

# Adolescent Mental Health in Jamaica

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# Jamaica

- Middle income island nation in the Caribbean sea
- Population – 2.7M (STATIN 2019)
- Adolescents (10-19y) - 21% of population



Image from [mapsnworld.com](https://www.mapsnworld.com)

# Hearing the Voices of the Jamaican Youth

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- **Local co-investigators:** Abigail Harrison; Caryl James Bateman  
*University of the West Indies*
- **Aim:** To hear the voices of the Jamaican adolescents regarding adolescent mental health in Jamaica – their opinions and lived experiences

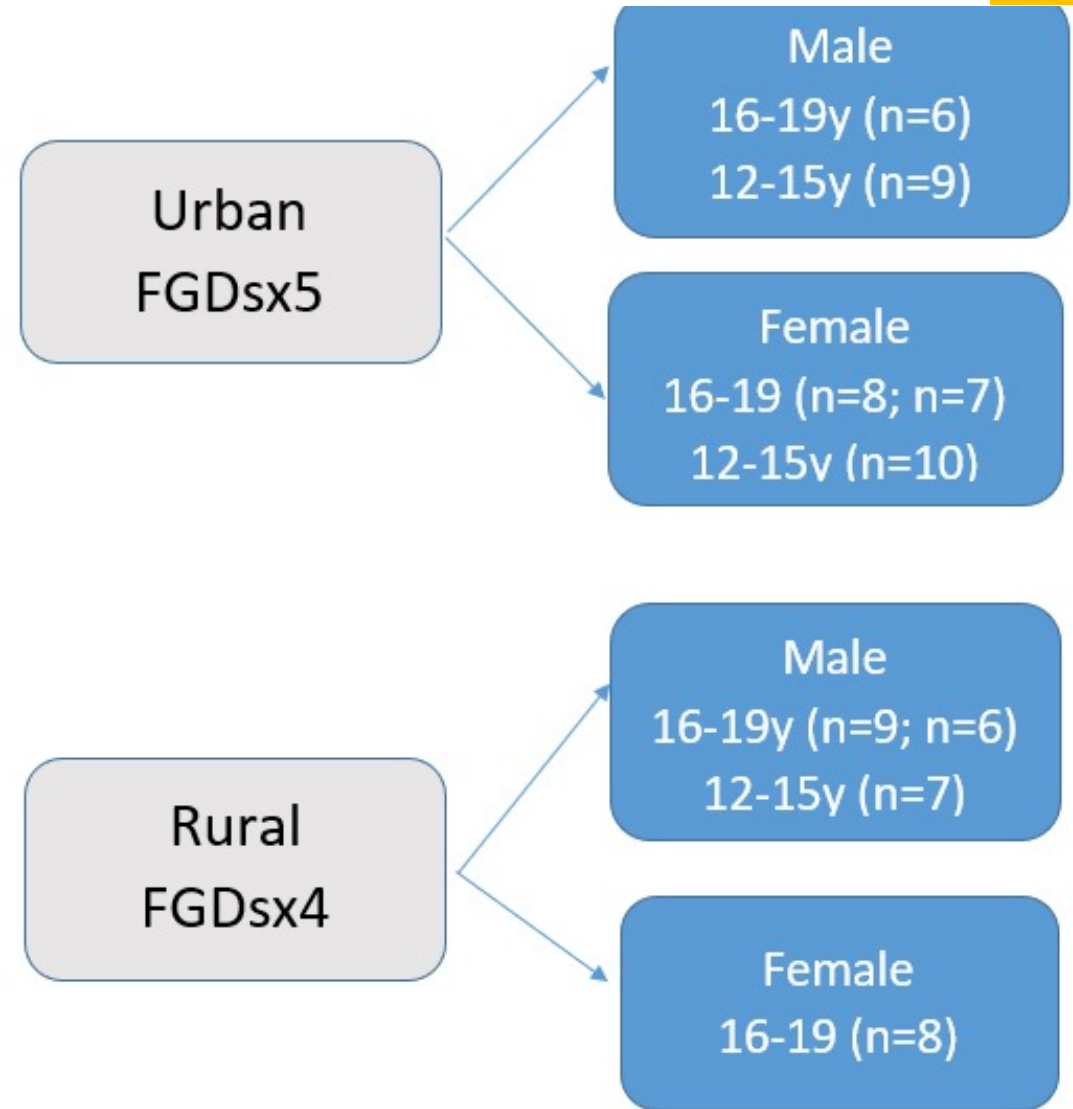
## Methodology

- A snow-balling technique was used to identify adolescents willing to participate
- School and community
- Parental consent; adolescent consent/assent (<18 years)



# Methodology

- FGDs were held virtually using Zoom® platform
- Participants used aliases
- Qualitative data analysis using an inductive thematic analysis approach (JHU)



N=70; Male 37(53%); Rural 30 (43%)

# Themes highlighted for Jamaican adolescents

- Depression as a major concern among adolescents
- Adolescents' perception their voices are not being 'heard '
- Gender-based differences in how adolescents manage stress and their emotions
- Gender-based violence

# Theme (1) – Depressive symptoms

- Adolescents were willing and able to discuss their emotional concerns
- Alluded to the pervasive nature of mental health concerns
- Depressive symptoms featured frequently
- Triggers
  - Financial and academic expectations from family
  - Abandonment by family (after a teen pregnancy)

# Neighbourhood Factors and Depression among Adolescents in Four Caribbean Countries

Gillian A. Lowe<sup>1,9\*</sup>, Garth Lipps<sup>2,9</sup>, Roger C. Gibson<sup>1</sup>, Sharon Halliday<sup>3</sup>, Amrie Morris<sup>4</sup>, Nelson Clarke<sup>5</sup>, Rosemarie N. Wilson<sup>2</sup>

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## Depressive symptoms among Jamaican adolescents 14-16 yo

- Overall 64%
- Minimal 36%
- Mild 23.4%
- Moderate 26.3%
- Severe 14.4%



## Theme (2)

### Adolescents' voices not being heard

Perception that their concerns went unnoticed/ unheard

Parents unable to connect with extent of adolescent's psychological pain

- *“The mentality of most Jamaican parents is that **depression is not a real thing** or the mental state of a child is not a real thing..” (Older rural boy)*
- *“some [adolescents] have actually spoken to their parents and **their parents kinda dismissed it, .....** so now just nobody confides in their parents anymore because that message is going around- that they just won't understand”. (younger urban girl)*

## Theme (3)

# Differences in emotional responses by gender

- Male adolescents' reluctant to show emotions for fear of being perceived as weak

*“its okay for girls to express their feeling(s) right, more than boys, where as to be men to be tough to keep our feelings inside” (Older urban male adolescent)*

*“...I think boys are...worried about showing their emotions because...if they cry [they're] gonna hear that ‘Ok, I am too soft’, and that is one of the reasons why guys don’t like to show their emotions”. (urban, older girl)*

# Theme (3)

## Differences in emotional responses by gender

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- Reluctance to seek help

*“Boys...have...pride or...confidence. So they feel like they [should] handle [problems] on their own. They don't need any help and...if they talk about emotions they make themselves vulnerable or weak”. (Younger rural boy)*

- Males expressed a lack of appreciation

*“Our mental health and our feelings aren't really appreciated or given any consideration” (Older rural boy)*

# Theme (4) Fear of Gender-Based Violence

*“[Girls worry about] coming home alive or even safe or even making it home...most times I don't even leave my road because you have some perverts in my community and sometimes I feel very uncomfortable, you know? And even if you tell somebody or say it to somebody like an adult, they will not believe you.” (older urban girl)*

## Hear us Jamaica, hear us!

Jessica Azar

Thursday, September 09, 2021



**Jamaica has seemingly silenced our grown women, so will you listen to the youth?**

It saddens me that, as a 13-year-old girl living in Jamaica, writing this letter even crosses my mind.

# Other significant findings

## Coping strategies

- Self-harm

*“I think the reason why people do self-harm like not suicide but self-harm by itself, I think it is because they are feeling so much emotional and mental pain that they think the physical pain is going to help block the emotional and mental [pain]....” (younger urban girl)*

- Substance use

- Social media

*“But what I see is that some of my peers ....are finding their escape from reality with their technology....” (older rural boy)*



# Other significant findings

## Social media and body image


*“One of the biggest issues is insecurities and also...how you visualize yourself. So a lot of it is with social media now, we have so many different platforms: TikTok, Instagram. We have certain images that we see as “the it” image and if people don’t fit into that...they have a bit of difficulty. (older urban girl)*

Eating and Weight Disorders - Studies on Anorexia, Bulimia and Obesity  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s40519-019-00814-5>

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Disordered eating behaviours and attitudes among adolescents in a middle-income country

Abigail N. Harrison<sup>1</sup>  · Caryl C. B. James Bateman<sup>2</sup> · Novie O. M. Younger-Coleman<sup>3</sup> · Michelle C. Williams<sup>1</sup> · Kern D. Rocke<sup>3</sup> · Stephanie C. Clato-Day Scarlett<sup>1</sup> · Susan M. Chang<sup>3</sup>

Received: 21 June 2019 / Accepted: 5 November 2019

# Other significant findings

- Family and Community support

*“having one person who is willing to help and show interest can go a long way” (older urban girl)*

- Stigma within the community and mocking behaviours invalidates their emotional and behavioral challenges.

*“... some people in the community mock you...they laugh at what you [have] been through.... People always find fun out of people being in bad situations. (older rural girl, Jamaica)*

# Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

- Many secondary effects
  - Losses – academic, friendships, opportunities
  - Increased responsibilities at home
  - More time
    - to think
    - engage in risky behaviours



# Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

## Lack of connection

*“we have become more distant from each other, miss, less connected you know?” (rural older male)*

## Unearthing hidden concerns

*“you also have way too much time to sit down by yourself and think, ....you're stuck in your room, by yourself, thinking about everything that you've been dismissing and that's how everything comes up so yeah” (younger urban girl)*

## Improved family connection

*“for me I'm not really used to being around my family because I'm like at school and with my school hours and their working hours so like it's kind of good to like be around them a bit more, so that I can like you know bond with them, and spend time that I wouldn't usually have” (urban older female)*



# Summary

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- Jamaican adolescents openly discuss their psychological distress and the support and lack thereof they have received
- Greater desire for parent and community support
- Knowledgeable about the psychological challenges that adolescents face
- There is a strong desire for connection, especially considering that this is a strong part of the culture
- When given the space adolescents are open to sharing



## Recommendations

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It is our duty to find resources where their thoughts and feelings can be acknowledged, and they are supported in a helpful way

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Increase parents'/ HCPs' awareness that males in the local context try to manage their stressors differently

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Parents/ HCPs need guidance on how to identify presenting features of depression and other common mental health concerns

Thank you

