

A critical analysis of the challenges faced by young people with neurodevelopmental disorders in accessing Sexual Reproductive Health Services in Zimbabwe. A case of Zimcare Trust, Zimbabwe

Ashely Ropafadzo Tome

Abstract

Young people with neurodevelopment disorders constitute a part of the minority population in Zimbabwe who are often sidelined from participating in activities that emancipate and educate the youth because of their differences from the mainstream population. It should be noted that although policies and awareness campaigns have been introduced to promote the inclusion of Persons with Disabilities previous research has not looked into the struggles and agonies associated with the accessibility of Sexual Reproductive Health services by young people with intellectual challenges. This is because young people with neurodevelopment disorders have been subjected to immense derogatory treatment, stereotyping and labelling since time immemorial, they have often been regarded as “retarded”, “crazy” and “inadequate” beings to mention but just a few. Young people with intellectual challenges are often deprived of their rights to sexuality, love, intimacy, reproduction and marriage because of the fear of producing children with similar characteristics by family and community members. Disability in Zimbabwe is often associated with God’s wrath, curses from ancestral spirits, kuomba which is a local name for money ritual and the manifestation of avenging spirits which is known as ngozi among the Shona people hence Persons with Disabilities experience severe stigma, discrimination and marginalization with their family members. Therefore, the main objective of the study was to explore the challenges associated with the accessibility of Sexual Reproductive Health services by young people with neurodevelopment disorders. The researcher used a qualitative method with a descriptive multiple case study design to examine the well-being of the young people. Six in-depth interviews with the young persons with neurodevelopmental disorders were conducted. Three key informant interviews with the Director, Superintendent and Sister in charge at ZimCare Trust were also carried out during data collection. Data were transcribed, translated and thematically analysed. The experiences of young people with neurodevelopment disorders in accessing Sexual Reproductive Health services are a reflection of a broken society, infringed polities and economic catastrophe.

Keywords: young people, neurodevelopment disorders, Sexual Reproductive Health, Zimcare Trust, Zimbabwe