

Opportunities to tailor HIV prevention programming for Ugandan young adults

Michele Ybarra MPH PhD¹, Tonya Prescott BA¹, Emmanuel Kyagaba²

¹Center for Innovative Public Health Research ²Mbarara University of Science and Technology

INTRODUCTION

Uganda, like most Sub-Saharan African countries, has comprehensive HIV prevention campaigns, yet programs tailored to young adults are completely lacking.



http://www.newvision.co.ug/search/young%20adult?button=&facet=true&page=2&per_page=10&sort=relevance1&utf8=%E2%9C%93

METHODS

In 2016, 202 18-22 year olds were recruited from across Uganda via Facebook to take part in online, 3-day, asynchronous focus groups (FGs). The aim of the FGs was to understand sexual health decision making to inform HIV prevention content development. The study sample was purposefully balanced on age, district, educational attainment, employment status, and income. Eight FGs were conducted; participants were stratified by sex and sexual behavior in the past 12 months.

RESULTS

Young adults who were abstinent said they were making this choice because they treasured virginity; and wanted to stay STD-free and avoid pregnancies. There were drawbacks, particularly for women who said that their boyfriends may leave if they did not have sex. Peer pressure and feeling excluded from those who were having sex were also disadvantages.

Ugandan young adults talked about the cultural norm of having multiple partners, both for financial gain and social status. Using condoms was universally noted as the right thing to do. At the same time, sexually active youth voiced several barriers to condom use, including: being allergic to rubber, fear of getting cancer with frequent use, and embarrassment.

When asked about how confident they were in negotiating condoms, sexually experienced women voiced a range of

responses from 'I can't at all' to 'sometimes' to 'always'.

Refusing sex was possible: If a woman did not want to have sex, respondents said she could blame it on her period and if a man did not want to have sex, he could say he was 'tired'. That said, all agreed that the refusal of sex in a relationship could be met with consequences (e.g., distrust by one's partner, an end to the relationship).



http://www.newvision.co.ug/search/young%20adult?button=&facet=true&page=2&per_page=10&sort=relevance1&utf8=%E2%9C%93

CONCLUSION

Several important challenges that Uganda young adults face in making healthy sexual decisions were voiced. These issues need to be directly addressed in HIV prevention programs tailored to this age group.

FUNDING

The project described is supported by Award Number R34 MH109296A from the **National Institute of Mental Health**. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institute of Mental Health.