



AIDS Concern position paper on Positive Sexuality Education for Young People

This is a public position statement setting out AIDS Concern's views about what needs to change in Hong Kong on sex education for young people. AIDS Concern will work with young people, parents, schools, youth workers and government to improve sex education for young people in line with the position set out here.

Executive Summary

- AIDS Concern recognises the absence of good quality sex education as a serious barrier in the work to prevent HIV infections in Hong Kong.
- AIDS Concern strongly believes that it is very important to establish positive sexuality education for young people, which should cover life skills training topics, including such issues as gender, developing relationships, sex and respect for sexual differences.
- AIDS Concern wants to see young people educated to understand better about the risk of HIV infection through different types of sexual activity.
- AIDS Concern strongly urges the government to review existing guidelines and to provide clearer requirement on CSE in secondary schools and for young people aged 12-25.
- AIDS Concern also urges the involvement of parents in CSE as they can play an important role in the establishment on CSE. Providing parents with information and advice on how to explain these sensitive matters to young people would be a major step forward.
- Youth workers are another crucial group which should be well-equipped and provided with training on positive sexuality education.
- We should look to evidence from other countries including New Zealand and United Kingdom on what makes for good guidance on sex education for young people.

What is Positive Sexuality Education?

Good sex education provides people with opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and skills relating to sexual development - physical, emotional and social. It

also offers people the opportunity to enhance their sexual and reproductive health by looking at personal and interpersonal skills, respect for themselves and other people, effective communication skills and problem-solving.

Some key principles should form the *basis* for positive sexuality education:

- An understanding of sexuality as a natural and healthy aspect of human life instead of something to be ashamed of;
- Empower the youth with accurate sexual health knowledge and effective communication skills to make responsible decisions on their sexual health matters
- Practice of safe and mutually consensual sexual activity

Background evidence on the current position in Hong Kong

Since it was published in 1997, the *Guideline on Sex Education in Secondary Schools* has been used by local schools. It vaguely suggests that “schools could consider factors such as resources, ethos, mission, students’ needs and so on before adopting the most appropriate way to implement sex education...” while the specific curriculum and class hours of sex education are not mentioned. As a result, different schools have different sex educations. In most of the cases, sex education is not a compulsory subject and is usually in the form of abstinence approach, which merely focuses on teaching about the human reproductive system, consequences of underage sex and teenage pregnancies.

In reference to extensive local and foreign research studies and real cases that are reported in the media, it is clear that our young generations do not possess sufficient sexual knowledge nor do they understand their own psychological needs. Worse still, young people do not know how to reflect on their sexual values and life skills.

Issues which are real and imperative to our young people such as how to protect and respect your sex partner(s) and how to encourage your partner(s) to have safer sex are not covered in current sex education, which also does not cover sexual diversity.

Why sex education is relevant and important to AIDS Concern

Sexual transmission remains the major mode of HIV infection in Hong Kong. In 2013 more than 70% of HIV cases were infected through heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual sex. This shows that (unprotected) sexual behaviour and the HIV/AIDS epidemic are closely linked.

How much people know about sexual health and safer sex has a direct impact on the

effectiveness of HIV prevention. In order to stop the spread of HIV in Hong Kong, it is vital to ensure appropriate sex education in schools to allow our next generation to be equipped with sufficient sexual health knowledge.

Right now young people can easily obtain sexual information online or through other mass media. However, much of this information is not accurate and a lot of it is misleading. With the lack of appropriate sex education in schools, it is very difficult for young people to identify whether the information they obtain is correct or not. As a result people can easily believe rumours like ‘rinsing one’s private part with water after unprotected sex can prevent infection’.

Young people tell AIDS Concern that with gender stereotypes exist which need to be corrected. For example, some people believe that only men can decide whether to use a condom and that women should comply to show love for their partner. These attitudes exist for many young people in Hong Kong and are hindering the prevention work on STIs and AIDS. According to our latest figures, 17% of sexually active youth we approached were infected by chlamydia, while only 5.9% of sex workers and 3.2% of clients of sex workers were infected (2011-2012).

The latest HIV/AIDS figures published by the Department of Health (Feb 2014), show that there is a rising trend in the newly infected cases which are result from sexual contact between men, that need to be provided with more concrete support and encouragement to adopt safer sex practices. Unfortunately current sex education is heterosexual centric with limited inclusion and sensitivity of youth with different sexuality. This bias risks not only creating a homophobic society without respect of diversity, but also creating obstacles for LGBT people to access the best HIV/AIDS and STIs information and treatment.

According to our research in May 2015, the sex education topic that students are most interested in learning is ‘How to openly communicate with partners about sex’, ‘How to deal with romantic relationships’ and ‘Understand and discuss different sexualities’. However, only 15%, 28% and 29% of the respondents reflected that they have learned these 3 respective topics in school. The results show that the sex education classes in school do not respond to the actual needs of young people, let alone helping them obtain sufficient sexual health knowledge and skills.

It is not only the students who are confused and dissatisfied by the existing sex education. a survey (「中小學教師眼中的心性教育」問卷調查 2009) conducted by Hong Kong Federation of Education Workers in 2009 found that 80% of teachers thought that they did not have

sufficient training for sex education and 60% said that the Education Bureau did not provide enough support for them to carry out sex education. This shows that although the **Guidelines** allow schools to have flexibility in determining sex education, teachers are not getting the training and support required to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge. Indeed the **Survey on HIV/AIDS and sex education in junior secondary level in Hong Kong – 2013** conducted by the Department of Health showed that 20% of schools don't mention the use of condoms during sex education. It is clear that the Curriculum Development Council does not provide an appropriate course structure for sex education for teachers and young people. The flexibility principle in the **Guidelines on Sex Education in Secondary Schools** worsens the situation because it does not provide any specific guidelines and support for schools to develop quality sex education.

More details on what AIDS Concern would like to see

1. A Review of Guidelines on Sex Education in Secondary Schools

AIDS Concern urges the Education Bureau to establish a professional committee to review the existing Guidelines on Sex Education in Secondary Schools to make positive sexuality education a compulsory component in secondary school curriculum for young people aged 12-25. The committee should also provide clearer guidelines on recommended class hours and to identify which parts of the existing curriculum should be made compulsory. This can help to establish a clearer standard structure for sex education and can help support teachers who complain of current vagueness. We suggest that the committee should consist of members from the education profession, scholars who are specialists in gender education and front-line staff from youth services organisations.

2. The establishment of a 'Positive Sexuality Education Foundation'

Most of the current teachers have never experienced sex education, and the lack of knowledge and skills makes it difficult for them to implement appropriate and quality sexuality education classes. Therefore, a systematic teacher training is paramount to the implementation of positive sexuality education. To encourage a wide adoption of positive sexuality education, AIDS Concern urges the government to establish a 'Positive Sexuality Education Foundation' to provide resources for the training of current teachers and non-governmental organizations to develop and implement sex education classes for young people. Sexuality education training should also be included as a compulsory part

of the prospective teachers' curriculum in universities.

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