

Factors that Militate against Effective Guidance and Counseling on Students' Sexual Awareness, Attitude and Behavior in Schools

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Abstract

Guidance and counseling comprises a very important and vital part of educational activities. It has emerged as a discipline to provide help to students such that they are not tormented by their internal conflicts and do not resort to self-destructive strategies. Guidance and counseling would certainly help to brighten the lives of many young people for it promotes emotional maturity, personality development, self responsibility, creativity and ability to solve problems. The role of the school and that of the teachers has, therefore, been expanding as the society becomes more diversified. With the crumbling of traditional family counselling, the guidance and counselling teachers have the direct responsibility for personal, social and moral welfare of the students. However, even after the establishment of the guidance and counseling units in schools, the wastage of youth as potential resources of our country is still deeply lamented as majority of them turn to self destruction through decadent acts. As a result of such acts, research studies reveal that the prevalence of adolescent pregnancies, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections among secondary school students is alarming. Following such findings questions arise on the role of guidance and counselling on imparting sexual knowledge and promoting responsible attitudes and behaviours to the youth. It is therefore in light of this that this paper seeks to address the factors that militate against effective guidance and counseling to students on sex knowledge, attitude and behavior. It is hoped that this paper will be invaluable to the Ministry of Education, Teachers Training Institutions and Non-governmental organizations working to expand guidance and counselling in schools with the sole intent of enhancing adolescent sexuality awareness, promotion of positive sexual attitude and responsible sexual behavior.

Introduction

Counseling must have existed in one form or another since the very beginning of human civilization. Man must have sought comfort, help and solace from the family and close associates. Children were brought up in a neatly woven relationship of the extended family in African Traditional Societies. The society had counselors who included aunts, uncles, and grandparents. However the home as one avenue of instilling sex education is challenged by modern constraints such as shattered cultural basis of child upbringing, rising standards of living, economic constraints, and inadequate family guidance and counseling, child headed homes, wars, tribal clashes, cattle rustling, displacement and moral conflict. As a result, issues of adolescent sexuality are increasingly being entrusted with the school.

Many African countries therefore have embraced the need for a more formal education process type of guidance and counseling to help adolescents on sexuality issues as a tool of fighting STIs, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, early marriages and school dropout cases. Teachers thus, play an even more critical role of being sources of accurate information and persons with whom young people can raise sensitive and complicated issues about sexuality. Ideally, as trusted gatekeepers of information, teachers can be instrumental in imparting accurate knowledge and skills on sexuality to young people. However, even after the establishment of the guidance and counselling unit in schools, the wastage of youth as potential resources of our countries is still deeply lamented as majority of them turn to self destruction through decadent acts.

The wastage of youth as potential resources is deeply lamented as majority of them are turning to self destruction through immoral acts. For example 40 million people in the world are already infected with HIV/AIDS, of this figure 28 million are found in Africa, out of these 60% are within the age range of 16-24 years which is youthful, productive and expected to provide future leaders (Kafu, 2004). Further according to Tuju (1996) approximately 1 out of 25 teenagers in Kenya engage in sexual intercourse before the age of 10 years. In addition, even before the advent of HIV/AIDS, the Ministry of Education in Kenya reported that 10,000 girls were being forced out of the country's primary education level annually due to pregnancy and others are facing sex related problems. Okeyo et al (1996) further observes that in Kenya like in many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the HIV/AIDS epidemic primarily has been found out to affect young sexually active adults. The available data shows that 80-90 percent of the infections are in the 15-49 years age range. Most of the deaths occur between the ages 25-35 for men and 20-30 for women. Assuming an average incubation period of 9-10 year, these deaths suggest that most infections occur during teenage. A study conducted in western province of Kenya on prevalence of HIV/AIDS among secondary schools students by Kafu (2004) further reveals that the spread of the disease among students is alarming. The study showed that a good number of students had the HIV virus. The implication is that the youth in secondary schools are high hit by STDs and hence their future and the future of the country is uncertain.

Following such findings questions arise on the role of guidance and counseling on imparting sexual knowledge and promoting responsible attitudes and behaviours to the youth. It is therefore in light of this that this paper seeks to address the factors that militate against effective guidance and counseling of students on sex knowledge, attitude and behavior. It is hoped that this paper will be invaluable to the Ministry of Education, Teachers Training Institutions and Non-governmental Organizations working to expand guidance and counseling in schools with the sole intent of promoting adolescent sexuality awareness, promotion of positive sexual attitude and responsible sexual behaviour.

Inadequate funding

Guidance and Counseling teachers need to be supported in carrying out innovative activities towards provision of their services. Various scholars, educators, politicians and even the general public have underscored the importance of adequate funding and infrastructure. All education managers should therefore support the teacher's efforts in the process of implementing the guidance and counseling program. Unfortunately most of the head teachers are appointed from amongst serving teachers most of whom lack training in institutional management (Kafwa, 2005). This adversely affects effective management of educational institutions and maintenance of quality and high standards of education including guidance and counseling services.

Funding is important in organizing in-service courses, motivating and encouraging teachers to expand their time and energy in innovative efforts, explaining and clarifying the objective of innovation to teachers, securing information about teachers' needs and problems, arranging joint meetings with staff and arranging informal meetings for discussions among teachers. Funding however has been a major obstacle to all countries (Kafwa, 2005). It is therefore evident that without funding, teachers will be paralyzed in their responsibility of guiding and counseling students. Research studies indicate that the education sector is already saddled with the problems of sourcing for adequate funding to improve access and quality. Inadequate funding which leads to lack of facilities and resources is the main hindrance to effective school guidance and counseling -based programs. Kafwa (2005) for instance, in her study pointed out lack of funds, vehicles, and shortage of staff to facilitate the supervision of the program characterize the schools studied in Kenya.

Further, the fact is that the education sectors in most countries have no provisions for guidance and counseling programs. Whatever funding is available for the implementation programmes is ad hoc and grossly inadequate. According to UNESCO(2007), responses from two countries in Africa gave the indication that since the establishment of their education committees with decentralized organs in all regions and districts, the education authorities have not made any funding available to them outside whatever funds they sourced from international agencies. These international agencies funds were usually for specific interventions. Insufficient funding of the program has made it extremely difficult to evolve effective schemes to reduce the impact of the epidemic on the victims and their dependence. Campaigns for safer sex makes it necessary for the committees to make the facilities for safer sex readily accessible and at affordable prices. All these demand adequate funds which is difficult to achieve in most cases.

Shortage of Guidance and Counseling Materials

Kochhar (1990) pointed out that a teacher who has adequate and relevant teaching materials and facilities will be more confident, effective and productive. Teachers might also have the competence and positive attitudes but if there are not enough resources, their efforts will come to naught. An ACCO Report (1979) in Kafwa (2005) also argued that it is of paramount importance that teachers get the required materials early enough to be able to give quality service. These resources should further be made more accessible to all teachers through establishment of resource centres with staff, audio-visual facilities and equipment and work materials. The provision of facilities and the appropriate use of teaching resources can provide a conducive environment in which in the long run would facilitate the direct and indirect change of behavior of the students. Studies however indicate that instructional resources for sex education are less available. Kafwa (2005) for instance found out that the following resources were not available in the schools studied in Kenya: transparencies, motion film projectors, filmstrip projectors, transparency projectors, filmstrips, slides, films, audiocassettes and videocassette recorders. Teachers should therefore be supplied with enough and relevant material for the success of the guidance and counseling program.

Shortage of Trained Teachers

The essence of the guidance and counseling program consists of knowledge and attitudes. Training therefore is a central theme. During training, teachers acquire skills and knowledge which they should be able to use in the classroom situation. The process involves the trainees learning to identify and solve problems through arbitration of tutors, therefore feeling qualified. Macharia (1987) asserts that there is need for systematic short in-service courses which should be conducted on a continuous basis, more so in the wake of any revision of national development objectives and priorities. Like pre-service and in-service programs, workshops and seminars help to prepare all those involved in the process of guidance and counseling by acquainting them with the new curriculum. Teachers need training if they are to handle the subject of sexuality confidently. They also need to develop positive attitudes towards the subject. Fullan (1982) postulated that the quality of education and learning depends heavily on the competence of the teachers; this is because they are in the forefront in the implementation of any school-based program. The way they have been trained, the extent of their specialization and the degree of their personal initiative can have curriculum change process. Teachers would therefore require special skills to handle specific skills to handle specific controversial topics in sex education like: condom use, sexual intercourse, delaying sexual activity, male and female organs among other topics.

However, there is a desperate shortage of teachers in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A UNESCO report (2006) estimates that 3 million more primary school teachers will be needed across the region by 2010. Severe economic and health problems are at the root of the crisis. HIV/AIDS has decimated the population, and many potential teachers are choosing better paid employment. In addition, a study by Kafwa (2005) found out that a big proportion of teachers were not trained to teach HIV/AIDS education program in secondary schools. She also found out that a few teachers indicated that they were trained on the content, but not the methodology of HIV/AIDS education. This situation results in difficulty in implementing the program. Chege (2007) reported that the few teachers who attempted to encourage participation and discussion during sex education expressed difficulties in dealing with what they described as embarrassing questions from students. A UNICEF study in Chege (2007) revealed that in almost all schools; didactic approaches were most common in sex education classes.

The study further showed there was little indication that students were allowed to set their agenda, ask questions or encouraged to reflect on issues pertaining sexuality that interested or concerned them. In the same study, some of the female teachers interviewed explained that they found it difficult to discuss sexuality, especially in mixed-sex classes because girls tended to become timid and would not participate. In some cases teachers found it difficult to conduct guidance and counseling on sexuality because they claimed that students were quite hostile to the subject. Undoubtedly, teachers needed the skills of engaging with apparently sensitive subject in ways that would make it interesting and acceptable to young people. A recent survey carried out by the Kenya National Union of Teachers (KNUT) also showed that Kenya teachers are not generally prepared for lessons and that many are not well informed about the subject. For teachers to become effective in teaching sex education, it is therefore imperative that they receive the relevant training that is tailor-made to develop skills on how to construct sex education broadly as a social relations subject rather than sex-focused per se.

Training teachers in participatory pedagogical skills should be a key component for both the in-service as well as pre-service teachers for all subjects, including sexuality and HIV/AIDS education.

Policies, Practices and Community Norms on Sexuality

There are several factors that explain the hostile, ambiguous and unclear policy climate that inhibits the school-based guidance and counseling on sexuality. Wangoi (1994) pointed out that, firstly, a belief that provision of sex education and contraceptives leads to an increase in sexual license and promiscuity. To the policy makers and religious leaders, particularly the Catholic Church, these provisions are equated to 'how to do sex' and 'freedom to go and have sex'. Secondly, the unclear distinctions between childhood and adulthood and thirdly, the mistaken notion that the adolescent is too young to know about sex matters. This notion fails to recognize that the adolescents, particularly young and unmarried ones are sexual beings, capable of engaging in sexual behaviour. As a result adults feel uncomfortable discussing young people's sexuality. All youth need information on abstinence and delayed sexual initiation as well as HIV/AIDS issues. An important prerequisite to effective guidance and counseling on sexuality issues therefore is clear policies and guidelines supporting young people's access to both information and services. These policies should be widely known by teachers and service providers and should be implemented.

However, in a survey by Education International of its members, 84% of those responding most of them from Africa said they received little or no support from reinforcing policies on the prevention of sex education and related discrimination. Where supportive policies have not been adopted, administrators at the local level may have to cope with input from religious groups and other stakeholders who may object to aspects of curriculum, particularly discussions about condom use for those already sexually active. Without clear guidance from policies, teachers may avoid controversial areas. Evaluations of teacher training programs show that teachers frequently fail to teach topics in which they have been trained to because they feel uncomfortable with the subject. A review of 11 African school-based sex education programmes identified selective guidance and teaching as a problem, especially regarding controversial areas such as condom use (UNESCO, 2007). An in-depth analysis of how an HIV/AIDS curriculum was taught in western Kenya by Action Aid, a United Kingdom-based group, found that some teachers select which messages to give, choose not to teach HIV/AIDS at all or rely on solely messages on abstinence. Sexually active youths therefore will not only feel excluded from messages forbidding premarital sex but will also have limited access to potentially life saving information.

Tuju (1996) further noted that myths, lies and rumours on sexuality prevail in the African society. For instance, it is a taboo for parents to discuss sexual matters with their children. As a result, in the absence of sex information, teenagers internalize the rumours and the myths and this often puts them in danger. He further pointed out that any discussion of youth sexuality in public degenerates into a debate dominated more by emotion rather than reason. In addition, many parents, churches and other interest groups become suspicious of any government programme which is intended to educate the youth about sexuality or reproductive health or family life, depending on what terminology is used. The negative side of such emotion is that nothing gets done to address the problems of youth sexuality. Youssef et al (1995) adds that policy makers often fear that parents will oppose sex education for young people; this therefore hinders teachers from giving accurate information to students.

A newspaper reporter reporting on AIDS in Kenya also observed that the diverse cultures in Kenya have posed great challenges in designing uniform education programs and approach in matters to sexuality among young people. (Daily Nation, 21st February 1999) This has greatly influenced the youth whose sexuality is greatly determined by knowledge about what is going on. To change these policies and social norms, policy makers need to consider the factors that deter teachers from discussing controversial areas of sexuality, including the influence of religious institutions, the fear of being fired, teachers' personal beliefs and a general belief that discussions about condoms and other safe sexual practices will encourage promiscuity. Therefore, clear policies and procedure, careful selection of teachers for training, ongoing training and support, and frequent teacher monitoring and supervision are required to minimize this problem.

Teacher attrition due to HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS-related attrition of teachers and managers in African educational system is alarming.

Mortality, morbidity and absenteeism in high-prevalence countries are expected to increase rapidly over the next 10-15 years.

The World Bank estimates that in Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe, about 1.5% of the teaching profession is lost each year to AIDS, and that the percentage of the teachers who are HIV positive is more than 30% in Uganda and Malawi, 20% in Zambia and 12% in South Africa. (UNESCO, 2007)

Teacher attrition due to HIV/AIDS leads to deteriorating educational system through stress on the human-resource base, worsening ratios of educators to students, loss of experienced teachers, increased demands on staff health benefits and pressure on educator training colleges to keep pace with the demand for new teachers. Teachers in Africa are regularly singled out as being a high risk group with respect to HIV/AIDS. In particular in the high prevalence countries, it is expected that the epidemic will cut a swathe through the teaching profession. It is commonly suggested that teachers are more likely to engage in high-risk sexual behaviour compared to the rest of the adult population. This is mainly because they are relatively well off, are frequently posted from one school to another, and in the case of male teachers, it is alleged that sizeable numbers have sexual relations with their students. A study by UNESCO in 2008 found out that in countries with high prevalence rates, teachers are greatly affected by the virus. Global estimates suggest that the cost of HIV to the educational system could be as \$1 billion per year as a result of teacher deaths and absenteeism, severely hindering the ability of education to deliver quality education (UNESCO 2008).

In some countries, a tenfold increase in teacher mortality and absenteeism due to HIV and AIDS has severely reduced both teaching and quality. Permanent or temporary absenteeism of one teacher has strong repercussions on the provision of quality education. This has been experienced in a number of countries; UNESCO (2006) reported that every month, 100 Tanzanian primary school teachers are estimated to die of AIDS related illnesses and in 2006 alone an estimated 45,000 additional teachers were needed to replace those lost to the epidemic. It further reports that in Zambia, HIV and AIDS are expected to reduce the number by 2010 from an expected 59,500 to only 50,000. In large countries, such as Tanzania and Kenya, with an AIDS-related death rate of one percent means that over 1,000 teachers die in a particular year: this is an appalling loss of human life and is a tragedy for the affected teachers and their families. A recent analysis by international labour organization on the impact of HIV and AIDS on human capita suggests that Kenya will be the second only to South Africa in the sheer number of teachers dying from HIV infection by 2010, well ahead of Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Uganda (Cohen, 2002). Most school-based HIV/AIDS interventions in sub-Saharan Africa rely on teachers as behaviour-formation and behaviour change agents to deliver prevention messages to the children. Teachers should therefore be encouraged to present themselves as positive role models for boys and girls to experience that adults can be responsible, caring, sensitive and empathetic human beings if they have to impact positively on the students' sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour.

Sexual Abuse of Students by Teachers

A growing body of research has documented the problem of sexual harassment of students by teachers. In one Ugandan district for instance, 31% of schoolgirls and 15% of schoolboys reported having been sexually abused, primarily by teachers (UNICEF, 1992). As a result these teachers would have no credibility with students when teaching HIV/AIDS content or sex education. Human Rights Watch (2007) reported that many girls around the world routinely experience school-related violence that puts their physical and psychological well-being at risk, undermines their opportunities to learn, and often causes them to drop out of school. School girls may be raped, sexually assaulted and sexually harassed by their teachers. They may be targeted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The report further discloses that in South Africa, schoolgirls of every race and economic group encounter sexual violence and harassment on a daily basis.

The study further documented that in South Africa in a study done in three provinces, cases of rape assault and sexual harassment of girls were committed by teachers. Girls were raped in school toilets, in empty classrooms and hallways, and in hostels and dormitories. Girls were also fondled, subjected to aggressive sexual advances, and verbally degraded at school. In the study girls reported sexual harassment by teachers, as well as psychological coercion to engage in 'dating relationships'. In some cases, girls acquiesced to sexual demands from teachers because of fears that they would be physically punished if they refused. In other cases teachers abused their positions of authority by promising better grades or money in exchange for sex. In the worst cases, teachers operated within a climate of seeming entitlement to sexual favors from students. The study also revealed that school authorities often concealed sexual violence and delayed disciplinary action against perpetrators.

In some cases schools responded with hostility and indifference to girls who complained about sexual violence and harassment. In many instances, schools actively discouraged victims of school-based sexual violence from alerting anyone outside the school or accessing the justice system, or even refused to cooperate with official investigators. A different study by Human Rights Watch investigation in Zambia found similar problems. Sexual abuse and exploitation in school environments was all too frequent. Some of the perpetrators were teachers who prey on vulnerable girls, exchanging answers to tests or higher grades for sex. Most abuses by teachers were however not reported. A more typical outcome was that the teacher was cautioned and possibly transferred. In some cases, parents negotiated for the teacher to marry the girl. Advocates for girls' education have tried to get stiffer penalties against teachers who abuse students, and to ensure that those found responsible are dismissed. However, the onus is on the girl's parents, not the school, to report the case to the police so that criminal charges can be enhanced. School administrators sometimes interfere with the process by transferring the teachers elsewhere, which makes it extremely difficult for the case to proceed on.

According to WHO(1994), in many of the schools, the construction of male teachers as sexual towards girls problematized the teaching of sex education lessons where some male teachers produced themselves as moralistic towards sex while at the same time pursuing sexual relations with the school girls. The apparent contradiction in the teachers' identities prompted students during guidance and counselling sessions to ask teachers questions aimed at embarrassing them about their sexuality, thus destabilizing their level of confidence in guiding and counselling the students. Further, the fact that many of the head teachers, who were exclusively male, tended to 'cover up' for the male colleagues implicated in sexualizing the girls added to difficulties experienced in counselor-client relation.

Conclusion

Guidance and Counselling influences not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the development of constructive attitude, skills and behaviours needed to develop appropriate personal and societal responses to adolescent sexuality. All stakeholders of education therefore should explore ways and means of mitigating the challenges discussed herein this paper.

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