

Nurse-Midwives' Attitudes towards Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Needs in Kenya and Zambia

Abstract:

Adolescent sexuality is a highly charged moral issue in Kenya and Zambia. Nurse-midwives are the core health care providers of adolescent sexual and reproductive health services but public health facilities are under-utilised by adolescents. The aim of this study was to investigate attitudes among Kenyan and Zambian nurse-midwives (n=820) toward adolescent sexual and reproductive health problems, in order to improve services for adolescents. Data were collected through a questionnaire. Findings revealed that nurse-midwives disapproved of adolescent sexual activity, including masturbation, contraceptive use and abortion, but also had a pragmatic attitude to handling these issues. Those with more education and those who had received continuing education on adolescent sexuality and reproduction showed a tendency towards more youth-friendly attitudes. We suggest that critical thinking around the cultural and moral dimensions of adolescent sexuality should be emphasised in undergraduate training and continuing education, to help nurse-midwives to deal more empathetically with the reality of adolescent sexuality. Those in nursing and other leadership positions could also play an important role in encouraging wider social discussion of these matters. This would create an environment that is more tolerant of adolescent sexuality and that recognises the beneficial public health effect for adolescents of greater access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services