

Module 5: HIV/AIDS and young people - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

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HIV/AIDS among the youth in Kenya

According to the Kenya AIDS Indicator Survey (KAIS) of 2007, young people aged 15-24 years have a HIV prevalence of 3.8% compared to the overall national prevalence rate of 7.1%. Still, 50% of new infections in Kenya occur in this age group. Particular groups of young people that HIV interventions need to target in Kenya are:

1. Youth living with HIV/AIDS
2. Young women
3. Uncircumcised young men
4. Commercial sex workers and clients
5. Young men who have sex with other men
6. Intravenous drug users

Rationale behind particular focus

Youth living with HIV/AIDS

These are vulnerable to stigmatization by society and may fear to seek services for treatment. They need treatment and have reproductive needs and this should be addressed by the health system. Majority of infections in Kenya being by sexual contact, attention to their special needs will also go a long way in preventing further spread. Dealing with stigma in Kenya will contribute towards disclosure.

Young women

According to the survey, young women in Kenya had a prevalence of 5.4% compared to 1.4% among men aged 15-24 years, making women four times more vulnerable. This is due to sexual coercion from older men, vulnerability to domestic violence and their anatomic and physiological disposition make them prone to bruising during sexual intercourse. Girls and young women from poor backgrounds are more vulnerable to transactional and nonconsensual sex from older men.

Uncircumcised men

There are communities in Kenya where male circumcision is not performed. The prevalence was higher among uncircumcised men (13.2%) compared to circumcised men (3.9%), making the former threefold more vulnerable than the latter. This is due to the higher risk of bruising in the uncircumcised young men.

Commercial sex workers

Young women engage in commercial sex because of economic difficulties or previous abuse. Due to multiple sexual partners, they are at a special risk of acquiring and spreading HIV. They may also be lured into not using protection during sex by their clients.

Young men who have sex with other men

This may often occur in prisons. Anal sex poses a higher risk for HIV transmission than vaginal because the anal mucosa is not adapted for sexual function and hence bruising would occur more often. Because of the moral implications of homosexuality in Kenya, it may be difficult to identify and target such young men with appropriate interventions.

Intravenous drug users

Young people may have limited knowledge regarding needle safety and are likely to receive the first injection from an older person. Because of needle sharing, these young people are predisposed to contracting HIV. Their addiction may also affect their health seeking behavior and even adherence to treatment.

Possible interventions

Young people living with HIV/AIDS

These need support and counseling about their status, adherence to treatment and contraception use. They need treatment services including co-trimoxazole prophylaxis, HAART for those eligible and management of opportunistic infections. They also need information concerning their needs of reproduction. Young mothers also need to be informed about prevention-of-parent-to-child transmission of HIV in order to halt vertical transmission. The healthcare system therefore needs to be equipped with needs. Fighting stigma should be a general goal in the community especially starting with healthcare workers.

Young women

Young women need to be aware of their vulnerability to contracting HIV due to their anatomical and physiological differences with men. Young women need to be empowered through equal opportunities for example education and employment. Fighting gender inequality will enable women have a better bargaining power in their own sexuality and curb domestic violence. For example, use of terms such as mother-to-child transmission point an accusing finger at women, forgetting male partners. The law needs to bring to justice those who abuse minors through sexual coercion or violent sex.

Uncircumcised young men

Circumcision should be promoted among communities that do not practice it. This includes offering free circumcision services by the government. Involvement of politicians from such communities in Kenya has helped in increasing the demand for circumcision.

Commercial sex workers and their clients

They need information on condom use and encouragement to use them. They also need regular HIV testing. 'Moonlight Voluntary Counseling and Testing' services in Kenya, specifically Nairobi, were such efforts. Fighting poverty will minimize the number of young girls engaging in prostitution. One such means is provision of education to poor households. Provision of loans services to these women will incentivize them to consider other income-generating engagements like small businesses. Training in other livelihood skills will be important for the commercial sex workers. Behavioral-change-communication programmes will be helpful to their clients.

Young men who have sex with other men

In prisons, more safety is needed in protecting young men from abuse. They need counseling and testing. However, community involvement is required in addressing this issue, for it may go unattended because of the moral implications. The risks of anal sex should be made clear to this group of young men. Peer education projects would be necessary in cascading this information as well as school-based curricula focusing on sexual orientation as well as transgender issues. Mainstreaming of MSM needs into the Kenya National AIDS Strategic Plan would be essential.

Intravenous drug users

Programmes should target dissuading initiation of intravenous drug use (primary prevention) in the school curriculum as well as secondary prevention for the youth already using intravenous drugs. Needle, syringe and opioid substitution programmes are examples of secondary prevention. These young people need counseling and testing. Those infected need treatment, as well as support in fighting drug use. Therefore, rehabilitation services are required in the healthcare system as well as regulations on availability of these drugs.

Assignment document

1. [Ferguson J. HIV/AIDS and young people. Paper presented at: Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research; 2010 Sep 26; Geneva.](#)