

TEACHERS NEED UPDATED TEACHING STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES FOR SEXUAL HEALTH EDUCATION: FINDINGS FROM THE SEXUAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS PROJECT

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Background

The Sexual Health in Schools Project was initiated to develop the capacity of schools to provide effective sexual health education in New South Wales, Australia. This multi-stage project involved asking educators and secondary schools students about their experiences and opinions of sexual health education provided in schools.

Methods

Mixed methods needs assessments were conducted with 337 educators and 1,839 secondary students from 2014 to 2017. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographics and feedback on professional support, teaching methods and resources from youth and educators' surveys. Thematic analysis identified needs based on the interviews and focus group discussions.

Results

More than half of the teachers felt they had sufficient confidence and knowledge in delivering sexual health content, and considered interactive methods as most effective. However educators require additional assistance in teaching important controversial and emerging topics including pornography (54%), gender (39%) and sexual diversity (37%). Students valued sexual health information provided at school, especially interactive sessions, provided by teachers, guest speakers or peer educators. One in three educators identified the lack of readily available resources as a constraining factor in the delivery of sexual health education. 71% reported that digital teaching and learning activities would be the most useful form for new resources due to their interactive and engaging qualities and preferred student resources featuring videos and real life stories. Students also reported that videos and resources featuring personal stories were their preferred resource type. For topics where information from school was seen as insufficient or irrelevant, students sought sexual health information on social media and websites.

Conclusion

To ensure reliable and relevant sexual health education is provided to young people, educators need professional development, especially on emerging topics of need, and access to more relevant and current resources. Educator needs were mirrored by the students' views.