

# **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

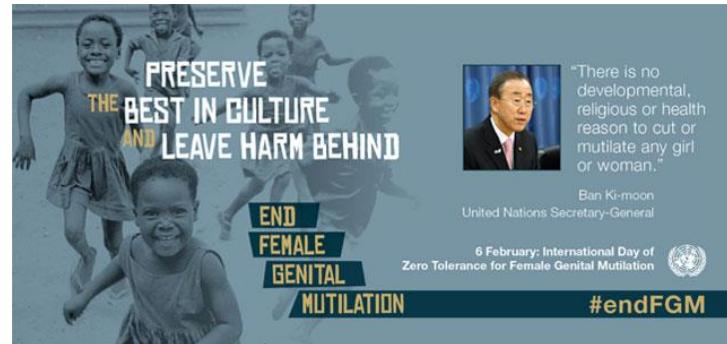
- Women's vulnerability – culture of silence around sex, norms of virginity, women's economic dependency, etc.
- Men's vulnerability – perception of greater power
- Sexuality/behaviour shaped by violence, poverty and marginalization
- Legitimacy of polygyny – concurrent partnerships perceived as natural

# 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**

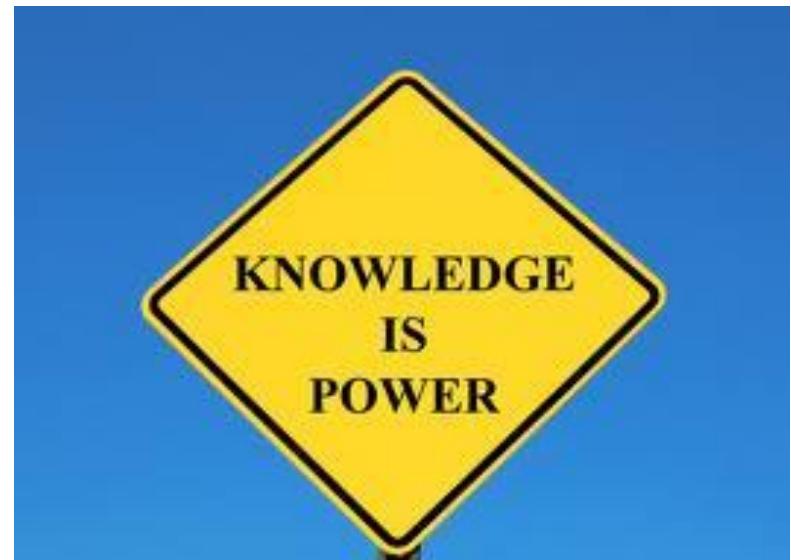
- Migration, economic marginalization, poverty and social exclusion
- Market economies
- The role of the new media and globalization
- Commercialization and commoditization of sex
- Multiple partnering and frequent partner exchange

# **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

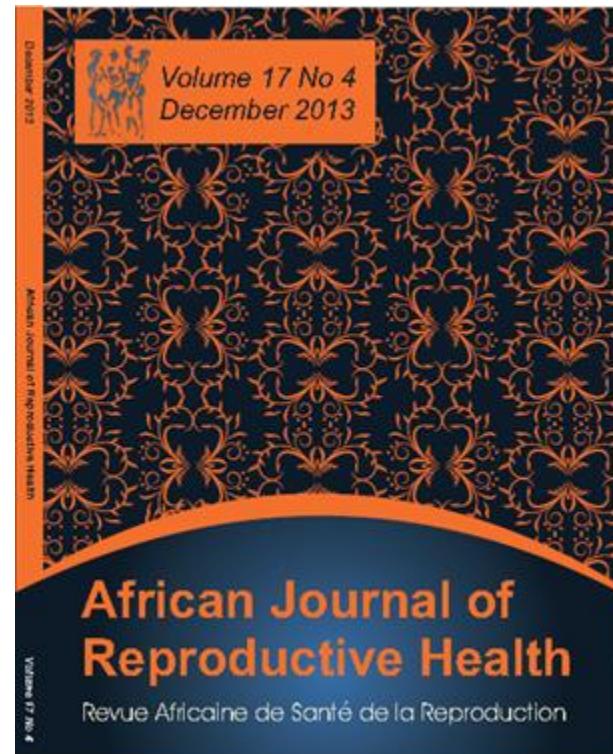
# African Centre of Excellence in Reproductive Health Research (CERHI)

- 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 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 Danke Ευχαριστίες Dalu  
Thank You Köszönöm Tack  
Спасибо Dank Gracias  
谢谢 Merci Seé ありがとう