

Accessibility and Utilization of Reproductive Health Information Among Secondary School Students in Chunya District, Tanzania

By

John Jackson

**[M.A (Information Studies), University of Dar es Salaam]
(2010)**

Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to determine the accessibility and utilization of reproductive health (RH) information among secondary school students in Chunya district. The study intended to investigate the extent to which secondary school students in areas with poor information infrastructure like Chunya had access to RH information especially on the aspects of family planning and safe motherhood and the extent to which they utilized this information.

The assumption was that the accessibility and utilisation of information on family planning and safe motherhood to students in rural areas might have revealed insight strategies that could be used to reduce early and unsafe sexual practices, early marriages and early pregnancies. The aim of the strategies was to decrease mortality among young people including deaths of school girls during or after giving birth.

The specific objectives of this study were to:

- Examine the awareness of students on issues of reproductive health in the study area;
- Identify sources of information that students in the Selected area consult to obtain information on RH;
- Determine factors affecting accessibility and utilization of RH information by students in their localities; and
- Propose a way forward and strategies for improving accessibility and utilization of RH information by students in the area of this study.

Chunya district is one of the eight districts of Mbeya region. It is in the north-western part of Mbeya region. It is bordered by Singida and Tabora regions to the north, Iringa region and Mbarali district in the east, Mbozi and Mbeya districts to the south, and Rukwa region and Lake Rukwa to the west.

This study was conducted in four selected secondary schools in Chunya district, namely: Kanga, Mkwajuni, Chunya and Lupa. The selected schools had distinctive features as private and public schools. Mkwajuni and Chunya were the only private secondary schools in the district, owned by Tanzania Parents Association. Kanga and Lupa secondary schools are the first government secondary schools in the district. In addition, all of the surveyed schools were ordinary level and co-education secondary schools. On the other hand, the district was selected because of its being in the remote area with poor information infrastructure.

The population of this study consisted of students from selected secondary schools in Chunya district. Some teachers and parents were also included in the study. The selection of samples was guided by gender consideration. The study had a sample size of 111 respondents that included 94 students, 13 teachers and 4 parents. The villages involved were Chunya Central, Lupa, Mkwajuni and Kanga.

This study employed simple random sampling in selecting four respondents from each class (from Form One to Form Four) to answer questionnaires. In each class, the researcher wrote two sets of numbers on pieces of paper and folded them. The first set matched the total number of female students while the second matched the number of male students in the class. According to the categorised sets, students in the class (except class leaders/monitors) would pick out numbers from these sets. In each category, two students picked the first two even numbers from each class who participated in answering the questionnaires provided that they were willing to participate. Thus, two female and two male students from each class participated in answering the questionnaires.

On the other hand, purposive sampling was used in selecting two leaders from each class who participated in focused group discussion. Also, purposive sampling was used in selecting two teachers (discipline master/mistress and academic master/mistress) from each of the selected schools who participated in the interview.

In selecting parents to participate in this study, purposive sampling was applied to select those who had been involved in child bearing and upbringing. Two parents from the place where the selected school was located were purposely selected to be included in the study.

Primary data were collected through survey using questionnaires with both closed and open-ended questions. Focused group discussions were also carried out with students. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with teachers and parents. Secondary data were gathered through documentary reviews from libraries and internet sources. Both published and unpublished documents, reports, articles and dissertations/theses were consulted.

The qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews, discussion and observation were analyzed through content analysis approach. The approach provided systematic examination of the materials that were more typically evaluated on an impressionistic basis.

Findings show that 16 (26%) out of 62 student respondents who answered the questionnaire were from Chunya Secondary School, 16 (26%) were from Lupa Secondary School, 15 (24%) from Mkwajuni Secondary School and 15 (24%) from Kanga Secondary School. As for teachers, 2 (28.6%) out of 7 of the respondents who answered the questionnaire were from Chunya, 2 (28.6%) from Mkwajuni, 2 (28.6%) from Kanga and only 1 (14.3%) were from Lupa.

On the role of information in managing reproductive health, 55 (92%) respondents from the students agreed that information had a role to play. On the other hand, all the 7 (100%) teachers who responded to the questions agreed that information had a role to play in managing reproductive health.

Concerning the access to available information on RH, 43 (69%) out of 62 students in Chunya said that they had access to such information and 5 (71%) of respondent teachers agreed that students had access to such information. Responses from teachers and parents revealed that about 90% of the respondents were of the opinion that youths/students had access to RH information but did not make use of it.

On the type of RH information students accessed, 4 (57.1) teachers said that their students were aware of family planning and 5 (71.4%) teachers said students were aware of preventive

measures on STDs and HIV/AIDS. The findings also showed that 38 (61%) student respondents claimed to have access to information on preventive measures on STDs and HIV/AIDS.

Further, students were asked whether they were aware of any family planning methods. About 52 (85%) of them responded that they were aware of some methods of family planning. All of the seven (100%) teachers claimed that their students were aware of some methods of family planning.

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions could be drawn:

- The accessibility and use of RH information in the study area should be considered as strategic aspects that could potentially contribute to the reduction of sexual practices before marriage as well as multiplicity of sexual partners. Youths in Chunya had less knowledge about family planning which they did not use.
- Although teachers and reading books were commonly used as sources of RH information among students in rural communities, there was need to devise multiple information systems in order to facilitate access to and use of RH information among secondary school students in Chunya district.
- Lack of appropriate reading materials on family planning and safe motherhood in languages understood by the local population, inadequate information searching skills, taboos/cultural factors, poverty, inappropriate dissemination methods, lack of RH information specialists and poor infrastructure as well as the long distance to institutional sources of information were the main limiting factors in managing youths' reproductive health.
- The time recommended to start disseminating RH information to youths should be 10 years and the latest age 21 years.

Basing on the findings and conclusions above, the study made the following recommendations:

- RH information literacy programmes for youths should be frequently conducted. The Government and non. governmental organisations should strive to improve the situation through training and information dissemination programmes particularly information literacy in rural areas.
- Information providers should consider the environmental impact (i.e. both cultural and reproductive health information needs) to the students and the rural populace to enable the information disseminated to be relevant and useful.
- Immediate and effective legal actions, including imprisonment, should be taken against those caught or known to engage in sexual practices with school girls as well as immature girls who have not started schooling.
- All information dissemination agencies should invest in disseminating RH information to rural communities so as to save lives of people who die due to lack of RH knowledge in such areas. The use of teachers and parents as main sources of RH information to rural youths should be supplemented by other information delivery methods to make information available and easily accessible.
- The Government should allocate adequate funds to support the development of the rural sector by reconstructing the infrastructure for dissemination of RH information.