

Abstract

Introduction: This thesis interrogates the extent to which information and communication technologies (ICTs) are being used to navigate the socio-cultural tensions surrounding SRHR and reconceptualise adolescent sexuality in Kenya, critically interrogating who is included or excluded in this reconceptualisation. The study sought to understand whether and how such reformulation, where it exists, is applied to 10-17-year-old adolescent girls, as well as what considerations, decisions, and strategies were made regarding their inclusion or exclusion.

Methodology: The study used a qualitative mixed methods design that included a review of online ICT-based SRHR websites and platforms operating in Kenya (and some extending across East Africa), 18 key informant interviews with implementers of the platforms, and participatory research conducted through seven focus group discussions with adolescent girls in Mathare area, an urban low-income settlement in Nairobi.

Results: The study found that ICTs are indeed reconceptualising sexual health interventions by moving beyond bio-medical, protective, and risk management approaches to more encompassing notions of sexual health that meet the needs, interests, and realities of young people. Despite ICT-based SRHR platforms adopting both conventional and non-conventional approaches to SRHR, they ultimately conform to socio-cultural norms surrounding SRHR and mimic conventional SRHR spaces – especially for sensitive SRHR issues such as abortion, masturbation, pornography, and teen pregnancy. This study identified that the girls were underserved by traditional sexuality education and that the girls are unable to access and benefit from ICT platforms due to their age and low-income socio-economic backgrounds. The ICT platforms were also often controlled by cultural and legal constraints.

Conclusions: The study therefore concludes that socio-cultural environments (including existing laws and policies, opposition from religious groups, and societal values about young people's sexuality) influence how implementers use ICTs to address SRHR, resulting in limitations for adolescent girls who continue to be denied access to comprehensive sexuality education in both offline and online spaces.

Recommendations: The study recommends age, language, and mode of communication, and contextual considerations necessary for designing more inclusive ICT-based ASRHR platforms. Moreover, there is need for SRHR implementers in both physical and digital spaces to reflect and challenge adult-centric approaches to ASRHR.