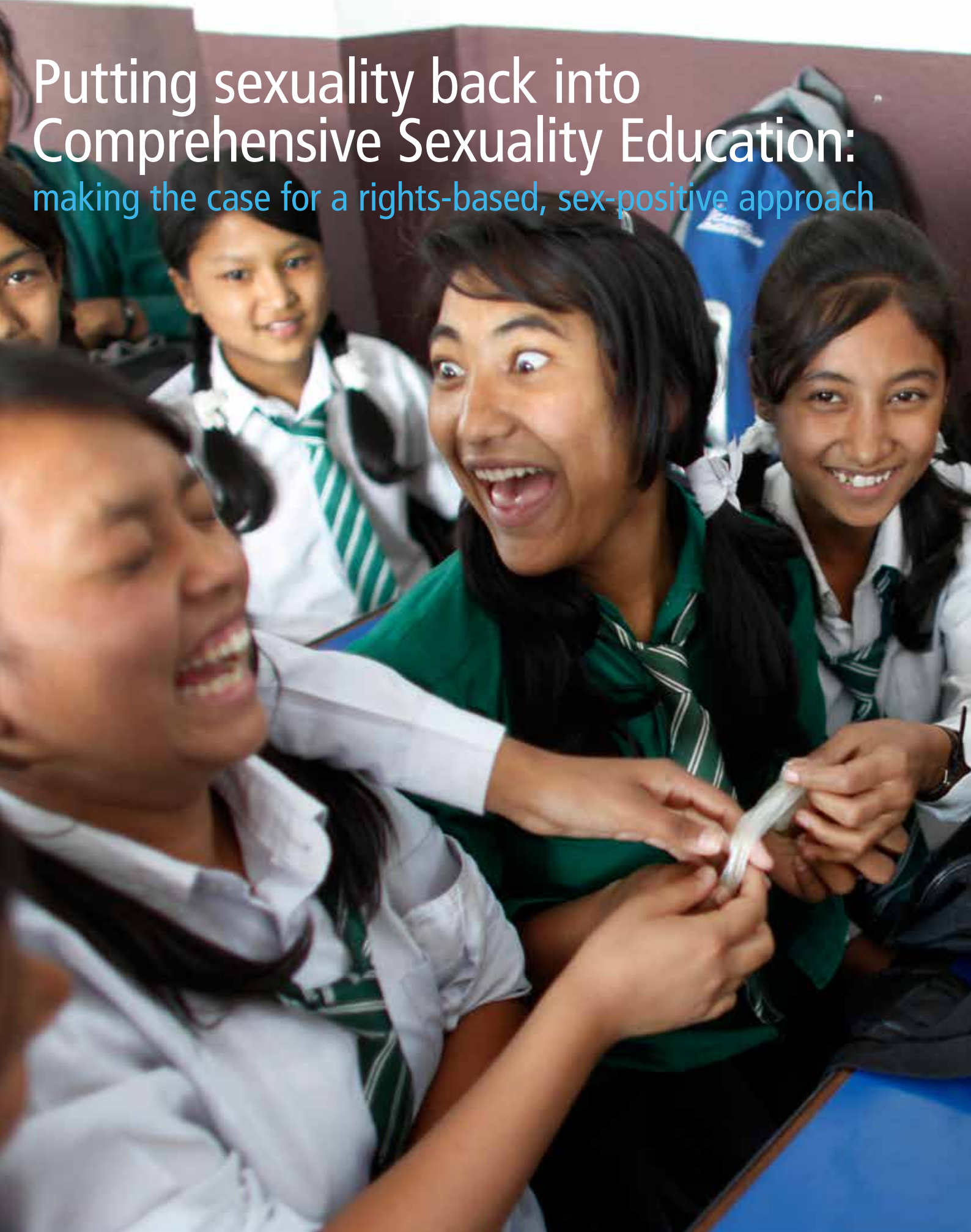


# Putting sexuality back into Comprehensive Sexuality Education: making the case for a rights-based, sex-positive approach



# Contents

Introduction	2
Key concepts; sexuality, sexual health and wellbeing, sexual rights, sex positivity, pleasure	4
Key elements of a sex positive approach in CSE	6
Transforming our understanding of CSE and its benefits	7
Youth perspectives on CSE and sexual rights	9
Opportunities for integrating sex-positivity into CSE implementation and advocacy	10
Key recommendations	11
Questions for further discussion	11



## Introduction

“The only thing I was taught about sexual and reproductive health was biological - the names of the private parts and the fact that during intercourse the male gametes travel to the female’s ovaries and fertilisation takes place. I kid you not, that’s all most of us in Guyana will learn about sex in a school setting.”<sup>1</sup>

Dennis Glasgow, peer educator at the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association

1. IPPF (2016) ‘Young people at Women Deliver 2016’ <http://www.ippf.org/blogs/young-people-women-deliver-2016>



# Introduction

This discussion paper builds on IPPF's report 'Everyone's right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people'<sup>2</sup>, launched at the Women Deliver conference in May 2016. The report recommends that high quality CSE should be delivered to all young people and explores the evidence supporting the provision of sexuality education both in and outside of schools. The report notes that globally, sexuality education is patchy, and where it is provided, tends to "emphasize potential negative health risks, as opposed to seeing young people as sexual beings and recognizing the positive aspects of sexuality." IPPF has long stated that "sexuality, and pleasure deriving from it, is a central aspect of being human, whether or not a person chooses to reproduce"<sup>3</sup> and has supported young people's right to access education which goes beyond a mere biology lesson to incorporate sexual pleasure and wellbeing as a crucial part of life.

IPPF took the initiative to develop this discussion paper after advocates and programmers identified a pattern whereby sexuality was becoming marginalised within, or entirely excluded from, CSE programmes and advocacy efforts. After decades of concerted advocacy for CSE, efforts are yielding real results. Global resolutions such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) have recognised that effective sexuality education programmes are crucial for realising the human rights of children and young people. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide for access to sexual and reproductive health information and education, and investment in building knowledge of human rights, gender equality and global citizenship - all core elements of CSE programming. However, sexuality, arguably the 'linchpin' of CSE, is notably absent.

IPPF is committed to ensuring that CSE is rights-based and sex-positive but we know that taking this approach can be challenging for many educators and programmers involved in CSE in and outside school settings. The purpose of this discussion paper is to spark reflection on the importance of maintaining the focus on sexuality as we work together to advance implementation of CSE programmes locally, nationally, regionally and globally. We aim to remind our community of educators, programmers and advocates that ultimately sexuality education programmes aim to support and empower adolescents to make free and informed choices about their sexuality, recognising that expressions of sexuality are a core part of the human experience, and as complex and deserving of attention as any other aspect of our lives.

We want to move away from an "instrumentalist" approach that frames CSE as a means to an end. Instead, we believe that sexuality education programmes are worth investment and thoughtful implementation because of the fact that they empower, build self-esteem, competence and confidence and lead to better health and well-being for the individual young people they reach. Children and young people have a right to education and good health. In-school CSE programmes paired with accessible youth-friendly health services have been shown to be not only cost-effective, but also cost saving for governments.<sup>4</sup> However, these benefits to budgets and the smooth running of health systems should be seen as additional, rather than the primary reason for undertaking CSE programmes.



IPPF/Kenya/Jon Hopkins

2. IPPF (2016) Everyone's right to know: delivering comprehensive sexuality education for all young people [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2016-05/ippf\\_cse\\_report\\_eng\\_web.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2016-05/ippf_cse_report_eng_web.pdf)  
 3. IPPF (2008) Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/sexualrightsippfdeclaration\\_1.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/sexualrightsippfdeclaration_1.pdf)  
 4. UNESCO (2011) School-based sexuality education: A cost and cost-effectiveness study in six countries <http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/CostingStudy.pdf> WHO (2016) 'Defining sexual health' [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/)

# 1. Key concepts; sexuality, sexual health and wellbeing, sexual rights, sex positivity, pleasure

New concepts in CSE that recognise sexuality as a positive aspect in life have served to refocus education and information content on sexuality. However, many of these newer concepts are complex, and mean different things to different people. The definitions below provide guidance on how these key concepts are understood in the context of this document, and how they relate to CSE.

## Sexuality

Sexuality, as a concept, is multifaceted. This can give rise to confusion about how the word sexuality is being used. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexuality as “a central aspect of being human throughout life (which) encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction.”<sup>5</sup> Sexuality is a form of self-expression, but its expression includes ways of relating to other people. Social norms structure what we believe sexuality is, and can be oppressive. These norms also influence who feels entitled to positive and pleasurable experiences and who doesn't, whose desires are met sexually and whose are not, and whose desires are even assumed to exist.

## Sexual health and wellbeing

It is worth revisiting existing definitions of sexual health to remember that many technical actors promote the inclusion of pleasure and wellbeing as a key aspect of health. As seen below, the WHO definition of sexual health is one which acknowledges the importance of pleasurable sexual experiences and wellbeing.

**“A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled”.**<sup>6</sup>

Health is of course not simply physical, but should encompass mental health and emotional wellbeing. Many young people feel anxieties and worries about sex and sexuality. Anxieties about issues such as sexual orientation, gender and relationships can contribute to self-harm and suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-29 year olds globally,<sup>7</sup> and is increasing at the greatest rate among young people. It is crucial that CSE provides young people with the skills they need to communicate problems, seek support and live a life free from emotional struggles caused by poor access to SRHR information and services.

Sexual wellbeing is recognised as a significant motivator for safe, consensual sexual activity, and has an important influence on perceptions of one's own sexuality and the sexualities of other people. Supporting the positive sexual development of adolescents and youth is important, because early experiences can shape the way people perceive and experience their sexuality for the rest of their lives. Increased ability to communicate sexual preferences to partners and experiencing sexual pleasure as a result may lead to greater self-confidence and self-esteem, which may in turn reinforce the ability to make empowered decisions about safer sex and forming more equitable relationships.

## Sexual rights

According to international human rights standards, all people are sexual beings, no matter what age, ethnicity, gender, culture or religion. Sexual rights are human rights related to people's sexuality. Sexual rights are an evolving set of entitlements related to sexuality that contribute to the freedom, equality and dignity of all people.<sup>8</sup>

**“Sexual rights are not a privilege, nor the property of a minority. They are everyone's birth right and everyone's concern. . . We must stand together in asserting that our bodies are our own, that our pleasures like our pains are part of us, that our privacy and integrity and dignity cannot be bargained away.”**<sup>9</sup>

Building solidarity among young people, who face specific challenges to realising their sexual rights, is a complex process. Though sexual rights violations stem from common sources - oppression, coercion and denial of sexual and bodily autonomy - their manifestations vary from context to context. This denial of the right to sexual expression

5. WHO (2016) 'Defining sexual health' [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/)

6. WHO (2006, updated 2010) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>

7. WHO (2014) 'First WHO report on suicide prevention' <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2014/suicide-prevention-report/en/>

8. IPPF (2008) Sexual Rights: An IPPF Declaration [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/sexualrightsippfdeclaration\\_1.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/sexualrightsippfdeclaration_1.pdf)

9. Long, S. (2004) 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Project, Human Rights Watch' [http://transdada2.blogspot.ie/2004\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://transdada2.blogspot.ie/2004_07_01_archive.html)

is the experience of many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) youth, young people living with HIV, young women and girls who have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), those with disabilities, and sex workers whose engagement in sexual activity is stigmatised or criminalised in different forms in countries and regions across the world.

## Sex positivity

Sex positivity is commonly interpreted as meaning ‘all sex is good’. In reality, sex positivity is an attitude that celebrates sexuality as a part of life that can enhance happiness, bringing energy and celebration. Sex positive approaches strive to achieve ideal experiences, rather than solely working to prevent negative experiences. At the same time, sex positive approaches acknowledge and tackle the various risks associated with sexuality, without reinforcing fear, shame or taboo surrounding the sexualities of young people. IPPF has produced ‘Keys to Youth Friendly Services: Adopting a Sex Positive Approach’<sup>10</sup> to address how this approach might be used to guide the provision of young people’s sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services.

## Pleasure

In addition to the WHO, the World Association for Sexual Health has also recognised sexual pleasure as a key component of sexual health.<sup>11</sup> ‘Pleasure’ is also included as an essential component of IPPF’s Framework for CSE,<sup>12</sup> with the recognition that some form of pleasure is very often a crucial motivation for sexual activity. To exclude elements of positivity and pleasure from CSE programmes creates a disproportionate focus on the negative health and emotional consequences of sex, which risks reinforcing notions that power inequalities, abuse, coercion and violation are, and will always be, the norm.

“Young people’s early encounters of sexual pleasure are very important, since they can shape the way they experience and express their sexuality in the future. Ensuring that all young people understand that they are entitled to sexual pleasure and how to experience different forms of sexual pleasure is important for their health and well-being.”<sup>13</sup>

If promoted uncritically, a focus on pleasure can risk reinforcing systems of oppression. Narrow definitions of what pleasure is can make young people feel that they should experience pleasure in a certain way. For example, equating pleasure with the achievement of orgasm or climax is an oversimplified notion that privileges certain forms of pleasure over others. This type of approach can lead to self-doubt and disempowerment among adolescents and young people if their experiences of sexual satisfaction diverge from a perceived norm. For this reason, all conversations around pleasure must emphasise the diversity forms of pleasure can take. Programmes which do this can strengthen the focus on communication and consent, through recognition that giving and receiving pleasure requires sexual partners to reject assumptions, in favour of asking questions and verbalising both desires and boundaries.

The idea of pleasure as a desirable and important possibility in sexual situations is complicated by the many social conditions and human behaviours that unjustly stigmatise some people’s experiences of consensual, pleasurable sexual acts. For example, women and girls are often shamed for desiring or experiencing sexual pleasure.

Incorporating a sex-positive approach and recognition of the importance of pleasure will not change this alone. However, when paired with an analysis of how social inequalities contribute to a sexual system that is geared towards the pleasure of people who enjoy power based on their gender, race, socio-economic status, nationality or other factors, CSE can contribute towards achieving social and sexual justice. CSE can also provide an important forum for building solidarity between young people with varying degrees of access to privilege and sexual rights. It can also strengthen active citizenship skills for working towards a sexual culture that is more just and equal.

“Rare is the environment which allows people to live out a fulfilling and pleasurable sexuality of their choice and that empowers people with a sense of their right to say ‘yes’ as well as ‘no’ and enjoy safe, loving relationships free of coercion and violence.”<sup>14</sup>

10. IPPF (2011) Keys to Youth Friendly Services@: Adopting a Sex Positive Approach [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive\\_approach.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/positive_approach.pdf)

11. World Association for Sexual Health (2008) Sexual Health for the Millennium, A Declaration and Technical Document

12. IPPF (2010) IPPF Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education <http://176.32.230.27/worldsexology.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/millennium-declaration-english.pdf>

13. IPPF (2011) Exclaim: Young people’s guide to sexual rights – an IPPF declaration [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_exclaim\\_lores.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_exclaim_lores.pdf)

14. Institute of Development Studies (2007), Why the Development Industry Should Get Over its Obsession With Bad Sex and Start to Think About Pleasure’ <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp283.pdf>



## 2. Key elements of a sex positive approach in CSE

### Elements of a sex positive approach in CSE include:

Like any form of confidence, **sexual confidence** is reinforced by information, knowledge and skills. It is supported by positive thinking and the ability to talk to other people about sexuality in a context free from stigma and shame. Sexual confidence has to do with understanding your intrinsic value and that you can bring something positive to a sexual encounter. Genuine sexual confidence develops internally within the young person from safe and supported sexual development. It is important not to confuse the term with the pressure to perform self-assurance in sexual matters where actual inner feelings of positivity and self-confidence are lacking. This can result from prescriptive norms about sexuality that sexualise and objectify young people, particularly girls and young women.

**Sexual literacy** reinforces sexual confidence. It is about understanding how to protect one's sexual health, having intimate knowledge of one's own body and sexuality, and being in touch with how sexuality influences one's life. Some definitions of sexual literacy reinforce the idea that learning and education about sexuality should be lifelong, and that sexuality education and information must include an analysis of how factors such as gender, race, disability, culture, religion or belief and age intersect with and shape our sexual beliefs.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, there have been longstanding debates about empowerment in the context of sexuality, as sexual **empowerment** and objectification can appear similar or the same from the outside. The difference lies in the distribution of power in a given sexual situation. In sexual situations, autonomy and shared power is derived from free and informed consent. Empowering adolescents and young people in their sexuality means ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to negotiate enjoyable, consensual experiences and to express their sexuality without the pressure to conform to prescriptive norms.

In the context of CSE, **competence** refers to having the ability, skills or knowledge to engage in sexual activity in a way that both the activity and outcomes are positive.<sup>16</sup> While the meaning of 'positive' is subjective, this can be broadly interpreted as reflecting well-being as captured in the WHO definition of sexual health,<sup>17</sup> including in the emotional sense of having enjoyed the experience through deriving pleasure and experiencing minimal or no regret.<sup>18</sup>

A sex-positive approach can strengthen **solidarity** in ensuring that a diversity of sexualities and experiences are heard and acknowledged, and also that there is a space for people who have experienced sexual exploitation or abuse, stigmatisation or shame, to be listened to and enabled to access support. In the context of sexuality, solidarity is demonstrated through contributing to building a shared culture free from violence, coercion, shame and stigma. Solidarity is built through recognising that although specific challenges to the full realisation of sexual rights vary from context to context, the movement to realise sexual rights is universal.



IPPF/Nepal/Mustafa Quraishi

15. The Kinsey Institute (2009) 'Kinsey Confidential: Sexual Literacy...What is that?' <http://kinseyconfidential.org/sexual-literacy/>

16. Hirst, J (2008) 'Developing sexual competence? Exploring strategies for the provision of effective sexualities and relationships education' <http://core.ac.uk/download/files/102/99923.pdf>

17. WHO (2006, updated 2010) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators [http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual\\_health/defining\\_sexual\\_health.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf)

18. Hirst, J (2012) 'It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education.' 13(4) Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning 423-436.

### 3. Transforming our understanding of CSE and its benefits

The past decade has seen exponential growth in research examining the impact of CSE programmes. This research provides a solid foundation for how we understand the potential of CSE to transform the lives of young people, and by extension, their communities and societies. CSE has a positive impact on safer sexual behaviours such as increasing condom use.<sup>19</sup> CSE has also been shown to have a positive impact on increasing self-esteem and knowledge levels, building self-efficacy, and challenging discriminatory attitudes, gender and social norms.<sup>20</sup>

IPPF's definition emphasises a positive approach, recognising that the aim of CSE extends beyond the prevention of negative health outcomes or unintended pregnancy, to embracing sexuality as a positive aspect of life.<sup>21</sup> While the new paradigm for CSE is multifaceted, it must incorporate an explicit focus on sexuality, and should consider the evidence supporting the effectiveness of programmes that adopt a sex-positive approach. Evidence has shown that sexuality education programmes that stress the creative and pleasurable aspects of sex, combined with honest and open discussion, have been critical for successful HIV and STI prevention initiatives.<sup>22</sup>

Our notions of what CSE includes and where it can be delivered goes beyond schools to include a range of non-formal settings. The need to reach the most marginalised adolescents and young people, including those who are not in school, has brought CSE into clinics where services are delivered, youth and outreach centres, and collectives where marginalised adolescents and youth, such as young sex workers and young transgender youth self-organise, socialise and access support.

CSE has become more flexible in terms of the fora where it can be delivered, and its content is more adaptable to local realities, largely because it is anchored in a shared sense of what core content is needed for CSE to be considered 'comprehensive'. Landmark regional and international guidelines, particularly UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education and the Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe released by the WHO and the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), have created a baseline understanding of what 'comprehensive' programming entails.

CSE now enjoys an advanced common understanding of its meaning and content, giving way to a shared vision for programming and its desired outcomes. While multiple definitions of CSE exist, the new paradigm for CSE focuses on a continual, building block approach that develops the knowledge and skills necessary for developing gender-equitable relationships and

societies, promoting and protecting human rights, generating values of equality and non-discrimination and building civic participation.

Similarly, research has also demonstrated that barriers to pleasure are cited as the main factor in the non-use of condoms, suggesting that strategies to achieve safer sex would be more effective if they focused on the pleasurable experiences that use of condoms can bring, as well as the fact that they can provide protection from STIs, HIV and unplanned pregnancy.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, there is growing evidence that promoting pleasure in male and female condom use, alongside safer sex messaging, can increase the consistent use of condoms and the practise of safer sex.<sup>24</sup>

The Pleasure Project has led the way in building the evidence base to support more widespread acceptance of a sex-positive approach. It began in 2004 as a campaign to direct more attention to a more honest and realistic approach to sexual health. The founder of the Pleasure Project, Anne Philpott, had been working on sexual health promotion and education, where she found that any mention of pleasure and sexuality were almost entirely absent from programmes. This didn't add up with her first-hand experience of promoting condoms during educational workshops and trainings where she and her colleagues found that people were more receptive to messages about how it feels to use condoms, rather than messages focusing on prohibiting certain risk-taking sexual behaviours. For example, participants were more engaged when the discussion centred on how it can feel to rub the inner and outer rings of a female condom against the clitoris or penis, than when the message was solely about how it can prevent pregnancy and STIs. The Pleasure Project continues to work to make sex safer by addressing the major reasons people have consensual sex- the pursuit of pleasure. The organisation's approach is based on identifying the reasons people do not have safer sex, including the belief that condoms reduce pleasure, and finding ways to counter these tendencies through innovative communications, and by broadening the approach taken in most sexuality education and intervention initiatives.<sup>25</sup>

While most sexuality education programmes diminish the focus on pleasure, many integrate some acknowledgement of it; however a central issue is the fact that programmes do not acknowledge everyone's pleasure. Pleasure is often integrated into programming in a way that is patriarchal and heteronormative. For example, many sexuality education programmes begin with education around puberty; the content relating to girls' bodies often covers menstruation, while content relating to boys' bodies focuses on erections, ejaculation and wet dreams. From the earliest lessons, underlying messages are already emerging whereby the bodies of

19. UNESCO (2009) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>

20. Ibid.

21. IPPF (2010) Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_framework\\_for\\_comprehensive\\_sexuality\\_education.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_framework_for_comprehensive_sexuality_education.pdf)

22. Boyce, P., Huang Soo Lee, M., Jenkins, C., Mohamed, Overs, C., Paiva, V., Reid, E., Tan, M. & Aggleton, P. (2007) Putting sexuality (back) into HIV/AIDS: Issues, Theory and Practice, *Global Public Health* 2, no. 1: 1-34.

23. Philpott, A., Knerr, W. and Maher, D. (2006) 'Promoting protection and pleasure: amplifying the effectiveness of barriers against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy'. *The Lancet* 368: 1-4.

24. Knerr, Wendy and Philpott Anne. (2006) 'Pleasure and Prevention: When Good Sex is Safer Sex.' 14(28) *Reproductive Health Matters* 23-31.

25. Knerr, Wendy and Philpott Anne. (2014) 'Strange bedfellows: bridging the worlds of academic, public health and the sex industry to improve sexual health outcomes.' 9(Suppl) *Health Research Policy and Systems* 1-13.



boys and men are associated with sexual arousal and pleasure, while the bodies of girls and women are associated with reproduction.<sup>26</sup>

Several studies have argued that denying the possibility of pleasure in sexual activity, particularly for women and girls, has a negative impact on their active negotiation of safer sex.<sup>27</sup> To normalise pleasure as a right for not only male bodies, but for all bodies, is a crucial starting point for developing sexual competence, particularly the ability to negotiate around pleasure and to exercise choices regarding involvement in relationships and sexual practices depending on whether they will yield a positive experience for all partners involved.<sup>28</sup>

Sex-positive CSE can play a crucial role in acknowledging a greater diversity of sexual practices, and in challenging heteronormativity.<sup>29</sup> In doing so, it offers meaningful content to adolescents and young people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and provides examples of sexual practices with decreased risks to health or of unintended pregnancy, and which offer equal pleasure potential for all partners involved.

Communicating around sexual preferences and vocalising what gives one sensations of pleasure is an empowering act in itself for many young people. It provides an opportunity to build communication skills, and express the self-confidence and self-esteem inherent in asserting that one deserves to have a pleasurable and positive experience. This, in turn, can reinforce the skills to negotiate safer sex including condom use and more equality in other aspects of the relationship. Sexuality education that promotes pleasure has a role to play in encouraging reciprocity in relationships, and in encouraging sexual practices that are safer and more equal.<sup>30</sup>

In educating communities about the benefits of female condom use, the Senegalese branch of Society for Women and AIDS in Africa creatively linked female condom use with pleasure. This was done through likening the sound of the movement of the polyurethane condom during intercourse to the rattling of bine-bine beads, an erotic accessory that men present to their female lovers to wear around their hips. This approach of combining context specificity with an understanding of the underlying reasons people seek to have sex, resulted in greater acceptance of female condoms, which place women in greater control when it comes to safer sex.<sup>31</sup>



IPPF/Colombia/JohnSpaul

26. Weiss, Suzannah (2016) '12 Reasons Why There's Orgasm Inequity,' Everyday Feminism <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/orgasm-inequality/>

27. Knerr, Wendy and Philpott Anne. (2006) 'Pleasure and Prevention: When Good Sex is Safer Sex.' 14(28) Reproductive Health Matters 23-31.

28. Hirst, J (2012) "It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education." 13(4) Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning 423-436.

29. Hirst, J (2012) "It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education." 13(4) Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning 423-436.

30. Hirst, J (2012) "It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education." 13(4) Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning 423-436.

31. Pleasure Project, (2008) The Global Mapping of Pleasure: A directory of organizations, programmes, media and people who eroticize safer sex [http://thepleasureproject.org/downloads/GM\\_Final.pdf](http://thepleasureproject.org/downloads/GM_Final.pdf)

## 4. Youth perspectives on CSE and sexual rights

IPPF has a long history that shows that programming which integrates the interests of adolescents and young people, and acknowledges the reasons they feel motivated to have sex, will be more successful because of the effort made to engage with the interests of young people and the realities of their lives. In this way, we believe that young people's perspectives are vital in shaping CSE programming.

The right of young people to participate in the design, development, monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programmes that affect their lives is widely recognized and promoted within the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and supported by the international human rights framework. Information provided by young people challenges more traditional approaches to sexuality education and highlights any disconnect between the content of CSE programmes and what they describe as being experiences of sexuality, and the information and education needs they've identified for themselves.

There is a need for programmes to be more responsive to these demonstrated information needs, for example through developing or strengthening content relating to pleasure and sexology.<sup>32 33</sup> Young people are the experts on their experiences of CSE, and the act of meaningfully involving them as participants in shaping CSE programming, and paying attention to the demonstrated information needs of diverse constituencies of adolescents and young people, can not only make programming more effective, it can reinforce the empowerment process.

Evidence from both new and traditional data sources shows that young people respond to, and actively seek out, sexuality information that is sex-positive, in contexts where they do not fear being made to feel ashamed for enjoying sex. Research with

adolescent girls and young women has shown that where the experience of pleasure among young women is normalised, young women request sexuality information relating to pleasure, including negotiating their own pleasure.<sup>34</sup>

The creators of RNW Media noticed a gap in the information available to young people online. While there was partial content relating to sexuality education available through the Internet, there was next to nothing about pleasure. Going against the tide in an era of approaches focused on disease prevention and risk reduction, RNW chose to establish a more sex-positive tone and began carrying content on sexual pleasure. This included resources addressing love, sex and relationships in a sex-positive way.

A look at the analytics of how adolescents and young people use the site reveals that pages with articles relating to pleasure out performed pages with content on more traditional sexuality education themes by 1.6 times, highlighting the disparities between the information young people seek, and what information they receive through traditional sexuality education programming.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that young people are seeking and successfully accessing information about sexual pleasure online also raises questions about whether non-formal education, particularly online sources, with the relatively higher degree of anonymity they provide, might be particularly well suited to communicating information and education about sexual pleasure.

While commitment to youth participation has been a longstanding priority for CSE programmers and advocates, the challenge of developing effective strategies for involving younger adolescents, particularly those who are marginalised, remains.

32. Sydsjö, G., Selling, K.E., Nyström, K., Oscarsson, C. and Kjellberg, S. (2006) 'Knowledge of reproduction in teenagers and young adults in Sweden'. *European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Healthcare* 11, no. 2: 117-125.

33. Rudolph, A. (2009) Paper presented at 'Critical Feminist Dialogues on Sex Education, Violence and Sexology: Between Agency, Pleasure, Shame and Pain', GEXcel Themes 4and5 conference, Linköping University.

34. Hirst, J (2012) 'It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education.' 13(4) *Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning* 423-436.)

35. Chakkalackal, Michelle (2015). 'Love Matters: CSE information in the digital era' presented at conference, 'Key Sexual Rights Issues for Young People', 10 December 2015, London, UK and personal communication with Michelle Chakkalackal of RNW Media.

## 5. Opportunities for integrating sex-positivity into CSE implementation and advocacy

### Implementation

- Addressing sensitive issues such as sexual rights, LGBTI identities, gender, and sexual pleasure in CSE faces many challenges in more traditional and religious contexts. It is important not to make generalisations, as there is diversity even within cultures and faiths about the interpretation of values and norms and how they are applied in practice. IPPF's work on abortion has taught us that it is possible to discuss contentious issues, working together with communities to find 'hooks' and common language to introduce a topic.<sup>36</sup>
- The language of sexuality is important. For example, most religions do not use the language of 'rights' when discussing sexuality but use their own theology to explain the issues. Therefore using 'rights based language' in CSE can be more contentious in faith settings, such as schools and other educational settings run by religious organisations. It is important not to use language loaded with negative judgements, and to use more inclusive language for reproductive health and rights projects.
- One clear opportunity, arguably, is that young people may be less afraid to dialogue with community and religious leaders, and that through them there is the possibility for a more frank and open discussion about topics that are important to them. If this is true, then there is a tremendous opportunity for young people to be agents of change on the issue of sexuality. This approach can be further strengthened when supported by good quality research and evidence.
- There is an opportunity to better discuss issues of sexuality through non-formal settings, and in particular, through digital channels. With increasing mobile phone ownership, some IPPF MAs are having success in reaching young people through confidential messaging via social media apps. These provide an opportunity for young people to ask questions on 'sensitive' topics and to receive referral information for further counselling and services.

### In Advocacy

- There are ample opportunities for integrating a sex-positive approach to CSE advocacy at the global level. This begins with bringing advocates, communities and practitioners together, and ensuring that experts in the fields of sexology are working alongside colleagues from the fields of public health, human rights and education. The SRHR community has moved away from 'siloed' or singular approaches to advocacy. This has involved integrating issues and bringing together experts whose perspectives have been shaped by multiple fields, in order to draw out the synergies and interlinkages.
- In strengthening advocacy efforts, there's a clear need to build on the existing evidence base with further research exploring the effects of sex-positive sexuality education, particularly when it comes to physical and mental well-being and empowerment outcomes for adolescents and young people. This will likely require rethinking traditional research paradigms. It has long been noted that the traditional research paradigm often resists complexity, despite growing recognition that sexuality and sexual health are products of a complex intersection of factors.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, advocacy for sex-positive CSE will also require rethinking advocacy at the national and international levels and other spaces that convene power. In high-level political spaces, often sexuality and the well-being of adolescents and young people is instrumentalised, reduced to a tool to be used in achieving 'more important' goals. CSE advocates must reframe any current messaging that places adolescents and young people's bodily autonomy and well-being below, or in the service of, broad aims, such as those of advancing development, reducing health budgets and improving the efficiency of health systems. A truly rights-based approach should prioritise the rights of the individual first and foremost, before any fiscal or social good that may arise from full realisation of those individual human rights.

36. IPPF (2015) How to talk about abortion: A guide to rights-based messaging [http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf\\_abortion\\_messaging\\_guide\\_web.pdf](http://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/ippf_abortion_messaging_guide_web.pdf)

37. Klugman, Barbara. (2014). 'Complexity versus the technical fix or how to put sexuality back into sexual health.' 9(6) *Global Public Health: An International Journal for Research, Policy and Practice* 653-660.



## 6. Key recommendations

- To ensure CSE programming is holistic and informed by a diversity of perspectives, IPPF recommends bringing together experts from the fields of public health, human rights, education and sexology together to move from 'siloed' approaches to CSE programming, policy-making and advocacy, towards more integrated models.
- The delivery of CSE in non-formal settings, particularly through social media, has revealed major disconnects between the information young people are seeking and the content of traditional CSE programmes. IPPF recommends that young people from a range of diverse backgrounds are meaningfully involved in all stages of the design, development, monitoring and evaluation of CSE programmes. This is crucial in ensuring programmes and policies are responding to the actual information needs and interests young people's participation raises.
- Listening to the voices of young sex workers, young asylum seekers, young people living with HIV, young people with disabilities, and other marginalized adolescents and young people, is vital to ensuring CSE is responsive to their specific needs. IPPF recommends strengthening partnerships with groups led by marginalized voices, supporting their direct participation and leadership in CSE programme development, research and advocacy.
- In rethinking how sex-positive CSE might be included in global advocacy efforts, we need to find and utilize opportunities for CSE advocates to open up a dialogue on resisting instrumentalist approaches to advocacy for the sexual rights of adolescents and young people, and to exploring the opportunities for integrating arguments to advance sex-positive CSE into advocacy for sexual rights at all levels.
- In the context of an often donor-driven SRHR landscape, while lack of investment can have the short-term benefit of leading to more daring initiatives, research and advocacy on sex-positive CSE has been continually under-resourced. IPPF recommends investing in research examining the impact of CSE programmes that adopt a sex-positive approach. This includes research looking at specific outcomes relating to the well-being of the young people they reach, including improvements in their relationships and more equitable interactions within their communities.
- We need to improve existing literature about negotiating pleasure and equality in sexual situations, tailored to the needs of young women, girls and other marginalised adolescents and young people, requires efforts to develop specific resources and trainings, or to tailor existing ones.

## 7. Questions for further discussion

While this paper has aimed to be comprehensive in the sources it draws upon, the movement to advance a sex-positive approach within CSE (and service provision) for young people is still new and growing. In many ways, this paper opens up more questions than it answers. Some of these questions are outlined below as jumping-off points for further discussion and debate:

- How can we create environments of openness and frankness to deliver sex-positive sexuality education and information?
- How can we support educators and parents to give information about sex and sexuality in a user friendly and accessible manner, even in restricted settings?
- How can programming make stronger connections between sexual health, sexual rights and sexual confidence?
- Do new technologies and the growth of non-formal education provide particular opportunities for integrating a sex positive approach into sexuality education and information?
- Can learning from the sex-related industries, such as condom promotion, be used as a potential tool for prevention and for promoting a more just culture around sexuality?
- How can barriers of stigma, self-censorship, pre-conceptions and discomfort with issues related to sex be effectively dealt with in advance of provision of CSE and related services?
- How can we take steps towards ensuring adolescents and young people's voices, in all their diversity, are informing CSE programming?
- Given that a sex-positive approach and related terminology are often misconstrued, how can we manage the perceptions of different stakeholders in advocacy and awareness-raising efforts?

# Abbreviations

CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
ICPD	International Conference on Population and Development
IPPF	International Planned Parenthood Federation
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

# Bibliography

## Works cited

1. Ahmed, A and Menon, S. (2006). *Rights and Desire: A facilitator's manual to healthy sexuality* (Breakthrough: New Delhi).
2. Boyce, P., Huang Soo Lee, M., Jenkins, C., Mohamed, O., Paiva, V., Reid, E., Tan, M. & Aggleton, P. 2007. Putting sexuality (back) into HIV/AIDS: Issues, Theory and Practice, *Global Public Health* 2, no. 1: 1-34.
3. Chakkalackal, Michelle (2015). "Love Matters: CSE information in the digital era" presented at conference, 'Key Sexual Rights Issues for Young People', 10 December 2015, London, UK and personal communication with Michelle Chakkalackal of RNW Media.
4. Commission on Population and Development. Resolution 2009/1 [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/pdf/42/CPD42\\_Res2009-1.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/commission/pdf/42/CPD42_Res2009-1.pdf)
5. Commission on Population and Development. Resolution 2012/1. [http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2012/Agenda%20item%208/Decisions%20and%20resolution/Resolution%202012\\_1\\_Adolescents%20and%20Youth.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/population/cpd/cpd2012/Agenda%20item%208/Decisions%20and%20resolution/Resolution%202012_1_Adolescents%20and%20Youth.pdf)
6. Gattuso, Reina, 'What I would have said to you last night had you not cum and then fallen asleep.' (Feministing.com, 19 January 2016) < <http://feministing.com/2016/01/19/what-i-would-have-said-to-you-last-night-had-you-not-cum-and-then-fallen-asleep/>> accessed 19 January 2016
7. Haberland, N., 2015, The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: A comprehensive review of evaluation studies. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41 (1): 31-42.
8. Hirst, J (2008). "Developing sexual competence? Exploring strategies for the provision of effective sexualities and relationships education" Sheffield Hallam University. <http://core.ac.uk/download/files/102/99923.pdf>
9. Hirst, J (2012). "It's got to be about enjoying yourself: young people, sexual pleasure, and sex and relationships education." 13(4) *Sex Education: sexuality, society and learning* 423-436.
10. IPPF, 2010, *Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)*, IPPF, London.
11. Jolly, S, et al eds., *Women, Sexuality and the Political Power of Pleasure* Zed Books, 2013).
12. Knerr, Wendy and Philpott Anne. (2014). 'Strange bedfellows: bridging the worlds of academic, public health and the sex industry to improve sexual health outcomes.' 9(Supp1) *Health Research Policy and Systems* 1-13.
13. Knerr, Wendy and Philpott Anne. (2006). 'Pleasure and Prevention: When Good Sex is Safer Sex.' 14(28) *Reproductive Health Matters* 23-31.
14. Long, S. (2004) 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights Project, Human Rights Watch', 15 December 2015 < [http://transdada2.blogspot.ie/2004\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://transdada2.blogspot.ie/2004_07_01_archive.html)> accessed 16 January 2016.
15. National Sexuality Resource Centre [http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/what\\_sexual\\_literacy/](http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/what_sexual_literacy/) / <http://kinseyconfidential.org/sexual-literacy/>
16. Negron, L'Orangelis Thomas, 'Body-mapping Workshop.' (Do You See HIV?, 19 August 2015) < <http://www.goporte.com/hiv/bodymapping-workshop/>> accessed 19 January 2016
17. OED Online. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 15 January 2016.
18. Philpott, A., Knerr, W. and Maher, D. 2006. Promoting protection and pleasure: amplifying the effectiveness of barriers against sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. *The Lancet* 368: 1-4.

19. Pleasure Project, 2008, The Global Mapping of Pleasure: A directory of organizations, programmes, media and people who eroticize safer sex, Oxford, UK/Delhi, India, < [http://thepleasureproject.org/downloads/GM\\_Final.pdf](http://thepleasureproject.org/downloads/GM_Final.pdf)> accessed 16 January 2016.
20. Ponzetti, James J Jr. 2015. Evidence-based Approaches to Sexuality Education: A Global Perspective. Routledge.
21. Rudolph, A. (2009). Paper presented at 'Critical Feminist Dialogues on Sex Education, Violence and Sexology: Between Agency, Pleasure, Shame and Pain', GEXcel Themes 4and5 conference, Linköping University.
22. Sydsjö, G., Selling, K.E., Nyström, K., Oscarsson, C. and Kjellberg, S. (2006). Knowledge of reproduction in teenagers and young adults in Sweden. *European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Healthcare* 11, no. 2: 117-125.
23. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." United Nations - Sustainable Development knowledge platform. (adopted 25 September 2015 UNGA Res A/70/L.1) <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>> accessed 16 January 2016.
24. UNESCO, 2009, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators. Paris, UNESCO.
25. UNESCO, 2011, School-based sexuality education: A cost and cost-effectiveness study in six countries, Paris, UNESCO.
26. Usigli, Antón Castellanos, 'Destigmatising Trans Pleasure.' (*Sexual Observer*, 24 October 2015) < <http://www.sexualobserver.com/destigmatizing-trans-pleasure.htm#sthash.RETTQcjd.s662XzOZ.dpbs>> accessed 19 January 2016.
27. Weiss, Suzannah, '12 Reasons Why There's Orgasm Inequity.' (*Everyday Feminism*, 27 December 2016) < <http://everydayfeminism.com/2015/12/orgasm-inequality/>> accessed 16 January 2016.
28. WHO. (2006, updated 2010) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators <[http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual\\_health/defining\\_sexual\\_health.pdf](http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/sexual_health/defining_sexual_health.pdf)> accessed 16 January 2016.

### Works reviewed but not cited

29. UNAIDS. 2014. The Gap Report. Geneva, UNAIDS. [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2014/UNAIDS\\_Gap\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/unaidspublication/2014/UNAIDS_Gap_report_en.pdf).
30. Santhya, K. G. 2011. Early Marriage and Sexual and Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Young Women: A Synthesis of Recent Evidence from Developing Countries. *Current Opinion in Obstetrics and Gynecology*, Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 334-339.
31. Haldre, K., Part, K., Ketting, E. 2012. Youth Sexual Health Improvement in Estonia, 1990-2009: the Role of Sexuality Education and Youth-Friendly Services. *European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care*. Vol. 17, No. 5, pp. 351-362.
32. De Graaf, H., Kruijer, H., van Acker, J., Meijer, S. 2011. Sex Under the Age of 25: A Population Study of Dutch Adolescent Sexual Health. Utrecht, Rutgers WPF
33. UNESCO. 2009. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach for Schools, Teachers and Health Educators. Paris, UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>.
34. UNFPA. 2014. Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Focus on Human Rights and Gender. New York, UNFPA. <http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Operational%20Guidance%20for%20CSE%20-Final%20WEB%20Version.pdf>.
35. IPPF. 2010. Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). London, IPPF. <http://www.ippf.org/resource/IPPF-Framework-Comprehensive-Sexuality-Education>.
36. WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA. 2010. Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A Framework for Policy Makers, Education and Health Authorities and Specialists. Cologne, BZgA and WHO. <http://www.bzga-whocc.de/?uid=20c71afcb419f260c6afd10b684768f5&id=home>.
37. Haberland, NA. 2015. The Case for Addressing Gender and Power in Sexuality and HIV Education: A Comprehensive Review of Evaluation Studies. *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Vol. 41, No. 1, pp. 31-42. <https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/4103115.html>.
38. Boler, T. 2003. The Sound of Silence: Difficulties in Communicating on HIV/AIDS in Schools. Experiences from India and Kenya. London, Action Aid. <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/AIDS/doc/HIV%20AIDS%20187.pdf>.
39. The Population Council and UNFPA. 2007. Addressing Gender and Rights in Your Sex/HIV Education Curriculum. New York, The Population Council. [http://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/7123\\_AddressGenderRights.pdf](http://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/7123_AddressGenderRights.pdf).
40. IPPF. 2013. From Evidence to Action: Advocating for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. London, IPPF. <http://www.ippf.org/resource/Evidence-Action-Advocating-comprehensive-sexuality-education>.



Published in August 2016 by the  
International Planned Parenthood Federation  
4 Newhams Row, London SE1 3UZ, UK

**tel** +44 (0)20 7939 8200

**fax** +44 (0)20 7939 8300

**web** [www.ippf.org](http://www.ippf.org)

**email** [info@ippf.org](mailto:info@ippf.org)

UK Registered Charity No. 229476

Cover image: IPPF/Nepal/Mustafa Quraishi