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Young Women's Advisory Group to the Equality Rights Alliance

Overview

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Who is YWAG?

- Young Women's Advisory Group to the Equality Rights Alliance
- A group of ten young women aged 18-30 across Australia bringing young women's voices and perspectives to the federal policy space

We believe that sex education is in need of reform!

First, a question...

How was your sex and relationships education?

How did it make you feel?

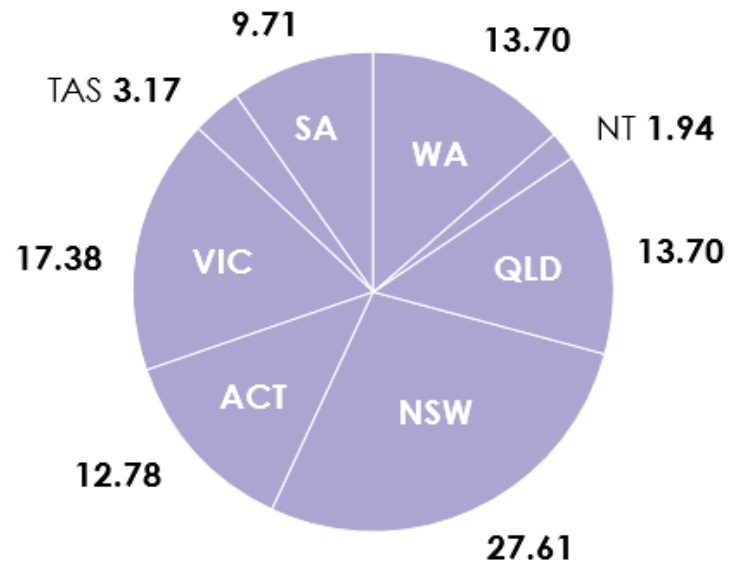
What is one thing you wish it had prepared you for, and why?

'Let's Talk' national survey

- Australian national survey of young women, aged 16-21, about their school sex education experience
- 1162 respondents
- 1011 fit the criteria

Limitation: young women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds not represented in a statistically significant way

STATE AND TERRITORY (%)



KEY FINDINGS

Most young people receive some type of sex education at school

Young women want more from their sex and respectful relationships education

Sex education is outdated – topics covered are very limited and do not meet the needs of young women

SEX EDUCATION IS FAILING YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS

“Sex education at school didn’t teach me these things as much as they should have”

of young women and girls were not taught about consent in their sex education at school.

After receiving sex education, young women did not feel confident in their understanding of respectful relationships and were unsure about their level of confidence in understanding concepts like consent. Almost two thirds (63%)

“I don’t believe that there were enough topics covered. And as I am older now, I am having to research what I did not learn in high school education because I was not aware of all the risks and possibilities involved”

“My sex education was very biologically-focused. Not a lot was conveyed beyond ‘this is how babies are made, try not to get STDs’. At a private girls’ high school there was some talk of being ‘emotionally ready for sex’, but it reflected an unhealthy, patriarchal glorification of virginity... There was nothing to do with LGBT awareness or LGBT safer sexual practices”

TOPICS COVERED IN SEX EDUCATION ARE SEVERELY LIMITED

Many respondents reported a strong emphasis on menstruation, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and contraception. Despite an emphasis on disease, many young women reported that they were not taught about the importance of being tested for STIs or where they could go to be tested (preferably for free). Abstinence was a strong theme for many respondents.

RESPECTFUL RELATIONSHIPS

“[We should be] discussing consent in terms of respect – generally just a big focus on respect.”

Less than half of respondents had been educated about relationships (40.4%). Only 37% of respondents agreed that sex education had made them feel confident in their understanding of relationships, with 48% disagreeing to some extent.

YWAG welcomes the recent impetus on respectful relationships and expects that data in years to come will reflect the evolution of this area of education.

“Provide education/ examples on a range of healthy relationships and subsequently discuss when and why one is unhealthy.”

CONSENT

“Consent was taught by a guest speaker briefly, I feel we should have had far more on it”

Forty eight per cent of respondents disagreed to some extent that after doing sex education in school they felt confident in their understanding of consent, while only 40% agreed to some extent that they felt confident.

“I recall learning ‘no means no’, but I don’t recall hearing about affirmative consent until university”

PLEASURE

Seeking to educate that sex is about pleasure helps to challenge negative ideas that sex and relationships are about power and control.

“The first time I had sex I didn't even know what an orgasm was”

Young women told us that pleasure was rarely included in their sex education classes. Nearly three quarters of respondents (74%) told us that after participating in sex and relationships education in school they did not feel confident in their understanding of pleasure.

Many respondents reported classes discussing male masturbation, but not female masturbation.

“I didn't even know sex was pleasurable for women until I was 16”

What needs to be improved?

*“Define **consent** for heavens sakes. Tell everyone what rape technically is.”*

*“Info on **consent, gender stereotypes**, teaching young boys not to rape instead of teaching young girls how to avoid being raped...”*

*“... make it a non-shameful issue... The teachers need to be open minded and consider multiple facets of one issue. Women's sexuality needs to stop being related to pure, virginal, 'sticky tape'. **Girls need to be empowered to take control of their sexuality for when they become legal adults.** [And more on] LBG**T** relationships.”*

*“... Actually talking about sex with girls would be a good start, rather than just talking about periods. Periods aren't sex. Talking about consent... in front of girls and boys in the same room so both sexes/ genders understand... **and also talking about what [constitutes] a healthy relationship and what doesn't because dating violence is really prevalent and translates to domestic violence when older.**”*

*“A positive focus on LGBTI+ relationships and sex has to be increased dramatically. **Pleasure and consent need to be given increased consideration for students to have respectful, fulfilling and truthful relationships into the future.**”*

Discussion and reflection

Did the young women's experiences resonate with you?

Did you see any similarities between your experiences and theirs'? Were there differences?

What stood out for you?

Discussion and reflection

YWAG's 8 Recommendations

That sex education should focus on

1. Informed consent
2. Positive and respectful relationships
3. A healthy and informed approach to sex
4. Gender and sexual diversity
5. Relationships and technology
6. Bodies
7. Reproductive health
8. Sexual health

Young women's voices in action

- *How can you put or adapt these young women's voices and perspectives into action in your work?*
- *How can they inform your practice?*
- *What is one action you can take in your practice?*

Young women's voices in action

Stay in touch!

Contact me at romy.listo@gmail.com

To read the full report:

http://equalityrightsalliance.org.au/sites/equalityrightsalliance.org.au/files/images/lets_talk_final_report_2016.pdf

Or our focus group research, 'A Whole Generation Out of Date':

<https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/publications/a-whole-generation-out-of-date-young-peoples-stories-of-sex-education-2/>