

### **Women's agency in intimate partnerships – a case study in a rural South African community**

While numerous studies have focused on gender dynamics in sexual relations, the issue of sexual agency has barely been addressed in South Africa. This qualitative study aims to explore South African rural black women's agency in intimate partnerships at a time of transition and amidst the HIV/AIDS pandemic. It explores whether there is some empirical evidence for what is a common perception, namely the lack of agency that rural black women have in negotiating their sexual relationships and the impact that this has on the risk of HIV/AIDS. One of the assumptions made was that age is a critical variable because of the changing dynamics of time figurations in gender practice. It is suggested that in non-violent partnerships the decisive variable for a woman's capacity for agency both in terms of decision-making on having sex as well as their potential for HIV self-protection strategies is marital status and not age.