

**SEXUAL ABSTINENCE AS A HIV PREVENTION STRATEGY
AMONG ADOLESCENT SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS
IN GARISSA MUNICIPALITY, GARISSA COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to examine factors associated with sexual abstinence and how those factors promote or constrain HIV transmission among secondary school adolescents in Garissa Municipality. This cross sectional study was carried out in Garissa town in North Eastern Kenya. This study investigated the perspective of secondary school adolescents in Garissa on abstinence-only sexual education as an effective tool for promoting adolescent sexual health. This descriptive, cross-sectional study that was designed to measure knowledge of the causes and prevention of HIV and AIDS; prevalence of abstinence behaviour and factors influencing abstinence behaviour (refraining and motivating factors) among secondary school students. Data collection was done using structured self-administered questionnaire with open and closed questions. A total of 333 students were interviewed. Four focus group discussions with 5 members each were conducted. Key informants that included club patrons and HIV/AIDS teachers were interviewed to triangulate information. Data was presented using charts, graphs and frequency tables. Analysis was done using SPSS 21.0. Results show that primary abstinence, secondary abstinence and sexual activeness among secondary school adolescents were 88.0%, 11.1% and 0.9% respectively. *Primary abstinent* adolescents were motivated by religious background (87.7%), wanted to wait till marriage (8.3%), young yet for sex (2.2%), those do not wanted sex (1.1%) and fear of getting HIV (0.7%) while *Secondary abstinent and sexually active* adolescents were motivated by love and friendship that they wanted have sex (69.2%) and desire to prove manhood/womanhood (curiosity) (20.5%) among other reasons like peer influence. Factors that were significantly associated with sexual behaviours were age, educational level of parents, exposure to HIV prevention messages in schools, and having opposite-sex friends. From FGDs, it was found that educated parents were more concerned about adolescent sexual behaviours, more so that of female adolescents than uneducated parents. It was also observed that strength of family ties and inter-dependability and advice amongst family members usually shape adolescent sexual behaviours. FGD participants mentioned that Fourth-form male students hire residential rooms in the pretext of revising for final examinations but also end up engaging sexual intercourse with female colleagues. It was concluded that sexual abstinence for unmarried adolescents is a challenging but possible practice. Parental effort on understanding adolescent development and discussing sexual behaviours lead to improved sexual outcomes. Based on the findings, to enhance sexual abstinence among adolescent students in secondary schools the study recommends encouraging adolescents to participate in religious activities. Programs that promote sexual abstinence in schools should be given high priority. Enhance good parent-child communication on adolescent sexuality to provide support to these growing members of the society.