

Faith, Flesh, and Stigma: Pentecostal Teachings, Sexual Health Practices, and HIV/AIDS Perceptions among Kampalan Youth,

I, s, a, a, c, S, s, e, k, a, m, a, t, t, e, ,, N, a, k, a, t, o, M, u, w, a, n, g, a, ,, J,
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| Abstract

The expansion of Pentecostalism in Uganda occurred alongside critical developments in the national HIV/AIDS response. Public health campaigns promoted biomedical knowledge, while many Pentecostal churches emphasised abstinence, fidelity, and spiritual healing. This created a complex environment for urban youth navigating sexual health and illness. This study investigates the influence of Pentecostal church teachings on the sexual health practices and perceptions of HIV/AIDS-related stigma among youth in Kampala. It examines how doctrinal messages were interpreted in daily life and their impact on stigma towards people living with HIV. This qualitative research employed a multi-method approach, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with purposively sampled youth aged 18–30 who identified as Pentecostal adherents. Participant observation was conducted in selected Pentecostal congregations in Kampala. Data were analysed thematically. Church teachings significantly shaped youth behaviour, with a strong emphasis on premarital abstinence framed as 'sexual purity'. This often led to an avoidance of condoms, which were viewed as enabling sin. A key finding was that a substantial proportion of participants expressed heightened stigma, frequently associating HIV infection with divine punishment for moral transgression. Pentecostal teachings provided a powerful moral framework for youth, but also fostered negative attitudes towards people

living with HIV and discouraged certain preventive practices. The churches' spiritualised narrative of the epidemic complicated public health efforts by reinforcing blame and stigma. Public health engagements with faith-based organisations should move beyond leadership-level dialogues to include youth congregants. Programmes should collaborate with theologians to develop messaging that integrates biomedical prevention with faith values without fostering stigma. Further research is needed on interventions to reduce stigma within religious communities. Pentecostalism, HIV/AIDS, stigma, sexual health, youth, Uganda This research contributes to African studies by detailing how Pentecostal doctrine directly shapes sexual health practices and perceptions of illness among urban youth, highlighting a critical tension between religious moral frameworks and public health objectives in Uganda.
