

Barriers affecting the capacity of school teachers and school nurses to deliver school-based comprehensive sexuality education programmes including HIV/STIs in the Middle East: a qualitative study

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Background:

School teachers and school nurses play a vital role in delivering school-based comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programs, and improving sexual health outcomes for young people. However, few studies have investigated the barriers affecting school teachers' and school nurses' willingness to deliver CSE programmes in the Middle East, which this qualitative study set out to explore.

Methods:

Four in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions were conducted in Oman, with twenty school teachers and five school nurses from seven public secondary schools. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify emerging themes.

Results:

Most of the participants supported CSE programs, and indicated that the contents of the CSE curriculum does not cover many sexual health matters, and are related to the anatomy of the reproductive system. Participants also reported that adolescents were more likely to obtain most of their sexual information from social media and Internet than from their parents, school teachers or school nurses. They argued that social media and the Internet may provide adolescents with inappropriate sexual health information, and encourage them to engage in risky sexual behaviours, such as unprotected premarital sex. However, the majority of the participants were uncomfortable and found it very difficult to discuss sexual health matters with the opposite sex. Furthermore, they stated that parental opposition, school administration, and cultural taboos and stigma surrounding sex education might inhibit the implementation of school-based CSE programs. They suggested that these barriers can be overcome by improving public awareness about the importance of CSE. Results also showed that there is a lack of policy and formal preparation to support school teachers and school nurses to conduct school-based CSE including HIV/STIs.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study provide implications for future efforts to change school policy to implement sustainable and effective school-based CSE programs in the Middle East.

Disclosure of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Human subjects approval statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the RMIT University Science Engineering & Health College Human Ethics Advisory Network (Reference No. BSEHAPP 40-15), and from Oman Ministry of Education.