

Opinions on distribution of condoms in primary and secondary schools

Is it proper for government to enhance condom distribution exercise in schools? by Thengo Kavinya

The issue of sex education has long been a controversial one. The two basic types of sex education in the Malawi are abstinence-only and comprehensive. While comprehensive education advocates abstinence as the primary defence against unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and HIV/AIDS, it also addresses the inevitability that some adolescents have or will engage in sexual behaviour. Providing information about contraception and how to have “safer” sex is an integral part of comprehensive sex education. Providing condoms in schools is a much debated aspect of some comprehensive programs. In contrast, abstinence-only programs discuss abstinence, or refraining from sex until marriage, as the only guarantee of protection from the growing epidemics of teenage pregnancy, STDs, and HIV/AIDS. Some schools and parents are afraid to give student's condoms out of fear that it will push them to engage in sex before they are ready. Condoms play a key role in preventing HIV infection around the world. In sub-Saharan Africa, most countries have seen an increase in condom use in recent years. Even when condoms are available, though, there are still a number of social, cultural and practical factors that may prevent people from using them. In the context of stable partnerships where pregnancy is desired, or where it may be difficult for one partner to suddenly suggest condom use, this option may not be practical. Thengo Kavinya asked several people their opinion:

Andrew Mulonyeni

Student (Malawi College of Accountancy)

The need to reduce the risk of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease for those who decide to have sexual relations requires less divisiveness. Parents can still instruct their children as they see fit, but parents and their elected representatives should entrust school boards with the power to supplement that instruction with informed, health-based programs and services, including condom distribution programs. The principal message teens should receive is that their continued health and safety is key.

Patrick Msomba

Garden Boy

Providing condoms to students in public education programs will reduce the incidence of underage pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. If one accepts the premise that condoms are an effective means of prevention, it stands to reason that their distribution could have a significant impact. Condoms are one of the most effective means of protecting against STDs, HIV and pregnancy. For their cost, they are easily the most cost-effective means of protecting against these threats.

Chifundo Nkhoma

Mechanic

It is best to have students abstain 100 percent, its a fact that youths are already exposed to dangers through early sex and that condoms would be of service. Providing students with condoms actually encourages the earlier onset of sexual activity. If young people believe they will be “safe” when using a condom they are much less likely to be deterred from engaging in dangerous and immoral behaviour.

Alex Jimu

Bus Conductor

Widespread condom distribution will establish sexual activity as the norm among young teens, creating peer pressure to participate in sex. The added temptation to engage in sexual activity that is “protected” will result in more women having sex at a younger age, perhaps furthering their exploitation.

Albert Chazama

Student (Malawi Polytechnic)

I feel condoms does not increase sexual activity but can decrease unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV. So I feel In the interest of public health, restrictions and barriers to condom use should be removed. Condom distribution cannot increase sexual activity.

Mayamiko Butawo

Businessman

Sex education program including condom provision accepts the inevitability of adolescent sex and encourages students to make wise, “safe” decisions if they do have sex. It is a wise investment by the government to supply condoms for schools in that it is very expensive to address problems created by irresponsible sexual behaviors.

Emmanuel Phiri

Driver

When the school tries to substitute the family as the shaper of personal values, it weakens the authority of the family. If the school weakens the family, it will contribute more to the increase of venereal disease and unwedded motherhood among teenagers than it can counteract by distributing condoms.