



Kimasomaso Programme Transcript

Transmission date: 16 May 2010

Topic: Mother-daughter communication on menstruation

Keynote speakers:

- **Ms Ron Ochako- African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC)**
- **Ms Gladys Someren-Ministry of Health, Kenya**
- **Ms Rastika Tembele- Aids Control Council, Tanzania**

This episode of Kimasomaso explores the reasons behind the communication gap between mother and daughter on the crucial but awkward-to-discuss subject of menstruation, and possible ways of bridging this gap. The programme also highlights initiatives by the Tanzanian government to reduce HIV infection rates.

INTRO MUSIC: (9 SECONDS)

Presenter: Welcome to Kimasomaso- a forum for the youth to discuss issues on gender and sexual reproductive health. My name is Amina Abubakar.

MUSIC FADE UP: (7 SECONDS)

Presenter: The focus of this week's edition is research conducted by the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) which examines the communication gap between mothers and daughters on the issue of menstruation. Are girls aware of the bodily changes they are experiencing during this period? Whose responsibility is it to educate the girl-child on menstruation?

Insert 1: I think it is the mother's role, as she was taught by her mother, and should pass the knowledge down to me.

Insert 2: I cannot discuss such issues with my mother, as she is very harsh.

Presenter: Agencies involved in anti-HIV campaigns in Tanzania are urging the residents of districts with the highest infection rate to continue using the laid-down strategies for reducing infection rates.

Insert 3: Every province has factors that increase the rate of HIV infection. Some of these factors are similar, for example alcohol abuse which has been cited in Iringa and Mara provinces. Overindulgence in alcohol leads to a situation where a person's judgment is impaired, increasing the possibility of someone engaging in risky sexual behaviour.

MUSIC INTERLUDE: 17 SECONDS

Presenter: Our Artist of the week is Kenyan gospel singer Emmy Kosgei, who will entertain her with the song "Taunet Nelel". Stay close for this and more, starting with our Tip of the Week.

Tip of the Week: Parents have a responsibility to educate their children on bodily changes they (the children) are experiencing. Children need to be informed that what is happening to them is not negative or harmful

Presenter: Research conducted by the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) conducted in Nairobi's informal slums reveals a huge gap in mother-daughter communication on menstrual issues. The research indicates that girls perceive themselves as adults who can make their own decisions once they start menstruating. This leads them to engage in sex at an early age, exposing themselves to the risk of HIV infections and unwanted pregnancies. The research notes that it is taboo within the African societal set-up for parents to discuss issues like menstruation with their children. The youth, as a result, receive inaccurate information from peers. Ms Ron Ochako is one of the Researchers involved in this project.

Ms Ron Ochako: We embarked on this research on realizing that many girls face difficulties during their menstrual period. Communication on menstruation between mother and daughter is a major problem.

Presenter: What were your findings?

Ms Ron Ochako: Many young girls do not know how to deal with menstruation. Their parents do not inform them on menstruation. The girls expect to receive information on menstruation from their teachers, while the teachers expect the parents to take up this responsibility.

Presenter: What are your recommendations?

Ms Ron Ochako: We recommend that mothers should open communication channels with their daughters. The girl child needs to know that menstruation is normal, not an illness.

Presenter: It is a fact that children who can communicate openly with their parents grow to become responsible, healthy adolescents. Despite the fact that mother-daughter communication on menstruation could prevent teenage sex, many parents are not inclined towards openly imparting information on this issue to their children. We have invited some youths from Nairobi to discuss this further. They are Becky, Wangeci, and Botul. We also have Bonita Hussein and Khadija to give the parents' point of view. Starting with you Botul, how do you relate with your parents?

Botul: We relate well. When I started menstruating, I informed my mother and she bought me sanitary pads. She advised me not to engage in sex with the boys, as I might get pregnant at an early age.

Presenter: How about you, Wangeci?

Wangeci: I was scared when I got my first period. My mother sensed that something was wrong with me. She examined me, and proceeded to show me how a sanitary pad is used. She even advised me not to run around when my pad is on, as the menstrual flow might leak out, and I might be embarrassed! My mother also warned me to keep off boys.

Presenter: What important information have you received from your parents?

Becky: None- I'm too embarrassed to ask!

Presenter: So where do you get information from?

Becky: From my friends. I fear my mother might harshly ask me why I'm asking her questions.

Presenter: Over to you Bonita. The youth here have said it's difficult to communicate with their parents. Some are too harsh, others get inquisitive. Do you communicate with your parents on sexual reproductive health issues?

Bonita: Yes I do, when they start menstruating. I advise them to be careful, and not to have sex because of the risk of contracting HIV or getting pregnant which might impede academic progress.

Presenter: Khadija, why are parents disinclined towards communicating with their children on sexual reproductive health issues?

Khadija: Some parents don't have time for their children. They might be busy trying to earn a livelihood, leaving the house help to care for the child. Many parents think that talking to their children about sexual reproductive health is a taboo, a notion that is outdated.

Presenter: How do you relate with your children?

Khadija: I am very open with my children. I got my first period in school. I was very shocked, and I told my mother about it as soon as I got home. I had to seek information from my mum; my mother never imparted information to me voluntarily. Arising from this, I decided to relate with my daughter differently- by being very candid and forthright.

Presenter: Botul, who would you seek information on sexual reproductive health from?

Botul: My mother, since she's the one who knows me best. Besides, she was taught by her mother, and should pass the knowledge down to me.

Presenter: What about you, Wangeci?

Wangeci: My mother- she's my closest friend, and she knows me best!

Presenter: There are many parents who have abdicated their responsibility of educating their children on sexual reproductive health matters to teachers. The youth need to receive adequate and accurate information on bodily changes. This information will empower them to make responsible, rational and informed decisions that will affect their future. Here is Gladys Someren from the Ministry of Health's Youth Affairs Department to tell us more about policies to enhance parent-child communication.

Gladys Someren: We have a policy that urges parents to seek information from government departments on issues raised by their children. We also urge youth to seek information on their health from health facilities in their vicinity. But we stress that parents need to communicate frankly with their children. We have availed information to facilitate this. The government has also formulated a policy that seeks to involve the society at large in parent-child communication. We have given guidelines to parents on how best they can communicate with their children on teenage sex and menstruation. We know that if the parents do not play this role, their children will seek information elsewhere. Many devious men mislead young girls that menstrual pain will subside if they engage in sex. That is how young girls expose themselves to the risk of contracting HIV and also getting an unplanned pregnancy. The society needs to take up the responsibility of educating the youth. Parents have a responsibility to educate their children on bodily changes they (the children) are experiencing. Children need to be informed that what is happening to them is not negative or harmful.

Presenter: That was Gladys Someren from the Youth Affairs Department of Kenya's Ministry of Health. Should you have questions or comments, please get in touch with us.

PROMO (CONTACTS) - 30 SECONDS

Presenter: This is Kimasomaso, a collaboration between the BBC and Research Matters- a project co-funded by International Development Research Centre (IDRC Canada) and the Swiss agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Here now is the song „Taunet Nelel’ by Kenya’s Emmy Kosgei, who recently won an award at a Kenyan gospel music awards show.

SONG: “TAUNET NELEL” BY EMMY KOSGEI (1.35 min)

Presenter: “Taunet Nelel” by Emmy Kosgei, who joins us now. Emmy, you were recently voted the Best Female Gospel Artist at a gospel music awards show. What does the award mean to you?

Emmy Kosgei: The award has elevated me to another level-professionally and personally. I can now gauge how popular my music is, and how far it has spread.

Presenter: Why do you sing in your native tongue (Kalenjin) instead of Swahili, which is more widely understood?

Presenter: I am a fan of South African music from the likes of Rebecca Malope, who sings in a language I do not understand! I believe that even my local language has universal appeal. Music is food for the soul, and the soul does not need to understand the language used in a song.

Presenter: Please give us a few lines of your song.

INSERT: EMMY SINGS ACAPELLA (19 SECONDS)

Presenter: Thanks! What is the song about?

Emmy Kosgei: The song talks about new beginnings made possible by God. It also talks about moving forward and letting go of the past. It’s an inspiring and uplifting song.

Presenter: Kenya’s Emmy Kosgei

MUSIC INTERLUDE: (11 SECONDS)

Presenter: A symposium involving various agencies involved in the fight against HIV was held recently in Tanzania. The aim was to urge the residents of districts with the highest infection rate to continue using the laid-down strategies for reducing infection rates. Eight Tanzanian provinces, among them Iringa, Shanga and Mbeya have not been successful in achieving the goal of a strategy unveiled 2 years ago by President Jakaya Kikwete to reduce HIV infection rates. The theme of that strategy was “A Tanzania Without Aids is Possible”. HIV infection rates have generally fallen to 5 percent from 7 percent, but more needs to be done to sensitise the youth on the importance of HIV

testing so as to reduce infection rates. Ms Rastika Tembele is the Director of National Awareness Campaigns at Tanzania's Aids Control Council. She spoke to my colleague Robby Marwa.

Ms Tembele: Ever since President Kikwete and his wife tested for HIV, many Tanzanians have come forward to know their HIV status. President Kikwete set a good example to follow, and people also realized that they can get medication if they test positive.

Robby Marwa: Why have some provinces failed in their efforts to reduce HIV infection rates?

Ms Tembele: Every province has factors that increase the rate of HIV infection. Some of these factors are similar, for example alcohol abuse which has been cited in Iringa and Mara provinces. Overindulgence in alcohol leads to a situation where a person's judgment is impaired, increasing the possibility of someone engaging in risky sexual behaviour. Traditional practices like wife inheritance and wife cleansing also contribute to the spread of HIV. We are trying to discourage the practice of wife inheritance, as the husband may have died of HIV.

Robby Marwa: How does the Aids Control Council facilitate efforts to reduce HIV infection rates?

Ms Tembele: It is the responsibility of the provinces to devise ways of reducing the infection rates. HIV may be a national disaster, but at provincial level it is a provincial disaster. The Aids Control Council assists by coming up with interventions that would help reduce HIV infection rates. This is not an issue of money; resources available at provincial level can be used to implement these interventions. HIV is at times not given the priority it deserves at provincial level, but provincial authorities need to realise that building schools, roads and other facilities is not as important as safeguarding the health of the population.

PROMO: (PROGRAMME TIMINGS)-40 SECONDS

Presenter: Should you have questions or comments, please get in touch with us.

PROMO (CONTACTS) - 30 SECONDS

Presenter: Please remember to include your address and phone contacts when writing to us. You can listen to us online at bbcswahili.com, and we're also on Facebook. Join us again next week, I'm Amina Abubakar

Goodbye.

This programme is a collaboration of the BBC World Service Trust and Research Matters - a project co-funded by the International Development Research Center, Canada (IDRC) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). It is broadcast on BBC World Service and its partner stations across East Africa.