

# LEARN. PROTECT. RESPECT. EMPOWER.

THE STATUS OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY  
EDUCATION IN ASIA-PACIFIC: A SUMMARY REVIEW 2020

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This factsheet is based on findings from a joint UNFPA, UNESCO and IPPF regional review on the status of comprehensive sexuality education in the Asia and Pacific region conducted in 2019, which includes Ministry of Education (MoE) questionnaires, expert questionnaires, and an online youth survey.

To access the background research report [click here](#)

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO TEACH SEXUALITY EDUCATION AS A MANDATORY AND STAND-ALONE SUBJECT?

- When sexuality education is optional, only taught informally outside of schools, or as an extra-curricular subject, a significant number of young people can miss the opportunity to receive education on their sexuality.
- Integrating sexuality education content into several other subjects may limit the quality and effectiveness of the education, diminishing the overall importance of sexuality education, compared to a stand-alone subject.<sup>1</sup>

## HOW IS SEXUALITY EDUCATION TAUGHT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC?

**Over half of the countries in the region teach sexuality education in a mandatory subject. However, it is often integrated into other subjects.**

COUNTRIES REPORTING THAT SEXUALITY  
EDUCATION IS TAUGHT AS A MANDATORY  
SUBJECT BY EDUCATION LEVEL

**57%**

**Mandatory at  
primary level**

(16 out of 28 countries)



**54%**

**Mandatory at  
secondary level**

(15 out of 28 countries)

Source: MoE questionnaire



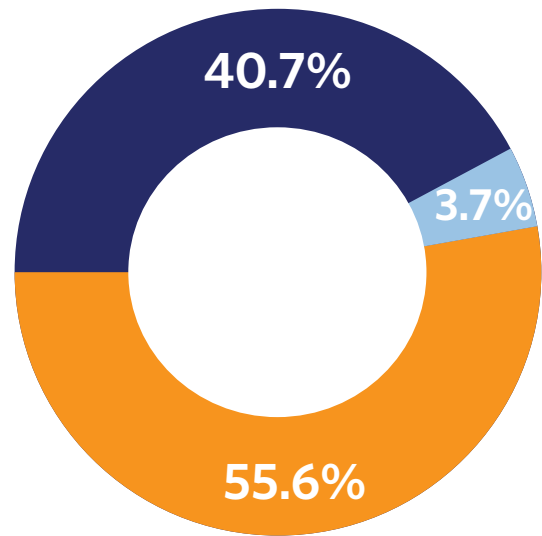
<sup>1</sup> Keogh, S. C. et al. (2018) 'Challenges to implementing national comprehensive sexuality education curricula in low- and middle-income countries: Case studies of Ghana, Kenya, Peru and Guatemala'. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0200513



## WHEN DOES SEXUALITY EDUCATION START IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC?

In 12 out of 27 countries, sexuality education is NOT introduced to young people in early childhood.

Grade at which sexuality education starts



Countries reporting whether sexuality education is integrated into other subjects or taught as a standalone sexuality education or health education subject by education level

### PRIMARY LEVEL (28 countries surveyed)

**25%**  
**Standalone**  
(7 countries)

**57%**  
**Integrated**  
(16 countries)

### SECONDARY LEVEL (28 countries surveyed)

**21%**  
**Standalone**  
(6 countries)

**68%**  
**Integrated**  
(19 countries)

Source: MoE questionnaire

● Kindergarten & Grade 1	15
● Grade 2-6	11
● Grade 7-12	1

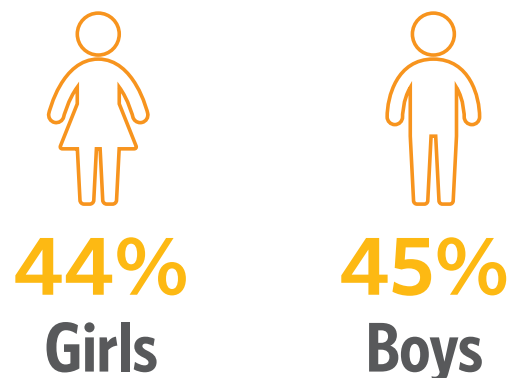
(27 countries surveyed)

Source: MoE questionnaire

## WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO TEACH SEXUALITY EDUCATION FROM AN EARLY AGE?

- In order to shape children's formation of values and behaviours that help them make positive decisions about their health and relationships, it is vital to ensure sexuality education reaches children early enough, before major developmental milestones in their lives.<sup>2</sup>

### OF 1432 ONLINE YOUTH SURVEY RESPONDENTS



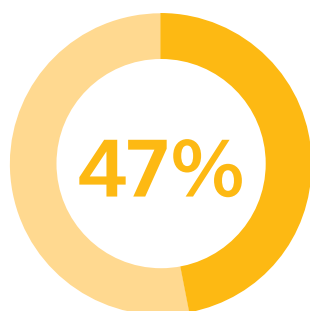
Had not received enough information about menstruation or wet dreams before they experienced them for the first time.

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO et al. (2018) *International technical guidance on sexuality education*. 2nd edn.

## Satisfaction with sexuality education was the lowest among online youth survey respondents who did not receive sexuality education in a timely manner.

Proportion of young people very or somewhat satisfied with the sexuality education they have received by timing

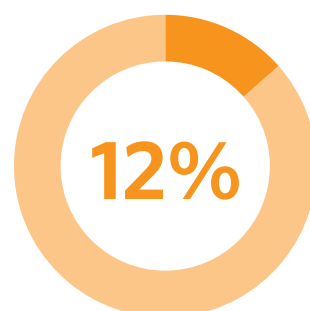
### EARLY SEXUALITY EDUCATION



#### Got

enough information about menstruation or wet dreams before experiencing them for the first time

### LATE SEXUALITY EDUCATION



#### Didn't get

enough information about menstruation or wet dreams before experiencing them for the first time

Source: Online youth survey data



People think it's too early to give children sex education. But I think it's important because it's the reality they will face in their life. Menstruation is something girls will face, and they should know what is actually going on with their bodies. Instead of just leaving them confused.

(21-year-old woman, Indonesia)



I wish it [sexuality education] was detailed in explaining the signs and symptoms of puberty instead of myself having to learn it all whilst being scared.

(21-year-old woman, Indonesia)

## WHAT DOES 'COMPREHENSIVE' MEAN IN THE CONTEXTS OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

'Comprehensive' refers to the breadth and depth of topics and to content that is consistently delivered to learners over time, throughout their education, rather than a one-off lesson or intervention.

## WHAT ARE THE KEY TOPICS THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN SEXUALITY EDUCATION?

- Relationships
- Values, rights, culture and sexuality
- Understanding gender
- Violence and staying safe
- Skills for health and well-being
- The human body and development
- Sexuality and sexual behaviour
- Sexual and reproductive health

Source: International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO et al. (2018) International technical guidance on sexuality education.

## WHAT ARE COMMONLY TAUGHT SEXUALITY EDUCATION TOPICS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC ACCORDING TO MINISTRY OF EDUCATION RESPONDENTS?

No countries in Asia and the Pacific cover all the eight concepts outlined in the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*.

Source: MoE survey



### What are commonly taught topics?

#### Primary level

The topics commonly reported as being covered in the curriculum at the primary level included puberty, HIV & AIDS / STIs, love and relationships, gender and gender norms, and sexual abuse/violence.

#### Secondary level

While topics such as puberty, HIV & AIDS / STIs, and sexual abuse/violence continue to be taught from primary through to the secondary level, there is an increase in the number of countries that introduce other topics at the secondary level, including pregnancy and birth, contraception and marriage.

Source: MoE Questionnaire



**Except reproductive anatomy, nothing else on sexual and reproductive health was taught in school.**

(24-year-old woman, Myanmar)



**I want to learn more about private relationships and how we can understand other people's values, respect them, and not impose our values on each other. It's more about consent.**

(21-year-old woman, Indonesia)

# TOP 7 TOPICS YOUNG PEOPLE DIDN'T LEARN BUT WISHED TO HAVE LEARNED IN SCHOOL

1

Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression



2

Gender equality, gender norms



3

Sexual abuse, violence, harassment



4

Contraception



5

Menstruation



6

Marriage, relationship, family



7

Sexually transmitted infections (not including HIV/AIDS)



## How comprehensive is the sexuality education curriculum in terms of topic coverage?<sup>4,5</sup>

Countries reporting their national curricula as 'comprehensive', according to MoE respondents



48%

At primary level

(13 out of 27 countries)



59%

At secondary level

(16 out of 27 countries)

VS

Experts reporting their national curricula as 'comprehensive'



22%

At primary level

(9 out of 41 countries)



37%

At secondary level

(16 out of 43 countries)

### TAKE ACTION

- Make sexuality education in schools a mandatory and stand-alone subject.
- Children should receive age-appropriate sexuality education from early primary, and before the onset of puberty and sexual activity, and education should continue throughout adolescence and adulthood.<sup>6</sup>
- At both primary and secondary levels, cover all eight key concepts in the *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* in an age-appropriate manner and in-depth, focusing first on strengthening and motivating learners to explore values, attitudes and norms concerning sexuality, before going on to address specific facts, knowledge and skills.

The accumulated coverage of the [sexuality education] contents tend to be patchy. One-off lectures, often by invited external speakers, usually for a large group of students seems the most common approach.

(China key informant interview with UN and Civil Society Organizations)

<sup>4</sup> 'Comprehensiveness' is often dependent on individual perspectives or country standards. Among some respondents, the number of topics covered and extensiveness of coverage did not serve as an indicator for 'comprehensiveness'.

<sup>5</sup> Following the analysis of the country surveys, an additional survey was conducted to gain experts' perspectives. Forty-three experts that consisted of individuals affiliated with UNFPA, UNESCO, IPPF member associations, other civil society organizations, as well as independent consultants completed a rapid online survey.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO. (2015) *Emerging evidence, lessons and practice in comprehensive sexuality education*.