

Resource:

Newcomer Sex Ed



Good sexual health education is accessible and inclusive for all learners. Sexual health is a key component of overall health and well-being, and a human right. Sexual health education should study sexuality from a holistic perspective. Young people should be encouraged to think critically about the relationships that they have/want to have, the rights and responsibilities that come with maintaining healthy relationships, and learn the skills to identify unhealthy/harmful behaviour. High quality sexual health education reflects on the experiences of newcomers that relate to sexual health. It also provides an opportunity to gain necessary skills to adapt to a new environment and navigate Canadian society effectively.

History

Beyond the conventional growing pains that begin to take place during adolescence, young people must also learn to adapt to their changing social worlds. For newcomers to Canada, this change is even more profound. Sexuality is an integral part of being human, and is a complex set of personal and social experiences that are not just about biology.

For newcomer youth, access to sexual and reproductive health care is impacted by:

- Isolation from support systems and distrust of the healthcare system
- The ongoing stress of the immigration process
- Cultural or language barriers
- Educational systems that perpetuate colonial ideals
- Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination
- Conflicting religions, or cultural values



Impact

Newcomers face many barriers in accessing supports and information related to healthy relationships, family planning, and sexual health. Many are isolated from their natural support systems, like extended family, trusted healthcare providers and friends from their home country. Compared to non-immigrant youth, immigrant adolescents experience unique social challenges that impact their health. At this stage in a young person's life individuals start to develop lifelong behaviours that will profoundly affect physical and mental health into adulthood. Many immigrant adolescents may also experience specific challenges due to the effects of migration and resettlement on their identity, stressors of their everyday life, and health risk behaviours (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2018).

The immigration experience creates an added layer of complexity in which the barriers created by socioeconomic status and race of newcomer youth make them less likely to access sexual health care or related information. Most immigrant youth are learning a new language and navigating new friendships, leaving them with fewer support networks to rely on in order to obtain essential services. Additionally, immigrant youth may not have had access to comprehensive sexuality education in their countries of origin (Salehi, R., Hynie, M., & Flicker, S., 2014). There is a need for sexual health education for all youth, but particularly immigrant youth. Sexual health education is recognized as a right for all individuals; however, barriers such as accessibility, stigma, and discrimination may impede young people from seeking out information. Those who do not receive health education lack knowledge about healthy relationships, experience an increased risk of victimization, and are more susceptible to negative health outcomes (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, 2015).

A 2010 study noted that 18.8 percent of newcomer youth participants had not experienced any sexual health education, representing a critical unmet need (Salehi R, Flicker S.). The study also suggests that although most immigrant youth eventually receive sexual health education through school or community services, this should not prevent further action to address the inequity for newcomer youth or those who simply missed these opportunities. When new Canadians are not provided with comprehensive sexuality education, the lack of knowledge about relationships, sexual health, creates an increased risk of negative outcomes like unplanned pregnancy and STIs (Saskatchewan Prevention Institute, 2015). Providing education that is inclusive and comprehensive, with an emphasis on healthy self-esteem and confidence will create the promotion of health, wellness, and relationship building for newcomers.

Recommendations

Community

Newcomers are entering a new community and are often leaving one behind. Existing in a new space takes resilience and strength, but it also amplifies hardships. Youth may benefit from being introduced to newcomer organizations or leaders and students that have shared experiences. Having a feeling of belonging and safety within a community is essential for health.

Representation

As mentioned in the Anti-Racist Sex Ed resource, representation matters. When unpacking content in the classroom, addressing the lived experiences of all students is important. Newcomer experiences should be included in resources, scenarios, and videos. Classroom materials should include diverse names and languages.

Adaptability

Sexual health education curriculums need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that the information is inclusive, relevant, culturally safe, honest, and informative. By including these conversations in the classroom you are preparing youth for a world outside of school. This education gives youth the tools they need to challenge oppression and stigma by taking on tough conversations.

Resources

- Saskatoon Sexual Health
 - New in Town
- SERC: Sexuality Education Resource Centre
 - Knowledge into Action (KiA) Program
- Planned Parenthood Toronto
- Supporting Newcomer Access Project (SNAP)
- SHORE Centre
 - Newcomer Health Programs



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