



# **Status report on the sexual and reproductive health of youth living in urban slums in Kenya**

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**Project: Strengthening Evidence for the Programming of Unintended Pregnancy (STEP UP)**

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# Kenyan Context: Urban Poor

- Adolescents make up a considerable proportion of urban population in Kenya.
  - Many in Nairobi live in the numerous slum settlements which house between 60 and 70% of the city's residents
  - Environment characterized by extreme poverty, poor schooling opportunities, early marriage, limited access to family planning services, illiteracy, sexual violence, and lack of access to essential services and amenities



# Kenyan Context: Urban Poor

- Increased risk for HIV infection, risky sexual behaviors, early childbearing, and other adverse SRH outcomes
  - 40 % of adolescent girls initiated sex at age 16 compared to 20% of non slum adolescent girls
  - Knowledge about contraception is inadequate; access to contraceptive methods limited
  - Girls below age 20 account for 16% of the over 20, 000 abortion related complications
    - 57% of abortions came from slum settlements
  - 13,000 Kenyan girls drop out of school annually because of an unintended pregnancy



# Objectives of Study

- Little attention has been paid to understanding and meeting the SRH challenges of adolescents living in resource poor urban settings.
  - Factors associated with SRH knowledge of young people
  - Understanding SRH attitudes and behaviors among urban poor
  - Understanding the needs of, and options for reaching, urban slum adolescents with messages and services about family planning, SRH including STIs/HIV, abortion, and infant, child and maternal health.



# Methodology

- Study is based on data from the Transition-to-Adulthood (TTA) project conducted by APHRC from 2007-2010, among 12-22 year olds living in Viwandani and Korogocho
  - 4058 young people interviewed as part of Wave one; respondents were re-interviewed in 2009 and 2010
  - Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected
  - Findings are based on simple descriptive statistics & cross-tabulations of mainly wave one data; as well as evidence based on the qualitative data



# Results: Descriptive Statistics

- The sample was almost equally distributed between males and females (51% vs. 49%)
- Most (89%) of adolescents had never been married
- Fifty-eight percent of adolescents were still in school
- About two-thirds (68%) of young people had at most a primary level of education
- Eight out of ten adolescents (81%) reported living with a parent or guardian



# SRH Knowledge of Urban Youth

- Awareness of menstrual cycle
  - Females are more likely to be aware
    - Higher proportion of out of school youths were aware of fertile period
    - Positively associated with education and age
- Knowledge of fertile period within the menstrual cycle
  - Only one in four girls accurately stated conception was most likely half way between periods
  - Positively associated with education, though differences were not very big



# SRH Attitudes:

Attitudes towards contraception and condom use

- Abstinence regarded as the best way to avoid pregnancy by most respondents; however, in some few cases abortion was suggested

*“It is just about sex, some people just have sex for fun, they don’t know what it means and again, early marriage, having babies at the wrong time, I mean when they are still too young...”*

***Interviewer:** What are some of the strategies that young people in this neighborhood use to cope with these challenges?*

***Respondent...** Some abstain, others use contraception...some do abortions.” (Viwandani, female, separated, 20)*



# SRH Attitudes:

Attitudes towards contraception and condom use

- Notable misconceptions were also expressed by respondents

*“There are some girls who are involved in sexual activities and use preventives like birth control pills, she advices us that starting to use those pills in early stages of life for a girl they are likely to make you barren in future. We are also told at school that the use of condoms is not good because there are some chemicals used in their manufacture and constant use of them can affect you in one way or another.” (Viwandani female, 16, single)*



# SRH Attitudes

- Intention to use contraception
  - 45% of boys and 52% of girls report intent to use in future
  - Uncertainty about future contraceptive use was higher for those currently in school but lower for those with at least a secondary education
  - Currently married and formerly married were more likely to report future intentions to use contraceptives





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# Reproductive Behavior

- Pregnancy Experience
  - Overall, 22% had ever been pregnant; 61% of sexually experienced had ever been pregnant
  - Negative association with education (72 vs. 42%) and current schooling status (68% vs. 5%)
  - Higher proportion of married and formerly married girls had ever been pregnant (86% and 52% respectively)
- Similar results were observed for girls who had initiated childbearing



# Reproductive Behavior: Unintended Pregnancy

- Overall 37% of adolescents had experienced an unintended pregnancy
  - 18% were mistimed; 19% were unwanted
  - Significant differences by age: younger women more likely to report pregnancy was unwanted
  - Marginal differences by education



# Reproductive Behavior

- Reasons for pregnancy varied and ranged from ‘mistake’, coercion, peer pressure, envy, and economic need

*“Q: you told me you got your first born at 16; did you plan for that pregnancy?”*

*A: “No, I didn’t even know that I was pregnant, it was a mistake I had not planned to start having babies at that time I was still living with my parents and I wronged my father.” (Female, married, 22 years)*



# Reproductive Behavior

- *“It was under pressure and I didn’t enjoy it [first sexual intercourse]. I had to do it to get a job...it was my first time to do it, I was also drunk and we didn’t use any protection that is why I got pregnant...it was not planned for.”  
(Married female, 23 years)*



# Discussion

- Findings underscore the significant challenges that adolescents in the slums face with regards to:
  - lack of knowledge on sexual and reproductive health matters,
  - attitudes that reflect prescribed ideologies; and
  - risky sexual behavior that tends to increase adverse outcomes for this group of youth.



# Discussion

- Substantial gaps in their understanding of sexual and reproductive knowledge
- Complex range of influences on young people's beliefs, perceptions and attitudes
  - Complexity of association between attitudes and behavior e.g. use of condoms
- Limited education was associated with adverse outcomes e.g. experience of unwanted pregnancy



# Preliminary Policy and Programmatic Implications

- Preliminary results point to a diversity of experiences among adolescents with regards to knowledge, attitude and behavior
  - Targeted programs are needed to reach them with range of SRH information and services at different stages – before they initiate sex, as sexually active unmarried youth, or as married individuals and couples.
  - Involving parents in SRH interventions
  - Continued marketing of condoms
- Poverty reduction strategies therefore remain crucial

