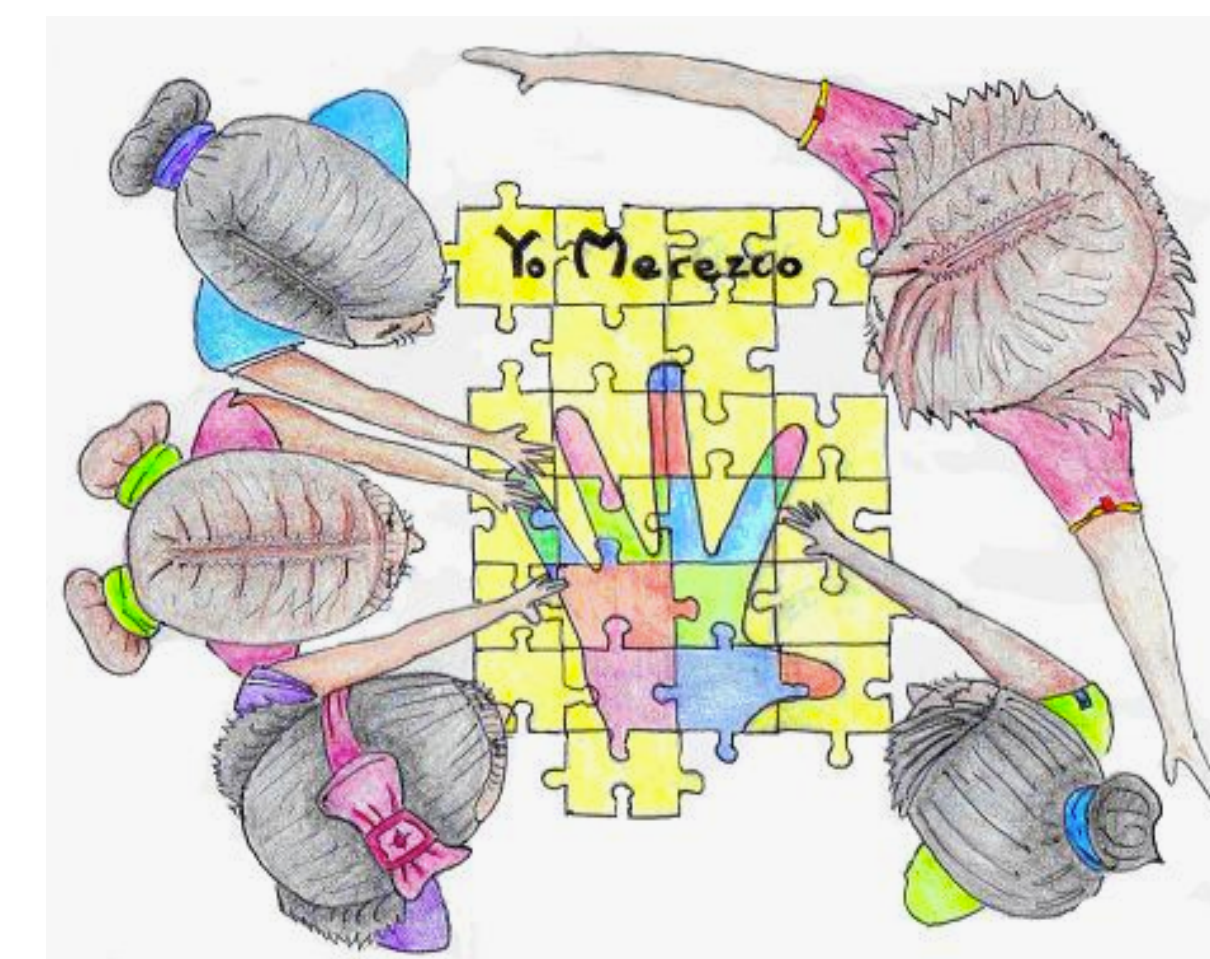




# Yo Merezco (I deserve): Latina empowerment through HIV/AIDS education

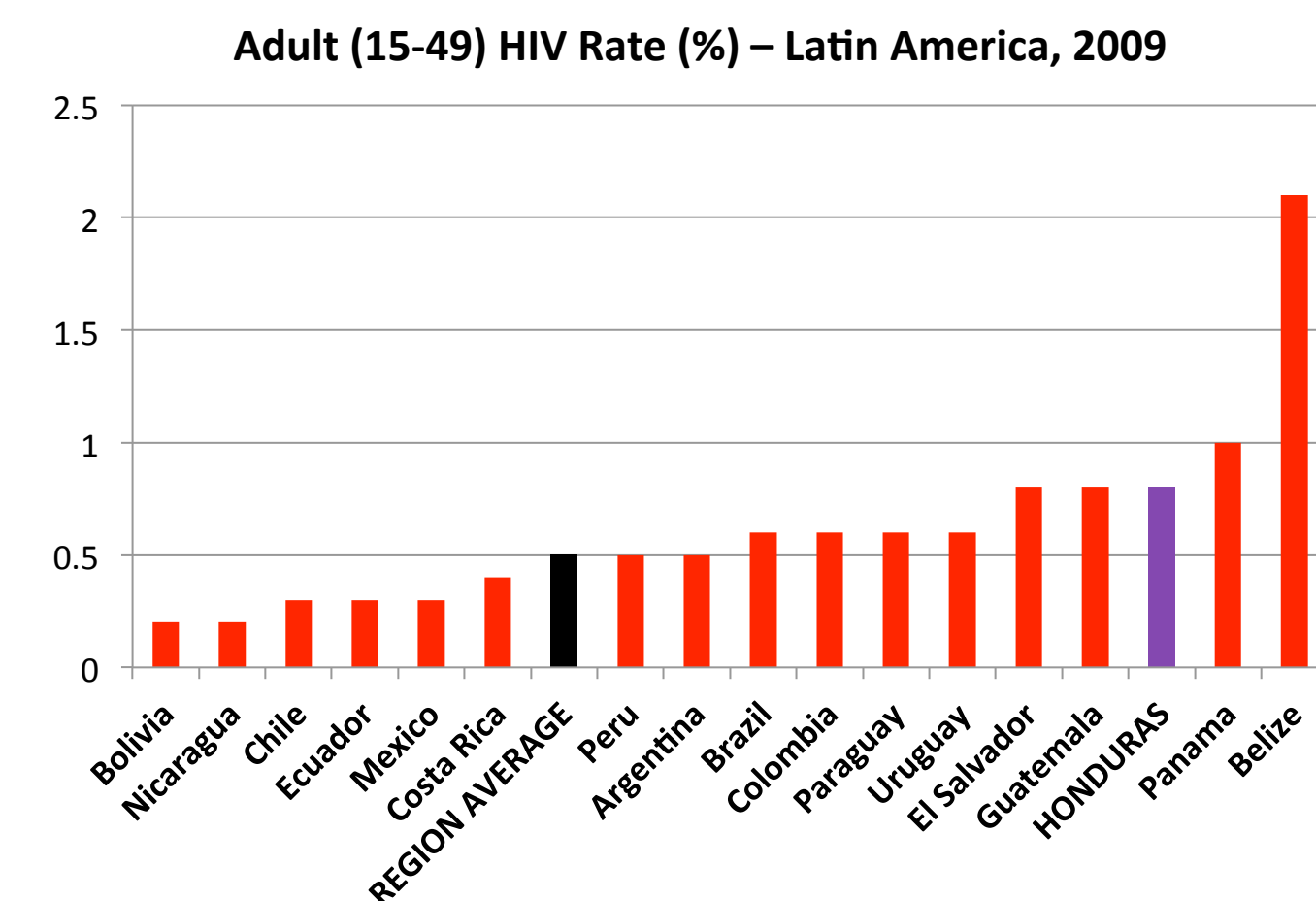
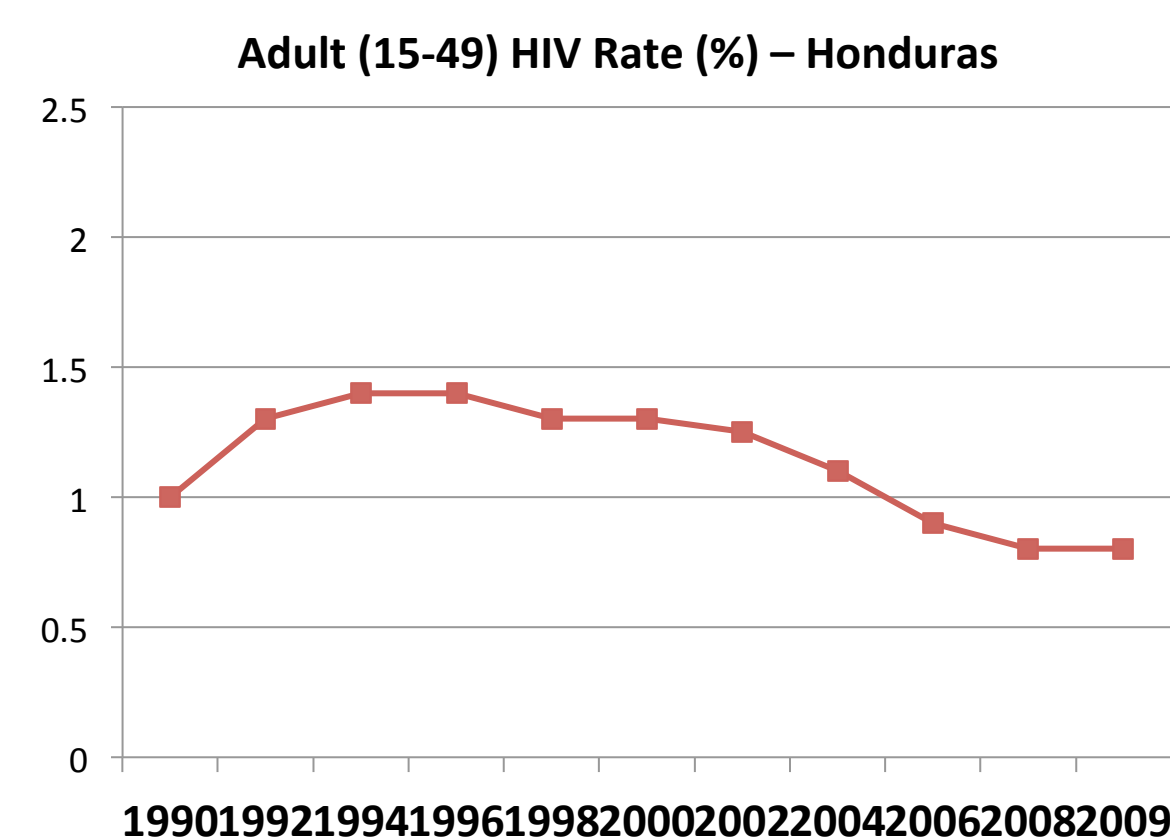
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## Introduction

The majority (76%) of Honduras's 39,000 HIV/AIDS cases are among 20-39 year olds. UNAIDS reports that just 30% of Honduran women aged 15-24 could identify HIV transmission/prevention methods, compared to 39% of similar aged men<sup>1</sup>. These data coupled with an historic lack of sexual decision making among Latinas encouraged a group of United States Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) to design an HIV/AIDS education program targeting young Latinas.



## Impact

The Peace Corps philosophy is centered around PCVs doing only development which is sustainable. For this reason *Yo Merezco* exists only in Spanish and was written in collaboration with and targeted towards community counterparts including schools, youth groups and churches.

Since 2007, *Yo Merezco* has been implemented by PCVs, community counterparts and NGOs throughout Central America. It been validated in over 100 youth-groups, with well over 1000 young Latinas enrolled. Peace Corps Honduras has adopted the program into its standard Volunteer training curricula and is expanding the program into neighboring Central American countries.

Participants completing pre- and post-program evaluations are uniformly more competent in naming HIV transmission and prevention methods correctly and are taught skills to communicate their knowledge to their peers and potential partners.

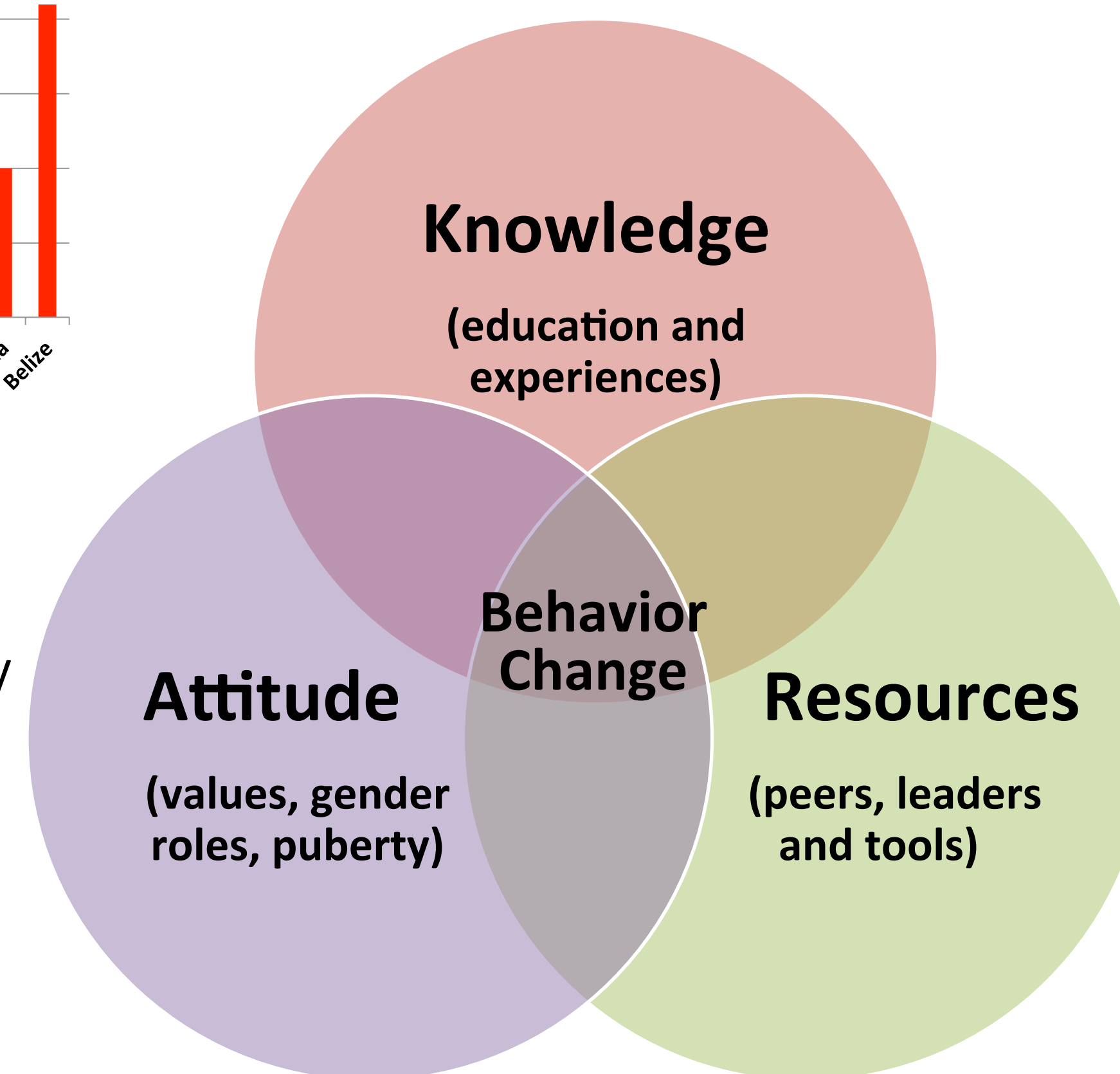
## The Education Program

Knowledge alone does not induce healthy behaviors. We designed *Yo Merezco* to be a mentorship program which teaches HIV prevention by empowering Latinas to understand and value their bodies. We do this through a series of lessons which build upon each other but carry a common theme: “*Yo Merezco*/I deserve...good health, a better life, friendship, understanding and a future.”

The 14-session curriculum includes the following topics:

- HIV/AIDS
- self-esteem
- communication
- abstinence
- menstruation
- gender roles
- goal setting
- decision making
- marriage
- domestic violence
- teen pregnancy
- anatomy and puberty

Each session ends with an evaluation relevant to the day's topic. This ensures the participants are absorbing the information and able to put it to use. Pre- and post-program evaluations are given to track progress and a comprehensive exam is given before participants receive a diploma.



## Conclusions

We've seen success with *Yo Merezco* because it is long term, targeted, and presented in an environment of peers. By nature of training local health educators it continues as a sustainable element in HIV/AIDS education in Central America.

### Traditional HIV Education

- short term (1hr-1day)
- knowledge based
- generalized
- often not culturally focused

### *Yo Merezco*

- long term (1-6 months)
- behavior change based
- targeted to Latinas ages 10-15
- 100% Latin-America focused
- home-grown and sustainable

### Acknowledgement and Appreciation for our program's funding:

- United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)
- United States Peace Corps Honduras

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup>UNAIDS *AIDSinfo Country Report, Honduras 2009* <http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/honduras/>