

Review Article

REVIEW OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION (CSE) CURRICULUM OF WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES AGAINST THE STANDARD CSE CURRICULUM: ANY EXISTING LITERATURE?

Olufadewa II^{1,3, 5} Adesina MA^{1-4*} Oladele RI^{1,3}

¹Slum and Rural Health Initiative Research Academy, Lalupon, Oyo State, Nigeria.

²Cephas Health Research Initiative Inc, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

³College of Medicine, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

⁴Universal Care for Africa Foundation, St Louis, USA.

⁵Pan African University of Life and Earth Sciences Institute, PAULESI, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

*Correspondence: Miracle A. Adesina; +234 703 036 9940; miracleadesina5@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: Young people (10-24 years), represent about 30% of the world's population and 40% of West Africa's population. Several studies have shown that they are in dire need of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) because they are vulnerable to risky and unhealthy behaviours such as unprotected sexual intercourse, sexual violence, unsafe abortion, multiple sexual partners among others. CSE is very effective in reducing these risky sexual behaviours and international agencies such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), WHO, UNAIDS and many more emphasize the need for CSE in the early stage of life, in formal settings such as in primary and secondary schools and informal settings such as religious centres.

The need for all countries in West Africa to have a national CSE curriculum that conforms to the standard CSE cannot be overemphasized as a recent study has shown that countries with CSE curriculum with moderate to serious gaps have higher prevalence of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) among youths. An online search of English literatures on review of the national CSE curriculum of West African countries in tandem with the standard CSE curriculum was carried out on AERD (African Education Research Database), PubMed, UNFPA, UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund) and UNWOMEN; however, no literature was found.

Conclusion: This shows that this is a highly neglected area; there is therefore an urgent need to conduct research on this area as this will help in properly and appropriately addressing the sexual and reproductive health issues of young people in West Africa.

Keywords: Review, Comprehensive sexuality education, Curriculum, Standard CSE, West Africa.

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INTRODUCTION

Young people (10-24 years), with a population of over 1.8 billion worldwide, represent about 30% of the world's population.¹ In West Africa, the percentage is even higher with about 40% belonging to this same age category.¹ However, several studies have shown that these young people are in dire need of comprehensive sexuality

education (CSE) because they are vulnerable to risky and unhealthy behaviours such as unprotected sex, sexual violence, multiple sexual partners, unsafe abortion, among others.²⁻⁵ Comprehensive Sexuality Education is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning scientifically accurate, culturally relevant, age-appropriate informational about the physical, cognitive, social, and the

emotional aspects of human sexuality. Also, most of them are exposed to fallacious and misleading media content on sexual and reproductive health issues. Therefore, the need to for all countries in West Africa to have a national CSE curriculum that conforms to the standard CSE cannot be overemphasized. This would go a long way in guiding youths in avoiding risky and unhealthy behaviours.

Furthermore, the health problems that young people face such as unwanted teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortion, Sexually Transmitted Infections, HIV among others have been linked to inadequate sexuality education.⁶⁻⁷ Hence, the need for a strong, evidence-based, accurate CSE curriculum that is well implemented cannot be overemphasized. Comprehensive sexuality education has been shown from several studies to be effective in empowering young people with the necessary information and skills on sexual and reproductive health.⁸⁻¹⁰ Fonner et al.,⁸ conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on thirty-three studies related to sexuality education programmes among young people from low and middle-income countries that presented evidence that young people with sex education had significantly greater HIV knowledge, lesser sexual partners, fewer initiation of first sex after the follow up period among others.

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United State (SIECUS) describes sexuality education as a lifelong process of learning about sexual development, sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image, and gender roles.¹¹ International agencies such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), UNAIDS and many more emphasize the need for CSE in the early stage of life, in formal settings such as in primary and secondary schools and informal settings such as religious centres. A recent study by Adesina and Olufadewa investigated the strengths and weaknesses of the CSE curriculums of 10 East and Southern African Countries against the standard CSE curriculum.¹³ The study revealed that majority (60%) of the countries had minor to moderate gaps or concerns in their curriculum while the remaining 40% had moderate to serious gaps or concerns.

This study, therefore, aims to investigate existing literatures that have reviewed the CSE curriculums in West African countries against the standard CSE

curriculum to identify gaps and areas of concerns in the present sexuality education curriculums of West African countries. The findings in this study would help in strengthening the CSE curriculum in this region to properly addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people. Additionally, findings from this study would serve as a wake-up call to researchers, stakeholders, policymakers, individuals, nongovernmental organizations, and any more to address issues of youth sexuality and reproductive health in West Africa. Also, implementation of recommendations from this article would enable adequate, detailed and comprehensive delivery of scientific and evidenced based information on sexuality and reproductive health to young persons.

A REVIEW

An electronic search of English literatures was carried out on AERD (African Education Research Database), HINARI, and PubMed using different combinations of series of key words: “review,” “inspection,” “evaluation,” “CSE,” “Comprehensive sexuality education,” “sex education,” “life planning skills,” “adolescent sexual and reproductive health,” “basic education,” “Let’s talk about AIDS,”; “series,” “curriculum,”; “west Africa,” “western Africa,” “western region of Africa,” “Benin,” “Burkina Faso,” “Cape Verde,” “The Gambia,” “Ghana,” “Guinea,” “Guinea-Bissau,” “Ivory Coast,” “Liberia,” “Mali,” “Mauritania,” “Niger,” “Nigeria,” “Senegal,” “Sierra Leone,” and “Togo”. All the relevant literatures from inception of the databases till August 31, 2019 were proposed to be included in the study. However, after in depth search, no relevant literature was found. Furthermore, Authors also searched UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), UNICEF (United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund) and UNWOMEN’s website for relevant literatures using the key words series. Again, the authors found no relevant literature.

In summary, no relevant literature on review of comprehensive sexuality education curriculum of Western African countries in line with the standard CSE was seen after the online search of AERD, PubMed, HINARI, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNWOMEN.

DISCUSSION

There are a number of literatures on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues in West Africa. These studies were carried out in Nigeria,^{2-3,14-19} Senegal,²⁰

Ghana,²¹⁻²² Burkina Faso²³⁻²⁵ and other countries. Studies on sexual and reproductive health issues carried out in West Africa have been on various topics: HIV/AIDS prevention,^{21,22,24,26} reproductive health education,^{3,16,27} health education,^{15,20,28} sex education^{4,14,18-19,23} and many more. West African SRH studies have assessed, unmet needs of sex education,²⁻⁴ impact or effectiveness of sex education,^{14-15,20,28-29} teachers and parents' attitude,^{16,18} knowledge on sexual education^{25,30} etc. Various populations have also been surveyed in sexual and reproductive health researchers in West Africa including, secondary school students,^{14,28-29} parents,¹⁶⁻¹⁷ teachers,¹⁶⁻¹⁷ male clients of female sex workers,²⁰ female sex workers,²⁰ and other population. Researchers studying sexual and reproductive health education have used various methods such as peer educators,^{16,20,27,29} teachers,²⁷ public lectures,²⁹ school health clubs,²⁹ cinemas or arts theatres²³ and games;²¹ to teach various populations about SRH issues.

Despite the abundance of literature in the field of SRH in West Africa; however, it seems nothing has been done as regards review of the comprehensive sexuality education curriculum of the individual countries in West Africa. No literature of any form on the review of the national CSE curriculum of West African countries in line with the standard CSE curriculum was found after in-depth and extensive search of AERD, PubMed, HINARI, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNWOMEN; this shows that this is a highly neglected area. There is therefore an urgent need to conduct research on this area as this will help in properly and appropriately addressing the SRH issues of the young people in West Africa.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The literatures were limited to those written in English language; this could have limited the literatures found during the online search. We also searched six of the most relevant databases on this research area; however, it is possible to have found some important/relevant literatures if other databases were used which could have limited the findings of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need for relevant international organizations such as UNICEF, UN, WHO that work at the fore of promotion of SRH of young people to conduct a review of the CSE curriculum of West African countries in line with the standard CSE curriculum.³¹ Furthermore,

relevant journals and publishers should consider publishing studies that focus on CSE curriculum and articles that critique various CSE curriculums in West Africa. Additionally, researchers interested in the field of Public Health Education and SRH promotion should conduct more studies and critical appraisals that focus on the CSE curriculum of West African countries which is a neglected area of research in the region.

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AVAILABILITY OF DATA AND MATERIALS

Not applicable.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Both authors conceptualized the study, MAA carried out the review of electronic search and wrote review and discussion section. OII helped to draft manuscript, wrote the introduction section and edited the manuscript. All authors approved the final manuscript.

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ETHICS APPROVAL AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Not applicable.

CONSENT FOR PUBLICATION

Not applicable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare they have no competing interest.

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