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**Why do we need CSE and what should be the essence of such education?**

**Opinions, needs and perspectives of Italian adolescents**



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## An exploratory and participatory research

Alloni A., Centrone M.R., and Viola, F. (2017). “Yes to Sexuality Education: Exploring the voices of Italian Adolescents”. In: *Social Work Review*, XVI n. 4/2017, pp. 1-19.

**RESEARCH QUESTION:** What are Italian adolescents’ needs, opinions and perspectives when it comes to the potential introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as a compulsory school subject?

**UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, 2018:**

*“all cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality”*





# Introduction to the research

## WHY THIS RESEARCH?

- No compulsory sex education in schools in Italy → Different laws discussed but not one succeeded. The decision falls upon the school board.
- Voices of children and adolescents quite absent.

## METHODOLOGY:

- Qualitative research. FGDs. Open coding (grounded theory).
- Three focus groups (Apulia, Lombardy and Veneto).
- Interviews conducted in December 2016.



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## FINDING 1: Faith and criticism in school

- ✓ **Positive opinion on learning sexuality education at school**
- ✓ Effective education = formal education, in schools, graded and compulsory
- ✓ Need for change → young external educators and smaller classes
- ✓ Feeling the current school system does not teach them what they need here and now → criticism to a school system that sees children only as “becomings”



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## FINDING 2: Gender categorisation and discrimination

**Gender norms and heteronormativity** → internalised in the teenagers' behaviours, ideas, language and experiences

**“Slut-shaming”** → girls are labelled against their sexual behaviour and feel discouraged to denounce it

**Cyberbullying** → all the interviewees tell us about a cyberbullying case that happened to a girl they know

**«Operation of the sexual double standard» (Allen, 2003)** → girls' anxiety in first intercourse/struggle in negotiating use of contraception



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## FINDING 3: Talks about sexuality framed by a protective discourse

- Embarrassed to talk to their parents → only in case of a serious problem. Interaction limited to sexual health issues.
- No other community spaces available.
- Digital media → an unreliable source of information.
- TV programmes on early pregnancy, STDs, and homosexuality → not produced with an educative purpose.
- Friends to learn and exchange experiences **BUT** reinforce heteronormative discourses and gender discrimination.

Young people are not recognized as sexual agents and sexuality education treats only of prevention of early pregnancies and STDs → **protective discourse in sexuality education (Allen, 2007)**



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## Why do we need CSE?

- ✓ Children and adolescents think it is important!
- ✓ Discourse on sexuality is absent at a societal level → **the concept of “taboo”**.
- ✓ CSE supports parent-child dialogue about sexuality (Turnbull, 2012; Donati et al., 2000) → **reinforcing a protective environment**
- ✓ CSE policies, programmes and curricula should respond to adolescents' needs → **RELEVANCE and EFFECTIVENESS** (Shalet et al., 2014)







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## What should be the essence of CSE? (1)

### Focus on digital media

- Online and offline are a continuum (Boyd, 2007).
- Digital media play an important role on the acquisition of information about sexuality (Livingstone and Mason, 2015).
- Experiment sexualities, reflect on problems and feelings and learn from peers.
- Adolescents do not trust information online and ask for support (Scarcelli, 2014).







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## What should be the essence of CSE? (2)

### Focus on combating gender stereotypes

- Episodes of bullying and abuse have deep roots in gender discrimination.
- Girls are not confident enough in denouncing and raising their voices → lacking language and examples among educators.
- Facilitate prevention of unhealthy sexual behaviours (Sanchez et al., 2005).
- **DO NOT HARM** reproducing heteronormative discourses (Shaull, 2005).





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## What should be the essence of CSE? (3)

### CHILD PARTICIPATION (Art. 12 UNCRC) → OWNERSHIP

- ✓ Participation in development of curricula → **children as “experts”**
- ✓ Participatory methods → **child-centred approach**
- ✓ **Adolescents should be recognised as “sexual agents”** → emancipate ourselves from a protective discourse on sexuality → **EMPOWERMENT**

**OWNERSHIP = EMPOWERMENT = PROTECTION** (Allen, 2007)





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## What to do next?

1. Establish legislative framework and practical policies → **standards;**
2. Take into account the views of **ALL** children → **intersectional approach;**
3. Plan **RESEARCH** → **evidence-based policies, programmes and curricula;**
4. Plan **EVALUATION** to assess short- and long-term impacts on **various outcomes, including but not limited to the prevention of VAC/VAW;**
5. **Provide support and training to teachers, educators** → listen to their challenges!
6. **Include parents/caregivers** → provide them with accurate information;
7. Do not forget other stakeholders! → **How can media and the private sector support CSE programmes?**





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## THANK YOU 😊 ANY QUESTIONS?

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