

# Adolescents' Views on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region



Reality Check Approach

November 2015

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All photographs included in this report are credited to the Palladium Reality Check Approach team.

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## Acronyms

<b>ARH</b>	adolescent reproductive health
<b>BAR</b>	Brong Ahafo Region
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UKAid)
<b>HHH</b>	Host Households
<b>JHS</b>	Junior High School
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>SHS</b>	Senior High School
<b>SRH</b>	sexual and reproductive health
<b>STI</b>	sexually transmitted infection

## Glossary

<b>Ampe</b>	A children's game where the leader and another player jump up at the same time, clap, and thrust one foot forward when they jump up. If the leader and the other player have the same foot forward, the leader wins a point. If they are different, then the other player becomes 'it' and plays against the remaining players.
<b>Chop money</b>	In this study, it refers to money given by boyfriends to their girlfriends for provisions and personal needs.
<b>Housetel</b>	A private house converted into a hostel
<b>Spanish Fly</b>	An aphrodisiac that allegedly increases female arousal and sexual desire, made from a type of green beetle called the <i>Lytta vesicatoria</i> .
<b>Tag</b>	A children's game that involves one or more players chasing other players in an attempt to 'tag' or touch them, usually with their hands.

## Currency exchange rate

100 GHS = 17.4 pounds sterling (September 2015)

100 pesewa = 1 GHS

# Ghanaian Law

Age of sexual consent	16 years
Alcohol	The buying, selling and consumption of alcohol below the age of 18 is illegal.
Gambling	Most forms of gambling are tolerated and considered well regulated under the Casino Licensing Act 1975, Gambling Machines Act 1973 and the Lotteries Betting Act 1960.
Homosexuality	Same-sex sexual activity among males is illegal, under Chapter 6 of the Criminal Code, 1960, as amended by The Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 2003, with prison sentences of between 5-25 years. It is uncertain whether same-sex sexual activity among females is illegal.
Induced abortion	Induced abortion is legally permissible in Ghana with grounds including conception resulting from rape, defilement of a female idiot or incest when there is risk to the life of the woman or likely injury to her mental or physical health or where there is substantial risk or serious abnormality or disease with the foetus. The abortion should also be conducted only at a Government hospital; registered private hospital, clinics registered under the Private Hospitals and Maternity Homes Act, 1958 (No. 8) and a place approved by the Minister of Health by a Legislative Instrument. Any abortion outside the defined framework is illegal; the perpetrator, person, who administers the drug or induces a woman to abort or uses an instrument to remove a conception from the uterus, is liable under the law.
Obscenity	A person who publishes or offers for sale an obscene book, writing, or representation commits a misdemeanour"- section 280 of Criminal Offences Act, 1960. (Act 29) Section 281 (1) of Act 29 also states that "A person commits a misdemeanour (a) for the purpose of or by way of trade, or for the purpose of distribution or public exhibition, makes, produces, or has in his possession any one or more obscene writing, drawings, prints, paintings, printed matter, picture, emblem, photographs, cinematography films or other obscene objects."
Marijuana use	The buying, selling and consumption of marijuana is illegal, yet Ghana has the highest consumption rate in the world with 11% consuming marijuana on a regular basis
Polygamy	Polygamy is illegal in Ghana, but the restrictions are not heavily enforced. Polygamous marriages are illegal under civil law, though are arguably considered to be legal under customary law and Sharia law.

# Executive Summary

The DFID-funded Ghana Adolescent Reproductive Health Project seeks to improve adolescent reproductive health choices in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region (BAR). This Reality Check Approach (RCA) Study was undertaken during July-September, 2015 to provide insights into adolescents' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours around sexual and reproductive health (SRH), based on the perceptions of adolescents themselves.

The Reality Check Approach involves researchers staying in the homes of study participants for several days and nights and using this opportunity to hang out and interact informally. This approach encourages informal ordinary interactions and builds trusted relations for open dialogue. We interacted with a total of 510 girls and boys between the ages of 10-24 and many more who were in their late twenties. Of the study age groups (10-24 years), 157 (62 girls and 95 boys) were members of households where the researchers actually stayed and with whom they had particularly detailed conversations. To cover diverse contexts for youth, families in urban slum, rural villages and middle class housing estates were selected to participate. In addition, researchers stayed with university students on campus and with secondary school students who collectively rent hostel accommodation in town. A total of 1257 people participated in the study.

Most of the young people met in the course of the study are still in full time education (school or university) and most aspired to complete their education. The middle class and university youth expected to have careers, whereas the slum youth hoped for good job opportunities which paid well. All see themselves getting married and having children in the future but do not want more than three or four (half the number their parents had). Marriages are seen as very expensive occasions and are consequently delayed. Most do not expect these to be monogamous marriages in the sense that extra marital affairs are accepted as the norm. However, polygamy (having multiple wives) is mostly frowned upon except by a small group of Muslim young men.

Young people prefer the company of peers and spend time at 'spots' hanging out with friends, chatting, listening to music, dancing with snacks and drinks (often alcohol). Middle class and university students watch films on their computers while village youth go to 'movie venues' to watch films, which as the night goes on are likely to be pornographic. Gambling is popular, especially among urban slum boys and when money is short at the end of school semesters. The urban slum has a number of popular informal '*tea parliaments*' where young people gather each evening as members of specific parliament groups. All but the middle class housing estates have locations where marijuana is smoked.

In all study locations, young people see dating as synonymous with engaging in sex. Because of this association, some were hesitant to admit they were dating out of concern that they may be judged or labelled, despite seeing nothing wrong with having sex before marriage. Many boys and girls shared that the type of partner they might date was likely to be very different from their future marriage partner. Romance was rarely talked about in relation to dating. Apart from seeing dating as a means to have sex, young people often describe the relationship as a transaction. Young men are commonly under the impression that they will need to provide for their girlfriends; this leads some to opt out of dating altogether in favour of casual sex. Young women generally had the same idea, expecting their boyfriends to buy them what they want, some relying on them to pay for their education, clothes and their children's needs. At university, the reciprocity is often seen as sex in return for help with course work and

assignments and in the secondary school hostels, girls are expected to cook, clean and provide sex for boys, with an expectation to be taken out and helped with school work, although many say they have other '*weekend boyfriends*' who support them financially.

Maintaining virginity is not regarded as '*a big deal*' for many, except among the small number of strongly religiously committed young people. Despite some girls claiming that the age for losing their virginity is around 18, the findings suggest that it is much younger and often correlates with entry into Junior High School and first menstruation. University and hostel students indicate that as soon as they enjoy the freedoms of living away from home, if it hasn't already happened, this will be the time to lose one's virginity. Many boys did not see anything wrong with having sex with girls as young as 11 or 12 if they '*already had breasts*'. Despite the prevalence of sexual activity, staying a virgin can also be an acceptable choice in middle class, slum and rural locations. However, most indicated that they would not expect their future spouse to be a virgin.

Cohabitation is still largely seen as unacceptable and even staying over at a boyfriend's house is not considered appropriate. Middle class and university students rent hotel rooms and guest houses to have sex with their girlfriends. Slum boys have rented their own accommodation and make arrangements with their roommates for some privacy in order to have sex, and secondary school children in hostels do likewise. The only groups which have more difficulty in finding space for sex are those living in villages, as their homes usually require them to share sleeping arrangements with siblings. For them, open spaces, alleyways and breaking into school premises are the main locations to have sex.

Boys brag about their sexual prowess. Slum boys particularly liked to share their sexual exploits, but university boys say it is the girls who are more likely to have multiple partners because they are searching for financial support. The hostel-based secondary school girls are described in the same way.

During our conversations, contraceptives were often mentioned, although there is diverse and limited knowledge and use of contraceptives among young people. Young people who used contraceptives, particularly condoms, do so chiefly because they are preventing unplanned pregnancy. Only in the university did we hear anyone talk about using contraceptives to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Some shared that using condoms diminished the pleasure and others with strong religious convictions viewed it as '*abortion*' as it interfered with the natural passage of sperm. The most common contraceptives used are the daily contraceptive pill or the morning after pill. Slum youth had the most extensive knowledge on and access to contraceptives and younger middle class urban youth had serious lack of knowledge on contraceptives. The female condom was little known and not used.

Access to contraceptives is good in all study locations and there are no age restrictions enforced. Dispensers are available and easily accessed in the slum area. Only some embarrassment prevails, especially among girls, and some prefer to purchase contraceptives away from where they live to avoid gossip, but nobody indicated that the shopkeepers are anything other than cooperative in servicing requests and providing advice. For this reason, youth did not see a need for special youth focused services.

Boys in particular often use sexual performance enhancers including Viagra, marijuana, 'Joy Daddy', 'dragon tablets' and herbal extracts, and all are readily available. They also tell us how they drop 'Spanish Fly' into girl's drinks to increase their sex drive.



Many girls shared that they have felt some form of sexual harassment at some time. Particularly, a few had been forced into sexual relations with teachers and lecturers with threats of low grades if they did not comply. But equally, some girls willingly entered into these relationships in order to secure good grades. There is no mention of homosexual harassment and, in general, a revulsion shared about homosexuality which is viewed as unnatural and leading to ill-health. There are many jokes and jibes shared around '*being gay*'.

Across all locations, the most serious consequence of sex is unwanted pregnancy, with no mention of STIs. Sometimes these unforeseen pregnancies are seen as opportunities; a way of leaving home, moving in with boyfriend's family and, in the slum, they are seen sometimes as almost a competition. There is little or no stigma to having a baby before marriage in the village or the slum. However, stigma exists for middle class youth and almost all take steps to get rid of unwanted pregnancies, usually through induced abortions if it is too late for measures such as the morning after pill. Although induced abortion in Ghana is not illegal under many circumstances, most young people believe it is and therefore seek each other's help to find out what to do. This inevitably leads to some unsafe practices. Middle class urban girls prefer private hospitals but the costs are high, although the outcomes are considered good. Others with less cash resort to extreme 'homemade' measures often involving drinking concoctions to induce abortion.

Some girls decide to keep their babies, sometimes through own choice, sometimes because alternatives are too costly and sometimes because they fear negative consequences of multiple induced abortions. There is a strong norm to accept or force acceptance of paternity, if not by the father himself then by his mother. Girls tell us that an early pregnancy does not always mean an end to their education prospects although it is often difficult because of the time commitment and teasing. Bringing up children is considered very expensive and burdensome.

Young people are at ease talking about sex, especially in the village and slum. These are not taboo subjects and they talk in intimate detail. They prefer peers or those slightly older (and therefore '*more experienced*') as sources of information, although those with access to the internet and television also find these useful sources of information. Many had attended sexual education classes at school, but these were considered formal, often not detailed enough and intended to give advice rather than information. Teachers we talked with worried about encouraging sexual activity by talking about it in school. A peer educator programme in village locations was recently terminated, which local people felt was a pity because they thought it worked well. Although some middle class youth feel that parents should be the ones to provide sex education in the home, they are wary of sharing with their parents in case their behaviour is disapproved of and their liberties curtailed. Like teachers, parents are felt to be advising rather than providing information. Posters, billboards, or other printed material such as calendars are largely unnoticed by the young.

Key study implications include:

**Sexual activity among youth;** Sexual activity in BAR is high and starts in early teens. Youth are very open to talking about sexual issues and there is no basis to suggest that talking about sex will encourage increased sexual activity.

**Age of consent and messaging about safer sex:** Clear information which is neither advisory nor moralizing needs to be provided on risks of early sexual activity, the need for safer sex and contraception, informed choice for induced abortion.

**Reducing the financial motive for transactional sex:** Innovations such as education loans targeted to particular times in the education calendar may obviate the need for girls to engage in sex for money and other support.

**Information on correct use of contraceptives key:** Contraceptive access is easy (and mostly through drugstores and dispensers) although knowledge of how they work may be sketchy especially among younger middle class. Contraceptives are used primarily to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

**Information about STIs lacking:** Generally, there was very poor understanding of STI infection routes, prevention, cure or long term consequences (especially among the middle class youth). This should be addressed with clear factual information. Even though readily available, condom use is low mainly because it is still perceived as diminishing pleasure. Use of condoms are not seen generally as a means to protect against STIs.

**Information, advice and assistance for safe abortion:** Unwanted pregnancies are prevalent across locations, and induced abortions are commonly sought. Most youth are not aware that induced abortion is legal under certain circumstance under Ghanaian Law; this lack of awareness inevitably results in unsafe practices. This suggests that there is a need to provide information about induced abortion choices, assessment of risks associated with unsafe abortion and abortion counselling services

**Emphasise the costs of raising children and youth lifestyle in delaying pregnancy:** The desire for small families and recognition of the costs of bringing up children can be capitalized on to promote contraceptive use, as well as promoting youth as a time to be cool and have fun.

**Using the internet and popular television for adolescent SRH messages** Information sourced online or through television is most trusted. Access to internet and social media is increasing and should probably be the mainstay of information dissemination. Advertisements and popular television dramas which incorporate factual information for young people to make their own choices are likely to be effective

**Peer to peer support and education processes which emphasise informality and street credibility:** Information needs to be promoted through peers or through informal means in the youths' own spaces. Religious and traditional leaders are not regarded as sources of information although they may help in some personal crises. Where information is provided in formal settings or in the form of advice or with implied judgement it is unlikely to be valued or accessed. Posters, billboards, or other printed material such as calendars are largely unnoticed by the young. .

**Emphasise youth friendly facilitation and approachability rather than fixed centres for youth friendly services:** Gossip and stigma are widespread and prevent young people from seeking formal service provision where they might be seen by others or have to queue/wait for services. For services to be 'youth friendly', providers will need to reach out to youth in their own private environments and through other private means, such as online or through mobile phone technology.

# Introduction

In Ghana, more than one in every 300 pregnancies results in the death of the mother. Many pregnancies are unintended and women need to have the choice to decide when and if to have their children. Adolescents (aged 10-19) constitute 22% of Ghana's population and face particular challenges related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH). In many areas, there is a reluctance to discuss and address SRH issues due to sociocultural factors, resulting in early and unprotected sex, unplanned pregnancies and girls dropping out of school due to pregnancy. The DFID-funded Ghana Adolescent Reproductive Health (GHARH) project aims to improve maternal and adolescent reproductive health choices in Ghana's Brong Ahafo Region (BAR) through increasing knowledge of, and shaping behaviour around, SRH, resulting in fewer and safer pregnancies, fewer sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and fewer girls dropping out of school due to pregnancy.

To inform the design, improvement and sustainability of programmatic interventions, the project is undertaking research on adolescent SRH issues. This Reality Check Approach (RCA) study was commissioned to provide insights into adolescents' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours around SRH.

The RCA study is intended to gather insights into the complex and multiple realities of adolescents regarding their sexual and reproductive health, in particular to understand their perspectives and decision making, as well as the role of peers, family, teachers, leaders and the media on this decision making. It is intended that these findings shall provide insights into:

- ① How contraceptive knowledge can better transform into increased use;
- ① What role media and other channels of information, including traditional and religious leaders, can play in providing appropriate and targeted information;
- ① How health providers can better address the needs of adolescents, including what would constitute a 'youth friendly' health facility; and
- ① What roles traditional and religious leaders can play in improving adolescent SRH education and outcomes.

# Methodology

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) is a qualitative approach in which trained researchers gather in-depth qualitative data through a multi-night immersion, open conversation and participant observation. This informal approach provides a context that enables the researcher to gain insights into the reality facing the people with whom they stay, their neighbours and the wider community. The main idea is to have sustained, detailed conversations and intense interactions with a small number of people in their own homes. Sharing in their lives provides opportunities to better understand and contextualise people's opinions, experiences and perspectives. The RCA is generally intended to track changes in how people live and experience their lives and involves repeating the RCA with the same people at approximately the same time each year over a period of several years.

The Reality Check Approach extends the tradition of listening studies (see Salmen 1998 and Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012<sup>1</sup>) and beneficiary assessments (see SDC 2013<sup>2</sup>) by combining elements of these approaches with researchers actually living with people whose views are being sought, usually those who are directly experiencing the issue under study.

RCA is sometimes likened to a 'light touch' participant observation. Participant observation involves entering the lives of the subjects of research and both participating in and observing their normal everyday activities and interactions. It usually entails extensive and detailed research into behaviour with a view to understanding people's perceptions and their actions over long periods of time. The Reality Check Approach is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people's own environments but differs by being comparatively quick and placing more emphasis on informal, relaxed and insightful conversations than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships.

Important characteristics of the Reality Check Approach are:

- ① **Living with** rather than visiting (thereby meeting the family/people in their own environment, understanding family/home dynamics and how days and nights are spent);
- ① **Having conversations** rather than conducting interviews (there is no note taking, thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider);
- ① **Learning** rather than finding out (suspending judgement, letting people take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important);
- ① **Centring on the household/place of residence** and interacting with families/people rather than users, communities or groups;

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<sup>1</sup> Salmen, Lawrence F. 1998. "Toward a Listening Bank: Review of Best Practices and Efficacy of Beneficiary Assessments". Social Development Papers 23. Washington: World Bank.

Anderson, Mary B., Dayna Brown, Isabella Jean. 2012. *Time to Listen; Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*. Cambridge MA:CDA.

<sup>2</sup> Shutt, Cathy and Laurent Ruedin. 2013. *SDC How-to-Note Beneficiary Assessment (BA)*. Berne: Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation.

- ⦿ **Being experiential** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (collecting water, cooking, work, hanging out) and accompany people (to school, to market, to the health clinic);
- ⦿ **Including** all members of households/living in units;
- ⦿ **Using private space** rather than public space for disclosure (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives);
- ⦿ **Accepting multiple realities** rather than public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including “smaller voices”)
- ⦿ **Interacting in ordinary daily life** with frontline service providers (accompanying people in their interactions with local service providers, meeting service providers, e.g. teachers, drug store workers, peer educators as they go about their usual routines);
- ⦿ **Taking a cross-sectoral view**, although each study has a special focus, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people’s lives;
- ⦿ **Understanding longitudinal change** and how change happens over time.

## Study participants and locations

### Location

The study was implemented in Ghana’s Brong Ahafo region, where the Adolescent Reproductive Health Project offices are based and where most of the project’s work takes place. Different contexts were purposely selected, including rural village, urban slum and middle class suburban neighbourhoods and two types of hostel arrangement; university formal hostel accommodation and informal residential arrangements for secondary school children from outside the city.

### The study team

The study team was composed of twelve researchers, including two international researchers and ten Ghanaian researchers (see Annex 2). Each international researcher was accompanied by a Ghanaian researcher/translator. Both researchers and researcher/translators participated in a full Level 1 RCA training (see below). The three main sub teams were led by either one of the two experienced Indonesian RCA practitioners or a Ghanaian who has previously participated in RCA conducted in Northern Ghana for the Millennium Development Village project. All the team were under thirty years old and selected to ensure that they were able to interact with young people informally and without judgement or bias. The overall lead was provided by Sherria Ayuandini and quality assurance and technical advice was provided by Dee Jupp, PhD.

### Host Households (HHH)/Living with units

A total of fourteen ‘home’ bases were selected for the study as described in the following table to cover the diversity of youth living arrangements.

**Table 1: Study ‘Home’ Bases**

Youth living in family home	
Slum	x3 HHH
Rural poor	x4 HHH
Middle class	x3 HHH
<b>Total family homes</b>	<b>10</b>

Places where youth live together	
University hostel	x1 hostel (male)
	x1 hostel (female)
Informal shared rental for secondary school children	x1 hostel (male)
	x1 hostel (female)
<b>Total hostels</b>	<b>4</b>

None of the households/ living with units were contacted in advance of the study in order to ensure that they did not make special arrangements for the researchers. Researchers spent time in the communities getting to know the community and being known before negotiating access to particular ‘homes’ where they stayed for several days and nights.

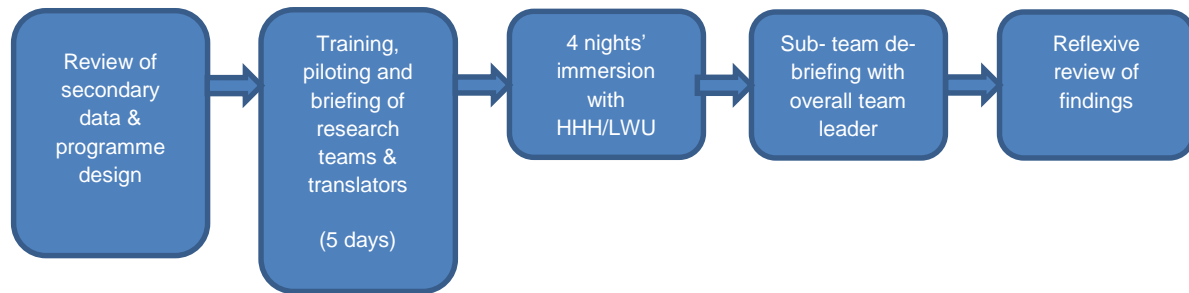
Families and groups living together were mostly very open to the approach and welcomed researchers into their homes and soon understood the purpose of the study and the need for the researchers not to be afforded guest status. Through easy conversations and fitting in with everyday life the researchers were able to engage all members of the family or co-habiting group, although they spent more time with the adolescents.

Each team member discreetly left a “gift” (soap, torch, some staple foods) for each family/living with unit on leaving, comprising food items to the value of about 60 GHS to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting the researcher. As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they help in domestic activities and do not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to ‘hosts’ are negligible. The timing of the gift was important so people did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

## Neighbours and other community members

While the fourteen ‘homes’ provide opportunities for intense and detailed interaction between researchers and the study participants, equally important are the interactions and conversations with the neighbours and the wider community, including leaders, religious leaders, teachers, peer educators, health professional and drug store workers. The researchers used the same approach of informal conversations, (see Annex 3 for the list of people met). Overall, this study included the views of at least 1250 people (of whom 510 were in the study focus age range of 10-24 years) with whom we interacted during immersion. These other interactions enable the construction of context information and triangulation of individual experiences with wider experiences to add credibility to and extend the findings.

## Training, Immersion and Debriefing



All the researchers and translators participated in a mandatory five-day training on the core principles and techniques of RCA, led by experienced RCA trainers from Indonesia. The training concentrated on researcher behaviour and sought to reduce researcher bias by getting researchers to recognise and work through their biases and build good practice of reflexivity vital to promote rigour in the execution of the study. This training included a two night immersion in villages within two hours' drive of Sunyani, where researchers and translators were able to try out their learning and new skills. This was followed by a day to reflect on this immersion experience and internalise lessons learned.

Following training, researchers and translators were briefed on the purpose of this particular baseline RCA study as well as key background information on the GHARH programme.

Insights were gathered over a period of four days and four nights' immersion with families, hostels and rented accommodation. Each team member kept their own field diaries but they never wrote these in front of the people they were conversing with. Some visuals were used to aid discussions such as cartoons depicting different potential dating /marriage partners, body maps and pair-wise ranking. To illustrate context and findings, photos were taken with the consent of the people concerned. These narratives and visual records formed the basis of detailed one day debriefing sessions held with **each** sub-team (i.e., from different slum, rural, middle class, university campus and hostel) as soon as possible after each round of the study was completed. These were led by the study team leader or sub-team leader and provided an important opportunity to further triangulate findings. These de-briefings were captured in rich note form and comprise the core documentation for this study.

The first round of immersion (comprising the urban, rural and middle class sub-urban neighbourhood studies) was followed by a final reflection day where all team members came together for facilitated discussion on study findings and main conclusions, led by the study team leader. This provided a further opportunity to ensure that the information emerged naturally from the conversations had at location level and were not overlaid with researcher interpretation. For timing reasons explained below the university and school hostel debriefings were held later in September.

## Study areas for conversation

RCA is not a theory-based research method, although it often generates people's theories of change and contributes well to grounded theory approaches. It does not have a pre-determined set of research questions, relying instead on iterations from information gathered *in situ* and building on progressive series of conversations. However, as part of the briefing process for researchers areas for conversations were developed to act as a guide to ensuring

that conversations are purposive. The outcome of the deliberations with the research team are provided in Annex1: Areas for Conversations.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for the design and execution of this study was granted by the Ghana Research Unit of the Research and Development Division, Ghana Health Service. Like most ethnographic based research, there is no intervention involved in RCA studies. At best, the study can be viewed as a way to empower the study participants in that they are able to express themselves freely in their own space. Researchers are not covert but become 'detached insiders'. As per American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, RCA adopts an ethical obligation to people '*which (when necessary) supersedes the goal of seeking new knowledge*'. Researchers '*do everything in their power to ensure that research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they conduct the research*'. All researchers are briefed on ethical considerations and Child Protection Policies before every field visit (irrespective of whether they have previously gone through this). All researchers sign Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy declarations as part of their contracts. All data (written and visual) is coded to protect the identity of individuals, their families and communities. As a result, the exact locations and identities of households and others are not revealed in this report.

## Study limitations

As with other research methods, this study has a number of limitations.

The study was purposely designed to engage with young people coming from and living in different context and situations. However, prioritizing this diversity means we were only able to cover small numbers in each study context, i.e. three villages, two university hostels, two student hostels, one urban slum area, and three middle class complexes. This would be expected to have some impact on the extent to which findings can be triangulated.

Young people in general were quite open and comfortable chatting with us about sex and sexuality but it would have been better to have had longer periods of interaction with them as they became increasingly comfortable talking with us. Male researchers sometimes found it harder to gather deep insights from young women and vice versa. Young people were also concerned when talking about a decision or experience that might be considered inappropriate and sometimes covered this up or provided misleading stories or information. Nevertheless, we found that after the first night they generally relaxed more and would open up to us, even admitting when they have previously told a half truth. We also encountered bragging and exaggeration, as well as young people's penchant for sensational stories, although we often were able to find out which story was more of a rumour in nature and which one was closer to what actually happened.

Young people did not talk much to us about STIs even when we raised the issue. The topic did not seem to be something that was seen as significant in their sexual experience. We could not however determine whether this was because there was an absence of problems or whether young people of Brong Ahafo region were not aware when they or someone else contracted STIs.

Researchers who went to the middle class area experienced unique challenges. Young people in this area were mostly at home, and tended to keep themselves to themselves, staying in



their houses behind tall fences and walls. It required extra effort to gain access to converse with the youth in middle class complexes.

Researchers in the urban slum found challenges in that young people were mostly at work during the day, with many migrants living in the slum; researchers also encountered some language barriers because of the use of local languages.

Researchers who went to the university and secondary school hostels were mostly only able to interact with the youth when they were back from school which was in the afternoon and evening. Most of those who were staying at the university hostel were first year students, so there was less engagement with senior students. That the timing of the study did not include weekends may have limited interactions with more students, as more students tended to be present at weekends.

## Findings

This section presents the views of young people between the ages of 10 and 24 on their perceptions and experience of sexual activity and reproductive health. The findings are presented from the position of these young people. We intend to convey their experience and views without overlaying our interpretation or judgement.

## Context

### Locations

Due to the ethical requirements for this study, the study locations are confidential. However, the following vignettes are provided in order to situate the findings.

#### Middleclass areas

The three households where we stayed are in different places; the first is a new housing estate with many houses newly occupied and signs of construction still in progress. Each house is intended for a family unit, is walled and separate from others. It is located some distance from shops, amenities and schools and is a predominantly Christian area with a church. The second household was in another new housing estate also with construction still in progress. Unlike the first housing estate, this one has schools, a health centre, supermarkets, restaurants and recreational centres. Most people living here are civil servants or in trade. The third household is within the main town and is a more socio-economically mixed community also with commercial areas. It has access to schools and all other urban amenities. People living here are civil servants, in trade, a few have farms outside the town and may be regarded as lower middle class, especially compared to the other two living in new housing estates.



## Urban slum



Rubbish dump between the slum and the market

This is a densely populated area (an estimated population of about 5000) and comprises small compounds with as many as 50 people sharing or renting a compound. The residents are mostly Muslim and comprise families who have been living here for several generations and seasonal migrant workers from Northern Ghana. They are market porters, scrap dealers, street sellers, transport providers, as well as some who work in shops and kiosks, squatting in unused buildings. They mostly use public toilets, pay fees for use of water standpipes and have electricity connections which may be legal (pre-paid) or hijacked

from legal connections. Access to amenities is good, including large market and transport hubs. One researcher stayed with the migrant workers who spend the night inside the market and therefore have no access to dedicated facilities. These are mostly men from Northern Ghana who work as porters (women prefer to work in Kumasi). When they have sufficient cash, they like to move into rented accommodation in the compound as described above. These areas have a bad reputation in the wider community.

## Rural areas

Four households were located in a small rural, but busy, town where the residents are predominantly Christians. Houses in these areas are mainly cement block. Inhabitants are mostly cocoa and rice farmers. The area has primary schools, market places and access to healthcare in town. The other two households were situated in a large village contiguous with the rural town, surrounded by hills and forest. Like those living in the rural town, they are mostly cocoa farmers but many also grow rice and cassava. The village has schools and a new health centre. The village is predominantly Christian with a few Muslims.



Queuing for water in the village

## University campus

The university is relatively new, with a student population of about 1500. The University has one hostel for first year students only, and the rest find hostels outside of the university campus. There are about four hostels and other houses converted into hostels for the students close to the university. The students refer to the houses converted into hostels as '*Housetels*'. Most of the *housetels* are single sex, either all male or all female. The annual rent for a place in a hostel is between GHS 1000-1500, which includes access to washing, toilet and cooking facilities.

## Secondary school children rented accommodation

Informal hostels for the Senior High School (attended by approximately 600 students) are located in town near the market, about 20 minutes' walk from the schools. Students, many of whom come from outside the town, live in these unsupervised, either in rented

rooms or in converted houses managed by one of the teachers. These houses are split by floors into accommodation for girls and for boys. Each room has about ten bunk beds and sleeps twenty students. There is no toilet facility so students have to use the public toilet in the market (or the ones at school) and purchase water from the standpipes. Because of strict rules, our researcher could not stay in the dormitory but lived in the adjoining part of the house. The annual rent for a bed in a dormitory is GHS 150 with no access to a toilet and limited access to cooking facilities.

## Our study participants

Most of the young people we interacted with were aged between 13 and 30 but we also gathered some insights from younger children. Those in the age range of 13 to 16 were mostly attending Junior High School (JHS), though a few were out of school. Those in the age range 16-19 were generally studying in Senior High School (SHS) although some were working or looking for work. Older people were in university, working or looking for work. We stayed in the following 'homes':

**Table 2: Information on the study 'homes' (where researchers stayed)**

location	Type of dwellings	Family/group	Number living together	Main pursuit	Main religion/ ethnicity
Urban slum	One room in compound	Family	2	Market sweeper	Christian
	One room in compound	Family	6	Painter decorator	Muslim
	One room in compound	Young cohabiting couple	3	Portering, domestic work	Muslim
Rural village	Small house	Family	4	Farming ( cocoa)	Christian
	Small house	Family	5	Farming ( cocoa)	Christian
	House	Family	11	Farming ( cocoa)	Christian
	Compound	Extended family	15	Farming ( cocoa)	Christian
Middle class	Single house	Family	9	Teacher, NGO work	Christian
	Single house	Family	7	Trader, teacher	Christian
	Upper storey of house	Family	6	Trader, civil servant	Christian
University hostel	Private house converted into hostel of 20 rooms	Hostel	2/room	Tertiary education	
	Private house converted into 9 rooms	Hostel	2/room	Tertiary education	
Secondary school student shared accommodation	Converted private house with 6 rooms	Hostel	20/room	Secondary education	
	Converted private house with 13 rooms	Hostel		Secondary education	

## Our Middleclass homes

Total number in study age range (10-24): 5 girls, 4 boys <sup>3</sup>. The study team stayed in three households, all of whom are Christians; one family comprised two brothers in their fifties/early sixties with their wives and seven children (young people between the ages of 14 and 30, five of whom were still in school). The parents are a teacher, NGO worker (who lives away), driver

<sup>3</sup> The numbers of young people written under the description of each home type are only the numbers with whom the study team actually lived. This does not include many more of the same age group with whom the study team interacted in the neighbourhood around the study 'homes'. For these numbers, see Annex 3.

and cleaner. Another family comprises a mother in her fifties who is a trader and lives with her two daughters ages 21 and 27 (a teacher) and her daughter in law (a seamstress), and three grandchildren (a boy of 17 years and two babies). The third family, possibly better described as lower-middle class, are parents in their late thirties/mid-forties with a sister-in-law (27) and five children between the ages of one and 15 years.

## Our Rural homes

Total number in study age range (10-24): 8 girls, 9 boys. We stayed in four rural homes, all of which are Christian. Three are nuclear families and one comprises an extended family. The extended family comprises two brothers in their forties, their wives, and their nine children, as well as two other boys living with them. These children range in age from 3 to 19 years. Another family comprises older grandparents and four of their nine children (aged 21 to 38) as well as five grandchildren (aged 5 to 24 years). The third family comprises a mother and father in their 50s/60s with four children between the ages of 10 and 23, all of whom are in school. The fourth family comprises a father in his seventies and wife in her fifties with two of their five children (aged 9 to 38) and one baby grandson.

## Our Urban slum homes

Total number in study age range (10-24): 2 girls, 3 boys. We stayed in three different living arrangements; a small family unit of mother (who sweeps the market) and her daughter (26), who is a student. This mother has six grandchildren, all in school, with ages ranging from two to 16 years. Another is a family with parents in their 40s with three children aged 13-22. The father is a painter/decorator and the mother is a food vendor. The third is a young couple who are cohabiting. They work as a porter and domestic worker and the woman (19) has a four year old boy from another relationship.

## The university hostels

**Total number in study age range (10-24): 28 girls, 47 boys.** One researcher (woman) stayed in a woman's hostel (a former private house converted into a hostel and referred to as 'housetel'), about a ten minute walk from the university and comprising about 20 rooms, most of which have a kitchen (with refrigerator and gas cylinder fired cooker) and bathroom/toilet and are shared by two students. Another researcher (man) stayed in a *housetel* further from campus and shared a room with twin brothers. This *housetel* is smaller, with only eight rooms, with two to a room and one toilet and bathroom for all 16 students to share. We found that the students at this time were mostly first year students and did not socialize much at all and mostly stayed in their own rooms.

## The SHS hostels

**Total number in study age range (10-24) girls: 19, boys: 33.** One woman researcher stayed in the house adjoining a hostel. She spent as long as possible with the students who live, unsupervised, in the hostel next door. This lack of supervision enables them to skip classes, leave at weekends and stay out late although the strict rules prohibiting others from staying in the hostel prevented the researcher from staying in the dormitory itself. The students cook and clean for themselves and even look after each other when ill. We were able to interact with about seventeen students (five girls and twelve boys) in depth, but these interactions were mostly confined to after school hours. The other researcher (man) was refused

accommodation with boys in a hostel by the landlord who offered a spare room for a small rent instead. Like the other hostel, this also has no toilet.

In addition to youth living in the study 'homes', the research team also interacted with others making a total of 1257 (see Annex 3). A total of 157 young people interacted with us in depth and a further 353 shared their perspectives on particular issues.

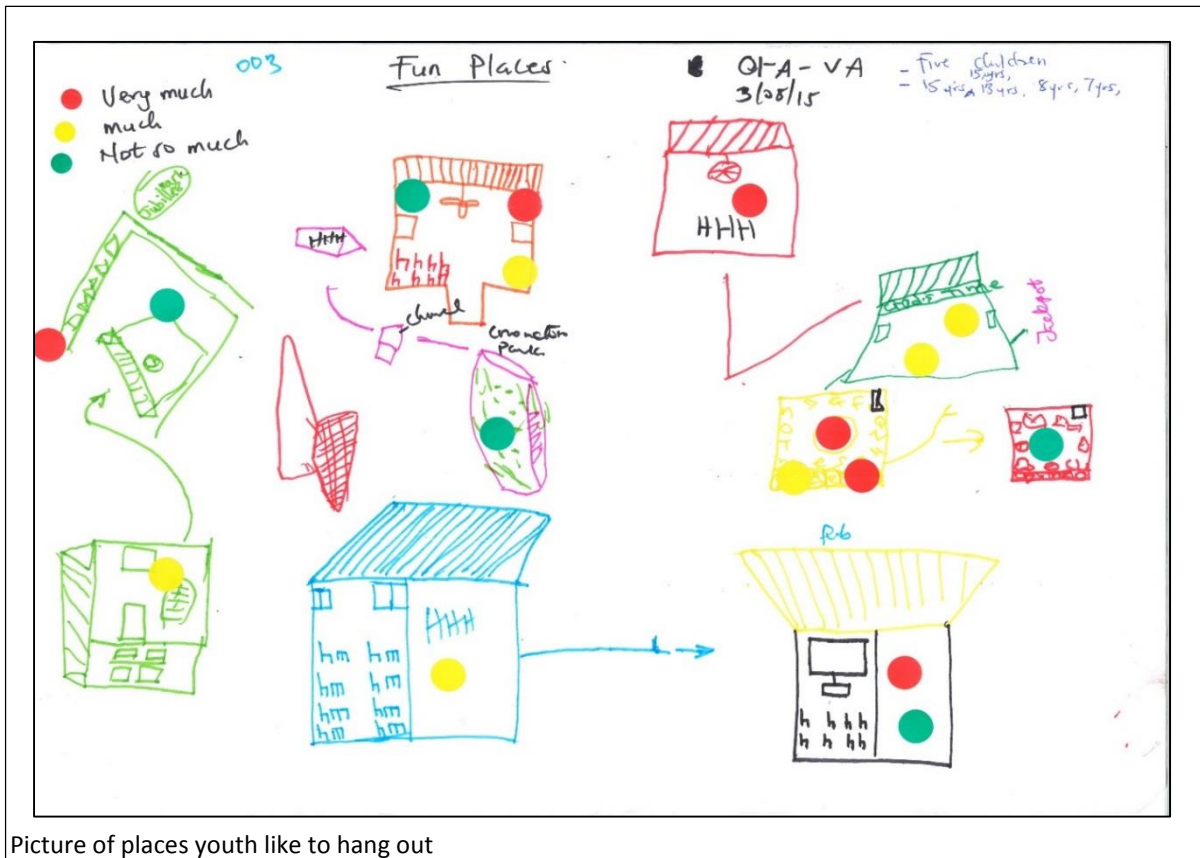
In general, young people quickly warmed to the RCA researchers and felt quite free discussing their feelings and thoughts in relation to dating and sex.

All the young people we met have aspirations for the future. The university students and middle class have ambitions for careers in health, education, law, engineering, computer and the civil service. The slum youths' ambitions are often less likely to be specific careers than well-paid work, which usually entails building networks of contacts locally and internationally, especially Singapore, Malaysia or Saudi Arabia. Those who migrated from Northern Ghana are especially seeking to develop networks which they hope will lead to job opportunities. Older youth from the villages aspire to become celebrities such as sportsmen or entertainers while younger ones retain their hopes of being teachers and nurses. Moving to larger cities is a common dream, where it is assumed there are many opportunities to make more money.

Those pursuing careers indicate that their focus on education is key and expect to delay serious relationships, marriage and having families. But those living in the slums are also keen to complete school and many are working as sweepers and porters in order to finance their studies. Some have no parental support but others need to supplement the support they have with informal employment. Others, especially girls, are working to save money to return to their studies having mostly finished high school and many hope to become nurses, although they also are concerned that connections are needed for admission to nursing school.

Most want to complete school before getting married and having children. Middle class youth want to get more financial security with a house and car before they consider having a family. All want no more than three or four children (about half the number their parents had), mostly because of the costs associated with raising children. They want boys and girls equally.

Some young men describe their futures with their wives as settling down with someone who is faithful and loyal. But though some imagine monogamous marriages, this was not a universal aspiration. One 20-year-old boy put into words what many felt, that '*the desire for other women will always be there, even when you are married,*' and would not promise to be faithful. In the village, it is considered normal to search for another partner when one's wife is pregnant. Some boys indicate that they would chase young girls into their old age. Village girls said that soon after marriage, wives stop making an effort to make husbands happy by not cooking, being pre-occupied with child rearing and withholding sex. Consequently they expect their husbands to have many partners. They think men take on fewer partners only when they have too many children to support.



Picture of places youth like to hang out

## Where youth like to hang out

Young people shared that they prefer to spend leisure time with their peers, usually outside the home. Some living at home explain they have parental restrictions on going out, especially those from middle class backgrounds or those in their early teens. These younger youth like to play childhood games near their homes. Those living in hostels feel they can enjoy new freedom.

Those who hang out with friends tell us they like places considered to be 'cool' including one of the ten hotels in the area. The two biggest hotels are especially liked because this is where movie stars sometimes can be spotted and where special events are held, particularly during Easter and Christmas. Young people also go to these hotels to celebrate their birthdays and watch football on large screen TVs.

They swim in the swimming pool, play billiards and snooker. If over 18, they go to the hotel clubs and spend the night dancing. Some clubs are more popular than others and some allow boys and girls as young as 15 to enter.

Bars, clubs, or what young people referred to as 'spots' are also among some of the favourite hangout places. These range from buildings to open areas where recorded music is played. Here, they dance and drink alcohol, chat with friends and sometimes chat over food. The



Electricity connections may be rare in the village and boys and girls often play ampe or tag under street lights.



market place is also a popular hang-out place for those living nearby; they roam the market during the day and listen to music and watch films at night.

Young people, especially boys, shared that they also like to watch football matches or play football themselves, especially at a particular park in town. Other sports venues, such as volleyball or basketball courts, are also popular, particularly with boys. Young men studying at the university play basketball every night at the campus hostel. In town, nearly every residential area has at least one or two football fields and, where there are none, football is



In one of the villages, the movie place was very dark, young people who were dating liked going there so they could be intimate in the dark.

played indoors in their homes whenever it is possible, especially if their houses have a wide mostly empty area. Game and movie centres are also popular places to hang out, especially for boys but some said girls play video games or football too. Some were *'even doing it better than the boys'*.

Some villages have places dedicated for playing movies, such as a shaded store front with television showing films or a small hut with a projector which charge 20 *pesewa* admission fee. In some places, the movies played later in the evening are pornographic. Sometimes young people, especially young men, come to these places to both watch

these films and exchange pornographic movies they have downloaded on their mobile phones.

Gambling spots are also popular, especially among young boys who play fruit machines<sup>4</sup> or hang out at betting shops where they bet on national and international football games. In fact, one of our researchers stayed in a small room in the slum shared with a group of young people which became a popular gambling spot each evening. One SHS student told us that most of the students in his school gambled a lot at the end of the school term when they were running out of money.

Youths also said they like to hang out in abandoned or quiet places such as fields, cemeteries and school grounds. In one village, young people had broken some of the windows of a school to gain access to hang out or have sex, but the schools have since hired security to prevent further damage and stop young men and women using these premises for intimate activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Slot machines.





Gambling in the urban slum is popular

University students shared that as there were no recreational or social facilities on campus, most spent recreational time watching movies or playing video games on their laptops. When they choose to hang out, they go with peers to hotels.

In the urban slum, where most are Muslims, many young people hang out at informal '*tea parliament*' stalls. These are corners with a few benches and the means to brew local tea. Young people explain that the tea helps the digestion and acts as an 'appetiser'<sup>5</sup>. But more importantly, it is reputed to enhance sexual performance. *Tea parliaments* are in every lane in the slum and most boys and some girls belong to their own *tea parliament* group, sometimes belonging to one far from where they actually live. The *tea parliaments* are busy from about 5pm and tea is taken in two rounds: one after the sundown prayer and the other one after evening prayer.

In some specific places, particularly in the urban slum and in the villages, there are known areas where some young people smoke marijuana and use cocaine. These places are not always popular among others

living in the area. Older people and young people themselves often caution each other about such places. They say users are easily angered and might become '*dangerous*'. One of our village HHH fathers cautioned a woman researcher saying, "*You should be careful with the boys because of the weed.*" He worried that they might harass her, touching her in places she did not want to be touched and worse. Some young men in the university also smoke marijuana and are also feared as they harass people who pass their hideouts in the evening and are known to snatch their bags, mobile phones and laptops.

Alcohol, especially beer, is popular, as is smoking packet cigarettes while hanging out with friends. Young men told us they know smoking is not good for them but they still continue, and young women who very rarely smoke also feel smoking is not good for health because of the labels they have seen on the pack.

## Who are they hanging out with?

Generally, the youth we interacted with indicated that they usually mix with people of their own age and background. Some places attract boys more than girls, such as sports grounds. But in many places, boys and girls hang out together listening to music, dancing or chatting. Young people, especially those from the middle class backgrounds, told us that while they do go out with their family, especially for birthday and other celebrations, they prefer to hang out with their classmates, their friends or with their boyfriends, girlfriends or lovers.

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<sup>5</sup> Meaning to help digestion as well as to increase appetite for sex.

For dates, students said they liked to go to restaurants, preferably somewhere a little further from home as parents are often against their children dating, especially their daughters. Young couples also like to wander around hand-in-hand, especially in the marketplaces in town.

## Dating

### What does dating mean?

In all our study locations, young people see dating or having a relationship as synonymous with engaging in sex. When someone actually admits to having a boyfriend or a girlfriend, this implies they have sexual relations. Otherwise you are just friends. Young men (20s) often confirm this by saying something like *'What is the essence of relationship if there is no sex, because sex in a relationship makes it more intimate?'* Others said, *'How can you have a relationship without sex? It would be boring. Sex makes you love the person more.'*

Because sex and relationships are seen to be one and the same by a lot of young people, they often would only admit to having a relationship if they believed the person they were talking to would not judge them. In some cases, young people would say to us that they were not in a relationship, only to later admit that they actually had a boyfriend or a girlfriend but were too shy to mention it at first. One couple insisted that they were just friends until we later found that they had been living together for a while.

Despite sometimes being shy to admit they were dating, boys and girls alike who were in relationships did not see anything wrong with dating. Most of these were older and were in SHS or had already graduated. But we also chatted to SHS students living in hostels who told us that it was very common for students to date among themselves. For example, a young man told us that there are only two girls in his hostel who are not dating and both are religious; one is a Christian, the other a Muslim. Others have boyfriends and girlfriends both in school and outside and left the hostels at weekend to be with their partners.

One man (20) typical of others, told us that sex was needed in a relationship, *'You need sexual chemistry with a partner before marriage. Marriages break up because sex is not good. So if you have a sexual relationship with your partner you know the chemistry. If your sexual partner is not good, you avoid marriage'*. Others did not link dating with marriage and engaged in sex for pleasure. One young woman (20s) explained that she was having sex with her current partner only for pleasure with no intention of marrying him, saying, *'We're just having fun.'* Another woman (late 20s) echoed this need and described how when she was engaged to her husband, he did not want to have sex although she did. She shared, *'It's a boring relationship without sex,'* and despite her efforts to seduce him he did not respond.

Young people living in the slum tended to be a lot more open talking about sex than others. The majority living in the slum are men and they said it was normal for them to be *'chasing girls'*. One young man (21) explained the view of others in the area: *'It is just about the sex and those who want to have sex take a separate room and live alone here.'*

Young people from middle class families are much less in favour of sexual relationships before marriage. This was particularly true for those who are still studying in JHS or younger. Some feel that dating is something for the future and not until SHS level or after completion of their education, when they are ready to get married. They make a distinction between dating for sex only and dating with the intent to later marry. They say they want to do the latter. A middle class teenage boy said, *'Most relationships won't lead to marriage'* and if a relationship is not

linked to marriage *'you should quit'*. By way of illustration, he shared the story of one of his friends, a girl who had had a relationship but they later broke up. This confirmed to him that the relationship was only for the boy to have sex with no intention to marry. For this young man and other middle class youth, dating is perceived to be something that is not good and those who date are considered to be *'bad boys'* and *'bad girls'*. Conversations suggest that many more middle class young people, both girls and boys, in their late teens and twenties opt for abstinence from sex than in the village or slum. Echoing others, a young woman (19) shared that, for her, dating was a sacrifice needing investment in time and emotion, which she was not yet ready for.

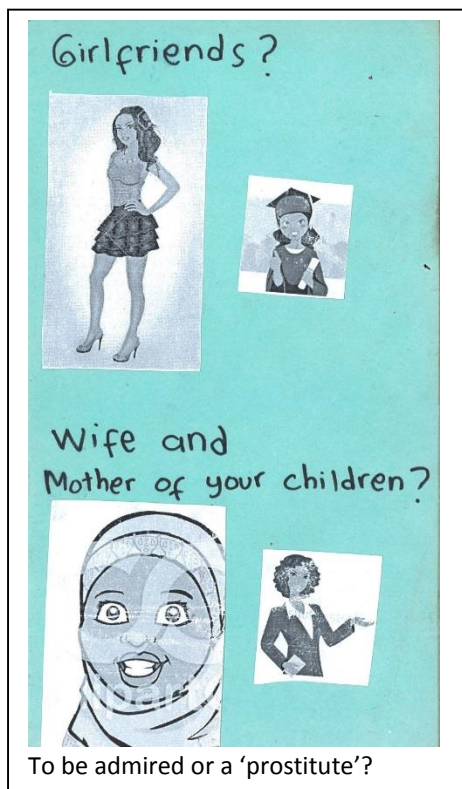
## Whom do they want to date?

Young people care a great deal about their appearance and they feel they can be judged by their peers based simply on the way they look. They said they decide to strike up a conversation, especially with someone of the opposite sex, based on their clothing. There is a strong need to appear *'cool'*, which includes looking and smelling good. Young men, especially those in the urban slum, spent considerable amounts of money on toiletries such as skin lotion, skin whitening, hair products, deodorant and perfume to achieve this.



The boys in my house in the slum had a range of toiletries including three different perfumes.

We shared pictures of girls dressed differently to provoke conversation and boys selected those they would like to date because they *'look sexy'*. But a girl wearing short and tight clothes may be labelled as a *'bad girl'* or even a *'prostitute'*. One of the illustrations of girls was often pointed out as a *'bad girl'* because it is assumed she is *'easy'* and would *'sleep around'*. Nevertheless, some girls shared that they wanted to fulfil the preferences of the boys and *'look sexy'*; for example, one young teen told us that she wanted to grow up to have a nice body. She used one of the pictures we shared and said in admiration *'Look at the body, the calf'*, but the same illustration was labelled by others as a prostitute.



A group of teenage boys agreed that, *'Girlfriends should be sexy girls. I like sexy girl who can open her legs for me.'* One man (20s) said about the pictures, *'These are your toy pictures. If they are real they will only be suitable for sex and not marriage. They don't look like people who take care of family, they don't look modest.'* He added, *'If a man marries such a woman, it's like a marketplace. Every man will also have access to her.'*

University students (men 21-24 years) also shared their preferences. One told us that he would want to date and marry a woman who was very sexy and has big buttocks. Another said a marriage partner should share the same religious faith



so they could understand each other better. Another young man told us that some women liked to date men who were physically attractive, the ones who were very muscular or the one who had hair on the chest. Such women did not care if their partners do not have money, he said.

Some young women in their early teens and from middle class backgrounds prefer to wear modest clothing and chose a picture that showed a woman covered all the way to her knees as their preferred attire and aspire to be like this when they are older. Young middle class boys/girls often regard any girls who have had sex before marriage as prostitutes. *'Some of our friends are pregnant because they have sex with people with money. These are very, very bad girls. They are only 13, 14, 15, and they get pregnant'*, shared middle class JHS students.

Young women, like the boys, also want to date those who look attractive. A young woman (16) told us, *'I want somebody who is neat'*. Others noted the following preferred attributes: *being handsome, being well-dressed, having fair complexion, being muscular*. Across the board, young women told us they would not like to date someone who drank a lot of alcohol, pointing to an illustration we provided of a young man holding a beer bottle. But the 'drunkard' was not the least popular; they selected the muscular, strong man as the one to be most avoided as they connected him to the potential for beatings. Only one woman said anything positive about this type, indicating that such a man would be able to discipline the children.



Handwritten on a board in the urban slum.

Some young women were open about the fact that they would probably date different people than those they would later marry. One girl (16) said to us, *'It's perfectly okay to date one person and have no intention of marrying that person.'* Several young women in the village said, *'A boyfriend is the one who can perform well in bed and also give us money.'* Another group of young women in the same village agreed and added that a husband is preferably someone who has been to school. We came across an older woman scolding some younger women in the village market because they were dating men whom she considered to not be good for them. *'Look at this stupid boy you're following,'* she said. *'You need to find someone who goes to school, who's able to take care of you.'*

Certain gender stereotypes prevail, with men as the dominant one who should be the one who asks the girl out. Young men all said they should be the one who approach the girls. They said this is preferable as *'girls who wants to force a relationship are bad.'* However, some girls are comfortable with showing feelings towards the guys they like. One girl (20s) said, *'Just go to the person. Don't wait for the guy to tell you. Things are really changing now.'*

A woman (19) told us she is not too happy being older than her boyfriend. For her, and for many, it would be *'a definite no'* if the woman was more than ten years older than the man. However, the other way around seemed to be more acceptable. We met several young women who are married already and their husbands are 10-15 years older than them. Young women university students explained they would want to marry older men as they are *'mature and established'*; they have employment and a car. Young men at university also prefer to date a woman younger than them. A second year student (21) said he could not date any of the girls on campus because they were either his age or older than him. He believes he could only

date first year students who would be enrolling in the next academic year when he finally gets to his third year of study. However, some young men told us that they do not mind if the women they are dating are older than them. If the woman is older but *'small and cute, nobody would know that she is older'*. By contrast and less common, one young man in his teens was perfectly happy to have a girlfriend who was clearly two years older than him. Another boy (17) told us that in his school *'age difference matters less and less nowadays'*. He said many girls he knew dated their juniors in school and it was considered acceptable, but he would prefer to settle with a woman who was younger than him because he believes that is ideal. . Another (19) told us that he wanted his wife to be *'his age mate so that they could have pleasant conversations'*.

## What has romance got to do with it?

The idea of romance within dating is rarely mentioned, although sometimes hoped for. For example, a group of young men (late 20s), with aspirations of love and romance derived from western movies, shared that they expect the girl friend to love them for who they are and not because she wanted something from them. They wish for a romantic relationship where a man and a woman could love each other from the heart and contrasted this with Ghanaian girls who would sometimes expect money from their boyfriends. Similarly, during a chat with a group of younger girls (15 to 18), one of them said that her idea of romance came from a Korean melodrama which portrayed her ideal type of romance.

Individual views and experiences also played a part in the way young people considered relationships and dating; for example, one young man (20s) shared that since he had his *'heart broken'* before, he now only has relationships for sex. His relationships are entered *'not with his heart but with his penis.'*

By contrast, some young men in the university told us that they would like to stay connected to their girlfriends all the time, even if she studies in a different university. Every morning and evening, they give their girlfriends a call, while during the day they would use social media application such as *WhatsApp*.

## The demands of dating

Apart from seeing dating as a means to have sex, young people often describe the relationship as a sort of transaction. Young men are commonly expect that they will need to provide for their girlfriends. Young women generally had the same idea, expecting their boyfriends to buy them whatever they want. Giving their girlfriends *'gifts'* leads young men to expect their

*'A relationship is a contract. I need something from you. I give it to you and you give it to me and it's done.'*

- Man (26), rural area

*'Boys are giving girls money and girls are giving boys sex.'*

- Group of young men, rural area

partners to have sex with them and girls who have sex with their boyfriends expect gifts. One young man in his late 20s seemed to echo others by saying, *'Why wouldn't I have sex with her when I am giving her money?'* The ability to give *'gifts'* becomes a key criteria in choosing boyfriends. In the university, where men outnumber women, young men with money have *'pulling power'*. For

example one man (21) said those with money were best able to attract girls, whereas *'the sweet talkers also get girls but these relationships do not even last to the end of the semester'*.

This view was repeated by other young people in other locations. One young man in his late 20s explained, *'Guys generally have sex. Guys secure their place in a relationship by having sex with the girl, so he knows that the girl is his.'* But to make sure that the girlfriend stays, the young man needs to be able cover her financial needs. Young men confided to us that it is

The young men in the village kept referring to one young woman, a hairdresser (23) who was known to exchange sex for money. They said, *'If you're horny, just go to her.'* One person bought rice for her and she said to him, *'At 2pm I will come and visit you.'* The next time he met her, after he intentionally missed the meeting hour, she looked at him in a way that made him think that she was saying *'I just wasted your money.'* When the young men of the village heard about it, they exclaimed, *"What? You didn't do it? You bought the rice for free. But don't worry, she'll come around."*

- Field notes, rural area

hard to have a girlfriend because you need money to do so. They said, *'Because we need to buy shoes and bags and dress. Its 50-150 GHS for one full dress. Shoes are about 80-100 GHS. Bag is 50-100 GHS'.* As a result, some young men choose not to have girlfriends and instead opt for casual sex. They said the young women they know have a lot of demands, *'They say, 'Buy me this, buy me that.'* A 25-year-old aspiring football player told us, *'It's different between prostitute and girlfriend. Because you have emotional*

*attachment with girlfriend. Although you might lose girlfriend because she's attracted to another man with more money. If you don't have money you can have a girlfriend but a girlfriend that you don't want, the ugly one. If you go for the one you really want, you need money to attract her.'*

This concept of reciprocity seems to be widely accepted; a 10-year-old boy said to one of our researchers, *'You're from the university. That's a huge opportunity. If you have money, you can be with a girl and then say, 'Next!' With 20GHS you can sleep with all the girls. 1GHS, they would sleep with you.'*

Many young women seem to be quite assertive in their requests for money or other gifts from boyfriends. Three girls, (18-21 years), asked one of our male researchers to take them to a noodle joint. They said to him that if he took them there, he could be their friend. *'You can get closer to us,'* they giggled. One of our HHH daughters (21) admitted her current relationship is entirely based on the financial support she gets from boyfriend and has no plans for a permanent relationship with him. She said she hopes to find a life partner in three or four years' time with whom she will marry and have kids. In the meantime, this relationship was for the money.

Some young women purposely enter relationships for the money to support them or their children. A young woman (18) with three children shared, *'If any guy gives me chop money, I'll sleep with him.'*<sup>6</sup> Some men felt some women are genuinely in need of financial support and say they want to help. One man (25) said that he has sympathy for women who look poor and likes to give them money. *'But the money should not be given for free'*, he



Young people in one village were used to having sex in between houses while leaning back on one of the walls. One of our researchers was trying to fall asleep one night when a couple started to be intimate under his window. As things heated up and the couple started making intimate noises, the researcher overheard the young woman asking her partner, *"Could you buy me a mobile phone?"*  
 - Field notes, rural area

quickly added, implying he expects sex in return. Some girls told us that the reason they want to be with older men is because they want someone who could cater for their needs. Others told us that school girls often sleep with the male market traders at the market to get money for their upkeep and school needs, particularly towards the end of the school term as their money runs out.

University students have a different view on reciprocity. Young women who have boyfriends in different tertiary institutions want their boyfriends to visit them and bring them food and like to flaunt the fact that they are from another institution, while those dating on campus expect help with their academic work. They explain that the courses are male-oriented and so having a classmate

as a boyfriend provides opportunities for tuition and assistance with assignments. According to a shopkeeper at the university campus, young men also benefit from having their girlfriends on campus as they cook for them and share the cost of food.

Similarly, SHS students staying in hostels told us that girls cook for their boyfriends. One girl (18) explained, *'We have to take care of them like our husbands. We also want them to love us and show us off to their friends.'* The boys confirmed this and also expect the girls to wash and iron their uniforms as well as do other chores such as sweeping, cleaning the place, and

<sup>6</sup> Chop money is money for provisions and personal needs.

emptying the trash bin. The girls expect their boyfriends to take them out on weekends and also help them with their school work, but the boys expect sex. As one 17-year-old boy said, *'If I am horny, why not?'* Some young men actually expect some financial assistance from their girlfriends, suggesting that the girls could get money from other men who may be interested in them and then they could share that money.

By contrast, some young people deplore the practice of dating, particularly having sex with a partner, with the aim to get money or gifts. They often refer to these girls as prostitutes. A pastor (30s) who works in one of the study villages said that he considered most of the young women in the village to be prostitutes and not worthy of marriage. He told us that only two out of a hundred young women in the village are still virgins and said women simply like having sex, *'Just because of the small need, they're going to have sex.'*

## To stay a virgin or not?

Secondary school students (in late teens) told us that virginity was *'not a big deal'*. Boys said most girls they know do not care about virginity, only caring about the money they can get: *"Imagine what they are doing. If they cared about virginity they would not be sleeping around like they do?"* (Boy, 18).

University students told us that most students have sex *'once they have freedom,'* i.e., as soon as they get to university and away from the watchful eyes of their parents. Others told us that their first sexual encounters are earlier still. JHS students told us that their friends who are 13 to 16 years old are having sex. A boy (19) shared that most of his friends had sex when they entered SHS at 15 years old. A group of young men (15 - 20 years) told us their first sexual experiences happened between 13 and 14 years of age. Some young people we talked to said that they knew their friends had started to have sex when they were in fifth or sixth grade of primary school, with some claiming their friends had been having sex since they were ten years old. One boy said he was nine when he first started having sex. One young university student (early 20s) said he thought it was good to have sex early as abstinence *'makes the sperms weaker'*. We were told often of cases where 13-year-old girls had become pregnant, and one HHH mother reminded us that she herself was pregnant when she was only 13.

Young men claimed that girls are having sex even earlier than boys and are ready for sex as soon as they are physically developed. They said that they would have sex with the girl, *'Only if you can touch the ladies' breasts. Even if she is 10 years old.'* Many young men do not seem to think there was any age that was too young for a woman to date saying, *'If she has breasts to hold she's good to go.'* One of our male researchers pointed out a girl in the village, who seemed only about 12 or 13 years old, hanging out with a group of boys. But the boys laughed and said, *'You can even put your leg in her and it will enter her!'* Here, no one frowns upon young girls having a relationship with boys in their twenties. One of our researchers saw an older woman greeting just such a couple, unperturbed. Another researcher met a taxi driver (mid 20s) with his girlfriend of 14. When asked about this, the taxi driver shrugged, saying his girlfriend could already *'perform sex anyway'*.

Many girls disagree with the early age for having sex and indicated that they only started to have sex around 18. But one young woman (late teens) told us that after the first menstruation, the desire to have sex comes, although her friend disagreed with her and argued that it depends on where you lived. She said that if you live in the slum, sex always happens around you, so you know about sex even if you had not menstruated yet.



Despite the prevalence of sexual activity, staying a virgin can also be an acceptable choice and those who chose to do so do not seem to experience pressure to have sex, regardless of where they live. One slum woman (20) said, *'It is better to abstain from sex to prevent pregnancy and STI because there is no complication'* and has decided not to have a boyfriend because she said she was *'looking out for her future'*. A boy from the same slum said he was

The village pastor said that there were only two young women in his entire village who were virgins and one of our HHH girls is as one of them. She is 17 and said the reason she was still a virgin is because her father and her brother do not allow her to go out. Each day she left before 7 am and came home around 3 pm, then went to the market to buy *'ingredients'* and returned to cook. She seemed nervous in any social situation and had no chance to mix with others on her own. This was confirmed by a local teacher who confirmed that the other virgin was actually staying at his house.

- Field notes, rural area

staying a virgin and hoped to be able to marry another virgin. *'But it will be difficult to find someone who's a virgin in this day and age,'* he admitted. Middle class youth seem to opt for abstinence more often. For example, a couple (mid 20s) shared that they have decided not to have sex before marriage, the girl's decision which is respected by her boyfriend. A mixed sex group (in their 20s), told us *'It's a decision you take, decision for you and your partner.'* Young middle class are also the only ones who indicated to us that maintaining virginity was important for their parents.

A few women at the university told us that virginity was important for them. *'You have to save yourself for your husband.'* They consider it an achievement if your husband is able to see your first blood. A Muslim university student (21) told us that virginity is important for him and was horrified at the idea of losing his virginity to a girl whom he did not end up marrying, saying, *'I could not be at peace'*.

Despite the acceptance of abstinence, this is often perceived as a surprising choice. For example, young people expressed surprise at the virginity of one of our

male researchers, *'You never had sex? Wow, university boy never had sex? What is the big deal? We're having sex and you don't have sex.'* Another group of young men said to another male researcher, *'It's rare for a student not to have girlfriend.'* In the urban slum and villages where it is more publicly known that young people engage in sex before marriage, choosing abstinence appears to be rare.

Generally, however, those who decide to wait to have sex until marriage do not seem to mind having a partner who has had sexual relationships. Young people, girls and boys, who told us they are waiting for marriage to have sex stated that they did not expect their partners to be virgins and have no problem not knowing their partner's past. Another group, consisting of nine boys (15-20 years) openly shared about their previous sexual relations and one said he did not mind that his girlfriend was not a virgin and they have decided that they are not going to have sex with each other in their relationship. One man (late 20s) shared that he would still be fine even if he found out his girlfriend was a prostitute: *'As long as we have common interests,'* Many male university students were quite incredulous about the idea of expecting to marry a virgin when you yourself had been having sex with others: *'Who are you... expecting the girl to keep the virginity for you when you were busily breaking other people's virginity or enjoying yourself sexually?'* Others suggested that there are downsides to marrying a virgin, as *'Virgins are not even good in bed – they cannot give any styles and they are always not willing to learn new sexual positions'*. One young man told us that it is difficult to have sex with

One young university student encouraged his ex-girlfriend who was studying in the same university with him to keep her pregnancy. She was worried about people talking about her behind her back. He told her not to worry about it because usually when rumours broke out, people talked about it for some weeks and then it became normal. *"Everyone stops talking about it."*

- Field notes, university

Another young woman wanted to continue her schooling despite her pregnancy. She was not showing much so she thought she would get away with it. However, her mother found out she was pregnant and told everyone about her daughter's condition. Because of the gossip, the daughter decided to quit school altogether.

- Field notes, rural area

a virgin because it entails a lot of work and patience. Another argued that a virgin would hardly ever initiate sex in marriage.

Committed Christians often told us that difficulties would arise come the wedding day if they had sex before marriage. An aspiring pastor in his twenties told us that if you have sex with the person you plan to marry, your wedding cannot be blessed by God. *'The Bible said you shouldn't have sex before marriage,'* he explained, *'So if you take to God to bless it in a wedding, instead of a blessing it turns into a curse. Because you're lying to God.'* This is a major worry for a number of young Christians and a motivation in preventing pregnancy because, *'they'll prevent you and your partner from marrying in a church'* (young woman). One young man (late 20s) said the trick is for other people to not know that you have had sex with your fiancé. *'Sexual relations that result in pregnancy before marriage mean your marriage won't be blessed. But if you have a relationship without*

*pregnancy, no way for people to know. But if you're pregnant then the priest won't bless your marriage,'* he told us.

Muslim young people also sometimes defer to their religion when talking about sex before marriage, but although they think it is sinful, they do it anyway. Their parents also use the same term: sinful. They said to us *'any sexual activity before marriage is sinful'*. One young man (25) said *'If you do it before marriage, it is sinful. If after marriage, God blesses that activity.'*

## Hot gossip

Young people across the board gossip about each other, especially about sexual adventures and sexual misconducts of their peers. These rumours are often about who has done what. Young men (15 -16 years) told us that they hear regular rumours in school about which girls engage in sexual activities and which girls have had sex for money. In the slum, young people talk about others' sexual exploits and who is providing sex for money. In the university, gossip influences whom to date. Young men prefer dating girls from other colleges because they do not want people meddling in their business and only one felt able to because he did not really care about what other people would say. Girls concurred, saying they prefer that others do not know too much about their boyfriends. *'College is very small and rumours spread very quickly'* (girl student, 23).

Some dismiss gossip, saying, *'They will gossip about you when you're dating but eventually they will stop and it becomes normal.'* A group of university students confirm this, saying that when gossip, especially about sexual intercourse, breaks out on campus, everyone is eager for the details and talks about it for a while, but after some time, no one talks about it further.

Young people tend to look down on those who like to gossip, particularly girls. Young men told us that these girls are *'bad girls'* and particularly despise girls gossiping about them. A group of young men (15-16) told us that they do not like how some girls would start rumours and are teased that they are dating simply because they stand next to someone in school. One of our researchers witnessed the discomfort of a young man because two girls were teasing him about how he had been rejected when he approached a girl. Gossiping about a proposal that was turned down is also quite common among young women in the university.

Many choose to avoid those who gossip. A girl (15), asked by one of our researchers why she was sitting alone, answered, *'Most of the ladies in town like gossiping, cursing each other because of boyfriends'* and she did not want to be part of this. A HHH girl (20) told us of a close friend who used to be part of a tightly-knit group of girls, but the confidentialities shared were spread as gossip. Others agreed that they were wary of sharing secrets, even with good friends.

## Long term relationships

### Living together

Young people's views on cohabitation seem to vary depending on the kind of community they live in and the extent to which this kind of arrangement is tolerated. Those coming from middle class backgrounds generally seem to see cohabitation and pregnancy before marriage as unacceptable, although there are exceptions, particularly when the couple have an intention to marry later on. One middle class HHH girl (20s) has a baby with her boyfriend who lives far away, though they also stay together sometimes. Because they intend to marry soon, her mother does not have a problem with this and appreciates the boyfriend is responsible and providing for her daughter and her baby. The girl, a teacher, regrets that so many young people get pregnant before marriage, worrying more about the lack of financial support than that the baby is born out of wedlock.

Within the slum community, cohabitation is often undertaken after the death of parents. One young couple started living together when he was 14 and she was 13 because both had lost their parents. Another young woman who had lost her parents lived in her own room but her boyfriend came to sleep over sometimes. Another young woman (19) originally lived alone after being orphaned but now lives with her boyfriend. Those who want to live together rent a

separate room from their parents and it is commonly agreed that they would not be permitted to live with their partners in their parent's house. Young people in the slum, especially those who are financially independent, have more freedom to make their own choices compared to their peers in the middle class area. For example, one HHH father said that young men living by themselves in rented rooms or a compound could do whatever they want and parents had no say in the matter.

A young woman (16) is currently pregnant. She is staying with an older woman but it was not clear whether the woman will allow her to stay and deliver the baby. But people told us that there will not be any problem with her because the baby's father has taken responsibility, so there is still a chance for the girl to move in with him, especially as she was helping him sell *kenkey*, which meant he was keen on having her around.

- Field notes; rural area

In the village, young people often live together when the girl gets pregnant. A group of young women (14 -18 years) explained this is very common practice, *'If a boy and a girl enter a relationship and the girl gets pregnant, if the guy accepts it, automatically the girl moves in with the guy'*. One HHH boy had his girlfriend staying with him since she got pregnant. Another young woman who was five months' pregnant told us she was staying with her *'husband'* although she is not married to him. The commonness of this kind of arrangement leads people to conclude that where a mother lives with a young child in her own house the family is still searching for the father as otherwise she would be living at his place. One HHH girl explained that sometimes the pregnant girl might still live in her mother's house but she and the baby's father would act as husband and wife, with her visiting him in the evening and later sleeping back at her mother's house. She felt that *'you have to marry'* to move in with a man.

University students generally told us they would rather marry first before moving in to live with their partners. However, several said there were those on campus who live together. Secondary High School students living in hostels expressed diverse views; some were okay with cohabitation, while others were not. One man (19) felt cohabitation is an opportunity because it helps partners to spend quality time together and explained that some students rent rooms together. Yet, another boy (18) staying at the same hostel said cohabitation is not good, *'Moving in to stay with a boyfriend is just like being married without performing the necessary marriage rites. The way young people nowadays do their things even makes it difficult to differentiate between boyfriend and fiancé and dating, courtship and marriage.'*

## Marriage

Almost none of the boys we interacted with expect to marry the girls they are currently dating. They describe those they want to marry as hardworking and *'we need educated girlfriend if we want to have good relationship.'* They prefer a future wife to be employed and able to share the financial burden of home and family. They said, *'Life is hard right now so we need a partner who can help financially.'* One man (23) echoed a common view by explaining that he would like to marry a woman who is already working in case he lost his job so that they would still be able to pay school and electricity bills. This preference was repeated by a group of younger boys, aged between 12 and 13 years who. They want to marry someone *'who could bring money to the house'*, hoping their wife might be a bank manager, a teacher or a nurse. One young taxi driver (late 20s) said that being hardworking is a form of care and that is what he is looking for in a wife, irrespective of her background, *'Saying I love you is just words of mouth but caring can be shown, through hardworking,'* he explained. Young women also said they would prefer to marry men who are hardworking, either a career man or someone who could take care of the farm.

During one of the conversations with a group of young men, one of them announced that he wanted to leave his wife, who lived in Northern Ghana. He said when he left home, she did not cook and did not wash his clothes. Other young men agreed to his decision: *"How can you be with a wife who doesn't wash your pants and doesn't cook for you!"*

- Field notes, urban slum

Religious Christian young women often told us that they would like to marry someone who is also a Christian, preferably from the same denomination. One HHH father stressed to us the importance of having the same religion in a marriage. He said that if a Christian man wants to marry a Muslim woman, she has to convert to Christianity. Although a Muslim woman (early

20s) told us she hoped to marry a rich man regardless of religion, the young Muslim men we met said they would prefer their wives and mothers of their children to wear the hijab, like their mothers. They also would like their wives to be calm, respectful of their parents, and able to cook. Young Christian men agreed that a wife should be calm, nurturing, respectful of their parents, and able cook. They said *'Even a white woman needs to be able to cook because that will make our parents happy.'*

In general, young people see enormous financial barriers to marriage. One young man said, *'The reason why I'm not married yet even though I'm 25 is because it's hard to be married. You need money to be married, money for daily needs. Preparation for wedding ceremony can be cheap, but for living together? You need place to live and you need food every day.'* In line with this, young people, especially young men, aspire to have a regular job with a stable income, and some shared they would like to have a house and a car first before contemplating marriage.

In general, young people told us that in a marriage, like in dating, they prefer the man to be older than the woman. Based on our observations and what people told us, women tend to have older partners. One HHH girl said that she would not marry a man who was too young. Her friend (15) agreed with her, saying she aspired to find a husband who is older rather than younger than her. One HHH mother kept lowering the age of her daughter when talking about her to one of our male researchers. It seemed she was hoping to match-make and worried that her daughter was actually older than the male researcher. Less typically, another HHH girl said to us that her preference was to actually have a partner who was the same age because she wanted to have the same decision making power. She said if the husband was older, there would be power imbalance between them.

## Views on polygamy

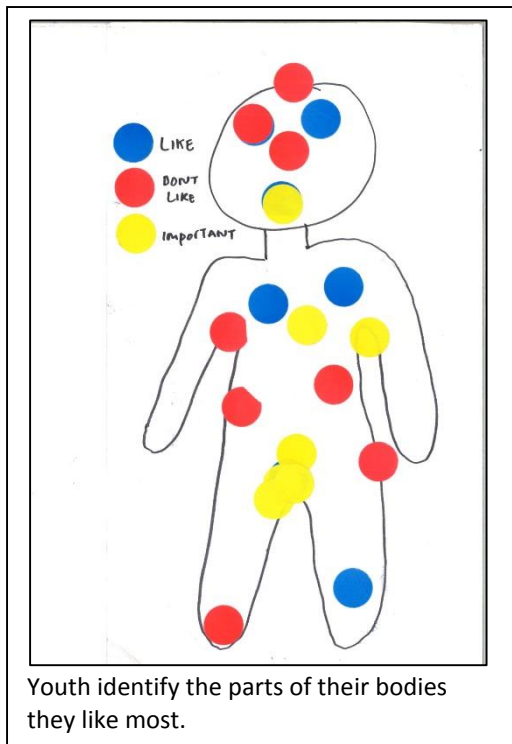
Although most accepted that extra-marital relations are a norm, they do not accept polygamy. The exception was within the Muslim community. One young Muslim man (late 20s) has seven girlfriends and aspires to have 4 wives, explaining, *'God told me Muslim men can marry 4 wives so I want to maximize God's command.'* One Muslim man (21) believes polygamy is good because it helps to protect the marriage. He explained that when the wife gives birth and is breastfeeding, they have to abstain from sex for six months. Having a second wife means the first wife would feel safe because the man would not be sleeping around. Another Muslim man (18) said he hoped to have four wives with plenty of children because that way he would be financially secure. Young Christian men are mostly against polygamy, as exemplified by one young man who said, *'There won't be fairness, and you can't serve two masters. Definitely you like one more than the other. There will be jealousy and conflict in the house.'* A HHH boy (19) said polygamy is not good and he would not choose that way of live. Others said, *'You have to be able to cater for wives and kids, so if you can't, you shouldn't go for polygamy. There'll be jealousy and conflict. When you die, your wives and children will fight over it [your wealth]. That if you don't make a will.'* Two Christian SHS girls told us that they believed polygamy was not good. *'What again would a married man want from a woman that his wife does not have already?'*

## Having Sex

### What is sex?

Among all young people, the common way to differentiate any other physical intimacy from sex is the act of the penis penetrating the vagina: *'Sex is penis in vagina, anything outside that is not sex'*. Kissing, touching and petting are not considered to be part of sex. One young woman (19) described being physically intimate with her boyfriend, kissing and caressing, but she told him she did not want to have sex and by that she meant she did not want to have penetration. University students also often chose to be very intimate without penetration. A shopkeeper at the university campus pointed out the trees behind the hostels where they gather to kiss, fondle and caress each other, especially in the night.

Some young people were even more explicit when explaining to us what sex was. For example, a group of young men shared a porn clip of sexual penetration with our researcher as they talked about what they meant when they said *'we are sending a woman to our room'*.



Youth identify the parts of their bodies they like most.

Many others would put their thumb in between their fingers when describing sex and a young boy of nine started doing humping motions when he mentioned that people in the area were having a lot of sex.

## Sexuality

Our researchers talked with mixed gender group of young people (15-18) in the urban slum about body parts, using pictures to facilitate conversation. Boys consistently considered their genitals to be the part they liked the most and the part they also thought the most important. A young man (18) said he liked his penis, *"Because God makes this penis to please women, so I like it. This is the machine gun."* Three other young men agreed that the penis was the most important organ because it could give pleasure to them and their girlfriends. Only one young man (15) differed, choosing his foot as the body part he liked the most as he liked to play

football a lot. In another location, two boys (9 and 10) often made reference to their penises in conversation, with the nine-year-old frequently flexing his arm, which he used to represent the penis. He said the penis was shaped like a banana so he would say, *'strong banana'* over and over again while flexing his arm. The 10-year-old said a big penis was a good thing as, *'if you have a big penis, you get all the girls.'*

Girls, on the other hand, said they liked their eyes best because they could see with their eyes. One young woman mentioned lips because with lips you could speak and give your opinions. Another chose heart because it was the organ that pumped blood in the body. Only one young woman chose her breasts to be the body parts she liked the most, not for sexual reasons but because of their importance in breastfeeding.

Boys talked and boasted more about sex than girls and they often seem to have more sexual freedom than girls. Young men showed pride in having a lot of girls. One young man claimed the principle there is *'one man for every seven women out there'*. Knowing this, he did not want to be selfish and stay with one woman only. Sometimes young men shared that being really good at sex could lead to increased popularity with girls. A young man in his late 20s

well known to perform well in bed, is said to be a womanizer. This is something to be proud of and many girls apparently approach him for sex. But generally, girls who want sex are widely regarded by boys as unacceptable as is 'sleeping around'. One man (20s) shared, *'There are some girls who are really bad, and in a relationship all they want is sex. So you can't just ignore it you have to satisfy your partner.'* One HHH girl said young men could show off if he has a girlfriend and could sleep with other girls as well, but a woman who slept around is labelled a prostitute. Because of this, young women never claim that they have multiple boyfriends.

Women themselves defined what is allowed or not allowed for them to do in a relationship with men. For example, it is generally agreed that women are not supposed to sleep over at the boyfriend's place. By way of illustration, girls recounted a story of a young woman who slept over at her boyfriend's place but accidentally became locked outside. Her friends laughed about this because although people knew she was having sex she was expected to keep it 'secret'.

Generally, young women told us they menstruated for the first time when they were ten or eleven years old, though some were 13. Some of these young women did not know they were menstruating when it happened and only understood after the parents told them what was happening. One girl of 13 started menstruation at around the age of nine and is already very physically developed, so young men have started to approach her. Her mother has decided to move house to avoid these advances. Reaching menstruation is often synonymous with a time to start having sex.

## Having sex

In the study villages, young people and adults alike seem to agree that *'sex is all over'*. One young woman, echoing others said, *'It has become a norm.'* A drug store worker confirmed this view, saying, *'Giving birth, having sex is now a norm so even if you're engaged in it, it's not frowned upon, it's okay.'* Older generations in the slum and village, while regretting that young people have sex before marriage, do not feel like they could do anything about it. For example, a group of old men (60s and 70s) told us *'Young people right now are stubborn because they can go together in front of us. Young couples are walking hand-in-hand. That didn't happen back then.'* They still regard living together and sexual activity as sinful. Other older Muslim men explained that according to Islam, dating does not permit you to even be together. However, they too felt there is nothing they could do about it. Others expressed their disapproval and even cautioned us about young people who slept around. One HHH father in the village said to one of our male researchers, *'You should be careful of these girls, they're just cheap and you can just sleep with them. Even with only 10 pesewa!'* Other researchers received similar warnings from other older villagers. One HHH mother told one of our male researchers to be careful with the girls he walked with, as young men could be very hostile if they saw him following someone's girlfriend. A HHH uncle cautioned one of our female researchers, saying that she needed to be careful with the way she moved around the village. Generally, advice meted out by adults to young people is usually met with abuse, which deters adults from offering advice. Young people told us about some efforts by adults to curb the frequency of young girls and boys sleeping around, such as banning clubs.



## Where they have sex

Where young people have sex depends on where they live and the private locations available to them. Young middle class go into town to find a place or wait for their parents to leave the house. One HHH girl (21) insinuated that she and her boyfriend rented a guesthouse whenever they met up in town. One young man (20s) said his girlfriend would come over and they would have sex in his bedroom, something the middle class can do as they often have a room of their own in their parents' house. One young woman (20s) echoed others who said they had to be sure parents were not in the house and she generally waited until 10 or 11 am, when her parents were at work, before her boyfriend could come over to see her.

Slum boys often live in rented accommodation and enjoy a degree of freedom living on their own and were able to use their rooms when they wanted to be sexually intimate with someone. Those who did not have a private room ask to borrow their friends' rooms, which they willingly provide for free. But it is expected to get permission to do this. One young boy used his brother's room without permission and was caught in the act. The brother told everyone about it and he became a laughing stock for a while. Because of having their own place, sex is regular most nights as well as during the day. One man (18) said he has five to seven current partners and has sex almost every night. Young people here all said they would rather not have sex under the same roof as their parents. For young slum women dating boyfriends outside the slum, a hotel room is usually rented as they rarely have a rented room of their own

In the village area, the story is quite different. Young men and young women usually do not have a place or room of their own as they have to share with as many as three siblings. Young people actually prefer to have sex outside in the afternoon or in the evening, usually after 10pm, either behind other people's houses or in a small alley between two houses. Two young men told us, *'This is a rural area, we sleep three per room, the only places we can do it are outside and in the classrooms.'* The school is the place of choice to have sex in the evenings, with windows having already been broken to gain entry. Young people also use an old Beetle car abandoned at one side of the village for sex in the evening, mostly after 9pm. They also use the canteen of the Sunday school. A pastor told us that whenever people went to church on Sunday morning, they would find used condoms on the floor of the canteen. A young man who actually owns his own room is likely, people said, to attract a lot of suitors. This was especially true if his room is well-decorated.



Rented room in the slum considered good for dating.

University students and SHS students living in hostels have sex in their hostel rooms, or in a room rented from a friend. Students said they either do not go to school or they feign illness at school and take permission from teachers to return to the hostel in order to have sex. Secondary High School girls living in hostels often spend the entire weekend with boyfriends, returning to school on Monday morning. Some young people staying in hostel use the sheds at the nearby market under cover of darkness and some also go to hotels in town to be intimate.



## How often?

Young people whose partners live outside their neighbourhoods are mostly monogamous with that partner and have fewer sexual engagements. One young man told us that he had sex once or twice in a month because his girlfriend lives outside of the slum. But other young people told us that they have sex quite regularly, especially when they have a steady partner, and indicate this would be at least once a day.

Young people studying in the university told us they have sex regularly. *"They have sex a lot,"* claimed one young man. However, another said that students like to be physically intimate on a daily basis, but this does not mean they have sex and only have sex once a month.

## Sex partners

Across the board, young people are quite open, telling us that they have or have had multiple sexual partners, either at the same time or serially. Young men are a bit more open compared to young women, even though young people kept telling us that women too had multiple sexual partners. This is because young men believe that a young woman could always decide to sleep with someone else who has more money, more popularity, a better mobile phone or bigger sexual organs. This is especially true in the village area and in the urban slum area where women are perceived to be always looking for money. In the village, when a young man calls a young woman his girl, this does not mean that they are monogamous; both could sleep with someone else if they consider it better sex.

Young men from the SHS hostels have suspicions that the girls in their school have multiple sex partners, particularly as they are away at weekends. They also think the girls are sleeping around with older men for money. One market trader confirmed this, saying, *'As for me, I am even afraid of them. They even take over people's husbands because of the sexual acts they can perform.'* SHS hostel boys are also known to have multiple partners. *'Apart from their girlfriends in school, some of the boys also have girlfriends at home,'* (boy, 18)

One young man in his 20s, a church leader, told us that he has had a lot of sexual relationships in the past but is now with one woman with whom he has sex most often, although he still has sex with others but *'it is just not as rampant as before'*. Young men admit that bragging rights might sometimes lead to exaggeration of the number of partners. One young man, for example, told us that he had 24 girlfriends, but a girl next to him laughed and said he actually only had seven. Young men, especially those from the slum, also sleep with call girls or commercial sex workers, sometimes frequenting a popular spot in town where many sex workers hang out.

Young women told us that they are not too keen on their boyfriends having sexual relationships with multiple partners. This is true even with those who are having relationships with married men. Others prefer to avoid worrying about whether their boyfriend is *'cheating'*. For example, a young woman (19) believes her boyfriend who lives away would not cheat but wasted no time worrying about this.

University students said they mostly are monogamous with one sexual partner, and men on campus are not regarded as particularly promiscuous. Young women students, on the other hand, have multiple boyfriends. They claimed this is especially true with *'high class'* girls because these girls want to *'maintain a luxurious lifestyle'* through receiving *'gifts'* from their many partners.

From what people told us, we found married or engaged young women in general to be less promiscuous than young men in the same situation. Although one young woman in her mid-20s told us that when she was engaged to her current husband, she was still seeing her previous boyfriend. Young men who are already married often have other sexual partners. One HHH girl who is seeing a married man told us that his married friend was seeing another girl who got pregnant and he refused to acknowledge paternity. The girl was devastated and decided to commit suicide because of it.

## Knowledge, access and use of contraceptives

During our conversations, contraceptives were often mentioned; however, knowledge and use of contraceptives is limited and varied among young people. Young people who use contraceptives, particularly condoms, do so chiefly because they want to prevent unplanned pregnancy. Very rarely did anyone talk about using contraceptives to prevent diseases. It was only during interactions in the university that young people said they might use condoms to avoid STIs. Young men in the university told us they use condoms because they were sure young women in campus had HIV/AIDS from sleeping around with other men. Young women students also indicated to us that they would ask their partner to use a condom if they saw that he had a sore on his penis.

A group of urban teenage boys talked about needing contraceptives to avoid their girlfriend getting pregnant. They said they would ask the girl to have an *'implant'* at the hospital. When asked how they would know whether the girl had an implant or not, they said that before sex they would ask, *"Do you do IUD or not?"*

Young people are mostly familiar with the condom, although those who are younger (in their early teens) sometimes have no knowledge of any form of contraceptive. Oral contraceptives are also quite well known by young women, although some confuse the emergency pill with those that need to be taken daily. The calendar system, *coitus interruptus*, IUD, and injections were also mentioned. Young women know more about different types of contraception while young men are mostly only aware of condoms and oral contraceptives, SHS girls living in hostels prefer to use pills, especially Postinor 2 (the so called *morning after pills*) *'to stop frequent pregnancies'* (girl, 16).

Older middle class girls aged above 19 seem quite comfortable using the oral contraceptives (either the daily ones or the emergency pill), but younger middle class teens (13-16) know almost nothing about contraceptives. Young slum women either chose oral contraceptives or injections to prevent pregnancy, while those in the villages mentioned to us that while they did try oral contraceptives, they ended up getting pregnant anyway and so lost trust in this method. For these young women, the use of the emergency pill is preferable, although some expressed concerns of long term use side effects. A HHH girl told us, *'It's bad for the womb. If you use it often, it's like abortion. When you want to get pregnant, the baby can't even stay in your womb. It rather came out.'* A pharmacist working near the university told us that she advises young

*'I rather use it (contraception) to protect myself than get pregnant. But I can still protect myself without using contraceptive. I take the emergency pill.'*

- Muslim girl (24)



Wide range of contraceptives on display in a village drugstore

women to take the daily oral contraceptives rather than the emergency pills and cautions that emergency pills also may not always work even when they are taken within the 72 hours stipulated time. Some young village women said they followed instructions given to them from a drug store operator but were confused. They said *'if then you have sex with 2 -3 guys you are pregnant.'* They lost trust in the drug store operator's advice and stopped using the drugs altogether. One former peer educator in the village confirmed to us that young women became pregnant because they were not clear how to use the pill. But even middle class girls make mistakes and one HHH girl (late 20s) said that forgetting to take oral contraceptives for one month resulted in her being pregnant. Her daughter is now four months old.

It is not difficult for young people to get access to the contraceptives they need. In most places, the drug store or the pharmacy are located near their houses or hostels, although those who live in certain middle class areas need to travel 15-20 minutes out of their residential complex. There is no age restriction imposed in accessing these drugs. One drug store owner in the village told us that young men and young women younger than 18 buy condoms and oral contraceptives frequently from her store.

Young men told us they sometimes stock up on condoms to make sure they have one when needed. An enterprising student, nicknamed 'One Second,' supplies condoms at school to his colleagues. A university student prefers to purchase condoms in bulk when he could afford to so that he *'could always have sex'*. There is a condom dispenser in the slum area and there are three pharmacies and two herbal shops nearby. Moreover, some young men told us that you simply need to go to hospital for family planning, i.e. anything that is not condoms or pills. IUDs and injections were said by some people to be free. One HHH mother said nurses come to the area to give women family planning injections free of charge.

Contraceptives are usually on open display in the pharmacy. Pharmacy workers say they do not sell contraceptives to people below 18 and claim to be able to know their ages by their face; however, young people did not experience any such barrier to access; indeed, 13 and 14 year olds told us that they were already going to drug stores to buy condoms and pills. Boys as young as 10 could easily buy condoms and them proudly showed them to us. 15 year old girls have contraceptive implants inserted at hospitals with no reference to their age.

Young women are often a bit shyer than young men when it comes to buying contraceptives. One drug store owner told us that the guys asked for contraceptives without any embarrassment. Two pharmacists working near the university told us *'90% of the male students who came here buy condoms'*, but young women, in contrast, come to pharmacies less frequently. When women need to buy contraceptives from the drug store or the pharmacy, they either send someone else to buy it for them or they wait for people to leave the store so no one is there when they buy contraceptives.

Table 3 provides a list of the commonly used contraceptives as shared by study participants and confirmed in local drug stores

A young SHS student (19) went to the drug store near the school to buy an energy drink called Lucozade. Instead of getting the drink, the store worker handed her the morning after pill, Postinor 2. Confusion ensued, which was quickly cleared up. The young woman told us that she was not sure why she was given the drug but thought it might have been because when other young women wanted to buy an emergency pill, they use the word Lucozade as a code for what they actually were looking for.

- Field notes, village

**Table 3: Commonly used contraceptives**

Contraceptive name	Type	Price	Quantity
Secure	Oral contraceptive	4.5 GHS	1 box of 3 strips
Lydia	Morning after pill	4 GHS	1 pack
Primolut N	Drug to delay menstruation	3 GHS	1 pack of 10 pills
Expensive brand of condom	Condom	1 GHS	3 condoms
Less expensive brand of condom	Condom	10-20 pesewa	3 condoms

Drug stores provide advice and some had advised young women to take Primolut N, a drug used to delay menstruation, as an oral contraceptive. They told them to take two pills per day in the morning and at night. The former peer educator we met in the village was well aware of this practice and he was quite furious about it: *'They only want to push drugs.* One such worker shares her own experience to inform the young women customers what to do if they miss one dose of their oral contraceptive. She tells them that when she forgets a tablet one day and has sex with her husband, she would take it the following morning and everything is okay. But the lack of trust in information from the drugstore meant that people do not believe her.

Some young people chose not to use any form of contraceptive. Some middle class Christians told us that the use of any contraceptive is equivalent to abortion. They said, *'Sex was meant for procreation, so if you have sex and you prevent procreation, you do abortion. It's a sin and it's bad.'* For these young people, anything that would prevent the sperm from reaching the womb is considered abortion. One pastor's son told us, *'Condom is abortion. You're throwing your babies away when you throw the condom away.'* They also saw masturbation as a form of abortion. A young man in his late teens said that masturbation is *'throwing sperms away'* and is wrong.

Other young people, both men and women, said they did not like using contraceptives, particularly condoms, because they diminish the pleasure of sex. They use the analogy of eating toffee with its wrapping still on as a metaphor for having sex with condoms. Some young women studying in the university told us that they also did not like their boyfriends using condoms but are not worried about getting pregnant because they make sure they have sex in their *'safe period'*.

*'I don't like to eat toffee with the rubber. How can you enjoy toffee with rubber on? You want to have a taste of that toffee.'*

- Men (20s) talking about using condoms

Some young people told us that it is only important to use condoms when the person you are about to sleep with is known to sleep around with other people. Young men also choose to use a condom when they barely know the woman they are about to sleep with. One drug store worker told us that people who come to the store to buy condoms are mostly those who visit the community for a short period. This is mainly because they do not know the girls so they want to protect themselves; community members rarely visit the store.

*'You only use condom when you don't trust your partner, when you feel the lady is sleeping around a lot.'*

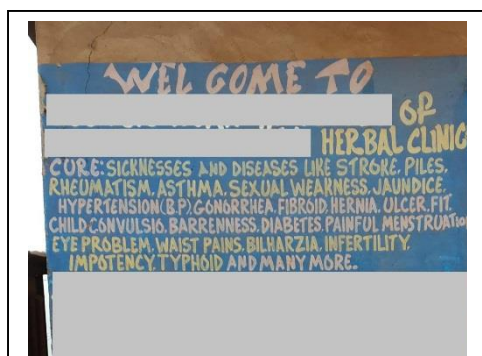
- Boys, urban

Village boys shared other reasons to use condoms. They explained to us, *'When you know you need to go two rounds with a lady, you use the rubber for the first instance. That will clean the place for you. Some ladies go to the bathroom and they do not clean well. Second round you can do it raw without CD [condom].'* For many of the young men in the village, the use of condoms is for hygiene reasons rather than to prevent diseases.

Female condoms are mostly unheard of. A licensed chemist in a drug store in the village told us, *'Patronage is low on female condoms,'* even though they are available for purchase. A former peer educator told us that, *'Girls don't like to insert anything down there, so putting condom down there is uncomfortable.'* A group of young university women shared they would never use the female condom because *'it feels like being a lesbian... It is like you are fingering yourself.'*

## Sexual performance enhancers

Young people, especially young men, use substances to enhance their sexual performance. One man (30) explained that *'Women expect you to be very good in bed, if not they leave you for another person.'* This is why young men were keen on taking enhancements. Others told us as result of taking enhancements, *'Boys can 'kill' the girl because it's very strong. And our penis will stay hard even after sex. Unless you have a 'game' [sex] you don't use it.'*



Small traditional herb shop in the slum which claims to heal sexual diseases and enhance sexual performance

Viagra is a popular enhancement often taken by these young men. It costs 5GHS per pack. Marijuana is also believed to enhance sexual performance. Young men in the village sometimes take it with other kinds of herbs, costing around 50 pesewa per roll. Young men in the slum also take herbal supplements, which they get from an herbal clinic. This enhancement can also be used by women, but young men tend to use it more. As mentioned above, slum boys drink specially prepared tea in the *tea parliaments*. The tea itself comes in a box that costs 1 GHS per box, with one parliament consisting of about 10 members consuming 3-4 packs a day. This tea is often mixed with marijuana.

Another favourite sexual enhancer is an alcoholic drink called 'Joy Daddy,' which costs 6GHS, and a tablet called the 'dragon tablet'. Young men told us that if you take the dragon tablet, *'You can ride the lady for 45 minutes before you realize your body starts to climax.'* An alternative is available but boys said the effect only lasts for 20-30 minutes. Some also mentioned ginger root and a specific small stone which costs 60GHS. Young men rub this

stone against the penis before any sexual activity as it is believed to make the penis bigger and the performance last longer. Young men also told us that they sometimes drop *Spanish fly* in young women's drink; Spanish fly has been used to make pigs achieve an oestrus state, and they hope it has the same effect on women.

## Sexual abuse and harassment

Young people, almost exclusively women, shared occasions where they felt coerced to have sex with someone in a position of authority. This includes at the workplace in exchange for promotion and in university with lecturers in exchange for good grades or exam questions in advance of exams. Students told us that sometimes lecturers deliberately fail particular girls in exams so they have to come back and plead, and lecturers say *'If you want to pass, this is what you have to do to.'* usually implying sex. But others who were staying at the university boarding house disagreed and said that the lecturers did not engage in such relationships with students as the university is small

*'The teachers fight with us over the girls. Then the girls get the exam questions in advance'*  
- SHS boys

and rumours spread quickly. However, teaching assistants do sleep around with students quite a lot. They told us that this is because most of the girls like to date older guys. Also, girls who date the teaching assistants are given preferential treatment, such as getting help with their assignments and extra tuition. One JHS student (13) told us that her schoolmates are having sex with teachers in her school. These teachers ask the students they date to run errands for them and say other teachers know about the situation but they do not care enough to do anything about it. Two 19-year-old SHS boys told us, *"The teachers fight with us over the girls"* and said the girls sleep with teachers to get exam questions in advance. One girl (18) pointed out a teacher who was passing by and commented that he is *'very bad'* because he sleeps around with the girls in school.

Young women we chatted with generally believe that they should have a say in the extent of intimacy. One university student ran away from her boyfriend when he refused to respect her desire for intimacy but no sex. Another young woman in her mid-20s told us that even in marriage she believes there still should be an agreement between the couples about sex: *'Not that the guy wants to have sex so you give yourself to the guy. You're not a sex toy. So you need to feel for it. Not only your husband. You have to have a say in your sex life.'* But men

often do not respect this and the following is typical: *'If you get a girl just touch, touch the breasts. She will say, 'No, no,' but later she'll give in. So if she said no, just continue. Girls think if you give in easily you're cheap.'* (Man (26). Some men we met in the university told us that some force girls who have dumped them for another to have sex with them.

*'A girl in her late teens came out of the house one day just wearing a sarong covering her from the breasts to the hips. People who saw this, including her mother, friends, and supervisor at work told her, "Go go go!" They all asked her to put something else on, as she was considered too sexy and it might attract men to rape her. People in the area where the girl lived believed the girls were the ones who needed to cover because it can tempt boys.'*

- Urban slum

Young women also told us that they experience some sexual discomforts, bordering harassment, from the opposite sex. Junior High School students, for example, told us that, in



school, boys would press their hands on girl students' buttocks, but the blame is usually passed to the girl *'for tempting the boy'* (see box).

## Homosexuality

Homosexuality is somewhat of a taboo topic among those with whom the study team interacted. Societies where homosexuality is strongly disapproved of often put pressure on homosexuals to appear to adopt heterosexual lifestyles, and homosexuals are therefore unlikely to seek sexual health services. In general, young men and young women in BAR have strong views against homosexuality. The extent of this hostility is illustrated by the following examples. One young man (18) disliked the idea so much he referred to his bottom as the body part he liked the least as he feared being a victim of homosexuality. A group of young men told us, *'We are strongly against homosexuality; if we find someone who's homosexual, we will report it to the police.'* When asked how they could tell that someone is a homosexual, they said, *'It's easy. If a man looks at another man's bottom, it indicates he is gay.'* Homosexuality was also frowned upon by SHS students who were living at hostels. One young man said homosexuality was a *'nasty act and I will not even want to associate with any homosexual'*. Young men often mocked their male friends for any feminine characteristics and label them as *'gays'*.

Young Muslims said homosexuality is a sin. But young Christians were often even more hostile to the idea. A group of church goers were furious, *'Why should a lady or a guy have sexual relations with the same sex?'* and quoted the Bible Genesis 2:19 referencing the demise of Sodom and Gomorrah. *'God punishes them and wipes them away.'* They also stated that God created Adam and Eve not Adam and some other man. They referred to the animal kingdom to stress their points, *'You don't see dogs doing that.'*

Young people also link homosexuality to unhealthy sex. One young woman claimed to us that homosexuals would be dying slowly because they would contract gonorrhoea and HIV: *'God created sperms to be put in a woman's womb, not in the man's body, so if it is put in the man's body, it'll become a disease.'* A young man (17) agreed and said the same happens to lesbians, *"Disease also happens with lesbians because when lesbians touch the two vaginas, they use dirty hands inside the vagina. So disease comes from that."*

One young woman (15) recounted a tale she has heard about a Ghanaian pastor who was jailed in the US for ten years for refusing to marry a gay couple in his church. She said this would never happen in Ghana because homosexuality is sinful and that many are angry that the pastor was imprisoned for his act. Many young people believe the couple should have been imprisoned, as homosexuality is a crime in Ghana.

Jokes about gay people and homosexual acts are often tossed around among the young. For instance, if a girl is fancied by two boys, the two boys will bet on who will become the boyfriend. They said the loser must give their bottom to the winner. Young men often make passing comments; for example, if one of them requests another to help with buying food, the other might say, *'Why? Do you think I'm a lesbian? What will I be doing with you?'* One of our researchers overheard two male university students making jokes about gay marriage in the US. One of them said to the other one, *'I have a brother and he can come and marry you and chop you off and get you a green card.'*



## Consequences of having sex

When talking about the consequences of having sex, young people tend to think more of unwanted pregnancy rather than any other negative consequences and take steps to avoid this. They fear the consequences of induced abortions and that a pregnancy might result in having to leave school early, and they shared many examples of their peers to illustrate this. University students confided to us that they were very careful about the potential effect of pregnancy on their studies. A few also worried that having a child would damage their future marriage prospects.

*'We are very cautious of the things that can jeopardize our schooling hence 'we play it safe'.*  
- University students

In general, despite how common this is, young people and adults still perceive young women who became pregnant at young age or before marriage to be *'bad girls'*. They are frequent recipients of disparaging comments and abuse. One church elder in his late 20s shared as he chatted in front of a shop selling pone credit, *'These girls, look at that small girl, not even 16, all they know is to give birth and go roaming.'*

*'If men are willing to marry a woman who has children already, why would they consider virginity to be something important?'*  
- Slum girls

A group of young slum women (16-18) dismissed the idea that having children might damage marriage prospects and said even with three or four children, you would still be able to find someone who would want to marry you. A younger group of girls (13-15), echoed this, saying having children would not stop a

man deciding to be with you. Some young women even considered having children to be an asset making them superior than others.

This confidence was not borne out in conversations with men; many young men we talked with are not keen on dating someone who is pregnant or already had children. This is especially true of younger boys (12-16) who do not like the idea of taking care of someone else's child. Three boys (15-16), told us emphatically that they would not want to date or marry a girl who is pregnant if *'I'm not the father!'* Another researcher asked two boys (12 and 13) whether they would want to marry someone who had a child and they replied, *'Why would you want to be a father to someone else's child? You've gone to school all this while, only to marry someone with a child?'* One of the boys then added, *'If only the father of the child will offer financial support so he can take care of the child, I don't have any problem.'*

However, we did meet several young men who had decided to settle down with women with children from a previous relationship. One HHH father in the urban slum currently cohabitates with a woman who already had a child; this situation was common and accepted. Some said it was all about emotion: *'If I love her, it doesn't matter'*.

## Getting pregnancy tests

Our conversations around access to pregnancy tests mostly took place in the village study location where there is a drug store catering to the needs of young people including pregnancy testing. The owner said *'they come and I test and I take their money.'* She refused to explain how this was done to our male researcher, saying, *'It's girls' talk.'*

The pharmacist at the pharmacy near the university said pregnancy test kits are available but women do not buy them. Most young people buy more contraceptives than pregnancy test kits. There was no mention of having pregnancy tests done in public health facilities.

Quite often, particularly in the village, young women found out that they were pregnant because their mothers noticed it before they did. Some mothers are so experienced, they could tell that their daughter was carrying very early in her pregnancy. A pregnant young woman told us, *'My mother said I was pregnant and I didn't believe her but when my period didn't show in one month and then two months, I believed her.'* A HHH mother told us that mothers usually notice the pregnancy before the girls so the girls do not even have the chance to do abortion. The mother would then march the girl to the boy's house. A friend of a one HHH girl who is three months' pregnant said her mother discovered that she was pregnant even though *'her stomach was still flat.'*

## Unwanted pregnancies

*'Teenage pregnancy has become a normal thing in urban slums'*

- Muslim woman (24) living in the slum

Regardless of the locations we stayed at, young people frequently shared stories and experiences of unplanned pregnancy. The way these pregnancies were viewed varies depending where the young people live. In the urban slum, the topic of unplanned pregnancy was often raised. Unplanned pregnancy is

considered to be very common, and young people claim that there is no difference in frequency among Muslims or Christians or between ethnicities. Being the one to get pregnant first can even become a competition. If one gives birth, other friends in that clique would want to give birth as well to avoid being marginalised. A woman in her twenties said that when she was younger, she often heard stories about people finding foetuses in the dump, but nowadays *'young people would rather give birth than do abortion'*. There is no stigma with early pregnancy in the slum and it seems to be the girl's choice nowadays.

In the village, early pregnancy, also a choice, usually leads to some kind of living together arrangement. As mentioned above, many young girls are doing this and there is clearly acceptance. If the father does not accept paternity, the girl can still decide to have the baby or she can choose induced abortion. A friend of one of our HHH girls told us that a lot of young women in the village experienced unplanned pregnancies, and secret induced abortions were common. But when the abortion did not work they would just give birth.

Among the middle class youth, the story is quite different. Early pregnancy is considered to be highly unacceptable and those who experienced it were considered to be *'bad boys'* and *'bad girls'*. Two boys (12 and 13) even said that they thought the girls who got pregnant deserved it, as they were having sex for money. But as the following section explains this does not mean that middle class girls are not getting pregnant but seems to suggest that they are more likely to seek induced abortion than the girls in the slums and villages.

## Induced abortions

Many of the young people we talked to consider abortion as a crime, as something illegal. One HHH mother told us if they catch someone who had done an abortion, the police would arrest the person. Although others confirmed this, she said, *'But who would tell the police? It's the same people who would buy the drug [abortion drug] for each other. Because if you report me, I don't know what will prevent me from reporting you when it's your time [doing abortion].'*

A 13 year old girl who is studying in JHS told us how her same-aged friends often decide to abort their pregnancies in school. She heard stories of how female students would go to the bathroom and saw what could only be the result of abortion. She recalled with some terror her own experience when she went to the bathroom and saw the floor covered in blood. *"I saw something in the middle of it. Like a piece of meat,"* she told us. She then called the cleaning lady, who cleaned the bathroom floor, and nothing more came of it.

- Field notes, middle class location

We were sitting in front of a kiosk chatting with the young woman who was taking care of the store. She was 19 years old and was considering going to nursing school as her next step of study. An older woman who was collecting donations from church passed by in front of us. She called to the young woman, telling her that her friend who was 22 had just passed away. The young woman was surprised and she covered her mouth with both her hands, asking the older woman what had happened. The older woman told her that the friend died of ectopic pregnancy. The young woman turned to us and said, *'It's abortion.'*

- Field notes, middle class location

We heard significantly more stories about induced abortion from young middle class compared to slum and village youth. One young woman (19), for example, told us a detailed story of her close friend who has had an induced abortion three times, first in a private hospital and subsequently self-induced by drinking some concoction that was recommended.

We also found middle class youth were more likely to know about botched induced abortions which resulted in the loss of life of the woman. Almost every young person we talked to knew of someone who had died in this way.

These stories were more than just hearsay as many of these young people knew the person personally and was able to tell us what happened in great detail. Checking across study locations, we did not feel that the young people were sensationalizing these stories.

One young woman (20) told us a story of her JHS friend who had several boyfriends and was benefitting financially from these arrangements. Her mother knew of and encouraged these liaisons because she too benefitted from this. This girl died after she completed JHS during an unsuccessful induced abortion. Another woman (19) told of her friend in SHS who secretly left school early one day to meet her boyfriend to tell him she was pregnant. He asked her to have an induced abortion and she took a concoction which led to severe haemorrhage. The boyfriend rushed her to the hospital and fled. She died there and was identified through her school credentials by the school matron. Another young woman (late 20s) told of a pastor's daughter who died because of a failed abortion. She had been unable to talk to her parents for fear of disappointing them and also took some concoction to terminate the pregnancy.

My HHH 'sister', 20, told me about a time when she was sick and went to the hospital. She waited ages in the queue until nearly closing time. Finally a doctor asked why she was still there. The doctor then told her that the queue she was in was the wrong one – it was a queue for abortion. It was a long queue.

- Field notes, village

By contrast, in the slum, we only heard a couple of stories of failed induced abortions from all the young people with whom we spoke. They all related the same story of a teacher's daughter who died because she tried to induce an abortion by drinking a mixture of water and ground glass. In the villages, people also said that they knew about '*drinking something*' but although they worried about its possible fatal results, they would still trust it.

## Means for induced abortion

For those who can afford them, private hospitals are the preferred safer choice for medically induced abortions as Government hospitals impose more conditions. As one young man (20s) told us, government hospitals would not perform an induced abortion unless the woman has had previous difficulties in giving birth or her life is in danger, whereas a private hospital will not have a problem as they '*charge a high fee for it*' (around 100-150GHS). Another young man told us that abortion services in the private hospitals are very good, with a very low fatality rate. Private clinics were also mentioned as an alternative.

Women also use the services of shamans who provide herbs to induce abortion. Others go to the drug store to buy drugs or other substances they believe will induce abortion. One young slum woman (18) told us that you must be at least 18 years old to buy abortion-related drugs and others agreed. Because of this, sometimes young people sent an adult to get them the drug they need, just in case they are not allowed to buy the drug themselves. However, most times, the drug stores do not enforce the age restriction. '*It's the money they care about,*' young people told us. Young women told us that the number of the pills you need to take depends on how strong or weak your stomach is. They said, for some women, they take only one pill and blood comes, but if the stomach is strong, they need to take two. Another young woman, a 15-year-old friend of our HHH girl, had a two-year-old baby because the drugs provided by the drug store to abort did not work, so she no longer trusts the drugstore.

The researchers had opportunities to talk to the people working at the drug stores. They explained to us the different uses of the drugs but were often confused. One female store worker was not aware that a certain pill (Lydia) was an emergency pill. She referred to it as a form of contraceptive that you could take when you found out that you were pregnant and did not know about the 72 hour window for use. She and other drug store workers also often

advise young women to take several oral contraceptive pills as a means to abort their pregnancy.

One of the young women in the village told us when she became pregnant, she visited the drug store. The worker advised her to use three or four packs of “Secure”, an oral contraceptive brand. She said using ‘Secure’ that way sometimes worked for abortion. Another worker told one of our researchers that “*When you’re pregnant and you come, I can give you ‘Postinor 2’*. They advise young village women to induce abortion with ‘Postinor 2’ by taking *‘two after sex and take another two the next day.’*”

If these drugs are not available, young women say they make their own home-made mixtures to induce abortion. A young woman (20) told us that drinking a lot of sugar mixed with either Coca Cola, Guinness or Nescafe coffee would do the trick. One young woman said to us, *‘Nescafe is the fastest way. Nescafe helps to bleed, I can pour a lot for you and you will bleed’*. The amount of sugar needed for this concoction will depend on how far along you are with your pregnancy. We heard about this approach in a number of different combinations from many young people, including a group of older boys and girls. Sometimes the mix includes tomato paste, toffee or a full bottle of malt. Others told us they use herbs they buy from an herb store or drink a concoction made out of cassava leaves. This is considered to be a traditional way to induce abortion. Young women in the village particularly preferred this trusted method over using drugs, even when they know that some women die this way. Some women use a soap referred to as ‘*Seventh Day Adventist soap*’ or ‘*SDA soap*’. There is a warning on the packaging of this soap saying that it is not supposed to be used by pregnant woman, which has led young people to assume it is good for inducing abortion. Many told us young women would also drink a lot of sugar mixed with a blue washing soap. The method of drinking ground bottle glass in sugared water or coffee was also often mentioned. One young woman told us that she heard women would also take a twig of a plant, remove the leaves and make the end pointy before sticking it inside the vagina to try to poke the uterus.

In the SHS, boys say they can buy a tablet (name unknown) that costs 30 GHS for their girlfriends to terminate pregnancies. Some girls also visit a private doctor for abortions.

## Getting information about abortion

Friends are often the first source of information on abortion and young people trust others’ experience of successful outcomes. Plenty of information circulates in the village this way and is easier to come by than for middle class youth. Those most regarded as useful informants have plenty of personal experience to share. For example, there are girls who are considered experts on abortion in some SHS and tell other girls how to terminate a pregnancy. Also, the woman in the village mentioned above who is infamous for sleeping with multiple men is regarded as having good knowledge about induced abortion. Similarly, the young man mentioned before as a womanizer is also regarded as having vast knowledge about different substances and drugs that can be taken to induce abortion. He claims that he only sleeps with *‘first class ladies’* who know what is best and this is what he, in turn, recommends. He mentioned one abortion drug called Cytotec, which he said is *‘the most powerful one’*. He also mentioned ‘X’POWER’ and ‘X pill’ but it is not clear what these are. These drugs are available from a pharmacy in the city centre without a prescription. He proudly announced that women should not be scared of getting pregnant by him as he would take care of the pregnancy using these drugs. When asked whether he knew any other drug he replied, *‘If I tell you all the drugs, you won’t come to me again.’*

## Choosing to keep the baby

Some young women decide to keep their pregnancy despite it being unplanned. Sometimes this is because they are worried that they might not be able to have a child in the future if they chose abortion. This is particularly true for those who have aborted pregnancies several times. Young women living in the village explained that the reason why some still give birth despite the pregnancy being unplanned had nothing to do with the abortion drugs not working but had more to do with the fear that if you did one abortion too many, you would not be able to give birth when you finally wanted to.

One woman in her late 20s told us that a medically induced abortion is too expensive for students, which is the reason why some decide to keep the pregnancy. But sometimes women said the obstacle is more than just financial. A young woman told us that what was really difficult for her was the emotional aspect, and she could not even think of the idea of abortion when she became pregnant. But encouragement from her mother helped her to go through with an abortion at the hospital. One HHH girl told us about a young man and his girlfriend who had terminated several previous pregnancies and had decided to keep their current pregnancy as the girl was tired of going through terminations.

Getting pregnant does not always mean an end to education. Middle class students shared stories of how their pregnant classmates would attend classes or exams while pregnant. One 19-year-old university student recalled the time when she was doing her final exams with several fellow students who were pregnant. One 13-year-old girl told us that a lot of her same-aged friends were getting pregnant. She counted at least five of them and as she had heard that older students from her school who had got pregnant got married as soon as they completed JHS, she imagined the same thing would happen to her five friends. But she also said it was not always easy and told us about her friend who was pregnant by her classmate boyfriend. They were both often teased and they found it hard to focus on their studies. '*They would chew their pens and then they would cry and go home,*' she told us. A young university student shared that his ex-girlfriend almost left school when news of her pregnancy broke because of the gossip but he persuaded her to keep the baby, although she favoured induced abortion, and returned to school. Three teenaged girls told us about the choices for two of their friends who were pregnant: either you can give birth and then come back to school or you can abort the pregnancy and immediately come back to school. Each chose a different course, but the one who gave birth had to repeat classes.

Because of the teasing and the difficulties of keeping up with studying, young women frequently choose themselves to leave school when they became pregnant. A 17-year-old young man we met at the hostel told us that girls in his school skipped school when they found out that they were pregnant because they would not want to be caught by the teachers. Another (18) told us most girls in his school decided to have induced abortions to avoid being sent away from the school. But others do return to school. For example, a young woman (17) living next door to one of our HHH had returned to school after her first boy was born on the advice of the pastor but could not manage after the second one was born a year later. In a different case, a young man said that his family and their pastor did everything possible to keep his sister in school when she got pregnant because she was considered academically

talented. She is now out of school, currently *'learning to trade'*<sup>7</sup>. Another young woman (15) with a two-year-old baby was also *'learning to trade'* as her parents insisted she left school to look after the baby. She had wanted to go to school and be a nurse. And another 17-year-old with two children said she had left school with her first pregnancy five years ago but was not living with the baby's father.

We also talked with young men of their experience when finding out their partner is pregnant. One young man in his late 20s told us that when a girl becomes pregnant, they have several choices. They could try to run away, decide to abort the pregnancy, or accept it. Some of his friends agreed with him and said that some men would deny it first but if the woman persisted, they would then run away together. If the man alone runs away, the woman's family would still send her to the man's family, who would have to take care of them. It seems to be common that if the man refuses to take responsibility, then his mother will. And some even suggested this as a strategy *'When the girl is pregnant, I would give the child to my mother,'*

On the other hand, some other young men actually talked about the advantages of getting the girlfriend pregnant, especially when parents did not approve of the relationship. A pregnancy forces the family to give the girl in marriage.

## Being young parents

Young people who already had children told us that it is not easy being a parent. One older woman (35) wondered how young people, especially single mothers, could manage as she herself struggled to raise a baby on her own while her husband worked abroad, even though he sent her regular remittances. One HHH girl (late 20s) is also raising a baby on her own, as her boyfriend is away. She told us she is lucky because her family helps her to take care of the baby. Her boyfriend sends money to her for the baby's needs, but she still needs her family's help for the baby's day-to-day care. A 27-year-old man with a baby told us, *"It's not easy to have a baby because every day you need to give money for housekeeping and if the child is sick you have to take him to the hospital. Children get sick often because they're young."*

One of our HHH mothers talked about giving birth at 15 and how difficult it is moving from place to place. Her parents tried to force her into marriage so that she was not a burden to them, but she moved out. *'They were not right. They wanted me out and they gave me to some villager because of my son,'* she told us. Another young woman (19) was thrown out by her parents who told her to find the man who impregnated her. She decided to move to a different village and now she has three children, all from different men. She is still struggling to find a job, but the father of her youngest child is visiting their son and helping out a bit. She often remarked to us that she would sleep with any man if he would provide for her children.

In the urban slum, we saw many young women take their babies to work. Some of these women put their babies on their backs while they are selling produce and goods. One older woman (43) employs some young women who came from the North for work and is the only one who would consider employing someone with a baby. But she told of one young mother whose baby disturbed everyone at dawn by crying loudly and whom she had recently had to

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<sup>7</sup> Meaning she was picking up certain skills such as sewing so he or she could earn some money from it.



let go because she had not kept up with her rent. The next day, someone else was already filling the vacancy.

## Sexually transmitted infections

As mentioned above, the biggest fear from sexual activity is unwanted pregnancy. Very few of the young people we talked with considered infections as possible unwanted consequences of sex. While some mentioned disease, they have very little information or knowledge about sexual transmitted infections (STIs). The rare occasions we heard these being discussed were by a group of young men (15-16) who mentioned AIDS in relation to their sex education lessons at school. Another group of young men mentioned an herbal cure for gonorrhoea as an example of rumours they have heard about sex. One young woman mentioned diseases in passing as one of the reasons why she did not want to have sex just yet. However, we did not have a sense that young people had any good awareness about this topic. Condom use was connected not to disease prevention but to hygiene concerns (see above).

The only group of people we talked to who seemed to have a about a better understanding of STIs are university students. HIV/AIDS is what most young men talked about and, as mentioned above, they feel most young women on campus were likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS because most of them *'sleep around with older men'*. Consequently, they are keen to use condoms. As mentioned above some women students insist on the use of condoms if they see signs of STIs, such as a sore on the penis.

One young man (23) said he left it to fate whether or not he would get infected if he had sex without protection. He said once he had made up his mind to have sex with someone, he would not mind whether she has gonorrhoea, HIV/AIDS, or other diseases, and would still have sex with her. One young man in his late teens told us that he had once used three condoms at the same time to make sure they would not leak and believed that when a girl had gonorrhoea, he could avoid it by using triple condoms.

## Information and influence

### Talking about sex

In general, young people are very open talking about sex and sexuality. When it comes to talking about the topic among themselves, we found young people in the village and in the urban slum to be slightly more open and comfortable about it than others. Jokes about sex are often heard in the urban slum area. Young people, particularly young men, also brag about sex, particularly when they are gambling or while working. For instance, when they were playing cards and one player spent all of his money, he was told to go to his ugly wife and have sex with her rather than staying at a table to continue playing. In the village, within minutes of hanging out with young people, sex would easily become a topic of conversation. Young men, particularly, often use names of private parts to insult people. Young women, on the other hand, were slightly more reserved. They are more comfortable talking about sex when it is a part of talking about relationships. Young men in the university told us that *'the girls do not like talking about their sexual life with their friends because they all want to be seen as good girls.'* Male students often like to brag about the numbers of sexual partners they had had and feel this contributes to bonding with their peers, from whom they also received sex tips.

Young women sometimes experienced scolding when they talked about sex in the open. A group of girls were talking about their boyfriends outside in the open one time and an older woman opened her window said to them, *'Why do you talk about sex openly? Are you coming to take my husband?'* But some girls were quite uninhibited. For example, a group of young girl teenagers were talking to each other about relationships, arguing about what boys did with them. *'He slept with me,'* said one casually. *'He just touched my breast. He didn't sleep with me,'* said another. *'Ah, he slept with you,'* teased the other young girl in the group.

SHS boys who stayed at the hostel openly talked with their friends about their sex life and the partners they have. Girls from the same area but who are not students also talked freely about their sex life and experiences with friends. But SHS girls living in the hostels preferred not to talk about their sexual experiences for fear of being labelled *'bad girls'*.

## Preferred sources of information

Those from a middle class background usually mentioned peers, parents and the internet as the main sources of information about sex. Some included teachers and organisations which came to the schools to educate them about sex and sexuality. Other family members were also mentioned, as well as the media and their pastor in church. Some even said to us that they would rather go to the pastor first than to their parents because they were afraid of the repercussions of going to their parents.

University students told us that their main source of information is the internet and peers. They shared information and confided in their friends whenever they had any challenges. One young student indicated he would use pornographic movies to educate his wife if he married a virgin.

Slum youth identified peers and media, such as television and radio, as the most important sources of information. As many of them are Muslims, they also told us they talk to the Imam in the mosque about sexuality. Older siblings as well as teachers are also important.

Young villagers largely rely on friends for information. The former peer educator told us he regretted this, as he said that young men especially would rather listen to peers who did not have the right information than those who did, such as himself. Indeed, the young people in the village never once mentioned the peer educator as their source of information. They also use pornography to learn about sexual skills and sexual positions. Some young people said that some people came from the main town to their schools (especially JHS) to teach them about sex and sexuality.

Key to the preference for information sources is trust, which refers to both trusting someone else with their experiences and trusting the information given them. The lack of trust was referred to by middle class youth as the main determinant of involving their peers or their parents. Slum youth trust the media, particularly television and radio, and they often refer to advertisements as their source of information on contraceptives. Young people in the village almost unanimously told us that peers were the one they trusted most with information about sex and sexuality, as well as in sharing their own experience.

## Sex education

Boys as young as ten are already quite knowledgeable about sex. One ten-year-old boy told us, *'If you want to hear people having sex, around 10 in the evening they make funny noises.'* And at another time said *'If you don't know how to have sex, go and ask the pig. When the pig is mating they really know how to do it.'* Other young children were quite knowledgeable about what was going on. If they did not know yet about sex, they at least had some notion what being in a relationship meant. A five-year-old girl interrupted the conversation when we were talking with her older family members and pointed to one of the older girls and said, *'this girl has a boyfriend.'* Some of the young people we talked with said that they received sex education in school, although some said they did not. A group of middle class youth did not receive any sex education in school and consequently had very limited knowledge on sex and sexuality. Many of them did not even know what menstruation was until their parents told them when they first experienced it. One girl of 13 said that as she did not receive sex education in school it had made her and her friends more curious and they tried to find information somewhere else.

When young people referred to sex education, they mostly meant at some point in school they received information about sex and sexuality given in a didactic way rather than interactive or informal way. Schools invite resource persons or an organization from the main town to provide the education to their students as 'sex education' is not a formal part of the curriculum and depends on the initiative of the school itself. One researcher talked to a group of boys (15-16) who all went to different schools. They all received some form

*'Nurses came to my school once and I remember they said "to have safe sex, do it three days after your period. If you have sex then, you are free. Two weeks after, if you have sex, you will be pregnant.'"*

- HHH girl

of sex education in school, although one claimed to receive it from a group of doctors and nurses who were invited to come and talk about the issue, while another explained that his sex education was given by an NGO called 'AIDS Alert'. A young girl (13) said she also received a form of sex education while she was in second grade of JHS, a programme called 'Girls' Talk'. We heard that some NGOs such as 'No Yawa' occasionally visit SHS to educate *'the students about sexual relationships, the dangers involved, the need to abstain from sex and the use of contraceptives for protection'* (Boy, 18). Sometimes, some of these NGOs visited with HIV/AIDS ambassadors who would share their life experiences with the students.

Some of the young people we talked to were pleased that they received sex education in school. A woman (20) told us that it was the only time she ever received any sex education and was because her a teacher took the initiative and included other human rights issues too. Another young woman (19) told us that she felt she received very good sex education at her school from a respected teacher who provided much detail about different aspects of sexuality.

Others were not satisfied with the sex education they received in school. One group of boys we talked with felt there was no real use in sex education as it just *'went in one ear and went out the next'*. One HHH boy (19) told us he received sex education as part of biology class but said the teachers did not go into details, something he thought was important so students would be well-informed and not influenced by peers. Another young man (18) told us that his teachers sometimes advised them to stay away from sex because it could have a negative

effect on the students' future. But, he said most of the students did not take the teachers seriously because "*young people nowadays feel they are smart,*"

One young woman teacher in JHS felt it was difficult for schools or teachers to provide sex education and cited her own experience where she and her fellow teachers had been eager to provide sex education but their hands were tied: '*We were not allowed to provide sex education officially. It was thought to encourage sex if you did so. So we talked to students informally only.*' This concern was not uncommon, and some young people and older generations we talked with continue to worry that sex education encourages young people to have sex.

## Church involvement in sex education

In the village area, sex education was sometimes organized by churches. Avid churchgoers in the middle class area told us they thought pastors needed to talk about sex in their preaching. '*They should constantly be hitting about sex*', they told us. Pastors in the village had tried to talk about sex from the pulpit, but this had not been successful and resulted in dwindling numbers coming to church, so they stopped.

## NGO involvement in sex education

As well as inviting NGOs to provide sex education in class, some told us about NGOs providing classes directly to the community. One NGO came to the village and provided sex education to a select few who in turn were supposed to teach others. But the classroom approach they used only taught how to use a condom.

A village girl (14) told that, for a while, there was a peer sex education programme running in the village but stopped about two years ago due to lack of funding. When it was running, there were a group of five peer educators who would go house-to-house to educate youth and married couples on how to protect themselves from STIs and unwanted pregnancy. One of the peer educators told us he stopped because he was fed up. He told us that young people would rather listen to their peers than to him. The village youth confirmed that they trusted their peers more. A woman told us that now sex education in the village was very poor, but before, the programme was really helping. She claimed that during the programme, young people did not engage in sex as '*rampantly as they are now*'. She told us a story of several men who had STIs and wanted to spread them, although it was not clear why they would want to do this. They ended up not doing it because they were educated through the programme. One HHH father was once himself a peer educator. He told us the NGO gave him a box of condoms to be given out free. However, he said men would have sex anyway even if they did not have a condom, so '*I decided to sell the condoms for 20 pesewa each*'.

## Talking with peers about sex

In general, young people told us they were most comfortable talking about sex with their peers. These are the people they would share information with and people they would feel comfortable to get tips from them before their first sexual experience. They, especially young men, also like to talk with someone older or someone they considered to be more experienced than them.

Quite a lot of middle class youth told us that they would rather go to peers than parents to get information and knowledge about sex or sexuality. These young people were not too close to their parents and were concerned that their parents might be upset knowing that they were

sexually active. Middle class youth look up to someone who was slightly older than them and believe that they are a good source of information concerning sex and sexuality. Young middle class girls especially go to peers or to someone slightly older when seeking information about terminating a pregnancy. A group of young men told us that when new students enter SHS, they receive orientation from a group of older students about school life, as well as about relationships and sexuality. These young men told us that they tended to boast of their experience, especially of their relationships, which made the new students to want to be exactly like their seniors. This sort of peer pressure and peer influence is not always seen as a good thing. One young man (17) said most of the students he knew started school with little knowledge of sex but were soon influenced by their peers, particularly their roommates, and they started emulating them.

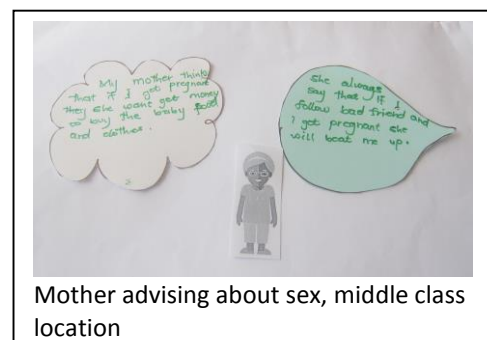
Slum youth felt very comfortable sharing information about sex and sexuality with their friends. One young woman told us that she talked about sex with her friends all the time. She trusted her friends because she even met her first boyfriend through them. *'I had my first boyfriend when I was just 15 years old. A friend introduced him to me,'* she told us. As with middle class girls, young slum women also go to friends when they are looking for information on induced abortion. Young slum men enjoy being mates with others of similar ethnic background and, through this bonding, discuss sex freely, including sexual enhancement.

Likewise, village youth are very comfortable going to their friends and peers to get information about sex and sexuality, particularly on induced abortion and contraceptives.

## Talking with parents about sex

Across the board, young people told us they were a bit wary about talking to their parents about sex or sexuality. Young people indicated that parents do not really like knowing that their children are already dating. Parents would also think of them as bad boys or bad girls if they found out that they were dating already, which stops the talking. This is exemplified by one village boy, who said, *'If I approach my mom and talk about my girlfriend, mom will see me as a bad guy. So why would I do that?'* A HHH girl in the village said that if she told her father about her boyfriend, her father would throw her out of the house.

Young middle class are more likely to say that they felt comfortable talking to their parents about sex than others. A group of young teenage girls said that they could talk to their mothers about everything. When there were young men approaching them, they would confide in their mother because they claimed their mother would be the first person they go to about everything. These young women would rather talk to their mothers rather than their fathers. A girl (15) told us that her father would not let her go out, and when he found out that she did anyway, he beat her. She sees her mother as an ally and her father as the disciplinarian. Many middle class youth believe parents are the ones who are supposed to teach their children about sex as they are closest to their children. One girl (13) was adamant that sex education in school encourages sex and so feels it should be the parents who teach their children about sex. She told us she talked to her mother about sex but later we realized this was actually her mother telling her to abstain from sex.



Similarly, a group of churchgoing young people told us that sex education should be taught in the house when the parents start to see changes in their child. This way, no one would influence them in decision making and lure them to sex. One 19-year-old told us that her mother talked to her openly about sex and would share with her exactly what she needed to do in certain situations, including concerning sex. Another teenage boy told us he was also comfortable talking to his parents about sexuality, although he asked his mother to leave the room when our researcher started to talk to him about relationships. The twin girls mentioned above also told us that they would confide in their mother first about anything, including about sex and sexuality. Their father lived abroad so their mother would be the first person they would go to. One of our researchers was present during one of these conversations and found it to be an opportunity for the mother to give advice using scenarios about other young people who became pregnant or contracted STIs. A 13-year-old girl also insinuated that her conversations about sex with her mother are also only advisory; for example, her mother cautioned her not to get pregnant like others. A group of girls (11-12) told us that they confide in their mothers about boys. A young woman (19) told us she was very close to her mother and talked to her in detail about sex. Her mother even told her how to clean herself after sex. Some middle class said they trusted parents more than others when it came to sharing their experiences and were wary of sharing with peers in case this turned into gossip. One HHH girl illustrated this by sharing how, as a result of a quarrel, her best friend spilled her secrets.

Slum youth rarely confide with parents and are often living away from them in rented rooms anyway. Young people only come to their parents to share about their relationship when they feel it is serious. For example, one young man (late 20s) told us if the woman he was seeing was someone he really liked, then he would talk to his mother about her.

## Talking with authority figures about sex

Several young people indicated that sometimes they would talk to people in authority, such as teachers or pastors, about sex and sexuality but generally this was only if they felt they were in trouble and had nowhere else to go. For example, one young woman told us that she needed to seek help from a teacher when she was menstruating for the first time at school and did not know what to do. Only one young woman, studying JHS grade 2, told us that young people should seek to talk to teachers first about sex and sexuality. Involving teachers was not generally thought to be appropriate. Very few boys indicated that they might trust a teacher.

Some young people said that they would go to see a pastor if they had problems, mainly because they were worried that they were going to get in trouble if they went straight to their parents. They hope the pastor can mediate with their parents about what had happened. However, young people in the village especially told us that they would not confide in a pastor. One pastor even recognized this and told us that they have tried talking to young people about sex and sexuality but, based on past experience of declining congregation sizes, they worry that *'If I do that, they will stop coming to church,'* as young people do not want to be preached at about sex. One young man we talked to (18) expressed deep trust in his religion and will only marry when God tells him to. Some university students were also deeply religious and lived by their Christian or Muslim teachings, which deny sex before marriage and will guide them in marriage choices.

## Influence of role models

Some young people told us that they look up to older role models. For example, a 10-year-old HHH boy in the village said that he knew that his older brother had a lot of girlfriends and he wanted to have the same kind of experience. Some young women shared that they like to talk with their older siblings, but many, both girls and boys, indicated that they were not able to talk to their older sister or brother and would be simply be waved away. Middle class parents often promote older siblings as examples for their younger brothers and sisters. A university student (19) said she often talked with her older married sister about sex topics. A HHH boy (19) prefers to go to his older brothers rather than his mother for advice. In the slum and villages, youth rarely shared with their siblings unless they were very close in age.

A group of young men we met in a middle class residential area told us that there were some older boys in their SHS whom they looked up to who were part of a church group called *Marshal*, who are sort of soldiers for the church. The young men in this group are considered cool and experienced people. Young people told us, '*They've been there before*' and greeted them with high fives with friendly motivating comments such as '*You're doing well, she'll come back to you*'.

Young people also looked up to famous artists or celebrities. Young people who lived in the village told us that really liked the singer/rapper Sarkodie. Young men really wanted to be like him because he was famous and all girls like him. They said looking like him was cool and they aspired to be as popular as him. University students also followed celebrities online or through social media such as 'WhatsApp'.

## Influence of media

Media is often the main source of information for young people about sex and sexuality. The middle class youth explained they use the internet to search for information on sex and sexuality. Typical of others, a girl (20) explained she prefers to be private about searching for information rather than asking others. One teenage boy said all information about sex is on the internet and is very confident that he could even talk to women about their own bodies because he knew a lot.

Television is seen as an important source of information. Young people get information about abortion, contraceptives and STIs from watching television, especially through television advertisements.

Soap operas are often quite graphic in their portrayal of relationships and family conflicts and use sexual innuendo quite openly and freely. Young people told us, '*Look! In Ghana we don't have romance like in the Western movie,*' referring to a more explicit scene on television. There are also television shows about health and sex education, but as one girl put it, some young people might not be able to benefit from these shows, particularly those in the village, as there are electricity outages or no electricity at all. Those villagers who did have access to electricity did not really watch television and did not watch these educational television programmes anyway, preferring soap operas. Middle class children are often banned from watching programmes about sex and sexuality even though they have television.

*'Anything you want to find is on the internet.'*

- HHH girl (20)



A few youth say they get information from the radio, and a young man (20s) told us he listens to the radio where they really *'talked about sex'*, including a regular Saturday programme which gives tips on sexual positions.

The only type of campaign known around sexual rights and behaviour were those by AIDS Alert or of health professionals making visits to schools. Posters, billboards, or other printed material such as calendars are largely unnoticed by the young. In one of the middle class residential areas, there are campaign posters with information about abortion and family planning, but none of the adolescents we chatted with knew anything about it. They had not even noticed a large billboard erected very near their houses with information on family planning. One young woman told us that although there were posters containing information in hospitals or clinics, young people did not tend to read them. There were no posters or campaign materials in the village.

One of our HHH fathers in the urban slum had a calendar from the Ghana AIDS commissioner. They used a football player as a model in the calendar with a clever message about protecting the goal post using the ABC method (abstinence, be faithful, condoms). Young man we chatted with told us that they knew the football player but they did not know anything about 'protect the goal' campaign.

## Influence of Pornography

Youth access pornography through mobile phone and video or movies shown in film centres and there were also anecdotal stories about books being read to find information on sexuality.

Young people, especially young men, talked openly to us about pornography. Some young male university students, especially those with strong religious convictions, claimed that they had no need to keep pornographic materials, but others had no problem telling us that they regularly watch pornography, referring to it sometimes as 'blue film'. In places where electricity is not constant such as in the rural villages, young men watch pornography on their mobile phones. They told us, *'Water and electricity might be a problem but communication with phone is not be a problem at all.'* They pass around the phone or share files with each other. They also watch these files on a computer if they have one. One HHH boy told us that he had 50 GB worth of pornography in his computer. In some places, like in the village, young men watch pornography at video or movie centres. Some young people, even young men themselves, sometimes regard their peers who watch pornography as *'bad boys'*.

## Adolescent reproductive health services

Young people rarely talked about services available to them in relation to sexual and reproductive health and counselling and indicated such services are largely not available. They feel the most urgent need is for centres providing abortion services and advice. They identified only two places where sexual and reproductive health services are currently available: the private hospital (mostly in relation to getting an induced abortion) and drug stores (for medicines and contraceptives). Pregnant women could go to the public hospital for antenatal check-ups, but other tests, such as pelvic examinations, never entered the conversation. One young man (20) told us about a private diagnostic centre where you could get scans. Young women in the village were excited about a new government health centre that was about to open and shared that they could *'now start having sex because if I get pregnant I can just go there instead of to the main town.'* One young woman told us how she

would go to the health centre in secret for an induced abortion *'I can just pass to the next town and no one knows about me coming to the health centre'*."

As mentioned above, young people chose to go to the pharmacy/drug store to get advice on contraceptives, although workers in these stores said young people mostly already knew what they wanted when they came and few came for advice. Those who watched contraceptive advertisements on television felt they had enough knowledge to go and buy what they needed from the pharmacy or the drug store. Generally, young people told us that both the private hospitals and drug stores were ready to help them as , according to them, *'they only care about the money and not who they are serving'*, so neither age or marital status matter when buying contraceptives or accessing abortion services. Drug store workers told us that sometimes young people, especially those from the middle class areas, would rather go somewhere quite far from their home to buy contraceptives so they would not be recognized. But this was more due to embarrassment and fear of other people in the area noticing that they were buying contraceptives rather than concerns of disclosure by the drug store staff.

The university has no clinic of its own although it has a sick bay. However, the sick bay is not resourced so *'if you go there, you won't even get first aid'*. This means students use their National Health Insurance cards to access health care at the government hospital nearby which they describe as providing 'adequate' care. University students also have access to a counselling unit, but they told us they hardly visit the unit for fear of being labelled as *'bad'* or *'having a problem'*.

Because of the absence of services geared specifically towards young people, and because young people did not consider themselves facing significant obstacles in fulfilling their sexual and reproductive health needs, they did not mention the need for services specifically for youth, even when we asked specifically about youth friendly services. This may be because such services are viewed as likely to be formal and provided at a specific location. Young people, especially in the urban slum, appreciated that we came to sit with them to just have conversations rather than coming armed with formal surveys or formal advice. One of them said, *'When foreigners and strangers come, they will be a bit hesitant to approach me. But we are just chatting easily'*. And others said when people come to the area from outside it was often formal and not very friendly, suggesting that approachability is key in the provision of non-judgmental services for young people.

## Study Implications

Unlike other sections of this report, this section takes an authorial perspective of the implications of the findings for adolescent sexual and reproductive health programming in the Ghana Brong Ahafo region. These implications have emerged from our interactions, conversations and observations of young people.

**Sexual activity among youth.** Sexual activity among youth in Brong Ahafo region of Ghana is high and starts in early teens regardless of background and especially where there is freedom from parents, such as in the slum and in hostels. The still-prevailing idea that talking about sex with youth will encourage them to engage in sexual activity seems to have no basis. In this study, youth were very open about talking about sex and their sexual activities.

**Age of consent and messaging about safer sex.** There is no appreciation of the age of consent for sex and that having sex under 16 is actually illegal. Whilst it would be extremely unwise to suggest taking legal action, the underlying premise for this law needs to be shared with youth so they understand the particularities of health and emotional risks of early sex. Clear information, rather than advice or moral instruction, needs to be available through appropriate channels (see below). The message needs to be safer sex.

**Reducing the financial motive for transactional sex.** The transactional nature of sexual activity (girls expect gifts, money and other forms of support in exchange for sex) is prevalent in villages, slums and educational institutions, and suggests a need to both challenge these norms and provide practical alternatives, such as student loans specially geared to specific semester demands.

**Information on correct use of contraceptives is key.** Contraceptive access is seen as easy and most youth, regardless of their age, are able to get the condoms, contraceptive pills and morning after pills they need without problems or uncooperative pharmacists/drugstore or health clinic staff. These contraceptives are seen as affordable. Knowledge of how the pills work or alternative means of contraception is limited, especially among young middle class youth. Targeting drugstore workers to provide useful and accurate information should be considered.

**Information about STIs is lacking.** Generally, there is very poor understanding of STI infection routes, prevention, cure or long term consequences (especially among the middle class youth). This should be addressed with clear factual information. Even though readily available, condom use is low mainly because it is still perceived as diminishing pleasure. Use of condoms are not seen generally as a means to protect against STIs though some suggest a connection to cleanliness.

**Information, advice and assistance for safe abortion.** Unwanted pregnancies are prevalent across locations, and induced abortions are commonly sought. Most youth are not aware that induced abortion is legal under certain circumstance under Ghanaian Law; this lack of awareness inevitably results in unsafe practices. This suggests that there is a need to provide information about induced abortion choices, assessment of risks associated with unsafe abortion and abortion counselling services.

**Emphasise the costs of raising children and youth lifestyle in delaying pregnancy.** The predominant desire to have fewer children compared with previous generations and the

concern with costs of bringing up and educating children can be capitalised on as an important driver in promoting increased use of contraceptives. Furthermore, youth shared that they value their youth as a time to have fun, experiment, pursue education, explore job opportunities, and spend money on themselves. It is clear that young people are very concerned about their cool image and lifestyle, so all these needs can also be capitalized on and compared to the burden of having children too young.

**Using the internet and popular television for adolescent SRH messages.** The internet and television are seen as trusted sources of information. The internet can also be used privately, including used to search for questions which have been already answered by others. This is important from the point of view of communication for behaviour change because more collective forms of information sharing suffer from group behaviour norms of embarrassment, fear of being labelled or judged, inability to get personal questions answered or excessive bragging. Access to internet and social media is increasing and should probably be the mainstay of information dissemination. Advertisements and popular television dramas which incorporate factual information for young people to make their own choices are likely to be effective (bearing in mind that some youth, especially from the middle class, are banned by their parents from looking at some of these). Other campaigns such as posters, billboards, leaflets are likely to have no effect.

**Peer-to-peer support and education processes which emphasise informality and street credibility.** While some shared that they would go to a trusted figure such as religious leader or teacher if they found themselves in trouble, especially relying on their role as potential mediator between them and their parents, they are not generally seen as important sources of information. Like parents, they provide advice and guidance rather than information. Concerns remain that they may judge or correct. For this reason, the preferred and trusted source of information is peers, especially those who are considered to have '*experience*'. This too is an important finding as it suggests that peer educators are likely to be the most appropriate means for imparting information on adolescent reproductive health. However, consideration should be given to the selection of these peer educators for them to have the credibility needed. Rather than emulating the advisory and sometimes instructional role of adults, they should be selected based on having personal and direct experience of contemporary lifestyles and having '*street credibility*'. The frequent positive comments made to the RCA team about our approach of easy, informal chatting in their own space supports the notion that outside educators/counsellors (rather than peer educators) need to adopt behaviours and attitudes which enable them to '*hang out*' and win the trust and confidence of young people.

**Emphasise youth friendly facilitation and approachability rather than fixed centres for youth friendly services.** Gossip and stigma are widespread and prevent young people from seeking formal service provision where they might be seen by others or have to queue/wait for services. For services to be '*youth friendly*', providers will need to reach out to youth in their own private environments and through other private means, such as online or through mobile phone technology.

**Table 4: Summary of some key aspects of Adolescent SRH by location**

	Slum	Village	Middle class
Early sexual activity (before 16)	Yes	Yes	To some extent (many before 16)
Ease of having sex before marriage	Easy and open	Acknowledged as prevalent. Privacy difficult.	In secret
View of early pregnancy	Accepted	Accepted , more likely to go to term and expected to marry father	Usually induced abortion sought
Access to contraceptives	Easy	Quite easy	Obtained in secret but easy
Ease of talking about sex	Very easy	Very easy	Slightly less open
Induced abortions	Well known methods, often use medicines from drug stores. Cost issues lead to unsafe abortions.	More likely than others to use local concoctions. High risk of unsafe abortions	Private hospitals ( cash) Secrecy and shame lead to unsafe abortions
Most trusted confidante	Friends	Friends	Older friends/relatives
Preferred information source	Friends (experience), Television, advertisements	Friends ( experience) Television, advertisements	Internet

# Annexes

## Annex 1: Areas of conversation

### DEMOGRAPHIC OF COMMUNITY

Urban/rural/peri-urban. Remoteness/topography/ physical access. Size of community (estimated population/ households). Main livelihoods. Culture/religion. Access to facilities (especially related to health, education, recreation, sexuality).

### YOUR HOUSEHOLD/FAMILY

Profile of the young people: age, education, gender, culture, religion, skills, dependents, work. Family: family tree, ages, gender, education, livelihoods. House: location, building materials, layout, toilet/drinking water facilities, key assets (land, livestock, work related equipment, electrical equipment, phones etc.).

### CONTEXT OF SCHOOL

High school/university. Public/private. Religious/not. Vocational/degree. Location. Demographic (male/female,

### PERCEPTION AND EXPECTATION

Perception and expectation of relationship/dating/romance/'love'/emotional elements. Perception of romance and love and marriage. Boys and girls perceptions & expectations of each other. Perceptions of what boy/girlfriend wants (at different ages). Characterization of 'sex' and intimacy & explanation of consensual sex. Expectation of sex (when to start/be sexually active, frequency, with whom). Expectation of others on them (sexual exploration, virginity, choice etc.). Perception and expectation of condom use, contraceptive pills, emergency pills, etc. Expectation of purity, chastity, modesty (and the opposite). Perception and expectation on gender issues and gender roles. Perception on sexual orientation (lesbianism/homosexuality/bisexualism, etc.). Perception on sexual identity (masculinity, femininity, transsexualism, androgyny, etc.). Relation of sexuality and identity (also in relation to religion or class). Perception of rude/good/cool boys and girls. Perception on consequences of sex (wanted/unwanted). Perception on HIV/STD

### SEXUAL AND RECREATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Types of recreational behavior & preferences. Places & times for and nature of 'hanging out'. Early experiences/exposure to sexual activity. Who to hang out with (who's cool/not cool). Recreational substance (smoking, drinking, drugs). Age of menstruation, puberty, desire for sex, first experience, masturbation, associated emotions. Freedom to exercise choice and voice. Use of condom, pill, female condom, emergency pill, etc. (conversation with males and females). Places, times, and frequency for sex. Sex partners (numbers, characteristics). Sexual acts they engage in. Preference (act, partner, etc.). Talking about sex with peers and adults (secrets, bragging, gossip, etc.). Prostitution/sex for money/patronage ('sugar daddy/mummy'). Forced sex/abuse and adult behavior. Experience of pregnancy for boys and girls (first and second hand experience). Experience of abortion (first and second hand experience). Being young parents/living apart parents. Experience of disease and illness.

### ASPIRATION

Life aspirations (career, love, marriage-monogamy/polygamy/serial polygamy/single, living together, future dreams). Family size. Ideal partner (life/just for the moment). Extra marital affair. Divorce. Difference aspired for future generation (sex and otherwise). Aspiration of parents (perception of youth & parents). Changes (changing trends-marriage/dating/sexual relationships).

Chat, explore, probe, present scenarios 'what if', introduce debate 'some people think', listen, draw, explain, dream, play

### SERVICES

Constraints/restriction/ease of access to advice. Constraints/restriction/ease of access to campaigns materials. Constraints/restriction/ease of access to contraceptives (condom, contraceptive pills, emergency pill, etc.). Knowledge of services available. Willingness to access services. Perception of services. Perception of personnel (approachability/trust). Perception of abortion and abortion service (own perception and others). Perception of medical services (pelvic exam, etc.). Experience of services (direct and indirect). Behavior of service providers. Access to pregnancy test (place, price). Superstition/misinformation on services (the use of pill, condom, etc.). Access to sexual and reproductive/relationship counseling. Confidentiality. Education centre. Perception of what constitutes youth friendly services (place, who provides services, deliver (how), anonymity, privacy, trust, timing).

### INFLUENCE AND INFORMATION

Different sources of information (general). Trust and perceived reliability of different sources. Peers (peer pressure, rite of passage, teasing and bullying, gaining prestige). Parents (what information, how). Siblings (what information, how). Extended family members (what information, how). People in authority (teachers, scouts, heads of hostels, pastoral leaders, community leaders). Culture (taboo, matrilineal/patrilineal, (wedding) ritual, superstition, festivals, funerals). Religion (norms/values, do's and don'ts, teachings & consequences). Media (popular media, songs, movies, social media, pornography, internet). Access to information (constraint/price, ease of access). Campaign (knowledge and effectiveness). Diseases and unwanted consequences. Role model (football players, siblings, celebrities, etc.). Jobs/careers/immediate social and work surroundings. Education-school/workplace- appropriateness, effectiveness. Gossip/rumors/stereotypes/labels. Social norms/values. Social consequences and punishments

## Annex 2: RCA team composition

**Overall team leader: Sherria Ayuandini**

**Technical advisor: Dee Jupp**

Round	Team	Code	Name	Role
Round 1	Team A	1A SA/GO	Sherria Ayuandini	Sub-team leader
		1A SA/GO	Gloria Aduofori	Interpreter
		1A VA	Victoria Ampiah	Team member
		1A NK	Nana Kwame	Team member
	Team B	1B RA/AB	Rizqan Adhima	Sub-team leader
		1B RA/AB	Anthony Boateng Bediako	Interpreter
		1B MN	Muhamad Nuruddin	Team member
		1B BA	Benedicta Andoh	Team member
	Team C	1C BS	Beatrice Sarpong	Sub-team leader
		1C BQ	Bismark Dzahene Quarshie	Team member
		1C DA	Doris Ataa Owusu	Team member
		1C RM	Pascal	Team member
Round 2	Team D	2D BS	Beatrice Sarpong	Sub-team leader
		2D BQ	Bismark Dzahene Quarshie	Team member



### Annex 3: List of people met during the study

Category	TOTAL	
	Female	Male
HHH adults	23	14
<b>HHH youth</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>HHH children</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>
FHH adults	72	79
<b>FHH youth</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>FHH children</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>32</b>
Principal	0	1
Teachers (accredited)	4	6
Voluntary teacher	2	1
Religious leader, teacher	6	11
NGO/activist	2	1
Nurse	6	3
Health assistance	7	16
Pharmacy operator	23	32
<b>Primary school students</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>JHS/SHS students</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>University students</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Out of school (primary school age)</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Out of school (secondary age)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>15</b>
Peer educator	1	2
Assembly man	1	3
Food vendors	53	8

Farmers	12	13
Fishermen	0	2
Transport operators	0	9
Shopkeepers	28	11
Porter	0	55
Football players	0	4
Tailor	1	4
Butcher	3	9
Lottery kiosk	1	11
Community members	2	8
	554	697
TOTAL	1251	people