

Gender, Family, and HIV/AIDS in Lesotho

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Population mobility and labor migration strongly influence southern Africa's severe HIV epidemic. Research on men's and women's sexual partnerships in the migration-HIV equation has often neglected their locus within broader gender and family systems. Using qualitative data from 74 in-depth interviews with urban and rural children's caregivers in the Lesotho Children's Project (LCP), this paper examines marriage, childbearing and motherhood as essential yet changing features of a gendered family system. The LCP data offer a lens into women's experiences through four main themes: 1) marriage as normative, although increasing fragile due to contemporary economic trends; 2) premarital childbearing, 3) the practice of 'social' motherhood among older women; and 4) tension between women's expected family roles, and relative household autonomy in the absence of men and younger women. These marital, family and household dynamics suggest an integrated framework of social vulnerability and individual risk through which gender and HIV/AIDS intersect.