

## SEXUAL EDUCATION INTERVENTIONS IN SCHOOLS: A KEY TO PREVENTING STIS/HIV

HUSNUL KHATIMAH<sup>1</sup>, ISRONI ASTUTI<sup>2</sup>, ERLIN PUSPITA<sup>3</sup>, DEDES FITRIA<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of Midwifery, Health Polytechnic Ministry of Health Jakarta I, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Department of Midwifery, Health Polytechnic Ministry of Health Bandung, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: Husnul Khatimah; [husnul.khatimah@poltekkesjakarta1.ac.id](mailto:husnul.khatimah@poltekkesjakarta1.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

Globally, reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting healthy practices are essential strategies for preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. Adolescents, a vulnerable group in this context, face numerous challenges, including lack of reproductive health knowledge, early sexual initiation, and gender inequalities, all of which increase their risk of STI and HIV exposure. Educational interventions, particularly those based in schools, are highly effective in fostering behavior change by equipping young people with the necessary knowledge, skills, and motivation to adopt safer sexual practices. School-based sexual health education programs can significantly improve awareness about STI transmission, prevention, and treatment. Such education empowers adolescents to make informed decisions, practice safer sex, and delay sexual activity. These programs also strengthen self-efficacy, which is critical in adopting healthy behaviors and resisting peer pressure. Additionally, sexual health education helps prevent unintended pregnancies, a significant issue in adolescent health, by providing information on contraception and sexual decision-making. Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) addresses the root causes of early pregnancies and sexual health risks, such as misinformation and stigma, and promotes informed, responsible choices. In sum, school-based sexual health education not only reduces the incidence of STIs and HIV but also enhances adolescents' overall sexual and reproductive health.

**KEYWORDS:** Adolescents, Sexual Health Education, STIs, HIV/AIDS.

### INTRODUCTION

Globally, reducing high-risk behaviors and promoting healthy behaviors have been recognized as the most effective methods for preventing STIs and HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup>. Adolescents are a vulnerable group to sexually transmitted infections, including hepatitis B and HIV/AIDS. During this period, they experience continuous physical, psychological, and social changes, along with various risk factors such as a lack of information about reproductive health, early sexual activity, social inequality, gender disparities, and myths that can increase the risk of exposure to STIs and HIV/AIDS<sup>2</sup>. Educational intervention is one of

the most effective strategies for promoting behavior change. The educational approach aims to provide the knowledge, information, and skills needed for individuals to adopt healthy behaviors. Additionally, the behavioral approach utilizes prevention strategies to motivate individuals to adhere to healthy behaviors. Globally, the prevention of high-risk behaviors and unprotected sex, along with the promotion of healthy behaviors, has been recognized as the most effective solution for preventing STIs. Rapid and accurate disease diagnosis, comprehensive and effective treatment, education on prevention and risk reduction, and the promotion of condom use are some of the key principles that can help control and address STIs, including HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup>. School-based sexual health education offers several important benefits in the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, including:

**Increased Awareness and Knowledge:** This education helps students understand fundamental concepts about STIs and HIV, including transmission, prevention, and treatment. Accurate knowledge can reduce the risk of disease spread. Worldwide, sex education and HIV/STD programs are viewed as partial solutions to sexual health issues. Sex education and HIV/STD programs, which are based on written curricula and delivered to youth in schools, clinics, or community settings, represent promising interventions for reducing risky sexual behaviors among adolescents. These programs are often well-designed for implementation in schools, where they have the potential to reach many teenagers. However, they can also be executed in clinics and community settings, where they may reach additional adolescents, including those at higher risk who may have dropped out of school<sup>3</sup>. Health education interventions have been proven effective in enhancing comprehensive knowledge related to HIV and STIs, including the spread and transmission of HIV/AIDS<sup>4</sup>.

**Behavioral Change:** The improved knowledge gained by students can lead to behavior changes, such as adopting safer sexual practices, including the use of condoms, and delaying sexual activity until they feel ready. In addition to increasing knowledge, sexual health education also enhances self-efficacy for abstinence and HIV testing<sup>5</sup>. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to act and persist in the face of obstacles and challenges, and it plays a crucial role in influencing behavior change. Previous studies have shown that low self-efficacy is associated with high-risk sexual behaviors. Sexual health education can also lead to positive changes in high-risk sexual behaviors and reduce stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV<sup>6-7</sup>.

**Prevention of Unwanted Pregnancy:** Comprehensive sexual health education also includes information about contraception, which can reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. Adolescent pregnancy continues to be a significant public health issue. Even a single instance of pregnancy can interrupt an adolescent's educational opportunities, potentially leading to adverse health and social outcomes. Pregnancy is an indicator that adolescents are engaging in unprotected sexual activity, which puts them at risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Pregnancy also leads to additional vulnerabilities among adolescent girls, including child marriage, the likelihood of undergoing unsafe abortions, and complications related to maternal health and childbirth. Studies show that Comprehensive Sexuality Education has great potential to provide adolescents with the necessary information about their bodies and sexuality, reduce misinformation, shame, and anxiety, and enhance their ability to make safe and informed decisions regarding their sexual and reproductive health, ultimately reducing unintended pregnancies<sup>8</sup>.

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