

APHA Panel Abstract

Serving the Underserved

There is general awareness and agreement that policies and programmes for young people are needed to decrease the estimated 5-6000 young people that become infected with HIV every day. Young people are epicenter of transmission and various internationally agreed upon targets and goals (ICPD, ICPD+5, UNGASS, MDGs, etc) provide direction and legitimacy for priority interventions for young people. Progress is being made, but in spite of impressive gains in some countries, much more will still need to be done in order to achieve the international goals set for 2005, 2010 and 2015. Progress is also threatened with the decreasing resources allocated to reproductive and sexual health of young people.

The conceptual framework for interventions to improve the reproductive and sexual health of young people (and also reduce their vulnerability to HIV), focuses on enabling young people to adopt attitudes and behaviors that reduce their risk of HIV and STI infection, unwanted pregnancy, and unsafe abortions; and ensuring that the social environments in which they live (including values, norms and gender roles) support the ability of young people to adopt safe and protective behaviors. However, the challenge is two-fold: identifying effective interventions and intervening at a scale able to halt the spread of the epidemic while also achieving sustainable and broad-based improvements in reproductive and sexual health.

This panel will provide an overview on the current reproductive health status of young people in sub-Saharan Africa based on findings from population-based surveys conducted from 2003 through 2005 of young people in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Uganda with a view to understanding the progress that has been made towards achieving global goals and targets to ensure that policies and programs protect the sexual and reproductive health of young people. Based on focus-group discussions with 15-19-year-olds, household survey data from adolescents 12-19, and preliminary data from in-depth interviews with key adults in these four countries, the panel will also explore the relationships of young people with their parents and guardians within the context of providing a supportive environment for young people.

The panel will review evaluation findings from impact surveys conducted in 2005, of an ASRH multi-country program implemented in Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania and Uganda to highlight contributions made by the programs to changes in reproductive health knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors of young people aged 10-24 years old. The discussion will also describe the mechanisms, challenges and lessons learned in scaling up an integrated, comprehensive and multi-sectoral program for young people.

Youth peer education (YPE) is one of the most widely used approaches in sub-Saharan Africa to influence attitudes, behaviors and to create enabling social environments. The panel will present and discuss the results of population-based sexual behavior surveys carried out in Zambia that examined exposure to YPE nationally and in six highly-

vulnerable districts. This includes relationships to sexual and protective behaviors, RH, STI, HIV/AIDS, stigma and discrimination, and use of youth-friendly services. Furthermore, the panel will discuss results from the youth behavior survey conducted in Tanzania's Iringa Province in 2003/4. Results to be presented relate to knowledge and attitudes about reproductive health and HIV, sexual behavior, use of services for STIs, HIV, and contraception, and reaching youth with information about RH and HIV. The findings are being used to plan for the development and implementation of interventions that youth need regarding HIV/AIDS prevention and reproductive health programs and services.