

Where and how do young people like to get their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information?

Experiences from students in higher learning institutions in Mbeya, Tanzania:

a cross-section

Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) among young adults in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) is still a major public health challenge. Early school-based sexuality education programs and sexual health information sharing between teachers, parents and young people have been considered protective against the sexual health risks to which young people are exposed.

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Where and how do young people like to get their sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information? Experiences from students in higher learning institutions in Mbeya, Tanzania: a cross-sectional study

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Abstract

Background: Sexual and reproductive health (SRH) among young adults in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) is still a major public health challenge. Early school-based sexuality education programs and sexual health information sharing between teachers, parents and young people have been considered protective against the sexual health risks to which young people are exposed. There is, however, limited information on the preferred choices of “where”, “how” and “from whom” young people would like to receive SRH information. We aimed to describe the experience and preferences of young people regarding their SRH education and learning and in particular communication with their parents/guardians.

Methods: We conducted a cross-sectional study among randomly selected students aged 18–24y attending Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) in Mbeya, Tanzania. We used a self-administered questionnaire to collect information on SRH education received, ability to discuss SRH matters with a parent/guardian and SRH information gaps encountered during their early sexual experience.

Results: We enrolled 504 students from 5 HLIs, of whom 446 (88.5%) reported to be sexually active, with mean age at sexual debut of 18.4y (SD 2.2). About 61% (307/504) of the participants found it difficult to discuss or did not discuss SRH matters with their parent/guardian while growing up. Learning about SRH matters was reported from peers (30.2%) and teacher-led school curriculum (22.7%). There was a strong gender-biased preference on SRH matters’ discussions, female and male participants preferred discussions with adults of their respective sex. Peers (18.2%), media (16.2%) and schools (14.2%) were described as the preferred sources of SRH information. On recalling their first sexual experience, sexually-initiated participants felt they needed to know more about sexual feelings, emotions and relationships (28.8%), safer sex (13.5%), how to be able to say ‘No’ (10.7%) and how to use a condom correctly (10.2%).

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