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Substance use and risky sexual behaviors among young men working at a rural roadside market in Malawi

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Abstract

Using an ecological model, we describe substance use and sexual risk behaviors of young male laborers at a roadside market in Malawi. Data included observations and interviews with 18 key market leaders and 15 laborers (ages 18–25). Alcohol, marijuana, and commercial sex workers (CSWs) were widely available. We identified 3 patterns of substance use: 6 young men currently used, 6 formerly used, and 3 never used. Substance use was linked to risky sex, including sex with CSWs. The market supported risky behaviors through availability of resources; supportive norms, including beliefs that substance use enhanced strength; and lack of restraints. Community-level poverty, cultural support for alcohol, interpersonal family/peer influences, early substance use, and school dropout also contributed to risky behaviors. Parental guidance was protective but not often reported. Local programs addressing substance use and risky sex simultaneously and better national substance use policies and mental health services are needed.

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Disclosures

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Keywords

HIV; Malawi; multiple sexual partners; risk behaviors; substance use; young men

Young men in many African countries, including Malawi, engage in substance use and sexual behaviors that put them at risk for HIV. Globally, the prevalence rates for use of all substances are higher among males than females (Onya & Fisher, 2008; World Health Organization, 2011). Early alcohol use may have lifelong consequences, including increased risk of later substance use disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Chen, Storr, & Anthony, 2008). Additionally, the use of alcohol and other substances is increasingly recognized as a key determinant of risky sexual behavior and HIV transmission in many African countries, including Malawi (Fisher, Cook, & Kapiga, 2010; Hahn, Woolf-King, & Muyindike, 2011).

The risk of contracting HIV through sexual behaviors is high in Malawi, where adult HIV prevalence is 11%. For young men, reported risky sexual behaviors, including having multiple partners and not using a condom at last sexual intercourse, are related to higher prevalence (National Statistical Office and ICF Macro, 2011). The limited research on substance use in Malawi has documented that substance use among young men in Malawi is increasing and that it is associated with risky sexual behaviors (Bisika, Konyani, Chamangwana, & Khanyizira, 2008). Alcohol and marijuana are the most common substances used. Half of the substance users had more than one sexual partner and 46% of all substance users never used condoms (Bisika et al., 2008). Therefore, understanding the substance use and sexual risk behaviors of young men in Malawi and the contextual factors that sustain these behaviors in different environments is an important public health priority.

Places with a high density of alcohol and marijuana outlets have been associated with increased substance use and convey pro-use and pro-risk taking community norms in Africa and other regions (Chilenski, 2011; Girish, Kavita, Gururaj, & Benegal, 2010; Kalichman, 2010; Pettigrew, Miller-Day, Krieger, & Hecht, 2012; Scribner, Theall, Simonsen, & Robinson, 2010). One alcohol environment common throughout Malawi and other low-resource countries is the roadside market. At the market, alcohol and marijuana are sold and numerous bars and rest houses, where rooms can be rented by the hour, are available. Many young men find informal employment in these markets and can be seen congregating and engaging in risky substance use and sexual behaviors.

The ecological model, originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) to describe factors at multiple levels that affect child development, has been widely used to explore the impact of different environments on risky substance use and/or sexual behaviors (Connell, Gilreath, Aklin, & Brex, 2010; DiClemente, Salaazar, Crosby, & Rosenthal, 2005; Duncan, Duncan, & Strycker, 2000; McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988; Scribner et al., 2008). When applied to substance use or risky behaviors in the community, ecological models acknowledge that individuals operate within different spheres of social influences and, therefore, risk behavior prevention should include multiple spheres of influence. In its report on global alcohol use by young people, the World Health Organization (2011)

recommended a multi-level approach as a more comprehensive approach to understanding substance use and HIV risk behaviors.

The empirically validated framework developed by Scribner et al. (2008) was the specific conceptual framework used to guide this study. They described HIV as the outcome of societal, neighborhood, interpersonal, and individual level factors. When applied to substance use and sexual behaviors at a rural market, societal norms and national policies and laws provide a broad context in which opportunities for substance use and risky sex are made available for young people (Wagenaar, Tobler, & Komro, 2010; Xu & Chaloupka, 2011). The next level of influence is the neighborhood, which includes the market as an alcohol environment as well as the communities surrounding the market. The interpersonal level of family and peers follows. Peer relationships and peer behaviors have been found to be significant influences on young people's behaviors in South Africa (Meghdadpour, Curtis, Pettifor, & MacPhail, 2012; Tenkorang, Maticka-Tyndale, & Rajulton, 2011). Lastly, individual level factors are considered. Introduction to alcohol at an early age may have lifelong consequences, while higher educational achievement may motivate people to think optimistically about the future and reduce the risk of substance use (Baker, Collins, & Leon, 2008; Edstrom & Khan, 2009; Uchidi, Magadi, & Mostazir, 2012). Understanding how factors at each of these levels influence young men's substance use and risky sexual behaviors may aid in the reduction of these risks.

Although much research has been done on substance use and HIV globally, in Malawi there is almost no research on substance use or the relationship between substance use and risky sexual behaviors that may lead to HIV infection. No available studies have examined roadside markets as alcohol environments that affect the risky substance use and sexual behaviors of young men working there.

To begin to address this gap, our study describes the substance use and sexual behaviors of young casual workers at a roadside market that put them at risk for HIV infection. Then, using an ecological perspective, we identify the market environment and other contextual factors linked to these risky behaviors.

Methods

Study Design

We used an ethnographic approach to develop a rich, holistic description of the multilevel societal, community, interpersonal, and individual factors affecting substance use and sexual risk behaviors of young men who work in the roadside market. As stated by Whitehead (2005), "The task of ethnography is the study of the socio-cultural context, processes, and meanings within a cultural system" (p.4). The aim of ethnography is to understand the study participants from their own systems of meanings (Barnard & Spencer, 2002; Whitehead, 2005).

For the study, we integrated three kinds of data: detailed observations of the market, interviews with key informants familiar with the market, and in-depth interviews with young

men who worked there. Integrating multiple data sources allowed us to build a holistic description of young male casual workers at the market and their risky behaviors.

Setting and sample—The study was conducted at Tsangano market along the main highway, at the border between Malawi and Mozambique. The district where the market was located was predominately rural, and the majority of residents were from the Ngoni tribe and Christian religion. The market's structures and activities were described in results based on our observations. A market committee oversaw market activities and registered all vendors and casual workers.

Purposive sampling was used for both observations and interviews. The research team observed different parts of the market on all 7 days of the week, at different times of the day, from early morning to late in the evening, to capture its diversity.

The 18 key leaders who participated in the study were purposively selected because they represented a variety of leadership positions and had in-depth knowledge of the activities of young men and the nature of substance use and sexual behaviors at the market. Five had official positions with the market committee as chairman, secretary, and committee members; they also owned their own businesses and occasionally hired young men to assist with sales. Eight were business owners operating within and around the market, three were owners of establishments, and two were guards/vendors. Some of the key leaders started off as casual workers at the market and had also used substances for more than 10 years. The key leaders had worked at the market for a period of 3–14 years. All had at least some secondary school education and were of Ngoni descent. Their ages ranged from 20 to 37 years.

The 15 young men who were interviewed were recruited through observation of the potato market, the major area where young men worked. Selection criteria were: 18–25 years of age, worked at the roadside market as casual workers for more than 1 month, and usually worked at least 15 hours a week. As shown in Table 1, the young men interviewed were ages 18 to 25 years. Nine were married and living with their wives, one was separated from his wife, and five were not yet married. All of them had worked at the market for a period of more than 2 years. Most of them had only a primary school education, but three had at least some secondary school education. All except two were of Ngoni descent.

Data Collection Guides

A semi-structured observation checklist was developed to enhance systematic observation of structures and interactions with ample room to add details and to note any unanticipated events or structures. A condensed observation guide is shown in Table 2.

Separate interview guides for key leaders and young men were developed. Questions were developed based on the ecological conceptual framework, our observations of the market, and prior research. Questions were open-ended with probes used to explore issues in detail. In the key leader interview guide, questions focused on what key leaders knew about young men, what young men did, and the reasons for working at the market, substance use, and sexual behaviors. The young men's interview guide focused on their life stories and

experiences working at the market, using alcohol and marijuana, and their sexual behaviors and relationships with women. Young men were also asked about their families, friends, and the people they worked with at the market.

The interview guides were developed in English, and then translated into Chichewa using a consensus translation process to enhance conceptual meaning. This involved independent translation and backtranslation by two bilingual translators followed by a meeting with the researcher to resolve inconsistencies and reach consensus for the final version (Chen & Boore, 2009; Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004).

Procedure

Institutional review board approval was obtained from the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Malawi. Permission to conduct the study at the market was obtained from the District Commissioner of Ntcheu and the chairperson of the market committee. Data were collected between June and August 2012. Two male research assistants were recruited to conduct observations because men would be less obtrusive observers in gatherings of young men or in drinking places. To ensure high quality and consistent data, the observers had a 5-day didactic and experiential training prior to collecting observation data.

Observations were conducted from June 20–30, 2012. We began by making a map of the market. Then we observed the market, covering different sectors of the market all days of the week and at different times of day (from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.). Three observers spent 60 hours each, for a total of 180 person-hours of observation. All three were present at the same time to reduce transportation costs, but they observed in different areas of the market. Observation notes were reviewed at the end of each day and new discoveries were added as needed.

After observation, in-depth interviews were conducted with the key leaders and then with young men. The first author conducted the interviews for both key leaders and young men. One of the co-authors role-modelled the first interviews to provide hands-on training. Each individual who expressed initial willingness to participate was taken to a private area at a nearby school building. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes. They were conducted in Chichewa and audiotaped.

A journal was kept with field notes written each day immediately after leaving the setting to produce a fresh recollection of the day's events. After each observation and interview, the summaries were entered into a computer. Interviews were then transcribed, and all data were entered into a computer. Field notes from observations and interviews, as well as consent forms with signatures, were kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the study team.

Analysis

Data analysis of the interviews was conducted in stages. The observations oriented us to the market, places where young men worked and congregated, and their work and leisure activities. The three different observers achieved a high level of agreement about different aspects of the market. Observation data brought out a “dialogue” with the data (Anderson

& Baumberg, 2006) and was used to evaluate explanations and confirm/disconfirm evidence from the interviews.

During data collection, simultaneous data collection and analysis were completed. Interviews were transcribed verbatim from the digital recordings and translated into English. The interviews were summarized after repeated listening to recordings and reading transcripts. Preliminary codes were developed based on the ecological conceptual framework, and new codes were added as we gained an emerging understanding of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). All codes were operationally defined so they could be applied consistently over time (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As transcription and translation were completed, each interview was entered into Atlas.ti.6.2, a software program for managing and analyzing qualitative data.

Intense analysis continued after all data were collected. During this process, the initial codes developed during data collection were continuously reviewed and modified as new themes were identified. Memos were written to document emerging understanding and decisions. After final codes were established, independent double coding of two interviews by the coauthors established an inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.90, generally considered acceptably high (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then all transcripts were modified as needed using the final codes and definitions. Finally, a case profile was created for each participant, and within and across case matrices were created to examine patterns or configurations (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Enhancing Rigor

We enhanced the rigor and trustworthiness of the study following the classic guidelines proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To enhance credibility, or faithfulness in describing the phenomena, we triangulated multiple sources of data to ensure a more comprehensive picture of the factors affecting young men's risk behavior. Spending time in the market and an iterative process of collecting and analyzing data allowed the researchers to develop an in-depth understanding of the environment. Observations and the early interview data were used to inform follow-up observations and interviews, and data collection continued until we reached saturation. Dependability, or stability of data over time, was enhanced by specifying how participants were selected, the consistency of observations by three different researchers, and high inter-coder reliability. An audit trail of the research process and decisions made, through a journal and memos, allowed an independent researcher to confirm the study. Transferability was enhanced by providing a detailed description of the context, allowing other researchers to make their own judgments about the study's relevance for other settings (Devers, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Results

The Market Environment

This extremely busy market was a sprawling open area along both sides of the major north-south highway in Malawi near the border with Mozambique. People from within and outside of Malawi visited the market to sell and purchase agricultural commodities

in bulk and smaller quantities. Cars and buses travelling on the highway stopped there to purchase refreshments and produce. People brought their farm and other goods in bulk by trucks, oxcarts, and other means. Others came with empty trucks and bought in bulk. There were both permanent and temporary structures, as well as open ground where vendors laid out goods for sale. The market was open all day, every day. Tuesdays and Fridays were especially busy for selling produce, and the days before involved heavy movement of goods into the market.

The market was also a thriving entertainment center. The market provided many work opportunities for the young men who were the focus of our study. Many people required the assistance of casual workers to load and unload their goods and to move them from one place to another within the market. Young men were hired to do this heavy physical labor. They were paid in cash at the completion of each separate job. Nearly all of them were from the surrounding villages and returned to their homes and families nearly every evening. Two had come to the market from another part of Malawi and they slept at the market, returning to their homes only occasionally.

Substance Use Patterns

Our observations documented widespread availability of substances and their use throughout the market, especially in the bars and open spaces around the market. Alcohol and marijuana were the only substances we saw being sold or used. Within the market there were seven bars selling alcoholic beverages plus multiple temporary areas where home brewed beer was sold. Available alcoholic beverages included beer, whisky, gin, and other drinks, all available in different sizes. The sachets (individual portions) were the most affordable for casual workers and had very high alcohol content (up to 40% or 80% proof). On Tuesdays and Fridays, women from nearby villages brought large drums of locally brewed beer to sell. Although marijuana was illegal in Malawi, it was grown in the surrounding villages. It was sold both in known locations in nearby villages and in certain areas of the market. Both marijuana and alcohol were used openly in the market, especially where trucks were loaded and offloaded.

The observers saw young men who were visibly drunk and who were smoking marijuana as they were working. Both key leaders and young men said that more than three quarters of casual workers, including the young men, used substances, and that half of those were heavy substance users.

We identified three patterns of substance use in the young men at this market: six were current substance users, six were former substance users, and three had never used substances. Of the 12 young men who reported having used substances now or in the past, all said they drank alcohol and 8 of them said they also used marijuana.

Current users—Of the six young men currently using substances, three were currently using alcohol only, two currently used both alcohol and marijuana, and one was currently using alcohol and had used marijuana in the past. Many of the current users reported having started young. Three of these young men came to the market already drinking and smoking

marijuana and continued to use them at the market. The current users all reported heavy and continuous substance use. One young man said:

When I wake up in the morning, I start the day by taking one packet of Chibuku [local beer] and smoke marijuana. Around mid-day, I get a drink, smoke another joint of marijuana, and continue drinking after 4 p.m., which is towards the end of my workday.

Current users mentioned several reasons for their substance use. They linked their use of both marijuana and alcohol to the need to enhance their physical strength and endurance while loading and unloading heavy market goods. One young man said, “Whenever I have a job to do, I need to smoke marijuana, so that my body can relax, feel well, and gain strength to be able to do any kind of job.” They also believed that drinking alcohol (but not using marijuana) was necessary to compete for the limited work available. They said they had to be rough, as sometimes they had to fight to grab the jobs from each other. As one young man put it:

The work we do is very, very competitive, and the buyers are also at times mean with us, hence we use alcohol to be more aggressive and courageous to deal with each other and buyers. This work is not for the weak-minded people.

The belief that substance use enhanced strength was widespread and was the primary reason given for using substances by both current and former users. Several key leaders also said that using alcohol and marijuana gave young men the endurance and aggressive attitude that enabled them to do their demanding jobs.

Another reason for using substances that was mentioned by current users and key leaders was that substance use gave them pleasure and relaxed feelings. As reported by one young man, “We use alcohol and marijuana to relax since it gives us a feeling of excitement.”

Although the informants did not use the terms “addicted” or “dependent,” their reports of heavy use of substances throughout the day were congruent with the standard signs of substance addiction, including taking substances to avoid or relieve withdrawal symptoms, using more substances than planned, life revolving around substance use, and using the substance every day (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). One young man said, “My body is used to marijuana so I need to smoke it; my body works well with marijuana.”

Ngoni cultural norms were another reason for young men’s use of substances. The market was located in a region where the Ngoni tribe was the largest ethnic group. In Ngoni culture, men are traditionally expected to drink alcoholic drinks. One young man stated, “I drink to live according to the expectation of my Ngoni culture. Drinking is part of our life.”

Former substance users—Six young men in our study reported that they used substances for some time when they started to work at the market but they no longer used either marijuana or alcohol. Four had formerly used alcohol only and two had used both alcohol and marijuana. Regarding their former use, they reported the same heavy use, early initiation, and reasons for use as current substance users.

All but one of the young men stopped using substances because of a specific and negative personal experience with alcohol and/or marijuana intoxication. Two young men stated that they had had a bad experience from a heavy bout of drinking; the other three had had a bad experience from heavy use of marijuana. One young man spent 21 months in jail after having caused havoc at his village after combining marijuana and alcohol. As stated by one young man:

I stopped drinking because I was causing problems whenever I was under the influence of alcohol. I would provoke and beat up people for unknown reasons. Some young men beat me up and I also learnt the truth about my religion. Islam does not allow alcohol drinking.

The other reason given for stopping substance use was increased maturity and growing responsibilities as well as disapproval from parents and others. Only one young man said this was the main reason he had quit using substances, but a number of them identified it as a contributing factor. Only one young man mentioned personal health as a reason for quitting; he was HIV infected and was advised that drinking was not good when taking antiretrovirals. Several key leaders noted that they had been heavy substance users in the past, like the young men now working as casual laborers. They expressed the belief that most young men would grow out of heavy substance use as they matured and gained added responsibilities.

Never used substances—Three young men reported that they had never used substances. They said they were at the market to earn money and not to waste their money on buying alcohol. As indicated by one young man: I came to work at this market to earn a living; in search of cash. I left home because there was severe poverty at our home. My parents are poor and we do not have support from anyone.

I cannot afford to spend my money on alcohol, knowing very well that alcohol kills people.

Two of the young men who had never used substances were the only ones who reported negative rather than positive effects of substance use. They thought that their peers were painting substance use positively as a reason to use them. As noted by one young man, “There is nothing good that can come out of alcohol and marijuana.”

Widely Available Commercial Sex

The observers, key informants, and young men all reported that many commercial sex workers (CSWs) and women on their own hung out at the bars and rest houses at the market. Others loitered in the market near the truck loading area. Opportunities for casual and commercial sex were physically close to areas where substance use occurred. There are were four rest houses next to the bars that sold rooms for short (hourly) and longer stays. Some of the women who frequented the market stayed there. Both the bars and rest houses were convenient places where the young men could meet sexual partners. Older women vendors in the vegetable sales area who invited the young men to have sex created another opportunity for them to have sex for money.

Nearly all of the participants believed that there was a link between substance use and risky sexual behaviors. Some participants reported that their peers got drunk and smoked marijuana before and during the time they were having sex with CSWs. Young men admitted that substances caused them to make risky decisions about sex. One young man stated:

You may have intended to use a condom, but due to alcohol consumption, condoms do not matter, what matters most is sex. You start thinking and regretting when the alcohol is out of your system, when friends tell you about it later. Alcohol is bad, why we drink it, only Satan knows.

When asked about their own sexual behaviors, surprisingly only one participant admitted to currently engaging in risky sexual behaviors. He reported that he had had sex with multiple partners for more than 8 years, and that he still engaged in sex with CSWs. He did not use a condom whenever the female CSWs requested it. He admitted that he knew that it was risky, especially because he had HIV. He felt that he was putting his life in danger by not using a condom, but he never mentioned the consequences of his behavior with female CSWs. This young man was not married. He explained:

Whenever I have a sexual desire, I go to the bar and have sex with any sex worker I meet at that particular time. I change sex partners because I do not want to be involved in a lasting relationship and I do not want to have sex with [just] one sex worker.

Only one young man reported that alcohol did not lead to unprotected sex for him because it dampened his desire for sex and delayed his ejaculation.

Our data showed that the young men who had never used substances also said they had never engaged in sex with multiple partners. They all said they were afraid of being infected with sexually transmitted illnesses, including HIV.

Market Factors Supporting Risky Behaviors

Market factors supporting risky behaviors included availability of resources, widespread norms supporting substance use, and absence of restraints for risky behaviors. At the market, the resources that enabled risky substance use and sexual behaviors were continuously available. We have already discussed how the market had a wide variety of places selling alcohol and marijuana every day and places where numerous CSWs congregated. Equally important, the market gave young men jobs that gave them ready cash on a daily basis. In the rural communities they came from, the market was the only place where young men could get substantial and regular cash earnings. Although nearly all the young men reported giving money to their families, their families had no way of knowing what the young men were earning. Many young men felt justified in using some or most of the money on personal needs and pleasures. One young man reported:

It is easy to get money at this market, any type of job you do is money. My daily earnings range between K1,500–5,000 (\$5.45–\$18 USD); I earn up to K8,000 (\$48 USD) in a week and that is enough money for my family to meet our needs and for me to spend some of it on buying alcohol, and I can afford to buy alcohol every day.

All but two of the participants reported it was easy to buy marijuana at this market, and that it was cheap and affordable, costing between K30 (\$0.18 USD) to K50 (\$0.30 USD). Numerous CSWs were readily available in the market. As one young man stated, “Women who trade in sex are plenty at this market, they are at the bars, rest houses, and some have their businesses inside this market; they may sell vegetables and sex at the same time.”

Norms supporting young men’s risky behaviors were also widespread at the market. As stated by one young man:

It is like a norm at this market, we get money, spend it, get more money, and spend it on alcohol and women—young men envy each other and are eager to learn what their peers are doing, such as smoking marijuana to reinforce their strength for them to get more jobs and more money to spend on risky behaviors.

The belief that the competitive nature of the work the young men did required them to use substances also supported substance use.

The market also lacked restraints on substance use or risky sexual behaviors that were present in most other environments. The market was not regulated by traditional customs that prevailed in villages or by national laws and regulatory authorities. Unlike bars and markets in towns and cities, rural markets had virtually no enforcement of national laws regulating the sale and use of alcoholic beverages, opening and closing times, or sales to minors. Enforcement of laws prohibiting marijuana sale and use was also absent. Some of the alcoholic beverages came from Mozambique and some from Malawi, with very different regulations about alcohol content and labeling. The people selling alcohol, marijuana, and sex wanted to make as much as they could. As stated by a bar owner:

It [license] does stipulate the opening and closing time, but at this market, things are different. We open the bars 24 hours a day. People have money, and they enjoy drinking alcohol, so we offer them that opportunity to drink. We do not want to deny them what they love to do.

There were no taxes or regulation of earnings in the market, and no oversight by the Ministry of Labor regarding safe working conditions, hours, or pay. The market was only 20 kilometers from the rural hospital, but the health system had no outreach to serve the health needs of market workers. The police had a station next to the market, but they focused on highway regulation and avoided getting involved in issues such as outbreaks of substance use-related violence or violations of regulations in the market.

Although there was a market committee, they viewed their role as consumer protection. Because the young men were casual workers, employers had little long-term commitment to their welfare. All of the key leaders observed that nobody at the market opposed young men’s substance use or sexual behaviors. As reported by one key leader:

The role of the market committee is to ensure peace at this market and to protect customers from unscrupulous workers. It is not the job of the committee to correct people’s personal behavior. If people want to destroy their lives, by drinking, smoking, and having sex with many women, that is their choice.

Non-Market Factors and Risky Behaviors

The market did not shape young men's substance use and risky sex behaviors in isolation. Other factors at the neighborhood, interpersonal, and individual levels also affected the young men. Most of these other factors also supported patterns of substance use and risky sex. Only a few countervailing or protective factors were identified, mainly by the young men whose families brought them up to avoid risky behaviors.

At the neighborhood level, local communities were linked to the market in a symbiotic relationship. The market provided a place to sell crops and substances and the communities provided a ready source of cheap labor, produce, and both legal and illegal substances. All but two of the young men interviewed moved between the market and their home communities daily and continued to be influenced by those communities. Young men grew up seeing others in their communities, often their own relatives, make money working at the market. Both young men and key leaders reported that poverty and a lack of alternative employment in their communities pushed young men to leave school early and work at the market.

Participants also reported that alcohol consumption in their own communities was common, and that marijuana was also available. This is partly due to the Ngoni culture discussed earlier, which was the predominant culture in these communities. Although youth were not encouraged to begin drinking beer at an early age, children saw their parents or other adults drink beer constantly. These role models encouraged the young men to drink. Although less common than alcohol, marijuana was grown in the communities and openly sold. Production of both alcohol and marijuana was doubtlessly encouraged by the presence of a ready market where it could be sold.

In small rural communities the behaviors of young men were widely known and elders often gave advice and warnings about unacceptable behaviors. Young men working at the market no longer experienced as much direct monitoring or behavior expectations as they would have if they were in the home community all day.

At the interpersonal level, both family relationships and peers affected young men's substance use. All the young men reported maintaining close ties with their families, and they all gave at least some financial support to their families. Most of the young men reported that they were supporting their mothers and siblings.

All but three young men had families that were poor. Ten young men reported that poverty in their homes influenced them to drop out of school and work at the market. Although their families did not encourage substance use or risky sex, working at the market gave them the opportunity to pay for substances and commercial sex they otherwise could not afford.

Eight of the 15 young men interviewed reported that they were brought up by their mothers. The absence of their father meant these young men had less parental guidance and were often very poor. Some of the young men grew up seeing their mothers make ends meet by brewing beer. Although the mothers told their sons not to drink beer, the young men saw beer drinking in and around their homes, which they said encouraged them to start drinking.

For a few young men, their families offered a protective influence against engaging in substance use or risky sex. They reported having a parent or guardian who helped them develop positive values in life. As one young man said:

I am lucky because my parents insisted on teaching us not to use any kind of substance in our home, my late father taught me that alcohol was a waste of money and marijuana caused mental illness. My siblings and I were raised in a Christian family; I follow what my father and mother taught me.

Peers were also identified by both young men and key leaders as influencing young men to make decisions to engage in or avoid risky behaviors. Observers reported that when they saw young men drinking, smoking, and dancing they were usually in groups of three or more. Five young men reported that peers from their homes influenced them to start using substances. The young men also reported that peers influenced each other to engage in sex with multiple partners. However, only one young man said that peers influenced him to engage in sex with multiple partners. As observed by one young man:

Most of us are weak minded and are easily influenced by what other people are doing. We copy bad behaviors from our peers working at this market. Therefore, we learn to drink and have sex with female sex workers. As young men we think that is normal and we also do the same-- It seems to be easier to copy bad behavior than good habits.

Individual-level factors affecting substance use and risky sexual behaviors included age at initiation of substance use and education. Exposure to opportunities for substance use at an early age was commonly identified as a factor. Observers noted that some males who looked to be very young were working in various jobs at the market. Both young men and key leaders identified lack of education as another factor in risky behaviors. They stated that young men who had never been to school or left early might not understand the uses of money; therefore, they might spend their cash on useless things such as alcohol and sex. No young man in this study completed secondary school education. Three young men felt that the lack of education was putting them at risk. One said, "Lack of education is killing young men from this area. We as young men fail to think and plan about the future, because nobody has taught us to do that." The three young men who had some secondary school education seemed to be more knowledgeable about the ill effects of risky behaviors. It was striking that neither the young men nor the key leaders expressed full awareness of the health risks associated with heavy substance use or discussed addiction.

Discussion

In this study we examined the substance use and sexual risk behaviors of young men who worked as casual workers in a rural Malawi market and the contextual factors that contributed to these behaviors. We add new information to the literature about how a rural roadside market environment fosters both substance use and risky sexual behaviors for the young men who work there. No prior study has looked at rural markets and the opportunities for risky behaviors they present for young men, although several studies have looked at substance use and risky sex in the context of bars and education settings in Africa (Bisika, Konyani, Chamangwana, & Khanyizira, 2008; Fisher, Cook, & Kapiga, 2010; Hahn,

Woolf-King, & Muyindike, 2011; Onya & Fisher, 2008). The rural market differed from those settings because it was an environment where young men both worked and engaged in leisure activities. Almost all of their waking hours were spent at the market almost every day, so the market's influence on these young men was pervasive. The findings are congruent with prior studies in Africa and other countries that found that availability and accessibility of bars, where they could drink and find sexual partners, posed a risk to young men (Scribner et al., 2008; Treno, Ponicki, Remer, & Gruenewald, 2008). As in previous research (Hahn, Woolf-King, & Muyindike, 2011), we found that alcohol consumption was associated with unprotected sex with multiple sexual partners, which increased the risk of HIV transmission. However, in this setting, much of the young men's substance use occurred during their working hours, not just in bars and drinking places.

The primary reason these young men gave for using substances has not been reported in prior studies. Many of the young men said they began using substances in order to help them do the work available at the market. They especially linked marijuana with giving them the strength and endurance to do their work, while they saw alcohol as helping them to be more aggressive and to obtain jobs against stiff competition from other young men. These beliefs were widespread in the market and not confined to the young men themselves.

We also identified a major cultural factor supporting alcohol use in the market. The market was located in the Ngoni cultural area and nearly all workers in the market were from this area. In Ngoni culture, drinking is endorsed and believed to be an important marker of manhood. These cultural norms reinforced the market factors supporting risky behaviors, including tolerance for unregulated alcohol sale and use, and also provided cultural support for alcohol use by individual young men. Although this particular tribal culture is unique, tribes in various parts of Africa also have norms supporting alcohol use, while other tribes do not. This cultural factor has not been part of the dialogue about substance use and HIV risk in Africa.

The influence of peers on young men found in this study was also congruent with previous findings from South Africa, where peer influence was significantly associated with risk of substance use among youth (Brook, Morojele, Zhang, & Brook, 2006). Previous studies also have found that school attendance had a protective effect on risky behavior (Sambisa, Curtis, & Stokes, 2010). We did not find this in our study, but our study was not analogous because all of the young men in our study dropped out of school at an early age, so we did not have a comparable group of young men.

Another important insight related to what we did not find in the data. Although the short term effects of substance use on behaviors were mentioned, the longterm physical and mental health effects, including addiction, were not brought up by either the young men or the key leaders. Despite the importance of religion in Malawi, religion was mentioned by only a few young men as a reason to not drink or to stop drinking. Because the market was always open, the majority of young men working at the market did not report attending church or mosque services regularly.

Although factors influencing the substance use and risky sex behaviors of young men working in the market were discussed separately, these factors were interrelated and interacted over time. For example, the surrounding communities have been influenced by the presence of the market. Knowing the links between all of the influencing factors may help explain the complex links between working in the market and high rates of substance use and risky sex for young men.

We also identified the need for more research regarding markets and other work settings in low-resource countries that may foster risky behaviors for their young workers. More research is also needed to identify specific ways in which rural communities and family influences can be protective and help young people avoid substance use and risky sexual behaviors.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study was the use of multiple ways of collecting data, namely, observations, followed by key leader and young men interviews. This approach gave the data richness and allowed the researchers to crosscheck results from different types of data (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). The study was also conducted with care to maintain rigor and trustworthiness, as detailed in the methods section.

However, there were some limitations to the study. Because the primary data collector was highly educated, female, and a nurse, it is possible that the young men may not have been comfortable discussing their own sexual behaviors with her. Our observations of many young men going to rest houses with young women after drinking was inconsistent with the young men's interview data. Although they too said that other young men engaged in risky sexual behaviors, only one young man admitted to personally engaging in sex with multiple partners. The young men appeared more willing to discuss their personal substance use. One possible explanation for this inconsistency across data sources is social desirability bias, especially when discussing sexuality, which is a culturally sensitive topic in Malawi. It is also possible that the men who agreed to be interviewed were engaging in less risky behaviors than those who refused. Although saturation was reached, the number of young men interviewed was relatively small. It is also possible that this market, which was very large and bordered another country, was not typical of all rural markets in Malawi.

In assessing the study overall, it is also important to reflect on the particular perspectives and biases of the primary data collector, an experienced community and mental health nursing expert. Thus, the researcher was sensitized to signs of substance use and addiction that might not have been apparent to another researcher. All of the observers were experienced nurses in Malawi with similar biases, and all were concerned about the health risks of substance use and risky sexual behaviors for the young men working at the market. These factors may have influenced the ways data were interpreted.

Implications

Our findings have important implications for policies and programs to address factors supporting substance use at multiple levels. As noted by Scribner et al. (2010), policies

reducing alcohol availability or cost tend to reduce its use. Malawi's national policies on substance use need to be updated and better enforced. These findings also highlight the importance of integrating alcohol consumption into HIV prevention programs as an important factor in preventing new HIV infections. National information and education campaigns have succeeded in increasing awareness of HIV prevention strategies, but a similar effort is needed to increase awareness of the health effects of substance use and addiction, especially for children and youth. Such efforts could be incorporated into the Life Skills programs for in-school and out-of-school youth.

Programs at the local level are also needed. At the market, health promotion programs should be developed for the young men working there. Because casual laborers have limited time, programs need to address HIV prevention and substance use together, including health consequences, recognition, and treatment of heavy substance use and addiction. The market committee could also do more to improve working conditions to discourage substance use and commercial sex at the market, but they did not see this as their job. In communities near the market, leaders and families should be made aware of the risks for young men who work in the market and consider strategies to help youth stay in school longer and avoid substance use and risky sexual behaviors. Parents should also be made aware of the powerful influences they can have on their children as guides and role models.

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Key Considerations

- Young men in Malawi identify their substance use as linked to having unprotected sex and paying for sex.
- The market fosters young men's risky behaviors through availability of substances, sex workers and the money to buy them, norms supporting risky behaviors, and lack of regulation.
- Policy makers should recognize the need for more information campaigns and services to address mental health needs related to substance use and addiction.
- Young men working at the market are a vulnerable group who need an intervention that addresses both substance use and risky sexual behaviors.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Young Men who Participated in the Study (N = 15)

Characteristic	Number of Participants
Age	
18–21	2
22–24	13
Education Level	
No education	1
Primary education	11
Secondary education	3
Time working at the market	
1–2 years	8
3–4 years	4
5 or more years	3
Marital Status	
Single	5
Married	9
Separated	1
Length of marriage	
Less than 1 year	3
1–2 years	3
3 or more years	3
Tribe	
Ngoni	13
Chewa	2

Table 2

Summary of Data Collection Guides

Observation Information: observer, date, start and end time, market site observed				
Instructions: This guide is to remind us of things to look for but should not limit observations. Enter all comments in the spaces provided. [note: form laid out with more space for documentation]				
1	Road side market (DONE ONCE)			
a.	Structures:			Comments
	Permanent structures, # _____		Shops, temporary, # _____	
	Temporary structures, # _____		Toilets, permanent # _____	
	Bars, # _____		Toilets, temporary # _____	
	Rest houses, # _____		Bathing rooms, permanent # _____	
	Shops: grocery, hardware etc. permanent, # _____		Bathing rooms, temporary # _____	
b.	Type of commodities sold (list)			
2.	Specific Area Observed (mark on map _____) Asked separately for places where alcohol is sold, bars, rest houses, pool is played, trucks load/unload, parking areas, special market days, market committee meeting place			
a.	Describe the place, what you see and hear people talk about			
b.	What are the activities taking place at this venue?			
c.	Describe the people frequenting the area.			
		Yes	No	N/A
	• Are people there as couples?			
	• Are people drinking, using marijuana?			
	• Are they visibly drunk or high?			
d.	Where do young people congregate; what is happening?			
e.	Describe commodities, services sold around that venue, including condoms			
3.	Sample of additional questions for specific areas: BARS			
a.	Types of alcohol sold & drunk			
b.	Type of activities taking place			
	• Men and women sitting together		Yes	No
	• Dancing: Couples, males and females			
	• Intimate interactions (e.g., touching, hugging, kissing, talking close together)			
				Comments

Observation Information: observer, date, start and end time, market site observed				
Instructions: This guide is to remind us of things to look for but should not limit observations. Enter all comments in the spaces provided. [note: form laid out with more space for documentation]				
c.				Is there a place there or just outside where it appears that people can buy a room for sexual encounters? Describe.

B Sample Interview Questions for Key Leaders

1. Demographic Information: Age, education, position/type of business at the market, etc.
NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL - MARKET ENVIRONMENT
2. What do young men do in this market?
- Why do young men come here rather than work elsewhere or remain in the village?
 - Are there regulations or informal expectations about belonging to the organization that young men have at this market?
 - Have you ever experienced problems with young men who work at this market?
 - Have you seen any young men drinking alcohol like beer, gin, or home brewed beer?
 - Have you seen any young men using marijuana in this area?

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL – YOUNG MEN’S RISKY SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

3. What do young men do when they are not working around this market?
- Do you ever see young men meeting with their sexual partners?
 - Is it easy for young men working in this market to get sexual partners? Why?
 - Do you see women who hang out in the market looking for young men?
 - Are there young men who have sex for money or favors around this place?

HIV RISK BEHAVIORS OF YOUNG MEN

- What do you think puts young men at risk of HIV at this market?
- What is the relationship between alcohol and marijuana use and HIV infection?

C. Sample interview questions for young men

1. Demographics: work at the market, economic help, age, education, tribe, etc.
NEIGHBORHOOD LEVEL (MARKET ENVIRONMENT)
2. Can you describe to me what your life is like working in the market?
- How did you come to work at this market? How long have you worked here?

INTERPERSONAL AND PERSONAL LEVEL (to encourage disclosure, we asked about various risky behaviors by first asking about friends and then self)

B Sample Interview Questions for Key Leaders

3. Can you describe to me the people you work with?
4. Some young men drink alcohol when they are relaxing. Do any of your friends drink alcohol?
5. How about you, have you ever drunk alcohol? Tell me about the last time you drank?
6. Some young men use marijuana as a way to relax. Do any of your friends use marijuana? Can you tell me how people get marijuana?
7. What about you, tell me about when you use marijuana.
8. Some young men have more than one sexual partner at a time or over a period of time. Do any of your friends do that?
9. Sometimes people have sex in exchange for money or favors. Do your friends do this?
10. Do your friends drink alcohol or use marijuana before having sex or when they are together with a partner?
11. Now let's talk about you. Are you currently having sex with anybody?
12. Sometimes people have sex in exchange for money or favors. Has this ever happened to you? Tell me more how it happened.
13. Do you ever drink or use marijuana before sex? With your partner?
14. Do you think the money you earn is important to your partner/s?
15. Who do you consider your most important partner? Tell me about your relationship.
16. Do you use condoms when you have sex? Tell me more about when you use condoms.
17. Do you talk with your partner(s) about sexual issues like using a condom? [Probes]
18. Overall, who influences you in making decisions about your life?

HIV RISK BEHAVIORS:

19. How does HIV relate to you?
 20. Do you think there is any relationship between alcohol use and HIV infection? Do you think there is any relationship between marijuana use and HIV infections?
-