

You and Your Body

TeamLift, Inc. is a US-based nonprofit that founded a school in Malawi named the Saint Mary's Girls' Secondary School, located outside of Karonga, Africa. TeamLift helps provide health, nutrition, and educational services to the community and they recently teamed up with the Oregon Health & Sciences University (OHSU) in Portland, Oregon to create a comprehensive sex education curriculum to empower and educate the girls at the school.

Need

Teenage pregnancy affects many countries across the world. In Malawi, nearly 30% of girls between the ages of 15 to 19 begin bear children, which is attributed to their poor economic status and social inequality (Chirwa, et al., 2019). The poor economic status and social inequality can be seen through a lack of comprehensive sex education, difficulties in obtaining contraceptives, and societal norms as it pertains to women. Given the socioeconomic difficulties in Malawi, the intent is that this supplemental curriculum will aid the students in advancing their educational opportunities and open the doors to careers that extend outside of teenage motherhood.

TeamLift has asked the capstone team at OHSU to create a comprehensive sex education program for their all-girls school in Malawi. When we began working on developing a curriculum, we discovered that Malawi already has its own approved sex education curriculum. Rather than disrupting the already existing education, we decided to provide the school with a supplemental curriculum that could be used at their discretion. The ability to have additional resources, designed to be flexible, will allow the educators to pick, choose, and edit which information is most pertinent to their students.

Positionality and Ethics: Recognizing Intentions

Our intention was to spread awareness, debunk myths within cultural taboos, and to better educate students and their community about sexual wellness. The culture in Malawi is different from culture in the United States so we wanted to be mindful on how we presented the information. We did not want the content to come across as us pushing our Westernized values on to them which is why the modules are meant to be a supplemental tool that educators can use when teaching people in their own community.

Modules and Curriculum Development

The supplemental curriculum was divided into eight modules that are comprised of: body/human anatomy, puberty, pregnancy and contraception, sexually transmitted diseases/sexually transmitted infections (STDs/STIs), LGBTQ+, consent, gender violence and abusive relationships, and healthy relationships.

The curriculum is a slide deck and can be downloaded into a PDF or saved onto a flash drive for multipurpose use and in line with the limited technology at the school. A copy of the slide deck along with scripts that include instructions on how to navigate and discuss this information with

the students will be provided. We expect that the program could be taught across contexts. Teachers can use the content as a traditional curriculum, for example as part of a health course, with the possibility of an exam or quiz at the end of the week, or one module a day and an exam at the end of the course. Additionally, the supplemental curriculum can be printed and stored in the library for individual engagement. With the creation of the new health clinic, information from the modules can be selected and distributed as a resource out of the school to provide additional information during clinical visits. With easy access to this information at the school and health clinic, information may then be disbursed throughout the local community.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation plays an important part in determining if the implementation of this curriculum was successful. This curriculum strives to reach young women with the goal of reducing teenage pregnancy rates, childhood marriages, gender violence, and discrimination while also increasing the number of women in Malawi pursuing higher education and careers and to overall improve the local and national economies.

To measure the success of this program one must track short-term outcomes and determine how well the material is being retained, mid-term outcomes to measure engagement amongst the student and their peers, and long-term outcomes to determine if there have been impacts made. This will be measured by tracking and using module quizzes, group and individual activities, average missed days of school due to menstruation, anonymous questions, and teacher reflections.

Conclusion

To address some of the issues in Malawi regarding high rates of teenage pregnancy and unbalanced power dynamics in relationships, we have put together a project to serve as a training tool for educators to utilize when teaching people in their community. We recognize that Malawi is an impoverished country with different cultural norms. Not everyone may have access to some of the resources discussed and Malawi has more conservative views on LGBTQ+ relationships compared to the United States. The curriculum is meant to be a supplementary tool and educators are free to omit information that they feel may not be relevant or even too sensitive and dangerous to discuss.

Team members

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References

Chirwa, G.C., Mazalale, J., Likupe, G., Nkhoma, D., Chiwaula, L., & Chintsanya, J. (2019). An evolution of socioeconomic related inequality in teenage pregnancy and childbearing in Malawi. *PLoS ONE* 14(11). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0225374>