

# X-press

The IPPF newsletter by and for young people

Volume 6

Number 1

Published bi-annually

May 2004

## Glossary

**SRH** – sexual and reproductive health

**ICPD** – International Conference on Population and Development 1994

**HIV/AIDS** – Human Immuno – deficiency Virus – Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

**STI** – Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexual and reproductive well-being is important for both men and women and it is unfortunate that the traditional family planning movement's focus on pregnancy and fertility has resulted in men and especially young men being isolated from its agenda. However, the shift from family planning to the more comprehensive sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and rights focus has brought about a strategic opportunity, to focus equally and yet separately on young men's SRH rights.

Reaching young men should be about addressing their own needs and rights and not only about addressing women's needs. In other words our work with young men should not only focus on preventing pregnancy, but explore love and relationships and how young men can express their own sexuality, be comfortable with their bodies and be healthy. We need to encourage new thinking about young men's sexual and reproductive health and create a realistic concept of masculinity and abandon harmful stereotyping which views young men as obstacles.

Finally, we must always remember that young men are not the same and that in addition to differences in socio-economic circumstances, they are diverse in their sexuality, life styles, and aspirations.

**This issue of X-Press explores young men's sexuality and related issues and a few ideas for relevant activities have also been included, so enjoy!**

### We have rights! (pg 2)

- Young men are not a homogeneous group
- Young men are still exploring their own sexuality and need non-judgemental guidance.
- SRH services should reach all young men and meet their different needs.

### Different and equal (pg 6)

- Young men's SRH is not a means to an end but an end in itself.
- Equal representation and participation
  - Understanding power relations

### It takes 2 (pg 5)

- SRH: whose concern?
- Learning about each other's bodies and feelings, supporting each other and making decisions together

## The importance of young men's SRH

### Who we really are...(pg 3)

- Negative social and cultural norms should be challenged
- Taboos around talking about sex and sexuality should be overcome
- Stereo-typical images of young men should be addressed.

### Seeing the bigger picture (pg 4)

- Lifestyle choices affect one's wellbeing and quality of life

### Working with us – the 'how to'(pg 7)

- Use non-judgmental terminology
- Use creative sexuality education materials – posters, films, games.
- Ensure youth participation in all activities, from educators to decision makers
  - Make a link with other youth services: sports camps, career guidance services.
  - Try to create youth friendly environments
    - Advocate and raise awareness among families, communities and policy makers for SRH.



# We have rights!

## YOUNG MEN ARE STILL EXPLORING THEIR OWN SEXUALITY AND NEED NON-JUDGEMENTAL GUIDANCE.

Once, I went to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and my doctor just assumed that I only had sex with girls. In fact I was dating a guy at the time and it was really awkward to correct her assumption.  
(Tavs Qvist, Denmark)

Young men want to be good leaders and good partners; involving young men in SRH programmes helps them explore their roles, expand their knowledge and make positive and informed decisions for their futures.  
(Chrisjan Appollus and Vaino Jacob, NAPPA, Namibia)

## SRH services should reach all young men and meet their different needs.

The peer education approach proved to be an excellent strategy to reach young men with SRH information and services, especially in situations where sexuality is stigmatized. It is an ideal means of breaking the silence, easing communication and encouraging open discussion.

(ZT, Kallo FGAE, Ethiopia)



Peer Counselors - FGAE, Ethiopia

SRH education can be integrated into informal contexts such as sports camps and youth centres and can also take place through workshops in work places and schools.

(Samuel Darko, Ghana)

## YOUNG MEN ARE NOT A HOMOGENEOUS GROUP

Targeting young men is considered an essential element in contemporary Sexual and Reproductive health strategies; this is because men in many societies are considered the key decision makers and hence advocating safe sex without them is like fighting a lost battle. However, if we look closely at the reasoning behind their inclusion, we will realise that often it is laden with negative social understandings about their own behaviours; they are perceived as a large part of the problem. Socially we have been taught that boys need to be reached before they become men and start causing 'trouble'. Their 'awful track record' of irresponsible sexual behaviour has been the central catalyst in the spread of STDs, unintended pregnancies and sexual coercion. We are told that men commit almost all recorded sex crimes! Indeed would we have wife beating, child abuse, sexual harassment and rape, were it not for men? Not an impressive record is it?

However, 'young men' are not a homogeneous group who share the same set of values, understandings and behaviours; on the contrary, they are a diverse group of individuals who have different needs, problems and attitudes and it is important that we begin to address them accordingly. Through my counselling, I often meet young men who feel the pressures of society's expectations on them. They feel girls expect them to want only one thing – sex, their friends expect them to behave macho and their parents just expect them to get into trouble. When someone is continuously treated as a problem, they often tend to become one. This perception is also portrayed by the media, where pornography has further engraved men's image as mindless sex machines and where Hollywood has certainly done its share to teach boys what they should aspire to. Finding one's way through this minefield of expectations can be quite a task; such demands can almost suffocate an insecure 14 year old boy, who is just worried if he'll ever be good enough to get a girlfriend. Most of the young men I work with just want the space to be (and to discover) themselves. So work to break this cycle of negative expectations: Think diversity, when thinking young men!

Tavs Qvist, Medical Student and Sex Counsellor, FPA Denmark

### IPPF YOUTH Manifesto

"VOICE" <http://www.ippf.org/youth/voice/index.htm>

"Young people must have information and education on sexuality and the best possible sexual and reproductive health services (including contraceptives)"

"Young people must be able to be active citizens in their society"

"Young people must be able to have pleasure and confidence in relationships and all aspects of sexuality."

## Activity

Be a journalist for a week and conduct interviews to find out the different SRH needs of the young men in your community. Start a discussion about their views on sexuality, reproductive health and attitudes towards relationships. Use photographs and slide shows to present your stories. At the same time, collect fingerprints or footprints to create a visual metaphor for diversity; collectively these can be made into art work and/or advocacy materials (posters etc) to publicise the concept of diversity.

# Who we really are...

## ADDRESSING STEREO-TYPICAL IMAGES OF YOUNG MEN

As young men we are expected to 'automatically' take control, know about sex, assume responsibilities and make decisions. We are not given information and as a result we make mistakes. We are not careless and do not have bad intentions, yet we are often blamed for unhealthy sexual practices and the spread of STDs and unintended pregnancies!

(Chrisjan Appollus, NAPPA, Namibia)

In Latin America, our actions and thoughts are greatly influenced by machismo, so as men, we are not allowed to express feelings of love, tenderness or fear.

(Fernando Ruiz Vallejo, 18, Profamilia/Colombia)

Understanding how society views sexuality is very important because it influences the behaviour of young people. The accepted expressions of 'masculinity' often mean that young men are not expected to talk about their weaknesses, mistakes or concerns nor about love and relationships. On the contrary they are expected to show a bold and experienced attitude towards sexuality. Young men are reluctant to question these values and often hide their own insecurities and fears; this is often the beginning of the cycle of unsafe sexual habits and practices.

(Omari Muhani, 22, UMATI, Tanzania)

## Overcoming taboos around talking about sex and sexuality

- Parents do not talk to children about sex or sexuality because of a fear that it might lead to promiscuity!
- Religious and social expectations which do not accept sexuality before marriage and promote abstinence as the only choice for the young people do not reflect their realities!
- The idea that 'respectful' young men and women should withdraw from any sex-related discussions, as they are inappropriate, sinful and unnecessary leads to dangerous and uninformed decisions!

(Solomon Obeng, Ghana)

Organizations must talk more about Sexuality and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, rather than only about family planning. Language has a great effect on the mindsets of young people and on their attitude and willingness to get involved.

(Achint Verma, Bhopal, FPA India)

## Challenging negative social and cultural norms

Rigid cultural habits can often over-ride the practice of informed SRH choices. For example if a young man shares his decisions with his wife and supports her in her household responsibilities, his family may reproach him and convince him that such behaviour is a sign of weakness and his wife's domination.

He will have to be very strong to practice values contrary to what he was brought up believing in.

(Yassin Mponda, Tanzania)

## Activity

Get a group of young men and young women together and brainstorm on the following questions

- As a young man/woman what do you think society expects of you?
- Do any of these expectations have negative consequences and if so what are they and how can they be overcome?
- Make two posters on what you would like to change about social expectations and hang them in your youth centre (e.g. don't expect us to know everything about sex; Do encourage us to ask questions and to share with you our thoughts about sexuality)

# Seeing the bigger picture

Feelings of having control over one's own life create confident, happy, empowered and active young people.

## Lifestyle choices affect one's well being and quality of life

I'm perplexed  
Outraged and vexed  
Why did I have unprotected sex?  
No job, a child  
If I had caught AIDS,  
What would I have done next?  
Had dreams destined for  
stardom and success  
But I lost control in loves' vortex  
Listen  
I can play on the decks  
Scout girls and flex  
But abstain or use Durex!

(Imhotep Oyortey, 15, London)

I believe that young men's involvement in SRH issues is a positive step towards a healthy young generation; one with empowered young people who can make informed decisions about their lives and their futures ... decisions ranging from the number of children they plan to have in the future to who they choose to be in relationships with and what kind of contraception they feel most comfortable and safe using.

(David Boakye-Boateng, Ghana)

Higher levels of unemployment, limited job opportunities and an increasing number of youth leaving or being turned out of schools are pushing young people towards risk taking and dangerous occupations such as street trading, drug trafficking, and sex work amongst others. These working conditions often restrict their access to SRH information and services and affect their life styles and choices as they become exposed to unhealthy situations which in turn have a negative effect on their physical and mental health. These conditions place young people in a cycle of vulnerability as their lack of skills and ill health further limit their employment possibilities.

(Philip Darko)

The attitude of a large number of young men in India, towards sexual and reproductive health (SRH), is reflected in an experience I had last year. I conducted a small survey among some young men I know, who come from the same social strata – urban, educated and well to do. I wanted to learn about their awareness levels on abortion, its legality and issues on unsafe abortion.

One of the young men I gave the questionnaire to, looked at it and said, "Oh, I'll pass this on to my fiancée. She can deal with this, since it concerns her." I was quite amazed! He just did not realise that the questionnaire was really meant for him. It was intended to gauge his awareness and involvement in an SRH issue that could quite conceivably concern him at some point in his life.

Young men in India have the usual concerns about sexuality and reproductive health as most other young men around the world. They want to know if masturbation is normal and whether or not it will make them weak. Adolescents sneak into cinemas showing adult movies and get most of their information on sex and sexuality from these movies as well as peers, magazines and the Internet. This information is not always correct and complete because such films and magazines are not designed to give out information but to titillate the consumer.

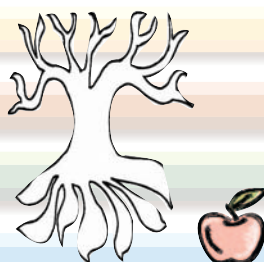
Young women, on the other hand, are expected to know next to nothing about their own sexuality. If a young girl is knowledgeable about sex, then she is perceived to have 'loose morals'. As a result, a lot of the times, young men know more about the act of intercourse than women do. This usually means that they can coerce a young woman into unsafe sexual practices.

The use of the condom is largely the domain of men. Women have very little negotiating skills or power in this respect. In fact, it is mainly men who buy condoms. The stigma is so great that even a married woman buying condoms will be stared at and will have to listen to lewd remarks.

There is an immense need to create avenues where both young men and young women can obtain complete and correct information on SRH without being judged. Young men have to be sensitised about the fact that sex and sexuality are about two human beings and not just themselves.

Arushi Singh, FPA India

Create links between SRH and different issues affecting our quality of life by using concepts of mind-mapping and associative thinking. Sit in a circle and using the problem tree shown below, discuss the causes, consequences and possible solutions to a given SRH issue eg; HIV/AIDS. This exercise highlights the links between SRH, education, poverty, gender norms and other wider socio-economic issues.



Roots – causes

Trunk – SRH issue

Branches – Consequences

Apples – Solutions

## Activity

# It takes 2

## SRH: whose concern?

Although the ICPD Programme for Action states that men play a key role in bringing about gender equality, many SRH projects in the developing countries have focused on women's rights and empowerment. This institutional focus and cultural and gender norms have distanced men from SRH and has resulted in poor communication between partners about such matters.

While women are often better acquainted with SRH issues and feel responsible for them, men feel this is not part of their role and are reluctant to get involved. However, decisions such as family size and contraception are made by men – but due to their limited involvement, these decisions are often uninformed! We must enable every individual to make free and informed choices on SRH and emphasize the importance of a partnership between men and women for the improvement of both their lives.

(Roshni Motha, FPA Sri Lanka)

Men and women are partners in sexual relations and in promoting positive sexual health and attitudes they should be treated as inseparable parts of the same equation. When both partners are informed, they will be better able to explore their understanding of relationships and love, strengthen their commitment to each other, decrease gender inequality and violence, reduce sexual partners and the spread of STIs and hence bring about a responsible and informed community.

(Odor King Obinna, Sure Health Nigeria)

The active involvement of men in family planning, the use of contraceptives, dual protection and abortion is very important in ensuring that reproductive health rights are upheld and that social awareness occurs collectively. Involving young men from the early stages of their adolescence, is an effective way of positively changing the traditional relationship between young men and women and their SRH practices.

(Gwan Roland Asangha, 19 Cameroon)

### LEARNING ABOUT EACH OTHER'S BODIES AND FEELINGS, SUPPORTING EACH OTHER AND MAKING DECISIONS TOGETHER.

During a SRH workshop in a boy's secondary school I was asked questions ranging from menstruation to how girls feel about sex. This interaction made me realize that boys long for information and a better understanding of SRH. I also learnt that if boys get as much information as girls then some of the SRH problems will be reduced because they will all be speaking the same language. So let's give the boys as much of a chance to get involved and make their contribution to SRH, then and only then will they appreciate SRH as being a relevant part of their lives.

(Anne Alan Sizomu, Uganda)

Involving young men in SRH encourages them to ask questions and acquire a sense of self awareness; it also encourages them to commit to safe sexual practices. This will help shift the traditional African view of seeing men as solely responsible for making SRH decisions to seeing it as a joint responsibility with their partners.

(Ibrahim J Mkwizu, UMATI, Tanzania)

Guess each other's thoughts...

Get a group of young men and young women together and ask them to write down what they expect of the opposite sex and what they believe the opposite sex expects of them. Ask the other group to guess what is on the list.

Create miming and acting games (charades) to make the guessing exercise more fun!

Use this time to correct misconceptions and understand expectations!

## Activity

# Different and equal

## YOUNG MEN'S SRH IS NOT A MEANS TO AN END, BUT AN END IN ITSELF

Young men have become important because reaching them is a means of protecting young girls; while women need to be empowered, men just need to behave!

This misunderstood view of the men's sexuality and the relationship between girls and boys has resulted in men's inclusion only as instruments of achieving women's sexual health and not as a goal in itself.

(Yassin Mponda, Tanzania)

I strongly feel that young men should be informed on matters concerning sexual and reproductive health. Gender equality should be re-conceptualised so as to incorporate both sexes equally and not only focus on women. This is particularly relevant to HIV/AIDS since it affects both men and women and both have the right to make decisions about their sexual behaviour and life choices.

(Helen Tjiungua, Namibia)

## UNDERSTANDING POWER RELATIONS

SRH education programmes should always take into account the power dynamics between men and women. If sexuality education is not implemented properly they can further aggravate unequal power relations. This emphasises how essential it is to ensure that young men have a real understanding and respect for SRH rights as this is an effective means by which to challenge coercion and promote a positive understanding of sexuality and gender equality.

(Obinna Paulinus Odor, Nigeria)

## Equal representation and participation

Young men should be involved in SRH at every level, from the grassroots community initiatives to national policy making so that they are represented and involved in the whole process. This will have a positive effect on encouraging healthy sexual habits and reducing the rate of infection transmission both because the policies will consider their needs and because they often have the upper hand in decision making regarding sexual relationships

(Kidega Omal, Uganda)

When a policy recommendation states that at least 50% of the elected national governing body of an Association should be women, it makes possible a 100% female representation without a clear emphasis on the importance of male representation. Although the absence of female representation in the past has provoked such recommendations, it is important now to ensure that the emphasis is on both genders equally

(Jay Pujanes, Philippines)

During the past 16 years, the services in our centre have been mainly dominated by young women, both as members and as peer counsellors. This has made it difficult to attract young men and to promote programs and services for them; it has not only excluded them but has reinforced the misconception that SRH is a woman's concern.

(Veejay Joel Salonga, Philippines)

Ask your group to draw or tell a childhood story about the first time they realised they were different from members of the opposite sex.

Discuss the main evidence of gender differences (such as differences in dress code, division of labour, biological changes)

## Activity

Discuss the links between this 'evidence' and cultural and social expectations of young men and women. Also consider how gender inequality affects the rights and happiness of both young men and young women.

# Working with us – the 'how to'

## Key issues to think about

note that these would be relevant to both young men and young women

- Use non-judgmental terminology
- Use creative sexuality education materials – posters, films, games.
- Ensure youth participation in all activities, from educators to decision makers
- Make a link with other youth services: sports camps, career guidance services.
- Try to create youth friendly environments – a space for young people to be free
- Advocate and raise awareness among families, communities and policy makers for SRH.



HIV/AIDS campaign by the young volunteers of MEXFAM – Mexico

Giving young people more access to information about their rights and more support for practicing them encourages a new collective mind set which can enable them to fight for things they believe in and to break social norms and taboos that forbid them from practicing and discussing things that are central to their lives

David Boakye-Boateng, Ghana

I think it's the right time to really give emphasis to us young men, in order to help us discuss sexuality openly without feeling afraid and/or shy.

Aries Bon Golez -PC, 21 Philippines

We need to let society know that it is time for truth and openness by educating them about young men's sexual and reproductive health rights - start with parents!

Sauda Cyprian, 21, Tanzania

To bring about a change, whatever it maybe, but especially when it is to do with mentalities, it is not always wise to engage in a head on attack about our differences. It is better to start with the points we agree on.

Callyste Tshiabola, Eldorado, DR Congo

We believe that boys can be reached through sports and recreational activities.

Yohannes Tsegaye, Ethiopia

Go through the list of activities suggested above, come up with practical and immediate positive actions to tackle these issues in your centre/home/community.

Think of these on three scales:

- 1) Small scale Immediate action (such as change of behaviours/terminologies)
- 2) Medium scale and short term (such as ideas for workshops or design some posters)
- 3) Large scale and long term (such as setting up special services or advocacy campaigns).

## Activity

Describe these actions in as much detail as possible. Document them well and include them in your overall group action plan. Create groups that can plan these actions and start implementing!

Microsoft Internet Explorer

Address: [www.ippf.org](#)

**If you want to read more...**

In their own right: Addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of men worldwide, Alan Guttmacher Institute 2004  
[www.agi-usa.org/pubs/itor\\_intl.pdf](http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/itor_intl.pdf)

Working with men, responding to AIDS – Gender, sexuality and HIV, A case study collection, International HIV/AIDS Alliance 2003  
[www.aidsalliance.org/\\_res/training/prevention/Working\\_with\\_men.pdf](http://www.aidsalliance.org/_res/training/prevention/Working_with_men.pdf)

It takes 2, Partnering with men in reproductive and sexual health, UNFPA 2003  
[www.unfpa.org/upload/lib\\_pub\\_file/153\\_filename\\_ItTakes2.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/153_filename_ItTakes2.pdf)

Boys and Men, Choices IPPF European Network 2002  
[www.ippfen.org](http://www.ippfen.org)

Young men and HIV – Culture, poverty and sexual risk, UNAIDS 2001  
[www.panos.org.uk/PDF/reports/youngmenandhivculture.pdf](http://www.panos.org.uk/PDF/reports/youngmenandhivculture.pdf)

Involving men in sexual and reproductive health, FORUM IPPF Western Hemisphere Region 2001  
[www.ippfwhr.org](http://www.ippfwhr.org)

What about boys? & Boys in the picture, WHO 2000  
[www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/OVERVIEW/AHD/adh\\_over.htm](http://www.who.int/child-adolescent-health/OVERVIEW/AHD/adh_over.htm)

Also see  
[www.fhi.org](http://www.fhi.org) Family Health International  
[www.rho.org](http://www.rho.org) Reproductive Health Outlook  
[www.paho.org](http://www.paho.org) Pan American Health Organisation



International Planned Parenthood Federation/ Western Hemisphere Region (IPPF/WHR) contributed – along with other organizations – to the development of a Manual and accompanying video on “Working with Young Men to Promote Health and Gender Equity”. The aim of the manual is to promote the abilities of young men to discuss and reflect on the “cost” of traditional masculinity and the advantages of more gender-equitable behaviours and to rethink what it means to be a man.

The activities cover themes from sexuality to emotions and preventing and living with HIV/AIDS

Accompanying this manual is an entertaining and thought-provoking 20 minute cartoon video, with no words, called “Once Upon a Boy”, which tells the story of a boy and the challenges he faces growing up.

The manual has been used in youth programs in IPPF Members Associations in Brazil, Bolivia, Jamaica, Peru and Mexico.

Copies are available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. For more information see <http://www.promundo.org.br/english/public.asp>



To mark the 10th Anniversary of ICPD a Global Round Table will be held in London at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre from 31 August to 2 September 2004.

The programme will emphasize;

- Assessing the progress made toward the achievement of ICPD.
- Determining what action is needed to realize the goals of ICPD by 2015.
- Focusing on outcomes aimed at answering such questions as how can we scale up and build on our successes, reach a wider constituency, reduce inequality and address marginalized and socially excluded people.

On the 30th of August 100 young people from across the world will come together to participate in a youth day themed **Youth Citizenship: Practicing our Sexual & Reproductive Rights.**

National and regional events shall also be taking place throughout the year. For a provisional timetable and further information please see [www.countdown2015.org](http://www.countdown2015.org)