



YouthNet

Early sexual debut, sexual violence, sexual risk-taking behavior and unintended pregnancy among adolescents in Uganda & Jamaica



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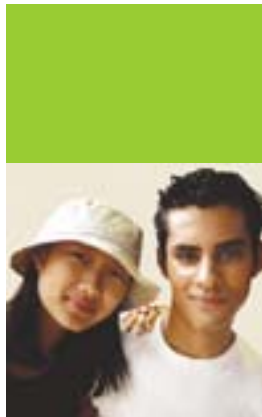
Rakai Health Sciences Program



Study rationale



- Need to identify underlying causes of adolescent pregnancy & to establish programs that provide acceptable, culturally appropriate measures for preventing unintended adolescent pregnancy
- Early sexual debut (first sexual intercourse at or before age 14) & sexual violence contribute to high rates of unintended pregnancy and STIs/HIV, among adolescents in resource-poor settings
- Strong link between early sexual debut and non-consensual sex
- Sexual violence linked with sexual risk-taking behavior, i.e., having more than one sexual partner and/or having unprotected sexual intercourse which places women at risk for pregnancy and/or STI/HIV infection



Study rationale

- Gender norms influence sexual debut, sexual violence and adolescent pregnancy
- Concerns about powerlessness experienced by adolescent girls in sexual relationships & how this affects their ability to self-protect against unintended pregnancy and HIV calls into question prevention strategies for young women experiencing coerced sex that rely on abstinence alone (or ABC approach)
- Study describes the relationships between sexual debut, sexual coercion/violence, and sexual risk-taking among pregnant adolescents & never pregnant peers
- Context of these linkages is critical to success of programs addressing unintended adolescent pregnancy

Phase I



- Study objective: to identify contextual factors & circumstances that influence pregnancy among young women: *Factors of particular interest include*:
 - What influences early sexual debut (14 years or younger)
 - What experiences (if any) are reported on sexual violence (sexual harassment, sexual coercion, physical violence, forced sex)
 - What are participants' perceptions/reports of their own sexual risk-taking (having more than one partner, having unprotected intercourse)
- Sites: Rakai District, Uganda & Kingston, Jamaica



Phase I Study Design

- Participants: young women age 15-17 years old
- Qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs)
- Series of in-depth interviews with pregnant and never pregnant, but sexually active adolescents

Data collection methods



Focus group discussions

- 2 FGDs with pregnant and 2 FGDs with never pregnant participants
- Semi-structured format including following topics:
 - Familiarity with “ABC” messages
 - Circumstances around sexual debut
 - Decision-making between boys and girls regarding sexual relationships
 - Contraceptive use
 - Gender norms related to sexual violence
 - Places to get help related to violence, role of parents, and education in schools regarding sexual debut and sexual violence

In-depth interviews

- Series of 3 interviews with pregnant + never pregnant but sexually active key informants
 - Uganda: 12 preg, 14 non-preg
 - Jamaica: 15/15
- Interview #1: Self and others
 - self-perceptions and gender norms
- Interview #2: Sex
 - sexual debut and any past sexual violence
- Interview #3: Pregnancy and sexual risk-taking
 - Risk perception associated with own sexual behaviors, including pregnancy

Experience of sexual debut (1)



- **Who initiates first sex?** All participants said first sex initiated/suggested by her male partner.
- **Use of contraception:** Most ‘never pregnant’ girls used condoms or some other contraception at first sex. Most pregnant girls used no contraception. In Jamaica, many of the pregnant girls had not really considered the possibility of getting pregnant.
- **Wantedness:** In Uganda, when directly asked, most said they wanted their 1st sex. In Jamaica, there was much ambivalence—many felt pressure though few would say it was forced.
- **Feelings about whether or not it was the right time for 1st sex:** Most said it was not the right age and wished they had waited until they were older.
- In Jamaica, almost all participants described it as “painful” or “unpleasant.”

Experience of sexual debut (2)



Reasons for having first sex

- “It just happened.”
- Wanted to see what it was like
- Love and affection for partner
- Boyfriend wanted it
- Verbal pressure
- Physical force
- In Uganda, there were promises of gifts, money or marriage or the obligation of sex within marriage

“I was still young – I should have been older than that – maybe like 18 or 20 years – by then I would have become a real girl who is grown up.”
-16 year old pregnant, married Ugandan woman who had her first sex at age 14

“it wouldn't be bad to abstain but boys can force you "nakulemerako" (refuse to leave you alone).... we as girls would try it (abstinence) but the boys force us.” *-Uganda FGD with never pregnant participants*

“My grandmother told me that she is very old she does not have money so we (orphans) should cater for ourselves...No (I didn't want the first sex) - I wanted money - to buy books - If I had books, I would not have sex.”
-16 year old pregnant Ugandan woman living with her grandmother because her parents had both died; had her first sexual experience at the age of 14

“It was embarrassing because I had no idea what I was doing..yeah..it was embarrassing and you felt bad.” *-Never pregnant girl from Jamaica*

“I went to his house late in the evening. We started kissing and then it just happened.” *Jamaican girl who was 16 when she first had sex*

Sexual coercion (1)



“...refers to a range of experiences that compel a person to have sex against her or his will.¹

- violence,
- threats,
- verbal insistence,
- deception,
- cultural expectations or
- economic circumstances”

Results in "lack of choice to pursue other options without severe social or physical consequences." ²

¹Heise L, Ellsberg M and Gottemoeller M, Ending violence against women, Population Reports, 1999, Series L, No. 11.

²Heise L, Moore K and Toubia N, Sexual coercion and reproductive health: a focus on research, New York: Population Council, 1995.

Sexual coercion (2)



- Continuum of lifetime experiences of coercion among participants:
 - **Forced sex.** Includes use of verbal threats, intimidation, physical force ('holding me down'), rape
 - **Lack of choice due to marital status.** Sex was a non-choice for those young women with husbands or in consensual union, due to cultural norms surrounding marriage, brideprice, and a wife's obligation to have sex with her husband whenever he wants. (Uganda)
 - **Unwanted sex.** Refers to having sex when she is not in the mood or she does not like it. Commonly explained as being done because it is easier (to have sex) than resisting social/peer/partner pressure placed upon them.
 - **Unwanted sexual touching**
 - **Verbal sexual harassment**

“...when I have stomach cramps, fever, and am very tired...my husband wants sex...I try to tell him that I am tired but he refuses and forces me to have sex against my wish.” -17 year old pregnant informant (Uganda)

“He used to come [to my] home all the time and I decided to do it so as to stop him from coming home and leave me alone.”
-14 year old never pregnant respondent (Uganda) who had 1st sex with boy and then ended the relationship

“At one point...He was trying to talk me into it and then he held me down but I was still refusing...I was vex afterwards...Bad, I felt bad and sad.” -Pregnant Jamaican girl

“I was there alone. He forced me to have sex and I didn't want to. [Why did you think you had no choice?] Maybe he would have hit me or something. I am afraid of him. He is very tall.”
-Never pregnant Jamaican girl

Feelings about adolescent pregnancy (from pregnant participants' perspective)



- Most did not plan to get pregnant; some explained with ambivalence that it “just happened.”
- Some aware that condoms could prevent pregnancy but not a viable option (partner refused, shops closed, incorrect use by partners); a few mentioned traditional methods of family planning (that failed them). Many not aware of any family planning methods.
- In Uganda, about ½ of pregnant participants happy about their pregnancies and the other ½ of participants not happy for a variety of reasons including a premature end to schooling, fear of parents' disapproval, anticipated pain and suffering due to the pregnancy itself, and anticipated financial burden.
- Most participants (married and unmarried) said it was not the right time for them to get pregnant. Better times to get pregnant included when a woman an adult/older (ex. 18 or 20), when she was out of her parents' house, when she is married, when she is of age to make her own decisions

Phase II



- Study objective: to determine the associations among the following variables: early sexual debut; sexual violence; sexual risk-taking behavior and unintended pregnancy
- Site: Kingston, Jamaica

Phase II Study design



- Participants: young women age 15-17 years old
- Quantitative interviews with a case-control design, to measure and compare the magnitude of the relationships between early sexual debut and sexual violence among pregnant adolescents compared to their never pregnant, but sexually active same-age peers

Phase II data collection methods



- 250 cases (pregnant) and 500 controls (never pregnant)
- Cases recruited through antenatal clinics and controls were same-age peers matched on neighborhood
- Survey questions developed based on Phase I data
 - Background information
 - Relationships and sexual experience
 - Experience of sexual violence
 - Experience of pregnancy (cases)



Key results: Background characteristics

	Controls (n=500)	Cases (n=250)	Total (n=750)
	%	%	%
Mean Age (years)	16	16	16
Attended at least secondary school	96	96	96
Lived in community less than 3 years*	17	24	20
Actively practices religion	32	34	33
Currently lives with father*[1]	26	20	24
Currently lives with mother*	69	61	66
Mother gives both emotional and financial support*	83	76	81
Father gives both emotional and financial support	47	40	44
Did not drink alcohol in last 4 weeks**	66	96	76
Involved in clubs/community groups in the area**	23	14	20
Relationship with parents/guardian is good or very good	63	65	64

[1] 'Currently lives with father' and 'Currently lives with mother' are not mutually exclusive

* p < .05

** p < .01

Key results:

Relationships, sex, and pregnancy



	Controls (n=500)	Cases (n=250)	Total (n=750)
	%	%	%
Relationship status **			
Single: in stable relationship and living w/ boyfriend	7	22	12
Single: in stable relationship and not living w/ boyfriend	73	66	70
Single: No relationship or casual relationship only	21	13	6
Age at first sex <=14 *	41	54	45
Partner for first sex was more than 5yrs older**	11	19	13
# of lifetime partners			
1	49	36	45
2	25	35	28
3+	25	29	26
Used contraceptive during 1st sexual intercourse**	88	80	86
Believes it is the woman's responsibility to use a contraceptive**	13	21	16
Ever used anything to avoid/delay getting pregnant*	84	78	82
Thinks it is very important to protect self against pregnancy**	98	91	96
Adults have talked to her about protecting self from pregnancy	98	96	97

** p < .01

* p < .05

Key results: Experiences of sexual coercion or violence



	Controls (n=500)	Cases (n=250)	Total (n=750)
	%	%	%
First time participant had sex, she was...			
Willing (wanted to)	66	66	66
Persuaded (did not really want to/not sure, talked into it)	27	26	27
Forced or raped (physically forced, held down, hit)	7	6	6
Last time participant had sex, she was...			
Willing (wanted to)	89	91	90
Persuaded (did not really wanted to/not sure, talked into it)	8	7	8
Forced or raped (physically forced, held down, hit, threaten)	3	2	2
Ever been touched in a way that made her feel uncomfortable *	63	51	59
Ever been a victim of violence at home	18	14	17
Feels safe at home	82	85	83
Partner has ever physically forced her to have sexual intercourse	25	19	23
Had ever had sexual intercourse when she did not want to	19	19	19
Partner has ever forced her to do something sexually degrading	6	6	6
Ever received money/gifts/something in exchange for sex	7	6	7

** p < .01

Summary points



- While many participants said they “wanted” their first sex, actually for many participants, their first sex was coerced; therefore the timing of their first sex (sexual debut) was not a choice.
- Lifetime experiences of sexual coercion were common.
- Conscious use of contraception main difference between pregnant and never pregnant girls in both countries; however, there is a lack of knowledge and/or misconceptions about family planning methods in general.
- Most pregnant participants did not plan their pregnancies and did not think it was the right time to be pregnant.
- Married adolescent women constitute a unique group with distinct needs when it comes to accessing/using health services and making decisions about sex, when to get pregnant and how many children to have (Uganda).

Program implications (1)



- Need for more education for girls *and boys* about sexuality, gender equality/respect for partners' rights, and communication and negotiation skills including teaching young people that sex can be a shared decision—wanted by both partners.
- Needs to be more intensive education about and access to contraception; however, pregnancy prevention programs must also address the social and cultural context of young women's lives.
- Support for continuing education needed for pregnant girls and generally, economic activities for girls/women.

Program implications (2)



- Sexual violence/coercion are related to gender equality and respect: this could be a focus on primary prevention with younger ages 10-14 years (before sexual debut)
- Pregnancy and HIV prevention programs need to address gender based violence and special needs of adolescents