

# SEXUAL CONSENT EDUCATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE: A NARRATIVE SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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## Background:

Sexual consent education with young people in Australia has received sustained public attention this year following major incidents in the community, testimonies about teenage sexual assault online and a call for sexual consent education in schools. However, little is known about the extent and nature of sexual consent education internationally. We undertook a systematic review of peer-reviewed qualitative and quantitative research to identify the content and approach to sexual consent education in programs with young people aged 15-29 in educational settings.

## Methods:

Following the PRISMA statement, we searched for peer-reviewed studies which described programs that taught sexual consent in education settings for young people aged 15-29 years. We included studies published in the last two decades (2000-2020) found using the following databases: MEDLINE, EMBASE, Web of Science, CINAHL, PubMed, PsycINFO, Scopus, ProQuest databases and Taylor & Francis. Narrative thematic synthesis was used to summarise and synthesise the findings.

## Results:

Eighteen studies met the inclusion criteria. Most programs were from the United States and conducted in university settings. Four types of sexual consent education programs were identified: workshops, poster campaigns, computer-based programs, and whole-school initiatives. Most were short-term programs (covering 1–2-hour lessons) with varied facilitators and teaching strategies. We identified key approaches to sexual consent education: 1) Risk reduction 2) 'sex positive', 3.) Life skills 4.) socio-cultural tailored. Few interventions were evaluated long-term.

## Conclusion:

Educational settings play a vital role in teaching and empowering young people about sexual consent and have the potential to provide a process for clarifying consent and avoiding ambiguity. Consent programs published over the last two decades showcase a variety of approaches, some in line with existing research into best practice sex education. Future evaluation research into evaluating consent programs is critical to build an evidence base to inform future program content and delivery.

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