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The prevalence and need of comprehensive sexual education (CSE) in secondary schools in Africa

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to study the prevalence and discuss the need for inculcating comprehensive sexual education in secondary school curriculums in Africa.

A double blinded cross-sectional study was conducted using a validated data tool or questionnaires to obtain the data for this study. Signed consent was given after detailed written explanation on each questionnaire. In the study, delegates were asked to choose a score from between 1 to 10 on how well they were taught CSE while in high/secondary, with 1 being little to no CSE and 10 being excellent CSE. An online Google form was used to retrieve the data and extracted as an excel sheet. Statistical analysis of these data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0.

The result showed that while less than 50% of participants had CSE while in secondary school 18.6% (21) had little to no sex education what so ever and 1.8% (2) had very good Comprehensive sexual education.

The results showed a sharp difference in prevalence between those who received no CSE, those who had an average level of CSE and those who had an excellent CSE while in secondary school. However, we must commend the fact that some 25.40% had an above average CSE while in secondary school. However, this is very low. Africans have an early age of sexual debut that usually falls within the high school age range.

In conclusion, while secondary schools in Africa should consider designing a standard CSE program, they should work towards uniformity and a rich content. As it will be a valuable tool to curbing poor SRHR practices and maternal mortality rates (MMR) in Africa.

Keywords: Comprehensive sex education (CSE), Africa, prevalence, secondary, schools

Introduction

Comprehensive sexual education is an age-appropriate education instruction curriculum that whose objective is to impact and improve healthy choices in sexual lives of people by giving them the needed knowledge, attitudes, skills and values [1]. It is a wholesome multisystem approach to creating a better understanding of sexuality and sexual health. It varies from Comprehensive Sexuality Education, which is more of a right based and gender-focused in or out of school education taught over several years [2]. Sex is a silent topic in Africa, especially amongst children, teenagers and adolescents. Parents are often hesitant to giving their children a wholesome sex education involving contraceptives, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections; as it is perceived as an early introduction to sexual activities [3]. This has not helped much, as there is still a high burden of teenage and unwanted pregnancies in Africa [4, 5]. Predisposing our young girls to the obstetric dangers of early pregnancies such as preterm labour, pre-eclampsia, eclampsia, obstructed labour, post-partum hemorrhage and puerperal complications to mention but a few. Not forgetting, unsafe abortions with its related morbidity and mortalities [6-8].

However, the intentions of Comprehensive Sex Education are not to promote early sexual activity as it preaches sexual abstinence as the safest choice, but to help prevent them from contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) with full understanding as to the process leading to and the dangers of its contraction [10-11]. It is also designed with the aim to reduce teenage and unwanted pregnancies, spousal and non-spousal domestic violence, thus promoting a more sexually health Africa. Basically, CSE seeks to impact physically and mentally in the young so that they can have better understanding about their sexual health and rights and those of others around them [10].

The aim of this paper is to study the prevalence and discuss the need for inculcating comprehensive sexual education in secondary school curriculums in Africa.

Methodology

A double blinded cross-sectional study was conducted using a validated data tool or questionnaires to obtain the data for this study. Signed consent was given after detailed written explanation on each questionnaire. The sample population for this study were the delegates at the SRHR session during the African Healthcare Students Summit (AHSS) held in December, 2020. Though 800 delegates registered for the summit, 113 delegates from 12 African countries attended the session on SRHR. Hence, our sample size of 113 subjects. In the study, delegates were asked to choose a score from between 1 to 10 on how well they were taught CSE while in high/secondary,

with 1 being little to no CSE and 10 being excellent CSE. An online Google form was used to retrieve the data and extracted as an excel sheet. Statistical analysis of these data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 20.0.

87.5% of delegates spoke English. The main religion practiced amongst the delegates were Christianity (49%) Islam (49%) and Traditional religion (2%). Nigeria (50%), Uganda (25%), Kenya (12%), Rwanda (2%), Ethiopia (2%), Liberia (2%), Togo (2%), Ghana (1%), Cameroon (1%), and Benin Republic (1%) were the nations from which participating delegates hailed (Fig 1).

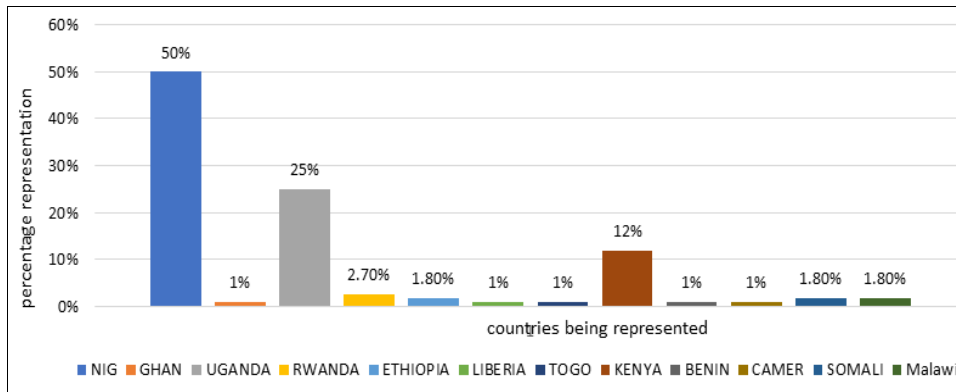


Fig 1: Percentage representation of each country in study

Result

The result showed that while less than 50% of participants had CSE while in secondary school 18.6% (21) had little to no sex

education what so ever and 1.8% (2) had very good Comprehensive sexual education.

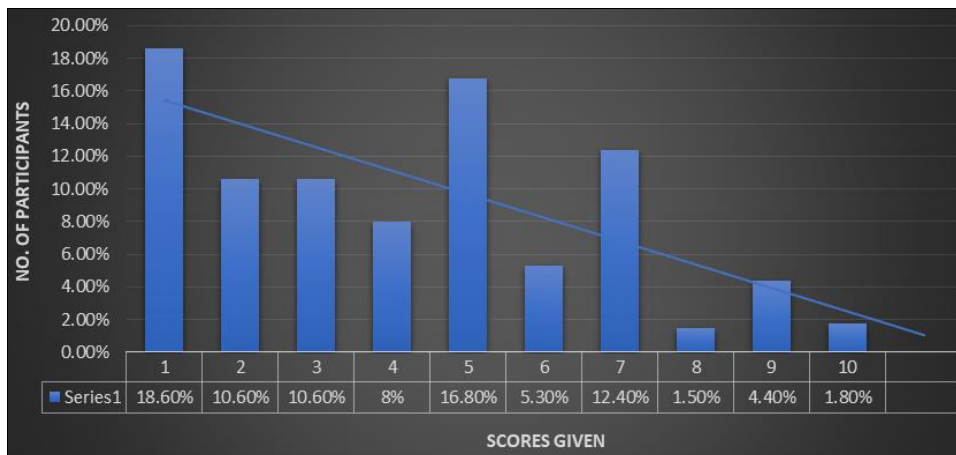


Fig 2: Prevalence of CSE in high/secondary schools in Africa

Discussion

The results showed a sharp difference in prevalence between those who received no CSE, those who had an average level of CSE and those who had an excellent CSE while in secondary school. Although we may be a bit consoled by the fact that a high percentage were about 50% educated, we should realize that half knowledge is often more dangerous than no knowledge. As incomplete or poorly delivered sex education may in fact lead to more sexual curiosity that may lead to an early sexual debut. However, we must commend the fact that some 25.40% had an above average CSE while in secondary school. However, this is very low. Africans have an early age of sexual debut that usually falls within the high school age range [3]. There is also a high prevalence of unwanted pregnancies amongst this age range [4]. We need to realize that inculcating a CSE curriculum

in secondary schools will promote topics connected to future sexual health and activities such as appropriate age of consent, safe sex, barrier and non-barrier contraceptives in prevention of unwanted pregnancies [12]. The dangers of poor CSE amongst Secondary schoolers has both current and futuristic repercussions. While unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion and STIs may mainly affect ladies, grooming unbaked or half-baked men into the society fuel poor SRHR practices like Gender Based Violence and sexual assaults [13]. However, CSE from secondary schools' level would have already groomed a majority mentally. Furthermore, CSE will teach alternative pregnancy outcomes such as adoption, rather than the dumping of babies or committing infanticide [14-15]. Religion and culture are often major inhibiting institutions to CSE. As they preach abstinence and believe CSE does not [16].

However, it should be noted that the most vastly agreed advantage of using CSE is not only that it teaches abstinence with reason and understanding, but the fact that CSE acknowledges the fact that the student population will become sexually active in the not too distant future^[2]. Thus, arming them to successfully make healthy sexual decisions in their future^[17].

Conclusion

The number of participants who had an above average CSE taught in secondary school were 25.4%. This is very poor, with only 1.8% having an excellent CSE experience.

Majority of African nations have poor CSE programs in their high and secondary schools. These CSE programs are essential to promoting a knowledgeable healthy sexual future. CSE does not promote promiscuity as it teaches abstinence as the best methods.

While secondary schools in Africa should consider designing a standard CSE program, they should work towards uniformity and a rich content. As it will be a valuable tool to curbing poor SRHR practices and maternal mortality rates (MMR) in Africa.

Abbreviations

CSE = Comprehensive Sexual Education

STI = Sexually Transmitted Infection

SRHR = Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

MMR = Maternal Mortality Rates

Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest

Authors contribution

Literature review and introduction = OTOBO D, ODIA A and AMAMCHUKWU L

Data analysis = ODIA A and ADEFILA J

Discussion = OTOBO D, ISHOLA M, and ADEFILA J

Final review and corrections editing = EDUGBE E A and MESHACK D

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