


O3 Plus regional conference on sexual and reproductive health and rights and comprehensive sexuality education

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Introduction

This special issue is a collection of six out of the 37 articles that were presented at the blended regional conference on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)¹ and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)² on 15 and 16 November 2022 at Great Zimbabwe University (GZU). The conference themes were the objectives of the Our Rights, Our lives, Our future plus (O3 Plus) project run by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The first phase of the O3 Plus project was implemented by tertiary institutions in Zimbabwe and Zambia aiming to ensure that young people in higher and tertiary education institutions (HTEIs) can realise positive health, education and gender equality outcomes. This project aim is linked to the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 4 which is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO 2016), with a specific focus on target 4.7 and means of achievement 4a.

This special issue forms part of special collections on 'Agenda 2063: the Africa we want', whose seven aspirations were set during the African Union's 24th Assembly of heads of states in January 2015, in Addis Ababa (The African Union Commission 2015). The articles in this issue contribute to aspirations number 1 on 'a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development', number 4 on 'a peaceful and secure Africa' and number 6 on 'people driven development' (The African Union Commission 2015).

Thematic outline of the articles

These six articles were written by authors from HTEIs in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa with the intention of building knowledge based on the four objectives of the O3 Plus project.³

The first theme, institutional strengthening for sustainability, is premised on supporting HTEIs to ensure that SRHR and CSE activities can be continued beyond the lifespan of the O3 Plus project. The first article by Chabata, Chari and Sibanda seeks to find a way 'Towards an Integrated Sexuality Education System in Higher and Tertiary Education Institutions'. They point out the need to bring in indigenous languages and cultures in the teaching of sexuality education as a means of improving its relevance and applicability.

Nyambiya, Mudzengi and Nago investigate 'female students' personal risk perception of developing breast cancer', which is in line with the student health and wellbeing objective. Trained medical staff at on-campus clinics assisted by trained peer educators guarantee the provision of accurate messages on SRHR and also ensure that all students can get access to services in a youth-friendly environment (Machawira, Castle & Herat 2021).

1. An integrated definition of SRHR is provided by Starrs et al. (2018) as a state of physical, emotional, mental and social wellbeing in relation to all aspects of sexuality and reproduction, not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity. Therefore, a positive approach to sexuality and reproduction should recognize the part played by pleasurable sexual relationships, trust, and communication in the promotion of self-esteem and overall wellbeing. All individuals have a right to make decisions governing their bodies and to access services that support that right. (p. 2646)

2. The UNESCO International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) (2018) defined CSE as, a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, wellbeing and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own wellbeing and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.

3. The four objectives of the O3 Plus project are: (1) Institutional strengthening for sustainability; (2) Student health and wellbeing; (3) Safe and inclusive campus environments; (4) Evidence building and knowledge sharing.

Note: Special Collection: O3 Plus, sub-edited by Munatsi Shoko, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The third article by Mwanza and Mwale that investigates 'students' perspectives of drug and substance abuse at a public university in Zambia' also falls within the second objective. Mwanza and Mwale view student perspectives as an important indicator of the interventions required for tackling drug and substance abuse. This article provides essential insights into the interface between drug and substance abuse and students' academic participation and performance, which increases cases of violence on campus and increases the risk of engaging in unprotected sex even for those students who do not take the drugs.

Samakao and Manda's article investigates 'the effects of GBV on students' wellbeing' in Zambia, which is in line with the third theme on promoting safe and inclusive campus environments. Ali (2017) points out that the idea of a 'safe space' on campus is linked to providing protection for marginalised and oppressed groups such as students with disabilities (SWDs) and young women. Samakao and Ali's article proffers strategies to tackle gender-based violence (GBV) on HTEI campuses including improving the available policies and putting suitable structures in place to respond to all incidences of GBV.

The fifth article by Chimbunde looks into available 'opportunities for tackling sexual harassment' within HTEIs in Zimbabwe with guidance from studies conducted in western countries. With guidance from a review of literature, the article manages to provide evidence that there is a need to develop sound anti-sexual harassment policies, and to ensure that the policies come to life. Chimbunde also emphasises the importance of establishing robust and independent complaint mechanisms to respond to all cases without fear or favour and it is important to raise students' awareness about the available policies.

The last article by Gukurume and Shoko considers ways of 'policing toxic masculinities and dealing with sexual violence on Zimbabwean university campuses'. Gukurume and Shoko highlight that some cases of sexual violence perpetrated on females in HTEIs are linked to toxic masculinities which include coercive sexual practices. These practices are embedded in socio-cultural beliefs that are tied together with religion, patriarchal dominance and other factors related to drug and substance abuse (Masvawure et al. 2009). Therefore, by addressing those masculinities there are chances of reducing the incidences of sexual violence.

Acknowledgements

Disclaimer

The views presented in these publications are those of the authors, and do not necessarily portray the views of UNESCO as well as the O3 PLUS project.

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