risks she is exposed to?

**Some answers may include:**

- Go to a clinic and ask about her contraceptive options to avoid pregnancy.
- Get free condoms from the clinic and always have them with her when she sees Jake.
- Be clear with Jake that she will not have sex unless they use a condom. She should have this discussion with him at a time when they can talk openly and when they are not kissing or touching, or doing anything sexual. She should talk calmly, and politely, but make clear that it is not negotiable for her.
- Tell Jake that she does not like it when he shouts at her, or talks very close to her face.
- She should make it clear to him that being **aggressive** is not acceptable to her.
- Seek help (counselling) from an organisation that deals with **gender-based violence** or **domestic violence**, or **at-risk** youth. Ask the class to think of what these organisations may be and suggest some yourself.

d. What might help Tuto end the relationship if she wanted to?

**Answers may include:**

- She could speak to a school counsellor, social worker, teacher, or other responsible adult who can support her emotionally and who can help her make a decision.
- Seek help (counselling) from an organisation that deals with **gender-based violence** or **domestic violence**, or **at-risk** youth. Ask the class to think of what these organisations may be and suggest some yourself.
- She can help her grandmother apply for child support grants so that the family receives more money.



## TEACHER TIPS

### General

This exercise requires learners to think seriously about social and economic inequality. Many of the issues raised are of the kind that learners may find upsetting, may have strong views about, or may have personally experienced.

It is important that you prepare learners to expect differing and somewhat contentious opinions related to sensitive topics. Emphasise the importance of considering how inequality affects different people, and that in order for this to be a meaningful exercise, everyone should respect each other's opinions and should not make moral judgements. Ask learners to respect each point of view in the discussions, and that there should be no interruptions, no judgements or name-calling, and no teasing or making fun of others.

It is important for you to be aware that the controversial and difficult nature of some of the identities discussed, may be very personal for some learners, especially girls. Learners should be allowed to opt-out of the exercise, or not share their feelings with the class if they so choose. Other learners may disclose that they have had experiences with poverty, **transactional relationships**, **inter-generational relationships**, **domestic violence**, or **HIV**. In such cases discreetly ask them to meet with you one-on-one later so that you can suggest counselling resources.

Some learners may make negative comments about other learners in the class. Remind them that judgement is not acceptable, and facilitate their understanding that people usually try to make the best decisions that they can, given their personal circumstances.

**Transactional sex** is a controversial topic and many teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a teacher it is necessary that you create an environment of respect and understanding for all your learners, and that your personal views or religious beliefs do not prevent you from doing this. Remember that discussions about transactional sex are not about moral judgement or religious views, but about creating empathy and critical thinking in your learners, treating people equally and fairly, and respecting other people's right to engage in mutually consensual relationships of their choice.

Remember, it may be unknown that a learner in your class may have engaged in transactional sexual activity, perhaps even with peers or with others in the school environment. Disclosure can stigmatise girls and create further vulnerability and isolation. For this reason be very sure to use inclusive and affirming language. For example, say 'we,' 'all people,' and 'some people,' and do not use 'they' or 'people like them.'

### Making the Link with Gender & Violence

This exercise shows how a person's vulnerability to violence is complex, and is affected by the different aspects of their identity. For example, Tuto's age in relation to her partner together with her socio-economic circumstances, expose her to greater risk of **violence**.

**Transactional sex** is intrinsically linked to **gender-based violence**. Older men use **power** to control younger **women**, and they have higher rates of HIV infection than younger men or adolescent boys.

### Assessment Ideas

Because the exercise is in written form, it can be turned in for assessment.

# TOUGH CHOICES IN TOUGH TIMES

Read the following story and answer the questions below.

**Tuto is a 16 year old girl.** She lives in a small wood and iron house with her Gogo (granny), her younger brother and sister. Tuto's father left them six years ago, right after her little sister was born. He used to send them money from time to time, but they have not heard from him in over a year now. Her mother recently died from an AIDS related illness. Gogo is very old, and seems angry that she has to look after children at her age. Tuto misses her mother and feels very lonely. She wishes she could talk to Gogo but Gogo does not like to talk about feelings.

Gogo gets an old-age pension, but this is not enough to take care of Tuto and her siblings. Tuto has tried to find a job, but no one wants to employ her while she is still in school. Although Gogo manages to give them a hot meal every night, she did not have money for school uniforms and shoes this year. Tuto's school shoes are too small and hurt her feet, her big toe is pushing through the front of her shoes and making a hole. Tuto is very embarrassed by this, and wishes she and her siblings had nice new clothes, like the other children at school. The other children at school do not talk to her, and she hears them making fun of her behind her back. She wishes she could be an adult and earn money. She wants to help Gogo take care of the family.

One day, when Tuto is walking home from school with her little brother and sister a big fancy car pulls up on the road alongside her. A man rolls down the driver's window and asks if they want a lift. Tuto knows that she shouldn't get into the car with a strange man, but it is so hot, they still have such a long way to go, and she always ends up carrying her little brother, and the man has such a nice friendly smile. She says yes. The man's name is Jake and his car smells like cologne and new leather. Tuto finds her favourite station on the radio while the man asks many questions about her and her family. Tuto notices that he is taking the long way to her house but she is having such a good time talking to Jake that she doesn't mind. Her little brother and sister are asleep in the backseat by the time they get to their house.

The next day Jake is waiting for them, and again drives them home. This continues for a few weeks, and the drives get longer and longer. He often brings them treats like chips and chocolates. When it is very hot he brings them ice-cream. Sometimes the treats are just for Tuto: a beaded wrist band, flowery smelling hand cream, a small tub of lip gloss, or even R50. Driving home with Jake is Tuto's favourite part of the day. She feels like a rich grown-up woman sitting in the front seat of the car. Jake always asks her about her day at school, and is so nice to her and little brother and sister. It is such a nice change from going straight home to Gogo who is always cross, and tired, and has so many chores for her to do. Little brother told Gogo about Jake and Gogo was angry. One day Jake asked Tuto her shoe size and the next day he brought her new school shoes. Gogo stopped scolding Tuto about the drives after this, but she still looks angry when they come home late from school.

After school one day, Jake drives straight to their house. Tuto is worried that she has done something wrong, but when Jake stops, he says goodbye to little brother and sister, and asks Tuto to stay. Tuto is worried about what Gogo will say if they go inside without her, but she is excited to be alone with Jake. She feels special and important as they pull away from the little wood and iron house, and Jake takes her hand in his. They stop outside the church. The church is closed during the week, and no one is around. Jake gives her a crisp new R200 note, and tells her that he wants Tuto to know how much he values her. Tuto is so happy, she has never had so much money before and she starts to say thank you when Jake kisses her. He is a good kisser and she can tell that he has had lots of practice. After this they go to the church every day after school to kiss and to touch each other. Soon Jake wants to have sex. Tuto is not sure, Jake is nice and has a handsome smile but he is old, and he has beer belly and hairs in his ears. More importantly, Tuto has always wanted to wait until she was in love. Tuto tries to refuse but Jake gets angry. He says that after all he has given her, she should want to do this for him. Tuto feels guilty, she likes all the things that Jake gives her, and he has never asked for anything from her before. She does not want him to stop giving her things; the money has been so helpful to the whole family. She also feels afraid, Jake is very scary when he is angry, and he talks very loudly and very close to her face. Eventually she agrees and they have sex even though Jake does not have a condom. After this Jake stops coming to see her every day, but when he does come he wants to have sex. He often forgets to bring condoms, but this does not stop him.

Gogo does not like Tuto driving around alone with a grown man. She asks many questions about Jake: 'Where is he from?', 'Why does he pick up school girls from the side of the road?', 'Does he have a wife?' Tuto does not answer these questions. She is angry that Gogo is not happy for her, and she also does not know the answer to many of Gogo's questions. Tuto tells Jake about Gogo's questions, and he tells her that he does have a wife, but that she is old, and mean, and he does not love her. Tuto is very upset, but Jake gives her another R200 and tells her to buy something to make herself feel better. The next day Jake has many bags of groceries in the car and carries them into Tuto's house. He talks with Gogo for some time. Gogo does not have any questions after this.

## ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- a Why do you think someone would choose to engage in such a relationship? In other words, what are the benefits to each of the characters?
- b Can you identify some risks that face Tuto within this story?
- c What could Tuto do to decrease the risks that she is exposed to?
- d What might help Tuto end the relationship if she wanted to?