

Involving Traditional Leaders to Respond to the Problems Faced By Youths: United Nations Population Fund

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Introduction

Globally, the youth population group has been regarded as one of the most vulnerable population categories as they are exposed to a wide range of risk behaviors, challenges and stigma [1]. Regardless of the fact, that they are the future of our society and that having a better insight about the problems affecting them will improve their health & rights, most of the community leaders are extremely reluctant to discuss about the issues (viz. unintended pregnancy, gender-based violence, gender inequality, acquisition of sexually transmitted infections, etc.) and thus youth have to bear the brunt of the eventual consequences [1-3]. In addition, high rates of youth unemployment and violation of human rights have been observed in heterogeneous settings [2,3].

Owing to the silence maintained by the community leaders and the lack of attention by the policy makers, quite disastrous after-effects have been reported [1]. In Swaziland, a southern nation in the African region, an extremely high prevalence rate (29%) of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection has been observed in the nation according to the recent estimates [1]. Further, high rates of teenage pregnancy in the 15-19 year age-group has also been reported in the nation, which is indirectly an indicator of the various social consequences that emerges because of the same like the death of the mother or new-born, gynecological complications, anemia, infections, school dropouts, limited vocational opportunities, etc. [1-3].

In order to improve the existing scenario, the United Nations Population Fund, along with other stakeholders has initiated a Safeguard Young People program [1]. This program essentially calls for the involvement of the traditional leaders who have a considerable influence over the health and rights of the vulnerable young people in their local society [1]. A wide range of activities have been performed under the program such as delivery of life-saving sexual and reproductive health information to the youth population, prevention

of unintended pregnancies and counseling about various ways in which acquisition of different sexually transmitted infections can be prevented [1-3].

Moreover, the program also covers the area of discouraging the practice of child marriage, promoting youths to return to their schools, exposing them to various types of skills training, and orienting about the key issues of human rights and importance of gender equality in the growth and welfare of any community [1]. Further, local peer educators have been earmarked and trained on various key issues of sexual and reproductive health, HIV and gender-based violence over a period of one week and these educators, have reached close to 0.1 million youths in the region, with a special focus on adolescent health [1].

The best part of the program is that the traditional and community leaders have welcomed the opportunity with both hands to establish supportive services and spread desired information to the vulnerable youth population groups [1]. In addition, traditional ceremonies have also been targeted by the educators to reach youths, and all efforts have been taken to reach other regions of the nation as well [1].

To conclude, there is an immense need to empower youths with necessary sexual and reproductive health related information and skills to enable them to have a better health and well-being, especially in low resource settings.

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