

## *Evolving and implementing programs on Human Sexuality and Life Skills for school children in India – A three-year experience.*

### **Abstract:**

Indian society, like elsewhere in the world, is changing rapidly thanks to electronic media. Indian parents and teachers largely remain conservative, refusing to discuss sexuality with their children while the family watches television serials dealing blatantly with teenage sexuality and biased media messages.

Children turn to the ever-accessible Internet, magazines and friends, often getting misleading information.

As gynecologists, we learnt first hand about the rising incidence of teenage pregnancies, depression, miscarles and HIV infections in Bangalore, India. We designed a course on Human Sexuality and Life skills dealing with knowledge of our bodies, nutrition, emotional changes during adolescence, personal safety, HIV and contraception. We also included life skills like communication, conflict resolution, and handling teasing and bullying. This program was stratified and conducted for schools (first to tenth standard) and colleges.

We analyzed the response of students, teachers and parents to the program. 99% of the students felt new and useful information was given, 83% felt that their queries had been answered, 73-80% felt that these classes were required. Responses from teachers varied from antagonism and apathy to whole-hearted support. From two schools, our work has expanded to include fifteen institutions in two cities over three years.

### **Authors:**

Dr Sangnata Saksena, MD (Obstetrics and Gynecology), DGO, Enfold Proactive Health trust, 553B, 8<sup>th</sup> Main 4<sup>th</sup> Block, Koramangala, Bangalore, India

Dr Shaliny Saldanha, MD (Obstetrics and Gynecology), DNB, Enfold Proactive Health trust, 553B, 8<sup>th</sup> Main 4<sup>th</sup> Block, Koramangala, Bangalore, India

### **Main Subjects:**

Adolescent Sexuality, Life Skills Program

### **Key Words:**

Human Sexuality

Life Skills

School Health Program

Adolescent Health

HIV/AIDS prevention

### **Article:**

Enfold Proactive Health Trust was started by us to implement a program dealing with human sexuality and life skills for school and college students. Working as gynecologists in a medical college hospital in Bangalore, we were perturbed by the rising incidence of teenage pregnancies and HIV infections in progressively younger age groups in the city.

Before implementing the program, Enfold conducted a study (published in Indian J Pediatrics) among 400 high school children in an urban co-educational English medium school in Bangalore to determine the source and extent of their knowledge of health and sexuality<sup>1</sup>. It showed that children turned to peers or media (movies, internet, magazines) rather than parents or textbooks for information on sex. The information gained was often erroneous and misleading. For instance 13% of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students, 38% of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and 37% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students believed that a baby is born naturally through the mother's navel or stomach. 53% of 10<sup>th</sup> standard students believed that condoms were 100% effective in preventing pregnancy and 40% believed that AIDS was limited only to homosexuals and sex workers. 36% to 40% of the students thought that menstruation was a means of expelling unclean blood from the body.

Following this study we took three sessions on anatomical, physiological and emotional changes in adolescents. The post-test showed a significant change<sup>2</sup>. Students had more accurate knowledge and a healthier attitude towards sexuality after the sessions.