REPORT CARD
HIV PREVENTION FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

INTRODUCTION

This Report Card aims to provide a summary of HIV prevention for girls and young women in Papua New Guinea.

The Report Card is one in a series produced by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), under the umbrella of the Global Coalition on Women and AIDS, and with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Young Positives.

This Report Card is the basis of extensive research carried out during 2006 by IPPF, involving both desk research on published data and reports, and in-country research in Papua New Guinea to provide more qualitative information.

There is a lack of infrastructure throughout the country and the number of varying local languages and geographical terrain mean that scale-up is an enormous challenge, particularly in terms of prevention. Stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV is still high and there have been reports of people living with HIV being buried alive.22 The national government response to HIV has however increased access to both voluntary testing and counselling (VCT) and antiretroviral (ARV) treatment and has clear guidelines on mother to child transmission (MTCT) which it is aiming to scale-up.

Research into the behaviour of both men and women is also taking place as part of the current National Plan on HIV/AIDS in the hope that it will inform future behaviour change strategies.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

COUNTRY CONTEXT:

Size of population: 5,772,000
Life expectancy at birth: 55.7 years
Percentage of population under 15 years: 40.7%
Population living below $1 per day: Data not available
Youth literacy (female rate as % of male rate): 64.1%
Median age at first marriage for women (ages 15-49): Data not available
Median age at first marriage for men (ages 15-49): Data not available
Median age at first sex among females (ages 15-49): Data not available
Median age at first sex among males (ages 15-49): Data not available
Total health expenditure (public and private) per capita per year: US $23
Contraceptive prevalence rate\* (1996-2004): 26%
Fertility rate: 4.1 children per woman
Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births (1990-2004): 370
Ethnic groups: Melanesian | Papuan | Negrito | Micronesian | Polynesian
Religions: Roman Catholic 22% | Lutheran 16% | Presbyterian / Methodist / London Missionary Society 8% | Anglican 5% | Evangelical Alliance 4% | Seventh-Day Adventist 1% | other Protestant 10% | indigenous beliefs 34%
Languages: Melanesian Pidgin | English spoken by 1%-2%

AIDS CONTEXT:

Adult HIV prevalence rate (2007 estimates): 1.61%\*a
HIV prevalence rate in young females (ages 15-24): 1.16%\*b
HIV prevalence in young males (ages 15-24): 0.4%\*b
HIV prevalence in pregnant women (2007 estimates): 2.03%\*c
HIV prevalence in vulnerable groups: Sex workers 16%\*c
Number of deaths due to AIDS (estimates 2007): 5,995\*d
Estimated number of orphans due to AIDS (ages 0-17) (2007 estimates): 3730\*e

HIV PREVENTION FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN CONTEXT:

Within the context of Papua New Guinea’s highly male-dominated society, the HIV epidemic presents an extreme threat to girls and young women who are at very high risk of infection. The country has a generalised epidemic with a prevalence rate of 1.8%, however high rates of gender-based sexual violence and the acceptance for men to have multiple and concurrent sexual partners contribute to young women and girls’ vulnerability. Many men, in particular young men, in both rural villages and urban settings are likely to take part in gang rape (known as line-ups) where one girl or young woman is forced to have sex with a number of young men. Although there are many different and varying cultures and communities within Papua New Guinea, a high rate of gender-based violence including domestic violence exists across the country. Access to health care for women has also traditionally been low as women are perceived as inferior to men, have lower life expectancy and very high maternal mortality rates. The epidemic, therefore, is driven by strong gender-based social and traditional customs and unfortunately there is little gendered policy and legislation to protect girls and young women from HIV/AIDS.
Prevention Component 1
Legal Provision (National Laws, Regulations, etc.)

Key Points:

- The legal age of marriage for girls is 16, or 14 with parental and court consent. However, customary and traditional practices allow the marriage of girls as young as 12 and children can be taken as additional wives or given as brides to pay family debts.  
- The minimum legal age for accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services is 18. However, in practice, girls between the ages of 14 and 17 are usually not denied these services if they try to access them. 
- Abortion is legal to save the life of the woman and in cases where mental or physical health will be damaged. In cases of incest, the approval of two medical doctors and one psychiatrist must be sought and in cases of rape, proof that rape took place must be available. 
- Mandatory HIV/AIDS testing is prohibited under the HIV/AIDS Management and Prevention Act. 
- The constitution provides for equal protection of both sexes under the law, however women often face discrimination and gender-based violence, particularly in the home. The PNG Law Reform Commission undertook research which found that in some areas of the country rates of domestic violence are as high as 100% of all women in marriages. Stigma and discrimination against all people living with HIV (PLHIV) remains high despite constitutional protection for equal rights for all. 
- In 2005 only 11 large businesses and government departments had established HIV/AIDS workplace policies and in 2006 there were reports of some companies dismissing employees after learning of their HIV positive status. 
- Sex work is illegal and HIV/AIDS peer education and the formation of sex worker action groups has incited violence and police harassment. However, the Sexual Offences and Crimes Against Children Act states that no person under 18 can be charged with the offence of selling a sexual service. Research undertaken on perceived dangers to sex workers identified protection from the police as their number one safety priority.

Quotes and Issues:

- “The existing laws in the country that protect the rights of young women and girls into existence before the advent of HIV/AIDS in PNG, there are no specific laws that protect this group.” (Interview with Focal Point on HIV/AIDS, UN Agency) 
- “[We need to] enact laws to abolish polygamy, and strengthen legislation that recognises the rights of women in PNG and empower female youth leaders through training to advocate on behalf of girls and young women based on existing legislation.” (Interview with nurse at Family Planning Association) 
- “If girls and young women are sexually assaulted by men and the case is reported to police by the girls and young women, the police in many instances fail to take action on the mere pretext that the girls and young women are prostitutes (two-kina-bush men) and they deserve to be assaulted.” (Interview with manager, National AIDS Council) 
- “In PNG there are laws that prohibit rape, incest and child abuse that could protect girls and young women from HIV infection. These laws are however not fully enforced in the country. Girls and young women also feel reluctant to report cases of abuse, incest and rapes for fear of being reprimanded by family members especially if the perpetrators of these offences happen to be with in the family.” (Interview with manager, UN Agency) 
- “In many rural communities in PNG if a girl gets her first menstruation she is considered to be ready for marriage and parents of the girl are willing to accept bride price [money] from any man who is able to pay a higher fee to marry the girl. We consider this as customary law (tumbuna pasin), although it is not a written law it is enforced vigorously and girls have no power to refuse these forms of marriages.” (Focus group discussion with girls and young women (15 – 19), rural area) 
- “If a client refuses to use a condom after you have offered him one and he forces sex with you, there are no grounds for you to lay a complaint. The police will normally say ‘After all he paid you well and why should you come to complain?’” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20–24, rural area) 
- “The HIV/AIDS Management and Prevention (HAMP) Act, introduced in 2003 was centred on rights of people living with HIV (PLHIV) and not much was written on HIV protection for girls and young women.” (Interview with HIV positive, young, female advocate)
The Second National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS in PNG addresses the full continuum of HIV/AIDS strategies in its seven priority areas, listed as:

- Treatment, counselling, care and support.
- Education and prevention.
- Epidemiology and surveillance.
- Social and behavioural change research.
- Leadership, partnership and coordination.
- Family and community support.
- Monitoring and evaluation.

The National Strategic Plan aims to make antiretroviral (ARV) treatment available and accessible to at least 25% of people currently infected with HIV and AIDS throughout Papua New Guinea by 2008. In addition, the Universal Access document developed by the Department of Health sets a target of 10,000 people on treatment by 2010.

Mother to Child transmission (MTCT) guidelines are in place, but there is a lack of available space for private and confidential consultation. The protocols for antenatal surveillance establish a target of 450 pregnant women to be tested throughout 2 months and for this to be repeated each year.

The National Strategic Plan aims to reduce incidence and the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in risk populations to 5% and in the general population to 3% by 2008 by training more health workers and ensuring availability of drugs for treatment.

The National Strategic Plan aims to strengthen social, cultural and economic research in order to better understand the different factors that influence behaviour and create behaviour change strategies.

The National Strategic Plan aims to provide comprehensive, accurate and relevant prevention messages through expanding STI/HIV prevention and education activities in the mass media, school programmes, peer education, and community drama groups.

Data produced by the surveillance system is not disaggregated by age and sex, for example, in 33% of the reported cases, age was not recorded.

“HIV/AIDS has been taught at our school. The lessons are about HIV/AIDS and how to prevent spread of HIV. We have also learnt how HIV is not spread and why we should not fear a person living with HIV.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20 -24 years, urban area)

“The government should put more funds into organisations caring for PLHIV and make it possible for those people living with the virus to travel to areas where the fear of AIDS is rife and to talk to community members.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20 -24 years, urban area)

“The government must fund non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) to help them build capacities of communities to participate in discussions on issues about sexuality and AIDS and find out solutions to solve the problems of HIV/AIDS.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20 -24 years, rural area)

“Condom distribution is a protocol that is supposed to be practiced in all health institutions in the country. VCT centres are being scaled up in hospitals, health centres and clinics in the country. If new developments are accompanied by the relevant advocacy targeted to girls and young women accessibility will improve.” (Interview with manager, UN Agency)

“Protocols on condom distribution, antenatal care and VCT are in existence. Service providers are overwhelmed by a large number of clients seeking assistance and with low wages and no incentives they easily become frustrated and tend to be hostile especially to girls and young women who seek assistance.” (Interview with manager, National AIDS Council)

“In PNG family units and the churches play important roles in the upbringing of girls and young women. The formulation of a policy by the government to recognize these roles and to develop the capacity of these institutions to mainstream HIV prevention in all activities that these groups carry out will help to improve HIV prevention for girls and young women.” (Interview with Manager, National AIDS Council)

“If the government can come out with a policy that enables girls and young women and also boys and young men to present themselves for medical check-ups free of charge at least twice before they attain the age of 25 years many young people will be obliged to protect themselves from HIV.” (Interview with HIV positive, young, female advocate)

“At school, lessons on sexual reproductive health were on the reproductive organs taught under biology. Lessons on relationships, sex and AIDS were not taught.” (Focus group discussion with young men aged 20 – 24, urban area)
HIV prevention services are available for sex workers in Papua New Guinea where a team of service providers have undergone intensive and rigorous training (including clinical attachment) on HIV management. These are in both rural and urban areas. They are also able to support sites in their activities.

In 2006, prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) was available in 15 hospitals throughout the country. Rural health institutions also started providing the service. However, rapid test kits were to be made available to all antenatal and family planning clinics in the country by 2008.

There is a low level of male condom availability in health centres.

As of July 2007, there are 38 public, private and faith-based organisation sites where antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) can be accessed. These are in both rural and urban areas.

There are over 30 antiretroviral treatment sites in Papua New Guinea where a team of service providers have undergone intensive and rigorous training (including clinical attachment) on HIV management.

In total, it is estimated that there are 56,175 people living with HIV and AIDS. Of these, 11% (6,348) including 636 children will need ART by the end of 2007. Of those needing treatment, 26% (1,647/6,348) were on treatment by end of June 2007.

HIV prevention services are available for sex workers under programs implemented by Save the Children in two cities and two urban areas. World Vision runs a drop in centre for sex workers in Port Moresby and the Seven Days Adventist also runs skill development project for sex workers in Lae.

“Promote more open discussions of sexuality by using mixed sex groups and discussing early marriage, age mixing in relationships, physical and sexual violence against women, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, exploitation, incest and polygamy.”

“If the HIV prevention messages for the general public had an impact on young men and boys, we should expect a reduction in rapes, new HIV cases and in sexual and physical violence against girls and young women but the opposite is the norm and all the above indices are increasing each day in the country.”

“Many of my friends who have used the services at the STI clinic have complained that after waiting in a queue for a long time, the clinic is short of drugs and that patients have to go home and come back the following day. Some never came back as they are unable to pay for the cost of transportation for the second time.”

“Condoms, both male and female, should be distributed in all communities by an NGO. If condoms are to be sold they should be cheap so that the unemployed young people would be able to afford to buy them.”

“HIV prevention services are available for boys and young men rather than for girls and young women. For example there are more male condoms given out free of charge than female condoms.”
KEY POINTS:

- In reality there are multiple social, logistical and financial barriers to girls and young women accessing services in Papua New Guinea, including:
  - Judgemental attitudes of families, community members and health workers.
  - Distance to service.
  - Lack of privacy and confidentiality.
  - Lack of information about what services are provided and their location.
  - Peer pressure and lack of information about prevention methods.
  - Traditional norms of gender inequality.
  - Stigma associated with HIV and AIDS that makes people reluctant to visit voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) centres.
  - Client waiting times.
  - Lack of availability of commodities (drugs for sexually transmitted infections [STI], contraceptives).

Many of these barriers particularly affect girls and young women living in rural areas.68

- The training modules for health staff on STI address gender and attitudes of staff and clinics and are encouraged to provide both male and female staff to ensure same gender service providers are available.69

- Although HIV Prevention, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, voluntary counselling and testing (VCT), STI treatment, condoms and antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) are all free for young women and girls to access, women are subordinate to men in many cultures within PNG, which has resulted in them having minimal access to all resources, including healthcare and education and/or prevention information.70

QUOTEs AND ISSUES:

- “Some churches forbid girls and young women using contraceptives.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20 – 24 years, urban area)

- “Boys and young men are less likely to be ridiculed when they access HIV prevention services compared to girls and young women. Although boys and young men have more access to HIV prevention services than girls and young women the rate of condom use is still low in the country.” (Interview with manager, UN Agency)

- “From my own experience as an HIV and AIDS Counselor, I feel boys and young men do not take HIV information and HIV prevention services seriously. We can change attitudes if we can involve boys and young men in the establishment of youth friendly centres on HIV prevention. Many young men and boys will change their attitude towards girls and young women if they make use of services provided by these centres. ” (Interview with HIV positive, young, female advocate)

- “[Prevention programmes] … should establish more services that can easily be accessed by girls and young women.” (Interview with manager UN Agency)

- “The shame that a young woman will bring to the extended family systems prevent many of them from finding out their HIV status. In some cultures in rural areas, girls and young unmarried women are not supposed to have sex and therefore should not avail themselves to services for sexual and reproductive health. In many cases the services are just not there.” (Interview with manager, HIV/AIDS support NGO)

- “On Wednesdays and Thursdays, the people who come for treatment form a long queue that stretches out from the building to the outside. It is embarrassing for many young people to be seen in the queue.” (Focus group discussion with young women and girls aged 15 – 19, rural area)

- “It is not true that people think you are accessing family planning services [if you are married] because you need the consent of your husband to do so. If it is HIV prevention services that you are accessing, your husband will become offended if he gets to know. Many married women fear to go for HIV prevention services because of this.” (Focus group discussion with young women and girls aged 15 – 19, rural area)

- “Many girls and young women are more concerned about what they think people would say about them than taking measures to avoid HIV.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20 – 24, urban area)

- “If boys and young men could refrain from making and drinking home brew, growing and smoking marijuana and make it a point to learn and understand HIV and how it is prevented, many girls and young women will be spared the ordeal of violence, rapes and gang rapes (line-ups) that are common in PNG society today.” (Focus group discussion with young men aged 20 – 24, urban area)
KEY POINTS:


- The National Council of Women - a women’s network to represent women of the country on the international scene and also nationally is a member of the National AIDS Council. There is also one seat for a person living with HIV (PLHIV) in the council.64 However it has been noted that most involvement of people living with HIV (PLHIV) is at a lower level.65

- I gat Hope, the main network of people living with HIV (PLHIV) has a women’s network which young women and girls can join. I gat Hope aims to lobby government, provide information, promote access to treatment and care, and fight stigma.67 In 2004 it had 20 members.68

- There is recognition from the National AIDS Council that more access to training for people living with HIV (PLHIV) is needed in order that they might be able to engage in the national HIV response.69

- There is one young HIV positive woman advocate who was funded by UNDP to produce a 10 series television programme on how she is coping with HIV. She also visits schools and workplaces to talk to people about HIV/AIDS.70

- A number of youth-related activities are conducted by the Australian Agency for International Development, various non-governmental organisations and other organisations. One young person was trained as a community theatre trainer and has been actively involved in building the skills of other young people as leaders in the fight against HIV in various provinces.71

QUOTES AND ISSUES:

- “Although PNG is a signatory to various international conventions, the government has done very little to improve the situation of girls and young women in the country. Girls and young women are always in constant fear of assault by men and their movements are curtailed. Government must work towards incorporating the commitments into the national legal framework to make it possible to implement CRC and CEDAW and other international legislations that protect girls and young women.” (Interview with manager UN Agency)

- “If I can recollect correctly, I don’t think girls or young women have ever been involved actively in the decision making process about AIDS at the national level. Those living with HIV have been involved but as to the level of involvement it is hard for me to say.” (Interview with nurse from Family Planning Association)

- “Although I have received training on HIV and AIDS, what motivates me to work is not the money I get, but the recognition that the project has given me. For example the project has given me a T-shirt with the project’s logo, a bag that I use to store condoms for distribution, a cap to wear and a constant supply of condoms from the project office to where I live. All these have contributed to give me some status in the community and many people in our community who want information about HIV and AIDS come to see me.” (Focus group discussion with young women aged 20-24 years, urban area)

- “Girls and young women should be encouraged to take the responses to rural communities where the majority of the disadvantaged girls and young women live.” (Interview with manager, UN Agency)

- “In PNG the voices of girls and young women are not heard. We only hear the voices of the rich or politicians who hardly speak about the plight facing girls and young women. ‘There is a need to create a special platform for girls and young women to air their feelings about how society treats them and they should be allowed to make plans and be supported by government with funding to implement the plans.’” (Interview with Manager, National AIDS Council)

- “The government should invest resources into existing women groups in the country to work with girls and young women by empowering them to get involved in the national decision making processes for HIV and AIDS.” (Interview with manager, UN Agency)

- “Groups come to our communities to talk about HIV prevention and where we can get prevention services and do performances to enlighten us about HIV and AIDS. We do not discuss how we can put what they have taught us into practice. They only tell us what to do and all that we do is to listen.” (Focus group discussion with young women and girls aged 15-19, rural area)
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this Report Card, a number of programmatic, policy and funding actions are recommended to enhance HIV prevention for girls and young women in Papua New Guinea. Key stakeholders – including government, relevant intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations, and donors – should consider the following actions:

LEGAL PROVISION

1. Introduce a comprehensive gender-based violence law which, in line with the constitution, recognises the rights of women as equal to those of men and addresses the social and cultural phenomena of:
   • Rape and gang rape (line-ups)
   • Customary practices between tribes which allow the abduction and rape of girls and young women as retaliation to tribal wrongs
   • Domestic violence and marital rape
   • Decriminalise sex work
   It is vital to ensure thorough dissemination and strong enforcement of these laws.

2. Review, amend and enforce legislation which allows marriage of girls as young as fourteen with consent of their parents and introduce legislation which ensures that customary and traditional practices which allow the marriage of girls as young as twelve are abolished.


POLICY PROVISION

4. Review all policy documents through a gendered lens and ensure that gender is used to critically address the way that society pressurises both men and women to partake in risky sexual and social behaviour that increases the possibility of HIV transmission.

5. Promote universal access to antiretroviral therapy (ART), while also promoting positive prevention*. Ensure that girls and young women living with HIV can receive treatment, care and support that is free and provided within an environment that not only addresses their HIV status, but recognises their broader needs relating to their gender, age and social status.

6. Build on current policy to implement a comprehensive, skills-based school sexuality education programme that incorporates gender issues and is targeted towards HIV/AIDS prevention. Ensure that teachers have the necessary training and capacity to teach this programme.

7. Review and strengthen Papua New Guinea’s action in the light of the aspects of the Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS from the 2 June 2006 High-Level Meeting (to follow up on UNGASS) that particularly relate to HIV prevention for girls and young women. These include sections: 7, 8, 11, 15, 21, 22, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31 and 34.

8. Recognise and support the efforts of the non-formal sector in addressing the epidemic including non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations by ensuring their involvement in addressing the epidemic including non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations by ensuring their involvement in addressing the epidemic.

AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES

9. Urgently develop and implement behaviour change communication (BCC) programmes for boys and young men to focus on gender-based violence addressing, in particular, gang rape and looking at the impact of home-brew and the use of marijuana in the increase of risky sexual behaviour.

10. Greatly increase the availability of male condoms, particularly in rural areas through the provision of condoms at all health clinics and in other major public sites and ensure that the provision of affordable female condoms is increased across the country.

11. Scale-up the availability of HIV prevention information, education and communication (IEC) materials in local languages in order to educate tribal elders and rural communities about the dangers facing young women and girls.

ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICES

12. Build on existing development of health systems infrastructure to increase access to all sexual and reproductive health and HIV services in rural and remote areas and expand service provision by using mobile clinics.

13. Ensure that every health clinic providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and HIV – related services has enough space to ensure privacy and confidentiality in terms of waiting rooms and consultation space, in particular for voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment centres and for the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT).

14. Develop information, education and communication (IEC) materials that are targeted towards young men and boys, and use them to advocate for sexual and reproductive health in places where young men and boys gather in order to encourage them to become more responsible for their sexual health and behaviour and to test for HIV.

PARTICIPATION AND RIGHTS

15. Bring young people together to improve communication skills between the sexes, challenge current attitudes and involve them in the dialogue on HIV prevention.

16. Promote skills and training for young women and girls, such as vocational training or training on policy and legislation to increase economic and political empowerment of this group.

17. Increase the involvement of young people living with HIV (YPLHIV), especially girls and young women in the national response to HIV prevention (including through mass media and other channels) both as a modality of stigma reduction and to ensure that the national response to HIV is more rights-based.

* Prevention for and with people living with HIV

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