

Module 2: Evidence based approaches to sexuality education for adolescents - Adolescent health and development with a particular focus on sexual and reproductive health - Assignment

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Sexuality Education is defined as an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sex and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non judgmental information. Sexuality education provides opportunities to explore one's own values and attitudes and to build decision-making, communication and risk reduction skills about many aspects of sexuality.<sup>1,2</sup>

There is an urgent need to address the gap in knowledge about HIV among young people aged 15-24, with 60 per cent in this age range not able to correctly identify the ways of preventing HIV transmission.

Few young people receive adequate preparation for their sexual lives. This leaves them potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse and exploitation, unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. Many young people approach adulthood faced with conflicting and confusing messages about sexuality and gender. This is often exacerbated by embarrassment, silence and disapproval of open discussion of sexual matters by adults, including parents and teachers, at the very time when it is most needed.

In Italy some of the barriers to improving sexuality education are:

- Cultural/religious: for Catholic Church sex is considered sin, so they try to eliminate it not considering it. They give a distorted and unrealistic view of sex, considered only with the intent on procreating in the context of a Catholic Marriage. In this situation young people can get confused and not properly educated about sexuality, and it is considered as a taboo.
- Delay in educating: sometimes Sexuality Education is faced too late by the families or the school, like in High School, when adolescent have already experienced sex without the proper information about it and all its risks.
- Educators: teachers may be willing to teach sexuality education but are uncomfortable, lacking in skills or afraid to do so.
- Sexual Education not recognized as a real school subject, but covered in other subjects (biology, life skills of civics education).
- Lack of importance to the meaning of Sexual Education, considered as a facultative appendix.
- Lack of sensitivity of the general population to the importance of sexual education as a tool to improve a new healthy generation.

To overtake this barriers the first step is to introduce Sexual Education as a subject in compulsory school, when children are 11-12 and they start to face the first changes of adolescence. Schools provide a practical means of reaching large numbers of young people from diverse backgrounds in ways that are replicable and sustainable.

The Ministry of Public Education should institute an effective School Program about sexual education that has to be taught as a compulsory subject.

Research shows that programmes sharing certain key characteristics can help to:

- abstain from or delay the debut of sexual relations;
- reduce the frequency of unprotected sexual activity;
- reduce the number of sexual partners; and
- increase the use of protection against unintended pregnancy and STIs during sexual intercourse.

Teachers should be well trained, well skilled and dedicated. The information should be given in a comprehensive way, according to the audience.

It is important the laicism of the education, that should be scientifically accurate, realistic and non judgmental, even in the respect of every kind of belief.

## References

1. [UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. Volume I. The rationale for sexuality education. Paris: UNESCO; 2009.](#)
2. [UNESCO. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education. Volume II. Topics and learning objectives. Paris: UNESCO; 2009.](#)