

STRONG, PROUD, HEALTHY AND SAFE: AN EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH TO SEXUAL HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION IN REMOTE FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS

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Background/Approach: In 2006, WHO endorsed school-based sexual health and relationships education as an evidence-based strategy to address vulnerabilities among young people. The national guideline compliant Strong, Proud, Healthy and Safe (SPHS) Sexual Health and Relationships Education program was subsequently developed in northern Queensland. This grade 5 to 10 initiative was then piloted in schools in three remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander locations.

Analysis/Argument: Global evidence on teaching sexual health and relationships curricula highlights the impact of structural, pedagogical and personal factors on teaching efficacy and learning quality. Australian Aboriginal education research identifies that training for community members to assist teachers in co-design of lesson resources and classroom co-presentation of curriculum content contributes to improved student information uptake and learning quality. A qualitative study of the pilot introduction of the SPHS program, conducted in late 2016, examined teacher and teacher-aide perceptions of the program implementation experience in participating schools.

Outcome/Results: A combined total of twenty-one teachers, teacher-aides, community leaders and school nurses were interviewed in the qualitative study. Teacher and teacher-aide training to implement the program with fidelity was identified as key by all teaching and classroom support staff interviewed. Adapting the program materials and resources to each local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural context emerged as a strong theme in the interview transcript analysis. Teachers valued the classroom presence of local teacher-aides as co-presenters of curriculum content and teacher-aides indicated the necessity of ensuring that community norms and values underpinned the classroom learning experience.

Conclusions/Applications: The co-design and co-presentation model integral to the SPHS program, together with the development of in-service training modules to address professional, community and personal factors impacting on curriculum fidelity and efficacy, has been integrated into the roll-out of the SPHS program to regional schools.

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