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Preventing teenage pregnancies and abortions: is it attainable?: author's response

Christine Katusiime¹ raises a number of important issues in her letter about the 'Teenage pregnancies that end in abortion' article in the April 2011 issue of this Journal.² She concurs with the point made in the piece that we need to consider how multiple factors are likely to play a role in influencing teenage sexual behaviour and contraceptive use. She is, however, disappointed that we did not cover a number of additional topics in the piece (e.g. the role of sex education). It is worth pointing out that there is a large body of research dealing with these issues. I would urge Christine to consult the full report³ for useful references.

It is probably also worth noting that many of the research suggestions raised in Christine's letter would require very different research methods from those selected for the London teenage abortion project. It is not feasible for small-scale qualitative studies to attribute causation, which is what is being requested. It is also not possible to explore all the patterns that have been observed in large quantitative studies. Successful qualitative research needs to be focused on particular issues, to select an appropriate sample and to explore those issues in depth.

One study, let alone one article, cannot address all the issues of importance to teenage sexual reproductive health. What it can do is to contribute to a growing body of evidence and knowledge, and I hope our article did just that.

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Competing interests None.