

The IPPF newsletter by and for young people

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X-press has been overwhelmed by the number of opinions that came flooding in about sexuality. We asked the question: **How do you express your sexuality? What makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable? How do other people make you feel about your own sexuality?** You can find many answers to these questions here, not only in articles, but in small quotes, poems, and pictures, all in this edition of **X-press!**

SEXUALITY IS NATURAL

Sexuality is something we feel, something we do, that comes from within ourselves by nature. Sexuality is something natural and should not be bad. Through sexuality we feel attracted to other people we like. When we speak about it we are not only referring to our genital organs but also about our feelings which sometimes lead us to have sex on our own or with other persons. Sometimes we do this out of curiosity to see what they are like in their body.

For me, sexuality means a possibility to learn to love and respect people and it is something we have to learn little by little. I live my sexuality calmly, without hurry, because I know that the age will come when I will be able to have sexual acts without problems with the person I appreciate and love.

Estuardo López Chután, aged 16,
worker at el Centro de Desarrollo Humano
Guatemala

www.virtualguatemala.com/cdhg



Picture by Sha-Kim, aged 25, Tanzania

contact him on wchachi@yahoo.com or visit his website at:
<http://chachi.8m.com>



International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF),
Regent's College, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS, UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7487 7911/7866. Fax +44 (0)20 7487 7865.
E-Mail: xpress@ippf.org Website: <http://www.ippf.org>

Sexuality

SEXUALITY... what does it make you think? Is it negative or positive? I would say this depends on the way you relate to the word. But it doesn't matter whether you are monk or prostitute you still face it. So why don't we just accept that our sexuality is natural, just as our desire to eat food, drink water, or be happy.

As a 17 year old, I'll be bold enough to say that I know the problem of youth and sexual issues in my country. I am not saying that in Armenia everything is wrong, no, there are actually some very good traditions with both Christian and cultural roots, but there are many superstitions. I'm not saying that people should break God's commands, be wicked and jump into sexual relationships, I just want people not to look at it as something to be ashamed of. And I don't condemn the older generation, for they've grown up with the idea that sex is bad, and that the whole purpose of a relationship should be having children. I'm not trying to tell them that they are

wrong, I just want them to let us be free in what we think about it ourselves, and express our ideas in our behaviour, dress and manners. Why must woman be ashamed and afraid of looking good, so that no one thinks or says something bad, or whistles at them? Why should women be uncomfortable with who they are? That's what freedom is - wanting to be yourself; and if we think logically and work a little bit on ourselves we won't have problems; for one person's freedom ends up where the freedom of another person starts. So all we need to do is just be clear where this is and feel the borders in order not to be a trouble to each other.

Being frank I would say that some people are sexual, very sexual, and some are not at all. Would you say that all prostitutes are sexual? Of course not. And a person is not sexual from the way he dresses or behaves; a person is sexual from deep inside. And a sexual kind of person never thinks about how to express it, because for him/her, just being who he/she is, is expressing his/her sexuality. Sexuality is not only tender, it can be rough, it can be wild, it can be

animalistic, it can be beautiful in its modesty. It can be every kind, as there are many of us in this world with different characters, and in the same way there are as many images of sexuality and the ways of expressing it.

So now, after all I have written above, I can surely say that no one has a moral right to condemn any person for the way he/she expresses his/her sexuality, when this behaviour doesn't go beyond the common moral code. We should let each other be comfortable, be who we are, and not be ashamed of our sexuality, for it's beautiful because it's part of us.



**Irina Ghaplanyan, aged 17
Member of the Youth Committee,
"For Family and Health" Association
Yerevan, Armenia**

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS ASIA-PACIFIC YOUTH FORUM 4th – 8th June 2001, Thailand.

It was an honour for me to represent FFPAM and IPPF East and South East Asia and Oceania Region at the United Nations Asia-Pacific Youth Forum.

It was my first time at an international conference and at first I was nervous because I did not know how to behave properly and feared I might not be able to communicate with other delegates well. However, everything was easier than expected! I found it friendly and I had support from young people from other countries.

I joined the discussion on HIV/AIDS among Young People, I was shocked by the increase rate of HIV/AIDS infection, which is getting higher and higher. Is it going to accelerate more in the future? I gave my opinion that every government should establish an AIDS Awareness Society in schools/institutions to give awareness to students.

I learnt a lot from this forum, especially about organising a workshop on HIV/AIDS. Young people proved that they are able to stand on their own. They had support from their family members and teachers. We do appreciate any help or assistance, but we are young people with abilities. This forum has given us young people a chance to prove it.



**Edmund Phoong Ee Ming, aged 18, Chairperson of
Penang Youth Advisory Centre of the Federation of
Family Planning Association, Malaysia (FFPAM)**

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT SEXUALITY?

Where sexuality is taboo, many parents can find it difficult to discuss within the family, we young people pick up our information where we can, which causes harm later on since it is not always accurate..... I would say that my sexuality is expressed with a lot of gentleness due to my gentle nature and to the good education given to me by my parents.

Dominique Manima Bukaka, young volunteer with Association pour le Bien Etre Familial/Naissances Désirables, Democratic Republic of Congo

Younger generations with their little knowledge get into unsafer sex. Sexuality to me means being attracted to the opposite sex, regardless of colour, race and the like factors.

James Hassen, aged 19, Ethiopia

Today safe sex is not only prudent, it could be the difference between life and death.

Hon.Olumola Shola Kolawole-Youth Co-ordinator, United Youth Front International. Nigeria.

Some people take the view that sexual feelings are wicked. Young people and the new generation may get this idea and feel guilty about the desire they sometimes have. But before in the time of our grandparents sex was also hushed up and people were afraid to talk about it. Many people would like to have sex but they are afraid of talking about it. We must come to terms with sex and put it in its right place. All of us must take the message to be healthy and happy.

Nesro Mohammed, aged 18, Ethiopia.

I think that young people should be more open to talk about sexuality. We must help each other rather than judge.

Amel Ben Hmed, Youth Committee, ATPF, Tunisia

I would be very surprised if someone was not interested in sexual and reproductive health since that's what everyone wants to understand, especially when young

Fatma Akhrout and Selma Krichene, aged 20, Tunisia

In Ghana, parents can be unaware or unwilling to accept their children's sexuality. If a mother finds a condom wrapper in her son's room this is evidence of her son's increasing sexuality. The best thing to do would be to have a talk with her son and help him open up about his sexuality. But parents in Ghana consider expressing one's sexuality a taboo. They may be aware of the sexual desires and feelings of their children, they are unwilling to accept them, hoping the associated problems will go away. But the problems will not just go away. Parents must be open about issues relating to sexuality. They may be in the best position help their children as they faced similar problems when they were young.

Mark Kojo Atuahene, aged 22, National Programmes co-coordinator of OMEGA, Ghana



Picture by Sha-Kim, aged 25, Tanzania

Focus group discussions in Pakistan

Mr Daud Saqlain, in charge of the youth section of FPA Pakistan, held focus group discussions with young people. Here are some of the results:

Young people in the focus group discussions were concerned about the development of their bodies, masturbation whether it is normal or harmful for health, ejaculation and orgasms. They were also worried

and afraid about spontaneous erections and 'wet dreams'. Most of them found some answers to their queries from friends, books, and magazines.

Knowledge on sexual and reproductive health issues enables young people to cope with physical and emotional changes, dispels myths and taboos about sexuality and lays the foundation for a satisfying sexual relationship. This indicates the need for providing unbiased information to 'in school' and 'out of school' youth, so that they are better informed and adjust to their changing physical, biological and emotional needs of growing up

Feeling and affection for Others

Sexuality involves the changes that occur in our bodies, both socially and physically. It also involves the expression of feelings and affections we have for our friends, relatives and lovers. Our maturity involves a sense of independence from parents and a clear sense of who we are. When we find partners and friends whom we share the same interests and dreams we feel comfortable since we all share the same world with them and they are ready to help us in the time of difficulties. I feel comfortable when my friends recognise my friendship for them and I

also feel happy when they reciprocate and appreciate every little thing I offer or do. In most of our communities our parents and community leaders are always there to decide our destiny. They always leave us to believe that we have no choice and control over our lives. This makes us feel uncomfortable because we cannot develop our own self identity and expressions of our sexuality. Our culture may expect us to marry at a tender age and have as many children as we can. If we have a focus into advancing our education and securing a

better career and then marrying later our decision is faced with prejudice and even discrimination in the society. Young people in the society who face discrimination, disability and other disadvantages sometimes believe that things just happen. They give up trying to influence what will happen and just end up accepting that everything happens to you by chance.

Mutwiri Marangu
Kirimara youth group
Family Planning
Association of Kenya



NGO "YOUNG PERU"

is inviting young people from all countries to apply to their "International Volunteer Program 2002" to be held in Tacna-Peru. More information can be found on the web page:

www.angelfire.com/pa/YOUNGSPERU/novedades

Or by writing to NGO Young Peru, Urbanización las Buganvillas H-9 Tacna, PERU

UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY POSTPONES SPECIAL SESSION ON CHILDREN

Following the terrorist attacks on New York, the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children, due to be held in September 2001, has been postponed. A new date is likely to be set for 2002.

The IPPF website www.ippf.org contains further information on the Special Session and the relevant documents. The website also contains a set of advocacy fact sheets on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people with useful facts and figures and information on international agreements relevant to the topic. The fact sheets can be used as advocacy tools for anyone working in the area of young people's sexual and reproductive health.

SOURCE: IPPF

www.ippf.org/resource/meetings/unssc/factsheetseries

Manifesto corner

This section of X-press contains examples and thoughts about the IPPF Youth Manifesto. Goal 1 of the manifesto is :

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

Young people from the FPA in Mauritania, (AMPF), write about their experiences of setting up information and service networks in their country:

Despite the difficult situation in Mauritania, our association has been able to develop innovative programmes for young people. As the first step, our youth committee set up community networks of volunteers in five regions. At present, we have 66 networks of young men and women totalling 1,000 young volunteers.

In parallel with these networks, we have set up youth centres in each of the regions. These centres are our meeting point for discussion, information sessions, plays, story telling etc...this is our only place of entertainment. In these centres, we have introduced listening cells for young people seeking information.

We have made a great step forward, but the road is still very long. We have provided the information and created demand but the demand for services is far from being satisfied. But there is a gleam of hope. Our problems can be solved. Our association is about to expand these centres and to increase their medical and educational equipment and the numbers of the personnel. We will be able to develop our skills and provide assistance to thousands of young Mauritians who want to be heard and want to benefit from the opportunities available. We are highly motivated and we have discussed with our association the possibility of opening a multi-disciplinary centre for young people in the capital, Nouakchott. They were all in favour of such an initiative and then it was up to us to think about the organisation and management of the centre. Our dream has become reality. Our centre exists and it has been up and running since June 2001. It is well equipped, we are putting programmes in place and we have appointed a young person as manager. Every day, we see young people, it is their centre, their leisure space, their source of information.

Don't forget to sign up on the internet to show your support to the [ippf/youth manifesto](http://www.ippf.org/youth/manifesto) at: www.ippf.org/youth/manifesto Or alternatively write with your name to manifesto@ippf.org



TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT BASED ON SEXUAL IDENTITY

The world over, lesbians, gay men, bisexual and transgender people are at particular risk of human rights violations because of their sexual identity, Amnesty International says in a new report, "Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Silence". They suffer persecution and violence simply for being who they are. They are tortured or ill-treated by state officials to extract confessions of "deviance", and sexually assaulted or raped to cure them of it. They are attacked in their homes and communities to punish and intimidate them because of their sexual orientation or gender identity

SOURCE: Amnesty International, 25 June 2001

Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Violence:

web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/Index/ACT400162001?OpenDocument&of=THEMES\SEXUAL+ORIENTATION

GLOBAL ACTION NETWORK

A new online community designed for young leaders working in population and reproductive health has been set up at www.GlobalActionNetwork.org. The website is a resource centre for young people around the world and a forum where individuals can connect on the website to other young people to share ideas and collaborate. It also links young people with senior level professionals in the field, holds online discussions and provides a gateway to fellowships, funding, and other opportunities.

Source: Global Action Network

WORLD YOUTH FORUM IN DAKAR

The 4th World Youth Forum was held in Senegal from the 5th-10th August with debate and consultation between youth groups and representatives of UN agencies. The Dakar Youth Empowerment Strategy was adopted which calls for youth to be empowered to participate more effectively in every aspect of society. Catherine Kamau, a youth volunteer from the Africa Region (FPAK), attended the World Youth Forum.

She reports back on her experiences.

Top on the agenda especially for Africa was the issue of HIV/AIDS, poverty and unemployment as key factors affecting young people. All regions of the world were represented in this Forum with the bulk of them from the African countries.

Governments sent delegates from their National Youth Councils. IPPF Africa Region co-convened a side event on the issue of HIV/AIDS and youth leadership, here we looked at issues of poverty and their linkages with gender imbalances. It was noted with concern that choice was lacking in the critical arena of decision making for girls and women.

Many declarations on the discussion areas were made. As usual yet another forum has succeeded in doing what all others do – to criticize the last forum and make recommendations of its own. It is upon us now to wake up to the cries of the lost lives and save others. Translating recommendations into actions can do this.



A full report with recommendations can be found on the UN website on youth.

www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/forum/index.html

EXPERIENCES OF A SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH PROMOTER

When I was younger, I used to mistake sex for sexuality and I never dared to ask about it because 'you don't talk about those things... It is bad, dirty, ugly'. Now that I am 22, I have learned that all young people need orientation to guide us towards the experience of an enriching sexuality, full of loving, motivating us to value our own body and that of our partner, as well as to value our rights in respecting those of other people.

On the personal side, some of these changes occurred through the openness and recognition our families have shown towards our work as promoters. Issues many of us found difficult in the beginning have now opened channels of communication and we can count on their support, confidence and approval. Our relatives have learnt and grown with us thanks to the many discussions on the subject; they even have asked for our support to orientate other members of the family. I have learnt the value of friendship, commitment, responsibility, persevering work and doing things with love.



Manuel Alejandro Mireles

Sexual and reproductive health promoter

AVESA (Venezuela Association for Alternative Sexual Education)

Manmireles@latinmail.com

WHAT MAKES ME FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE

It makes me feel uncomfortable when people judge other people's sexuality simply because they do not share their sexual preferences, and they think these people are degenerate or mentally ill.

A recent case was that of the National Police, who said they would expel any police officer (male or female) from their ranks if it was discovered or suspected that they were homosexual. And I ask myself: where are we going to end when so many young people are discriminated against simply because of their sexual preferences?

Another case occurred in a street. Young people of both sexes were walking by about 7-9pm one evening and they were thrown out, arrested or insulted simply because the police did not accept their preferences, their way of walking or the way they dressed. The police officers asked them: 'Are you gay? Are you into heavy metal music? You are a degenerate!' And again I ask myself: 'what about human rights: Where are the organizations that are working with young people?'

All this happened and nobody, no-one did a thing!

But I asked them why they were doing this and I just was humiliated and insulted in front of many people because I had come to their defence and no one else had.

Many people make me feel good and comfortable with myself, though others question my acts or opinions simply because I come to the defence of people because of their ideologies, or preferences. This does not bother me, and that's important – for me to believe in what I think.

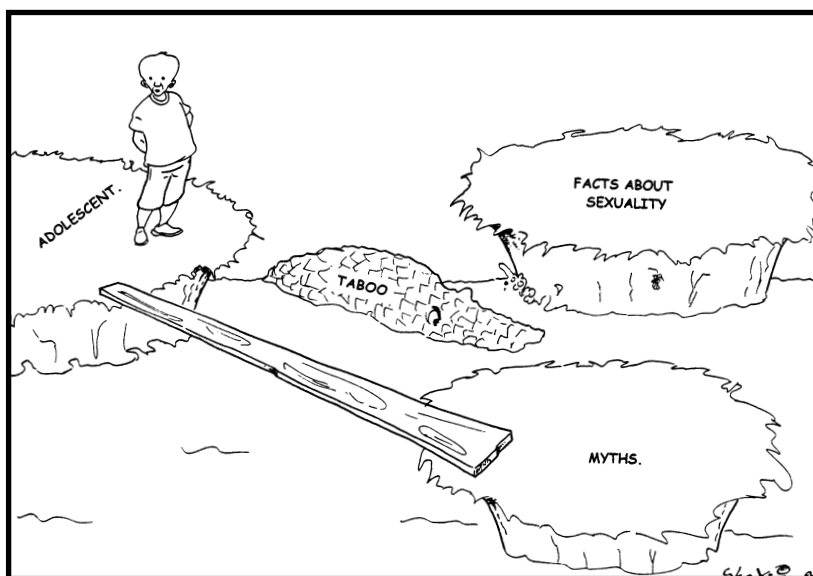
José Miguel Renville
Pro-Familia
Dominican Republic



RESOURCE PACK ON GENDER AND SEXUAL & REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Ipas and Health & Development Networks have produced a resource pack/training curriculum called "Gender or sex: who cares?" for adolescents and professionals working with young people. The pack includes a manual, curriculum cards and handouts and provides an introduction to the topic of gender and sexual & reproductive health. It includes activities that are easily reproduced and adaptable to varying cultures and circumstances. Available in English and Spanish, it is free of charge to organisations in developing countries (maximum of 5 copies).

Source: **Ipas/Health and Development Networks**, 26 September 2001
email: christiee@ipas.org



Picture by Sha-Kim, aged 25, Tanzania

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE MAHLER FORUM

The Danish FPA held a workshop and discussion forum, with NGOs and young people, in Copenhagen from 22-28th August 2001. The question we had to answer was: How can young people be involved in the fight against HIV/AIDS? We discussed some of the problems encountered in each of the countries represented in the meeting and came up with suggestions.

During the conference we visited a Danish Secondary School. The students asked questions about our work in FPAs. One curious fact is that some Danish youths think that AIDS is a problem in other countries but not theirs. Myself I think they must start acting immediately, because otherwise there is going to be a serious problem in Denmark. They worry about unwanted pregnancies, so girls take contraceptive pills, but they don't use a condom, nor ask their partner to use one. Therefore it is necessary to create awareness about HIV/AIDS – it is not someone else's problem, it is everybody's problem.

We discussed the meaning of "Rights", arriving at the following conclusions. No one can take rights away from you, rights are something you fight for, universal, gives us meaning as human beings. Rights give you the freedom to do the things you want to do as long as you don't violate other people's freedom and we must respect and protect our rights and rights of others. We talked about how some human rights are not respected.

For instance, sometimes young people do not have sufficient information about sexuality because adults think it is immoral – this is a violation of the right to education and information.

The final day we presented our work and ideas to a panel of experts and over 100 people from NGOs, policy-making bodies, donors, the press and young people. I felt very nervous, but I think it went well. After each presentation there was a time for questions; people in the audience contributed to the presentations, suggesting ideas and asking us questions.

I think the Mahler Forum was the most enriching experience I have ever had. I learned about different cultures of the world and the diverse viewpoints different people have in different regions; also I had occasion to forge friendships I am sure will last for a long time. I shall use all my newly acquired knowledge in everyday life, thus helping other young people to learn about their sexuality and talk about it openly.

Marisol Romero Durá, aged 16 , MEXFAM,



Participants of the Mahler forum at work



Part of Marisol's presentation at the Mahler forum was on cultural barriers to talking about sexuality

X-press

YOURSELF

The next edition of X-press will look at **DIVERSITY** and differences. Young people are not all the same. Different young people may have different needs, what do you think this means for sexual and reproductive health? Do different young people need different services, information and programmes? Should we recognise differences between young people? Does this lead to discrimination? Is there any time when you have been discriminated against or when being different has been an advantage? Do you work with disadvantaged groups of young people and would you like to share your experiences in X-press?

X-press is made up of your ideas and opinions on different issues, and it is a space to share your experiences of the projects you are involved in. So keep your articles, poems, ideas, drawings or photos coming. These need to reach us by the 29th March 2002.