Evidence on delay in sexual initiation, multiple partnerships and condom use among young people: the PAHO review of Caribbean HIV behavioural studies
Young people age 15-24 are key to HIV epidemiology

- It has been estimated that 50% of HIV transmission globally takes place in this age group
- Frequency of sexual activity and partner turnover are high
- Limited skills to adopt safer sexual practices such as delay in sexual initiation (or “Abstinence”), reduction in the number of sex partners (or “Being faithful”) and condom use
Most quantitative HIV surveys in the Caribbean have been with youth (with varying age groups) or the general population (usually with 25-49 age group).

Many have been used for national monitoring or reporting but have not been published in peer reviewed literature nor compared systematically to develop a Caribbean profile.

The Pan American Health Organisation HIV Caribbean Office (PHCO) commissioned a review to synthesise Caribbean HIV seroprevalence and behavioural studies.

This presentation focuses on review results relating to the sexual behaviour of young people.

Results for Barbados are highlighted.
Methods

- The review prioritised studies with indicators recommended by international agencies such as UNAIDS and PEPFAR and/or agreed by UNGASS.
  - Epidemiologically important indicators
  - Maximisation of comparability between countries
- These indicators measured multiple partnerships, age at first sex, abstinence and condom use.
- The age group 15-24 was the focus, in line with recommendations by international organisations
Methods

- Studies were accessed via searches on PubMed online database, the CHRC Database of Caribbean HIV Research and the HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database.

- PHCO sent a letter to National AIDS Programmes (NAPs) requesting access to studies and selected Caribbean HIV researchers were contacted via email.

- At the Caribbean HIV Conference in The Bahamas, November 2011, flyers were handed out by PHCO staff and the consultant to participants to request that they provide relevant studies via email.
Results

- Few studies were accessed from NAPs and via flyers handed out at the Caribbean HIV conference.
- The review relied largely on databases and contact with researchers.
- Some studies were excluded because they did not cover the required age group (15-24) or use the selected indicators.
- Inter-country comparisons and longitudinal analyses were limited by lack of uniformity in populations and research methods.
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

“Primary abstinence”: Percentages of young people aged 15–24 who have never had sex

Average percentages: 27% for males, 48% for females

Sources: DR and Haiti: HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database (Measure Evaluation) 
OECS Behavioural Surveillance Surveys (CAREC 2007)
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

“Primary abstinence”

- Many Caribbean youth surveys have asked the question, “Have you ever had sex?” thus enabling the calculation of the percentage who have never had sex (primary abstinence).

- However, comparability is thwarted by varying age ranges of study populations.

- Barbados youth KABP 2009 used 15-29 age group. In this age group, 26% said they’d never had sex (not disaggregated by sex).
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

Early sex: Percentage of young women and men aged 15-24 who have had sexual intercourse before the age of 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua and Barbuda</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Kitts and Nevis</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: DR and Haiti: HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database (Measure Evaluation)
OECS: OECS KABP surveys (OECS HAPU and Health Economics Unit, UWI)
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

Sex by age 15

- In all countries with comparable data, more males than females had sex by age 15
- Barbados KABP studies 2006 (15-24 age group) and 2009 15-29 age group) do not disaggregate by sex
- Overall % who had sex before age 15 in the Barbados surveys was higher than in any of the other studies: 30% in 2006 and 31% in 2009 as compared with range 14% to 29%, average 20% in the other Caribbean countries.
- International comparative study among 15 year olds in 18 European countries showed that, on average, 15% had sex before the age of 15 (range 10% to 36%) (Health Behaviour in School Age Children study by WHO, 2006)
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

In Barbados among 15-29 year olds:

Source: Division of Youth Affairs, National Youth KABP Survey on HIV, 2009
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

Median age at first sex

- Barbados youth KABP 2009 shows median age at first sex was 16 (not disaggregated by sex).
- OECS BSS 2006 with 15-24 year olds showed median age of first sex of 14 or 15 for boys and 16 for girls in all 6 countries.
- Other Caribbean surveys with slightly different age groups point to similar median ages of first sex.
- Thus more than half of sexually active youth report sex before the legal age of consent.
- (Recall that about 27% of males and 48% of females report they never had sex)
Age mixing in sexual relationships: Percentage of females aged 15-19 who have had sex with a man at least 10 years older than themselves in the last 12 months

Sources: Barbados: TIGSex study (Perks et al, 2012)
Jamaica: 2008 HIV/ AIDS KABP Survey (Hope Enterprises)
DR and Haiti: HIV/ AIDS Survey Indicators Database (Measure Evaluation)
OECS: Country reports from OECS KABP surveys (OECS HAPU and UWI Health Economics Unit).
Delay in sexual initiation and early sexual experiences

- **Age mixing:**
  - Surveys indicate that most Caribbean youth have first sex with an older person, with the age difference being larger for girls than boys.
  - Research (mostly qualitative) has suggested that transactional sex may explain sex between young people and older men.
  - Barbados TIGSex survey with females aged 15-19 showed that 43% had sex for money and 47% for gifts.
  - Qualitative and quantitative research suggests substantial levels of forced sex, especially against girls and/or at first sex.
  - Measures of forced sex vary widely and have not been included in most surveys with 15-24 year olds.
Multiple partnerships

Percentage of males and females who had sexual intercourse with more than one partner over the past 12 months

Sources: Jamaica: 2008 HIV/AIDS KABP Survey (Hope Enterprises)
DR and Haiti: HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database (Measure Evaluation)
OECS: Country reports from OECS KABP surveys (OECS HAPU and UWI Health Economics Unit).
Multiple partnerships

- Jamaica studies shows rise in percentage of male and female youth with multiple partners between 2004 and 2008. No other longitudinal studies found.
- Other studies with different youth age groups confirm the pattern of higher frequency of multiple partnerships by males than females.
- Most Caribbean youth do not report multiple partnerships in past year (except Jamaican males).
- Barbados KABP studies do not include this indicator. 2006 report indicates “30% of sexually active young people had had more than one sexual partner in the preceding four months.” 2009 report states that, of sexually active youth, 15.4% had more than one regular and 17.5% more than one non-regular partner in the preceding twelve months.
Condom use

Condom use at first sex: Percentage of males and females who used a condom the first time they had sex, of those who ever had sex.

Sources: DR and Haiti: HIV/AIDS Survey Indicators Database (Measure Evaluation) OECS KABP surveys (OECS HAPU and UWI Health Economics Unit).
Many Caribbean youth studies measure condom use at last sex or consistency of condom use. Condom use at last sex among people who had more than one partner is an UNGASS indicator for adults but not for youth.

In terms of condom use at last sex, the evidence suggests that condom use is higher among youth than older people, but there is no clear pattern in propensity of male versus female youth to use condoms.

Longitudinal data from Jamaica show significant increases in condom use at last sex with a regular partner among males but not females. This was accompanied by increased perception of HIV risk (Norman et al, 2007).

In Barbados in 2009, 66.1% of sexually active youth aged 15-29 indicated a condom was used the last time they had sex.
Conclusion 1: methodology for HIV behavioural studies

- With the exception of multi-country and longitudinal studies, study methods vary. Caution should be used in comparisons; in this review patterns are highlighted using diagrams.
- There remain many studies in which indicator construction appears not to have been influenced by the UNGASS, UNAIDS and PEPFAR recommendations.
- Further capacity building and HIV behavioural surveillance system strengthening are recommended.
- Need for greater use of standardised indicators in Barbados to enable comparisons with other countries and over time. Important for M&E.
- Standard indicators do not capture important risk/protective factors relating to HIV such as transactional sex, gender-based violence, drug use, genital practices and HIV treatment adherence.
Conclusion 2: Implications for HIV prevention in Barbados and the Caribbean

- Existing data suggest that Barbados has among the highest rates in the Caribbean with respect to intergenerational sex among females and sex below the age of 15. Sex below 15 is higher than the average in a multi-country study including 18 European countries.

- Sexually active young people are vulnerable through early sexual initiation, intergenerational sex, multiple partnerships and inconsistent condom use.

- Existing sexual health promotion strategies that tend to focus on ABC have had limited success.

- These should be supplemented by initiatives against child abuse and to contest the norms and economic factors driving transactional sex, along with skills to negotiate safe sex and equitable relationships.
Acknowledgements

- Authors of studies reviewed
- Co-authors/ advisory team:
  - Paul Edwards, Noreen Jack, Claudette Francis, Sandra Jones. PAHO HIV Caribbean Office, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
  - Sonia Caffe, Amalia Del Riego, Floriza Gennari, Catharina Cuellar. Pan American Health Organization, Washington DC
  - Eldonna Boisson. Caribbean Epidemiology Centre