Training course in adolescent sexual and reproductive health 2021

Comprehensive sexuality education provision

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Question 1

Why do adolescents need comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)? – identify one reason.

Young people and adolescents need Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in their lives because "CSE prepares them for a safe, productive, fulfilling life in a world where gender-based violence, gender inequality, early and unintended pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) still pose serious risks to their health and well-being." (UNESCO, 2018, p.12).

Question 2

What according to you is the biggest operational constraint in the provision of CSE in your country, and why?

In most countries, including Palestine, planning, implementing and monitoring comprehensive sexuality education programs is complex and may be considered the biggest operational constraint in the provision of CSE in Palestine. This includes different aspects, starting from not offering CSE as a stand-alone subject in school but integrating it into other key subjects; while this demonstrates the relevance of the field to other subjects and addresses the issue of overcrowded curricula, it can diminish the importance of sexuality education, as it may not carry the weight of a stand-alone subject for teachers or students. Moreover, teachers may spend less time on comprehensive sexuality education topics they do not want to cover and may not be trained to integrate them effectively. This is especially the case when the subjects into which comprehensive sexuality education is integrated are elective and/or non-examinable (UNESCO, 2018).

In fact, in the past few years, the Ministry of Education in Palestine has arranged several training courses and capacity building programs for school teachers on implementing CSE programs within the national curriculum, however, it is still unclear how the planning and implementation of CSE in schools is being monitored and evaluated, especially that there are no data collected to fulfill the international indicators of monitoring in-school CSE (UNFPA, 2016).

Question 3

In what way could CSE be integrated into your country's educational curriculum?

In Palestine, the current educational curriculum includes basic sex education knowledge that focuses mainly on reproductive physiology while it does not adequately cover topics such as reproductive rights, gender, contraception, STIs and other relevant topics that adolescents want and need to know (UNFPA, 2016). And since we still lack the capacity

needed for teachers to implement this job efficiently, I believe that another form of CSE intervention within educational curriculum should take place, until we can –on a governmental level- apply CSE as a separate one-subject at the national curriculum, with highly qualified staff of teachers. This alternative intervention is to adopt the Peer Education approach within schools.

From a personal experience working and leading the Y-PEER network in Palestine between 2015 and until now, it was quite successful to integrate CSE in the educational curriculum through peer-to-peer interactive techniques, implemented by young people (peers) who are considered closer to adolescents than teachers in terms of age, needs and mentality. This helped the ease of transferring knowledge and sharing thoughts between the peer educators and students in schools in CSE which is considered a sensitive topic to this age group. This means involving young people in curriculum development; which is recognized as key to ensuring that content is relevant and tailored to their needs, and exceeds the limit of the traditional curriculum which only discusses anatomy and biology, to include relationships, sexual and reproductive health, and social norms and gender to make life skills training more relevant and effective (UNESCO, 2018).

Question 4

Identify three strategies that Aahung and Rutgers used to build community support for CSE in Pakistan?

1. Understanding the local context as the foundation for program design and development.
2. Strategically selecting issues to be included in curricula to tailor content to the programs context.
3. Engaging gate-keepers at many levels through outreach and sensitization (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018).

Question 5.1

Within the ecological framework, what are the levels of influences that need to be understood when planning to deliver sexuality education to adolescents?

There are five levels of influences to be considered when planning to deliver sexuality education to adolescents which are:

1. Individual (Adolescents).
2. Interpersonal (Parents, peers).
3. Organizational (school administrators, teachers).
4. Community (community and religious leaders).

4. Societal (policies, political and religious leaders) (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018).

Question 5.2

In the case of Aahung and Rutgers, who were the gatekeepers or influential people in the lives of adolescents that were engaged and sensitized?

Adolescents' influencers "Gatekeepers" were identified on different levels of the ecological framework. On the interpersonal level, there were Parents and community members (focusing on engaging men and boys in specific), while on the organizational level there were school administrators and teachers and these two levels had the main gatekeepers who were sensitized and engaged. However, there were also other influencers on the community level and the structural and societal level; such as key advocates, decision makers, religious leaders, and government officials and stakeholders in the education and health departments in specific. In addition, it was important to partner with local Civil Society Organizations and International NGOs in the process as well (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018).

Question 5.3

In your context, which gatekeepers or influential people would need to be engaged and sensitized to deliver CSE?

Based on UNFPA Revised Report on Demographic Change: Opportunities for Development in Palestine, which was published in 2016, 28% of the adolescents declared that this stage of their life (referring to adolescence) caused several issues for them in their lives, as they were not ready to step into it due to the lack of knowledge and information. And when they were asked about the people they seek information from when needed, regarding their SRH, 82% chose their fathers, 43% chose their mothers, 38% chose a sibling/family relative, 29% chose friends, while 42% preferred their teachers (UNFPA, 2016)

Out of that, we can conclude that the most important and influential people to adolescents in Palestine based on their own opinion are Parents/relatives, young people (peers and friends), and school teachers. While I myself would add to that the importance of including and sensitizing psychosocial counselors in schools and school administrators, healthcare providers, religious leaders, and government's officials and decision makers.

Question 6

What strategies did Rutgers and Aahung use to overcome resistance to CSE in Pakistan?

Both NGOs strengthened their media presence to build positive public perception, relied on schools to demonstrate the positive impact of their programs on the confidence and performance of students and teachers, and linked schools and media to create additional active mechanism. In addition, they both took advantage of key moments of positive momentum when society would be more receptive to their messages such as Ramadan after widely publicized reports of gender-based violence emerged.

These main actions were applied differently in each case as follows:

- Rutgers Pakistan:
  1. Stimulated public discussion by reaching out to a small group of respected and well-known journalists.
  2. Organized school visits for journalists, who then produced a number of positive stories about their firsthand observations.
  3. Assisted textbook writers in drafting a module for life skills-based education, resulting in its inclusion in provincial textbooks.
- Aahung:
  1. Led sensitization and value clarification workshops with schools and the media and created an additional active mechanism, which included organizing specific meetings to discuss issues, to provide support to teachers and school administrators when cases of opposition arose by parents or the community.
  2. Increased community acceptance by strategically using opportune moments to stress the value of their work.
  3. Reviewed language, increased transparency, leveraged strategic partnerships, and engaged "champions" when faced with backlash (Chandra-Mouli et al., 2018).

Question 7

How is CSE different from sexuality education?

Sexual Education (SE) has evolved through time to address the prevailing sexual and reproductive health challenges facing young people, however, it focused only on specific issues related to SRH starting from the prevention of unintended pregnancy, to prevention of HIV, to awareness about sexual abuse and finally addressing online bullying. While Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) goes beyond educating about reproduction, risks and disease; it reaffirms the position of sexuality education within a framework of human rights and gender equality and deals with spiritual dimensions of sexuality by providing information, exploring values, and attitudes as well as feelings, including pleasure. It focuses on the recreational part of sex rather than procreation. Worldwide, experts have been since moving away from traditional "sex-ed" that only focuses on how to avoid negative sexual health outcomes; towards a more holistic social

and emotional scope within a framework of human rights and gender equality (Wahba, 2020).

Question 8.1

What are the considerations that the International Technical Guidance suggests when designing a school-based CSE program?

1. The program has to follow and coincide with all relevant national policies, guidelines, regulations and laws.
2. To adopt clear goals, concepts and learning objectives; which should then be articulated within the contents.
3. It should follow the life-cycle approach and develop in an incremental way providing information in a manner appropriate to the age and development of the pupils.
4. Ensure that the curriculum will be acceptable for implementation: This means that the topics it covers and its content have to be politically, religiously and culturally appropriate. No other way makes the program applicable. Political leaders and all other stakeholders should be engaged and consulted or involved in some way.
5. The contents have to be practical: The topics and contents to be taught to young people should address what they need to know and what they want to know. This is a basic issue that will ensure making the program practical.
6. The program needs to be effective: Programs should adopt interactive and participatory educational approach based on skill-building.

(Wahba, 2020).

Question 8.2

What did the Egyptian Family Health Society (EFHS) do to understand the needs of adolescents related to sexuality education before initiating their school-based SE program?

The scientific committee of EFHS decided to conduct what it called a "learn by educating" needs assessment exercise. They conducted several seminars (the first round was in 250 schools in 22 Governorates) in which they began with a biology lesson about male and female reproductive organs already included within the official school curriculum for the seventh school grade. The well-trained young physicians providing the seminars used to discuss the selected lesson and devote enough time to answer the questions received from students. They had also been instructed to collect all the papers received from students with their questions during the seminars; white papers for boys and blue for girls. Almost 4000 papers had been received from students during the first round of seminars, each containing one or more questions. All papers were received at

the headquarters and were examined by members of the Scientific Committee. The students' questions proved to be a very valuable and revealing source of information. They reflected precisely what almost 1200 Egyptian students in both preparatory and secondary schools aged 12 – 17 years wanted to know, had problem with or were concerned about, as well as the misinformation they had in relation to general and reproductive health. It has been a very informative and rewarding experience. Based upon this "needs assessment" exercise EFHS was able to design the needed curriculum for its school-based reproductive health education program (Wahba, 2020).

Question 8.3

What were the protocols used to respond to sensitive questions asked during the EFHS' seminars?

Along with discussing the designated lesson during the EFHS' seminars, it had been planned to allocate ample time for responding to anonymous written questions from students. However, it had been left to the "chaperoning" teacher to decide which questions would be answered, while the rest of the "sensitive" questions were referred to the Youth Health Hotline operated by the Society. Other than that, all papers with questions from the students were collected for the needs assessment (Wahba, 2020).

Question 9.1

Describe a CSE initiative in your country that you believe has affectively promoted CSE for adolescents in or out of school.

Y-PEER Network in Palestine -which is part of the Y-PEER International Network- is a youth-led network of young people aiming to promote SRHR through interactive peer-to-peer approach, and has been working since 2000 in more than 50 countries around the world. It has been proved that the work of Y-PEER in general in Palestine, promotes CSE in and out of school. The network annually conducts a number of CSE sessions with adolescents and young people, either through formally arranged meetings within schools, universities, youth centers…etc., or within informal gatherings. These sessions and interactive methods used by Y-PEER to promote a healthy lifestyle and to educate young people on CSE were highly valued, and based on the participatory learning approach, which gives the students/participants the opportunity to discover the information by themselves or through discussions, or even fun games. Taking this approach in such sensitive topics was a huge success to avoid any awkwardness or embarrassment, and ensured the participation of all students in the process of learning.

Question 9.2

Identify one factor that has contributed to the effectiveness of this initiative.

The initiatives were designed, planned, implemented by young people to their peers of young people, which is considered the key for its effectiveness and success especially among adolescents who considered those young peer educators as friends rather than teachers. They all could interact, share and express thoughts and feelings towards even the most sensitive topics, in which are considered to be taboos in their communities.

Question 9.3

Identify 2 factors that you believe are critical for strengthening implementation of CSE in your country?

1. Collection and analysis of data for adolescents and their actual needs, especially with the emerging of Generation Z and their modern high-tech life style they are having. This requires innovative methods of collecting data and identifying what adolescents actually need and want to know in Palestine.
2. Monitoring and evaluating the quality of CSE implemented in and out of school, especially when implemented by teachers within the curriculum. There should be a strong partnership built between CSOs and MoE to strengthen the CSE Program in schools with peer-to-peer approach conducted by young experts who are well-trained and qualified to do so, and offered by CSOs.

References

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