

Background on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health in Botswana¹

Botswana is a middle-income country with a per capita income is \$5,747². The national population is 1.77 million. The main sources of revenue are diamond mines and beef exportation. The culture is strongly tied to religious faith. Churches are the largest grassroots organizations in the country. In 2003, several churches made significant progress in responding to the needs of the young people, by pledging support for adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH) and HIV/AIDS programs.

The Government of Botswana created a national policy on AIDS in 1993³. In 1996 and in 2002, revisions to the policy produced the National Multi-Sectoral Strategic Plan that focuses on HIV prevention and reducing its impact at all levels of society through policy development, institutional capacity building and service delivery.

Knowledge and Attitudes: Young people in Botswana comparatively have a high level of ASRH knowledge, almost universally, they are aware of condoms and the HIV/AIDS virus. However myths are strong and there is widespread stigma regarding HIV.

- 44% of young people know that a person can have HIV for 10 years without showing symptoms.
- 25% of young people agree that asking a partner to use a condom is like saying "I don't trust you".
- 12% of adolescents 10-14 and 18% of young people 15-24 years believe a condom can be used with every encounter
- 33% of young people perceive themselves at no risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS.
- 56% of young people believe they can negotiate condom use with their partner.
- 48% of young people believe that they can refuse unwanted sex.
- 50% of young people think that kissing can transmit AIDS and 60-75% believe an HIV positive person should be isolated (losing their job or business).

Sexual Behaviors and Practices: For a young person in Botswana, the first sexual act typically, is planned in advance and condoms are used. However, for very young adolescents, sex is more likely to be unplanned, forced and without a condom. On average, males become sexually active earlier than girls. Young people feel considerable peer pressure to engage in sex and have one regular partner and one casual partner per year. Young people mainly obtain condoms from health facilities and retail shops for reasons of privacy and constant availability.

- The mean age of sexual debut for females is 17.2 and 16.5 for males.
- 3.3% of females and 10.4% of males, aged 10-14, have had sex.
- 62.6% of males and 68.3% of females, aged 15-24, have had sex.
- 74% of males and 87% of the females, aged 15-24, used a condom with their first sexual act.
- About 10% of young people have exchanged sex for money and/or had sex with someone ten years older.
- 33% of sexually active females, aged 10-14, have been forced to have sex compared to 3.3% for their male peers. For girls 15-24, the figure remains high at a reported 10%.
- 3% of sexually active young people have had sex with someone they suspected had an STI.

Health Status: Botswana has the highest prevalence rate of HIV in the world. This is in conjunction with the majority of the population living in rural environments while the country is being urbanized. Adolescent pregnancy is high and to some extent, prohibits girls from completing their education.

- National HIV prevalence is 35%, among women 15-19 years old, 27%, and for women 20-24 years old, 43%.
- 1.5% of people aged 10-14 and 16% of young people 15-24 are utilizing voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) services.
- 1.7% of male 10-14 and 1.9% of females the same age, have had a HIV test. This increases to 11.4% and 14.6% for males and females aged 15-24.
- About 10% of sexually active male adolescents had an STI in the past year and 75% of those received treatment.
- 18.5% of males and 10% of females, aged 10-24, have sought STI information and treatment.
- Approximately 12% of females' aged 10-14, 41% of females 15-19 and 51% of females 20-24 have been pregnant.
- Adolescent contraceptive use is 20%.

¹ All facts unless otherwise noted are from the Baseline Study on Knowledge, Attitudes, Behaviors and Practices of Adolescents and Youth on Sexual and Reproductive Health presents the statistics from select states in Botswana.

² Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/country/bwa/en/> on 7/05/04 from WHO website.

³ Retrieved from <http://www.unbotswana.org/bw/undp/hivaids.html> on 7/5/04 from UNDP website.