

“But Miss, you’re embarrassing us!”

The potential for peer-educated Sexual and Relationships Education (SRE) in Scotland

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Project Overview

Education by peers (educators of “equal social standing”, to pupils like university students or young professionals) has been recognised as an effective means of delivering SRE. This approach may help to improve its current implementation in Scotland.

Current Policy

- The Scottish Government has **no fixed curriculum** for SRE but publishes a circular outlining expected learning outcomes.
- Schools are obliged to provide an SRE course at primary and secondary level but attendance is **non-compulsory**.
- This education is typically carried out by teachers, although resources are also available for parents.
- While **peer education networks** have been established to deal with youth substance abuse, peer education initiatives for SRE have so far been overlooked.

Methodology

This project combines academic research with interviews of leading peer educators and facilitators to argue that peer education represents a valuable means of improving SRE education in Scotland.

Over the course of the project, we conducted interviews with **Sexpression Edinburgh**, a charitable body which provides inclusive and up-to-date SRE to local schools through student volunteers and **Eilidh MacAskill**, a performance artist who provides SRE to primary schools through the character Gendersaurus Rex.

A further interview is planned with **Hannah Daly** of Going Forward Scotland, a charity who use peer education principles in youth work across Scotland.

Stakeholders

The main stakeholders for our project would be contemporary **SRE educators**, including teachers, health professionals and the parents themselves.

Specific organisations with the potential to improve peer-led SRE in Scotland include the **Scottish Peer Education Network** and **Ministry of Education** led by Deputy First Minister John Swinney.

The project will also aim to reach local **school boards** to increase awareness of the potential for peer education in Scotland.

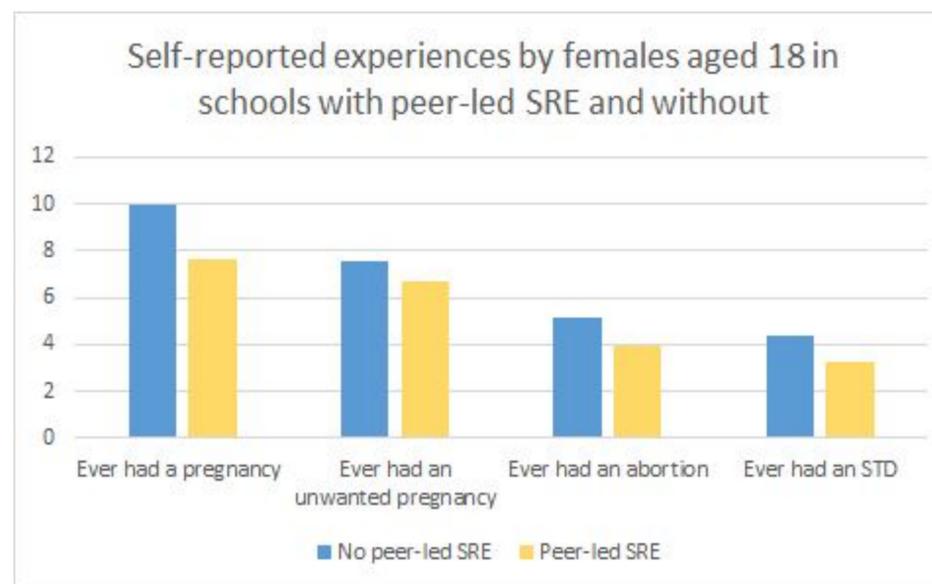
Research

Parent-Led SRE

- Presents a valuable and safe way for children to learn about sex and relationships
- However, parents have expressed a lack of confidence, feeling underprepared or unwilling to teach sensitive subjects (M. Malacane & J. Beckmeyer, 2016)
- As few as 50% of parents actively seek to their children about sex and relationships (J. Reid & E. Teijlingen, 2006)

Teacher-led SRE

- Scottish students report a high level of dissatisfaction with teacher-led education (J. Reid & E. Teijlingen, 2006)
- Students are often unwilling to discuss sensitive subjects with their teachers (K. Lowden & J. Powney, 1996).
- Even with training, teachers remain uncomfortable with their own knowledge of the subject, in particular complex issues like LGBTQI+ identities. (MacAskill, 2018; Sexpression, 2017)



Based on information in J. Stephenson et al. (2005)

Potential benefits of peer-led SRE

- Pupils typically find peers more credible than teachers and parents (National Hemophilia Foundation, 1994; DiClemente, 1993)
- Groups like Sexpression and Gendersaurus Rex are already providing SRE in a number of Scottish schools
- Peer educators themselves can gain valuable, transferable skills from the experience (FOCUS on Young Adults, 1997; National 4-H Council, 1999)
- Peer education has been proven to reduce potentially harmful sexual activity amongst girls in England (J. Stephenson et al., 2005)
- Anonymous peer-led services like Sexinfo and In Case You're Curious have proven successful in the US. (O'Malley et al., 2017)
- Peers are often able to use vocabulary which pupils can relate to where older educators may not (Sexpression, 2017)

Challenges to peer-led SRE

- SRE charities struggle to find the resources to reach out to local schools and many rely on word-of-mouth promotion (Sexpression, 2017)
- State schools rarely have much time to devote to voluntary and extra-curricular elements like peer-led SRE (Sexpression, 2017)

Findings

- Developing peer-led SRE across schools in Scotland would modernize sex education and improve the sexual health of youth with the experience also benefiting peer educators themselves
- Peer-led SRE tackles problems that parent- and teacher-led SRE have posed to a comfortable learning environment for students
- Compulsory SRE would ensure that information reaches the majority of students which helps to reduce unwanted pregnancies, STD's and abortions

Recommendations

- **Consideration** of SRE as a core subject in Scottish schools
- **Promotion** of peer education by school boards and the Scottish government as a means of delivering SRE
- **Implementation** of further peer-led SRE courses throughout primary and secondary schools
- **Creation** of a peer education network for Scotland able to coordinate and promote the efforts of individual educators

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