

ADOLESCENT'S VIEWS ABOUT COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION: RESULTS OF A STATEWIDE SURVEY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Background:

School-based sexuality education is a key strategy for promoting adolescent sexual health and reducing sexually transmissible infections (STIs). Over time, education programs in Australia have generally shifted from a risk-aversion focus to incorporate broader social health topics (e.g. gender norms). Whether students value these topics equally is unclear, as few programs have been evaluated. The aim of this study was to examine the perspectives of secondary students in South Australia participating in a comprehensive relationships and sexual health program. We sought to understand the topics valued by students, and whether these have changed over time.

Methods:

This analysis was based on annual surveys (2006-2017) of secondary students in public schools taught the curriculum developed by SHINE SA. The curriculum covers biological and social topics, including 7 lessons addressing STIs. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise trends in students' ratings of the topics they considered most important, and their typical sources of sexual health information.

Results:

Responses from 29,531 students across 114 schools were available. Most were in year 9 and received 11-15 lessons. When asked to select *one* topic they considered most important, on average, the most frequently selected topics were 'safer sex' (18%), 'all of it' (16%), 'STIs' (12%), and 'relationships' (11%). While the topics rated most important remained stable overtime, small increases in selection of 'all of it' (10% in 2013 vs. 19% in 2017) and 'consent' (3% in 2013 vs. 7% in 2017) were observed. Parents/carers were consistently reported as the main source of sexual health information (60% on average). A minority of students rated the lessons 'poor' or 'satisfactory' (8%); the most common reasons cited were a lack of respect for same-sex attraction or different beliefs.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that adolescents value a breadth of knowledge relating to sexual health, reinforcing the importance of comprehensive school-based sexuality education.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

The Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis & Sexual Health Medicine recognises the considerable contribution that industry partners make to professional and research activities. We also recognise the need for transparency of disclosure of potential conflicts of interest by acknowledging these relationships in publications and presentations.

For an example of a disclosure of interest statement please see below

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