



Sexuality Education in Peru: New Evidence from Three Departments

This fact sheet presents new evidence on the need for and provision of sexuality education in Peru from a study conducted in Lima, Ayacucho and Ucayali in 2015. Data were collected in 61 secondary schools from students in grades 4 and 5 (aged 15–17), teachers and principals, as well as from key informants involved with education policy and program development and implementation.

The need for comprehensive sexuality education

- Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is necessary to ensure adolescents' healthy sexual and reproductive development, and foster knowledge, attitudes, values and practical skills to enable them to develop positive views of their sexuality.
- According to international guidelines, CSE should provide accurate information on a range of age-appropriate topics covering the categories of sexual and reproductive physiology, HIV/STI prevention, contraception and unintended pregnancy, values and interpersonal skills, and gender and sexual and reproductive rights.^{1,2}
- CSE programs that focus on human rights, gender equality and empowerment, and that encourage active engagement among participants, have been shown to improve knowledge, self-confidence and communication skills, positively change attitudes and gender norms, and increase contraceptive use among sexually active adolescents.^{2,3}
- According to the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey, 31% of adolescent women aged 15–19 in Peru have had sex.

The CSE policy and program environment

- In 2008, the Peruvian government signed a Latin American and Caribbean regional declaration in which it committed to providing rights-based CSE in primary and secondary school.⁴ In the same year, the Ministry of Education launched the Educational Guidelines and Pedagogical Orientation for CSE.
- Despite advances in policy, implementation of CSE is particularly weak in terms of teacher training and procedures for monitoring and evaluation.
- Following approval in 2016 of the New National Curriculum for Basic Education, which addresses gender equality and sexuality more comprehensively, there have been strong reactions from certain religious groups that oppose teaching these topics, but the comprehensive approach to teaching about gender and sexuality has been maintained.

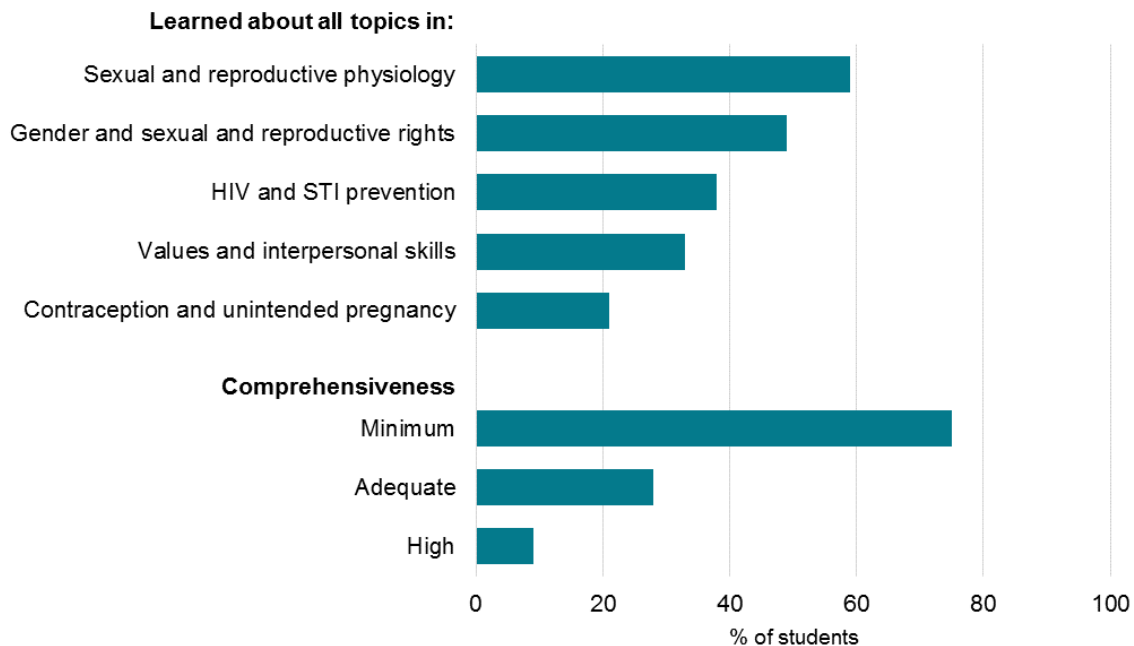
Approval for sexuality education

- Virtually all students, teachers and principals surveyed (97–100%) thought that sexuality education should be taught in school.
- Almost all (92%) students who reported having received some type of sexuality education considered such education useful or very useful in their personal lives. Nearly a quarter (23%) reported that they did not receive this information from their parents.
- The majority (65%) of students started receiving sexuality education in the first three years of secondary school, but 26% of those students would have preferred to start earlier. Among students who started sexuality education in the last two years of secondary school, nearly 40% would have chosen to start earlier.

Curriculum content and teaching methods

- Only 9% of students reported learning about all 18 topics identified by the study team as constituting a comprehensive curriculum. Students said that much more emphasis is placed on reproductive physiology than on pregnancy prevention or values and interpersonal skills (Figure).
- The messages conveyed by teachers are mixed: While the majority of teachers acknowledged that adolescents have the right to information, a third reported teaching that sex is dangerous and a similar proportion taught that it should be avoided before marriage.
- A sizeable proportion (34%) of teachers who taught about abstinence emphasized that it is the best or only method to prevent STIs and pregnancy.
- While 94% of teachers reported covering contraception in class, only 70% of students said they learned about different methods, and only half reported learning how to use or where to get contraceptives.
- Sexuality education is mainly taught through lectures; creative and interactive methods are used much less frequently, although many students reported preferring such methods.

Figure: Very few students reported learning about all topics that constitute a comprehensive curriculum, especially those related to contraception.



NOTE: "Minimum" indicates at least one topic in each category; "adequate," nearly all topics, except one at most, in each category; and "high," all topics in each category. Levels are not mutually exclusive; for example, schools that meet the adequate level also meet the minimum level. The full list of topics can be found in the full report.

Teacher training and support

- The main barriers to teaching sexuality education reported by teachers were lack of teaching materials, time and training.

- Only 48% of teachers reported having received pre-service training, and fewer than half reported receiving in-service training in the three years prior to the survey. Only 35% of teachers perceived their training in sexuality education to be adequate, and nearly three-quarters (73%) requested more training.
- Among teachers who received training, only 28% were trained on all topics that constitute a comprehensive curriculum.
- Although the government has developed materials for teaching CSE in Peru, these have not been widely distributed to schools. Fewer than half of teachers had access to lesson plans, national textbooks or manuals, or audiovisual materials.
- More than 40% of teachers wanted additional assistance with teaching about contraceptive methods, sexual orientation and HIV.

Classroom environment

- A majority of schools had policies aimed at promoting a safe and supportive environment. Nonetheless, only 27% of students felt safe expressing themselves in front of others at school. Fifty-three percent of students feared being teased, and a quarter feared physical harm.
- Thirty-nine percent of students did not ask questions in sexuality education classes because they felt embarrassed, and 21% did not ask because they feared being ridiculed by others.

Recommendations

- Improving sexuality education in Peru requires strengthening the policy framework for its compulsory implementation in schools, establishing a national program managed by a permanent technical team in the Ministry of Education, with an increased budget to support its implementation, and a monitoring and evaluation system.
- The teaching of sexuality education should be made more comprehensive, and the teaching methods diversified, to reflect international guidelines on CSE—more emphasis on practical skills; less reliance on fear-based and moralistic messages; and increased focus on pregnancy-prevention strategies that cover a broad range of contraceptives and negotiating skills.
- Teacher training, including in-service training for updating skills and techniques, should be prioritized to ensure teachers have the information, support and resources necessary to confidently and effectively teach sensitive topics.

Sources

Most data in this fact sheet are drawn from Motta A et al., From Paper to Practice: Sexuality Education Policies and Their Implementation in Peru, New York: Guttmacher Institute, 2017.

Acknowledgments

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