

Module 2: Evidence based approaches to sexuality education for adolescents - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

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Barriers to expanding or improving sexual education

Effective sexuality education provides young people with age-appropriate, culturally relevant and scientifically accurate information. It also provides young people with structured opportunities to explore attitudes and values and to practise the skills they will need to be able to make informed decisions about their sexual lives. Sexuality education is an essential element of HIV prevention and is critical to achieving universal access targets for prevention, treatment, care and support. While there are no programmes that can eliminate the risk of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancy, and coercive or abusive sexual activity, properly designed and implemented programmes can reduce some of these risks. There are a number of issues that have hindered the improvement of sexual education in my community. Very little is being done to address these issues. The issues involve having no national curricula and official materials for study purposes. Teachers are not properly trained and there is very poor material development and production. There is lack of adequate information on sex education for adolescents and the required skills to effect and impart this knowledge is lacking. The African culture is very sensitive when it comes to discussing sex education with adolescents. There is a cultural belief that such education can encourage sexual activity. This has led to lack of family and community support for the adolescents. Most schools have poor conditions to conduct these education sessions and finally there is lack of political commitment from our governments.

Overcoming these Barriers

Sexuality education is a sensitive issue and is most likely to be effectively introduced and implemented when sufficient political will exists to support it. Even in settings that are socially and culturally conservative and where discussion of sexual matters has traditionally been taboo, it is possible to introduce sexuality education; there are no two ways about it. The name and delivery mechanisms for sexuality education (e.g. formal, non-formal, extra-curricular, teacher-led, youth-led) need to be selected with care. It is important to be sensitive to community concerns, but it is also important to ensure that programmes retain key elements of effectiveness. A considerable amount of international experience already exists in terms of teacher training and curriculum and materials development. There is need for international organizations to facilitate the sharing of this experience and its application and adaptation to different social and cultural settings. Inevitably, difficulties encountered in the implementation of sexuality education will reflect broader systemic problems within the education sector: limited resources; teachers who are over-burdened and insufficiently trained and supported; crowded curricula that inevitably lead to the prioritization of subjects that are examined over those that are not, there is definitely need for a paradigm shift if these levers have to be a success. When necessary, governments

should be held accountable in relation to their responsibilities as signatories to relevant international agreements. However, it is also important, where feasible, to avoid making sexuality education a ‘political football’ – a vehicle through which the respective agendas of a range of competing political interest groups are pursued. It will be young people who pay the price.

Thus, what needs to be done is commitment to addressing HIV/AIDS and sexuality education in a favourable context within the education system. There is need for sensitization for teachers and community members on sex education. The need for support for in-service training for teachers and dissemination of appropriate materials. The need for withdrawal of homophobic teaching material from the school curricula.

Assignment documents

1. [IPPF. From evidence to action: Advocating for comprehensive sexuality education. London: IPPF; 2009.](#)
2. [UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. Volume I. The rationale for sexuality education. Paris: UNESCO; 2009.](#)
3. [UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. Volume II. Topics and learning objectives. Paris: UNESCO; 2009.](#)
4. [UNESCO. Levers of Success. Case studies of national sexuality education programmes. Paris: UNESCO; 2010.](#)