

Videos and text messages support sexuality education

SchoolNet Uganda (SNU) runs two electronic and mobile SRHR solutions: instructional videos for secondary school teachers to use in their classes and an SMS helpline for youth to ask personal SRHR questions. Young co-researchers assessed the attractiveness, challenges and opportunities of these solutions among rural youth. Both the instructional videos and SMS helpline are promising, although many improvements can be made.

Attractive videos and helpline

A majority of youth who watched the instructional videos felt they learned about relevant issues in a way that was easy to understand. Also teachers felt the videos addressed real life challenges faced by young people. The topics include relationships, pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) like HIV, and gender based violence.

“I have acquired skills through the instructional videos. I learned how to use sanitary pads. I also learnt how to make cakes and how to protect myself from sexual advances from male relatives.” (female participant, Rubongi)

Moreover, the videos encouraged discussion. Participants felt that the videos were more appealing and detailed than teachers giving SRHR information to students. Furthermore, the SMS helpline was assessed positively because it allows youth to ask personal questions confidentially. Most youth felt the information they received through text messaging was useful, and roughly half of them found the information shared easy to understand.

Improve quality and use of instructional videos

The videos themselves and the screening can be refined. The quality of the videos can be improved. Youth requests more videos on missing topics like body changes, personal hygiene, masturbation, HIV parent-child communication, career guidance and life skills. And especially rural teachers are more dependent on the right equipment for video screening:

“Whenever I get money, I rent a television set, a DVD player and a generator and show the instructional videos to students.” (female teacher 47)

More youth could be reached through regular video screenings, if teachers embed the videos in their classes. Uniformity in the use of instructional videos among teachers should improve. Currently, videos are showed weekly (35%), monthly (25%) or once a school term (39%), depending on the school. Some students mention that videos were screened only during the lunch break or after school, which prevent many of them from watching. Other teachers used the videos in their lessons, enabling discussion and

Facts about the research

Where? Jinja, Iganga, Bugiri and Tororo

By whom?

- SchoolNet Uganda (SNU)

For whom?

Young people (10-24 years old) at 45 secondary schools.

Scope of research

7 young co-researchers conducted a survey among 412 young respondents – mainly rural residents below 18 years (63%); 13 in-depth interviews with staff, peer educators and teachers; and 12 focus group discussions with both users and non-users of the e/m health solutions.

better understanding. More than 40% of the teachers give minimal or non-specific referral information for additional SRHR services:

"I suggest teachers also share with us the SMS helpline number. In case of a personal situation, we can send a question." (male participant, Buwenge Progressive)

Improve quality and access to SMS helpline

Many youth are not aware there is a SMS helpline. A third of the respondents never used it for SRHR-related questions and nearly half only texted once. SNU management and staff do not prioritise the SMS helpline. It takes on average three days to respond to incoming questions, despite its potential for sharing quality information in a confidential setting. Moreover, about 72% of the survey respondents who had used the SMS helpline reported receiving referrals to additional SRHR information and services, although sometimes the information was non-specific.

The cost of texting might be an obstacle to access to the SMS helpline, whereas access to a mobile phone didn't seem a concern. Almost all youth use either their personal or a friends' phone.

Recommendations

- Ensure the quality of the videos, including sound, use simple language, more appealing pictures and include peers, shorten the duration of the videos and cover the topics that youth believe are missing.
- Provide a free SMS helpline.
- Strengthen learning on SRHR topics by integrating the instructional videos as part of school activities or curriculums, clearly instructing teachers on how to best use the videos and asking them to specifically refer to additional SRHR information and services.
- Ensure sufficient staffing to ensure regular supply of instructional videos to schools, quick follow-up on emergent concerns of teachers and students and create room for creativity to improve videos, SMS services and their content.
- Support schools by hiring equipment for video screening.

