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Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices of Students towards Their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights in Tertiary Institutions: A Case Study of Bulawayo Polytechnic

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Abstract:

Reproductive Rights were initially officially recognized at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994. This study sought to determine the level of knowledge, attitudes and practices of students towards their Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR). A descriptive survey design was used and random stratified sampling was done to get a sample from the population of all National Certificate, National Diploma and Higher National Diploma Bulawayo Polytechnic students. Focus group discussions were done with the first year students in Applied Art, Applied Science, Automotive and Mechanical divisions. Two questionnaires were designed and employed to gather data for the study from students and heads of divisions. A descriptive analysis using SPSS was used to give data more meaning. The study revealed that there is no policy framework on SRHR in higher education institutions and students need information and guidance on SRHR during their study duration in the institution. Due to the fact that there is no policy framework of SRHR, the knowledge levels are low among students at Bulawayo Polytechnic. Students express ambivalent attitudes due to low knowledge levels. The students indicated that at one point or the other their sexual and reproductive rights were infringed and they did not report the matter. Students are aware of their right to sexual and reproductive health but they lack skills to exercise the right. The researcher recommends that the institutions should have an SRHR policy to fight and empower both male and female students from sexual abuse.

Keywords: Knowledge, attitudes practices, students, sexual reproductive health rights

1. Introduction

Bulawayo Metropolitan has five institutions of higher learning. The students joining higher learning institutions come from high schools where sexuality issues are not discussed openly. Tertiary Institutions population comprise of youths of between 18 to 36 years.

By availing information in sexual and reproductive health rights, it will protect young people against threats both behavioural and environmental, and this will complement and support policy and environmental change. Educated individual, act in an informed manner. This also reduces chances of sexual abuse, date rape cases and forced sexual relationships between staff and students.

Nationally, SAYWHAT is an organisation set up for students, by students for students in recognition of their sexual and reproductive rights over 8 years ago.

Students have been fighting to get abortion rights implying that they are have unplanned pregnancies. This means that their knowledge of their reproductive rights is limited.

This paper seeks to establish the knowledge, attitudes and perception of students towards sexual and reproductive health rights.

Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws international human rights documents and other consensus statements. They include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence to :-the highest attainable standard of sexual health including access to sexual and reproductive health care services, seek, receive and impart information related to sexuality; sexuality education; respect for bodily integrity; choose their partner; decide to be sexually active or not; consensual sexual relations; consensual marriage; decide whether or not and when to have children and pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life.

Responsible exercise of human rights requires that all persons respect the rights of others.

WHO 2004, working definitions, www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexual-health.html

The Cairo International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), building on the World Health Organization's definition of health, defines reproductive health as:

- a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and... not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes. Reproductive health therefore implies that people are able to have a satisfying and safe sex life and that they have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law, and the right of access to appropriate health-care services that will enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth and provide couples with the best chance of having a healthy infant (para 72).

The Beijing conference, reaffirmed the Cairo Programme's definition of reproductive health and advances women's wider interests, especially in the area of sexual rights. Paragraph 96 states:

- "The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. Equal relationships between women and men in matters of sexual relations and reproduction, including full respect for the integrity of the person, require mutual respect, consent and shared responsibility for sexual behaviour and its consequences."

1.1. SRHR as Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the agreed treaties establish that human rights apply to everyone and that no one should be excluded. They identify that SRHR entails not only the absence of reproductive or sexual illnesses, but also the full enjoyment and well-being of sexual health.

SRHR, as part of human rights, have the following principles of human rights described in the Universal Declaration and outlined by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA):

Shaw (2006), a rights based approach to access means the provisions of SRH services and information with particular reference to sexuality and sexual rights of different groups. There is need for individuals to behave responsibly. This is working on the assumption that individuals have relevant knowledge, skills and resources to do so, which is also determined by responsibilities of others, researchers, health professionals, religious leaders, national governments and donor governments.

Ingham (2005) noted that sexuality education may empower people to be more comfortable with their bodies and to be in a position to communicate their wishes to safer sex and to resist coercion. Santelli (2006) added by noting that sexuality education must be comprehensive providing relevant information on a variety of prevention strategies to enable students to make informed decisions.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study worked looked at the following theories in trying to understand the knowledge, attitudes and practices of students towards their sexual reproductive health rights, expectancy-value theory, information richness theory and information utilization capacity theory.

Expectancy-value theory was postulated by Raynor (1982), it explains that if individuals adopt certain attitudes depending on perceived merits and demerits of the goal to be achieved. Knowledge, behaviours and attitudes towards sexual reproductive health rights is likely to be changed by access and use of reproductive health information and benefits realized from its use

1.3. General Objective

To identify the knowledge levels, attitudes and practices of students in Tertiary institutions in Bulawayo Metropolitan towards their Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights.

1.3.1. Specific Objectives

1. To determine the knowledge levels, attitudes and practices of students in terms of their Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights.
2. To identify students' source of information in terms of Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights.
3. To determine what information on Sexual and Reproductive health and Rights is available from Tertiary Institutions?

2. Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey which looks with intense accuracy at the phenomena under study and describes precisely what the researcher sees (Leedy 1980). The method enabled the researcher to collect data within a short time. The researcher came up with a self-structured questionnaire for heads of divisions and students. Focus group discussions were done with the students and were intended to give the participants a chance to give their views, perceptions, opinions and reactions to the issues relating to sexual reproductive health rights. The researcher held focus group discussions with the students that she was familiar with and the purpose of the focus group discussions was given and also explained why she had to tape the discussions. Students questionnaires were randomly distributed and each head of division was given a questionnaire.

2.1. Population

The population of Bulawayo polytechnic consists of 3500 students who are spread out in 8 departments.

2.2. Sample

Random sampling was done across the board of students, picking up 300 students were randomly sampled to respond to questionnaire, and all heads of division were given questionnaires. The focus group discussions were done with students in their first year at the institution, in following divisions; Applied Science, Automative, Applied Art & Design and Mechanical, where one of the researchers teaches.

2.3. Data Collection Procedure.

The researchers personally distributed questionnaires randomly to students and all heads of divisions. The focus group discussions were done with students in Applied science, Automative, Applied Art & Design and Mechanical where the researcher is familiar with the students.

2.4. Data Presentation and Analysis Methods

The data collected through questionnaires was analysed using spss programme 16.0.

2.5. Data Analysis for SRHR Students Questionnaire

From the 300 questionnaires which were distributed to students and 227 questionnaires were returned. 7 Heads of divisions returned the questionnaires.

2.6. Response Rate

The questionnaire response rate for students was 75.7% and the response rate for Heads of divisions was 87.5%

3. Findings

The following are the responses from six Heads of divisions. The three heads of divisions did not return the questionnaire. The Heads of divisions who did respond will not be mentioned so as to uphold confidentiality. 16.7% female and 83.3% males. The disparity of gender being what is on the ground. The distribution of questionnaires was almost fair with 48% females and 52% males.

The heads of divisions respondents fall under the following age ranges, 31-35 years 16.7%, 36-40 years, 33.3% and 46+ years was 50%. The majority of respondents were in age range of 26-30 years represented by 66%, followed by 21-25 years represented by 12%, 31-35 with a 10% and 36+ and 15-20 years' age range with 2% each. The respondents were mature to understand the questions and respond appropriately.

The divisions were presented in the following manner, Automative 26%, commerce 20%, Applied science 8% and civil engineering 26%, mechanical and electrical 8% each. 4% did not indicate their divisions. The majority of divisions were covered.

The item focused on identifying the level of students and was targeting returning students. N.C. 28%, N.D. 30% and 42% did not indicate the level they are in. 50% said that they have oriented students and 50% said that did not orient students at all.

The information above shows that 50% agreed to have been oriented in SRHR issues while 48% said no. 2% did not respond to the question. 50% said that they have oriented students and 50% said that did not orient students at all.

3.1. Frequency of Attendance to SRHR Programmes

On the item that sought to establish how frequent the students attend to SRHR issues, responses were as follows. 5.3% once, 3.5% twice, 11.5% three times, none 63.9% and 15.8% did not respond. The Heads of divisions responded as follows: 16.7% attend three times a term, 50% said none and 33.3% did not respond to the item.

3.2. Sources of Information on SRHR Issues.

The students responded by stating that the lecturers and radio/television are their main sources of information with each scoring 22%, friends 18%, classmates 14% and 14% did not respond to the question. The Heads of divisions categorized the following as the students' sources of SRHR information 16.7% friends, 16.7% class, 50% lecturers and 16.7% did not respond to the item.

3.3. Are Students Able to Exercise Their Right to Say Yes/No to Sexual Intercourse?

Responses from students; 98% of the respondents said that they have a right to say yes or no to sexual intercourse while 2% said they don't have the right. Heads of divisions responded as follows; 83.3% said that students exercise their SRHR and 16.7% did not respond to the item.

3.4. Categories of People That Had Infringed the Sexual Rights of Students.

Students responses; - 21.1% were had their right infringed by boy/girlfriend. 2.2% had their right infringed by a relative .5.3% were infringed by strangers. 4.4% by classmates, 4% by husband/wife, 4.8% by teacher 48% were not in a position to say that their right was infringed at one time or the other or not. Some students said that their sexual rights have never been infringed and are represented by 6.2% Heads of divisions' responses 50% boy/girlfriend, 16.7% classmate, 16.7% teacher and 16.7% did not respond to the item.

60% did not respond to the question and also did not give any reason either did they indicate that it was inapplicable to them. This indicates that something might have happened and have not come to terms with so as to be in position to say it. Students responses; - 21.1% were had their right infringed by boy/girlfriend. 2.2% had their right infringed by a relative .5.3% were infringed by

strangers, 4,4% by classmates, 4% by husband/wife, 4,8% by teacher 40% were not in a position to say that their right was infringed at one time or the other or not. Heads of divisions' responses 50% boy/girlfriend, 16,7% classmate, 16,7% teacher and 16,7% did not respond to the item.

3.5. Complaints on Infringement of Sexual Rights

The item that sought to establish if students complained to authorities when their sexual right was infringed, only 9,3% had complained and 57,3% did not complain when their sexual right was infringed while 33,5% did not respond to the question. Heads of divisions that had received students complains on infringement of sexual rights are represented by 43% and 57% had not received any complaints of that nature.

3.6. Reasons for Not Complaining

The following were give as reasons for not complaining by students;

Ashamed, Married, defended self, He apologized, reached an agreement, wanted it, loved her, no big deal, Family protection, saw nothing wrong with it, Life time opportunity, it felt great.

3.7. Options That Are SRHR Related

The students responded as follows, 74% of respondents said self-control, 8% indicated problem solving, 6% and 2% indicated freedom of expression and communication respectively.

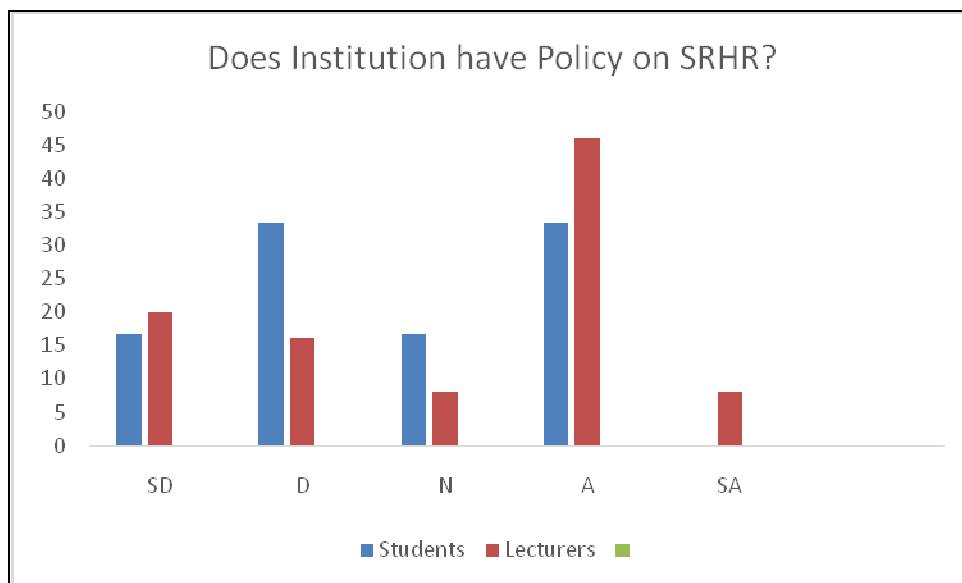


Figure 1: Policy on SRHR

➤ Key SD-strongly disagree `D.-disagree N.-neutral A-agree SA-strongly agree.

Fig 1 focuses on Policy on SRHR in the institution. The heads of division responses were 16.7% strongly disagreed, 33.3% disagreed, 16.7% and 33.3% agreed. The responses were, 8% strongly agreed, 46% agreed that the institution has SRHR policy, 8% were neutral, 16% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed. one respondent in the focus group discussions conducted noted that, '....there is no information which is being provided by the institution....the subject area is not being topicalized and sensationalized in its thorough magnitude. SRHR information is being gathered from friends who are equally ignorant on the subject matter.'

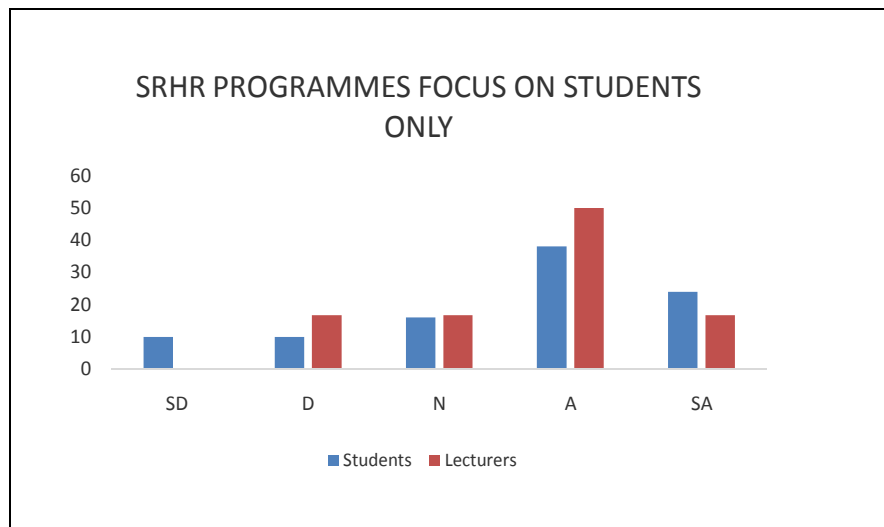


Figure 2: Focus of SRHR Programmes

Fig 2. Highlights SRHR programmes focus on student only. The heads of divisions 16.7% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 16.7% were neutral and 16.7% disagreed. 24% strongly agreed that SRHR programmes must focus on students, 38% agreed, 16% were neutral and 14% & 16% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. On students who strongly agree has 24% while on other hand those who strongly agree is 16.7%, therefore the difference between those who strongly agree and those who strongly disagree is 7.3%. This therefore means that the knowledge and perceptions is insignificant. FGD, one respondent noted that, '...the programmes should focus on everyone in the institution ... everyone is capable of taking advantage of the other when it comes to sexual issues.'

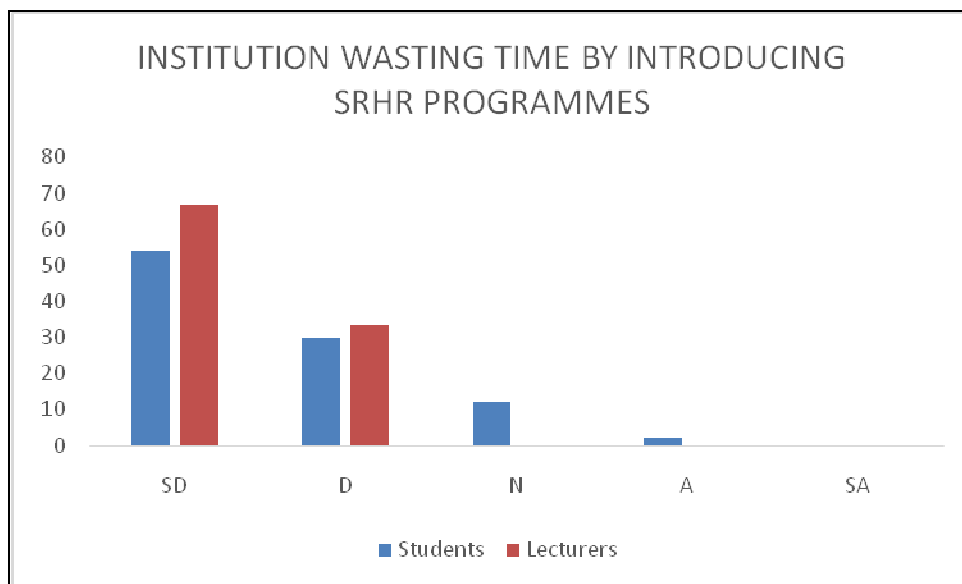


Figure 3: Institution wasting time by introducing SRHR programmes

Fig 3 reflects institution wasting time by introducing SRHR programmes

On the item that sought to establish if the institution is wasting learning time by introducing SRHR programmes, the heads of divisions responded by 66.7% strongly disagreed and 33.3% disagreed. For students 2% agreed, 12% were neutral while 30% & 54% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively and 2% did not respond to the item that the institution is wasting time by introducing SRHR programmes. FGD one respondent noted that, '...we are overburdened with core subjects therefore such lessons which are not examinable be introduced and done once a month as edutainment.'

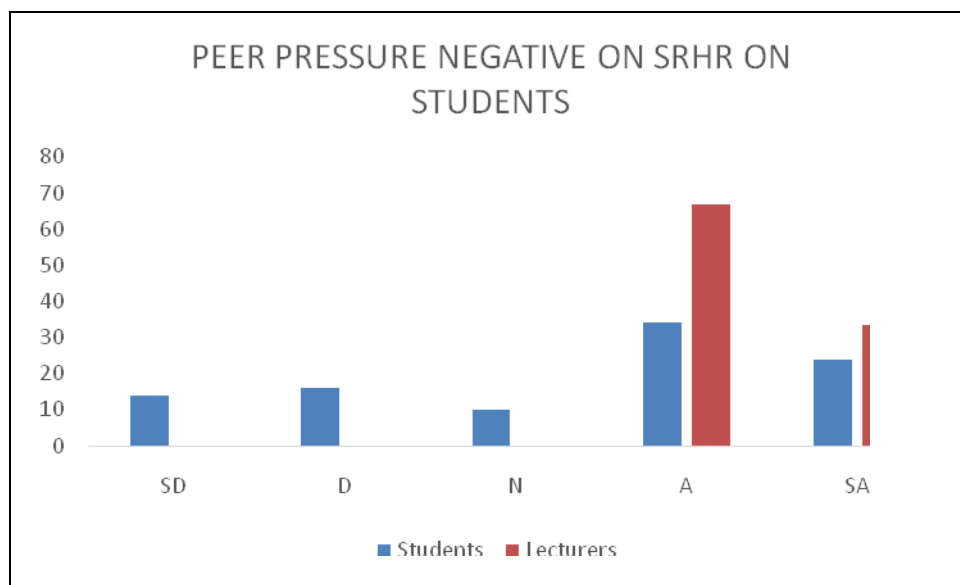


Figure 4: Peer pressure negative on SRHR on students

The bar graph above shows the rating of students on the item that sought to find out if peer pressure has negative effects on SRHR issues. 14% & 16% strongly disagree and agree respectively, 10% were neutral, 34% & 24% agreed and strongly agreed respectively while 2% did not respond to the question. Heads of divisions agreed that peer pressure has negative effects on SRHR issues, 66.7% agreed and 33.3% strongly agreed. FGD-one respondent noted that, '... we do consult each other more often and my behavior or decision is shaped with what I share with friends.' And there was a lot of consensus on this.

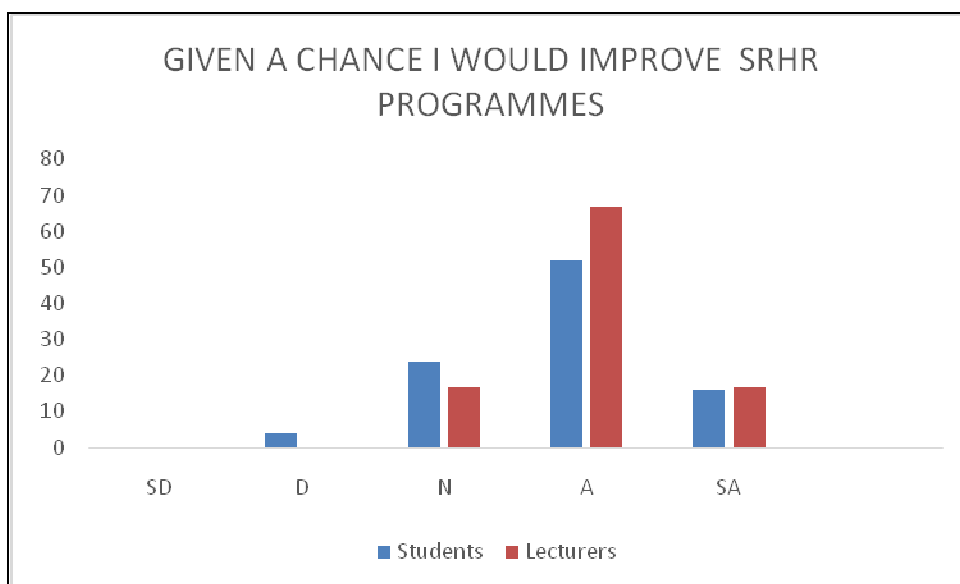


Figure 5: Improvement on SRHR programmes.

➤ Key SD- strongly disagree D – disagree N-neutral A-agree SA-strongly agree

The above fig 5 shows how students rated the above notion, 16% & 52% strongly agreed and agreed respectively to the notion that if given a chance they would improve SRHR programmes, 24% were neutral, 4% disagreed and 4% did not respond to the question. Therefore 68% agreed that they would improve SRHR programs if they were given a chance. Heads of division responded by agreeing to the notion 66.7% agreed, 16.7% strongly agreed and 16.7% were neutral. The difference on the responses from Heads of Divisions is 50%, which shows that there is room for improvement on the services.

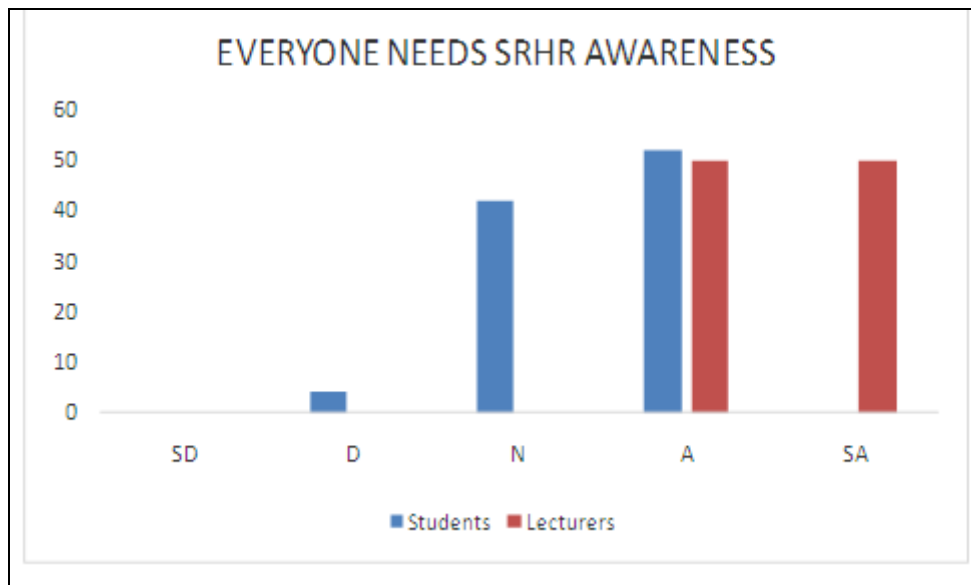


Figure 6: Access to SRHR awareness

➤ Key SD- strongly disagree D – disagree N-nuetral A-agree SA-strongly agree

Fig 6 reflects on access to SRHR by students and lecturers. A greater percentage is of the idea that everyone needs awareness in SRHR as represented by 52%, 42% were neutral, 4% disagreed and 2% did not respond to the question. Heads of divisions agreed that everyone needs awareness on SRHR issues with 50% agree and 50% strongly agreed. FGD argued that, ‘SRHR awareness should be done to everyone as there is a possibility of either lecturers and students infringing each other’s sexual rights.’

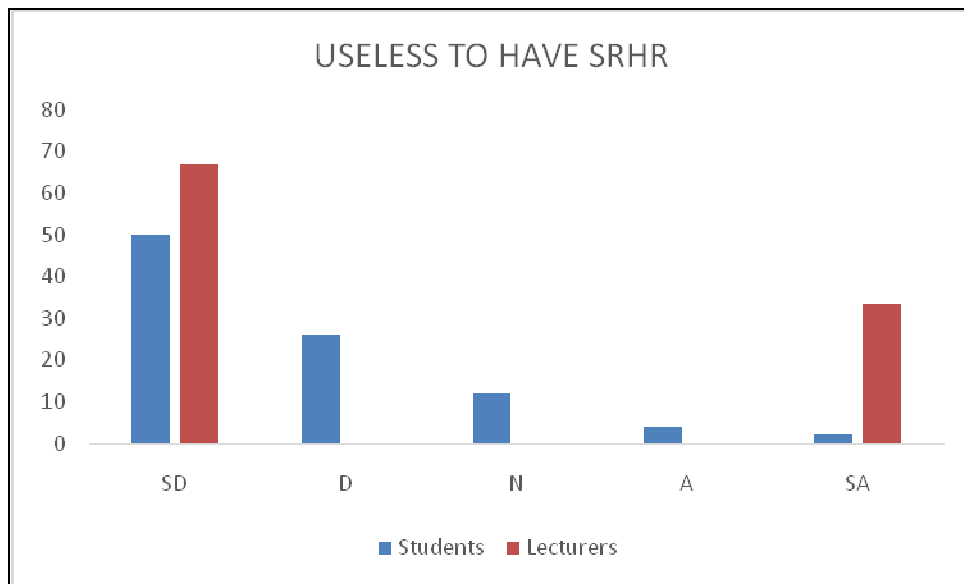


Figure 7: Reflects the use of SRHR to students and lecturers

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3-nuetral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

Fig 7 above shows that 50% & 26% strongly disagreed and disagreed that it is useless to have SRHR programmes at the institution. 12% were neutral while 4% & 2% agreed and strongly agreed, 6% did not respond to the question. Therefore 76% disagreed to the notion. For lecturers, 33.3% strongly agreed and 66.7% strongly disagreed that it is useless to have SRHR programmes at the institution. FGD, one respondent noted that, ‘it is useless if it’s not being examined and also if anyone who infringes one’s right does not get punished, it becomes meaningless.’

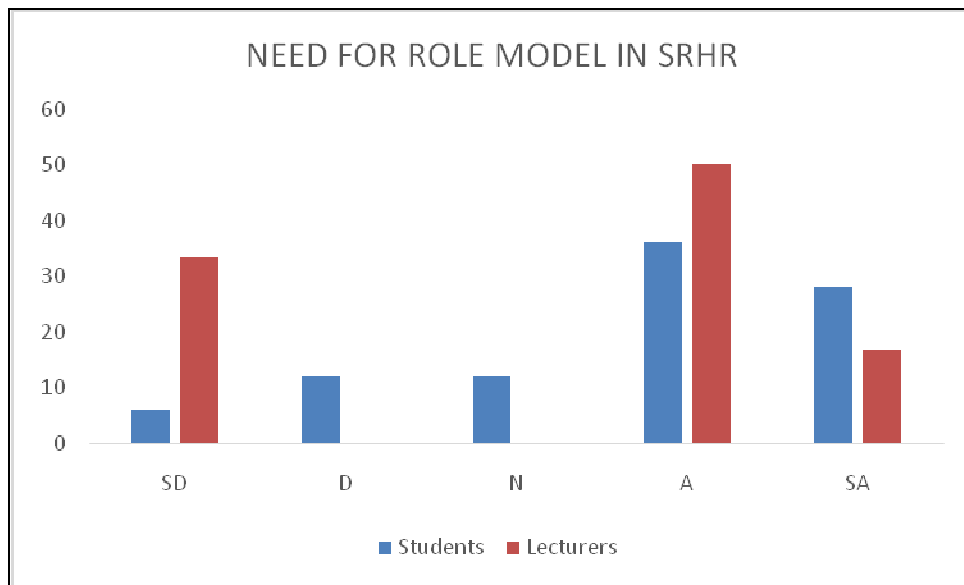


Figure 8: Need for Role Model

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3-nuetral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

Fig 8 above ,shows the responses to the item that sought to find out if students need role models for one to take SRHR seriously,50% agreed,16.7% strongly agreed and33.3% strongly disagreed 36% & 28% agreed and strongly agreed that there is need for a role model for one to take SRHR seriously12% were neutral ,12%& 6% strongly disagreed and disagreed.6% did not respond to the question.FGD, one respondents noted that, ‘...role models are needed.....and we need both good and bad role models so that we can choose which side to take... having seen both sides of the coin.’

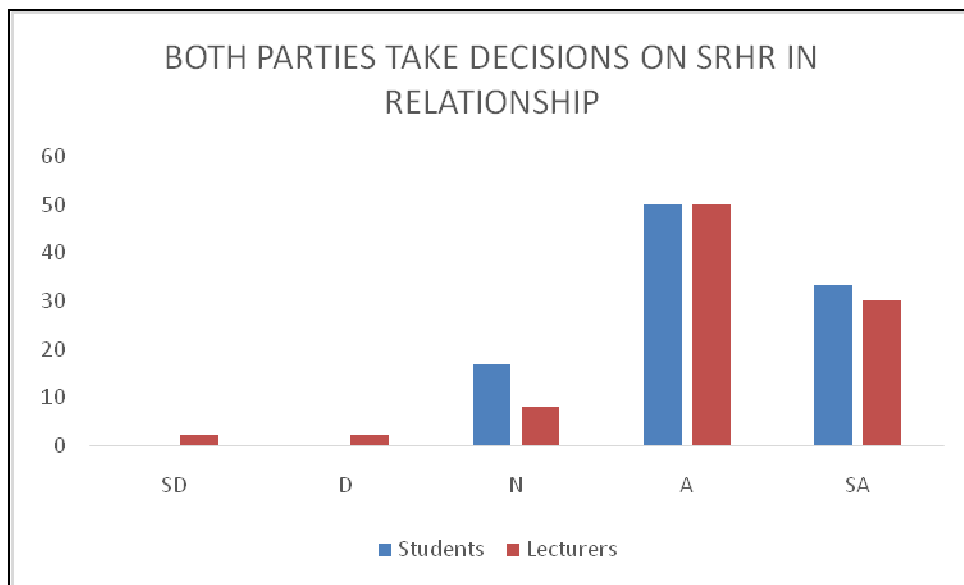


Figure 9: Decision on SRHR

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3-nuetral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

Fig 9 shows strides made in a relationship on decisions on SRHR. The item that sought to find out if both parties must take decisions in terms of SRHR in issues in a relation 33.3%strongly agreed, 50% agreed and were 16.7% were neutral.50% & 30% agreed and strongly agreed respectively that both parties must take decisions in terms of SRHR issues in a relationship.8% were neutral ,4% disagreed and strongly disagreed.8% did not respond.FGD, one respondent noted that, ‘...anyone who says they discuss SRHR with partners are lying..... in relationships things just happen,....one might have planned it but the other will be ignorant of the plans.. especially girls.’

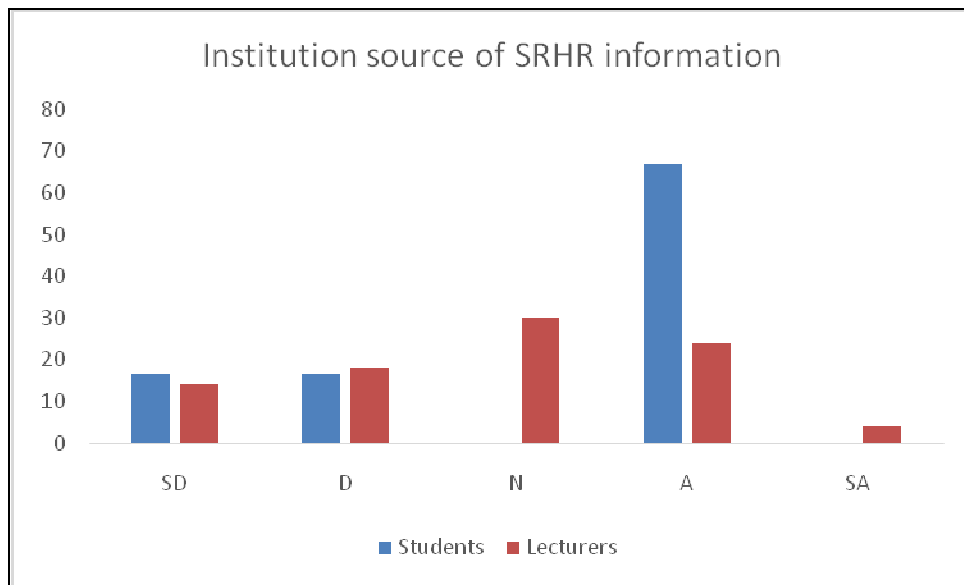


Figure 10: Institution Source of SRHR information

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3- neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

The item sought to establish if the institution is the main source of SRHR issues 66.7% agree, 16.7% disagreed and 16.7% strongly disagreed 30% were neutral on this above mentioned item, 10% did not respond. 24% & 4% agreed and strongly agreed that the institution is their main source of SRHR issues. 14% & 18% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Therefore 28% agreed while 32% disagreed. Therefore, the institution is not doing its best considering that students spend 8 hours or more at the institution. FGD-one respondent noted that, ‘the institution has no platform where we students can freely express ourselves on those issues and we have many questions that go unanswered...’

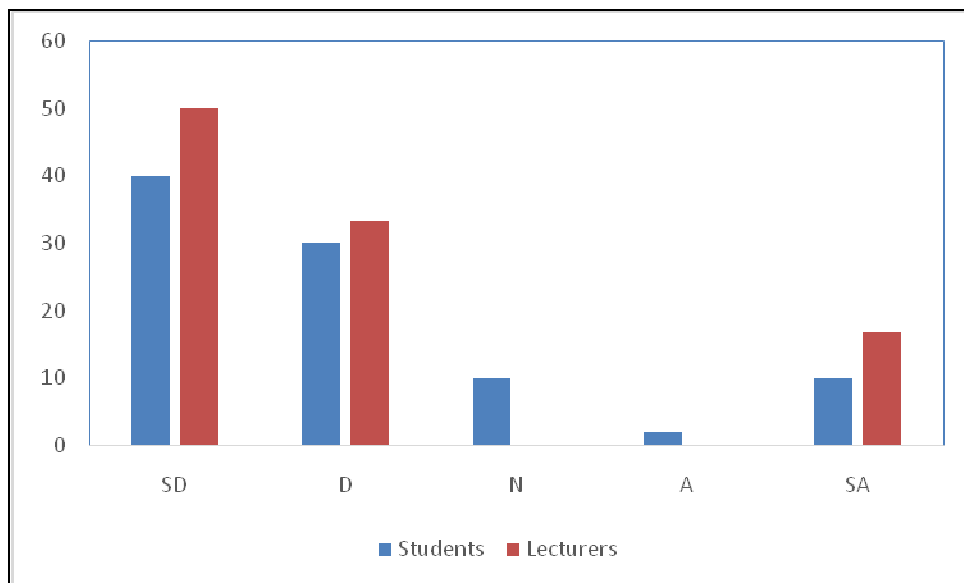


Figure 11: SRHR for girls should be left in men's hands

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3- neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

The above fig 11 shows the ratings on SRHR for girls being left in the hands of men. The responses were, 16.7% strongly agreed, 33.3% disagreed and 50% strongly disagreed 40% & 30% strongly disagreed and disagreed that SRHR for girls should be left in men's hands, 10% were neutral 2% & 10% agreed and strongly agreed that SRHR for girls should be left in men's hands. 8% did not respond to the item. Therefore 12% agreed to the above notion and 70% did not agree. FGD;-one of the respondents noted that, ‘it's not ideal... because it's not easy for a woman to talk freely to someone of the opposite sex on those... issues... man can misinterpret you and take advantage of the situation.’

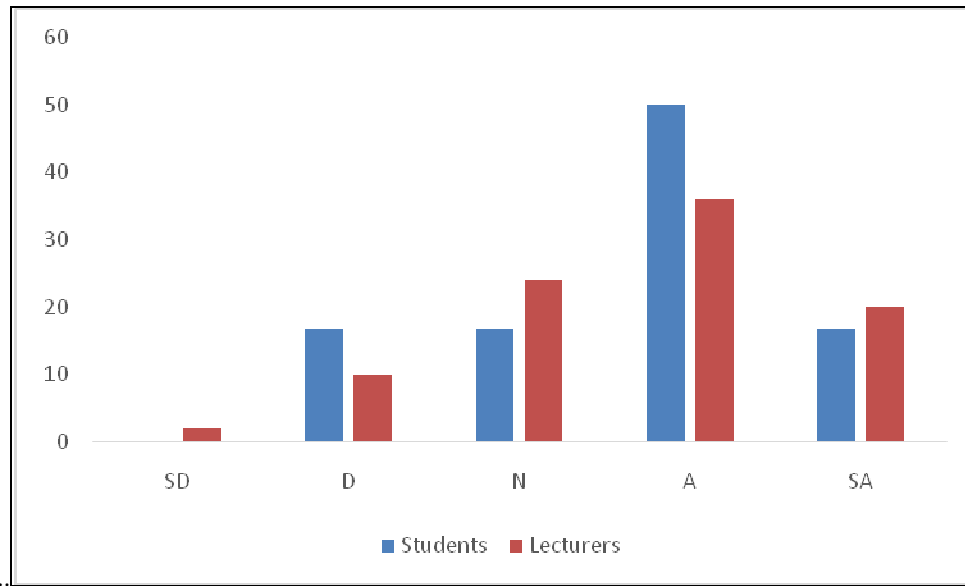


Figure 12: Behavior Change is one of the institution's SRHR awareness strategies

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3- neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

Fig 12 reflects that behavior change is the institutions' SRHR awareness strategies. The item that sought to find out if behavior change is one of the institution's SRHR awareness strategies 50% agree, 16.7% strongly agree, 16.7% disagree and 16.7% were neutral. 24% were neutral while 36% & 20% agreed and strongly agreed respectively, 10% & 2% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively to the above notion. 8% did not respond to the item. 56% agreed that behavior change is one of the institution's SRHR awareness strategies and 12% disagreed. FGD-one respondent noted that, '...in Health Education lessons we are taught condom use as a preventive measure to HIV & AIDS....I feel this encourages us to indulge in sex knowing that we are protected...'

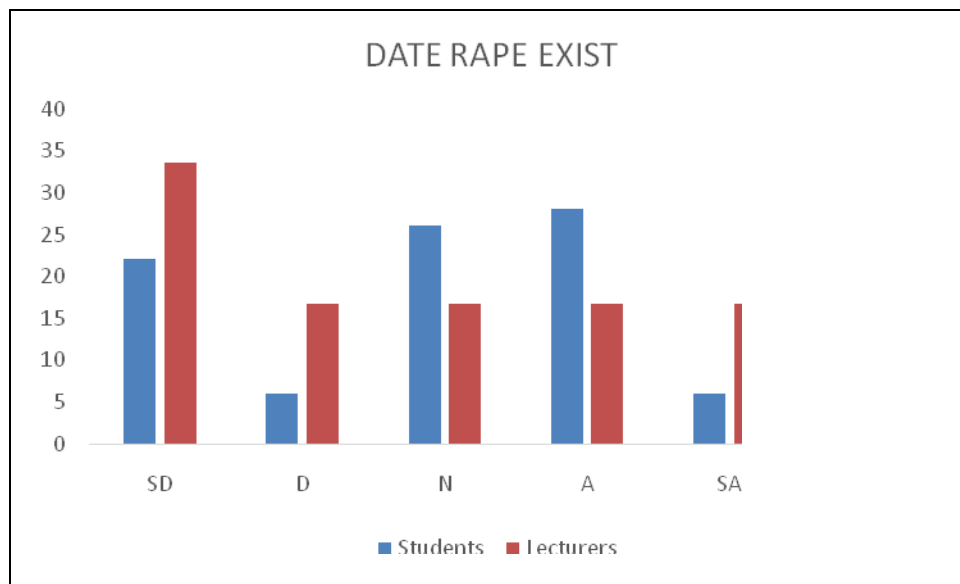


Figure 13: Existence of Date Rape

➤ Key 1- strongly disagree 2 – disagree 3- neutral 4-agree 5-strongly agree

Fig 13 reflects the existence of date rape. The above bar chart shows the responses to the item that sought to find out if date rape exists, the following were the responses 26% were neutral, 12% did not respond, 28% & 6% agreed and strongly agreed that there is date rape while 22% & 6% strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Heads of divisions 16.7% strongly agree, 16.7% agree, 16.7% neutral, 16.7% disagree and 33.3% strongly

disagreed. FGD-one respondent noted that date rape exists most of the times as in most cases only one part with be prepared to have sex.”

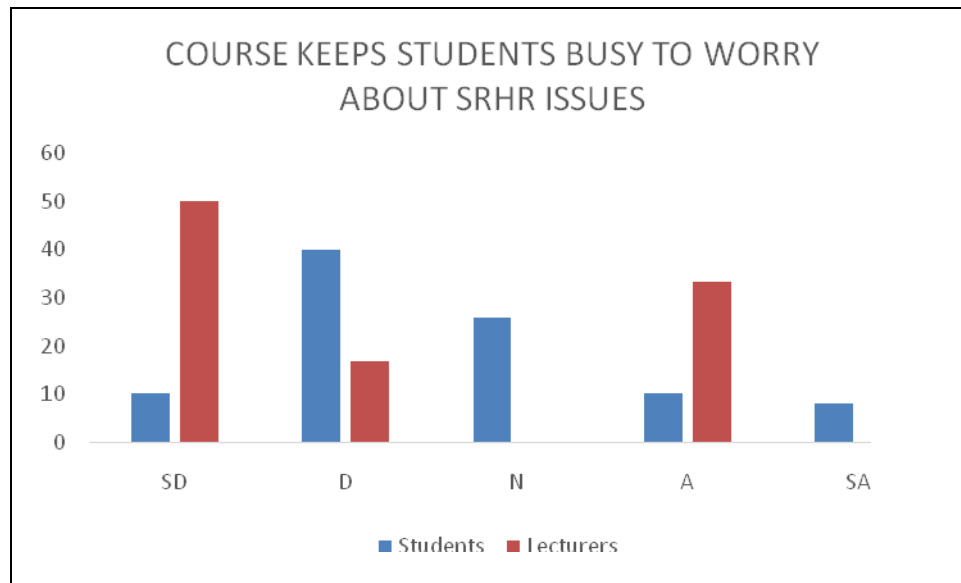


Figure 14: Course Keeps Students Busy to Worry About SRHR Issues.

Fig 14. above shows responses to the item that sought to find out if students course keeps them busy from worrying about SRHR issues. 10% & 40% strongly disagreed and disagreed to the above notion. 10% & 8% agreed and strongly agreed while 26 % were neutral and 6% did not respond. Heads of divisions 33.3% agreed that 50% strongly disagree, 16.7% disagreed to the notion that students' course keeps them busy from worrying about SRHR issues. FGD-one respondent noted that, '... after a day of hard work we distress by seeing our sexual partners... though we don't have convenient places for that..... may the opposite sex be allowed in our rooms.'

- Suggestions on how to improve the SRHR programmes at the institution.

The following were their responses.

Introduce lectures on SRHR which are compulsory for all students, give pamphlets, fund programmes, distribute condoms and contraceptive pills, introduce awareness programmes, advertise, educate women, teach moral lessons, introduces guidance classes, educate men, teach church stuff, lecturers should be role models, need more freedom, be allowed into opposite sex hotels, a clear policy on SRHR, have a serious health committee members, rotate leadership, give skills, involve people and their views.

4. Discussions

The study revealed that students are aware of their SRHR but when their rights are infringed upon they fail to take action. This evident by 9.3% who complained and 57.3% who did not complain and 33.3% did not respond to the item on the infringement of sexual rights. Similarly, to the findings of a study in Zimbabwe by Action Researchers, that youths are aware of the risks of HIV but they falter when it comes to practice.

The Action Researcher in their study found out that boyfriends pressurize girlfriends to have sex, which this paper referred to as date rape. Both papers agree that date rape does exist among the youth. The students get information on SRHR from friends and classmates. Kurz and Johnson-Welch, (1994) referred to as unfulfilling because friends are similarly uninformed. For those who get SRHR information from parents, Oikeh (1981) had this to say, most parents may not be knowledgeable on sexual matters or they are afraid to discuss them. Intergenerational studies by Wilson, Mparadzi and Lavelle (1995), found out that when parents and children communicate on Reproductive health issues, it is often limited to threats and warnings without any explanations. This leaves the learning institutions as the most viable source of information if SRHR is made as part of the curriculum. This would assist in the prevention of reproductive health problems.

5. Conclusions

- The study revealed that there is no policy framework on SRHR in higher educational institutions
- Students need information and guidance on SRHR during their duration in the institution.
- Due to the fact that there is no policy framework of SRHR, the knowledge levels are low among students at Bulawayo Polytechnic.
- The students have ambivalent attitudes which they express due to low knowledge levels.

- The students indicated that at one point or the other their sexual and reproductive rights were infringed and they did not report the matter.
- Students are aware of their right to sexual and reproductive health but they lack skills to exercise the Right.

6. Recommendations

- The researchers recommend that the institutions should have an SRHR policy to fight and empower both male and female students from sexual abuse.
- There be psychological counselling services as the majority had their sexual rights infringed at one point and the issue was not dealt with.
- The institutions should have centers where students can freely get Sexual Reproductive Health materials.

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