

The Community Stakeholders' Perspectives on Sexual Health Education for Young Adolescents in Western New York, USA: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Abstract : In the United States, up to 10% of girls and 22 % of boys 10-14 years have had sex, 5% of them had their first sex before 11 years, and the age of first sexual encounter is reported to be 8 years. Over 4,000 adolescent girls, 10-14 years, become pregnant every year, and 2.6% of the abortions in 2019 were among adolescents below 15 years. Despite these negative outcomes, little research has been conducted to understand the sexual health education offered to young adolescents ages 10-14. Early sexual health education is one of the most effective strategies to help lower the rate of early pregnancies, HIV infections, and other sexually transmitted. Such knowledge is necessary to inform best practices for supporting the healthy sexual development of young adolescents and prevent adverse outcomes. This qualitative descriptive study was conducted to explore the community stakeholders' experiences in sexual health education for young adolescents ages 10-14 and ascertain the young adolescents' sexual health support needs. Maximum variation purposive sampling was used to recruit a total sample of 13 community stakeholders, including health education teachers, members of youth-based organizations, and Adolescent Clinic providers in Rochester, New York State, in the United States of America from April to June 2022. Data were collected through semi-structured individual in-depth interviews and were analyzed using MAXQDA following a conventional content analysis approach. Triangulation, team analysis, and respondent validation to enhance rigor were also employed to enhance study rigor. The participants were predominantly female (92.3%) and comprised of Caucasians (53.8%), Black/African Americans (38.5%), and Indian-American (7.7%), with ages ranging from 23-59. Four themes emerged: the perceived need for early sexual health education, preferred timing to initiate sexual health conversations, perceived age-appropriate content for young adolescents, and initiating sexual health conversations with young adolescents. The participants described encouraging and concerning experiences. Most participants were concerned that young adolescents are living in a sexually driven environment and are not given the sexual health education they need, even though they are open to learning sexual health materials. There was consensus on the need to initiate sexual health conversations early at 4 years or younger, standardize sexual health education in schools and make age-appropriate sexual health education progressive. These results show that early sexual health education is essential if young adolescents are to delay sexual debut, prevent early pregnancies, and if the goal of ending the HIV epidemic is to be achieved. However, research is needed on a larger scale to understand how best to implement sexual health education among young adolescents and to inform interventions for implementing contextually-relevant sexuality education for this population. These findings call for increased multidisciplinary efforts in promoting early sexual health education for young adolescents.

Keywords : community stakeholders' perspectives, sexual development, sexual health education, young adolescents

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