

# Implementation of sexuality education in middle schools in China



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## Foreword

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development set 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including goals relating to quality education, gender equality, and health and well-being. Specific targets under these goals include ensuring that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development; eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls; and ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health and to reproductive rights.

Increasing evidence shows the value of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in improving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and combating the physical, mental and social challenges adolescents face in their transition from childhood to adulthood. CSE is therefore gaining recognition worldwide as an essential element of quality education.

In countries where the national policy requires compulsory SRH education but where there are no specific standards or guidance for the curriculum, the effectiveness of CSE varies from school to school. The success of CSE depends largely on how the schools perceive the issue, the quality of the curriculum used by the schools, how schools deliver the curriculum, and on the perspectives of school leaders and teachers, the teachers' capacities, and their access to technical support and resources.

Recognizing the importance of local research to support CSE policy-making and programme development, the UNESCO and UNFPA offices in China initiated the study presented in this publication. The study's findings offer concrete evidence on how middle schools in China are implementing sexuality education, and indicate an urgent need to put in place national curriculum standards for SRH education and to provide professional training for teachers, both pre-service and in-service. These findings strengthen the evidence base for policy-making, and complement the updated International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, published by the United Nations in early 2018.

We trust that policy-makers, researchers and educators will find this publication valuable in their efforts to develop successful CSE policies and programmes in China. UNESCO and UNFPA, along with the other UN agencies in China, stand ready to support the Chinese government and partners in stepping up CSE efforts, so as to benefit the 165 million adolescents in China and assist them to become healthy and productive adults.

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and the Republic of Korea

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The research project was conducted under the leadership of Marielza Oliveira, Director of the UNESCO Beijing Cluster Office and Representative to the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea, with overall coordination by Hongyan Li, National Programme Officer, under the supervision of Robert Parua, Education Specialist. UNFPA co-organized the research project, and under the leadership of Babatunde Ahonsi, Representative of the UNFPA China Office, the following people contributed to the project: Navchaa Suren, Deputy Representative of UNFPA China, and Soyoltuya Bayaraa, Chen Jianzhong and Gaoshan Junjian.

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## Acronyms

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<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>CSE</b>	Comprehensive sexuality education
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>NWCCW</b>	National Working Committee on Children and Women
<b>SIPPR</b>	Shanghai Institute of Planned Parenthood Research
<b>SRH</b>	Sexual and reproductive health
<b>STI</b>	Sexually transmitted infection
<b>UNAIDS</b>	The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization



## Executive summary

China boasts one of the largest adolescent populations in the world, with 165 million in total (United Nations, 2017). In recent decades, Chinese adolescents have reached sexual maturity at increasingly early ages, and more and more young people in China are open to premarital sex while at the same time they generally lack sexual and reproductive health knowledge and awareness of safe sex. In light of this situation and the risks adolescents face in terms of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, abortions and sexual and gender-based violence, education about sexuality is of utmost importance.

This publication describes the findings of a study that aimed to understand the status of the implementation of sexuality education in Chinese middle schools. The study surveyed key stakeholders, including students, teachers and principals, education officials and other educators, seeking to understand how they receive or provide sexuality education, as well as their perceptions of and attitudes to school-based sexuality education. This publication also provides a summary of policies and good practices and identifies gaps in light of the study, on the basis of which it offers practical recommendations for further improvement of school-based sexuality education in China.

The study, the largest of its kind in China so far, adopted a cross-sectional design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches. It sampled 30 middle schools across six provinces and municipalities in China that claimed to have sexuality education in place. A total of 4,737 students, 151 teachers and 29 principals from these schools participated in the survey. The study collected quantitative data through digital and printed questionnaires, and compiled qualitative information through in-depth interviews.

The study found that integration is the main approach to sexuality education in the surveyed Chinese middle schools. These schools commonly integrate sexuality education into subjects such as psychology, biology and moral education as well as into class meetings. Only one school was identified as having a curriculum schedule and timetable that allocated class hours specifically for sexuality education.

Sexuality education in the surveyed schools tends to cover conventional topics such as physiological and psychological development during puberty, HIV and AIDS prevention and interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex, but rarely touches on topics such as gender, sexual orientation, sexual behaviour, violence, sexual rights and contraception. Teachers delivering sexuality education demonstrate limited understanding of comprehensive sexuality education and receive insufficient training and support.

To improve the effectiveness of sexuality education in schools, it is proposed that a national curriculum standard or guidance for sexuality education be developed for both primary and secondary schools. The schools should also proactively explore the possibility of making sexuality education an independent course or sufficiently integrate it into an independent health education course. Teacher training should be provided to improve the effectiveness of teaching, and school leadership support should be strengthened. It is also recommended that multi-stakeholder collaboration be encouraged and enabled to support and complement school-based sexuality education.

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