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Policy Brief

ENGENDERING ECONOMIC GROWTH BY INVESTING IN HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF OSUN YOUTH

Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right of every human being including young people¹. Research as shown that the adolescent and youth are the most vulnerable to various health challenges such as HIV, mental disorder, drug abuse etc². According to World Health Organization (WHO), its been discovered that 10-20% of adolescents globally experience mental disorders and half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and seventy-five per cent by mid-20s³. Also, In 2016, an estimated 2.1 million people within the age range 10 -19 were living with HIV and the majority were in Africa region. While the world is now recording a decline in overall number of HIV-related deaths since the peak in 2006, HIV related deaths among adolescents is still on the increase. According to UNAIDS, as of 2018, the prevalence of HIV among adults 15 -49 years was 1.5% and 53, 000 people died from an AIDS-related illness⁴. This increase in HIV among adolescent and young people can be traced to lack of proper implementation of Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) in schools and paucity of well-equipped youth-friendly health centers across the Nigeria, which makes the youth, Osun youth inclusive vulnerable to new HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies and pregnancy-related complications including unsafe abortion⁵.

Key messages

Studies have shown that the adolescent and youth are the most vulnerable to various health challenges. While, most are healthy, but there is still substantial premature death, illness, and injury among adolescents. Alcohol or tobacco use, mental disorder, unprotected sex and/or exposure to violence can jeopardize not only their current health, but also their health as adults, and even the health of their future children.

According to WHO, its been discovered that 10-20% of adolescents globally experience mental disorders and half of all mental illnesses begin by the age of 14 and 75% by mid-20s. According to UNAIDS, as of 2018, the prevalence of HIV among adults 15 -49 years was 1.5% and 53, 000 people died from an AIDS-related illness. Lack of proper implementation of Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE) in schools and paucity of well-equipped youth-friendly health centers across the Nigeria, which makes the youth, Osun youth inclusive vulnerable to new HIV infection, unwanted pregnancies and pregnancy-related complications including unsafe abortion.

The 2018 report of Drug Use in Nigeria by UNODC reported that in Osun State, Nigeria, The estimated prevalence of drug use in Osun state is 14%. The alarming rate of substance abuse and misuse among youths in Osun state calls for serious concern.

It is imperative for Osun State Government to promote healthy behaviours amidst adolescence, and invest deliberately in health of Osun youth to better protect them from health risks that are critical for the prevention of health problems in adulthood.

The Drug Use in Nigeria 2018 report of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) reported that in Nigeria, one in seven persons aged 15-64 years had used a drug (other than tobacco and alcohol) in the past year. The past year prevalence of any drug use is estimated at 14.4 per cent (range 14.0 per cent - 14.8 per cent), corresponding to 14.3 million people aged 15-64 years who had used a psychoactive substance in the past year for non-medical purposes. More startling was the fact that the highest levels of any past-year drug use were among those aged 25 -39 years. The alarming rate of substance abuse and misuse among youths in Osun state calls for serious concern. The

estimated prevalence of drug use in Osun state is 14 per cent⁶.

The current population of Osun state is estimated to be 5,179,720 out of which 2,577,637 (49.8%) falls between the ages of 15 - 45. This underscores the fact that the active population that is expected to be contributing to the economy of the state are mostly young people. The deliberate investment of government into health and wellbeing of this huge population will determine if the numbers will be a blessing or a burden, today and in the future.

Recommendations

Osun Drug Abuse Response Department:

There is a need for urgent intervention to halt the current trend of drug abuse that can lead to security and economic calamity in the state. In addition to the health burden of drug abuse to the addict, it has social implications that call for concern for all and sundry. One of the primary responsibilities of government is to protect the lives and properties of the citizen through pragmatic policies and provision of infrastructure. The Osun Drug Abuse Response Department will demonstrate governments commitment to ensure that young people lead productive lives. The department is envisioned to have a three-pronged mandate of prevention (campaigns to hinder drug abuse debut among young people), treatment (smoking cessation therapy, addiction counselling) and rehabilitation/reintegration where needed.

Sexual and Reproductive Health:

Osun Youth Agenda is recommending conversion of some strategically located government facilities that are currently underutilized into youth-friendly centers (at least one per senatorial district for piloting). These centers must be youth-driven and designed through bottom-up community participation for sustainability and impact. All the staff should be trained in global practice on the provision of youth-friendly health services. The government can explore public-private partnership and community ownership model to fund and equip the center with facilities that can attract young people such as Wi-Fi, games, sporting facilities.

References:

1. <https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution> (Accessed 24/09/2019)
2. Adolescent HIV/AIDS: Issues and challenges. Smriti Naswa and Y. S. Marfatia 2010
3. https://www.who.int/mental_health/maternal-child/child_adolescent/en/ (Accessed 24/09/2019)
4. <https://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/nigeria> (Accessed 24/09/2019)
5. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescents-health-risks-and-solutions> (Accessed 24/09/2019)
6. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/Drugs/Drug_Use_Survey_Nigeria_2019_BOOK.pdf (Accessed 24/09/2019)

Family Life and HIV Education (FLHE):

The government should adopt the Family Life and HIV Education curriculum for public and private schools across the state to provide age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education to the students in other to prevent sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and pregnancy-related complications such as unsafe abortion.

Inclusion for People Living with Disability:

The government may need to start looking into providing ramps and handrails for people living with disability in all existing primary health centers and hospitals in order to make those centers PLWD friendly and to promote inclusion in line with the recently pass of Disability bill by the Federal House Of Assembly.

Policy Issues

Drug Abuse Committee in the State Ministry of Health

The recommendation for Osun Drug Abuse Department is without prejudice to the Drug Abuse Committee that is currently in place under the pharmaceutical division of the ministry. The OYA recommendation is to ensure that the issue of drug abuse among young people in the state is tackled proactively, consistently and passionately by upgrading the Drug abuse committee to a full fledged Stand-alone agency.

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