

# Underwear Exposure through Sagging: Unearthing Women and Girls' Perception of Young Males' Modern Style of Dressing in Zambia

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## ABSTRACT

*The social behaviour of dressing among young people characterized by jeans/trousers or panties hanging low exposing the underwear is an under researched area in Zambia despite the practice being commonplace in the streets, stations, schools, colleges and universities. The objective of this study was to bring out views and opinions of Zambian women and girls on the practice of sagging. The study took a qualitative approach. It was conducted in 4 provinces of Zambia among 120 participants- 20 males and 100 females aged between 18 and 50 years. This study found that majority of women regarded sagging as an obscene, embarrassing and childish practice that should be banned. A small proportion of female participants found sagging largely entertaining as well as an expression of being current with fashion trends. The study recommends that while it may be democratic for young people to express themselves through the style of dressing they love, it may be more rewarding for them to pause and consider the local cultural values.*

**KEY WORDS:** sagging, values, culture, underwear, exposure

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The underwear is the clothing closest to the male/female skin (Sang & Paik, 2009:1). It covers the male/female genitalia. This 'intimate apparel' (Datta 2018:166) is kept hidden and treated as an out-of-sight innerwear. Exposure of the underwear by either males or females is regarded as taboo in both developed and developing societies. In modern times however, some young men have transitioned from the time-honoured conservative culture of hiding the underwear to the style of intentional exposure of the undergarment through 'sagging'. Sagging is 'a style of dress characterized by the wearing of shorts/pants or a pair of trousers well below the waist, thus exposing the underwear and/or flesh to public view' (Koppel, 2007 in Vandivort, 2009:667). Sagging has been around since at least the early 1990s (Wellington 2007). Social scientists and Historians trace the origin of the style of sagging from the American prisons. It is reported that prisoners were supplied with extra-sized uniforms without belts for suicide prevention and for weapon prohibition (Koppel, undated in Vandivort, 2009). The practice was quickly adopted by street gangs as a means of self expression and self identification with gang and prison culture (Trebay, 2000).

Sagging was later embraced and popularized by rap artists. As hip-hop music topped the music chart, so did the artists' fame and their sagging style. Eventually, the practice found extreme popularity among the youth population, especially young men and boys (Chandler & Chandler- Smith, undated). Hip-hop music and the practice of sagging stormed Africa during early 1990s. Clark (2007) in an article titled *Africa: The Rise of African Hip Hop* explains that tales of poverty, crime, violence and corruption characterizing American Hip – hop and rap music at the time, were also stories countless urban African youths identified with. Hip-hop culture therefore, found fertile ground in Africa. Hip-hop music along with the culture surrounding it was quickly adopted by African youths who in no time began to mimic their American 'counterpart in dressing, speaking, and behaviour' (Uzobo et al. 2014:34). Thus in Nigeria, Uzobo et al.,(2014) observed that 'out of every ten young people in the street, 2 to 5 walk around with their undergarments revealed. In Kenya just like in other parts of Africa, 'early development of Kenyan hip-hop was heavily influenced by American hip-hop'(Barkley 2007:6).

In Zambia, hip-hop music and the style of sagging emerged during the early 1990s. Zambian youths from elite families owning a radio and television and could access magazines featuring rap and hip-hop artists were the earliest to embrace the style of sagging. These youths treasured the 'singularly muscular, tattooed, bald-headed, sagged jeans, bandana-clad image (Reeves, 2016) of Tupac Shakur. They would hang the poster(s) of Tupac and other American hip-hop artists close to where they slept in school dormitories. They adored and

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idolized Tupac Shakur, Notorious B.I.G, Snoop Doggy Dogg, Dr Dre, Queen Latifah and other pioneer rappers. They regarded themselves socially exposed and civilized. Oftentimes they walked in small bands and usually crushed on high school girls from elite families who undoubtedly understood who they were and what symbol they stood for. They spoke their English rather fast flavouring each word with American accent. They dressed and acted different- they pulled down their trousers, and wore a unique hair style. They walked as though the trousers were heavy. Wherever and whenever they met as a small group, they began to rap imitating their American rap idols. They would go, 'Dear Mama' or 'Snoopy Doggy Dogg and Dr Dre is at the door'... As self-styled disciples of the American hip-hop artists, they strove to raise their profiles in the social circles as having reached the pinnacle of civilization. While sagging was associated with delinquency and urban street gangs (Demby, 2014; Vandivort 2009 quoting a list of legal battles) in America, in Zambia, it was associated with elitism.

Zambian saggars imitated African Americans in many ways from accent, to gait, and behaviour. They could play and watch hip hop music from dusk to dawn. By the year 2020, the earliest saggars in Zambia, hit their mid 40s to early 50s in terms of age in years. The Zambian sagger pioneers may have moved away from the practice but the style of sagging has neither declined nor fizzled out. Today, hip-hop music has penetrated rural corners of the country and popularized the style of sagging among the youth population. With no known study exploring women and girls' perception on sagging this study is already a ground breaking research into the world of young people.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Findings of this study will shine a clearer light on how women and girls in Zambia perceive the young masculine culture of peeking out the underwear through sagging.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

The study used a cross-sectional explorative design. To ensure adequate 'contribution to understanding' (Sargeant, 2012:1) of the unique social life under study, collection of rich in-depth data, was achieved through a qualitative approach. The study was conducted between December, 2020 and August, 2021. Thomson (2004), surfing through articles grounded in qualitative research found that scholars used a wide range of sample size from 5 to 350. This study used a total of 120 participants broken down to 100 females and 20 males across 4 provinces of Zambia. Participants included High school students aged 18years and above, college and university students, house wives, civil servants, and those from the business world. To recruit participants for the study, two sampling methods were used namely purposive and convenient sampling methods. Participants recruited from boarding houses, offices, markets were sampled purposively while those met in shopping malls and streets were enlisted in the study through convenient sampling. The study used 4 Research Assistants- 1 in each of the 4 provinces. All the Research Assistants were holders of a Bachelor's Degree. Data collection was done through an open ended questionnaire for literate participants and interview for illiterate participants. Each province contributed a total of 30 participants- 25 females and 5 males.

A thorough explanation on the purpose of the study was provided to participants before data collection. Participation was voluntary. Participants answering the questionnaire were not allowed to indicate their names for confidentiality and anonymity. All the 80 questionnaires were answered. Participants who narrated their views through interviews did not introduce themselves using their names. Permission was granted to Research Assistants to record conversations but to delete immediately after data analysis. At the end of each interview, researchers re-played audio files for participants to verify, correct or add information. For data analysis, written content from the completed questionnaires were read and re-read. Recorded audio files were played repeatedly for familiarity. Qualitative data was analyzed through content and thematic analysis. The authors used content and thematic analysis for the purpose of 'generating new insights' (Braun & Clarke, 2006:77-101) as no similar study had been conducted in Zambia. Data analysis followed a six-phase approach as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2012) namely familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and producing report.

**III. Results**

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants**

VARIABLE	PARAMETRE			
Gender	Male	Female		
	20	100		
Age	18- 22	4	18- 22	20
	23-27	4	3-27	20
	28-32	3	28-32	15
	33-37	3	33-37	15
	38-42	3	38-42	15
	43 and above	3	43 and above	15
Marital Status	Single	12	Single	55
	Married	8	Married	45
Occupation	Farmer	2	Farmer	20
	Taxi/bus driver	3	Businesswoman	20
	Business man	3	Student	25
	Police Officer	2	Health Worker	15
	Teacher	2	Teacher	15
	Health Worker	4	Police woman	05
	Student	4		

**How does the Zambian society treat the underwear?**

The question was designed to find out how the undergarment was treated in Zambia. Participants answered universally that the underwear was treated with privacy across the country. It was washed in private, put out to dry in private, worn in private and kept as private clothing without any possibility of the wearer attempting to show it to the public intentionally.

‘The underwear is the clothing worn to cover and hide a person’s private parts. In our country the underwear has a high secretive stature’ (Female participant).

‘The underwear has a private fixture. Whenever it peeks out it stirs uncomfortability to the public’ (Male participant).

‘You can literally observe that the underwear is so private because people feel uncomfortable when buying it. They wash and dry it in private, wear it in private and are always conscious to avoid the underwear poking out in public’ (Female participant).

**What is your experience over males and underwear exposure?**

This question was intended to gain an accurate and deep understanding of the existence of underwear exposure practice among males through sagging. Participants explained that underwear exposure had reached epidemic proportion in the country among the youth population. Participants added that the adult population had also to some extent adopted the style. The age range of males reported to be hooked to the practice of sagging was 12 to 40 years.

‘I see a lot of males especially youths proudly exposing the underwear in public. The practice is common at bus stations, in buses, minibuses, taxis, schools, colleges and universities. Males deliberately pull the jeans down so that the underwear is seen’ (Female participant).

‘The moment you wake up, know that it’s a new day and a new exposure to male underwear because the practice is everywhere’ (Female participant).

‘Males are crazy though not everyone but those between 12 to 40years because they do their business while the underwear is showing’ (Female participant).

‘Young adults no longer treat the underwear private. They deliberately leave it out to the public to see. In most cases the public not only see the underwear but also the cleft jaggging out between the buttocks’ (Male participant).

When asked to state in terms of marital and educational status who precisely was a firm adherent to the sagging practice, participants explained that the style was prevalent among singles and less common among the married

males. Similarly, the practice was reported to have gained a substantial foothold among the less educated than the educated population though the practice was excessively rampant in colleges and universities.

'Sagging is common among single males as most of them are still at primary, high school or in college or university' (Female participant).

'The practice is widespread among the less educated married male adults' (Male participant).

#### **Where do you think the style of underwear exposure among Zambian males originate?**

This question attempted to find out from participants the plausible origin of sagging. Participants reported that exposure to American hip-hop artists was the origin of sagging among male youths in Zambia.

'Our youths copied from hip-hop artists in America' (Male participant).

'Sagging originated from the Western world through rap music' (Female participant).

When participants were asked to state the kind of underwear commonly exposed, they explained that designer innerwear were commonly shown to the public.

'I see all kinds of underwear but designer panties are commonly exposed' (Female participant).

'Underwear with a label such as Adidas, Nike are commonly exposed' (Female participant).

'Some expose boxers' (Female participant).

'Some males expose expensive intimate brands such as Hugo Boss, Calvin Klein, Emporio Armani, Derek Rose including Versace' (Female participant).

#### **What do you think are the reasons for underwear exposure among males?**

The purpose of this question was to find out why the practice of sagging had been embraced by the male folk. Participants explained that sagging existed for self-identity expression, as an embodiment of fashion, as a means to lure females, attention seeking and conformity.

'It is the utmost desire of every youth to fit in society and create space for oneself where the entire society will recognize and appreciate him. If he feels sagging would put him above the rest in society he will go for it' (Female participant).

'To suit trending fashion as there are low-waisted sagging jeans on the market' (Female participant).

'Sagging is an investment meant to attract females' (Female participant).

'The underwear shown in public is a dangling carrot a man waves to females that he is available for sex' (Male participant).

'In adult males, sagging is a means for attracting young girls' (Female participant).

'Other males sag their jeans to suit the behaviour of their peers' (Female participant).

'Some sag to show off that they are in the class of their own' (Female participant).

#### **How do you find the practice of underwear exposure among males?**

This question was meant to pull out feelings, views and opinions of females over the style of exposing underwear among males. The general comment from female participants was that the practice was disgusting, disrespectful and sickening. Some young female participants aged 18 years and very few educated adult females explained that while the practice was abhorred by society in general, they offered liberal views.

'I find the practice irritating' (Female participant).

'For me the practice is not pleasing at all because most males do not wash their underwear' (Female participant).

'It is a sign of immaturity' (Female participant).

'Whoever sags is a big baby in man's body! That's how I feel' (Female participant).

'Very annoying' (Female participant).

'If such a man would dare propose love to me I will tell him please look elsewhere until you grow up' (Female participant).

'Shameful' (Female participant).

'Bad behaviour' (Female participant).

'Junk. I wouldn't feel proud to introduce such a man to my friends as my boyfriend' (Female participant).

'Nauseating' (Female participant).

'Childish' (Female participant).

'Uncultured' (Female participant).

'Embarrassing because some men expose torn underwear' (Female participant).

'A bad example to children' (Female participant)

'Disgraceful to society' (Female participant).

'Insulting and disrespectful to women' (Female participant).

'Real cartoonish and the actor a playboy' (Female participant)

'A sign of moral declension' (Female participant).

'If a man copies such kind of dressing, it's easier for him to do drugs' (Female participant).

'Totally indecent for me' (Female participant).

'There are certain men who fail to wipe themselves up each time they leave the toilet, and society is made to see fecal matter smeared along the cleft through sagging. That's horrible man!' (Female participant).

Some young female participants who said they were still in high school or college had divergent views about the practice.

'It's ok for me so long the underwear exposed is pure white and expensive' (Female participant).

'If a dude wears expensive underwear brand then he can as well buy his lady an expensive panties. You see that' (Female participant).

'I like such men. They are more loving and more entertaining. They will hug you, kiss you, sing you a song and buy you gifts. In short they know how to treat a woman' (Female participant).

'For me that's swag' (Female participant).

A few females in formal employment had this to say:

'You cannot judge a man's personality based on the style of his dressing. For me I look beyond the fashion and appreciate a man who he is what he is capable of doing and so on' (Female participant).

'Social life is dynamic the fashion of yesterday cannot be the yardstick for today' (Female participant).

'Our society is democratic. Democracy allows people to express themselves freely and if men feel sagging is the best way to express themselves then who cares' (Female participant).

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

Sagging is a style of dressing common among male youths where the undergarment is visible. The practice has been around in Zambia for 30 years. This study explored women and girls' perception of the fashion. This study found that participants were aware that sagging had established itself as a way of life among males especially the youth society. Participants defined sagging as the style of dressing that leaves the inner wear showing to the public. This definition tallies with the well-established definition – 'a style of dress characterized by the wearing of pants well below the waist, thus exposing underwear and/or flesh to public view' Koppel 2007 in Vandivort, 2009). The study found that sagging is a foreign style of dressing in Zambia copied from the American hip-hop artists. Through culture diffusion as a result of improved technology, music, videos, magazines, movies and social interaction between urban youths and rural youths social pressure to adopt what youths watch and hear has been on ascendancy. Findings of this study support the findings of Uzobo et al., (2014) in their article titled *Indecent Dressing and Awareness of Health Problems: A Study of 'Sagging' Dress Pattern Among Selected Male High School Students in Bayelsa State* found that sagging among Nigerian youths was a recent social behaviour imported from American rappers.

This study also found that saggings were prompted to pull down their jeans intentionally and walk around with their underwear poking out because they fell victim to the circulating male fashion wave. Some did so to express an identity of being socially exposed while others as a means to attract females. Participants reported that saggings, using sagging as a tool to hunt females usually targeted young girls or older women to devour their financial savings. One participant narrated, 'one should not write off saggings. They are extremely witty. Their accent is American, their language is invigorating to females, their knowledge of technology is unmatched, their manners polished, respectful and entertaining. Tell me which one among females would fend off such a young man? These are young men who succeed to convince elderly women to fall in love with them' (Male participant). This study found that most female participants were disgusted with the practice of sagging. Participants related sagging to decline in morality and an assault to local cultural values. Participants' views in this study support the views of some of the women in the United States of America. One lady in America simply said, 'pants hanging off a young male's butt, in some cases exposing dirty-looking boxers, is disgusting' (Mitchell, 2012). While in India the style of youths walking around with droopy jeans especially in parts which remain conservative even today, sagging is often frowned upon as indecent (Raina, 2009).

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

The social behaviour of dressing characterized by jeans/trousers or panties hanging low exposing the underwear is an under researched area in Zambia despite the practice being commonplace in the streets, stations, schools, colleges and universities. The objective of this study was to bring out views and opinions of Zambian women and girls over the practice. This study found that majority of women regarded sagging as an obscene, embarrassing and childish practice that should be banned. A small proportion of participants found sagging more entertaining and an expression of being current with fashion.

#### **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that while it may be democratic for young people to express themselves through the style of dress they love, it may be more rewarding for them to pause and consider the local cultural values. Primary, high schools, colleges and universities should codify modest dressing in their rules, ban and punish all forms of immodest dressing including sagging. Meanwhile, families, churches and communities

should unitedly inculcate sound moral values including acceptable dress code. Councils and Parliament to enact anti-sagging laws to bar young people from sliding into the practice of sagging.

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