

ADDRESSING TABOOS: BREAKING THE SILENCE ON REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN EDUCATION

by:

ADRIAN CHRISTOPHER M. MIGUEL

Teacher I, Mariveles National High School - Poblacion

In the context of Philippine education, conversations about reproductive health and sexuality have often been treated as sensitive topics. The history of sex education in the country shows a significant gap between the actual experiences and risks faced by teenagers and what they learn in schools. Several factors contribute to this mismatch, such as a narrow focus on biology, societal taboos around sexuality, moral and religious biases, and a lack of emphasis on important aspects like gender relations and adolescent rights (Pakasi & Kartikawati, 2013).

According to the 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), there has been a reduction in the incidence of teenage pregnancies among Filipino females aged 15 to 19, decreasing from 8.6 percent in 2017 to 5.4 percent in 2022 (Dela Peña, 2023). While this decline is a positive sign, it underscores the urgency of addressing the root causes of teenage pregnancies, one of which is the absence of comprehensive sexual education.

The Philippine Family Planning Organization of the Philippines points out a critical missing element in the teenage pregnancy crisis—the lack of comprehensive sexual education (COMMONER, 2021). Comprehensive sex education involves high-quality teaching covering a wide range of concepts related to sexuality and relationships. It goes beyond biology to include discussions on sexual well-being and skills necessary for responsible adulthood.

Despite the enactment of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act in 2012, which included the integration of sexuality education from kindergarten to Grade 12, the

execution has encountered difficulties. The 2018 Policy Guidelines for the Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), issued by the Department of Education, seeks to tackle concerns such as teenage pregnancy, sexual assault, and the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV (UNESCO, 2019). The curriculum is designed to fulfill the health and protection requirements of students, offering extensive information to promote gender equality and empowerment. At present, the CSE curricula are undergoing testing in specific schools located beyond the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

With one-third of the Philippine population being young people, it's crucial to address gaps in reproductive and sexual health education. Recognizing that comprehensive sexual education is essential for equipping youth with knowledge and skills for responsible decision-making, healthy relationships, and protection against sexual risks is a significant step forward.

Breaking the silence on reproductive health in Philippine education is not only a necessity but a responsibility. By acknowledging historical taboos, understanding current trends in teenage pregnancies, and actively implementing comprehensive sexual education, the Philippines can pave the way for a generation of empowered and informed individuals. It's time to bridge the gap between education and reality, fostering an environment where open discussions about reproductive health are not only accepted but embraced as essential components of a holistic education.

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