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## What do we know about the HIV risk characteristics of adolescent girls and young women in Kenya? Findings from DREAMS Implementation Science research

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# WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE HIV RISK CHARACTERISTICS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN KENYA?

## FINDINGS FROM DREAMS IMPLEMENTATION SCIENCE RESEARCH

The Population Council is conducting implementation science research in Kenya to build needed evidence to inform community-based, girl-centered interventions. DREAMS programs in Kenya are implementing a core package of interventions in the highest HIV burden areas to address HIV risk among adolescent girls and young women (AGYW)—a population in which AIDS is the leading cause of death in the region. Critical to this process is understanding AGYW’s knowledge, attitudes, sexual behaviors, and characteristics of their sexual partnerships that may put them at risk of HIV acquisition.

This brief summarizes key findings from a survey of 1,778 AGYW, more than half of whom are enrolled in DREAMS programming. The data were collected in urban and peri-urban sites where the DREAMS program is being implemented in Kisumu County, Nyanza Province between October 2016 and February 2017. Subsequent data collection will assess the interventions’ effectiveness in reducing HIV vulnerability among AGYW.

**Location:** Kisumu County, Nyanza Province

**Study Duration:** 2016–2018

**Funder:** Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

This research is conducted in collaboration with APHIA plus/PATH.

**For more information,** contact Sanyukta Mathur (smathur@popcouncil.org), or Jerry Okal (jokal@popcouncil.org).

### KEY FINDINGS

More than 40 percent of AGYW lacked comprehensive knowledge of condoms, HIV and AIDS, and prevention of mother-to-child transmission.

Nearly half of adolescent girls and over 90 percent of young women report having had sex; and among sexually active AGYW, their condom use at last sex was low.

Over 80 percent of AGYW had recently tested for HIV. Among AGYW who reported being HIV positive, most were on treatment.

Many AGYW reported experiencing sexually transmitted infection symptoms, but less than one-third had sought treatment.

The age difference between a young woman and her male partner was greater than between an adolescent girl and her male partner. More male partners of young women engaged in jobs associated with high HIV risk (e.g., miner, trucker) compared to male partners of adolescent girls.

A high proportion of AGYW had experienced physical or sexual violence from their partner in the last year and a majority of AGYW anticipated abuse from their male partners if they tested HIV positive and disclosed to their partner.

Nearly 90 percent of AGYW knew their partner’s HIV status.

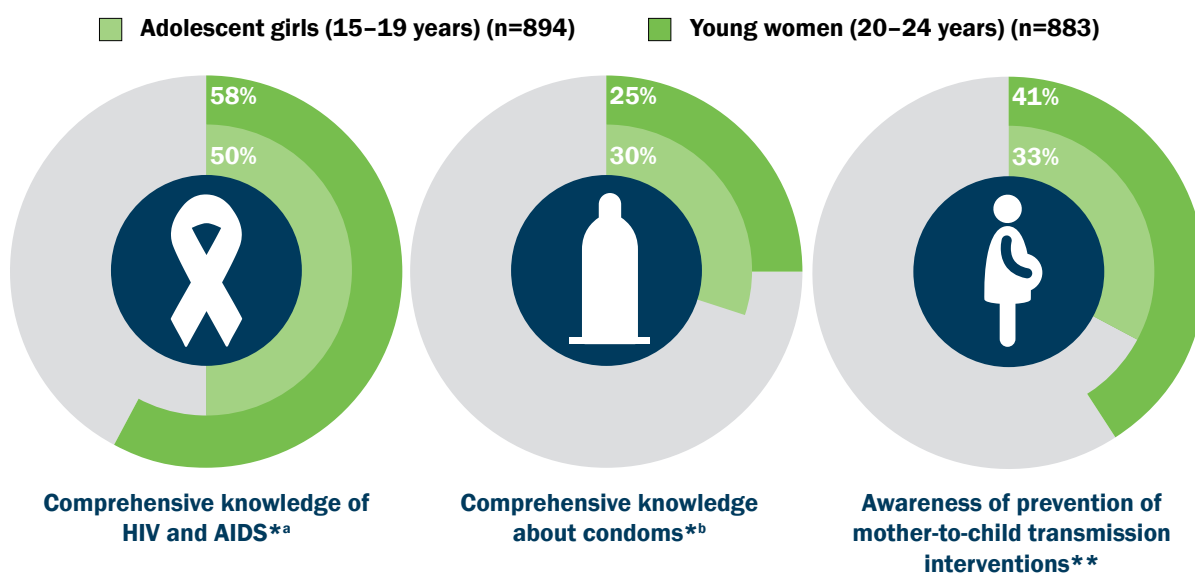
## RESULTS

### Who are the survey respondents?

	894 (15–19 years) %	883 (20–24 years) %
<b>Education</b>		
Completed some secondary school	51	51
Currently in school	64	21
<b>Civil status</b>		
Never been married***	11	58
<b>Parental loss</b>		
At least one parent***	43	59
Both parents***	11	26
<b>Food security</b>		
Gone without eating at least a whole day and night in the past month	22	26
<b>Mobility</b>		
Lived in their community for 5 or more years**	65	45
Travel outside their community at least once a month**	9	13

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

### What do AGYW know about HIV and AIDS?

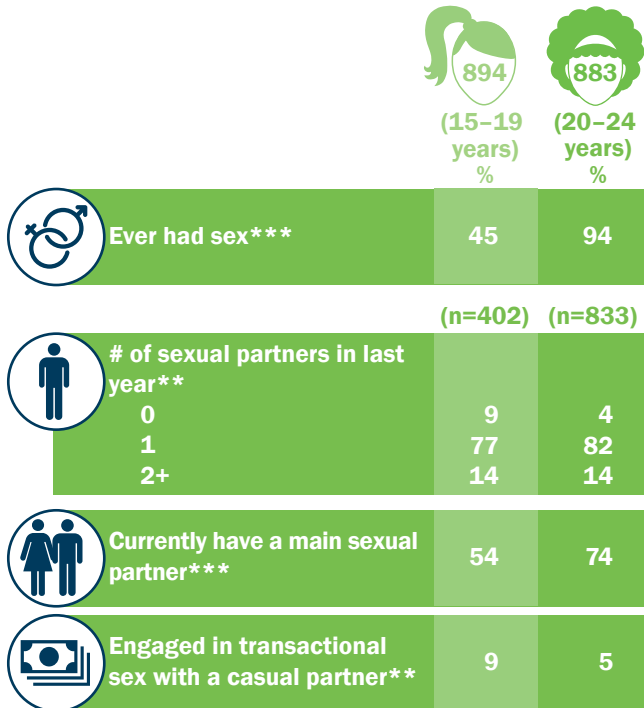


\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

<sup>a</sup>Knowing that consistent use of condoms and having just one uninfected faithful partner can reduce the likelihood of getting the AIDS virus; knowing that a healthy looking person can have the AIDS virus; and rejecting the two most common local misconceptions about HIV transmission and prevention.

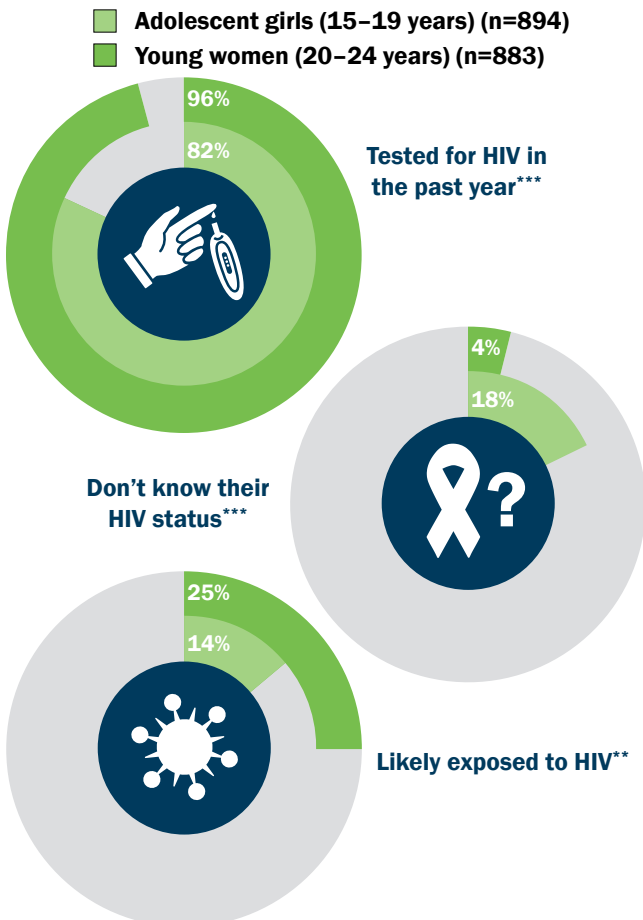
<sup>b</sup>Knowing that condoms prevent HIV, pregnancy, and STIs.

## What are the sexual behaviors of AGYW?



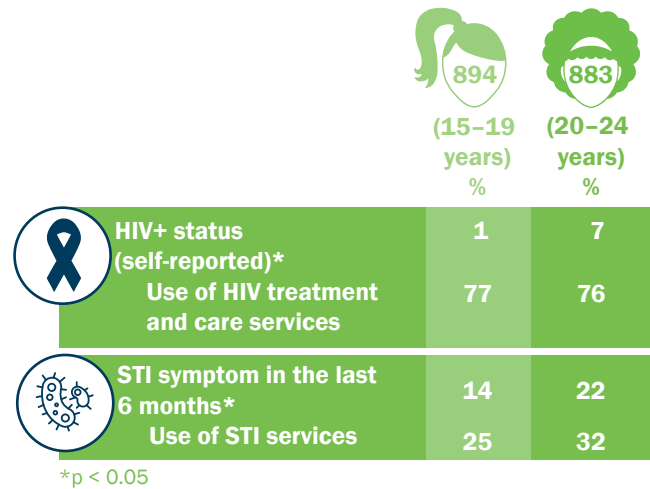
\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

## Have AGYW recently tested for HIV, do they know their status, and do they think they are at risk of getting HIV?



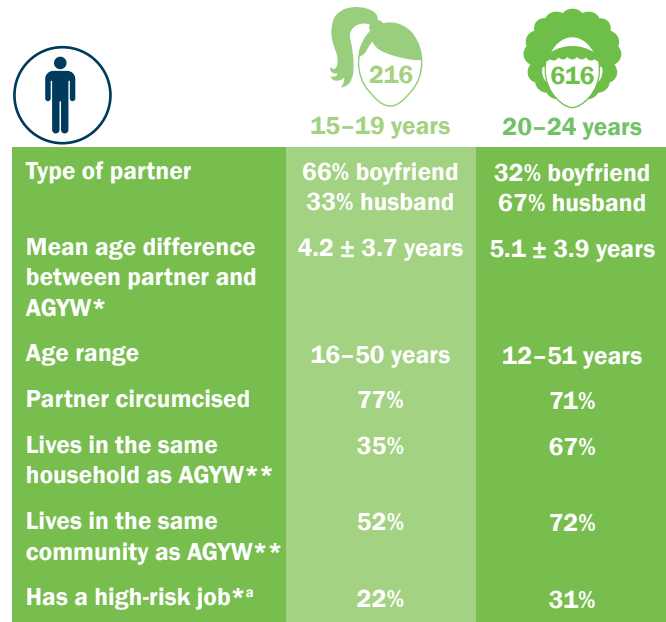
\*\*p < 0.01, \*\*\*p < 0.001

## What is the HIV status, STI experience, and service use among AGYW?



\*p < 0.05

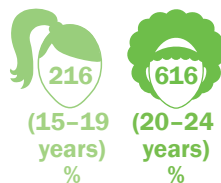
## What do AGYW tell us about their male partners?



\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

<sup>a</sup>Defined as job categories associated with a greater risk of HIV acquisition and high HIV prevalence (e.g., truckers, laborers).

## What do AGYW tell us about the characteristics of their current relationships?



	(15-19 years) %	(20-24 years) %	
In partnership for a year or more***	76	88	
Desire to have a/another child with current partner	65	76	
Reported condom use at last sex*	52	36	
Experienced partner violence in last year	Physical	25	33
	Sexual	17	19
	Anticipate partner abuse or end of relationship if test HIV+	53	60
Know their partner's HIV status <sup>a</sup>	87	89	

\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.001

<sup>a</sup>Most AGYW knew their partner's HIV status through couples counseling.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen comprehensive HIV and AIDS education for AGYW. As each generation of women becomes sexually active, they need socially and contextually relevant sexuality education.

The Population Council's *It's All One Curriculum* is a comprehensive curriculum for program developers that focuses on helping adolescents develop the capacity for healthy, respectful relationships and protect themselves from unwanted and unsafe sex, unintended pregnancy, and STIs.

Available at: [popcouncil.org/itsallone](http://popcouncil.org/itsallone)

- Sustain the high HIV testing rates among AGYW while strengthening linkages to HIV treatment and STI care services.
- Emphasize dual protection through the use of condoms with casual and main partners to avoid pregnancy and HIV, particularly when AGYW might be engaged in transactional relationships.
- Emphasize HIV risk avoidance within the context of stable relationships, as many AGYW are sexually active and in relatively long-term relationships, with high fertility desire, and low condom use.
- Assess both partner and relationship characteristics to comprehensively understand AGYW's HIV risk.
- Address physical and sexual violence experienced by AGYW, as well as their fear of violence and stigma from partners if they test HIV positive.