

Abstract

Unwanted teenage pregnancy and the attendant morbidity and mortality necessitate an understanding of the factors influencing adolescent sexuality and the implementation of programmes designed to improve their knowledge and reproductive behaviour. A randomized controlled study on reproductive health knowledge and behaviour was undertaken among adolescent pupils drawn from a multi-stage random cluster sample. A self-administered questionnaire was used to assess aspects of reproductive health knowledge and behaviour at baseline followed by a health education intervention, except for control schools. Results are based on 1689 responses made up of 1159 intervention and 530 control respondents. There was a significant increase in correct knowledge about aspects of menstruation in intervention as compared with control schools [odds ratio (OR) = 4.5, 95% confidence interval (CI) = 3.4-6.1]. Significantly, (OR = 2.0, 95% CI = 1.1-3.9) more pupils from intervention than control schools scored correctly on practice relating to menstruation. Pupils from intervention schools were more likely ($P < 0.001$) to know that a boy experiencing wet dreams could make a girl pregnant and that a girl could get pregnant at her first sexual intercourse (OR = 1.4, 95% CI = 1.1-1.9). Knowledge of family planning was low in both groups at baseline but was high at five months follow-up in the intervention schools. The findings point to the need for early school-based reproductive health education programmes, incorporating correct information on reproductive biology and the subsequent prevention of reproductive ill health.