

Redefining sexual health for long-term benefits.

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Introduction

Sexual health is important throughout a person's life, not just during their reproductive years, from childhood to adolescence and into old age. It is defined by the quality and safety of people's relationships: with themselves and others, with family and friends, and with society as a whole, including gender conventions that affect our lives. The realisation and protection of everyone's human rights relating to their sexuality is a prerequisite for these interactions [1].

The World Health Organization's (WHO) working definition of sexual health emphasises a positive and respectful attitude toward sexuality and sexual relationships that is much more than the physical and that cannot be separated from sexual well-being: Sexual health is more than just the absence of sickness, malfunction, or infirmity; it is a condition of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being associated to sexuality. Sexual health necessitates a positive and respectful attitude toward sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the ability to have joyful and safe sexual encounters devoid of compulsion, prejudice, and violence. All people's sexual rights must be recognised, protected, and fulfilled in order to achieve and sustain sexual health [2].

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The importance of pleasure in the success of sexual health interventions

A new study published in the open-access journal PLOS ONE on the importance of considering sexual pleasure, not just disease risk, when creating sexual health programmes, was published just in time for Valentine's Day (14th February, 2022). Based on the findings of numerous projects, the study suggests that sexual education and health interventions be redesigned to include sexual pleasure considerations, especially when encouraging safer sex. This entails understanding why individuals have sex and accepting that sexual encounters can and should be joyful [3].

Historically, sexual health education and services have promoted safer sex practises by focusing on risk reduction and disease prevention, without understanding how safer sex may also increase closeness, enjoyment, consent, and wellness," says a paper co-author from the World Health Organization. "The bottom line is that programmes that better represent the reasons people have sex — including pleasure — have better health results." These findings are hoped to inspire the sexual and reproductive health and rights community to advocate services that educate and equip consumers to engage in safe, consensual, and joyful sex [4].

What next for sexual health and well-being?

Specific interventions aimed at improving sexual well-being are gradually becoming available: The latest version of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD), which includes a chapter on sexual health for the first time, is a significant milestone. WHO facilitates the diagnosis and appropriate management of a wide range of sexual health disorders by offering the most up-to-date evidence-based definitions? From January 2022, countries have been using this chapter. Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based approach to teaching and learning about sexuality's cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions. WHO recently cooperated with partners, including HRP, to produce guidelines for out-of-school CSE programmes that are appropriate and safe for various populations of children and adolescents? This is in addition to the United Nations' guidance on sexuality education in schools. Both of these declarations emphasised that sexual behaviour, as well as giving and receiving sexual pleasure, is a normal and healthy part of life.

Another suggestion is for policymakers to incorporate brief sexuality-related communication, a therapeutic strategy for behaviour modification that offers a holistic and positive view of sexual health and sexuality, into their plans whenever practical. Unfortunately, this is not the case for everyone. Non-consensual and violent sexual behaviour affects many women, girls, and gender-diverse people. WHO and HRP are assisting countries around the world in their efforts to prevent and manage the effects of all forms of sexual violence. WHO is creating new worldwide policies to manage STIs, including HIV, in order to eliminate infections that harm sexual health, while taking into account the present pandemic-induced health system disruptions?

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Given the numerous evidence gaps that must be addressed in order to achieve universal access to STI/HIV services, WHO is presently prioritising a research agenda aimed at enhancing national STI programme implementation. This agenda will build on WHO's leadership in creating innovative point-of-care diagnostics for faster and more accurate diagnostic testing, as well as in defining the "Global STI Vaccine Roadmap" to drive research and development for new STI vaccines [5].

One of the most important aspects of being human

Individuals', couples', and families' overall health and well-being, as well as the social and economic development of communities and countries, are all dependent on good sexual health. WHO is dedicated to diagnosing and supporting sexual health so that everyone everywhere can exercise their human rights to sexuality and sexual well-being?

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