

FAMILY COMMUNICATION AND YOUTH PERCEPTION ON PREGNANCY, SEXUALITY AND SEX EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The sexual problem among youths has become one of the major issues being debated amongst Tanzanian society. The increasing number of teenagers who get pregnant before getting married is considered a disgrace by the Tanzanian public. Therefore, this study was conducted among teenagers in Mbeya City, to examine their perception of sexuality and teenage pregnancy regarding sexuality. There were 100 Tanzanian participants selected for this study, with ages ranging from 13 to 17 years old. Overall results show that majority of the participants had a conservative- inclined perception of sexuality as well as teenage pregnancy regarding sexuality. However, daily school participants with parents who communicated more openly about sexuality issues will have a more conservative perception of sexuality and teenage pregnancy. In addition, girls were found to have a more conservative perception of both issues than boys. Discussion centres upon the importance of parental influence on promoting positive youth development, especially in obtaining appropriate sexual knowledge and reducing risky sexual behaviour among teenagers. The importance of sex education in school is also discussed.

Keywords: Teenage sexuality, Family communication, Sexual behaviour, Tanzania

1.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the major social issues involving young teenagers is the issue of teenage pregnancy. In fact, the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy has also been considered as a major social problem in many countries around the world that need to be addressed and need to be avoided because of the undesired effects on the development of youth (Paton, Bullivant, & Soto, 2020). For example, according to the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA, 2018), the occurrence of teenage pregnancy has violated the rights of female teenagers and led to life-threatening consequences in terms of sexual and reproductive health (Indongo, 2020). The term 'teenage pregnancy' is defined as a 'teenager or underaged girl (usually within the ages of 13-19) becoming pregnant' by the World Health Organisation (Soto, Soto, & Bullivant, 2020). Based on the definition, young girls have become the main focus when discussing the issue of teenage pregnancy rather than young boys. Most of the studies on teenage pregnancy are frequently focused on young girls' conditions probably due to the fact that young girls are the ones who will be the most disadvantaged as a result of being mothers at a very young age.

There are also a few factors that contribute to the high occurrence of teenage pregnancy among teenagers in our country. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2011) Tanzania, teenage pregnancy is associated with lower educational levels, higher rates of poverty of the family, negative adolescent sexual behaviour, peer pressure, incorrect use of contraception and sexual abuse in family (Arunda, Agardh, & Asamoah, 2020). However, the most prevalent factor that contributes to risky sexual behaviour among young teenagers is the lack of information about sexual and reproductive health (Urindwanayo & Richter, 2020). A study by Bylund, Målqvist, Peter, & Wees,(2020) on the influence of gender, race, age and personal belief on adolescents' sexual knowledge found a relatively low level of sexual knowledge among the adolescents. The respondents for this research were school-age adolescents. Studies have suggested that teenagers with high levels of sexual knowledge have fewer tendencies to get involved in risky sexual behaviour or to practice unsafe sexual relationships (Mbilinyi, 2020). Besides, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2011), the society in Tanzania disapproves premarital marriage and this is the reason for our young teenagers having limited or no access to sexual and reproduction health information. Therefore, there is a need for researchers to investigate the level of knowledge among teenagers especially their knowledge of sexuality (Stark, 2020). The number of unintended pregnancy cases in our country can be minimized or reduced more effectively when teenagers have sufficient knowledge of sexuality, sexual and reproductive health.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

However, despite the seriousness of pregnancy issues amongst our youngsters, information about reproductive and sexual health is still considered limited in our country as compared to other countries as reported in the research conducted by Wamoyi et al. (2020) and Dwyer, Kulasingam, Mwimbe, Dickson, & Rogers (2019). Information about reproductive and sexual health is very important for teenagers to understand in order to prevent the sexual problem at an early stage. Several past studies discussed this issue in more detail (Shumbusho, Henry, & Sharon, 2020; Wemaeli et al., 2020). The research conducted by Wemaeli et al., (2020) was aimed at assessing knowledge about sexual and reproductive health amongst secondary school students in rural Tanzania. They found that the participants lacked knowledge regarding the important aspects of sexual and reproductive health. Thus, the researchers pointed out the need to strengthen sexual and reproductive health education in Tanzania and the outcome of this research is in line with the statement by (Kimbwereza, Nkya, & Mboya, 2020) regarding the issue of limited information about reproductive and sexual health in Tanzania. In order to enhance the knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, sexual education has been proposed to educate teenagers about the idea of sexuality. Besides, due to the issue of the lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health among our young teenagers as mentioned in previous research, there is a need to strengthen the sexual education programs in schools (Kj et al., 2020). Given the situation, the current research seeks to examine the existing contents of sexual education syllabus in schools based on adolescents' perception. Sexual education is very important to be taught to the young people in Tanzania as one of the ways to prevent the increasing number of unintended pregnancies amongst teenagers.

This new module of sexual education is considered as the current effort by the government to educate young teenagers about sexual and reproductive health since no national sexual

education has been implemented in the school curriculum. Teenagers' perception about topics or contents of the sexual education is incredibly crucial to identify the knowledge gap that exists and the information about sexuality that they require. A search on the topic of the influence of family structure on Tanzanian teenagers' perception of sexuality, or pregnancy found very few published works on this matter (Kj et al., 2020). According to the research conducted by Folk et al., (2019), family structure has a significant impact on a youngster's sexual behaviour in which the degree of parent-child closeness or the levels of parental involvement can make the child adhere to socially acceptable behaviours. The researcher also revealed that the children who lived in two-parent families were found to have a lower risk of problematic behaviours and lower rates of sexual debut as compared to the children who lived with the single parent (Assari, 2020).

Accordingly, it is also found that family structure is important to the development of sexual behaviour of young teenagers. For this particular research, the effect of family structure is one of the important elements to be studied in more details because the participants who are involved in this study come from two different family structures living with two-parent families and living with single-parent families (Finlay et al., 2020). Therefore, this research sought to investigate the youth's perspectives of the topic of teenage pregnancy and sexuality, as well as to investigate the current educational efforts to teach sexuality to youths in schools, and the influence of family structure on youth perception of teenage pregnancy, sexuality and sex education. This is to address the scarcity of research on teenage pregnancy and sexuality (George, Amin, & CM de Abreu, 2020; Reczek, 2020).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODS

For this paper, the types of sampling used were convenience sampling and cluster sampling. Convenience sampling was the first step utilized. First of all, after contacting several institutions, two institutions expressed their interest in the researcher's study and gave their consent to include their students as respondents. Therefore, this assisted the researcher in locating students from both institutions since the researcher had obtained the consent to include students as respondents for the researcher's study. The second step was utilizing cluster sampling. In cluster sampling, a cluster is defined as a group of population elements that constitutes the sampling unit; instead of a single element of the population (Demir, 2020). To be included as respondents in this study, the teenagers needed to fulfil the following inclusion criteria. The respondents must share similar characteristics such as similar age group, attending public school (thus, receiving the same educational training). The main differences between the respondents from the two institutions were their family structure and living arrangements. It was the aim of this paper to investigate whether the family structure would make a difference in their knowledge and perception of teenage pregnancy, sexuality and sex education. Besides that, the respondents were selected from secondary schools private and public because the students who studied in that school came from a variety of lifestyles and family backgrounds.

4.0 RESULT

The data applied for this study was retrieved by assigning 200 questionnaires to Tanzanian students of secondary schools both private and secondary in Mbeya City, out of which 100

were usable for the analysis, representing 67.5% of the population. All the research outcomes were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and presented in Descriptive Statistic Analysis, Analysis based on Category, Correlation Analysis and Independent Samples t-Test.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The teenagers with a conservative-inclined perception of teenage pregnancy are less likely to get involved in any sexual activities since they could be more informed about the negative consequences of having sex at a very young age. Therefore, having a conservative attitude may result in less likely to be involved or engaging in any sexual activities. Since teenage pregnancy is a major social problem in many countries, it is important that teenagers be aware of the negative consequences of their behaviour especially the effect of peer pressure (UNICEF, 2011). Similar to the results obtained for the topic of teenage pregnancy, the majority of the participants also had a conservative-inclined perception of sexuality. In a less urban society in the southern region of the country, it can be expected that teenagers could be more conservative when discussing sexuality. Therefore, the topic of sexuality among young people is often associated with the negative consequences of the sexual problem which resulted in the participants' conservative perception regarding this issue.

Another concern is on the minimal research attention that has been directed toward teenagers' perception of the effect of family communication and sexuality in the literature. The family or more specifically parents are one of the common sources of information that teenagers could refer to when they have questions about sex or sexuality. In relation to the topic of family communication, further analyses were also conducted to test whether the youths' perception on sexuality and teenage pregnancy would differ based on family structure. Family structure refers to the family arrangement in which the teenagers live such as, single-parent family with mother or father, or two-parent family with both mother and father. Previous research found that teenagers who lived in a two parent's family are less likely to have their first sex early as compared to teenagers who lived in a single-parent family.

Other than teenager's perception of the issue of teenage pregnancy and knowledge of sexuality, the researcher also wanted to investigate the youths' perception of family communication regarding sexuality. Family, especially parents are important in teenager's life especially when they are growing up. The outcome of this research demonstrates that family communication has a positive relationship with the perception of sexuality for the daily school participants (i.e., non-orphans). More open communication with parents can actually promote positive youth development since teenagers would be able to understand the risk of having sex at a very young age. They would feel comfortable to ask about sexuality to their parents and parents would have the opportunity to check up on their children's knowledge of sexuality. On the contrary, teenagers who have a poor relationship and poor communication with their parents are more likely to perform sex at a very young age (i.e., 15 years). Parents play an important role to educate their children about the concept of sexuality since parents spend more time with their children compared to other people and should know their children better than any other people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the research problem part, this study has raised up the issue regarding the problem of having a “national sex education” that will particularly teach students about sexuality matter in the school curriculum. As discussed in earlier chapters, formal sex education in Tanzania is still lacking and has received mixed reviews and reception from the Tanzanian public. However, to tackle the complex sexual related problems among teenagers, it is important that formal sex education is being taught in schools by trained teachers who are competent and not reluctant to teach this subject. This is to ensure that they receive correct information regarding sexuality since they could have received wrong or misleading information from unreliable sources such as peers or the internet. The upsurge in access to the internet especially through the use of gadgets among teenagers is an alarming trend since they could easily gain unrestricted access to websites such as pornography.

From the findings of this research, it is recommended that the implementation of sex education in our country take into account many important elements to ensure the effectiveness of the subject. As mentioned earlier, sexuality in Tanzania is considered a ‘taboo’ topic. Many people feel ashamed and find it difficult to discuss sex openly and directly. However, despite the taboo, more teenagers are engaging in risky sexual behaviour that could jeopardise their health and possibly their future. Therefore, more culturally sensitive sex education should be implemented. Currently, only a few sexuality topics are included in the school textbooks that do not really cover important issues such as the responsibility of the youth when it comes to sexuality, the negative effects of getting involved in sexual activities at a very young age, and how social stigma will affect their action. Formal sexual education needs to take into account many elements especially the consideration of more culturally sensitive content, gender aspects, age-appropriate contents, consequences of sexual behaviour and decision, as well as the teenagers’ input on the topic of sexuality and teenage pregnancy that they want to learn. Other than that, formal sexual education should include the message about abstinence to encourage teenagers to think more wisely before engaging in any unsafe sexual activity (UNICEF, 2011). The teacher who is in charge of teaching this subject should also be trained accurately and appropriately, and are competent to teach it. Problems arise when teachers feel embarrassed and do not feel comfortable teaching the subjects. As a result, important topics could be skipped or not explained properly to the students.

In addition, school social work is relatively new in Tanzania and currently, the position of a school social worker is not being offered in any school. However, in many countries around the world, school social workers have played a major role in promoting sex education programs to children in schools. Having a school social worker could be a great asset to schools as they are trained to assess the needs of students and deliver important messages to students. School social workers should be able to deliver sex education programs that promote abstinence among students while at the same time deal with the message regarding protection and contraception for students who have already committed sex and are at risk of getting pregnant. Other than school social workers, there are teen educators from government agencies that can deliver sex education programs or talks outside of the school environment. Therefore, other than school social workers, schools could also invite teen educators to deliver sex education programs or talks to teenagers at school.

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