



# MEN'S VOICES MEN'S CHOICES



Sexuality, fatherhood  
and male identity  
in a changing society.  
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# Female nurse confronts male soccer players



*Gethwana Makhaye's male role model was her loving father. He insisted that she should go to school and study medicine.*

Gethwana Makhaye has indeed transgressed gender barriers. She is a nurse who is disseminating sexual knowledge to men. It took a lot of time and strength to enter into their half of the ground, she told the Lusaka seminar.

Ms Makhaye works for the Shosholozza AIDS project within the Targeted Aids Interventions Programme in South Africa.

## WOMEN AS SEX OBJECTS

Kwa Zulu Natal is the most violent province in South Africa, and it has the highest prevalence of HIV/AIDS infection, almost 27 % in 1997.

Many trucks pass through, and the harbour is full of commercial sex workers.

People are unemployed and poor and the level of education is low. It is a highly traditional province, with a mix of ethnic groups dominated by Zulu people. Polygamy is still common. Men look upon women as sex objects.

"I've seen how helpless they are," says Ms Makhaye. "Some of them say 'I know quite well that my husband is sleeping around with quite a number of women, but I cannot ask him to do use a condom, it's taboo to talk about sex.'"

## HER BROTHER WEPT

There were also deeply personal reasons behind Ms Makhaye's starting the HIV/AIDS project:

"The first time I saw a man weep, was when my brother wept when his wife died."

Later, it struck Ms Makhaye that her sister-in-law must have died from AIDS. She asked her brother to take an HIV-test.

“He came back from the doctor, smiling, telling me he was HIV positive. I asked how he could be smiling, and he answered: ‘The doctor told me not to worry and showed me a pile of forms of a lot other people who were also HIV positive’. I said: ‘Forget about the pile. YOU! YOU, as my brother are HIV positive, what does that mean to you?’”

The brother got the message and wept again. They both decided to tell the family.

## **CONVINCED THE LEADERS**

Ms Makhaye decided to reach out directly to men. Soccer-players became the target group. In South Africa, soccer is a very common men’s game in rural and urban areas, with players ranging from under 10 up to 40 years old. It has got the largest group of supporters and the highest media coverage of all sports.

It was not easy to work through different layers of resistance and get meetings to function. Sometimes the invited men even refused to come.

“People didn’t believe that there was a problem of AIDS. And they didn’t like a woman to talk to them about AIDS.”

However, Ms Makhaye didn’t give up. She managed to convince leaders and coaches, and the project started in 1998. These are the arguments that may

alert soccer players at the information meetings:

### *Listen to the coach:*

“When you play soccer you need shin pads, if you don’t want your legs to break. If you are not feeling well, you need some time to recover. When you have sex, you must have a condom on, otherwise you will face another danger. If you have an STD, your private part must rest. In soccer you have reserve players, but when you contract HIV you can not call on a second life and say ‘Please come in!’”

“By working in a structure like soccer, the information will be spread to a larger group, says Ms Makhaye. We plan to appoint mentors who will continue our work by supporting young players. Mentorship will make the project sustainable.”

## **SAVED HER PARENTS’ MARRIAGE**

Gethwana Makhaye also has her very early experiences of how deeply rooted traditional roles are.

“My grandfather was disappointed that there were no children coming to my parents. He decided that my father should get married to another woman, but then my mother got pregnant. When I appeared, the second marriage was cancelled.”

After saving the marriage, the little new-born daughter got her name: Gethwana. It means “get one”.