

FACT SHEET ON YOUTH: MEN AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

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HIGHLIGHTS

- ***The young Jamaican man has his first sexual intercourse at an earlier age than his counterpart in the rest of the Caribbean.¹***
- ***Most young men lack accurate and adequate reproductive health information.***
- ***Jamaican men are socially encouraged and culturally pressured to show their sexual prowess.***
- ***Less than 50% of sexually active adolescent males use condoms consistently.***
- ***Jamaican men are at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections and becoming fathers.***
- ***Most young men view "saying NO to sex" as a girl's responsibility;***
- ***Few young fathers learn about parenting from any formal source in their lifetime and express the need for additional information or programmes to deal with issues of fathering.***

Background

Reproductive health is a crucial area of discussion in Jamaica today as it relates, not only to physical health but also encompasses mental and social well being. Sadly, the reproductive health of men has commanded less attention than that of women. The main issues associated with men's reproductive health are: the male influence on female health and child rearing; male participation in the reproductive process and how that participation impacts on their own definition of sexuality, identity and gender roles.² The exploration and understanding of these issues separate from its female equivalent, are important because of the cultural pressure and social encouragement experienced by male adolescents to be sexually active.

Sociologists observe that Jamaican manhood is demonstrated by sexual prowess and is usually measured by the number of serial, or concurrent, female sexual partners and the number of children that result from each sexual relationship. Many Jamaican men subscribe to this behaviour as it affirms their heterosexuality and refutes any possible reference of homosexuality, a practise culturally seen as deviant.³

Early sexual initiation, cultural ideologies related to male sexual behaviour, the prevalence of misinformation regarding sex and sexuality, and the difficulties that many young men face in accessing correct reproductive health information and services in their communities, put them at risk of becoming fathers before they are ready and contracting sexually transmitted infections (STIs).⁴

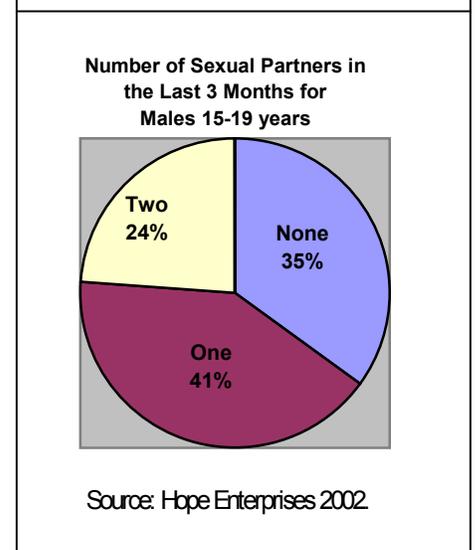
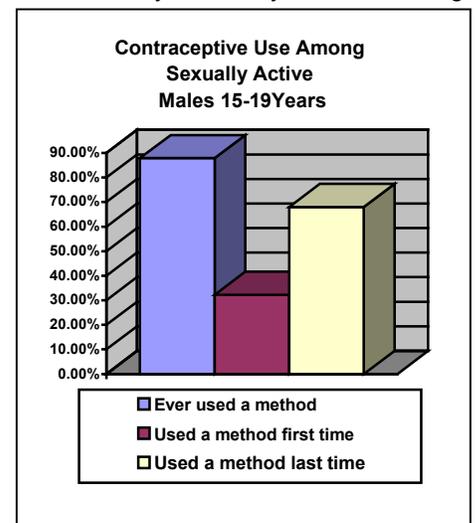
Sexual Initiation

Sexual activity begins early for many Jamaican men. The average age at first sexual intercourse for males, 15-19 years, in 2001, was 13.2 years.¹ Boys' early sexual debut is treated with tolerance and even amusement; this is not the case with girls. There is concern about male heterosexual orientation, so advances are greeted with relief by caregivers.⁵ A recent study found that in 2000, of adolescent males, ages 15-19 years, 91% admitted to being sexually experienced. It also found that approximately 20% of males, aged 10-14 years, were sexually active by 2001.⁶

Chevannes', et al. (2000) study of young men, ages 10-24, conducted in rural, suburban, and inner city communities, found that most of the young men had had sexual intercourse by the time they reached age 19. Young men from the inner city areas were more likely to have first sexual intercourse between the ages of 10-14. Most young men said that abstinence did not apply to them. The men from suburban areas, who said abstinence was viable, said it would be very difficult.⁷

Adolescent Males at Risk of STIs, and early Fatherhood

Among the 15-19 sexually active males, figures show that almost half of them (48%), do not always use a condom with their



regular sexual partner. They are slightly more cautious with non-regular partners with 41% of them not using a condom every time they have sex.⁸ Data from the 1997 RHS show that only 36% of adolescent males ages, 15 to 19 years, and 27% of men, ages 20 to 24 years, use a condom every time they have sexual intercourse.⁹

In the same study, 41.7% of sexually active adolescent males, 10-14 years, admitted to having multiple sex partners. Fifty-four percent of males between 15-19 years admitted the same.⁹ 21% of young men, ages 15-24, who were currently involved in an intimate relationship, had sex with two or more partners in the last 3 months.

In a recent study (Gayle, 2002) of 194 fathers, whose partners attended the Women's Centre when pregnant as teenagers, only two had fewer than two partners, and three men reported having as many as over 30 sexual partners before age 19.¹⁰

Accurate or Adequate Sexual & Reproductive Health Information Lacking

Most young men receive reproductive health information from school, homes, and the streets. Young men from inner city communities are more likely than other young men to cite the streets as their primary source of this information.⁷ In a survey of students, ages 11-14 (Jackson, et al. 1998), less than 11% of boys correctly identified the point during the menstrual cycle when a girl is most likely to become pregnant, and only 50% knew that pregnancy was possible at first sexual intercourse.

About 26% of boys believed that oral contraceptives could protect against STIs. 44% of them believed that sex with a virgin could cure STIs.¹¹ In a national survey of youth, aged 15-24 years, 22% of men did not know that correct and consistent use of condoms prevents many STIs, and 40% of youth did not know that oral contraceptives are highly effective in preventing pregnancy.¹

Men are at Risk of STIs, including HIV/AIDS

Jamaica's highest infection rate for HIV/AIDS occurs among youth aged 15-24. The estimated prevalence rate among young men, aged 15 to 24, is 0.07%.¹² Risk factors reported by HIV infected persons include, a history of STIs (38.7%), multiple sex partners (31.8%), and sexual intercourse with a sex worker (23%).

Many young men under 15 years first experience sex with a commercial sex worker.¹³ About 25% of sex workers in Montego Bay and 9% of those in Kingston, in the late 1990s, were HIV infected.¹⁴ One out of fifteen men reported with AIDS, have sex with both women and men.¹² Men 50 years and older are 2.5 times more at risk of HIV infection than women in the same age group, and the number of such AIDS cases have doubled in the last three years.¹²

Homophobia and Homosexuality

Jamaica can be reasonably described as one of the countries most intolerant of homosexuality in the Western Hemisphere². In general, anal intercourse is considered revolting by Jamaicans, whether with a woman or a man. There is extreme homophobia among Jamaica's male population and even discussion of the topic can cause unease and discomfort.²

Jamaican mothers are more likely to warn their sons of early sexual activity with women, than fathers, because of their fears. Young men feel it important to have more than one girlfriend to safeguard the possibility of being associated with homosexuals.²

Early Fatherhood and Family Planning

Seldom are young Jamaican men prepared for the responsibility of fatherhood. According to Gayle (2002) very few young fathers learn about parenting from any formal source in their lifetime. Most of the information the young men receive is from female relatives. However, boys prefer to discuss issues of sexuality and reproductive health with their fathers. The study also shows that there is a serious need for programmes aimed at assisting

fathers to deal with issues of fathering. To date very few sustained programme exists, one being Fathers Incorporated, which assists fathers with related issues.¹⁰

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Fact Sheet on Youth in Jamaica: Men and Reproductive Health



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