

What do teens *really* want to know?

Sexual health questions asked in Toronto Teen Survey workshops

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Introduction

The aim of the Toronto Teen Survey (TTS) is to gather information from youth on the assets, gaps, and barriers that currently exist in sexual health education and services for Toronto's diverse communities. Information gathered from youth and service providers will be used to develop a city-wide strategy to increase positive sexual health outcomes for youth. The project uses a community-based participatory research model to engage youth and service providers over the course of the project. This presentation focuses on Phase 2, the data collection from youth.

Although there are various methods for teens to access sexual health information (e.g. internet, health care providers) very little is known about what topics they would like to know more about. In group sexual health education settings, youth may be hesitant to vocalize their questions out of a fear of them being identified and negatively judged by their peers.

Objectives

1. To evaluate if providing youth with an anonymous and confidential method of receiving sexual health information is effective in encouraging youth participation in sexual health workshops.
2. To determine the most frequently identified sexual health topics where youth have requested information within an educational workshop setting.

Methods

Members of the project's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC)—with support from the coordinator—facilitated 90 sexual health survey workshops with teens in a variety of community and youth service agencies across Toronto. In these workshops, participants were provided with an introduction to Planned Parenthood Toronto and the Toronto Teen Survey project. After informing participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of the survey and workshop activities, YAC members administered the survey to consenting youth and provided assistance when needed.

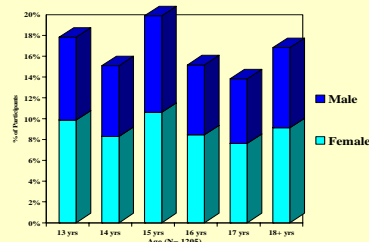
Upon completion of the survey, participants were given a piece of paper and asked to write down any questions they have about sex or sexuality that they would like to have answered by the facilitators. Participants were reminded that it was an anonymous activity and to not share their questions with their peers.

All participants were required to fold their paper and submit it into an opaque bag. After all pieces of paper were collected, the facilitators answered all questions and provided resources informing youth of local sexual health services. All questions and comments were later entered into Microsoft Word and coded with N6 software for analysis.

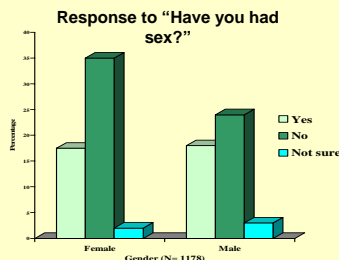
Results

A total of 1,205 youth participated in the workshops. The demographics show that participants from all genders and ages were well-represented in this study. Fifty-four percent of participants identified as female, 45% as male, and less than 1% as transgender or two-spirit. The following graph shows the analysis of age and gender.

Participants by Age & Gender

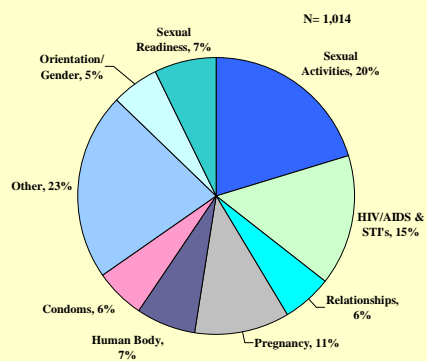


Survey results showed that for the question "Have you had sex?", 37% of all participants answered yes to the question; 59% answered no; and 4% were not sure. The following graph shows the analysis by gender.



A total of 1,014 questions were submitted within the 90 workshops. The research team categorized the questions into 16 broad categories, of which 4 of them have been collapsed into the 'Other' category in the below chart.

Participant Questions Sorted By Topic



Frequently Asked Questions

Generally, there were some common questions that were often asked in the workshops. Below are some of the most frequently asked questions that would be asked within a workshop:

- Can a girl get pregnant...
 - from having sex when it's her first time?
 - if she has sex on her period?
 - from having anal sex?
- How do you know if you have an STI?
- Can you get HIV/STI from kissing or blowjobs?
- When is it the right time to have sex?
- Does it hurt/ Do you bleed the first time you have sex?
- Why do people jerk off? How do you masturbate?
- Why are guys more sexual/horny than girls?
- How can you tell if someone really likes you?

Conclusions

The findings show that a significant proportion of youth (over 80%) had chosen to participate in the sexual health question-and-answer activity. The participants were also actively engaged in the activity and asked questions that covered a wide spectrum of topics that spanned sexual and reproductive health, sexuality, and relationships. Within the workshops, participants were generally comfortable with the peer-to-peer education format and often initiated dialogue with the facilitators by asking follow-up questions or creating candid group discussions based on the answers provided.

The results showed that the most commonly requested inquiries dealt with learning more about sexual activities (20%), HIV/AIDS and STIs (15%), and pregnancy (11%). This suggests that these topics are what youth find most personally relevant despite the finding that almost 60% of the youth reported that they have not ever had sex. This supports the notion that youth are interested in and willing to access sexual and reproductive health information *prior* to being sexually active in order to have a basis for healthy decision-making.

Overall this study has demonstrated that using a youth-led method of engaging youth in sexual health education that incorporates anonymity and confidentiality can be an effective way of increasing participant access to information that is both individually and socially relevant.

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For further information

Contact clayne@ppt.on.ca. More information on this and related projects can be obtained at www.ppt.on.ca. A link to an online, PDF-version of this poster is also available at www.ppt.on.ca.