What Tanzanian Young People Want to Know About Sexual Health; Implications for School-Based Sex and Relationships Education

Kitila A.K. Mkumbo

Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, University of Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

It is very important that sex and relationships education (SRE) programme developers attempt to elicit, understand and incorporate young people's views in the SRE development and implementation processes. This paper reports the findings of a study that sought to identify young people's self-identified learning needs and priorities regarding sexual health that should be included in school-based SRE. Seven hundred and fifteen primary and secondary students aged between eight years and over 20 years old completed a survey between June and September 2007. The questionnaire had both closed and open-ended items. The open-ended items asked students to provide up to two questions on sex and relationships; this study briefly reports on the results of students' responses. Students raised a total of 535 questions, which were subjected to quantitative content analysis. This revealed that students asked a wide range of questions across three major themes of SRE; namely, facts and information, attitudes and values, and relationships and skills. The most frequently asked questions were on sexual decision-making (27%), sexual pleasure and enjoyment (20%), relationships (14%), safer sex and condom use (10%), sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (8%) and masturbation (7%). Of these topics, only sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS are currently covered in Tanzania's school curriculum. The results of this study show that, although students consider HIV/AIDS as one of the important SRE areas, they want a broader SRE coverage than a purely health-oriented model can offer. Furthermore, the nature of the questions that students asked exposes some serious inadequacies in the current SRE programmes in Tanzania. This calls for broad schoolbased SRE programmes, which should reflect a wider coverage of sexual health than the present curriculum's rather narrow focus on HIV/AIDS.