Overcoming Utah Sex Education Barriers Using Global Examples

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**PURPOSE**
To use successful global examples of sexual education reforms to overcome similar barriers to comprehensive sex education and health in Utah.

**BACKGROUND**
- Utah’s barriers to comprehensive sexual education:
  - Utah’s sex education policy is currently abstinence-only in public schools
  - A majority of Utahns (67%) are LDS creating a conservative culture
- A conservative culture often restricts healthy discussions about sex and promotes abstinence-only education.
- States with abstinence-only education have higher rates of teen pregnancy (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011), do not delay teenage sex, and do not reduce rate of STIs (Kirby et al., 2007; Underhill et al., 2007).
- 70% of Utah parents think there needs to be more comprehensive sex education with abstinence and contraceptive information (Steadman, 2014).
- In 2010, Utah’s unintended teen pregnancies cost the state and federal governments $158.0 million (Sonfield and Kost, 2015)

**METHODS**
We selected countries with similar barriers to Utah’s sexual education and with a lower GDP to demonstrate that Utah has the resources to implement successful sexual education programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Utah</th>
<th>Uganda</th>
<th>Kenya</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP (million)</td>
<td>$140,600</td>
<td>$26,369</td>
<td>$63,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STI Prevalence</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>6.6-7.7%</td>
<td>4.9-7.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contraceptive Use</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Conservative Religion</td>
<td>67% LDS</td>
<td>70% Christian 30% Muslim</td>
<td>82% Christian 11% Muslim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**RESULTS**

**Uganda implemented the programs:** The World Starts With Me, Science and Success, and Reach a Hand
The programs emphasized:
- Proper use of contraceptives
- Sexual abuse awareness
Results of the programs include:
- Lower STI rates
- Reduced unplanned pregnancies

**Kenya implemented the program:** Nyeri Youth Health Project, The World Starts With Me, KARHP
The program emphasized:
- Proper use of contraception
- Interpersonal communication in relationships
- Spread across government, religious, school, non-governmental organizations, and parent involvement
Results of the program include:
- Lower STI rates
- Reduced unplanned pregnancies

**DISCUSSION**
Utah’s abstinence-only sex education, predominant religion, and conservative culture serve as barriers to comprehensive sex education in the state, which in turn lead to low rates of contraceptive use and high rates of STIs. Uganda and Kenya were chosen based on similar barriers of religion, culture, and abstinence-only education. Results showed that the programs that were implemented in order to form comprehensive sex education conformed to the dominant culture/religion, were widely accepted, and resulted in decreased rates of unplanned pregnancies and STIs. These countries had a lower GDP than Utah, which indicates Utah has the resources to implement similar programs. We propose that current Utah sex education programs look to these global examples in order to overcome these barriers and promote healthier sexual activity.

**CONCLUSION**
Looking at global examples of sex ed programs demonstrated that:
- Comprehensive sexual education can be implemented in a culturally conservative area with limited resources, such as Utah
- Comprehensive sex ed can lower rates of STIs and unplanned pregnancies

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
- The Honors College, University of Utah
- Global Health Scholars
- Sources available upon request