BREAKING SILENCES:
LEWISTON-AUBURN SOMALI YOUTH & SEX EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

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with Cait Vaughan, MFP Organizer
Introducing the Interns!

Meet Farhiyo, Maryam, and Shukri
Goals for Program

1) Learn and apply the basics of community outreach and engagement,

2) Interns share their experiences, views, and insights about issues of sexual and reproductive health that are relevant to them,

3) Have important conversations with peers and gather data from young African immigrant/children of immigrants about sexual and reproductive health,

4) Engage with clinical professionals and other MFP staff about findings and offer recommendations for developing & sustaining connections to this community.
Who did we survey & how?

- 80 respondents total; 2/3 female and 1/3 male
- Youngest respondents = 13, Oldest = 23, 50% = 17-19 years old
- Primarily Somali/American youth
- Interns performed outreach primarily in parks and engaged in group and 1:1 conversations to complete the surveys
KEY FINDINGS
Question: Have you had sex before marriage?
Question: *Do you think a lot of your friends have had sex?*

Only 10% of respondents reported having premarital sex, but *almost half* believe that a lot of their friends are having/have had sex. There is a *gap* in what the data shows and the perception of how common it is for teens in this group to engage in premarital sex.

Boys are 20% *more likely* than girls to think their friends are sexually active.
We suspect that more people had premarital sex than reported. We think this could be due to:

- Taking survey in group settings
- Worry of “outing” self to peer in the community
- People we know are maybe less likely to tell the truth due to shame/stigma
Rating Scale: *It is wrong to have sex before marriage.*

55% of all respondents **AGREE** or **STRONGLY AGREE** with this statement. 1/3 of all respondents were **NEUTRAL** on the statement.

However, girls were **30% more likely** to express strong agreement & boys were **almost twice as likely** to be neutral.
We suspect that girls expressing stronger feelings on this topic than boys has to do with the following factors:

- Girls are typically judged more harshly than boys when it comes to sex. Peers will gossip about her, but nobody is concerned about who she had sex WITH.

- Girls/women have a responsibility to carry forward culture and traditions more than boys or men.

- A girl’s family might judge/shame her or throw her out for having premarital sex.

- Everything a girl does reflects on her family.

- If boys have premarital sex and their families find out, they will be reprimanded, but no one will hold onto it.
Question: *Do you know how people get STDs?*

Even though 54% of all respondents claimed to know how STDs are transmitted, **only 20% of explanations conveyed understanding**, and 25% were ambiguous on whether or not the person understood how STDs are transmitted.

This could be explained by differing interpretations of the question **OR** a gap in perceived knowledge and actual comprehension.
Question: Who would you go to if you thought/knew you had an STD?

- It is important for family physicians to ask about sexual and reproductive health in environments of privacy where patients could answer truthfully.
- Outreach about the MFP clinical services with youth is very important.
- Mothers might be a key change agent/resource for young people regarding sexual and reproductive health.
Question: Which forms of birth control are you most familiar with?

- Condoms: 90% Familiarity, 85% Rate of Effectiveness
- The Pill: 70% Familiarity, 65% Rate of Effectiveness
- The Shot: 60% Familiarity, 55% Rate of Effectiveness
- Implant: 50% Familiarity, 45% Rate of Effectiveness
- IUD: 40% Familiarity, 35% Rate of Effectiveness
- Withdrawal: 30% Familiarity, 25% Rate of Effectiveness
- Plan B: 20% Familiarity, 15% Rate of Effectiveness
- The Patch: 10% Familiarity, 5% Rate of Effectiveness
- The Ring: 0% Familiarity, 0% Rate of Effectiveness
- Fertility Awareness: 0% Familiarity, 0% Rate of Effectiveness
Question: Where do you learn about birth control?

- Older siblings, mother and health teachers all ranked very LOW as sources.
- NO ONE listed FATHER as a source of information about birth control.
Rating Scale: *Birth control should be free & available to everyone.*

Male & female respondents are EQUALLY LIKELY to feel NEUTRAL on the statement and EQUALLY LIKELY to DISAGREE with the statement.

GIRLS are MORE LIKELY to express STRONG agreement and disagreement than boys.
We were surprised that so many respondents had positive or neutral views on birth control access & use.

This is different from what we are taught within our families and religion, and thus, different than what we expected.

We believe our parents’ generation would feel very differently about this than youth. This could be part of a shift in perspective by the younger generation being brought up in the United States instead of Africa.
Some Recommendations

- More outreach about the clinic is needed in the community; not enough people know about it.

- Need clinic materials that are translated and include pictures of Somali/African people.

- It would be good to have a Somali person who is a community health worker focusing on sexual and reproductive health and family planning issues in the community.

- Immigrant-led organizations should be out in the community more leading conversations on these topics, breaking silence on the issues.

- We need MORE education in school about sexual and reproductive health.

- Our peers could help fight shame and stigma about sex and sexuality by ending a culture of gossip and doing campaigns about harassment.
WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR US?
Sources for Additional Information

• **HEART Women & Girls** - Promotes sexual health and sexual violence awareness in Muslim communities through health education, advocacy, research and training. 
  [www.heartwomenandgirls.org](http://www.heartwomenandgirls.org)

• **WellShare International** - Our life-changing work takes place in both Minnesota and East Africa, enabling us to reduce health disparities and provide community members with the essential knowledge and care they need to take charge of their own health. 
  [www.wellshareinternational.org](http://www.wellshareinternational.org)

• **Immigrant Resource Center of Maine** - The mission of Immigrant Resource Center Of Maine (IRCofMe), formerly known as United Somali Women of Maine, is to support refugee and immigrant communities by offering culturally and linguistically sensitive services to promote a healthy and equitable Maine. 
  [www.ircofmaine.org](http://www.ircofmaine.org)