

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sexual Behavior, Knowledge and Information Sources of Very Young Adolescents in Four Sub-Saharan African Countries

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Abstract

Adolescents are a key target group for HIV and pregnancy prevention efforts, yet very little is known about the youngest adolescents: those under age 15. New survey data from 12-14 year olds in Burkina Faso, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda are used to describe their sexual activity, knowledge about HIV, STIs and pregnancy prevention, and sources of sexual and reproductive health information, including sex education in schools. Results show that very young adolescents are already beginning to be sexually active and many believe their close friends are sexually active. They have high levels of awareness but little in-depth knowledge about pregnancy and HIV prevention. Multiple information sources are used and preferred by very young adolescents. Given their needs for HIV, STI and pregnancy prevention information that is specific and practical and considering that the large majority are attending school in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, school-based sex education is a particularly promising avenue for reaching adolescents under age 15.

Keywords: Very young adolescents, sexual behaviour, reproductive health, sex education, sub-Saharan Africa

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