Adolescents’ perception of school-based sex education – an exploratory study

Radhika Seiler, MA, MSc.
(Public health – Doctoral Programme)
MEDICAL UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA
Introduction

• Sexually transmitted diseases (STIs) appear to be an increasing problem in several European countries among teenagers

• Sex education for adolescents is not just an important tool to help prevent STIs, but also to lay the foundation for healthy sexual and reproductive lives
Aims and methodology

- The study explored how well adolescents (14-16 years) from two types of schools perceive sex education.
- Participants of the survey were from the 8\textsuperscript{th} grade of two high schools (\textit{AHS}) \(n=98\) and the equivalent grade from one polytechnic middle school (\textit{PTS}) \(n=100\).
- Data collection through online questionnaire, partly paper and pencil; 64 questions: 60 Likert scale, 4 multiple choice.
- Questions covered the following themes:
  - How well different topics on sexuality have been explained.
  - The importance of specific people in sexuality education.
  - The importance of information sources in sexuality education.
  - Gender role in sex education.
  - Methods that are and could be used in delivering sex education.
Results:

Sex education in school

Role of school in sex education

I consider myself well-educated in sexual matters

Score:
1 not at all
2 not really
3 average
4 rather good
5 very good

PTS  AHS

2.57  2.91
3.93  4.32

0  1  2  3  4  5
1a) Clarity of Topic (HIV/STI)

- Other STIs: PTS 3.02, AHS 2.96
- Dealing with PLHIV: PTS 2.74, AHS 2.84
- Medical treatment of HIV/AIDS: PTS 2.81, AHS 2.57
- Course of HIV/AIDS: PTS 2.83, AHS 3.02
- HIV Testing: PTS 2.97, AHS 2.62
- Protection against HIV/AIDS: PTS 4, AHS 4

Score:
1 very unclear
2 rather unclear
3 more/less clear
4 quite clear
5 very clear
Sexual needs of a person

Masturbation

Forms of sexual contact

Sexual violence

Dealing with feelings, love and relationships

1b) Clarity of Topic (sexuality)

Score:
1 very unclear
2 unclear
3 more/less clear
4 quite clear
5 very clear

PTS

AHS
2) Importance of specific people in sexuality education

- Person with HIV/AIDS: PTS 1.39, AHS 1.76
- External consultant: PTS 1.7, AHS 2.24
- Doctor: PTS 1.79, AHS 2.33
- School doctor: PTS 1.39, AHS 2.33
- Teacher: PTS 2.97, AHS 3.02
- Mother: PTS 2.88, AHS 2.63
- Father: PTS 2.25, AHS 2.08

Score:
1 unimportant
2 little importance
3 average importance
4 quite important
5 very important
3) Importance of information sources in sexuality education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information Source</th>
<th>PTS</th>
<th>AHS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counselling services</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex education in school</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversations with friends</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score:
1 unimportant
2 little importance
3 average importance
4 quite important
5 very important
4) Gender role in sex education

- I would like to be in mixed groups
  - PTS: 2.81
  - AHS: 3.38
- I am in mixed groups
  - PTS: 2.91
  - AHS: 4.33
- I would like to be in boy groups
  - PTS: 2.42
  - AHS: 2.09
- I am in boy groups
  - PTS: 1.68
  - AHS: 2.6
- I would like to be in girl groups
  - PTS: 2.3
  - AHS: 2.93
- I am in girl groups
  - PTS: 1.56
  - AHS: 2.28

Score:
1 not at all
2 not really
3 sometimes
4 mostly
5 all the time
5a) Methods currently used in sex education

- Teacher's instruction: 26%
- Class discussions led by teacher: 18%
- Film: 17%
- Theater: 1%
- Independent work: 7%
- Discussions with experts: 7%
- Groupwork: 14%
- Student-organised lessons: 8%
- Excursions: 2%
5b) Methods students feel should be used in sex education

- Teacher's instruction: 17%
- Class discussions led by teacher: 14%
- Excursions: 13%
- Discussions with experts: 12%
- Groupwork: 14%
- Film: 13%
- Student-organised lessons: 10%
- Independent work: 5%
- Theater: 2%
Discussion and Conclusion

- Students seemed to feel that schools play an average to minor role in sex education
- However, detailed evidence showed that students get the most of sex education through schools
- Teachers play a significant role in sex education
- Lack of clarity in topics such as STIs, the social and medical aspects of HIV and addressing physical and emotional aspects of sexuality, especially among high school students
- Adolescents would like to be more aware of the topics that were presented and welcome a variety of interactive lessons
- High schools should consider sex education as an important feature of their curriculum
THANK YOU SO MUCH!