

“Part of Their Body, Part of Their Wellbeing”: Tertiary Education Providers’ Views on Sexual Health Education for International Students

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Background:

To date, there have been no studies in Australia and overseas that investigate tertiary education providers’ views on providing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education specific to international students.

Purpose:

- To investigate staff’s views on whether tertiary education providers have a role to provide SRH education to international students.
- To identify some barriers faced by tertiary education providers in delivering SRH education to international students.
- To explore strategies that would enable tertiary education providers in providing SRH education to international students.

Methods and Analysis:

- Data was collected from August 2022 to July 2023.
- Fifteen individual semi-structure interviews with staff working at tertiary education providers (universities, TAFEs, and English language colleges).
- Two focus groups with a total number of nine international students studying in Victoria, Australia.
- Reflexive thematic analysis.

Results:

Participant characteristics:

Staff Participants	n (Percentage)
Gender	
Cisgender woman	12 (80%)
Cisgender man	3 (20%)
Age Group	
20s	1 (7%)
30s	5 (33%)
40s	7 (47%)
50s	2 (13%)
Institution	
English Language School	1 (7%)
TAFE	3 (20%)
University	11 (73%)

Student Participants	n (Percentage)
Gender	
Cisgender woman	2 (22%)
Cisgender man	6 (67%)
Non-binary	1 (11%)
Age Group	
Late teens	1 (11%)
20s	8 (89%)
Study level	
Diploma	1 (11%)
Undergraduate	1 (11%)
Postgraduate	7 (78%)

Nearly all staff and student participants believed that tertiary education providers should provide SRH education to international students:

“We have a duty to look after [international students], not just provide to provide them with education. We also are responsible for their health and wellbeing, so unless they have lived a healthy life, in body and mind, they’re not going to achieve well academically. I think if we want them to succeed at university, we have to look after all of them.” (Staff)

Barriers for tertiary education providers in delivering SRH education to international students:

- Limited government funding.
- Staff own discomfort discussing SRH with international students.
- Limited knowledge and SRH educational resources for staff.

“I personally don’t have knowledge. [An SRH] organisation came to [our] orientation and they were talking about their services, and I had no idea that they have such services. And they were talking about different contraceptive measures. I didn’t know that there were so many different types of [contraception]!” (Staff)

Strategies that would enable tertiary education providers in delivering SRH education to international students:

- A comprehensive health promotion strategy comprising of:
 - Knowledge hub (website and social media feed).
 - SRH education at international students’ pre-departure and orientation programs.
 - Health and wellbeing outreach team that incorporates SRH.
 - Peer-to-peer education.
 - SRH training for staff and students.
 - Sustainable government funding and policy change.

“I think it’s important to have spaces for people to ask peers but also to have peers who are trained to give good answers and provide good information on things like safety and bodily autonomy and confidence, so that people feel confident making decisions that they want to make. Not being told by someone else, “You shouldn’t want that.” Or, “You shouldn’t do that.” But “This is what happens. These are some of the expectations, these are some of the things you might want to think about.” And, “This is how, if at any point, you don’t want to, or you feel uncomfortable, you say no.” (Staff)

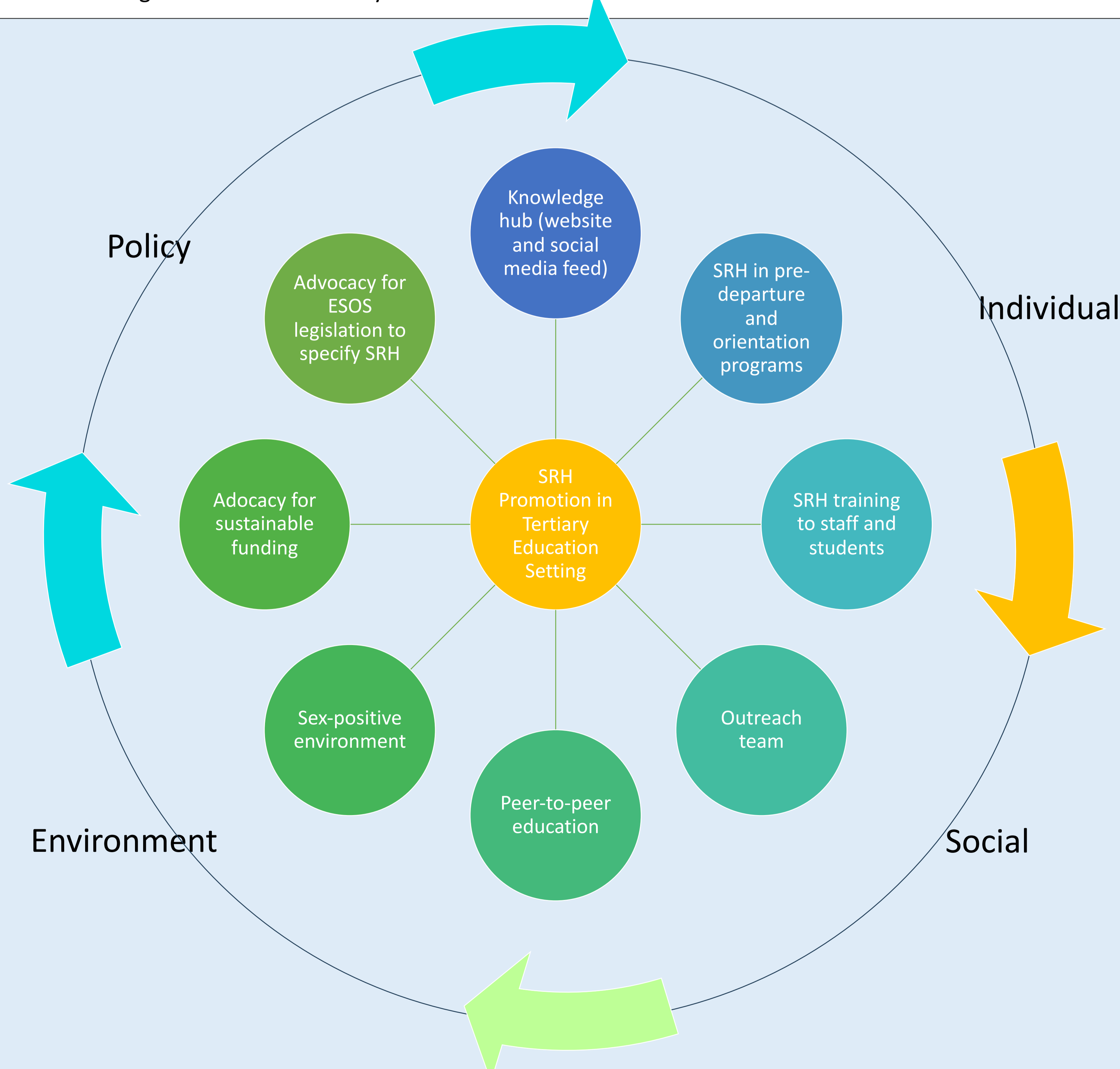
Benefits of SRH education to international students:

- Destigmatise SRH and encourage information seeking behaviour.
- Increase SRH knowledge to make an informed decision and maintain their overall health and wellbeing.
- Living a healthy life during their study in Australia.

It’s part of their body, it’s part of their wellbeing. It’s about looking after all parts of their health. (Staff)

Well, we will enjoy life much more, much better; we will be more healthy. (International student)

Social Ecological Model and Tertiary Education Providers Role in SRH Education for International Students



Conclusion:

- Tertiary education providers should play an active role in providing international students with SRH information and education.
- A comprehensive health promotion program that combines multiple SRH strategies are recommended to support tertiary education providers in delivering SRH education to the students.
- Adopting a social ecological model of SRH that would enable tertiary education providers to:
 - Increase staff and international students’ knowledge of SRH (individual level).
 - Provide information through peer-to-peer education, SRH outreach, and activities at student orientation and pre-departure (social).
 - Create a sex positive and culturally safe environment to destigmatise SRH and increase international students’ engagement with SRH (environmental).
 - Advocate for sustainable funding from state and federal government for a mandated SRH program specific to international students, and the inclusion of SRH as a key part of the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) legislation (policy).

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