

## Minding the Gap: Adolescent access to Sexual health education

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Providing comprehensive sex education is effective at assisting young people to make healthy decisions about sex and to adopt healthy sexual behaviors. This has been shown to delay initiation to sex or adopting the practice of protecting themselves when they do initiate sex. Other benefits shown to have been achieved from giving comprehensive sex education include reduced; frequency of sex, number of new partners and incidence of unprotected sex. Additionally, there is evidence linking provision of sex education to use of condoms and contraception among the sexually active youths.

Although it is the concern of many that discussions on sex education with adolescents at an early age might lead to them engaging in sex earlier than others who receive this education at a later stage and also having unsafe sexual activity, many evaluations have proven this to be wrong.

In reality, what many fail to understand is that sex education is not limited to sex but it encompasses sexual health, sexual reproduction, and sexuality which is an uncomfortable subject for many parents to talk about. As such, many youths are left to their own devices when it comes to their sexual health. It is not surprising therefore to hear many youths admitting to learning more about sex from their friends and not from their parents.

In talking with Timothy, an AMPATH Health Reporter, Paul, a resident of Eldoret reveals that in all his educational years, he was never given any sex education. It was only after completing college that he was able to get information on sex education from other youths in a dance crew he joined.

Despite efforts to have sex education covered in primary and secondary schools, the education given is not standardized and might vary from school to school. Vincent a resident of Nandi Hills narrates that his first experience with sex education was in primary school class 6, when they were shown a video of sick people with HIV as a way of scaring them not to have sex. Other than this, the only message from his parents and the church, was not to have sex until marriage, but nothing about how to have safe sex. Most of his real sex education came from his peers, both positive and negative!

Awhile back, there was an article in a newspaper of a 14 year old girl who gave birth to triplets at the Bungoma District Hospital through normal delivery. It is sad to have such a young girl go through such an experience. Instead of focusing on her education, she now has to put that aside to attend to her maternal responsibilities. This is not an isolated case as Vincent recalls young girls getting pregnant because they didn't know how to protect themselves because they did not receive adequate sex education.

With many parents abdicating their parental role and upbringing to the media, youths end up picking so much information and lifestyle from the media which is often times than not more detrimental. Most media programs targeted for the youths give the perception of having sex and multiple sexual partners being 'cool', and most youths tend to adapt their lifestyles to this. With no one giving them a different standpoint, this ends up being perceived as the wholesome truth. To reiterate this point, in his interview, Peter points out that TV, Radio and social media have replaced the roles of parents and schools in giving children guidelines on sex education and that most public schools do not teach children about sex education. Paul from Eldoret reports that he learned about sexual health from the media, "I only used to hear of contraceptives, HIV infection rates and STD's through media adverts"

From the various interviews done by our reporters, some of the identified barriers to access of comprehensive sex education include cultural believes and ignorance. Sylvia who was interviewed by Timothy believes that most people are constrained from accessing sexual health education due to ignorance and the African cultural norms which make it a taboo for adults to have talks and discussions with the youths on this topic.

In another interview, our reporter Brenda speaks to Peter, a resident of Uasin Gishu and a parent of two teenagers. Peter reports that sex education should be given to adolescents who have reached puberty stage to guide them on their sex life. He believes sex education is important in promoting good behavior, enhancing healthy and meaningful interactions, enabling youth to learn the negative effects of sex activities, such as; early pregnancy, contracting STIs and getting cervical cancer.

Although he is in support of provision of sex education to teenagers, he would like this to be done by a mentor who is a professional in the topic, and that the girl child should be taught separately from the boy child. This way, the curiosity and urge to practice what is taught is eliminated. Peter admits to finding it challenging to discuss this topic with his children. He feels his children are ashamed of the topic and have no courage to ask him as their father any questions concerning sex issues.

According to UNICEF, in 2016 alone, 610,000 young people between the ages of 15 to 24 were newly infected with HIV, of whom 260,000 were adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19. Another report done in 2014 supports that rate of new infections of HIV is increasing among the adolescents. Additionally, number of teenage pregnancies is on the rise. It is therefore time for all of us to stop burying our heads in the sand and face this issue head on. Regardless of our traditional conservative backgrounds, parents and the society at large have to stop shying from discussing sex matters with their children and the youths. Religious leaders too have to be involved as religion has been and still is a large stumbling block when it comes to teaching sex education to children. Now more than ever, we must not be afraid to have discussions on sex education with the youth.

**REPORT FROM 22ND JULY, 2017 TAKEN AT 0.51738035873111, 35.267658233643**

### **How do young Kenyans receive sex education?**

The quality of sex education young people receive is predictive of healthy sexual behaviors, including when they initiate sexual activity, whether they practice safe sex, and how sex impacts their health. To understand more about sex education young Kenyans receive, I interviewed Vincent, a young man from Nandi Hills who works at AMPATH, about his sex education. He recalls his first experience with sex education in primary school class 6 when they were shown a video of people sick with HIV as a way to scare them not to have sex. From his parents and church, the only message was not to have sex until

marriage, but nothing about how to have safe sex. Because of this, he feels, they did not receive adequate sex education, and he recalls young girls even 12 or 13 years old becoming pregnant because they didn't know how to protect themselves. Most of his real sex education came from his peers-- both positive and negative! He felt there was a lot of teasing and encouragement to start having sex. But there was also discussion about using condoms. He went in the evening to secretly pick up condoms from the dispensary, but didn't know how to use them & had to find out on his own. Given his experiences, he thinks parents should provide good sex education early enough, including use of condoms and family planning to be safe and prevent infections and pregnancy.

Download full report [here](https://her.timby.org/download/?id=562) (https://her.timby.org/download/?id=562)

**REPORT FROM 31ST JULY, 2017 TAKEN AT 0.5133029, 35.2614899**

### **SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION**

In talking with Timothy, an AMPATH Health Reporter, Paul, a resident of Eldoret shares his views on sexual health education. He reveals that in all his educational years, he was never given any sex education. It was only after completing college that he was able to get information on sex education from other youths in a dance crew he joined. The much he knew about sexual health he learnt from the media. "I only used to hear of contraceptives, HIV infection rates and STD's through media adverts" Paul said. Having witnessed many abortion cases, he believes that it is due to lack of access to sexual health education. In spite of the varying perceptions concerning the topic of sexual health, he strongly feels that information on this should still be availed and easily accessible to inform choices on reproductive health. Paul urges the government to step in to ensure all people access sexual health education. Not only does he think this will help in encouraging use of family planning but also help control spread of HIV/AIDs and other sexually related health problems. From this conversation, it is clearly established that sexual health is a topic that is rarely talked about in the community, which leaves many youths with lack of information on how to go about practicing safe sex. In the end, many end up making bad choices that would probably have been avoided had they had access to the right information pertaining their sexuality.

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**REPORT FROM 31ST JULY, 2017 TAKEN AT 0.51274568882926, 35.274546146393**

### **Minding the Gap: Adolescent access to Sexual health education**

In an interview with Sylvia, a resident of West Indies, Eldoret, she reveals that she first accessed sexual education while in high school. Due to the African cultural beliefs that make this topic a taboo to openly discuss on, her parents never had any discussion on sexual health with her. She believes that most people are constrained from accessing sexual health education due to ignorance and the African cultural beliefs and norms which makes it even more of a taboo for adults to have talks and discussions with the youths on this topic. She believes that more platforms need to be created that will enable more people, especially the adolescents have access to the right sexual health education. This she believes "will enable people to practice safe sex and make informed decisions concerning their sexual health " Sylvia said.

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