

**Research and Knowledge
Management for Sexuality and Sexual
Rights in Africa**

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Presentation Format

- Background
- Global context of sexuality research
- What we know about sexual health & Sexuality research in Africa
- What we do not know
- Recommendations on knowledge management on sexuality and SH in Africa
- Conclusion

Background

- ❖ Sexuality and its effects remain one of the most widely discussed subjects in contemporary social development
- ❖ In Africa, its discourse is highly influenced by concepts of morality, religion and cultural norms
- ❖ Its actual practice and doctrines are often shrouded in secrecy
- ❖ Thus, while research on sexuality and sexual behaviour is increasingly accorded high priority in developed countries, this has not been the case in SSA
- ❖ Research and documentation on sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights in SSA is poorly developed, hence the paucity of information on this subject matter in the continent

Global Context of Sexuality Research

Much of the universal research on sexuality has been based on biomedical model

- Focus on the individual (little on the couple)
- Universal physiological drive
- Rooted in shared physiology and psychology
- Based on measurable outcomes derived from surveys (e.g. use of contraceptives, no of sex partners, etc.).

Global Context of Sexuality Research (Contd.)

- To date, sexuality has only been seen as a sexual health problem (i.e. not seen beyond disease causation and prevention, e.g. STI, HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies)
- Researchers now argue for a paradigm shift that explores sexuality beyond the boundaries of health and ill-health, with emphasis on the lived experiences of sexuality and sexual behaviour

What is known about sexuality in Africa

- High rates of sexuality-related illnesses (unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, STIs, HIV/AIDS, etc.)
- Evidence of high sexuality and sexual networking, based on indirect and ethnographic studies
- The influence of culture, religion and morality on sexuality and sexual rights
- Generally, a lot more is unknown than known about sexuality and sexual rights in Africa
- Indeed, the right of individuals to free sexual expression is known only for its limitation rather than the development of a nuanced approach for its engagement

What is known about sexuality in SSA

- Women's vulnerability – culture of silence around sex, norms of virginity, women's economic dependency, etc.
- Men's vulnerability – perception of greater power
- Sexuality/behaviour shaped by violence, poverty and marginalization
- Legitimacy of polygyny – concurrent partnerships perceived as natural

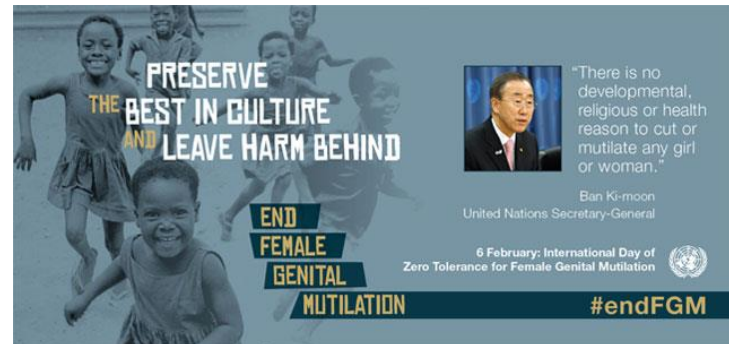
Some Research Evidence from the Nigerian Literature

- Sexuality influenced by frequent mobility and migration (hidden relationships) among men
- “Sugar Daddy Relationships”, “Aristos”, “Runs”- young girls looking to increase their consumption ability
- Wives reluctant to confront on sexual satiety – to protect the marriage
- Challenging husband/asking him to use condoms difficult

FGM and Female Sexuality

- FGM does not prevent orgasmic response
- It may increase women's use of multiple sexual partners, leading to greater risks of STIs and HIV

Ref: Okonofua et al *British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 2002; 109, 1089 – 1096.



Sexuality, human rights and homophobia in SSA

- MSM are one of the most stigmatized of all HIV risk groups in SSA
- MSY often subjected to homophobia, harassment, discrimination and criminalization
- Male same sex sexual behaviour is illegal in 31 SSA countries and potentially attracts the death penalty in 4 countries



Access to services

- There is documented public health consequences of widespread human rights abuses among MSM including increased risks of HIV acquisition and limiting access to lifesaving HIV services
- MSM who suffered homophobic abuses were five times as likely to be HIV-infected as those who were unexposed.

What is **not** known about Sexuality in Africa

- Social dimensions of sexuality
- The cultural context and political economy in which sexuality is embedded, constructed and lived in
- The relationship between power, gender and sexuality
- The deeper meaning of the cultural, religious and normative interpretation of sex, sexuality and sexual rights

Not known: Role of macro-economic determinants

- Migration, economic marginalization, poverty and social exclusion
- Market economies
- The role of the new media and globalization
- Commercialization and commoditization of sex
- Multiple partnering and frequent partner exchange

Not known: Intervention Research in Sexuality and Sexual Rights

- Limited data on interventions that are effective in promoting the sexual rights of vulnerable populations
- What are effective strategies for countering the traditional, cultural and religious beliefs that stand on the way of sexuality and sexual rights in Africa?
- And, how do we counter the current wave of homophobia, and the abuse of rights of citizens that are pervading the continent?

Knowledge management on Sexuality in SSA

- Limited publications on sexuality and sexual research in Africa
- Only a few conferences document empirical research findings on sexuality and sexual research from SSA
- Only few international journals document sexuality and sexual health research from SSA



Why low knowledge of sexuality and sexual health in Africa?

- Low capacity and resources for research
- Poor funding
- Lack of integration of sexuality research into indigenous curricular and research systems
- The difficulty in researching sexuality due to its sublime and subterranean nature – demanding approaches and methods outside the realms of traditional methods of research

Building sexuality knowledge in SSA: Some solutions

- Capacity building and research training with emphasis on sexuality and sexual health research
- Prioritization of funding for research about sexuality and sexual health in SSA
- The systemic integration of sexual health and sexuality research into undergraduate and post-graduate training curricular in SSA
- Support for indigenous African journals to publish sexuality and sexual health research

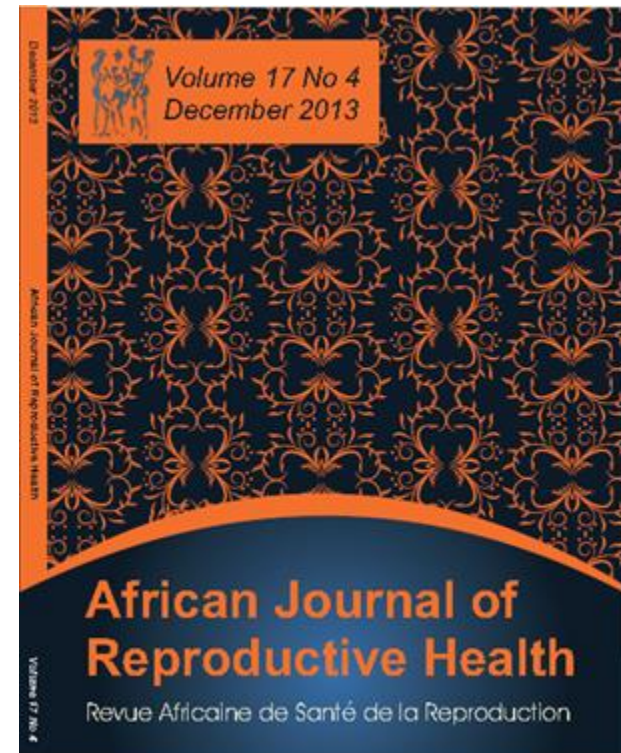
African Centre of Excellence in Reproductive Health Research (CERHI)

- Located at the University of Benin, and funded by the World Bank
- To act as a training hub for the next generation of leaders in RH in SSA.
- To stimulate indigenous research in RH needed to drive policies and programs in the region
- To mobilize local, regional and international support for improving RH in WA



African Journal of Reproductive Health

- Africa's leading journal that publishes articles on sexuality and sexual health in Africa
- Established in 1997, has published 4 issues each year without a break
- Indexed in multiple international sources and published in 8 websites
- A special edition on sexuality and sexual health in SSA scheduled for December 2014



Forthcoming Textbook – June 2014

**Confronting the
Challenges of
Reproductive health in
Africa: A Textbook for
Students and
Development
Practitioners**



**Publishers: Adonis &
Abbey Publishers of
Southbank House, Black
Prince Road, London SE1
7SJ, UK**

Conclusions

- Sexuality research in SSA is still at low level of development.
- Efforts need to be concentrated on prioritizing its improvement as an approach for promoting sexuality and sexual health in the region.
- Hopefully, this conference will identify the way forward.



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Grazie

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Thank You Köszönöm

Tack

Спасибо Dank Gracias

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Merci

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Obrigado