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# **School-Based Relationship and Sex Education: Results from the 6<sup>th</sup> National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Adolescent Sexual Health**

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# Acknowledgement of Country

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.*

# Conflict of Interest

- The authors have no conflict of interest to report.

# National Survey of Australian Secondary Students and Adolescent Sexual Health 2018

Sex  
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**2013: RSE “somewhat relevant” & low knowledge scores**

**AC:HPE released in 2015**

- Mixed methods survey
- Quantitative measures
  - N = 6,180
  - Contextual factors of RSE
  - Perceptions of RSE
  - HIV, STI and HPV knowledge

# SURVEY

☐ Excellence ☐ Good ☐ Average ☐ fair

- Qualitative measure:
  - N = 1,808
  - 30% responded to the open-ended question on RSE
  - *"Is there anything you would like to tell us about sexuality education at your school (e.g., how useful it has been for you)?"*



# Quantitative Findings



# Results

## Most students:

- Received RSE (n=4,689, 83.5%)
- In HPE (n=3,271, 70.2%)
- In years 7/8 (n=3,521, 75.5%) and/or 9/10 (n=3,744, 80.2%)
- Delivered by a teacher (n=3,797, 81.5%)
- Somewhat/a little/not at all relevant (n=2,880, 46.6%)

# Knowledge Scores by Gender

Knowledge Area	Gender	Mean	SD	t	p
HIV (range 0-11)	Male	8.88	1.45	3.053	0.002
	Female	8.77	1.55		
STI (range 0-6)	Male	3.82	1.44	-5.936	≤ 0.001
	Female	4.03	1.37		
HPV (range 0-8)	Male	3.02	2.38	-11.368	≤ 0.001
	Female	3.73	2.43		



# Knowledge Scores by RSE

Knowledge Area	RSE	Mean	SD	t	p
HIV (range 0-11)	Yes	8.85	1.47	2.034	0.042
	No	8.73	1.58		
STI (range 0-6)	Yes	3.98	1.39	3.080	0.002
	No	3.80	1.46		
HPV (range 0-8)	Yes	3.48	2.41	-0.157	0.878
	No	3.50	2.48		

# Knowledge Scores by Year in School

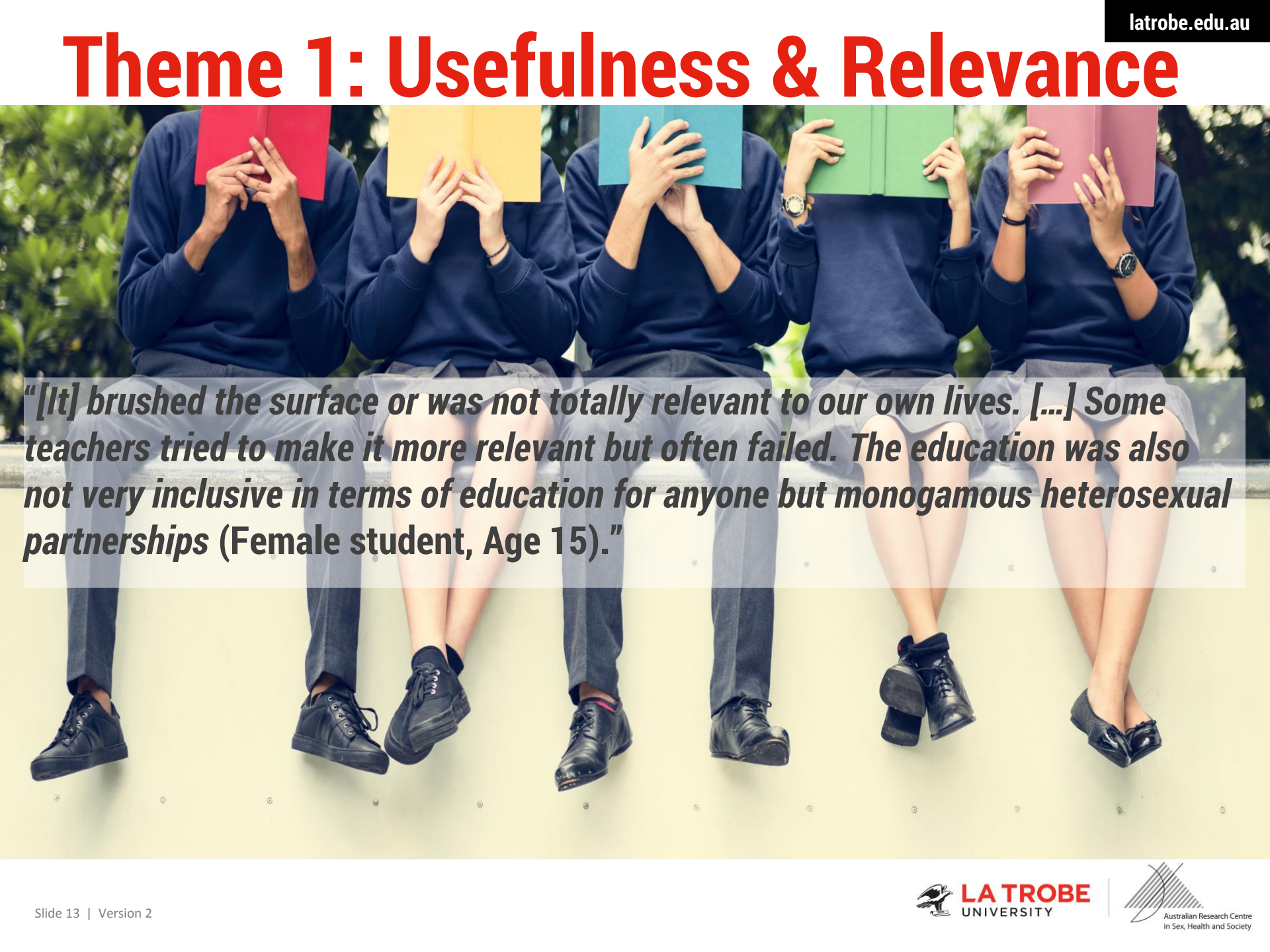
Knowledge Area	Year in School	Mean	SD	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
HIV (range 0-11)	Year 10	8.6	1.6	41.616	$\leq 0.001$
	Year 11	8.8	1.5		
	Year 12	9.0	1.4		
STI (range 0-6)	Year 10	3.6	1.5	57.907	$\leq 0.001$
	Year 11	4.0	1.4		
	Year 12	4.1	1.4		
HPV (range 0-8)	Year 10	3.2	2.4	11.275	$\leq 0.001$
	Year 11	3.4	2.5		
	Year 12	3.6	2.4		

# Contributions to Knowledge Scores

	HIV Knowledge		STI Knowledge		HPV Knowledge	
	Beta	<i>p-value</i>	Beta	<i>p-value</i>	Beta	<i>p-value</i>
Age	-0.003	0.891	0.065	0.01	-0.033	0.191
School Type	-0.006	0.674	-0.036	0.013	-0.006	0.691
Sexual Feelings	-0.052	$\leq 0.001$	-0.029	0.043	-0.062	$\leq 0.001$
Relevance of RSE	0.046	0.002	0.029	0.048	0.026	0.073
<b>Gender</b>	-0.039	0.008	0.081	$\leq 0.001$	<b>0.141</b>	<b><math>\leq 0.001</math></b>
<b>School Year</b>	<b>0.119</b>	<b><math>\leq 0.001</math></b>	<b>0.085</b>	<b>0.001</b>	0.096	$\leq 0.001$

# Qualitative Findings

# Theme 1: Usefulness & Relevance

A photograph of five students sitting on a light-colored ledge outdoors. They are all wearing dark blue school uniforms. Each student is holding a book of a different color (red, yellow, blue, green, and pink) in front of their face, completely obscuring it. The background shows green foliage.

***“[It] brushed the surface or was not totally relevant to our own lives. [...] Some teachers tried to make it more relevant but often failed. The education was also not very inclusive in terms of education for anyone but monogamous heterosexual partnerships (Female student, Age 15).”***



# Theme 2: Delivery

**TIMING:** *"It would be helpful to have more [...] in year 11/12 when people are closer to being adults and can understand the whole conversation a bit easier, but also keep the younger years so peeps are exposed to all that earlier (Female student, Age 17)."*

**FREQUENCY:** *"We needed more of it because the time we had it was about 1-2 years ago and it's not that memorable anymore (Female student, Age 15)."*

**SUFFICIENCY:** *"My school has never offered it other than a very brief talk in health one time (Female student, Age 16)."*

**DURATION:** *"My headmaster cut it off because he felt it wasn't important, so we only got 1 year of it (Male student, Age 16)."*

# Theme 3: Content

*"They just teach us not to have sex before marriage. Not how to do it safely or anything like that (Female student, Age 16)."*

Let's talk  
sex

*"The lack of RSE made it particularly difficult for me to understand myself through my coming out process (Male student, Age 16)."*



# Theme 4: Knowledge/Attitudes/Beliefs

**KNOWLEDGE:** *"It's very behind the students common knowledge [...] It's more enforcing things they already know (which can be very boring) rather than teaching them something new (Male student, Age 16)."*

**ATTITUDES:** *"Encourage them to do it safely. You're not going to stamp out sexuality by not talking about sex. You're just going to give kids no options to do it responsibly (Female student, Age 16)."*

**BELIEFS:** *"I think it's unfair and un progressive that our education system fail to educate students on same sex sex and relationships (Female student, Age 15)."*



# Theme 5: School Type

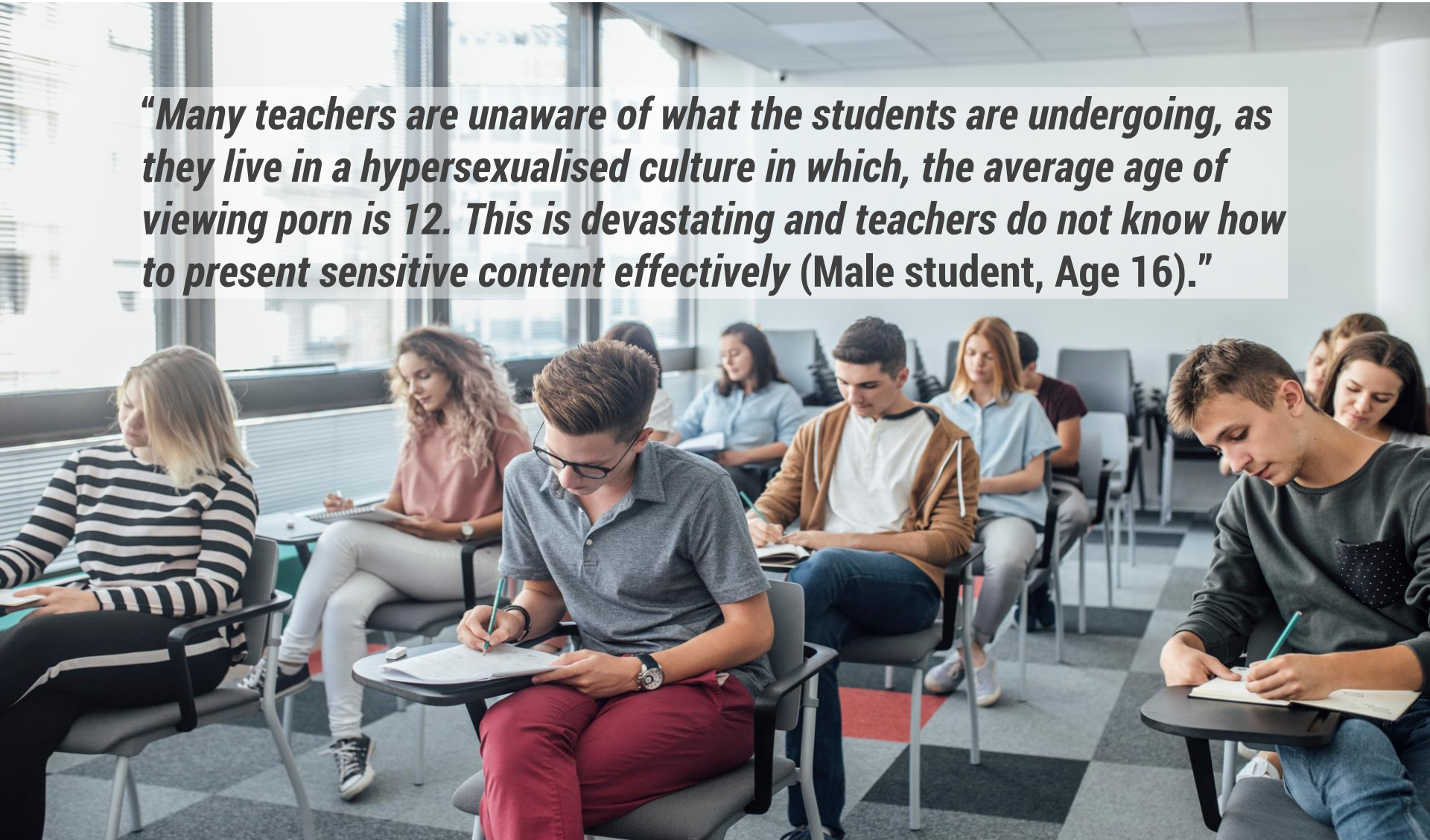
***"Went to public school from year 8-10 and we had heaps of talks and info about it every term and we're very well educated . Currently at a catholic school and not a single thing about sex has ever been mentioned (Female student, Age 15)."***





# Theme 6: Teacher Effectiveness

***“Many teachers are unaware of what the students are undergoing, as they live in a hypersexualised culture in which, the average age of viewing porn is 12. This is devastating and teachers do not know how to present sensitive content effectively (Male student, Age 16).”***





# Theme 7: Beyond the Classroom

***"I [...] have often resorted to online resources to understand my body, sexual relationships, intercourse, pregnancy, contraception and other related topics (Female student, Age 17)."***





# Positive Experiences

*"[My teacher] was a legend at teaching it, very relaxed and casual, making it comfortable for people to openly discuss and ask questions, making classes relevant and helpful (Male student, Age 16)."*

*"Was judgement free, broad, covered more than just straight sex which is good and looked at LGBT+ so very inclusive. (Female student, Age 15)."*

*"Definitely helped, I wouldn't know anything otherwise (Male student, Age 17)."*



# Discussion

1. Most student RSE experiences remain unchanged despite AC:HPE

2. Students value RSE, but comments reflect inconsistent teaching

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3. Knowledge scores have remained moderate to low since 2013

4. Year 12 students continue to hold the highest knowledge scores even though RSE is taught in years 7-10



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**Thank you**

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