

Training course in adolescent sexual and reproductive
health 2019

Comprehensive sexuality education provision

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Question 1:

What evidence could you use to convince decision makers that CSE does not harm children and adolescents?

Looking at the current HIV prevalence in Zimbabwe, most new infections are sited between the ages of 14 to 24 for the young females and this has been a growing concern in terms of what methods to use to ensure our young people are safe. Evidence supports that introducing CSE to children and adolescents in and out of school broadens their knowledge and understanding of their selves, their bodies and their rights, in a country that is patriarchal in nature. Children and adolescents are prone to all forms of abuse, emotional, neglect, physical and sexual; thus requiring comprehensive information on how their environment functions and how they can protect themselves in the face of danger. CSE incorporated in the school curriculums will aid children and adolescents with information, knowledge and power to understand their rights and how to exercise these rights in the face of danger. In Manicaland, a province in Zimbabwe, many young girls die during child birth, having been married off at a young age. In a region where religion, custom, and tradition deem child marriage to be a norm, such young people can be empowered by the introduction of CSE in their community health centers and schools. Parents should also be educated that teaching children and adolescents on CSE does not harm or increase their sexual activity but rather reduces their sexual risks and regulates their behaviour in respect to engaging into early sexual debut. Decision makers have to be aware of the challenges facing children and adolescents in the different communities in the country and notice how much impact the availability of knowledge, skills and positive values can contribute to ensuring a healthy livelihood for these young people. Africa has been backward in terms of technology in the previous years, however, children and adolescents in this millennium have full access of the media and social networking platforms and are not aware of the impact so much mixed information has on their lives and wellbeing. There is a need to ensure that young people are able to use this information to better their lives and understand their sexuality and are not confused by what they see on social media or television, being able to separate reality and fiction. CSE ensures that young people have comprehensive information that is scientifically correct, age specific and culturally sensitive and empowers the young mind to be a productive citizen.

Question 2:

What in your opinion is one widely held misconception about CSE?

One widely held misconception is that CSE goes against our culture and tradition. Growing up, our grandparents and parents used to go for sex education training in an effort to prepare them from marriage. A young girl at the age of 10 would start getting lessons in cooking, fetching firewood and how to treat or respect the opposite sex. When looking at such practices, one can argue that sexual education has been a part of our culture for generations, however it was only to benefit the patriarchal environment and not the girl child. However CSE comes in to balance the scales and provide accurate information, knowledge and skill to all young people debunking harmful norms and ensuring equality.

Question 3:

What are the eight underpinning concepts of the ITGSE? In your opinion, which one is the most important and why?

The eight underpinning concepts of the ITGSE are;

- Relationships
- Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality
- Understanding Gender
- Violence and Staying Safe
- Skills for Health and Well-being
- The Human Body and Development
- Sexuality and Sexual Behavior
- Sexual and Reproductive Health

In my opinion, Relationships concept is core amongst the concepts, as it forms the basis of a child/ adolescent. The family is that back-born of the child and they learn most of the copying technics from childhood through socialisation, the environment, friends and the people around them, with-whom they form relationships with. Children and adolescents learn how to love, what commitment entails, what parenting means and what romantic relationships are through watching their parents and also the association they have with the people around them. If this group of people are informed and well targeted with CSE, and have the knowledge, skills and technical guidance, they are able to shape the future of generations to come and ensure a safe environment for all children and adolescents. One cannot however overlook that all the concepts are interlinked and work together in ensuring the safeguarding of all children and adolescents, equipping them with adequate knowledge, skills, attitude and values that empower them.

Question 4

The UNESCO publication identifies barriers to the implementation of CSE (pages 4-11). Of these barriers, identify three that are most relevant to your country and explain why.

The three barriers to the implementation of CSE most relevant to Zimbabwe are, social opposition (resistance by key line ministries), insufficient training, guidance and support of the teachers or implementers and lack of funding for effective delivery of CSE. The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) in Zimbabwe has openly declared their unwillingness to take up CSE and have subjected to picking some topics in the circular that they deem necessary and relative for the learners to embrace. Omission of these key topics result in the learners not having adequate understanding of CSE and how it fits their needs. MoPSE has a subject they refer to as Guidance and Counseling (G&C) which touches on a lot of livelihood topics and amongst those, Life-skills, sexuality, HIV/AIDs.

In my opinion, the ministry has the mandate to build and nature learning, life-skills and information gathering for all children in Zimbabwe and denying them comprehensive education is cheating them of the opportunity to be prepared for the future. Another barrier is on the capacity strengthening and building of teachers who teach these learners on CSE. There is no specific trained teacher on G&C in Zimbabwe, therefore whoever is free during the timeslot is deemed adequate to talk to the student on sexuality education and puberty. CSE as a subject is not examinable therefore most teachers do not find it worth their time and would rather concentrate on the subjects that are examinable and measures through grading.

Apart from the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) operating in Zimbabwe, who have a health mandate, the government has not openly invested in CSE in schools and therefore there isn't adequate funding to cater for it. Training of teachers on CSE and teaching the subject itself requires resources and funding thus most schools drop it in favour of Science subjects that receive full funding from the government. Student in the Science department receive scholarships to encourage them to continue in that field of work and excel, however this is not the same for student who study social sciences.

Question 5

The UNESCO publication proposes actions to overcome these barriers (pages 12-14). Of these actions, identify two that are most appropriate to the barriers that you have identified.

There is need for the Zimbabwean government to enact supportive laws on CSE, have coherent policies and dedicate budgets to the ensuring all students have access to information on CSE. At the moment the country is yet to align the law on age to sexual consent and consent to marriage, this has caused a lot of confusion as most men walk free having been accused of sexually abusing a minor (below age of 18) and yet the law gives the minors consent to sex at the age of 16. There is need to align such laws and ensure that hush penalties are given to perpetrators, this in turn will ensure willingness of the masses to have a better understanding of CSE and how they can always stay at the right side of the law, it will also go a long way in protecting our young boys and girls.

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, which provides the starting point to education of children from Early Childhood Development (ECD), should lobby and advocate for government investment on teacher education and support in CSE. All teacher training institutions should be mandated to have CSE as a core module in their curricular and if possible have teachers who are specifically qualified in CSE trained and available in each school. The ministry should also develop close monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that ensure that the rolling out of the CSE curriculum is standard for both the teacher and the learner. In my opinion, since the teachers only concentrate on the examinable subjects, there might be needed to add CSE to the list of subjects that are examinable for both quantitative and qualitative monitoring. A results based approach to CSE learning in schools would ensure that learners acquire information that is standard, and with great quality; and will also improve the government's effort to ensure that the educators are well skilled to teach the subject.

In conclusion, creating a passion for CSE requires all key stakeholders, which are the community gate-keepers, parents, health workers, government, teachers and the learners themselves to be willing to embrace CSE and what it stands to address. Meaningful understanding of the benefits of imparting CSE knowledge and skills to learners will go a long way to ensure all African countries and surrounding names have a healthy and health conscious people.

Reference documents

- [UNESCO. International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach. UNESCO Publishing; 2018.](#)

- [WHO. WHO recommendations on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.](#)