

Impact of Sex Education by Parents on Tertiary Student's Sexual Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to explore through the use of qualitative method the perceptions of tertiary students on the impact of sex education by parent' son their current sexual behavior. The paper further looks at the challenges faced when discussing sex related issues. The study concludes that parents play a pivotal role in educating their children on sex matters because findings have revealed that positive sexual behavior of the students is influenced mostly by the teachings they got from their parents when they were still young. If all the parents can be engaged in educating their children from an early age about sex matters possibly the prevalence of risky behaviors on sexual health amongst the youths will be lowered.

Keywords: sex education, sexual behavior, parent, year two students, risky behaviour

INTRODUCTION

Sex education is fundamental to children's health even though it is a difficult subject to be discussed by parents and their children. Evidence from Seloilwe's et al (2001) study entitled "HIV/AIDS at the University of Botswana: Behavioural and prevention issues" revealed that risky sexual behaviours are prevailing among the young people across the globe. In many countries some of the risky behaviours that adolescents normally engage in are having multiple concurrent partners, low usage of condoms and high rate of drug use (Imaledo et al, 2012). As bad as it may, several studies have revealed that parental involvement on sex education has an effect on children as it can lead to positive sexual behavior. It has been revealed that it delays sex engagement, encourages protected sex and also reduces unplanned pregnancy amongst the youths (Bushaija et al, 2013; Fatusi & Hindin, 2009; Ogle et al, 2008; Weeks, 1995). Scholars argue that children are exposed to a wide range of sources about sex information (Blum & Nelson-Mmari, 2004; Williams et al, 2002) either formally or informally (Weeks, 1995). This may imply that the information they get from these sources may have a negative effect on them. Children often make decisions based on wrong information they get from these unreliable sources (NASP, 2003).

However, it is of utmost importance that parents discuss sex issues with their children. This will ensure that they get the correct information which could help them make informed decisions on issues pertaining to sex. According to Kaufman's (2011) suggestion parents should be the children's first source of sex education to protect them from risky sexual behaviour as they grow up. Imaledo et al (2012) confirmed that some children naturally explore and take risks in a variety of things in their live seven on sex matters. The above revelation therefore necessitates that children be given the right information by their parents for the betterment of their wellbeing. Physiologically, the alterations in reproductive organs that occur in the life of adolescents often serve as an inspiring force in their pursuit to tryout sex (Imaledo et al, 2012). By providing the correct information, parents are basically finding out what the children already know as well as correct any misinformation that they might have.

According to Warwick (2006) parents play a pivotal role in the provision of sex education to their children although there are challenges that inhibit them to discuss sex matters with their children. He further clarified that lack of parental involvement in sex education is influenced by a wide variety of issues. For example, such challenges can be classified as lack of sexual information (Warwick, 2006), feeling of discomfort to talk about sex issues with children (Bersamin et al., 2008; Kasonde, 2013).

Additionally, sex issues being considered a taboo and against the cultural practices (Ajidahum, 2013). According to a study done in Ghana by Botchway (2004) entitled “*Parent and adolescent male’s communication about sexuality in the context of HIV/AIDS*” some parents observed that discussions on sexual matters are a way of tempting the youth to engage in sexual activity. The study has further revealed that some of the parents think that adolescents are not mature enough to be taught about sex matters. In Botswana, sex education is offered by teachers at schools. Bowden’s et al (2003) study revealed that teachers are the main agents for teaching sex education. Byers et al (2008) further stresses that majority of parents may believe that schools have the primary responsibility for educating their children on sexual health issues, hence the reason why some parents may rather opt for a dormant role.

On the contrary there are those parents who according to Kraus et al (2008) have confidence in parent offered sex education as they believe that it has a significant behavioural strategy that could help in the prevention of risky behaviours. In view of the fact that parental involvement in their children’s sex education may possibly play a huge role by lowering the higher rates of risky behaviors, it calls for immediate attention. Given this background from the literature, it is pivotal to state that a lot still need to be done to help parents realize their role of educating their children on sex matters despite the different notions they have about sex education (Ajidahum, 2013).

Risky sexual behaviours are common incidences amongst students in higher institutions as well. Agardh(2012) stressed that tertiary students are susceptible to a variety of risky behaviours such as consumption of alcohol, cigarette smoking, use of illegal drugs, multiple sexual partners and lower rates of condom use (Adhikari, 2012). In a study that was conducted by Ibe (2003) amongst students from tertiary institutions in River State, the results confirmed that 57.0% of the respondents reported to having sex without a condom, 42.1% having had multiple sexual partners while 22.8% used condom at first sexual encounter. This clarifies Imaledo et al’s (2012) study that many young people in higher institutions are becoming sexually active and majority of them do not have the necessary reproductive health information to engage in safe sex. Agardh (2012) further asserts that the risky sexual behaviour is brought by the fact that students have increased privacy afforded by the fact that they stay away from their parents. Consequently, sex education offered by parents can possibly play a pivotal role at this stage. “If adequate sex counsel is received to face the challenge of growing up, then parents and their children will be protected from embarrassment of messing up while growing up” (Ajidahun, 2013, p36).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will help parents realise their role of educating their children on sex issues. It will also act as an eye opener to those who think sex education is not relevant for children. It is through the findings that parents will realise that the information they offer their children, not only help them when they are young but also has long term effects on their sexual behaviour. The findings will also add value to the existing knowledge on sex education.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of study was to explore the impact of sex education by parents on tertiary student's sexual behavior. The challenges faced during the discussions were also explored.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does sex education offered by parents impact University student's sexual behavior?
2. What are the challenges faced when parent offer reeducation to their children?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was employed for this study. A case study was adopted which according to Yin (2003) is a research technique that permits for in depth investigation of events, phenomenon or other observations within real life context with an aim to develop a theory. The study was conducted amongst University of Botswana students. The target population was second year students for the 2014/2015 academic year. Thirty students were chosen through purposive sampling technique. Interviews were used to gather data from the respondents.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Importance of parent offered sex education

Various topics appeared from the data and there were; provision of health education to the adolescents and builds strong relationships between parents and their children.

It provides Sexual Health Education

Sexual health education is a very crucial element of health throughout a person's life. Several researches have revealed that parents do influence adolescent's sexual attitudes and behaviour (Hutchinson, 2002; Meschke et al, 2002; Hutchinson et al., 2003; Pequegnat & Szapocznik, 2000). Young people who are taught by their parents on sexual matters according to Ogle et al (2008) are more likely to delay sex, have fewer partners and are more likely to use condoms and other birth control methods when they engage in sex activity. As children grow up they make use of same information they learnt from their parents. In a study conducted by Fentahun et al (2012) entitled '*Parents Perception, students and teachers attitudes towards school sex education*' all parents admitted that sex education helps in the prevention of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy as well as family planning problem. The parents agreed that sex education is an indisputable notion. Following the report of this study, it has emerged that sex education that children get from their parents was very crucial. It was an eye opener to most of them. Many have found better ways of dealing with issues of sexuality such as engaging in protected sex at all times. This is in line with what Ajidahun (2013) found out that adolescents who are knowledgeable on sex matters are more likely to use contraceptives regularly as well as to delay sexual intimacy. There is much evidence in this study that parent offered sex education contributes hugely to positive sexual health of student's wellbeing. For instance, 100% of the thirty respondents acknowledged that they learnt a lot from their parents. The following comments suffice to illustrate the issue:

"...because it helped me to protect myself from STI diseases like HIV and AIDS"UV1

"...since my parents taught me about sex, I have never had sex with any man without knowing their status and I make sure that I don't have multiple partners"UV8

“...my parents educated me on the importance of abstinence so I am abstaining and focusing on my school work, I am pure and free from diseases”. UV3

The above views suggest that what parents teach their children has positive impact on future sexual behaviour. The information they acquired from their parents has a positive impact in their lives. This substantiates Knox's (2011) view that parents should teach their children about sex related matters. Most of the participant's acknowledged that what they learnt from their parents is very useful. These revelations corroborates the findings of Bushaija et al(2013) research that has shown that sex education does not increase the rates of sexual activity among teenagers but rather increases prevention behaviours among those who are sexually active.

Improves relationships between parents and their children

Relationships are very significant in a person's life. They are the bases of all other relationships in one's life (Heifetz, 2013). Having an excellent relationship with parents is therefore, of utmost importance for a person's wellbeing. Research shows that young people who report having good sex discussions with their parents have stronger relationships with their parents (Angera , 2008; Meschke et al, 2002). In support of this statement, one respondent stated that; *“...after the sex education I got from my mother, we became friends. Before, it was never easier to come to her with any of my problems”*UV9. It can be argued that sex education offered by parent has a positive impact on children's relationships with their parents. This case confirms an argument raised by Ajidahun(2013, p36) that “if the communication line is free, the child can tell the parents what he or she is going through and proper counsel can be given.” He further indicated that parents should always create a platform which will allow their children to relate with them as friends. Ventura et al (1998) further asserts that adolescents who are able to approach their parents or elders on issues of sex as opposed to those who get information from other sources such as school or community programmes have better chance to avoid pregnancy and other risky behaviours.

Challenges encountered when discussing sex matters with parents

Majority of the respondents indicated that they experienced huge challenges in discussing issues pertaining to sex with their parents. Children also have a difficulty to discuss sexual matters with their parents. They instead find it easy to talk with other people such as friends and extended family members(Mookodi et al as cited in Francoeur & Noonan, 2004). Three main themes emerged from the study.

Lack of openness by parents

Lack of openness by parents has been found as an issue of concern by the children. Whittaker(2008) revealed that sex is regarded as a sensitive issue which parents and children find it difficult to discuss. Ajidahum (2013) stated that parents are from a different thought on issues of sexuality and may have different views concerning sex education. The findings revealed that 50% of the respondents indicated that their parents had difficulties concerning this issue. This is in line with a study that was conducted among young people in Nigeria which confirmed that there is lack of communication between parents and children about sex issues (Imaledo, et al, 2012). This challenge was shared by one respondent who said; *“...it is awkward, she did not open up about some topics like the sex act itself”*UV3. Taking the above revelation into account, what this means is that although parents find it very difficult to discuss issues of sex with children, children are longing for an open discussion about all sex related issues. According to Zolten & Long's (2006) view parents who avoid talking about sexual issues with their children put their children at a great health threat. This therefore calls for attention of parents to have a fresh look into this matter.

Discomfort

As the students reported, it was a challenge for the parents to discuss sex issues with them. This is in line with other researchers findings that many parents are uncomfortable to discuss sexual issues with their children (Ajidahun,2013;Bersamin et al., 2008;Kasonde, 2013) as stated earlier to some parents, discussing sexual issues is culturally wrong therefore, the discussion should be delayed to a time when the child is mature enough(Ajidahum,2013).This is what one respondent had shared: “...my parents were traditional which made it hard to freely and openly talk about sex especially about condom use”UV8.The above declaration signifies that it is not easy for parents to discuss sex matters with their children. Therefore, this may imply that the delay to discuss issues of sex with children put them under unnecessary health threats. They might make decisions based on wrong information they get from unreliable sources.

It further shows that children as well have difficulty to freely discuss with their parents to a point that they also find it very hard to respond to questions asked by their parents (Whittaker, 2009). Therefore they become uncomfortable to engage freely in the discussions regarding sex with their parents. Some of the participants had to substantiate this statement by saying;

“...I was uncomfortable to talk to my parents about sex...” UV4

“...I had lots of questions and I was afraid to ask my mother...UV1

According to this comment, children were not free to discuss issues pertaining to sex with their parents, 80% of the respondents revealed that they were uncomfortable to discuss issues with their parents. Angera (2004) suggested that it is good for parents to strive for the best relationship with their children so that sex issues can be easily addressed.

Fear of being judged

Fear of being judged to talk about sex issues was indicated as a challenge by 68% of the respondents. This led them not to freely open up and ask questions especially where they needed clarity. The following are some of what the respondents had to say;

“...I just thought if I asked a question my mother will automatically say I am a bad person and I had already started engaging in sex...” UV7

“...I felt she was going to think that I had already stated engaging in sex and this fear led me to turn to other sources for more information and still I felt my questions were not answered” UV1

The above sentiments show that children have a common belief that if they open up and ask questions on sex matters their parents would judge them. They lamented their frustration on why they cannot freely talk about sex issues with their parents. As stated earlier it is not good for their wellbeing as it has long term effects on their sexual behavior and attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The study identified that the issue of parent sex education stands out as one of the greatest tools of nurturing sexual behaviour amongst the youth. This is because the study has confirmed that sex education offered by parents is of paramount importance. As earlier indicated, the provision of sex education by parents cannot be divorced from the children upbringing. Taking into account that sex education positively reinforced the children's relationships with their parents. However, in spite of little contribution by parents as a source of sex education, findings signify that there seems to be a considerable impact they make.

This is evident even when children have grown up and are independent. The findings revealed that majority of the respondents lived quite good lives as far as positive sexual behaviour is concerned. Most of them reported that they still abstain and engage in protected sex because of the teachings they got from their parents. The paper concludes that parents play a vital role in educating their children on sex matters. Evidently, positive sexual behavior of the students is mostly influenced by the teachings they acquired from their parents at an early age. In the view of the above, if parents can all jointly take this as their responsibility to educate their children on sexual issues, risky sexual behaviour amongst the youth will be a thing of the past. The youth are more likely to engage in safer sex practices as a result. As mentioned earlier, lack of parental involvement on children's sexual matters is a clear indicator that parents have a responsibility of reassessing their parenting skills. Even though there are challenges that hinder them from engaging in thorough discussions with their children, sex education offered by parents remain the key in children's sexual health. It is therefore, advisable for parents to deal with their shortcomings and be made aware of the importance of discussing sex issues with their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Programs that can allow strong parental involvement on sex education should be developed. This will help parents realize that their children deserve to be taught about sex education at an early age.
2. Workshops on sex education should be conducted for parents so that they can know how to handle the issues at family level.
3. Assertiveness training workshops should be done in schools to help children open up on issues of sex education with their parents.

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