

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

Hilda Musonza

Bokamoso Private Hospital, Gaborone, Botswana

Groups of young people who should be targeted with hiv interventions in Zimbabwe

The groups to be targeted include:

- Adolescent girls who normally do not have a voice to say out their rights.
- Orphans and street kids, who do not have parental guidance, or who live with older relatives or guardians who take advantage of them.
- Children living in dysfunctional families.
- Young people who have dropped out of school.
- Those with extreme poverty or are unemployed who normally has less access to information and resources.
- Homosexuals, bisexuals and transgendered populations.
- Young people living with HIV, and those living with infected people.
- Drug or substance abusers who normally have impaired judgment.
- Those in remote areas who normally have limited access to health and social services as they have to travel long distances for the services.
- College students who live in campus or away from their families.

The factors (the “drivers”) which make them vulnerable

The factors, which make these groups vulnerable, include personal, cultural, economic, social and political.

1. Personal factors such as lack of knowledge and skills required to protect oneself leads to factors like unprotected sex, multiple partners and injecting oneself with unsterile equipment.
2. Some social and cultural factors make young people vulnerable in that there is gender inequality. They are oppressive to the girl child, they stigmatise and disempower women. Some sects, like another group of the Apostolic sect, act as barriers to essential HIV prevention messages by encouraging polygamy, discouraging family planning and any other health services, and old men marrying young girls in arranged marriages.

Absence of protective factors like education, supportive family and peer networks increases vulnerability. In the Shona culture if a girl gets pregnant before the traditional marriage she is

chased from her home by her parents and relatives, to go to the man who is responsible. In some cases, the man will deny responsibility, which will leave the girl in a dilemma of what to do.

For some boys and young men, peer pressure occasionally forces them to take risks and prove their manhood by having sex with multiple partners or by taking drugs which later influences them into unprotected sex.

3. Due to poverty, young girls are now having sex with old, married men in exchange for money, clothes and food, and some boys are having affairs with older women as well.

The quality of services rendered by a number of health institutions usually make young people refrain from seeking the services they require. For some areas, the services are far and costly to the young people who usually cannot ask for the money from their parents, as they will not want them to know about their sexual life.

4. The government is yet to accept homosexuality and bisexuality so these groups find it difficult to access the services they require as they still face discrimination.

The interventions most important (for each group) which would contribute to achieving the UNAIDS goal of empowering young people to protect themselves from HIV

1. Knowledge empowerment so that they can develop the capacity to think, understand and make informed decisions.
2. Improving the quantity as well as quality of the services rendered so that adolescents can feel at ease when they visit them.
3. The government should enforce laws against repressive societal norms and values.
4. Reducing the numbers of sexual partners and stick to one faithful partner.
5. Increasing circumcision of males and consistent use of condoms.
6. Increasing HIV counseling and testing centers and encouraging their maximum use.
7. Proper physical and psychological care for the infected ones.
8. Intensive training for health service providers so they can be sensitive to adolescents' needs.
9. Encouraging adherence to treatment and continuation of treatment.
10. Discouraging stigma and discrimination.
11. Including young people in decision making on policies targeted to them.
12. Providing them with communication skills to discuss about sex with their partners or parents.

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.](#)