

## **Selected Findings from a Forthcoming Report: The 2001 National Survey of South African Youth**

The following excerpts come from a forthcoming report based on a national survey of South African youth ages 12-17. The survey was conducted October to November 2001 among a nationally representative sample of 2204 youth. The survey was designed to shed light on how South African youth view their lives today and what they think about their futures, with a particular focus on HIV/AIDS and sexual behavior. Much of the data regarding youth attitudes and behaviors related to sex and sexuality are not included in this summary, but will be addressed in the forthcoming report.

In addition, the survey also provides some initial data on South African young people's awareness of, attitudes towards, and experiences with *loveLife*. *loveLife*—South Africa's national HIV prevention program for youth uses a comprehensive approach to HIV prevention which combines a highly visible awareness and education campaign with adolescent friendly services in public clinics and countrywide outreach and support programs for young people.

In addition to the youth survey, the parents and guardians of the 12-17 year-olds were also surveyed about their views and experiences related to open communication about sex and sexuality and about *loveLife*.

The findings reported here provide some early indications of *loveLife*'s reach. A separate comprehensive monitoring and evaluation program developed with the assistance of an international expert advisory panel is underway and will provide the main evaluation of *loveLife*'s impact, including indicators related to adolescent sexual behavior, such as delayed onset of sexual activity, condom use and reduction in number of sexual partners, as well as reductions in HIV infection, other STDs and teenage pregnancy. This evaluation will be jointly implemented through a partnership between researchers at the Reproductive Health Research Unit, the Medical Research Council of South Africa, and Cambridge University (UK).

### **SELECTED FINDINGS:**

#### **I. South African Youth Today:**

- **Young people generally responded positively when asked about their lives today, but hold mixed views about their future opportunities (Chart 1).** Eight in ten South African youth report being “very happy” (61%) or “somewhat happy” (22%) about their lives at present, and very few report being either “somewhat unhappy” (4%) or “very unhappy” (4%). When asked specifically about their future prospects, young people gave more mixed responses. Almost half (45%) agreed that they have “limitless” opportunities, but about a quarter (26%) believe their opportunities are “only limited.” Furthermore, about three in

ten indicated that their future opportunities are “very limited” (21%) or that they have no opportunities at all (8%).

- **Education ranks as the number one priority for young people, but they worry most about HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy (Chart 2).** When asked to choose from a list of priorities, about two-thirds of young South Africans indicated that “getting a good education” (63%) is their top priority. Ranking second, but selected by far fewer youth was “protect myself and loved ones from HIV/AIDS” (21%). Even fewer chose having “a stable happy family” (11%), “caring for my family and others” (3%) or “living a responsible life” (1%) as their top priority. However, when asked instead about what concerns them most, HIV/AIDS was their top concern, picked by about three in ten young people (33%). Teenage pregnancy was second, picked by 30% as their top concern. Fewer youth indicated that crime (17%), sexual abuse (12%), or violence (8%) is their top concern.
- **South African youth almost universally watch television and listen to the radio, and rank media as among the most common places they get information about sex and sexuality (Chart 3, 4).** There has been phenomenal growth in television viewership among young South Africans—with 95% reporting they watch television (95%), listen to the radio (92%), and read magazines (82%) and newspapers (76%). In fact, about six in ten say they watch television (67%) or listen to the radio (58%) everyday. On the other hand, fewer youth use the Internet (41% ever used), including just 6% who say they use it everyday. At least two-thirds of youth report that they get at least some information about sex, sexuality and relationships from television (72%), teachers (71%), magazines (67%) and friends (65%).

## II. Young South Africans View of and Reported Experiences with *loveLife*

### Reported Awareness of *loveLife*

- **The data indicate that at this relatively early stage in the program’s implementation *loveLife*’s highly visible campaign is reaching a significant proportion of South African youth (Chart 5).** More than 6 out of 10 (62%) young South Africans report having heard of *loveLife*, including a majority of youth in all key demographic groups. For example, 62% of African youth, 58% of both coloured and Indian youth, and 67% of white youth are familiar with *loveLife*. Particularly reassuring in terms of the extent to which *loveLife* is reaching youth from all different areas and backgrounds is the fact that the majority of youth who describe their family as poor or very poor (58%) and those who say their family has enough to live on (63%) or more than enough to live on (67%) all report having heard of *loveLife*. Similarly, youth living in rural areas (61%) are just as likely to report having heard of *loveLife* as those who live in urban areas (62%).

- **Television and school rank as the most common sources of *loveLife* information (Chart 6, 7).** Large majorities of the 62% of youth who report having heard of *loveLife* say they heard of it from television (78%) or school (70%), though many other sources were also named by over half of the youth who were familiar with *loveLife* including radio (59%), newspapers (56%), billboards (52%), and taxis (52%). Clinics are also raising awareness of *loveLife* (40%), as are friends (37%) and Y-centers (23%). In terms of South African youth overall, *loveLife*'s television campaign has reached almost half of the country's youth (48%), and 43% are hearing of *loveLife* at school.
- **Among the 62% of young people who have heard of *loveLife*, reported awareness of specific *loveLife* products varies considerably (Chart 8, 9).** At this early point, the more widely known products include billboards (66%), S'camto GroundBreakers (50%), *loveLife* Games (44%) and *loveLife* taxis (43%). Some products that are lesser known are the *loveLife* Tours (14%), and the *loveLife* website (12%). In terms of the number of South African youth overall who are aware of various *loveLife* products, about four out of 10 (41%) are aware of *loveLife* billboards, and about three out of ten (31%) have seen the S'camto GroundBreakers television series. A little more than a quarter of all South African youth have heard of the *loveLife* Games (27%), taxis (27%), and S'camto@large (27%).

### **Overall Assessment of *loveLife***

- **Youth who report having heard of *loveLife* generally had a very positive assessment of it and its impact on them (Chart 10).** Among the 62% of youth who have heard of *loveLife*, about seven out of 10 agreed with the statements "It made me think about making safer choices" (73%); "It was different and I was interested (73%); and "It reflected young people's aspirations and lifestyle" (70%). A majority (62%) of young people who had heard of *loveLife* also agreed "It talked about sex in a positive way and they liked it." Only about a quarter (24%) of those who know of *loveLife* gave it a negative assessment agreeing with the statement "It was boring and I was not interested," and fewer (16%) agreed that "It was vulgar and I did not like it."
- **Youth indicated that they think *loveLife* is good for the country (Chart 11).** When asked if they think *loveLife* is good or bad for the youth of the country, almost nine in 10 (89%) of those who report having heard of *loveLife* indicated that they think *loveLife* is good for the youth of the country. Those who reported that they had not heard of *loveLife* were read a description of *loveLife* and then all youth, both those who have heard of *loveLife* and those who have not, were asked if they thought *loveLife* was a good or bad thing for the country. Almost nine in 10 agreed that they thought it was a good thing for the country, with 12% instead saying it is bad for the country.

## **Reported Impact of *loveLife***

- **When asked about the impact that *loveLife* had on them personally, many of the youth who had heard of *loveLife* indicated that they had taken some action as a result of what they had seen or heard (Chart 12).** A majority (58%) of the 62% of youth who had heard of *loveLife* reported that as a result of *loveLife* they had talked to their friends, family, or others about *loveLife* and/or lifestyle issues in general; looked for more information on sex, sexuality and relationships between men and women (39%); or been to a clinic or private doctor (20%). Fewer reported calling either thetaJUNCTION (9%) or another helpline (15%), and only one out of ten said they had visited *loveLife*'s website. About a quarter (23%) of youth who have heard of *loveLife* said they have taken no personal action as a result of what they saw or heard.
- **Many youth who have heard of *loveLife* report it is influencing their attitudes and behaviors related to sexual health choices (Chart 13).** Among the 62% of youth who have heard of *loveLife*, 76% agreed with the statement that *loveLife* has caused them to be more aware of the risks of unprotected sex. A majority of youth who have heard of *loveLife* also report that as a result of it they are thinking about and discussing relationships -- 67% say it has caused them to talk to their friends about sex, sexuality, and relationships between men and women, and 57% agree that it has caused them to think more about the openness and honesty of their romantic relationships. In addition, some who have heard of *loveLife* report making behavioral changes as a result of *loveLife*, including delaying or abstaining from sex (65%) and exploring other forms of sexual activity, like masturbation or oral sex (21%). In terms of South African youth overall, these numbers translate into 47% of all South African youth reporting that as a result of *loveLife* they are more aware of the risks of unprotected sex, and 42% saying it has influenced them to talk to their friends about sex, sexuality and relationships.
- **Further, many sexually experienced South African youth also report making behavioral changes that could reduce their risk of HIV (Chart 14).** Among the 20% of all youth who are both sexually experienced (defined as youth who report ever having had sexual intercourse) and who have heard of *loveLife*, almost eight out of 10 (78%) report that as a result of *loveLife* they have used condoms when having sex. Almost seven out of 10 (69%) sexually experienced youth who have heard of *loveLife* report it has caused them to limit or reduce their number of sexual partners, and 63% say it has caused them to be more assertive in insisting on the use of a condom. But, one out of five sexually experienced youth who have heard of *loveLife* (20%) indicate that it has caused them to have sex more often. This means that in terms of sexually experienced South African youth overall, more than half (53%) report that as a result of *loveLife* they have used condoms when having sex, and almost half say that it has caused them to limit or

reduce their number of sexual partners (47%), but 14% of all sexually experienced youth say that as a result of *loveLife* they have sex more often.

- **Consistent with *loveLife*'s goal of creating an environment for more open communication about sex and sexuality, many young people who have heard of *loveLife* report that it has given them the opportunity to talk to their parents about sensitive issues (Chart 15).** Among the 62% of those who have heard of *loveLife*, 64% say it has provided them the opportunity to talk to their parents about HIV/AIDS, and nearly half say it has provided them the opportunity to talk with their parents about relationships between men and women (48%), sex (46%), and other difficult issues (48%).
- **While young people who are familiar with *loveLife* report that *loveLife* is providing them with an opportunity to talk to their parents about some difficult issues, they are much more likely to discuss *loveLife* itself with friends than with family members (Chart 16).** A little more than half (54%) of youth who have heard of *loveLife* report that they discuss it with their friends. Still, four out of 10 youth who have heard of *loveLife* report discussing it with their mother, and a similar number (37%) say they have talked about it with family members other than their parents or siblings. About one third (34%) say they have talked about it with their brother or sister. Fewer (16%) say they have discussed it with their father or with others (11%).
- **Young people seem to endorse *loveLife*'s focus on communication as large majorities of those youth who have heard of *loveLife* agree that more open communication about sex and sexuality can help reduce risk (Chart 17).** A large majority (82%) of those youth who had heard of *loveLife* agreed that more open communication about sex and sexuality could help reduce the risk of HIV/AIDS. A similar number (80%) indicated that they believe that open communication could help reduce the risk of teen pregnancy. Large majorities also agreed that more open communication about sex and sexuality could encourage adolescence to be more responsible (76%) and encourage them to delay sex (72%). Many fewer, but still three in ten (29%) of those who had heard of *loveLife* felt that open communication about sex and sexuality actually encourages adolescence to initiate sex, and two in 10 (19%) agree that this type of communication has no value.

### III. Parents' Views and Reported Experiences

- **Parents voice concern about HIV/AIDS, but have mixed views on whether open communication with their children can help promote good sexual health behavior (Chart 18, 19).** Four in ten parents of 12-17 year olds choose HIV/AIDS as the top concern for young South Africans today, which is more than those who choose sexual abuse (21%), crime (17%), unemployment (16%), or teenage pregnancy (6%). However, more parents disagreed (58%) than agreed

(42%) that open communication about sex and sexuality can help reduce the risk of a youth getting HIV/AIDS. This was also true when asked about a variety of other sexual health behaviors. On the other hands, most parents do not seem to feel that open communication promotes sex (86% disagree), just 14% agree that it does.

- **And while they are likely to report talking about HIV/AIDS with their children, parents are less likely to report having conversations about other sexual health concerns (Chart 20).** Parents of 12-17 year olds are considerably more likely to report that they talk with their teenager at least sometimes about their child's aspirations (79%, say 'often' or 'sometimes'), HIV/AIDS (72%), and alcohol and drugs (71%). Fewer, but still about half, say they talk with their child at least sometimes about the risks of unprotected sex (54%) or contraception (52%). Fewer report frequent conversations about pressure to have sex (38% say they do at least sometimes) or about deciding when and whether to have sex (36%), and more than 4 in ten say they have never talked with their child about either of these topics.
- **About four in ten parents are aware of *loveLife* and report that it has provided them with opportunities to talk with their children although they have taken few other actions (Chart 21, 22).** Among the 41% of parents of 12-17 year olds who say they have heard of *loveLife*, 61% say they have talked with their child about it.
- **Parents overall gave a generally positive assessment of *loveLife* (Chart 23).** After being read a description of *loveLife*, 88% of all parents of South African youth ages 12-17 agreed that they think *loveLife* is a good thing for the country. Conversely, twelve percent indicated that it was not a good thing for the country.

#### **IV. Final Thoughts– Challenges and Opportunities Highlighted by These Findings**

- **It is early.** *loveLife* was initiated only two years ago, and during that time, its visibility and programs have continued to expand. With that in mind, these findings reflect only the early stages of the *loveLife* effort. It will be critical to continue to look at both youth and others' reactions and engagement with the program over time.
- **Many still have not heard.** The findings reported here focus heavily on reports from the 62% of South African youth who have heard of *loveLife*, but it is important to recognize that currently almost four in ten (38%) 12-17 year olds are still not aware of this effort. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for those involved in *loveLife* to continue to broaden and enhance their efforts at getting the word out to other youth.

- **Awareness is just a first step.** While the findings suggest that many youth are aware of *loveLife* and its overall goals, awareness is just a first step in a long-term process of impacting actual attitudes and behaviors.
- **Reported behavior change may or may not reflect actual behavior change.** Many youth who have heard of *loveLife* report that it positively influenced their attitudes and behaviors, yet this survey is limited in its ability to shed light on actual behavior changes. An additional broader, multi-year evaluation that is currently underway will examine other key pieces of information for evaluating *loveLife*'s impact including indicators related to adolescent sexual behavior, such as delayed onset of sexual activity, condom use and reduction in number of sexual partners, as well as reductions in HIV infection, other STDs, and teenage pregnancy.
- **While youth seem open to more communication and believe it could help in the effort to ensure good sexual health outcomes, parents seem more reluctant and less convinced that it could make a difference.** One of the key challenges will be to convince more parents that open communication about sex and sexuality can in fact help ensure that South African youth make healthier choices.

### **Methodology**

The 2001 National Survey of South African Youth was conducted among a nationally representative random sample of 2204 youth ages 12-17 by Africa Strategic Research Corporation and the Kaiser Family Foundation. The parent survey was conducted among the 2204 parents or guardians of the youth who were interviewed. Interviews were conducted in person in the language of the respondents' choice between October and November, 2001. The margin of sampling error is plus or minus 2.3 percentage points for all youth and plus or minus 2.3 percentage points for parents. For results based on subsets of respondents the margin of sampling error is higher. Note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error.