

Twenty years after the International Conference on Population and Development: Where are we with Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights? – Key messages from a Special Supplement of the Journal of Adolescent Health.

The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was a landmark event in Sexual and Reproductive Health. It laid out a bold, clear, and comprehensive definition of reproductive health as, “...a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in all matters relating to the reproductive system and to its functions and processes.”

The ICPD Programme of Action was forward looking in many areas and notably in relation to adolescents and young people. It called for international and national efforts aimed at “meeting the educational and (health) service needs of adolescents to enable them to deal in a positive and responsible way with their sexuality.”

In his report reviewing 20 years of progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action, Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon noted that while important progress has been made in the twenty years since the ICPD, this progress has been unequal and fragmented, and that new challenges, realities and opportunities have emerged (http://icpdbeyond2014.org/uploads/browser/files/icpd_global_review_report.pdf).

To complement the above review, WHO’s Department of Reproductive Health and Research and the International Women’s Health Coalition carried out a review of the research evidence and implementation experience in Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (ASRHR) since the ICPD. Working papers were prepared on five complementary and interrelated intervention areas to promote ASRHR. These include: 1) creating an enabling environment; 2) providing comprehensive sexuality education; 3) providing sexual and reproductive health services and creating demand for their use; 4) preventing intimate partner violence and sexual violence; and 5) promoting youth participation. These papers were discussed at an expert group meeting that brought together representatives of national governments, national and international NGOs, United Nations agencies, and researchers. Based on the outcomes of the expert group meeting, the papers were revised for publication as a special supplement of the Journal of Adolescent Health.

This knowledge summary presents the key findings and the implications of these findings for action and for research, in each of the five papers in this Special Supplement.

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Creating an enabling environment for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights: A framework and promising approaches.

Svanemyr, Amin, Robles and Greene apply an ecological framework to outline the key elements of creating an enabling environment for ASRHR.

Key findings:

- Interventions should address determinants of SRH problems at individual, relationship, community and societal levels to strengthen adolescents' agency, promote supportive relationships and change social norms to facilitate the empowerment of adolescents.
- At **individual level**, interventions can include efforts to empower girls by building their assets and creating safe spaces for them to congregate; at **relationship level** it includes building parental support and communication, and strengthening peer support; at **community level** it includes engaging men, boys and the wider community to transform unequal gender and other social norms; at **societal level**, it includes laws and policies that protect and promote human rights and address societal awareness about ASRHR issues.
- Programmes and projects should be implemented in a complementary way with multiple components that operate at different levels of the ecological framework to create an enabling environment for ASRHR.
- Developing and evaluating such multi-component and multi-level programmes and projects is an emerging field; the review identified few rigorous evaluations.

Implications:

For action

- Adapt the key elements of the conceptual framework and promising approaches to the realities of different contexts and test their feasibility and effectiveness.

For research and evaluation

- Carry out research and more rigorous evaluations of programmes and projects to strengthen the evidence base in this area.

Providing comprehensive sexuality education: Emerging trends in evidence and practice

Haberland and Rogow review the evidence regarding effectiveness – as well as implementation and quality – of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), highlighting the importance of a gender and rights perspective.

Key findings:

- Despite long-established evidence that CSE does not foster earlier sexual debut or unsafe sexual activity, large-scale implementation of programmes has occurred only in a small number of countries.
- CSE programmes which explicitly include content on gender equality and power relations are more likely to reduce rates of sexually transmitted infection and unintended pregnancy, than programmes which ignore such content.
- There is a gradual shift towards an “empowerment” approach in implementing CSE in many settings.
- Programme leaders and policymakers cite a particular need to strengthen capacity among teachers to conduct CSE.

Implications:

For action

- Expand the coverage of CSE programmes that explicitly include content on “gender equality and power relations”, prioritizing the most vulnerable adolescents (including married girls), as well as students in upper primary grades (this is especially because in many contexts large numbers of girls do not make the transition to secondary school).
- Scale up school-based programmes with serious investments to strengthen teachers' capacity to deliver empowerment approaches to CSE.
- Link CSE to enabling factors in the wider environment for example, ensuring safe schools and improving girls' financial literacy.

For research and evaluation

- Conduct rigorous evaluations of CSE interventions that aim to affect multiple outcomes in adolescents

– including health, social, and education outcomes.

- Conduct longitudinal studies that examine the outcomes of primary-level CSE that include specific content on “gender equality, power relations and human rights”.

Effective Strategies to Provide Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health Services and to Increase Demand and Community Support

Denno, Hoopes and Chandra-Mouli present a review of programmes and projects that have been effective in improving adolescents’ access to, and use of, SRH services in low- and middle-income countries.

Key findings:

- Programmes that have increased adolescent uptake of SRH services in different contexts include: training and support of health workers; improving the adolescent-friendliness of health facilities; and information outreach through multiple channels.
 - Simply providing adolescent friendliness training for health workers is insufficient.
- Limited data exists regarding the effectiveness of providing adolescents with SRH services outside health facilities (e.g. pharmacies and community outreach), with one exception.
 - Mixed-use youth centres are not an effective way to deliver SRH services.
 - There is a paucity of outcome evaluation among vulnerable and marginalized populations.
- Across different contexts, demand generation activities have been associated with increased utilization of SRH services among adolescents.
- Evidence regarding activities to increase community support is limited, but data suggests that they can play an important role in improving adolescent access to and utilization of SRH services.

Implications:

For action

- Formulate and apply laws and policies to enable and promote the delivery of adolescent SRH services, including promotion and linkages through channels such as schools.
- Implement a package of interventions to support SRH service delivery that include: health worker training and support; improvements to make facilities adolescent-friendly; provision of information to adolescents; and the creation of an enabling environment at the community level.

For research and evaluation

Conduct evaluations and implementation research in conjunction with programme implementation, especially related to:

- Cost-effectiveness analyses to inform the most efficient use of limited resources.
- Stratification of results by socioeconomic status and by other vulnerabilities to determine which strategies are effective at reaching populations most in need.
- Determine which specific components in a multicomponent intervention are improving outcomes.
- The types of demand generation interventions that effectively improve access to and uptake of SRH services.

Addressing intimate partner and sexual violence among adolescents: Emerging evidence of effectiveness.

Lundgren and Amin identify effective approaches to prevent intimate partner violence and sexual violence among adolescents.

Key findings:

Four promising approaches emerge from this review:

- School-based dating violence prevention interventions are shown to be successful in reducing perpetration of violence in high-income countries.
- Psychological support interventions aimed at children and adolescents exposed to violence between parents have reduced the perpetration of intimate partner violence during adolescence in high-income country settings.
- Community-based participatory group education with boys and girls has successfully improved gender equitable attitudes, but not changes behaviours in low- and middle- income countries.
- Parenting support interventions in high-income countries have shown promise in preventing child

maltreatment, strongly associated with later experience or perpetration of intimate partner violence.

- There are significant gaps in evidence, particularly from low and middle-income country settings.

Implications:

For action

- Adapt and test successfully piloted programmes from high-income countries in low- and middle-income countries.
- Implement interventions that challenge social norms which condone gender-based violence.
- Support and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equality.
- Foster learning between: researchers and programme implementers; different technical areas such as gender socialization and early childhood development; high-and low-income settings.
- Begin with the “end in mind” so that pilot programmes can be replicated and scaled-up in low-resource settings.

For research and evaluation

- Conduct longitudinal research to identify pathways to violence.
- Conduct longer term follow up to assess sustainability of behavioural changes with respect to perpetration and experience of violence.
- Measure behavioural changes and triangulate reported reductions in perpetration of violence with experiences of violence.
- Strengthen the evidence-base of what works to prevent violence with younger adolescents as well as with vulnerable groups such as migrants, out-of-school youth or domestic workers.

Ensuring youth’s right to participation and the promotion of youth leadership in the development of sexual and reproductive health policies and programmes.

Villa Torres and Svanemyr summarize the evidence and present youth participation models and frameworks, evaluation tools, and new methodologies.

Key findings:

- Several conceptual frameworks have been developed to better understand youth participation. These frameworks are designed to monitor youth development programmes and projects that have youth participation as a key component.
- There is little evidence and consensus on the effectiveness of youth participation in health programmes and projects.
- The most monitored and evaluated intervention type is peer education programme. The effectiveness of peer education is unclear – studies on peer education have been of low quality and with weak evidence of effectiveness.
- Participation is a right and therefore should not be evaluated only in terms of health outcomes and impact.
- Efforts to pursue meaningful youth participation must be combined with efforts to assess whether they contribute to the success of programmes and projects.

Implications:

For action

- Combine efforts to pursue meaningful youth participation with efforts to assess whether they contribute to the success of programmes and projects.
- Implement innovative approaches to meaningfully involve young people in SRH programmes.

For research and evaluation

Documentation, rigorous evaluation and research are urgently needed in two key areas:

- Young people’s participation and leadership as a process and as a programme component.
- Indicators and methodologies to assess processes and outcomes.

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