

ABSTRACT

Background

Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) needs of young people remains a big challenge. This study explored experiences and perceptions of young people in Kenya aged 10–24 with regard to their SRH needs and whether these are met by the available healthcare services.

Methods

18 focus group discussions and 39 in-depth interviews were conducted at health care facilities and youth centres across selected urban and rural settings in Kenya. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Data was analysed using the thematic framework approach.

Results

Young people's perceptions are not uniform and show variation between boys and girls as well as for type of service delivery. Girls seeking antenatal care and family planning services at health facilities characterise the available services as good and staff as helpful. However, boys perceive services at health facilities as designed for women and children, and therefore feel uncomfortable seeking services. At youth centres, young people value the non-health benefits including availability of recreational facilities, prevention of idleness, building of confidence, improving interpersonal communication skills, vocational training and facilitation of career progression.

Conclusion

Providing young people with SRH information and services through the existing healthcare system, presents an opportunity that should be further optimised. Providing recreational activities via youth centres is reported by young people themselves to not lead to increased uptake of SRH healthcare services. There is need for more research to evaluate how perceived non-health benefits young people do gain from youth centres could lead to improved SRH of young people.