

Let's Talk About Sex:

Exploring Social Influences on The Sexual
Health of Young Racialized Women

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Background

HIV in African, Caribbean and Black (ACB) -Canadian Communities:

- The HIV infection rate in the ACB community = 12.6 times higher than in Canadians of other races.¹
- The ACB population accounts for 17% of the people living with HIV and AIDS and 27% of the new HIV infections in Ontario. ²
- African and Caribbean people account for 10% of Toronto's population and yet 33% of the city's new HIV infections.³

Background

Gender and Age:

- Women account for a growing proportion of positive HIV test reports across Canada.⁴
- Heterosexual contact is the primary mode of HIV transmission amongst ACB women.⁴
- ACB youth are diagnosed with HIV and AIDS at increasingly younger ages than youth of other ethnic groups.¹

Background

The Jane-Finch Community:

- Located in North-West Toronto
- Jane-Finch is home to over 150, 000 people, 75% of whom are visible minorities.⁵
- 21.1% of the Jane-Finch population is ACB = one of the Toronto's largest ACB communities.⁵
- 39% of the residents in Jane-Finch are classified as low income.⁵
- In 2007, the youth in Jane-Finch displayed some of the highest Sexually Transmitted Infection and pregnancy rates in the city of Toronto.⁶



Study Objective

To work with Black Creek Community Health Centre and local City of Toronto community centers to explore how a group of 15 young (14 – 18 years old), ACB women residing in the Jane-Finch community make sense of the factors that influence their sexual decisions.

Methods

Nine Week Workshop

- **Photovoice:** using photographic technique and creative writing, participants are able to reflect their understanding of the issues in their communities.
- **Interviews:** semi-structured individual interviews



Photo titled **Safety First**

Findings - Stereotypes

- Negative stereotypes prescribed the kinds of sexual behavior expected of young women in the community
- These stereotypes were informed by the media, outsiders, religion and culture.



*“Disgraceful phrases are written on this stomach .LOSER, DIRTY, WHORE, BABY MOMMA, NO AMBITION. These words describe how Jane-Finch girls are portrayed. This relates to our lives because everywhere you go ignorant people who lack knowledge will judge you because you are from Jane-Finch. Sometimes when I say I am from Jane-Finch, people jump to conclusions that I am a liar, I am sexually active, I am a loser who doesn't care about life and I am not going to finish high school. This makes it hard cuz boys won't date or have sex with a girl if she's from Jane-Finch cuz of the things he hears about girls in the area. They think their brainers and hoes. Some girls live up to the stereotypes, but not all girls fit the stereotypes of the whore who is not going to graduate high school. Not every girl here is the same and you can't judge everyone based on what a couple of girls do,” (photo-narrative titled **If I don't respect myself, how can anyone else?**)*

Findings

- social distancing from the negative labels, and ultimately other young women in the community.
- Avoid admitting to sexual activity
- Don't access sexual health services and information = a form of "outing one's sexual activity"



Photo titled My Name Is



Photo titled **Caged Up**

Participants feared but wanted to communicate about sexual health with their parents.

Participants reported a lack of autonomy due to parental and religious controls.

Photo titled **Purity**



Findings – Sex and \$



- The youth expressed the frustration of the lack of access to money and employment opportunities within the community.

The existence of **transactional sexual relations**

- Between male youth and female youth
- Across the boundaries of race
- Between female youth and significantly older men

Closing Points

- ◉ Power,
- ◉ Domination and
- ◉ The social construction of sexualities

References

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- ⁵City of Toronto Social Development, Finance and Administration Division (2006). Retrieved March 16th, 2010 from http://www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/priority2001/full_jane-finch.pdf
- ⁶Robertson, Shani. (2007). *Who Feels It Knows: The Challenges of HIV Prevention for Young Black Women in Toronto*. Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention.

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