

# #LetsTalkAboutIt – Sexuality Education in Hong Kong

## Executive Summary

Sexuality education is essential to helping young people become happy and healthy adults. As they grow up, they have to deal with changes in their bodies, while trying to connect with their peers and making sense of conflicting messages from the world about relationship “shoulds” and “should nots”. Both school and home play a critical role in supporting our youth to become confident, competent young adults in sex and relationship matters.

So how has Hong Kong (HK) done so far in terms of sexuality education?

Given the potentially wide scope of this topic, we have narrowed down our objectives to two issues that we think are more timely, relevant and under-researched in HK:

- (I) **Technology and youth dating** - We want to know if (and, if yes, how) technology has influenced HK youth’s behaviour and attitudes in the context of dating and sex, with a focus on: (a) online dating, (b) the role of instant messaging and social media, and (c) sexting.
- (II) **Sexuality education and sexual competence** - We want to better understand how young people learn about sex and relationships (that is, their sources of sexuality education) and their competence in these issues. We are especially interested in the role of parents in educating children about sex and relationships.

We engaged Ipsos HK to conduct a survey among 502 young people aged between 12 and 24 in HK. Survey fieldwork was conducted from March to April 2016. 402 respondents were recruited online, while 100 respondents were recruited in person.

### (I) Technology and youth dating

- a. **Online dating** is common among youth in HK, but they have a largely negative perception of it.
  - i. 67% have used an online dating platform. Among online dating platform users, 47% have gone out with someone whom they met online, and 43% with dating experience have dated someone whom they met online.
  - ii. Yet, HK youth’s perception of online dating is largely negative. 55% think that people lie on online dating platforms. 48% is worried about disclosing personal information. Only 39% agree that it is a good way to meet people. The discrepancy between online dating usage and perception is one of the questions arising out of this research that warrants further study (a possibility is that some one-time users of online dating did not have a good experience).
- b. **Instant messaging and social media** has altered young dating norms.
  - i. Texting and private messaging is the most popular communication channel among young daters – across genders, age groups and relationship stages. It is preferred to in-person meetings, phone calls and other social media interactions.
  - ii. Among those who have had experience in breaking up, 53% experienced breaking up via text, 22% experienced “ghosting” (that is, simply ignoring and shutting down communications), and 16% experienced a one-sided change in Facebook relationship status.
  - iii. Although one of the functions of social media is to connect people to their communities, its use in dating is still mainly in private communications. 63% will not display their relationship status on Facebook. A majority (67%) does not feel the need to share posts of PDA (public display of affection) to show the world how much they care about their partner.
  - iv. HK youth have mixed views of whether social media is good or bad for relationships. 50% of young daters agree that social media brings about positive influences to relationships, by



allowing them to be emotionally closer to their partner (57%) and to be more aware of what is going on in their partner's life (63%). Yet, 45-52% agree that seeing their partner's interactions with others on social media makes them feel insecure and unsure about their relationship.

- c. **Sexting** is neither commonly practiced nor well received by young people in HK.
  - i. Overall, 22% of the respondents have sent or received a sext. 10% of the respondents have sent a sext. 21% have received a sext.
  - ii. Generally, HK youth view sexting negatively: 24% described it as “disgusting”, 21% called it “stupid” and 16% described it as “risky”.

## **(II) Sexuality education and sexual competence**

- a. There is room for improvement for HK youth's **competence in sex and relationship**.
  - i. Among youth who have had sex, 44% did not use contraceptives every time they had sex, and 11% did not use contraceptives at all. Out of those who did use contraceptives, not a small number chose relatively ineffective methods e.g., extra-vaginal ejaculation (12%) and natural rhythm (10%).
  - ii. 40% felt that they were incompetent in sex and relationship matters. Nearly 40% (39%) wished that they had delayed their first time of having sex.
- b. There needs to be more and better **sexuality education**, especially at home.
  - i. The two main sources of sexuality education for young people in HK are school teachers (29%) and the media (27%). The latter is a cause for concern because information from the media may not be accurate and/or sufficient for young people who are often curious about sex and relationships.
  - ii. Sexuality education at home is inadequate and starts too late. An overwhelming 77% of the respondents did not have their parents talk about sex with them growing up. Parents play an especially small role in sexuality education among boys.

## **Implications and suggestions**

The prevalence of online dating among HK youth has implications for sexuality education programmes. To the extent that they are still preaching a blanket “no” to the use of online dating, this approach may not be effective in teaching young people safety precautions when using these platforms, or generally in reaching out to young people. In light of technological advances, there is a need to critically examine the content, relevance and timeliness of sexuality education.

More generally, sexuality education programmes should be evaluated as to their reach and impact on young people. Any effective methods and best practices should be identified and shared among practitioners. Parents also need to do more, start earlier and pay more attention to their boys' needs in sexuality education. The Government can take the lead – both in encouraging reviews and exchanges by sexuality education practitioners, and in providing more community education for parents.

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**Effective sexuality education can equip young people with the knowledge, skills and values to make responsible choices about their sexual and social relationships, which is fundamental to their personal development and wellbeing. We hope that this study will act as a starting point – for experts and practitioners to further their work and research in this area, and for the public to start talking about sex and sexuality education. Let's talk about it.**

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