

# Beliefs, Barriers and Breakthroughs - Accessing Sexual and Reproductive Health Care Services, Information and Education: A Review of Tanzania's National and Institutional Policies

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Tanzania suffers high adverse reproductive and sexual health (RSH) indicators including high levels of maternal mortality, adolescent births, mother to child transmission of HIV, persistence of child and teenage marriages, girls forced to drop out of school due to pregnancy, and low contraceptive prevalence. RSH programmes have limited orientation to key populations and there is little evidence of integration of RSH and HIV/AIDS interventions (HEARD, 2015).

Adolescents constitute a significant proportion of the population, at about 34.7% (15-34 years) (TDHS, 2015-2016). A high percentage of adolescents are sexually active; Two in five girls are married by the age of 18 and more than 50% of 18 year old girls are pregnant or already mothers. Contributory factors to early sexual debut and high numbers of unplanned pregnancies may include a contraception prevalence of just 12% for sexually active adolescents and young women (15-24 years old) as well as limited provision of comprehensive sex education in schools, resulting in a lack of awareness and education around HIV, AIDS, and RSH fuelling myths and the spread of misinformation (HEARD, 2015).

## The Research Problem

Reproductive and sexual health services, information and education have never been truly viewed as a main priority for investment by National governments, despite the positive impacts investment in these areas has on an adolescent population, such as the prevention of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. This lack of venture can be seen worldwide yet it is more prominent in the global south, in countries such as Tanzania, a country that has the 11th highest adolescent (15-19) birth rate in the world at 119.38 per 1,000 live births (MoH et al, 2016). These pregnancies have major influences on the father and mother, in particular the mother, as her ability to progress economically and/or educationally is jeopardised and in most cases halted, preventing these young women from reaching their full potential and posing psychological stress.

Understanding the reasons behind lack of investment in RSH services and education is a key component in moving forward towards customised universal reproductive and sexual health education and healthcare. This researcher recognises the importance of observing and questioning human behaviour derived from culture, traditions and beliefs alongside current strategies and policies implemented in order to achieve breakthroughs in preventing unwanted, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

## The Research Purpose

The aim of this research is to analyse data collected previously by this researcher in Dar es Salaam University College of Education (a government run institution, and one of the leading colleges in teacher training in Tanzania) and consider how this data collected and analysed corresponds to national and institutional strategies, policies and reproductive rights in place in Tanzania. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, goal 3; 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages', with particular focus on target 3.7; 'by 2030 ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs', will drive this research, as it is imperil when focusing on policies and strategies in place in Tanzania.

### The Research Objectives

This researcher aims to gain deeper insight into and understanding of the behaviours and beliefs that enclose and have a major impact on reproductive and sexual health education, rights and services in Tanzania -drawing from previous research conducted at Dar es Salaam University College of Education; 'How the students and staff of DUCE, perceive and engage with Reproductive and Sexual Health and Reproductive and Sexual Health Education, information, services and supports available at DUCE - The rise of unplanned pregnancy and the myths surrounding contraception. Previous year's research at the college alluded to increasing rates of pregnancy on campus; research was conducted to investigate these gaps.

It is hoped that by analysing the data collected and linking it with the progress Tanzania is making in achieving this target, it will become apparent that more progress must be made in areas such as education and its significance in providing people with control and confidence over their bodies, as well as giving individuals the ability to reach their full potential in life by preventing sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted/unplanned pregnancy.