

# Adolescent health issues and needs

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## Session objectives

At the end of this session, participants would have:

1. Explored and listed the different health needs of adolescents
2. Appreciated the need for strategies that would be adequately addressed
3. Appreciated the need to address the issues of adolescent health.

## Why talk about adolescent health?

**Brainstorm:** Individual work, then volunteers to read out. Facilitator's information:

As children grow up into adolescents, they experience many changes. Such changes occur in their bodies physically, physiologically, emotionally, etc. There are changes in the way they behave, the way people expect them to behave and they develop interests and preoccupations. These are normal natural parts of growing-up, and these are not easy with little or no information to guide them. This is the time they have many questions but hardly any straight answers, especially when the questions are about the changes in their bodies.

Many adults are most times, reluctant to discuss such issues openly. Adolescents, therefore, try to piece together information from peers, TV, magazines or rely on their imagination and come up with risky answers most of which are far from the truth.

Can you think of such questions adolescents ask? Work in 3s and give answers.

## Facilitator's information

- What is happening to my body?
- Why is my body changing?
- What is this sex stuff really all about?
- Am I attractive?
- Am I normal?
- What is the right time to start?

Yet, every growing child has a right to a life of dignity, to liberty and to good health. When it comes to sexuality, every adolescent has the right to:

- Accurate information about sexuality
- Express or not express her/his sexual-

ity safely

- Make decisions about sexuality in her/his own life
- Not be forced in any way into being physical or sexual
- Say NO to an unwanted touch of any kind
- Be a happy and a healthy person
- Know how to protect herself/himself from harm.

## Exercise - Group work

1. What are the key (a) Economic (b) Educational concerns of adolescents, that can expose them to risks?
2. What are the key social concerns that can be risky for adolescents?
3. What are the health concerns of adolescents?
4. What are the qualities of a sexually healthy adolescent?

## Facilitator's information

### 1. (a) Economic concerns

- Unemployment
- Underemployment
- Lack of skills
- Inability to meet basic needs
- Poverty
- Gangs and armed robbery
- Commercial sex work
- Discriminatory employment policies
- Social pressure of materialism
- Inflation.

### (b) Educational concerns

- Increasing cost of education
- Strikes and instability of educational system
- Lack of facilities
- Inadequate guidance and counselling for career choices
- Secret cults
- Lack of sexuality information.

### 2. Social concerns

- Poor or lack of parental care
- Drug abuse
- Peer pressure, media influence
- Trafficking in girls
- Social corruption
- Tribalism, ethnicity, nepotism
- Lack of, or dwindling social infra-

structure - health, education, transportation, etc.

- Lack of recreational facilities
- 419
- Gender discrimination
- Religious factors
- Security, insecurity
- Sexual harassment/abuse
- Erosion of positive values.

### 3. Health

- Rape and other forms of gender-based violence
- Teenage pregnancy
- Unsafe abortion
- Unmet contraceptive needs
- STIs, including HIV/AIDS
- Stress and depression
- Lack of adolescent-friendly health services
- Attitude of health service providers.

### 4. Qualities of sexually healthy adolescents

- Know and appreciate their bodies
- Interact with both genders in appropriate and respectful ways
- Express love and intimacy in appropriate ways
- Avoid exploitative relationship
- Identify their values and know their limits
- Take responsibility for their own behaviour
- Communicate effectively with family and friends
- Ask questions of parents and other adults about sexual issues
- Enjoy sexual feelings without necessarily acting upon them
- Are able to communicate and negotiate sexual limits
- Understand the consequences of sexual activity
- Communicate desires not to have sex and accept refusals to sex
- Talk with a partner about sexual activity before it occurs, including limits, contraceptives and condom use
- Understand the impact of media messages on thoughts, feelings, values and behaviours related to sexuality

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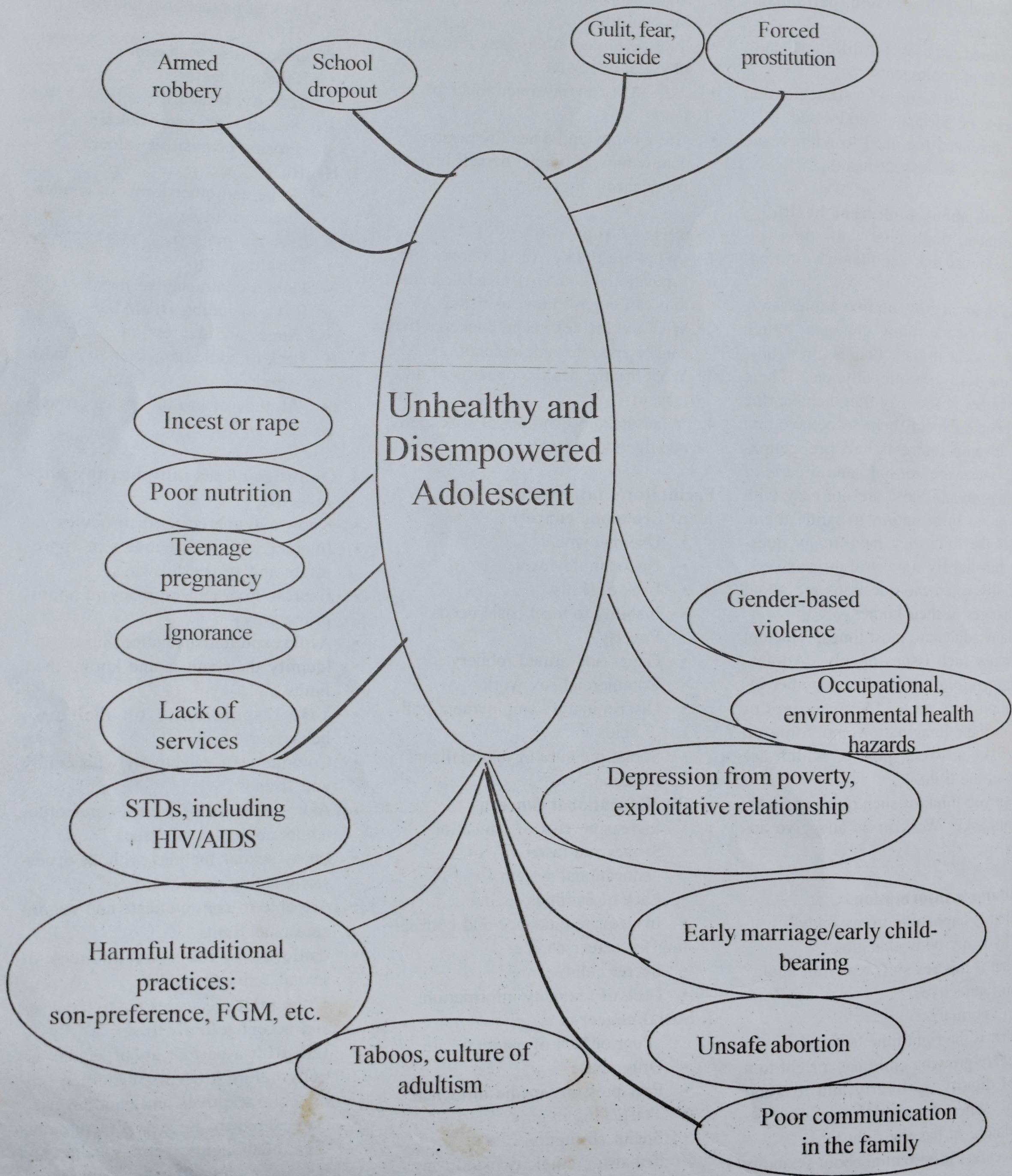
- Seek information about human sexuality as needed
- Seek counselling services for in-

# Adolescent health issues

- formed decision-making
- If sexually active, use contraception effectively to avoid pregnancy and use

condoms each time; practise safer sex to avoid contracting or transmitting STIs.

## Some problems affecting adolescent health

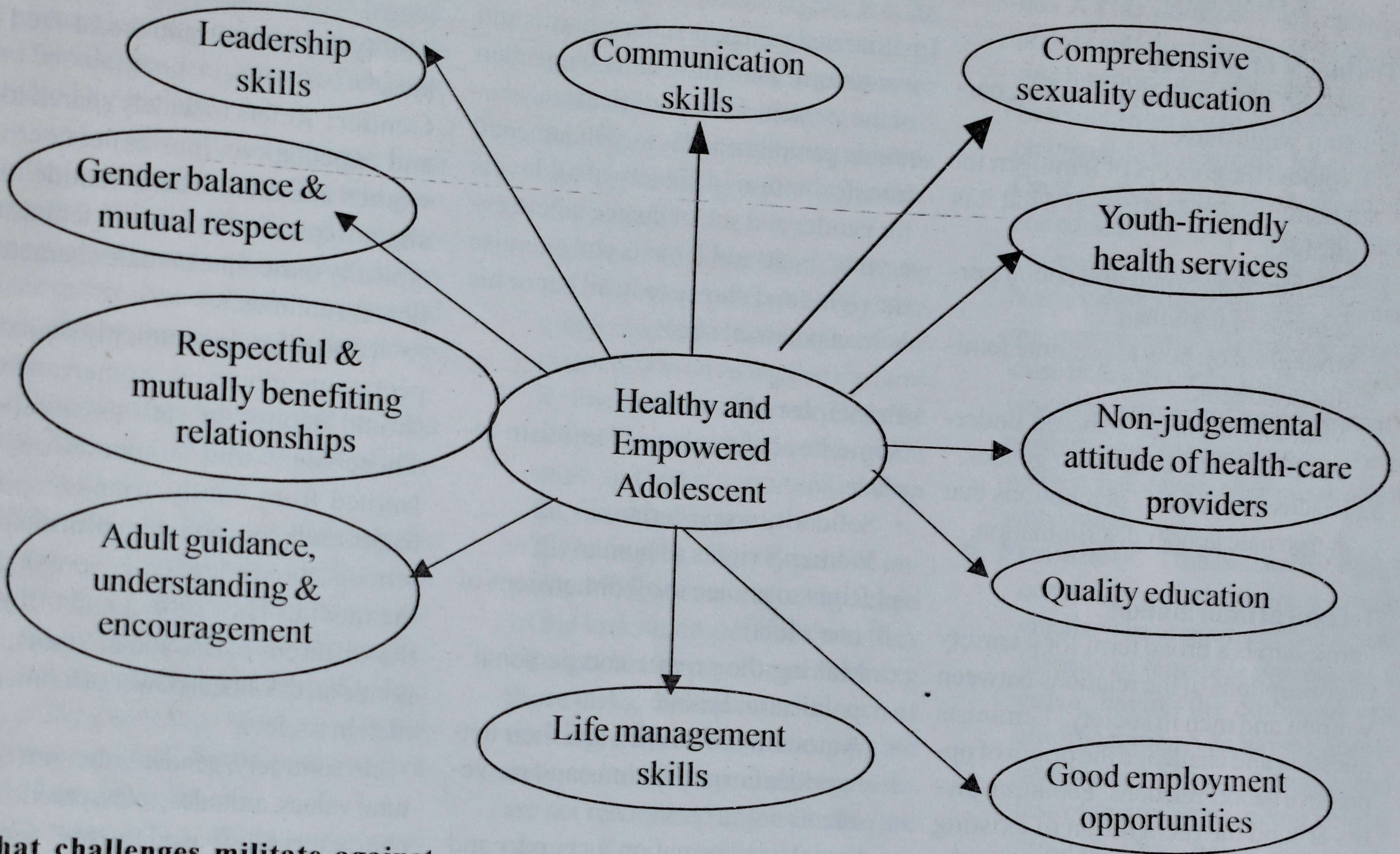


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# What actions can be taken to ensure good health for adolescents?

## Facilitator's information



### What challenges militate against adolescent sexual health?

- Lack of information: Many do not go to school or they drop out (house girls)
- Myths, e.g; you cannot become pregnant at the first time you have sex
- Incest, other gender-based sexual exploitation
- Lack of access to contraceptives, family planning clinics for adults and couples
- Ignorance, no sexuality education
- Alcohol or drug use; contraceptive failure.

### Maintaining personal hygiene for good health

#### For girls' bodies:

1. Wash genitals daily with clean water, no soap, antiseptic, deodorants, etc, are required.
2. While washing after using the toilet, wash from front to back in a motion away from the vagina to prevent in-

fection.

3. Change underwear regularly (at least once a day) and avoid synthetic panties. Use cotton.
4. Wash panties carefully to make sure you wash off all the soap.
5. Dry panties in the sun. Sunlight kills some germs.
6. Do not put any unclean, sharp edged objects into the vagina.
7. Do not touch your genitals with dirty hands. Keep your nails short so that you do not hurt yourself.
8. Use clean sanitary towel, clean cotton cloth or tampon for menstrual blood, not toilet tissue paper.

#### For boys:

1. Wash genitals daily with clean water. No soap, antiseptic, deodorants, etc, are required.
2. Dirt might accumulate as a sticky white substance called smegma, under the foreskin if not circumcised. Gently move the foreskin back and

wash the tip of the penis. Most Nigerian cultures circumcise male children.

3. While washing after toilet, wash in a motion away from the penis i.e front to back, to prevent infection
4. Change underwear regularly (at least once a day) and avoid synthetic undies.
5. Wash undies carefully to make sure you wash off all the soap.
6. Dry undies in the sun. Sunlight kills some germs.
7. Do not touch your genitals with dirty hands. Keep your nails short so that you do not hurt yourself.

### References

1. The Red Book: What You Want to Know About Yourself; 10 - 14 years by TARSHI, 1999.
2. The Blue Book: What You Want to Know About Yourself; 15 + Years., TARSHI, 1999 ©