

USAGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS LUBRICANTS AMONG MOST AT RISK POPULATIONS (MARPs) IN JAMAICA

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*Target Groups: Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), Female Sex
Workers (FSW) and Youth at Risk (YAR)*

Qualitative research carried out by
Maxine Wedderburn
Deborah Bourne
Melanie Smith
Nadia Robinson
Veronica Samuels-Dixon

PSI's Four Pillars

Bottom Line Health Impact * Private Sector Speed and Efficiency * Decentralization, Innovation,
and Entrepreneurship * Long-term Commitment to the People We Serve

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KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES:

The use of a water-based lubricant with a latex condom reduces the risk of transmission of HIV and some sexually transmitted infections (STIs). As a part of its program in Jamaica, Population Services International (PSI) through its Caribbean affiliate - PSI/C - and funding from its CARISMA II project, utilizes didactic and interactive activities to normalize the use of lubricants. The program is target specific, working directly with MSMs, FSWs and Youth at Risk through collaborative relationships with the Jamaica Red Cross and Jamaica AIDS Support for Life. This study provides an overview of the beliefs, knowledge levels, barriers to access and use and packaging preferences of lubricants. The findings of this study will be used to guide and improve Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Inter-personal Communication (IPC) activities and interventions for lubricants among MSMs, FSWs and Youth at Risk in Jamaica.

WHAT WAS LEARNED:

In Jamaica there is a pervasive public view that personal lubricants are products intended for use by MSMs, a highly discriminated group in Jamaica. This juxtaposition of lubricants and MSMs support a reluctance to purchase the product for fear of being labeled as “gay”. This reluctance is especially seen among youth, even those who have benefitted from an intervention. In fact youth (who have not participated in an intervention) have very limited knowledge of lubricants and perpetuate the stigmatizing of lubricant users. MSMs and FSWs emerged as regular users of lubricants. The general practice among MSMs, FSWs and Youth (to a lesser extent) who use lubricants, is that they do not use condoms with the main partner, however they will use condoms along with the lubricant with a commercial or secondary partner. In the event that MSMs, FSWs and/or Youth want to use a personal lubricant and they do not have, they will use olive oil, baby oil and hand lotion in its place.

PROGRAMME IMPACT:

The study identified beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and social norms as factors to influence and change. These factors can be leveraged in didactic and interactive BCC activities and mass media campaigns that offer lubricant education in an effort to diffuse the stigma and normalize the use of lubricants and position the product for pleasure.

1 BACKGROUND

The purpose of this study is to provide information that can be used to develop messages and campaigns for increasing the use of water-based lubricants and supporting willingness to access same among MSMs, FSWs and the Youth.

Specifically, the study objectives were to:

- a. Identify beliefs relating to the use of lubricants;
- b. Identify the barriers to access and use which are held by the target groups;
- c. Describe the openings – when, where, and by whom target groups can be effectively communicated with;
- d. Understand the experience of the target groups with the desired behavior and alternative behaviors in the category;
- e. Describe the level of knowledge which exists among the target groups in respect of lubricants;
- f. Understand current lubricant brand associations, and response to sizes.

2. TESTING PROCESS

2.1. Qualitative Research (Focus Groups)

A focus group methodology was used to conduct this study. Each focus group lasted between 1 ½ to 2 hours and was steered by a conversation guide (see Annex I) facilitated by a trained moderator and assistant moderator. A total of six focus groups comprising a total of forty-eight participants were conducted. Of the six focus groups, two focus groups with a maximum of eight participants per group were conducted among three key target populations.

Three target populations were considered for this qualitative insight. They include:

- Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) – in this study MSM refers to men between the ages of 18 and 35 years who have sex with men and who self-identifies as such.
- Female Sex Workers (FSW) – in this study FSW refers to women between the ages of 18 and 39 years who engage in sex in exchange for money.
- Youth – in this study youth refers to a person between the ages of 18 and 24 years old

Using the snowballing technique participants were identified through references from Jamaica AIDS Support for Life (JASL) or Jamaica Red Cross (JAS). All participants belong to the Kingston Metropolitan Area (KMA). KMA is a specific zoning which includes the Portmore Community and the parishes of Kingston and St Andrew. Recruitment was also based on the criteria of: self identified member of the target population, willingness to participate and basic literacy. Attention was also paid to ensure a balanced mix of persons who did not participate and persons who have participated in an intervention on lubricants conducted by either JASL or JRC. No compensation was offered to participants, refreshments and travel reimbursements were provided as incentives.

Each focus group (after seeking consent) was audio taped and detailed transcripts produced. All data were analyzed by Hope Caribbean researchers. Thematic content analysis was done on all transcripts and emerging themes were identified and explored in each succeeding group. Quotations from the data are italicized in this report. Quotations in some cases were edited for clarity.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Intervention has positively impacted attitudes to lubricants

Persons from all target groups who had participated in an intervention on lubricants were able to cite benefits to lubricant use. Cited benefits included:

- helps prevent the condom from breaking;
- enhances overall pleasure of sex;
- reduces tearing and bleeding in the vagina and anus;
- lessens bruising of both the penis and vagina.

“Lubes are a must for me. It makes the sex more exciting and can make it (sex) go on for a longer time too because there is no tearing or bruising, and the lube just make it feel better.” (MSM, age 24, Kingston)

“I use lubes a lot. Most of my clients are very big, their penis, and without the lube I couldn’t manage most of them, and I would have to quit work early every night. So it helps me so I can work longer hours and see more clients, so more money in my pocket.” (FSW, age 22, Kingston)

The overall attitude of those persons who have been educated about lubricants is that the benefits outweigh the concerns, and that lubricants enhance and increase the pleasure of sex.

On the contrary, persons did not engage an intervention view lubricants as a ‘last-resort’ necessity only when ‘tightness or dryness’ of the vagina or anus are an issue. These persons were only aware of lubes as making sex easier in that lubes provide moisture for the vagina and anus helping the penis to ‘slide in more easily’.

“Sometimes my man really want sex but I’m not really in the mood. So if we try and it can’t go in cause I’m too dry, then he will ask me to use something to wet it (vagina) up. So for me that is the only purpose to make the penis go in easier.” (Female youth, age 22, Kingston)

“When I have whole heap of client in one night, and especially if one has a really big penis, then I will use the lubricant because I know I’m not going to be wet and I want him to slide in easily. Otherwise I’m not using it.” (FSW, age 30, Kingston)

Intervention and sampling by health professionals emerged as having played a significant role in adjusting the attitudes of MSM, FSW and Youth to the use and consequent benefits of

lubricants. This difference in attitude is stark when compared to members of all three populations who have not participated in any intervention programs.

2. Stigma associated with lubes as being “for gays” is pervasive and supports a reluctance to purchase the product

Although the MSM, FSW and Youth populations feel that personal lubricants are beneficial, each group had members who responded that ‘*Lubes are most necessary for gay men*’. Each population reported that the society-at-large views personal lubricants as mainly needed for the MSM community:

“Is mostly gay men buy and use lubes, cause they need it for their type of sex. I would feel funny to go into a pharmacy and buy a lube, next thing the people think ‘me gone’ (I’m gay)...” (Male Youth, age 21, Kingston)

“Truthfully, I don’t let it bother me when I go to buy lubes, I don’t pay attention to the people around, I have my money and I’m going to get what I need. I realize that most people think that it’s only gay men who buy lubes but I don’t care.” (MSM, age 25, Kingston)

All populations spoke of this societal stereotype as a well established ‘stigma’ in Jamaica. Although some recognized this as faulty reasoning, they reported ‘*that’s just how people view it overall*’. The stigma acts as a barrier to access particularly for the Youth population. This was found to be so even in cases where they had participated in intervention and could cite the benefits of lubricant use.

Unlike the Youth, the MSM and FSW community were much more likely to access personal lubricants. Members of these two communities, particularly where they had participated in an intervention accessed the product more regularly than those who were not exposed to an intervention. Both MSMs and FSWs speak of the relative ‘ease’ of accessing personal lubricants for themselves. They purchase lubricants at pharmacies; and get the free lubricants at the Ministry of Health, Jamaica Red Cross and Jamaica Aids Support for Life.

“Me no have no problem to get the lube, either me go down to Ministry go get some, or me go to the pharmacy go buy it.” (FSW, age 27, Kingston)

“Some guys feel funny to go buy the lubes in the pharmacy. I have a friend who puts on a lab coat and pretends to be a doctor, and goes to the pharmacist and says

'Pharmacist, let me have three boxes of those lubricants there.' And because they believe he is a doctor nobody looks at him funny. I don't feel funny to buy it but sometimes I go to Jamaica Aids Support to get it." (MSM, age 30, Kingston)

3. The Youth population is largely unexposed to, and uneducated about branded lubricants

The majority of the Youth population in this study had no knowledge of personal lubricants. The only members of the Youth community that were able to speak about lubricants are those who had participated in health programs. When asked about 'lubricants' the unexposed Youth did not know what was being referred to:

"Personal Lubricant? No miss I don't know what that is." (Female Youth, age 22, Kingston)

"To tell you the truth, before I went to the Red Cross people, I never know anything lubricant." (Male Youth, age 19, Kingston)

The Youth use the word 'oil' to refer to anything used as a personal lubricant. However, when they refer to 'oil' none of the unexposed youth was making reference to an actual manufactured personal lubricant, but instead speaking of household items used for lubrication during intercourse. Their lack of exposure also meant that none of these young people had ever attempted to purchase a lubricant, nor did they know of the availability of getting the lubricant for free.

Even amongst the Youth population with education about lubricants, actual usage is low. Both male and female youth who had been educated about lubricants and now have a favorable opinion, still had never personally used it. Some of these youth had been given samples by the Red Cross, but there is a 'disconnect' between themselves and using lubricants. They gave two main reasons for never having used lubricants:

- Although they know the facts about lubricant use, they still associate lubricants with gay men: One young man only changed his view of that when he heard a popular dancehall deejay sing about using lubricant with a girl during intercourse.

"Although I know about lubes being good and everything, I just still see it as something for MSM. So is only when I hear 'Tommy Lee' song talking about KY

*Jelly, that I really start to say to myself that straight man use it too for real.”
(Male Youth, age 19, Kingston)*

- They remember to use a condom, but forget about the lubricant during sexual intercourse:

“A few weeks ago I was having sex, and the girl was really tight, and it took me at least six minutes to be able to enter her fully. Anyway a few days after that I was cleaning up my room and saw the KY Jelly I had gotten from Red Cross, and realized that it was right there the whole time, and I just never even think to look for it, instead of struggling so hard.” (Male Youth, age 22, Kingston)

The few Youth who had actually used a lubricant felt that it was ‘good and made the sex nicer, and would use it again’.

4. All three populations (MSM, FSW, Youth) have had some experience with using ‘alternative’ types of lubrication for intercourse.

Almost all of the participants in this study have previously, or are currently using ‘alternative’ types of lubrication during intercourse. These ‘alternatives’ are seemingly popular and used frequently. Persons from the three populations listed the same products generally used for lubrication: Baby oil, Vaseline, saliva, Olive oil, cooking oil and hand lotion. One reason for the popularity of these products is that they are readily available.

“A lot of guys like to just use their saliva, by spitting on their penis, and that’s the lubrication before they go in. Sometimes you were not prepared for having sex so you don’t have any lubricant with you, and so spit is the next best thing.” (MSM, age 23, Kingston)

“The last time my guy came to check me, I kept getting dry, so we just used some baby oil from off the dresser and then everything was fine.” (Female youth, age 23, Kingston)

The three populations use different terms to refer to lubricants:

- MSM – ‘lube’
- FSW – ‘pum-pum gel’ or ‘gel’

- Youth – ‘oil’ (note that often the youth are referring to ‘alternatives’ rather than standard lubricants)

Very few of the youth who participated had ever used a personal lubricant. Many had however used alternatives for lubrication. These are used without a condom when having intercourse with their main partner who is trusted, and with a condom in any other sexual situation.

- **Limited information exists about the effect of oil-based lubricants on condoms**

Among the persons who had been educated about lubricants, only members of the MSM community were able to explain that there are three types of lubricants: water-based, oil-based and silicone. The MSMs and FSWs and exposed Youth, were able to explain that oils (baby oil, Vaseline, cooking oil) and oil-based lubricants can breakdown the latex of the condom. However, the unexposed Youth did not express any knowledge of the risk associated with using oils with latex condoms.

Some FSWs and female Youth were convinced that the best lubricant is Olive Oil, with no possible damaging side effects.

“I didn’t like the feeling of the lubricants. I tried several brands, KY Jelly and Durex and they all made me itch. So I did my research and I have been using Olive oil for a year with no problem.” (FSW, age 24, Kingston)

The majority of the youth were not aware that using oil as a lubricant could burst a latex condom, and put them at risk. They expressed interest and eagerness to learn about standard lubricants when shown a brochure explaining how to use it.

5. Concerns that lubricants in reducing friction during intercourse, also reduce pleasure

Although the use of personal lubricants is most prevalent in both the MSM and FSW community, they also expressed the most ‘concerns’ and ‘dislikes’ about lubricants. The most common ‘dislike’ of using lubrication is that it may give the impression that they are ‘too loose’. Even though the complaint is similar, it affects the two communities in slightly different ways:

MSM

Some members of the MSM community are reluctant to use lubricants. As reported, some of the MSMs who play the male role during intercourse (referred to as ‘tops’) prefer to feel the ‘*tightness and grip*’ of the anus, and feel that the lubricant makes penetration ‘too easy’. For these men, saliva is the preferred form of lubrication. For some of the MSMs who play the role of the female (referred to as ‘bottoms’) during intercourse, they do not like using lubricants as they do not want to feel ‘*too big*’ to their partner. Also some indicated that they prefer to feel some amount of pain from being penetrated.

“I know one guy who always talks about how the pain in sex makes him feel good...”
(MSM, age 25, Kingston)

Another complaint about lubricants is that they are too ‘*sticky and messy*’, and that when being used the rhythm of penetration is accompanied by a loud sound similar to continuous flatulence:

“Lubes can make the sex sound like farting, and I can’t stand that.”

One noteworthy behavior related to lubricants in the MSM community is that the ‘tops’ will neither buy, nor carry lubes with them, it is expected that ‘bottoms’ will provide lubricants for the sex act.

FSW

Some members of the FSW community are reluctant to use lubricants. While some FSWs reported that using the lubricant make the ‘work’ easier, there are others who feel that the lubricant makes the ‘work’ more difficult. All FSWs reported feeling happy when the client ‘*comes quickly (orgasms quickly)*’, the difference is that some of them felt that the lubricant helped the man to orgasm more quickly, while others felt that the lubricant prolonged the sex act. There is also a concern that when they use a lubricant the man is able to insert the penis more deeply into the vagina and possibly damage their cervix.

“I have been working on the street for many years now, and I don’t use lubricant. I prefer when it dry and the client can’t get too far inside, and just that friction makes them come quickly. If I use a gel (lubricant) him a go want to stay too long before him come (orgasm), and me no have time for that.”(FSW, age 50, Kingston)

Another complaint about lubricants by the FSW population is that some women feel that using lubricants makes them prone to ‘getting an infection’, and ‘having a lot of itching if it is not washed off immediately after use’. They had the same ‘dislike’ as the MSM regarding the ‘stickiness and messiness’, and the ‘sound the bodies make during intercourse when gels are used’.

Youth

Youth population meanwhile view the need to use a lubricant as evidence that the female is ‘very tight’. Possibly due to their inexperience with lubricants the youth population did not have any concerns. The only opinion they expressed is that if a woman needs to use a lubricant, it is viewed positively by both the male and the female, because it means that ‘her vagina is tight’, and so will provide more pleasure for her partner.

6. In all three populations (MSM, FSW, Youth) if lubricants are used, it is without condoms with their main partner, and with condoms with other sexual partners.

Across the three populations the decision to use a condom was based on the level of commitment of the sexual partner, so no condom is used regularly with ‘main’ or ‘long-term’ partners who are trusted. The decision to use lubricants tends not to be based on the type of partner, but on the individual’s exposure to lubricants and their perceived need or desire for it.

As it relates to the decision to use lubricants, the three populations had slightly different drivers affecting their decision.

MSM

As reported in this study, MSMs were the most frequent users of lubricants and all participating members of the community were current users of lubricants. They expressed one particular view about lubricants that was not expressed by any other population. There is a belief that using a lubricant helps to prevent transmission of HIV or STDs. Based on this reasoning,

lubricants are sometimes used as a safety measure if no condom is available, in a situation that would have otherwise been seen as risky.

“Sometimes you will take a chance and have sex with someone that you only kinda trust, if you have no condom but you have a lube available. Because you know with the lube you will not tear, but also the lube makes it easy for everything to run back out and not stay inside of you.” (MSM, age 26, Kingston)

FSW

The majority of the FSWs interviewed are regular users of lubricants. They report one hundred percent (100%) condom usage with their clients, but do not regularly use condoms with their ‘main’ partner. As it relates to lubes, they will rarely use a lube with their main partner. They explained that vaginal dryness is not usually a problem with the main partner, so they have no need to use the lubricant.

“My personal man just has my ticket, so almost as soon as I see him, I start to get wet. I have never needed to use a lubricant when I am with him.” (FSW, age 27, Kingston)

7. Response to brands and packages

The majority of participants from all three populations were aware of two brands of lubricants: KY Jelly and Durex. The persons who got free lubricants from JASL and the Ministry of Health were also aware of the Lifestyle brand. All participants who use lubricants feel that the quality of these brands is excellent. They also like the fact that ‘flavored’ lubricants are available.

The three populations expressed different preferences for the ‘size of the package’ in which they buy their lubricant:

- MSM – prefer the ease of carrying the sachets in their wallet. It is discreet and readily available, ‘just in case’.
- FSW – prefer the tube the size of lipstick. It is easy for them to push it into their brassiere, and it won’t spill. They do not like the sachets, because sometimes the sachet will break open in their handbag, or if they use a little with a client they have no way to store the remainder without it spilling.
- Youth – prefer the bottle that they can keep at home. This package is also thought to be longer lasting.

8. Low media recall for lubricants.

In all three populations the only persons who were aware of an advertising campaign for lubricants had participated in the pre-screening process of the campaign. They were able to report that they have heard and seen the ad played both on radio and on television. They felt that the ad would only attract persons who already had some knowledge about using lubricants, and not those who did not know what it is. But they all felt that the slogan was easy to remember and 'catchy'. The slogan as they recall it is '*Remember to Tube up and Lube up.*'"

"I remember watching television one night, and during a particular show I saw the ad many times. The thing I remember the most is the line 'Tube up and Lube up'.

In all three populations the majority of persons had no awareness of seeing or hearing an advertisement on local television or radio promoting the use of lubricants.

RESEARCH TO ACTION

This study provides valuable insight for the design of BCC, IPC and Mass Media activities and interventions. A number of beliefs, knowledge, attitudes and social norms relating to lubricant use to be addressed were identified. Potential ways in which the study findings could be applied programmatically include:

- **Behaviour Change Communication and Interpersonal Communication Activities and Interventions:**

Activities and interventions with all target populations (especially youth) should be harnessed using the 'stages of change' model which recognizes human behaviour as a process that allows for the approach of people on a one-to-one basis in consideration of individual needs. The essence of the interaction is based in building skill sets within the target populations to become Peer Educators who then metaphorically walk with along the continuum of the 'stages of change' moving them towards healthier behaviours.

The interaction between the peer educator and member of the target group utilizes interactive learning simulations that promote self-risk perception and the identification of goals towards achieving healthier behaviours. The interaction and engagement should focus on:

- Correct and consistent condom use
 - Use of lubricants as a part of condom use
 - Use of lubricants for pleasure (for all parties involved in the sexual act)
 - Use of lubricants to reduce risk of HIV and other STI transmission
 - Debunking of myths and misconceptions about lubricant use
- **Mass Media Campaigns**
 - Mass Media campaigns should focus on general population sensitizing to the use of lubricants. Normalizing the use of lubricants will make it easier for anyone to access without pointing fingers.
 - Mass media should also extend beyond traditional advertising. Many members of the target population are reached easier via social media such as black berry broadcasts, smart phone applications, Facebook, Twitter and Insta-gram to name a few. Social media initiatives should be used alongside traditional media (radio, print, TV) to reach persons.

- **Dialogue with Commercial Sector:**

Engage the commercial sector to sensitize on the importance of point of sale. Lubricants should be positioned where customers feel comfortable accessing. Positioned behind the cashier for example may create obvious attention and discomfort in purchasing. These engagements should also seek to sensitize sales clerks in an effort to address stigma and discrimination.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: Moderators Guide for FGD Attitudes & Usage of Personal Lubricants

January 2013

Introduction

Brief introduction of Hope Caribbean Company and relay objectives of the study to group participants. – to glean information about relationships and safe sex practises used with specific communities. Moderator will encourage open discussion in a comfortable and safe space. Participants will be encouraged to be free to express their opinion without fear of judgment. Each participant will be asked to introduce themselves by stating their name and by describing themselves using two adjectives, to the group as an icebreaker.

Relationships

1. How would you describe a good relationship?
2. How would you describe a bad relationship?
3. How important is sex in a relationship? Why?

1. Awareness and Attitude

1. What words come to mind when you think of personal lubricants?
2. Why do people use personal lubricants?
3. Who do you think use lubricants? Who do you think SHOULD use lubricants?
4. Who do you think use lubricants?
5. What are some of the benefits of using lubricants?
6. What are some of the concerns?

2. General Usage

1. Do people within the MSM/FSW/Youth community see lubricants as a product that enhances/diminishes the overall sexual experience? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Are lubricants used with or without condoms? Why?
3. When would you be more likely to use lubricants?
4. Do partners influence lubricant use?

3. Access & availability

1. Where do you buy or get lubricants?
2. Are they easy to get?
3. What are some of challenges faced when getting lubricants?

4. Brand /Type Lubricant awareness

1. What brands do you know of?
2. What types of lubricants are there?
3. What sizes are available?

5. *Personal Experience*

1. Have you ever used lubricants before?
2. If yes, what brand or type did you use?
3. What brand is preferred? Why?
4. What type of lubricant do you prefer? Why?
5. Where did/do you get it?
6. What was/is it like getting/buying it?
7. What do you think can be done to get people to use lubricants more?

6. *Communication*

1. Can you recall any advertisement on TV, radio, fliers, posters, etc for lubricants?
2. If yes, what do you remember specifically about the advertisement?
3. What was your overall view of the advertisement?