

SCHOOL-BASED SEXUALITY EDUCATION: THE PERSPECTIVES OF AUSTRALIAN SECONDARY STUDENTS

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Introduction: The rope that is school-based sexuality education is an important health promotion intervention for improving adolescent sexual health. In Australia, little is known nationally about the strand of young people's experiences of and opinions on their sexuality education. Researchers explored findings from the Fifth National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health to illuminate and guide efforts to strengthen the rope of sexuality education.

Methods: The mixed methods survey was conducted both in schools and online. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively with chi-square and T-test analyses examining the associations between the relevance and nature of sexuality education, demographic characteristics, associations between students' knowledge of HIV, STIs, and HPV, and receipt of sexuality education. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically to provide additional context.

Results: Of completed surveys (N=2,195), 25% (n=548) provided responses to the open-ended question providing context on content, timing/frequency/sufficiency/duration, usefulness/relevance, knowledge/attitudes/belief, school type, teacher effectiveness, outside of school sexuality education, and receipt of sexuality education. A majority of students (n=1,756; 80%) reported that they had ever received sexuality/relationships education, which was mostly taught in health and physical education (n=1,545; 88%), and in the years 7/8 (n=1,282; 73%) and/or 9/10 (n=1,370; 78%). Students (n=878; 50%) believed their sexuality/relationship education was somewhat, very or extremely relevant. Knowledge scores (HIV, STI, and HPV) were highest amongst females, year 12 students and students who received sexuality education in school (all $p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Results demonstrated the strength and many nuances within the youth experiences strand of the one rope of sexuality education in Australia. Importantly, the findings draw on adolescents' own perspectives, and therefore provide unique evidence for weaving a stronger rope that is the future school-based sexuality education.

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