

Reproductive Biology Knowledge, And Behaviour Of Teenagers In East, Central And Southern Africa: The Zimbabwe Case Study.

Abstract:

Sexuality in the teenager is often complicated by unplanned/unwanted pregnancy, abortion and the risks of STDs including AIDS. There is therefore a need for improved understanding of factors affecting adolescent sexuality and the implementation of programmes designed to improve their knowledge, risk awareness and subsequent behavioural outcomes. A multicentre study of reproductive health knowledge and behaviour followed by a health education intervention was undertaken amongst teenagers in selected countries of East, Central and Southern Africa. Reported here are findings at baseline derived from the Zimbabwe component on reproductive biology knowledge and behavior. A self-administered questionnaire was used among 1 689 adolescent pupils drawn from rural, urban, co-education, single sex, boarding and day secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Correct knowledge on reproductive biology as measured by the meaning and interpretation of menstruation and wet dreams varied by school from 68 pc to 86 pc, with a significant trend ($p < 0,01$) based on level of education at baseline. The reported mean age at which menarche took place was 13,5 years \pm 1,3 (mean \pm SD). First coitus was reported to have taken place at the mean age of 12 years for boys and 13,6 years for girls. Seventeen pc of the adolescent pupils reported that they were sexually experienced and 33,2 had relationships. There were misconceptions reported on menstruation with 23 pc reporting that it was an illness. Peers, followed by magazines were the first sources of information on various aspects of reproductive biology, both of which might not provide the correct first information. Among pupils reporting that they were sexually experienced, the largest proportion (56 pc) had unprotected sex. The findings point to the need for targeting the adolescent pupils for information on reproductive biology and increased awareness on the risks of pregnancy, STDs and HIV. PIP: A multicenter study of reproductive health knowledge and behavior followed by a health education intervention was undertaken among teenagers in selected countries of eastern, central, and southern Africa. Baseline findings are reported from the Zimbabwe component of the study. 1689 adolescents from rural, urban, coeducational, single sex, boarding, and day secondary schools in Zimbabwe participated in the study. 789 were aged 10-14 years, 872 were aged 15-19, 10 were older than 19, and 18 did not offer their age. 48.4% of participants were male. Correct knowledge on reproductive biology was measured by the meaning and interpretation of menstruation and wet dreams as indicated by responses to self-administered questionnaires. That knowledge varied by school from 68% to 86%, with a significant trend based upon the level of education at baseline. Menarche occurred at the reported mean age of 13.5 years, with first coitus occurring at the mean ages of 12 years for boys and 13.6 years for girls. 17% reported being sexually experienced and 33.2% were involved in relationships. 23% believed menstruation to be an illness. Peers, followed by magazines, were the main sources of information on reproductive biology. 56% of the respondents who reported being sexually experienced had unprotected sex. These findings point to the need to target adolescent students with information on reproductive biology and increased awareness on the risks of pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and HIV.