

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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The following are some of the barriers to sexuality education faced in Zambia

1. Cultural barriers

- The age difference between older people e.g. teachers and parents and young people makes it difficult to broach topics concerning sex, contraceptives and pregnancy.
- Differences in attitudes to sexual behaviour due to diverse approaches to life and living have created tensions and are categorised as “traditional” and “modern” views to distinguish the attitudes of young people and older generations.
- Despite the rising number of teenage pregnancies in Zambia there is widespread denial that young people are engaging in sexual intercourse, this makes it difficult to gain political will needed to introduce sex education in schools.
- Teachers are often criticised and stigmatised when found teaching on sexuality issues as these topics are often regarded as taboo by many communities.

2. Knowledge barrier

- It is thought that sex education encourages young people to experiment begin having sex early.

3. Religious barriers

- Various interventions are regarded as being against a particular religion – for instance the use of condoms is hugely discouraged in the Catholic Church.
- Certain faith based schools forbid the teaching of sex education.

4. Political barriers

- Prevention of a problem is more difficult to galvanise political support for at it is involves taking action on something that might or may not happen in the future.
- Many young people do not have access to policy makers.

5. Legal barriers

- There are certain laws that make certain sexual preferences illegal and therefore deny the existence of certain sexual minorities. Such forms of punitive legislation hamper HIV prevention efforts by denying that some of the key populations involved in the HIV epidemic even exist.

6. Individual barriers

- Many young people feel that they cannot be infected by HIV, they see it as an illness that infects others. Furthermore the availability of treatment adds to their sense of invincibility.
- It is assumed that young people are too immature and irresponsible to handle certain information.
- Gender roles can make it more difficult for teachers to teach about sex to students of the opposite sex.
- Adults often lack the necessary communication skills needed to teach sex education.

7. Limitations of programmes and education equality

- Sex education programmes in schools are not examinable and are therefore not taken seriously by teachers and learners.
- Teachers are not adequately trained to teach about sex and HIV and can therefore be resistant to teaching what is often perceived as a sensitive subject.
- Schools are poorly resourced and it is therefore difficult to deliver good quality sex education programme.
- Young people receive information on sexuality issues from various sources and they very often get conflicting messages.

Suggestions on overcoming these barriers

Suggestions on overcoming barriers to sexuality education in Zambia include the following:

- Recognising which young people need to be reached and find out and create educational messages that will be appropriate for them and apply to the current contexts of their lives.
- Older generations should admit that many young people are having sex and they should become familiar with the average age of first sexual encounter and use this evidence to design sex education messages which are age-appropriate.
- Young people make their own decisions to either have sex or not and they should be trusted and empowered to make their own informed decisions based on a wide variety of options on how to protect themselves against HIV infection.
- There is now overwhelming evidence that sex education programmes do not encourage sexual experimentation and good quality programmes are associated with a range of positive health and behaviour outcomes.
- Sex education should be made age appropriate to accommodate pre-pubescent, pubescent and older youth, who are more likely to be sexually active.
- The use of all forms of media should be applied in order to reach as many young people as possible.
- Sex education must not be limited to schools only but should be available in places where young people are found such as cinemas, clubs, sports facilities and any other recreational places. Religious establishments should also have sex education available for young people.
- Initiative must be set up that include young people in the designing and testing of messages and educational materials. This will help ensure that programmes speak to the realities of young people and their sex lives.
- Parents and communities must be involved in the dialogue and community processes must be prioritised in order to gain support for sex education programmes in schools.
- It is vital to include religious groups and discuss with them the importance of providing sex education.

- Vital also is the leadership of the ministries of Health and Education of Zambia in coordinating programmes that ensure that messages given by different NGOs on sex education are compatible and evidence based.
- National laws must be reviewed which deal with or violate human rights and sexual rights, advocacy efforts must then be stepped up for said legislature to be altered.
- Integration of services would lead to a link between condoms use, family planning and treatment and testing of sexually transmitted infections including HIV with educational programmes.
- Ready access to condoms for HIV and family planning purposes must be stepped up as currently the demand for condoms outweighs their supply.
- Include and improve teacher training courses in sexuality education.
- Finally the compilation of national unified textbooks and teaching reference books is necessary in schools and public libraries.

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.](#)