

SEXUAL HEALTH AND AIDS PREVENTION FOR ADOLESCENTS

ANITA NUDELMAN

The writer is an applied medical anthropologist, in charge of Health Promotion (including sexual health and HIV prevention) for adolescents in residential schools in Israel, and expert consultant for The Aharon Ofri International Training on "Sexual Health and HIV Prevention."

A course on Sexual Health and AIDS Prevention for Adolescents, geared towards African professionals, was developed by Ms. Yonat Liss from MASHAV's Ofri Training Center, and myself, based on an educational model implemented in residential schools in Israel. It was planned according to the new MASHAV policy which recommends that courses and projects should include a number of professionals belonging to each participating institution, in order to ensure continuity and to enable a strong impact on communities and countries.

Thus, all the participants in our first course, which took place at the Ofri Center in November-December 2007, were pivotal decision makers at the four institutions that collaborate within their home countries: from Uganda – the Population Secretariat, Ministry of Finance, Planning & Economic Development; from Kenya – the Ministry of Health – North Rift Valley (Western Kenya); also from Kenya, the Ministry of Health- NASCOP (Kenya National AIDS/STDs Control Programme), and the Ministry of Youth Affairs-MOYA.

Great feedback was received from all the participants of the first course, who later applied elements of our culture-sensitive interactive educational approach to develop projects for promoting adolescent sexual health, ready for implementation in their countries. A second course took place in Israel during March-April 2008, and was sponsored jointly by MASHAV and UNAIDS West and Central Africa.

When I was asked to take part in an on-the-spot-training course on AIDS Prevention to be held in Kenya in August 2008, I decided it would be a good opportunity to contact our Kenyan and Ugandan course graduates. They immediately expressed interest in meeting, saying that they wanted to share with me what they had been doing since their course in Israel, and to get further professional feedback and consultation. The Israeli Embassy in Nairobi recognized the importance of a continued professional collaboration on such a significant issue as HIV prevention for adolescents, and organized a one day follow-up seminar in Nairobi on August 2008. The Deputy Ambassador to Kenya, Maor Elbaz, and MASHAV officer, Geoffrey Kiringa, worked intensively in the organization of this seminar, which would not have become a reality without them.

FOLLOW-UP SEMINAR AND REUNION

The Seminar was held at the excellent facilities of the Fairview Hotel in Nairobi, and was attended by 21 course graduates! This included almost all of the Kenyan and Ugandan

participants from the two above mentioned courses held at the Ofri Center. The seminar included a discussion of implementing the educational approach and the culture-sensitive projects developed in Israel, both at the institutional and the individual levels. New educational activities developed in Israel and Kenya were also presented. The reunion concluded with guided group work, planning Sexual Health and AIDS Prevention projects and activities for adolescents for the next 6 months.

Israeli Ambassador to Kenya, H.E. Yaacov Keidar, was present during a long session in which each graduate shared the professional significance of the course in Israel and how he or she had implemented the educational approach learned there.

The following is a summary of the salient points raised:

1. **The Ministry of Youth Affairs, Kenya (MOYA)** has introduced the project developed in Israel into their annual budget, which was due to start in September, 2008. In addition, the participants have trained some of their peers and have collaborated with UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), using methods learned in Israel. There has also been training of peers in a number of Youth Polytechnic schools, especially in the area of AIDS prevention. The Director of Training at MOYA has also expressed interest in attending our next course in Israel, in order to integrate it nationally into the Ministry's activities.
2. One participant, who previously worked for MOYA and is now a Senior Assistant Director for Curriculum Development for out-of-school adolescents at **KIE (Kenya Institute of Education)**, has included our approach in her training for this institution.
3. **Ministry of Health (NASCOPI):** All participants have implemented activities in their respective Districts and trained trainers on sexual health (although many of them have not yet received a separate budget for these activities, due to the political situation in Kenya this year.)
4. **Ministry of Health North Rift Valley-Western Kenya:** Although this area has been suffering political unrest, the team's activities have been impressive:
 - Schools and health centers have been targeted throughout the district, including many groups of displaced youth.
 - The team has worked closely with counsellors and health trainers, introducing youth activities and trying to make health facilities "youth friendly."
 - Activities were introduced in youth groups formed jointly with NASCOPI, as well as with other NGOs in the area.

- A graduate who works for Handicap International has introduced these activities and received funding for peer training, jointly with other NGOs.
- In addition, our graduates use a once-a-week popular radio program, to convey culture-sensitive messages regarding sexual health to the youth in their districts.

5. **Individual participants in Kenya:** The few individual participants (only one per institution) also have done important work.

- A graduate, who is an Assistant Director in the **Kenya Prisons Service** – Health Sector, has held workshops on sexual health in three prisons dealing with youth rehabilitation.
- A graduate who works at the **Ministry of Gender and Culture** has held seminars with trainers of youth using interactive methods for HIV prevention.
- A graduate who was sponsored by **UNESCO** and works for the Ministry of Education has established a community-based organization in Nairobi to promote sexual health among youth.

6. **Population Secretariat – Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development – Uganda:**

This group has been very active, setting up SHIP – The Sexual Health Improvement Project – an organization to promote adolescent sexual health and AIDS prevention, introducing the program into the Department for Family Health at the Ministry, and piloting it in schools throughout the country. They have also designed a syllabus for an undergraduate course on adolescent sexuality and sexual health, which was approved by Makerere University. I must mention here that Ms. Rivka Uziel-Krispin, the Cultural Attaché to the General Consulate of Uganda in Israel, has been very supportive of this group.

7. **Personal Commitment:** In addition to their official work to promote adolescent sexual health and AIDS prevention via their work places, all graduates have shown their personal commitment by doing volunteer work among youth in their churches and local communities.

CLOSING REMARKS

Most of the graduates who attended this Seminar are professionals and government officials, who can guarantee an effective influence on thousands of adolescents, and on official policy in their countries. They view the formation of "a committed and attached working group" during their training at the Ofri Center, as well as the continued support received ever since from us, as a turning point in their way





Anita Nudelman and African professionals during the course held at the Ofri Center



Kenyan and Ugandan course graduates with Israeli Ambassador Keidar and staff in Nairobi

of promoting sexual health and HIV prevention among youth in their countries. The graduates felt that this follow up enrichment seminar and reunion energized them, that they received helpful feedback and further professional consultation, and learned a lot from each other.

Based on my work on applied research and training both in Israel and in Africa for many years, I believe in a “culture-sensitive” interactive approach to sexual health and AIDS prevention. Thus, some of my workshops were planned jointly with graduates, who introduced local cultural issues and dilemmas into the discussion, helping me to facilitate the presentations, as well. This had a great impact on the course participants, who felt that we were really addressing them, and not, instead trying to introduce Western or Israeli ideas which are not applicable in Africa.

THE OFRI CENTER



The Ofri Center was established in 1989 as a core extension of MASHAV, the Center for International Cooperation of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education. The Center’s area of expertise is the transmission of knowledge about education, which is essential for the development of civil society. It concerns itself with learning at all levels, from elementary and secondary school through adult education, and provides knowledge and training for basic skills development, civic awareness, community education, education for special populations, treatment for youth (including those at-risk), youth integration, and education for health and AIDS-prevention.

Adopting the UN’s development goals for the new millennium and the world agenda the Ofri Center has made its goal the contribution to the sustainable development of human resources internationally, based on knowledge and experience accumulated in Israel. The Center has developed a unique, holistic approach that takes into consideration the emotional and creative aspects of the pedagogical process. Its working methods enable program participants to make practical use of theoretical knowledge in their own specific locations.

Since its inception, the Ofri Center has trained thousands of program participants from countries throughout the world. Top experts in education, communications, civil development, and community action have shared a wealth of Israeli knowledge and experience. The Center cooperates with senior staff in the Israeli Ministry of Education, academic experts, government organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with expertise in these areas. In addition, it communicates and cooperates with key international organizations such as UNESCO, OECD, USAID, the World Bank, and the International Organization