



Online youth want personal contact and true stories

Online solutions for sexual and reproductive health in developing countries are expanding quickly. Yet little is known about the effectiveness of these e/m health initiatives. Reach a Hand Uganda (RAHU) launched the online platform and campaign 'Sautiplus' to bring sexual health information to young people. Research findings show that young people find Sautiplus accessible and informative, although not interactive enough.

Love and sex attract

Sauti means 'sound' in Swahili and refers to the campaign's slogan: 'Let's increase the sound so everybody can hear the message!' However, some messages are more popular than others. Young people were mostly interested in relationship issues and information on how to get and use contraceptives such as condoms and the pill. Only a few looked for information on sexually transmitted diseases and treatments.

Most respondents (mainly young men above the age of 18) said they were satisfied about the Sautiplus website and Facebook page, although going online comes with many challenges: bad Internet connection, lack of a laptop or smartphone, lack of money to pay for an Internet cafe and the limited time they are given to go online at school. Also, sex is a private and sensitive matter. Especially girls said they are not at ease reading information on sex in a computer lab.

More personal interaction

Young people got to know about the SautiPlus website through school outreach (25%), peer educators (23%) and Facebook advertisements (18%). Both the website and Facebook were subjected to critical analysis. The information was offered mostly as text, photo and video material. The Facebook page has 31,000 followers; it is regularly updated and there is interaction with its visitors through Facebook Messenger, although the website remains quite static. Interestingly, many young people sent messages asking directions to the organisation's offices, seeking live contact. Remarkably, the online survey showed that young visitors found the available referral information useful, while researchers observed that referral information was minimal and hidden in the website. The most liked posts, with the widest reach, on the Sautiplus Facebook page concerned (personal) stories about love and relationships, cheating boyfriends or girlfriends, teen pregnancies and HIV prevention.

Recommendations

- Ensure you attract girls and young women to the online services.

Facts about the research

Where? Jinga, Iganga, Hana and online

By whom?

- Reach a Hand Uganda (RAHU)

For whom?

Ugandan youth, aged 12-24

Scope of the research

7 young co-researchers conducted 8 in-depth interviews, 8 focus group discussions and did website analysis. 135 respondents participated in an online survey.

- Make use of a (female) peer educators' network for online interaction with youth, also outside office hours when most young people are online.
- Add games and true, personal stories that are appealing for young website visitors.
- Include and update referral links to other reliable SRHR services (both offline and online).

