

# GENDER-BASED INFLUENCES ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OUTCOMES: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION AMONG ADOLESCENT AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN LUUKA DISTRICT, UGANDA.

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## 1. Background.

Globally there are over 7.9 billion persons of which 16.7% are Adolescents and Young People (AYP), 90% of whom live in low-developing countries, with 40% from Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest pregnancy rate (218 per 1,000 women) and about 33 abortions occur per 1,000 women aged 15-49 years annually. This study aimed to explore the gender-based influences on SRH outcomes among AYPs in the Luuka district, Uganda.

## 2. Methods.

Between March and April 2022, we conducted 8 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 8-12 purposively selected AYPs between the age of 15-24 years in 2 sub-counties of Luuka District, Uganda. Four FGDs in the Ikumbya sub-county consisting of 2 male groups and 2 female groups among 15-17 years in-school AYPs. Four FGDs in the Bokooma sub-county, 2 male groups, and 2 female groups among 18-24 years out-of-school AYPs.

We explored the SRHR needs of AYPs, examined typical growth timelines for female AYPs, and the key growth social and cultural critical events that occur in the AYPs growth pathways that impact on the SRH outcomes including access to contraceptives.

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, translated, and data analyzed thematically.

## 3. Results.

Unwanted pregnancies, forced marriages, and unregulated abortions are reported as key life events. Negative societal norms - women seen as sex objects, a source of income for parents, household duties exclusive to be done by females, low female self-esteem, and negative myths on family planning (male mainly) were highlighted as major barriers to contraceptive access and utilization despite the need.

## 4. Recommendations.

Based on the research finding, we recommend comprehensive SRHR policies and programs, efforts should be made to promote mindset change and challenge negative societal norms and stereotypes, deliberate gender-sensitive interventions

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should be integrated into SRHR programs and a multi-sectoral approach involving government agencies, healthcare providers, educators, parents, and community leaders is essential

## 5. Conclusion.

SRHR policies and programs should aim at addressing comprehensive mindset change with deliberate intentions of breaking negative societal norms and stereotypes. Deliberate gender-sensitive interventions in family planning will go a long way in ensuring equitable access and utilization of the same.

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## Author biography

**Sande Silvesteri** is a Ugandan Social Scientist with extensive experience in public health research. He holds a bachelor's degree in social work and social Administration from Makerere University and currently pursuing a master's degree in Public Health Monitoring and Evaluation at Makerere University School of Public Health in Uganda.

Sande Silvesteri has significant experience in designing and implementing Public Health Social Behavioral Change Communication campaigns, as well as creating demand for health commodities and services. He has also conducted capacity-building initiatives for health agents and has extensive experience in implementing both qualitative and quantitative health projects.

Prior to his role as a Social Scientist at MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit, Sande worked with FHI 360 on a USAID-funded Communication for Healthy Communities project. Additionally, he has worked with Makerere University School of Public Health implementing various research projects, encompassing studies on Sexual Reproductive Health, CIVIL registration, and Noncommunicable diseases to Neglected Tropical Diseases. Sande is a Trainer of Trainers for SHRH and a beneficiary of the SET-SRHR program that was implemented by Makerere University School of Public Health.

**Abiodun Yetunde Omotoso** is skilled in digital health interventions, Economic evaluation, health technologies assessment, human-centered design, systems thinking, Edtech for health promotion and education as well as health care financing. As an evaluation specialist, Abiodun has developed effective result-based management frameworks and supported evaluation studies for donor-funded projects.

Abiodun continually adopts research and data storytelling to contribute to knowledge management, project implementation, and advocacy that influences social change.

**Tobias Kisoke** is a highly experienced Social Worker with a commendable track record of six years in successfully implementing community livelihoods and health projects targeted toward women, girls, and youths. Throughout his career, he has consistently demonstrated his commitment to facilitating positive change through effective behavior change communication, social mobilization, and advocacy efforts.

With a deep understanding of the complex social dynamics at play, Tobias has actively engaged

with communities to promote sustainable development and improve the well-being of marginalized populations. By employing innovative strategies and creative approaches, he has effectively facilitated behavior change, empowering individuals to make informed choices about their health, livelihoods, and overall quality of life.

Tobias's professional journey has afforded him a comprehensive view of social research processes. Beyond simply reporting numbers, he recognizes the significance of measuring progress in terms of tangible impact and long-term outcomes. By incorporating rigorous monitoring and evaluation frameworks into his projects, he ensures that interventions are evidence-based and have a lasting, transformative effect on the communities he serves.

Drawing on his extensive field experience, he brings valuable insights to inform the design and implementation of community-based interventions. His work goes beyond surface-level interventions, delving into the underlying social determinants that influence health, livelihoods, and overall well-being.

**Rachael Arowolo** is a dedicated Public Health professional and an advocate for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. With a wealth of experience spanning 8 years in both the profit and not-for-profit sectors, she is passionately committed to enhancing the quality of life for young people and advancing sustainable health-related policies across Africa.

Rachael's primary focus lies in fostering community engagement, conducting research, and advocating for initiatives that contribute to the well-being and empowerment of young individuals. She actively seeks to bridge the gap in knowledge and resources, equipping young people with comprehensive sexuality education to make informed decisions about their health and relationships.

Through her work, Rachael strives to address pressing health challenges, such as adolescent reproductive health, HIV prevention, gender-based violence, life planning, and ending female Genital mutilation. She collaborates with diverse stakeholders, including governmental organiza-

tions, NGOs, and local communities, to develop and implement evidence-based interventions that promote positive sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

Rachael's multidimensional approach encompasses research, policy development, and advocacy to bring about sustainable change. By actively engaging with communities, she ensures that health-related interventions are tailored to their specific needs and cultural contexts, fostering ownership and long-term impact.

With her expertise and unwavering dedication, Rachael Arowolo continues to drive forward the agenda of comprehensive sex education and sustainable health policies, aiming to create a brighter future for young people across Africa.