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**PSC WORKING PAPER**

The Likoma Network Study: Context, Data Collection and Initial Results

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Abstract

The sexual networks connecting members of a population have important consequences for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. However, very few datasets currently exist that allow an investigation of the structure of sexual networks, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where HIV epidemics have become generalized. In this paper, we describe the context and methods of the Likoma Network Study (LNS), a survey of complete sexual networks we conducted on Likoma island (Malawi) between October 2005 and March 2006. We start by reviewing theoretical arguments and empirical studies emphasizing the importance of network structures for the epidemiology of sexually transmitted diseases. We describe the island setting of this study, and argue that the choice of an island as a research site addresses the possible sources of bias in the collection of complete network data. We then describe in detail our empirical strategy for the identification of sexual networks, as well as for the collection of biomarker data (HIV infection). Finally, we provide initial results relating to the socioeconomic context of the island, the size and composition of sexual networks, the prevalence of HIV in the study population, the quality of the sexual network data, the determinants of successful contact tracing during the LNS, and basic measures of network connectivity.

Keywords

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