

Sigma's 30th International Nursing Research Congress

Mental Health Issues Among Adolescent Girls Related to Sexual Health: Interpretive Descriptive Design

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Background

Sexual health incorporates a wide range of interlinked mental, physical, and emotional factors. Therefore, sexual health and sexuality issues can affect a woman's physiological and psychological well-being, and, also, her family, relationships, work and her own hopes and fears. Mental health can precipitate risky sexual behaviour, with the impeding risks of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse and violence. Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health issues in adolescent population group; however, the role of sexuality in those has not been explored. After the onset of puberty, the risk of depressive disorders increases substantially among girls who remain 1.5-2 times more likely than boys to be diagnosed with depression. As both mental health and adolescent health are neglected areas of global health there is a lack of consistent reporting and poor quality data pointing to the need to expand the body of evidence on which to base targeted health promotion policies and strategies.

Purpose:

The study aims to explore the sexual health-related stress and anxiety among adolescent girls in Pakistan. Specific Aims: To: a) investigate issues related to sexual health that may be perceived as stressors by adolescent girls, b) increase understanding of the lived experience of adolescent girls in developing sexuality, the consequences of sexuality-related stressors and responses, c) explore participants' perceptions on what approaches would help them to successfully adjust and cope with those stressors.

Methods:

For this study, the Interpretive Description (ID) will be used as an Approach to Inquiry. ID is chosen to study the complex phenomena of mental health and sexual health in depth, to go beyond the evidence and search for what else might be there. A purposive sampling strategy will be used to select adolescent girls' age (15-19 years) in the study. Adolescent girls will be interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide to collect data regarding their perceptions of mental health issues as related to adolescent sexuality. Sample size will depend on data saturation. In parallel, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) will be used and numeric rating scales to score the intensity of sexuality-related mental health issues among adolescent girls. An iterative and inductive analysis approach will be used as encouraged by ID design.

Results:

The results of this research hold the potential to contribute to an integrated approach to adolescents' mental and sexual health and the development of future policies, strategies, services and training. They will also provide valuable preliminary evidence on the perceptions of sexuality-related stress and the consequences of the stressors among adolescent girls. Moreover, I intend to develop a multilevel knowledge translation plan to ensure that key messages are developed for specific audiences.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the literature review shows that mental health is a significant aspect of the sexual health and addressing mental health stressors related to sexual health can improve the overall health and well-being of adolescent girls. However, little is known about the sexuality-related stressors experienced by adolescent girls in their day-to-day situations. Moreover, I believe that ID is a valuable approach for studying the experiences of sexuality-related stressors and their impact on the mental health of adolescents' girls in Pakistan. The in-depth interpretive approach using ongoing coherent reasoning, reflective thinking, and questioning techniques at every step of the research process will allow me to envision, elucidate, comprehend, and develop an enriched understanding of the complex phenomena of sexuality and its significance on mental health among adolescent girls in Pakistan.

Title:

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Keywords:

Adolescent girls, Mental health and Sexual health

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Abstract Summary:

Mental, physical, and social conditions are vital for human life that are interconnected. Sexual and mental health are two sides of same coin. Although the international community has pledged to address mental health problems related to sexual and reproductive health, many girls are affected by deleterious consequences of unrecognized problems.

Content Outline:

Sexual health incorporates a wide range of interlinked mental, physical, and emotional factors. Therefore, sexual health and sexuality issues can affect a woman's physiological and psychological well-being, and, also, her family, relationships, work and her own hopes and fears. Mental health can precipitate risky sexual behaviour, with the impeding risks of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, substance abuse and violence. The study aims to explore the association between mental and sexual health in adolescent girls, in order to gain a better understanding of the interplay between the two and to be able to identify types of mental health problems, risk factors and to inform future prevention strategies. For this study, the Interpretive Description will be used as an Approach to Inquiry. Interviews will be conducted from adolescent girls' age 15-19 years using a semi-structured interview guide to explore their perceptions of mental health issues as related to adolescent sexuality. These interpretations will help us to understand the impact of sexual health on mental health in young girls and to develop culturally sensitive and youth-friendly interventions for the adolescent population. The results of this research hold the potential to contribute to an integrated approach to adolescents' mental and sexual health and the development of future policies, strategies, services and training.

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Author Summary: I am working as a research assistant at University of Alberta. I have studied Masters of Science in Nursing. I graduated BScN from AKU School of Nursing and worked in AKUH for two years as Registered Nurse. I have worked as Algorithm consultant at JHPIEGO in making of mother, neonatal and child health emergencies algorithms and worked at Marie Stopes Society in developing family planning algorithms.