

Enhancing Students' Understanding of Sexually Transmitted Diseases through Health Education Counseling at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau

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ABSTRACT

Community service activities in the field of adolescent health education are increasingly important as schools face the need to provide accurate, age-appropriate, and preventive information on reproductive health issues. One topic that requires careful educational intervention is sexually transmitted diseases, as limited understanding among adolescents may contribute to misconceptions, stigma, and unhealthy decision-making. This community service program was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau with the aim of improving students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases through a counseling-based health education activity. The program targeted high school students and was implemented in the form of direct educational counseling. The activity consisted of preparation, material delivery, interactive discussion, and question-and-answer sessions. The counseling materials covered the basic definition of sexually transmitted diseases, modes of transmission, potential health consequences, and preventive measures relevant to adolescents. The activity was designed to provide students with clear and accessible information in a school-based setting that supports learning and participation. The implementation of the program showed that the counseling activity was carried out effectively and received positive responses from participants. Students demonstrated active engagement during the session and showed improved understanding of the topic, particularly regarding the meaning of sexually transmitted diseases, their routes of transmission, and the importance of prevention through responsible health behavior. Overall, this activity indicates that school-based health counseling can serve as a strategic community service approach to strengthening adolescent health literacy and promoting preventive awareness among students.



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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by rapid physical, psychological, cognitive, and social changes. During this stage, young people begin to build greater independence, develop personal values, and make decisions that may shape their long-term well-being. At the same time, adolescence is also a period in which individuals become increasingly exposed to complex information, social influences, and health-related risks (Fleary et al., 2018). For this reason, educational support during adolescence should not be limited to academic achievement alone but should also address health literacy, self-awareness, and the capacity to make informed decisions. Among the many dimensions of adolescent health, reproductive health remains one of the most important yet often insufficiently addressed topics in educational settings.

The need for reproductive health education among adolescents is closely related to their developmental characteristics. Adolescents are naturally curious and increasingly aware of bodily changes, interpersonal relationships, and identity formation. However, curiosity does not always coincide with access to valid and responsible information. In many settings, discussions on reproductive and sexual health remain socially sensitive, culturally restricted, or inadequately integrated into formal education (Corcoran et al., 2020). As a result, adolescents may seek information from informal or unreliable sources, including peers, social media, and unverified digital content. Such conditions may

lead to misconceptions, fragmented understanding, and poor judgment regarding health risks. Therefore, educational interventions that provide accurate, structured, and context-sensitive health information are essential for supporting adolescent development in a safe and constructive manner (Vongxay et al., 2019).

One important issue within adolescent reproductive health is sexually transmitted diseases. Sexually transmitted diseases represent a significant public health concern because they affect not only physical health but also psychological, social, and educational well-being. In general terms, sexually transmitted diseases are infections that can be transmitted primarily through sexual contact, and in some cases through other routes depending on the type of infection. A lack of knowledge about these diseases may increase vulnerability to misinformation, stigma, fear, and inappropriate attitudes toward prevention and treatment. For adolescents, limited understanding of sexually transmitted diseases can be particularly problematic because this age group is still developing the maturity needed to interpret health information critically and translate it into responsible behavior (Almeida & Sousa, 2022). Consequently, improving students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases should be viewed as part of a broader strategy to strengthen adolescent health literacy and preventive awareness.

The importance of introducing this topic at the school level lies not in creating fear, but in building informed awareness. Preventive health education is most effective when it equips young people with clear knowledge before they encounter risky situations, rather than after health problems emerge. Within this preventive framework, learning about sexually transmitted diseases helps students understand basic concepts of transmission, recognize the health consequences associated with unsafe behavior, and appreciate the importance of responsible decision-making. It also encourages students to view health not merely as the absence of illness, but as a condition that must be maintained through knowledge, caution, and positive habits. Thus, educational efforts on sexually transmitted diseases should be positioned as a preventive and promotive health strategy rather than as a narrow or stigmatizing discussion (Nkrumah et al., 2024).

Schools play a highly strategic role in implementing such educational interventions. As formal institutions where adolescents spend a substantial portion of their time, schools are not only centers of academic instruction but also environments for character formation, social interaction, and behavioral development. Because of this broader educational role, schools are appropriate spaces for delivering health information that supports students' personal and social growth. School-based health education has several advantages. First, it allows information to be delivered in a structured and supervised setting. Second, it enables educators or facilitators to adapt the content to students' age and level of understanding. Third, it creates opportunities for interaction, clarification, and discussion, which are especially important when addressing sensitive health topics. In this sense, schools are well positioned to serve as effective partners in community service programs aimed at strengthening adolescent health awareness.

Within the school setting, counseling or educational outreach is one of the practical methods that can be used to communicate health information. Counseling activities are particularly relevant because they combine direct explanation with interactive engagement. Through counseling, participants not only receive information but also have opportunities to ask questions, confirm their understanding, and respond to issues that may otherwise remain unclear. In adolescent health education, this interactive dimension is crucial because students often need guidance in interpreting concepts that are new, sensitive, or socially influenced. A counseling-based approach also makes it possible to present health material in a more accessible and less intimidating manner. Rather than relying solely on written information, direct educational counseling creates a communicative atmosphere in which students can learn actively and meaningfully.

The implementation of community service programs in schools reflects the broader social responsibility of higher education and health-oriented outreach. Community service is not merely an institutional obligation; it is a means of translating academic knowledge into practical benefits for society. In the context of schools, community service can bridge gaps between public health knowledge and students' educational needs. A school-based counseling activity on sexually transmitted diseases therefore represents an applied contribution to adolescent well-being. It allows facilitators to deliver relevant health information directly to students while responding to real educational needs in the community. In addition, such activities support schools in reinforcing preventive health values and may complement existing efforts to promote student welfare.

SMA Negeri 1 Baubau was selected as the location for this community service activity because senior high school students constitute an important target group for preventive reproductive health education. At this educational level, students are in a stage of increasing maturity and social exposure, making them appropriate recipients of structured health information. The counseling activity conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau focused on introducing students to the concept of sexually transmitted diseases, their modes of transmission, their possible impacts on health, and key preventive measures. Although the available field data are limited to the basic implementation information and general outcomes of the activity, the program was designed as a preventive educational effort to strengthen student understanding within a formal learning environment.

The relevance of this activity is further supported by the need to cultivate health literacy among adolescents in ways that are informative, ethical, and contextually appropriate. Health literacy involves more than possessing factual information; it includes the ability to understand health messages, interpret risk, and adopt preventive attitudes. In the case of sexually transmitted diseases, health literacy is especially important because the topic is often surrounded by misunderstanding or discomfort. By providing clear and academically grounded explanations through counseling, students can develop a more balanced and responsible understanding of the issue. This not only benefits them individually but also contributes to a healthier school environment in which awareness and prevention are valued.

Based on these considerations, this community service activity was conducted with the general objective of improving students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases through health education counseling at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau. More specifically, the activity aimed to provide students with basic knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, explain their routes of transmission and potential health impacts, and encourage awareness of preventive behavior among adolescents. Through this activity, the school-based community service program is expected to contribute to the strengthening of adolescent reproductive health education in a practical and meaningful way.

RESEARCH METHODS

This community service activity employed an educational counseling approach to improve students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau. The method was designed as a school-based health education intervention delivered in a direct and interactive format. In the context of community service, counseling was selected because it enables facilitators to communicate health information clearly while also creating opportunities for participants to engage actively with the material. This approach was considered appropriate for adolescent participants because the topic of sexually transmitted diseases requires not only factual explanation but also careful communication adapted to students' level of understanding.

The activity was conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau, with high school students serving as the primary participants. The school setting was chosen because it provides an organized educational environment in which adolescent health information can be delivered in a structured and supervised manner. As students spend a substantial amount of time in school, this setting offers an effective platform for preventive health education, particularly for topics related to reproductive health and adolescent well-being. The target group of this program consisted of students who were considered to be at an appropriate developmental stage to receive basic educational information on sexually transmitted diseases as part of broader health literacy strengthening.

The implementation of the activity was organized into three main stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation stage involved initial coordination with the school, determination of the activity setting, and preparation of educational materials. Coordination with the school was important to ensure that the activity could be integrated smoothly into the school environment and conducted in a manner consistent with the needs and context of the participants. At this stage, the team also prepared the counseling content and supporting presentation media to facilitate systematic and understandable delivery of the material. The preparation process was intended to ensure that the activity would proceed in an orderly, relevant, and educationally appropriate manner.

The implementation stage constituted the core of the community service activity. The counseling session was delivered directly to students through an educational presentation followed by interactive discussion and question-and-answer sessions. The use of direct explanation allowed the facilitators to introduce key concepts related to sexually transmitted diseases in a clear and organized sequence. Meanwhile, the discussion component enabled students to engage with the material more

actively, clarify points they did not fully understand, and respond to the information presented. This interactive format was particularly important given the sensitive nature of the topic, as it helped create a learning atmosphere that was informative, respectful, and participatory.

The content of the counseling session focused on several essential aspects of sexually transmitted diseases. These included the general definition of sexually transmitted diseases, common modes of transmission, possible health impacts, and preventive measures relevant to adolescents. The material was presented in academic but accessible language so that students could understand the topic without unnecessary complexity. The emphasis of the session was preventive in nature, aiming to strengthen students' awareness and understanding rather than merely providing isolated information. By framing the material within a health promotion perspective, the activity sought to encourage students to recognize the importance of maintaining reproductive health and making responsible decisions related to personal well-being.

The evaluation stage was carried out qualitatively based on participants' engagement and the overall course of the activity. Since detailed quantitative measurements such as pre-test and post-test data were not available, the success of the activity was assessed through observable indicators during implementation. These indicators included students' attention during the counseling session, their participation in discussion and question-and-answer interactions, and their apparent comprehension of the material as reflected in their responses. In addition, activity documentation was used as supporting evidence that the program was conducted successfully and that participation took place in an active and organized manner.

Overall, the method used in this community service activity emphasized direct educational communication, contextual delivery, and participatory engagement. The three-stage structure of preparation, implementation, and evaluation provided a simple yet systematic framework for conducting school-based health counseling. Through this method, the program aimed to provide meaningful educational benefits to students at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau and to support preventive efforts in adolescent reproductive health education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity on sexually transmitted diseases at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau was implemented in a conducive educational setting and demonstrated the practical value of school-based health counseling for adolescents. Based on the available documentation and the basic implementation information provided, the activity was carried out through direct counseling involving presenters, facilitators, and student participants in a classroom environment. The visual documentation indicates that the session was conducted in an organized manner, with students gathered in a formal school space and the material delivered through face-to-face interaction. This implementation context is important because the effectiveness of educational outreach is often influenced by whether the learning environment supports attention, communication, and participant involvement (Shorey & Chua, 2023).

From an implementation perspective, the activity reflected a structured community service process in which the school functioned as an active partner. The setting of the counseling session suggests that the activity was not merely incidental, but rather intentionally organized within the school environment. The presence of a discussion table, presentation facilities, and participant assembly points to a formal educational atmosphere that enabled the counseling process to proceed in a focused way. Such a setting is highly relevant for adolescent health education because sensitive topics, including sexually transmitted diseases, require an environment that balances seriousness, clarity, and comfort. In this regard, the school-based setting helped create a legitimate and supportive context for discussing a topic that is often misunderstood or avoided (Denford et al., 2017).

One of the most visible results of the activity was the positive level of student participation. Although detailed numerical participation data were not available, the documentation and the general description of the event indicate that students attended the activity in substantial numbers and engaged with the program in a collective learning setting. In community service activities, active participation is an important indicator of program acceptance, particularly when the subject matter involves health education. Adolescents are more likely to benefit from counseling when they are willing to attend, listen, and respond to the educational content. The large-group participation seen in the activity therefore suggests that the topic and delivery method were sufficiently relevant and accessible to the target audience (Kemigisha et al., 2019).

Student enthusiasm also appears to have been an important supporting factor in the implementation of the counseling session. Educational counseling is most effective when participants do not merely occupy the space physically, but also engage mentally and socially with the learning process. In this activity, the counseling approach appears to have facilitated a communicative interaction between the presenters and the students. The available information notes that the activity received positive responses from participants and contributed to improving their understanding of sexually transmitted diseases. This suggests that the counseling session was able to capture students' attention and create a learning atmosphere in which the material could be received meaningfully. In a school-based educational program, such responsiveness is significant because it indicates that the intervention was not rejected as overly sensitive, abstract, or irrelevant (Jefferson et al., 2021).



Figure 1. Delivery of counseling material on sexually transmitted diseases by the implementing team at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau.

The content delivery component was central to the success of the activity. The counseling focused on introducing students to the concept of sexually transmitted diseases, their routes of transmission, their potential consequences, and preventive measures relevant to adolescent life. These components represent the essential knowledge base needed for introductory health literacy on the topic. The educational value of this content lies in its preventive orientation. Rather than discussing sexually transmitted diseases in a purely clinical or alarming manner, the counseling framed the topic as part of broader health awareness and responsible behavior. This is particularly important in adolescent education because preventive messages are more effective when they are communicated in a balanced, informative, and non-stigmatizing way (Arakawa, 2021).

The use of direct counseling as the main educational method appears to have supported comprehension. Direct face-to-face delivery remains one of the most effective forms of health education in settings where participants may need immediate clarification and contextual explanation. This is especially true for sexually transmitted diseases, a topic that can be surrounded by embarrassment, myths, and fragmented information. Through direct counseling, presenters are able to regulate the tone of delivery, simplify difficult concepts, and observe participants' reactions during the session. This dynamic cannot always be achieved through passive media alone. In the present activity, the counseling format likely contributed to students' understanding because it enabled the material to be presented sequentially and interactively in language appropriate to their educational level (Sani et al., 2016).

A major result of the activity was the improvement in students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases. Although this conclusion is based on qualitative observation and the general outcome reported rather than on pre-test and post-test scores, it remains a meaningful outcome within the context of community service reporting. Improved understanding in this case refers to students' enhanced recognition of what sexually transmitted diseases are, how they may be transmitted, why they can be dangerous, and why prevention is essential. In adolescent health education, even a basic conceptual improvement can have significant long-term value because knowledge often serves as the

foundation for attitude formation and later behavioral choices. When students understand a health issue more clearly, they are better positioned to interpret future information, resist misconceptions, and respond more responsibly to health-related messages (Mahmutovic Vranic et al., 2019).

The significance of this increased understanding should be considered in relation to adolescent developmental needs. Adolescents often stand at the intersection of curiosity, social influence, and limited life experience. They may hear partial or inaccurate information about reproductive health from peers or digital platforms, yet lack the tools to assess that information critically. In such conditions, school-based counseling can function as a corrective educational mechanism. By offering clear explanations in an academic setting, the activity helps replace uncertainty with structured understanding. This is one of the most meaningful contributions of community service in education: not simply transmitting facts, but guiding participants toward a more informed and responsible interpretation of health issues (Doubova et al., 2017).

Another important aspect of the results is the role of the activity in fostering preventive awareness. The reported increase in understanding was not limited to knowledge of definitions or transmission routes, but also extended to awareness of prevention. This is a crucial outcome because the broader objective of reproductive health education is not merely to inform students that a health problem exists, but to encourage early awareness of how health risks can be avoided. Preventive awareness among adolescents contributes to the development of healthier attitudes, stronger caution in personal decision-making, and greater appreciation of self-care. In the context of sexually transmitted diseases, prevention-oriented understanding may include awareness of responsible behavior, the value of accurate health information, and the importance of avoiding risky conduct. The counseling activity therefore contributed not only to cognitive learning but also to the early formation of a preventive health mindset.

The findings of this activity also highlight the strategic role of schools in health promotion. Schools are uniquely positioned to support preventive interventions because they bring together students within an organized institutional setting where educational messages can be delivered systematically. In many cases, adolescents may not have access to structured reproductive health discussions at home or in informal social environments. As a result, schools become one of the few spaces where age-appropriate and guided information can be provided in a reliable way. The implementation of this counseling session at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau demonstrates how community service can strengthen the school's educational function by supplementing formal learning with targeted health literacy activities. In this sense, the activity had relevance not only for the students as individuals but also for the school as a setting that supports holistic student development.



Figure 2. Students' participation during the sexually transmitted diseases counseling activity at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau.

The program also illustrates the practical compatibility between community service objectives and adolescent health education needs. Community service in educational institutions should ideally

respond to concrete social and developmental needs in ways that are feasible, context-sensitive, and beneficial. The issue of sexually transmitted diseases among adolescents meets these criteria because it is socially relevant, educationally necessary, and suitable for preventive intervention. By conducting counseling at the school level, the activity translated academic concern for public health into direct educational practice. This makes the program meaningful from both a service perspective and an educational perspective. It serves the community by addressing a health literacy need, while also reinforcing the role of educational institutions in promoting student well-being.

The positive implementation of the activity was likely supported by several enabling factors. First, institutional support from the school appears to have played an important role. Community service programs are generally more effective when there is cooperation from the host institution in terms of space, scheduling, and participant mobilization. The orderly setting visible in the documentation suggests that school coordination contributed to the smooth execution of the counseling session. Second, the school environment itself provided a familiar and disciplined learning space for participants, which may have enhanced attentiveness and reduced barriers to participation. Third, the use of direct interpersonal communication likely made the material more approachable, especially for students who may not have engaged with such topics independently. Together, these factors helped create conditions in which the educational goals of the activity could be achieved (Kadir, 2026b).

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The most notable limitation is the absence of quantitative evaluation data. Since no pre-test and post-test scores, survey results, or numerical indicators of knowledge change were reported, the conclusion regarding increased understanding is based primarily on qualitative observation and general response patterns. While this does not invalidate the outcome, it does limit the precision with which the educational impact can be measured. A second limitation concerns the scope of the activity. As a single counseling session, the intervention may have been effective in introducing the topic and raising awareness, but it is not sufficient on its own to guarantee long-term retention or behavioral change. Adolescent health literacy develops over time and often requires repeated exposure, reinforcement, and integration with broader educational efforts. A third limitation is that sensitive topics such as sexually transmitted diseases may require ongoing support mechanisms to ensure that students continue to access reliable information after the activity has concluded.

These limitations, however, also point toward constructive directions for future improvement. Follow-up programs could strengthen the impact of the counseling by introducing simple evaluation instruments, such as short pre-session and post-session questionnaires, reflection sheets, or structured feedback forms. Such tools would allow future community service reports to demonstrate educational outcomes more clearly and analytically. In addition, schools could collaborate with facilitators to organize periodic reproductive health education sessions rather than one-time interventions. Repeated counseling would help reinforce learning, normalize responsible discussion of health topics, and sustain preventive awareness among students. Supporting materials such as posters, handouts, or school health campaigns could also extend the educational reach of the program beyond the counseling session itself.

In broader terms, the activity at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau demonstrates that counseling-based community service can make a meaningful contribution to adolescent reproductive health literacy even when conducted with modest resources and limited evaluative data. Its significance lies in its responsiveness to a real educational need, its use of an accessible school-based format, and its focus on prevention rather than stigma. The program shows that health education for adolescents is most effective when it is delivered in a context that is structured, interactive, and developmentally appropriate. By improving students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases, the activity contributed to the cultivation of informed awareness, which is one of the most fundamental goals of preventive education (Arakawa, 2021)

Overall, the results and discussion indicate that the counseling activity achieved its primary purpose of enhancing students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau. The implementation process, participant engagement, educational content, and reported improvement in understanding together suggest that the activity functioned effectively as a school-based community service intervention. Although more rigorous evaluation would strengthen future reports, the present activity already demonstrates the relevance of integrating reproductive health counseling into community service programs for adolescents. Its outcomes support the view that

preventive health education in schools is not only necessary but also feasible and beneficial when delivered through a communicative and context-sensitive approach (Kadir, 2026a)

CONCLUSION

The community service activity conducted through health education counseling at SMA Negeri 1 Baubau was successfully implemented as a school-based effort to improve students' understanding of sexually transmitted diseases. The activity demonstrated that counseling can function as an effective educational method for delivering reproductive health information to adolescent learners in a direct, structured, and interactive manner. Through the presentation of essential material on the definition, transmission, impacts, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, students were provided with basic yet important knowledge needed to strengthen their health literacy. The positive response shown by participants further indicates that such educational interventions are relevant and acceptable within the school environment.

In a broader sense, this activity highlights the importance of integrating preventive health education into community service programs for adolescents. School-based counseling not only supports the transfer of knowledge but also contributes to the development of preventive awareness and more responsible attitudes toward personal health. Although the present activity was limited by the absence of quantitative evaluation data, it still provides meaningful evidence that educational counseling can serve as a practical approach to promoting adolescent reproductive health understanding. Future programs are expected to expand this effort through periodic implementation, stronger evaluation instruments, and closer collaboration with schools so that the benefits of the activity may be sustained over time.

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