

Leveraging ICTs to Improve Sexual Health Literacies and Practices of University Students in Kenya

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Abstract

The Objective of the study was to leverage ICTs to improve sexual health literacies and practices of 300 First- and Second-Year female Bachelor of Education students from three purposively selected public universities situated in urban and peri-urban contexts of Kenya. The study, an intervention dubbed Campus Girl Keepers (CGKs) project, had three components: needs assessment to determine CGKs' level of sexual health literacies and practices at baseline; intervention phase (consisting of three campus dialogues on sexual health-related topics and establishment of CGKs-led WhatsApp Communities of Practice for sharing sexual health information); and documentation of CGK project impact on students' sexual health literacies and practices.

Research questions included: What agentic activities did CGKs undertake to improve their sexual health literacies and practices?

Data collection was done through documentary analysis of: Summaries of WhatsApp chats over project period; CGKs' self-reflections; and field notes of face-to-face campus dialogues and individual interviews with three Deans of Students.

Data analysis was done using open-coding to generate themes that were used to present findings of the study.

Findings of the study indicated that CGKs were self-directed to engage in the study through data collection on patterns and trends in female University students' sexual health literacies and practices; utilization of data and evidence to proactively engage in quality WhatsApp and face-to-face campus dialogues and to interrogate their emerging sexual health literacies and practices. The range of topics discussed and the breadth and depth of self-disclosures in discussions affirmed that quality friendships were nurtured. Incorporation and leveraging WhatsApp extended safe spaces for CGKs to have unlimited access to sexual health information anytime, anywhere, anyhow.

The conclusion reached is that CGKs' project, situated in a local context, was impactful and agentic in aligning CGKs sexual health knowledge with their sexual health behavior. CGKs became each other's keeper keen to succeed together. They built social trust and harnessed each other's social capital to transform their storied lives. They honed their social and emotional skills. Solutions to female university students' sexual health literacies and practices stemmed from within – among CGKs themselves.

Recommendations from the findings of the study are that teacher education programs should build female (and male) University students' social and emotional skills to enable them manage their sexual health and well-being; create safe spaces for University students to interrogate their sexual health literacies and practices; and harness other ICTs to support University students' sexual health literacies and practices. This journey ends where another begins: to sustainably bolster female University students' cognitive and social skills which determine their motivation and ability to access, understand and appraise sexual health knowledge and competently use it to improve their sexual health practices, with potential overflow to secondary school students they will teach upon graduation.

Key Words

Campus Dialogues Health-Literate Knowledge Building Literacies Self-Disclosure
Sexual Health Literacies Sexual Health Practices WhatsApp Communities of Practice