What You Ask and How You Ask It: 
Results of a baseline survey among very young adolescents (10-14 years old) in Honduras

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background

The teenage pregnancy rate in Honduras is among the highest in the region at 22% (Ministry of Health of Honduras, 2012). Challenges faced by young people are amplified due to low levels of educational attainment, limited economic opportunities, and limited access to AYSRH (adolescent, youth, sexual reproductive health) services. Population Services International (PSI) and PASMO/Honduras are working with young girls aged 10-19 to address harmful gender norms, which contribute to unintended teenage pregnancy. Conducting research among adolescents is challenging and existing data in Honduras is limited, particularly among very young adolescents (VYAs) between the ages of 10-14. As part of the Conexión en Conexión project, funded by the SUMMIT foundation, PSI/PASMO developed and implemented a baseline study to collect information among adolescents in Honduras.

methodology

Separate questionnaires were developed for 10-14 and 15-19 year-olds to ensure questions were appropriate with regards to age, maturity and understanding. Parental/guardian consent to participate was granted for girls <18 and voluntary, informed consent was given by participants. This analysis documents the experiences and presents the results from a sub-sample of 201 VYA between the ages of 10-14.

The questionnaire for 10-14 year olds used closed, short answer questions. Norms regarding gender and violence were measured using age-appropriate statements with three-point scale responses (agree, disagree, and strongly disagree). To facilitate the interview and better engage participants, researchers used three boxes marked with emotion faces that corresponded to the scale responses. Respondents were asked to deposit a token in the box that corresponded to their answer to the statement that was read aloud by the interviewer. To ensure relevance and context to questions on gender norms, the questionnaire included two stories portraying the lives of young boys and young girls living within a typical Honduran community. Questions about norms and gender were anchored to the stories, the characters, and situation portrayed.

key findings

Preliminary analysis of the 10-14 year old baseline data indicates that 57% of respondents live with both of their parents, 35% live with a single parent and 8% live with someone else. Even when there is a parent in the household, many are absent during long stretches of hours or days. Girls are often cared for by other adults or family members without legal guardianship—a challenge for both research and parental involvement during program implementation. Most girls watch television (90%), 21% report having their own cell phone and 34% use the internet—24% doing so on a weekly basis. Many VYA girls enrolled in the program perceive social norms reflecting gender preference (40% agree that families are always happier when a boy is born and 23% agree that parents are more proud of sons than daughters.) While GBV is generally perceived as ‘not normal’ and 93% agree that girls who experienced violence should report it, 40% also agree that an obedient woman is better than an intelligent woman, and 24% agree that a good woman never contradicts her husband.

program intervention

Chicas en Conexión is PASMO/Honduras’ girls’ empowerment project adapted from Population Council’s flagship program, Abrilento Oportunidades. The program is implemented in six rural communities in Valle de Sula with girls aged 10-19 to:

1) Increase gender equity and empower VYA and adolescent girls by improving access to education, providing safe meeting spaces, and enhancing leadership and decision-making skills.
2) Increase access to and voluntary use of quality, youth-friendly AYSRH services.

As part of a mixed methods study, a quantitative baseline survey was administered to all 293 eligible girls participating in the program to collect information on their perspectives on issues linked to AYSRH. The survey included questions on knowledge, attitudes, motivations and activities related to sexuality, marriage, reproductive health, gender norms, and gender-based violence (GBV).

perspectives on male authority: girls 10-14 (n=197)

This baseline study provided the opportunity to learn about an under-researched group and also to try new ways of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data. Conducting research on AYSRH is complex and requires the development of adequate tools that are responsive to age, maturity and cognition of VYA. During the study implementation there were several lessons learned:

1) VYAs were more willing to participate in the study than older girls. The interactive and dynamic data collection techniques employed with this age group creates greater engagement with respondents than traditional interviewing techniques.
2) Making complex concepts such as gender norms and GBV accessible to VYAs was critical. Questionnaires were kept short and possible response choices reduced to facilitate data collection.
3) Study results indicate that many VYA have access to media. Mobile devices and internet could potentially emerge as important channels for intervention with certain segments of VYAs.
4) When analysis of responses is complete, the findings regarding girls’ attitudes and perceptions will suggest areas of intervention for the program. Findings regarding girls’ attitudes and perceptions regarding gender norms and violence demonstrate suggest the importance of addressing these topics.

Research on key populations like VYAs is critical for ensuring that all people have access to quality health care.

program implications

ideal age for first pregnancy

knowledge of family planning methods: girls 15-19 (n=89)

Based on spontaneous responses.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>OC</th>
<th>Condom</th>
<th>IUD</th>
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<td>83.1%</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
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What is your preferred method of contraception? (agree, disagree, not sure) 

- 83.1% are OC, 69.7% use condoms, 12.4% are IUD.

What is your preferred method of contraception? (agree, disagree, not sure) 

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What do you think about your family planning methods? (agree, disagree, not sure)

- 83.1% agree

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