What is sexual empowerment? And how to measure it?

Ine Vanwesenbeeck

ICRH, Gent, December 4, 2014
Preview

• Wide application of the concept..
• What elements does it contain?
• What is difficult about it?
• What are ways forward?
‘Western’ feminism..
‘Southern’ feminism..

Sexuality and Empowerment: An Intimate Connection

Kate Hawkins, Andrea Cornwall and Tessa Lewin

Empowerment: A journey not a destination

Pathways Policy Paper

October 2011
Development in general..

Measuring Empowerment in Practice:
Structuring Analysis and Framing Indicators

Ruth Alsop
Nina Heinsohn

Agency and Empowerment:
A review of concepts, indicators and empirical evidence

Emma Samman* and Maria Emma Santos*
Prepared for the 2009 Human Development Report in Latin America and the Caribbean
First Draft: May 18, 2009
Health and well-being promotion..
What does ‘empowerment’ mean in school-based sex and relationships education?

Grace Spencer*, Claire Maxwell and Peter Aggleton

Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education University of London, London, UK
Elements of sexual empowerment

• Expansion of ability to make choices irt sexuality
• Components: agency, competence, control..
• A process rather than an outcome
• Degrees:
  • *having* choice (resources, opportunities) => structural/ideological
  • *using* choice (agency, power) => individual/experiential
  • *achieving* choice (outcome) => structural and individual
• Dimensions:
  • psychological, physical, social, economic, legal
• Degrees and dimensions indivisible
More elements..

- Individual & relational (proxy, collective) agency
- Requires at least (self-) awareness of (self-) interests
- And an enabling environment..
- Participation and people-centeredness crucial
- Goals, processes and outcomes may differ across individuals, contexts, times and places
- Outcomes may be messy, contradictory, unintended
Criticisms, doubts, problems...

- With so much variety, a useful concept at all?
- Is authentic choice possible at all?
- Sexual empowerment overly sexualised?
- Awareness may be burdening (for girls)
- What are boys’ empowerment needs and concerns?
- Dictating goals by definition disempowering
- Educators’ vs girls’/boys’ sexual empowerment goals
- Sexual empowerment vs sexual health
More problems..

• In programming
  • No one-size-fits-all strategies
  • Heterogeneity of empowerment needs/concerns
  • Limited compatibility w health/outcome centered approach

• In research
  • Empowerment too complex to measure?
  • Lack of a universal(ly agreed) individual measure/indicator
  • Measuring at individual level alone insufficient
  • Deficiency of study designs
Ways forward

• Complex obligation!
• Transparency & precision: empowerment for what?
• In programming
  • Knowledge, skills, awareness, support, gender transformation
  • Connecting bottom-up and top-down goals
  • Multicomponent programming
• In research
  • Agree upon crucial indicators
  • Multidimensional and multi-method measuring
  • Studying how and when (which) sexual empowerment can have positive outcomes for whom
Thank you for your attention!

“GET UP, STAND UP, STAND UP FOR YOUR RIGHTS. GET UP, STAND UP, DON’T GIVE UP THE FIGHT.”

BOB MARLEY