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**No. 170, 2003**

Marindo, Ravai, Steve Pearson, and **John B. Casterline**. "Condom use and abstinence among unmarried young people in Zimbabwe: Which strategy, whose agenda?" *Policy Research Division Working Paper* no. 170. New York: Population Council. ([PDF](#))

**Abstract**

This paper compares the views about abstinence and condom use expressed by young people in Zimbabwe in focus-group discussions with the views underlying national policies and religious and traditional beliefs. Young people's decisions to adopt one or the other of these risk-reduction strategies may not necessarily indicate genuine individual choices, but rather their deference to adults' interests as they understand those interests. Policymakers and traditional and Christian leaders promote abstinence as the exclusive strategy for all young people, whereas nongovernmental organizations and the private sector promote condom use. Evidence from the focus-group discussions indicates that adolescents are aware of this conflict between choice of strategy and sometimes conceal their condom use in order not to disappoint adults. In some cases, their moral conflict gives young people limited choices about reproductive behavior. Clear and open policies regarding condom use and abstinence should be promoted as complementary alternatives. Moreover, adults should reconsider their moralizing concerning young people's sexual activity and support real rather than limited choices with regard to adolescents' reproductive health. In a country where the level of HIV prevalence among sexually active adults is one of highest in the world, and where a large proportion of HIV infections is believed to occur during adolescence, this message carries an urgency that can no longer be ignored.



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