

SEX & RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION

Executive Summary



RELATIONSHIP

FRIENDS
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Executive Summary

The inadequacy of sex and relationship education (hereafter sex education) has always been a problem in Hong Kong, and the issue has only worsened in recent years. The reasons behind this issue are as follows:

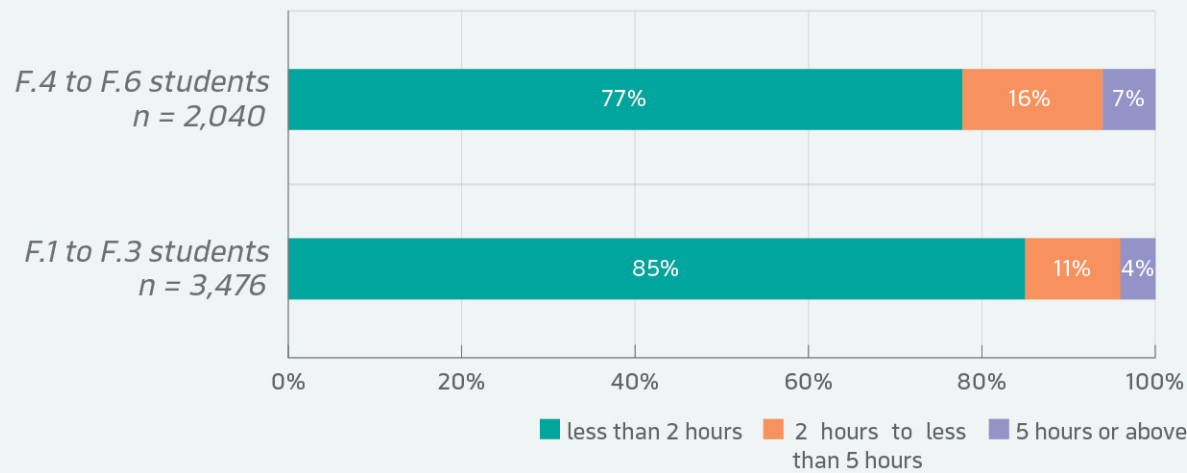
- 1. The Government’s sex education guidelines are outdated.
- 2. Many schools have neglected the subject.
- 3. The number of teaching hours of sex education is generally low.
- 4. Teachers lack the knowledge and skills to conduct sex education.
- 5. The content of sex education is narrow and overly conservative.

To better understand students’ views on sex education and teaching quality, MWYO collected 5,516 survey responses from 12 Hong Kong secondary schools between late January and late May 2021. 3,476 responses were from F.1 to F.3 students, and 2,040 responses were from F.4 to F.6 students. The main findings are as follows:

1. Insufficient teaching hours

Due to school closures under the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2021, overall teaching hours have been reduced. 85% of F.1 to F.3 students and 77% of F.4 to F.6 students stated that they received less than two hours of sex education every year. F.1 to F.3 students generally receive fewer teaching hours of sex education than F.4 to F.6 students.

Figure 1: Average annual teaching hours of sex education in secondary schools



Note: The difference between F.1 to F.3 students and F.4 to F.6 students are statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) under the chi-square test.

2. Schools generally lack teaching on topics which students would like to learn the most

As shown in Table 1, boys are more interested in gaining knowledge related to the physiological aspect of sex. Respondents were asked to choose three topics in sex education which they were most interested in. 36% of F.1 to F.3 boys and 27% of F.4 to F.6 boys stated interest in puberty. 26% of F.1 to F.3 boys and 33% of F.4 to F.6 boys were interested in learning about masturbation. On the other hand, girls are more eager to learn about sexual attitudes and social issues related to sex and relationships. 27% of F.1 to F.3 girls and 34% of F.4 to F.6 girls are interested in LGBTQ issues, while 24% of F.4 to F.6 girls preferred knowing about gender equality.

Regardless of age and gender, students were generally interested in learning about handling relationships. For F.1 to F.3 students, 25% of boys and 28% of girls wanted to know about that topic. For F.4 to F.6 students, 29% of boys and 34% of girls had similar preferences.

According to Table 1, F.4 to F.6 students are interested in learning about masturbation, LGBTQ issues, handling relationships and gender equality. These observations can be contrasted with Table 2. For four topics which F.4 to F.6 students showed more interest in, nearly 70% or more of them thought that they had not learnt enough or did not learn these topics at school at all. There is a mismatch between what schools provide in sex education and what students need and expect.

Table 1: The top three most popular topics in sex education for secondary school students

F.4 to F.6 boys (n = 1,238)		F.4 to F.6 girls (n = 790)	
Masturbation	33%	LGBTQ issues	34%
Handling relationships	29%	Handling relationships	34%
Puberty	27%	Gender equality	24%
F.1 to F.3 boys (n = 2,056)		F.1 to F.3 girls (n = 1,396)	
Puberty	36%	Puberty	30%
Masturbation	26%	Handling relationships	28%
Handling relationships	25%	LGBTQ issues	27%

Note: Respondents chose a maximum of 3 out of 16 topics.

Table 2: Proportion of F.4 to F.6 students who considered that insufficient teaching was given, for the most popular topics (n = 2,040)

	Proportion of F.4 to F.6 students who considered that insufficient teaching was given
Masturbation	83%
LGBTQ issues	77%
Handling relationships	74%
Gender equality	69%

Note: This refers to the proportion of those who answered “Yes, but I have not learnt enough” and “No, I did not learn this at all”.

3. Teaching mode and quality have not met students’ expectations

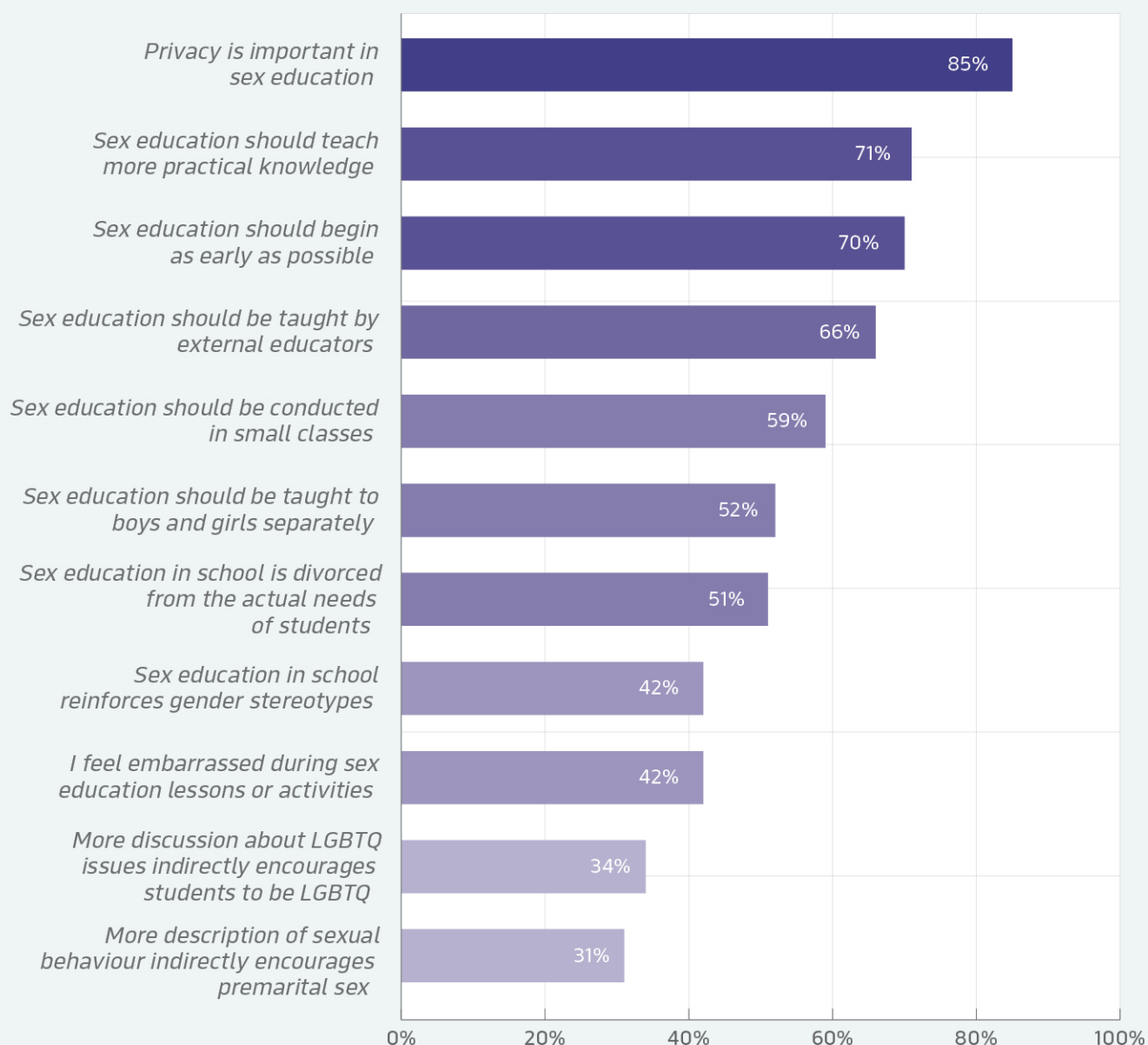
Secondary schools provide a variety of sex education activities for students. Some activities are led by teachers, including class teachers and teachers of various subjects, while others are led by external educators, including social workers, nurses, psychologists, and sex education practitioners. Overall, students have given similar ratings for the teaching quality of teachers and external educators. However, more students consider the delivery of external educators (45%) to be boring than that of teachers (36%).

Table 3: Secondary school students’ views on the teaching quality of sex education by teachers and external educators

	Proportion of students who consider teachers to have this issue (n = 2,381)	Proportion of students who consider external educators to have this issue (n = 3,091)
Seem embarrassed while teaching sex education	35%	38%
Deliver boring sex education	36%	45%
Provide information which is not useful	28%	31%
Cannot adequately answer questions regarding sex and relationships	31%	32%

As shown in Figure 2, 85% of students believe that “privacy is important in sex education” and 59% of them agree that “sex education should be conducted in small classes”.

Figure 2: Proportion of students who agree with the following statements (n = 5,161)



4. F.4 to F.6 students tend to obtain sexual knowledge from unreliable sources

Table 4 shows the discrepancies between F.1 to F.3 students and F.4 to F.6 students in terms of how they obtain their sexual knowledge. F.4 to F.6 students mainly learn from their friends or classmates (21% of boys and 19% of girls), as well as from online forums and social media platforms (20% of boys and 28% of girls). More alarmingly, 16% of F.4 to F.6 boys credited pornographic material as their main source of sexual knowledge. As for more trustworthy sources, 24% of F.4 to F.6 boys and 27% of F.4 to F.6 girls mainly obtain their sexual knowledge from either teachers or external educators.

F.1 to F.3 students tend to learn about sex from more reliable sources. 29% of F.1 to F.3 boys and 22% of F.1 to F.3 girls primarily obtain their sexual knowledge from teachers, more than from other sources. More F.1 to F.3 girls (16%) learned from their family members than F.1 to F.3 boys did (7%).

Table 4: Main sources of sexual knowledge for secondary school students (Top 5)

F.4 to F.6 boys (n = 1,184)		F.4 to F.6 girls (n = 754)	
Friends or classmates	21%	Forums or social media platforms	28%
Forums or social media platforms	20%	Friends or classmates	19%
Pornographic websites or magazines	16%	External educators	16%
Teachers	14%	Teachers	11%
External educators	10%	Family members	6%
F.1 to F.3 boys (n = 1,948)		F.1 to F.3 girls (n = 1,318)	
Teachers	29%	Teachers	22%
Friends or classmates	23%	Friends or classmates	18%
Forums or social media platforms	8%	Family members	16%
External educators	8%	Forums or social media platforms	15%
Family members	7%	External educators	9%

Note: Green boxes denote reliable sources; orange boxes denote unreliable sources

5. Boys and girls at different grades have discrepancies in their sexual attitudes

A sizeable proportion of secondary school boys do not have the correct attitude towards consent. When asked if a person should say yes when their significant other asks for sex (or other intimate acts), despite not wanting to, 22% of F.1 to F.3 boys and 25% of F.4 to F.6 boys agreed. In contrast, only 14% of F.1 to F.3 girls and 9% of F.4 to F.6 girls agreed.

86% of F.4 to F.6 students believe that dating is acceptable at their age, while 66% of F.1 to F.3 students feel the same. The majority of F.4 to F.6 students believe that it is acceptable to browse pornography (80% of boys and 60% of girls). 55% of F.4 to F.6 boys and 25% of F.4 to F.6 girls consider sharing pornography with others to be acceptable.

A significantly larger proportion of F.4 to F.6 boys (61%) deem pre-marital sex acceptable than F.4 to F.6 girls (44%). An alarming 32% of F.1 to F.3 students believe pre-marital sex to be acceptable at their age.

Generally, only a small proportion of students believe having video sex chats, filming sex videos and exchanging nude photos to be acceptable. However, it is still worth mentioning that around 20% of F.4 to F.6 boys find each of these acts to be acceptable.

Table 5: Proportion of F.1 to F.3 students who consider the following acts to be acceptable at their age

	Average (n = 3,123)	F.1 to F.3 girls (n = 1,263)	F.1 to F.3 boys (n = 1,860)
Dating	66%	68%	65%
Befriending transgender people	63%	73%	57%
Befriending people of different sexual orientations	63%	71%	58%
Breaking up	61%	66%	57%
Browsing pornography	42%	33%	48%
In a virtual relationship with a netizen	40%	41%	39%
Online dating	37%	33%	39%
Pre-marital sex	32%	23%	37%
Sharing pornography	25%	17%	30%
Sexting	23%	16%	28%
Giving birth before marriage (you or significant other)	21%	17%	23%
Abortion (you or significant other)	17%	15%	18%
One-night stand	17%	8%	22%
Video sex chat	11%	6%	14%
Filming sex videos	9%	4%	13%
Exchanging nude photos	9%	4%	13%

Note: Considering an act to be acceptable is not equivalent to having done the act previously.

Table 6: Proportion of F.4 to F.6 students who consider the following acts to be acceptable at their age

	Average (n = 1,890)	F.4 to F.6 girls (n = 731)	F.4 to F.6 boys (n = 1,159)
Dating	86%	85%	87%
Befriending transgender people	78%	86%	72%
Befriending people of different sexual orientations	78%	85%	73%
Breaking up	77%	81%	75%
Browsing pornography	72%	60%	80%
Pre-marital sex	55%	44%	61%
Online dating	53%	41%	61%
In a virtual relationship with a netizen	49%	45%	51%
Sharing pornography	44%	25%	55%
Sexting	39%	23%	48%
One-night stand	30%	13%	40%
Giving birth before marriage (you or significant other)	29%	20%	32%
Abortion (you or significant other)	22%	17%	25%
Video sex chat	15%	7%	19%
Filming sex videos	14%	4%	20%
Exchanging nude photos	14%	5%	19%

Note: Considering an act to be acceptable is not equivalent to having done the act previously.

6. Most students would opt for male condoms as a protective method during sex, while a sizable proportion would opt for the natural cycle method or withdrawal

79% of F.1 to F.3 students and 89% of F.4 to F.6 students would opt for male condoms as a protective method during sex. However, a sizable proportion would choose to use less reliable practices such as the natural cycle method (29% of F.1 to F.3 students and 35% of F.4 to F.6 students) or withdrawal (33% of F.1 to F.3 students and 34% of F.4 to F.6 students).

Table 7: Proportion of students who would opt for the following protective methods during sex

	F.1 to F.3 Students (n = 3,123)	F.4 to F.6 Students (n = 1,890)
Male condoms	79%	89%
Contraceptive pills	33%	42%
Natural cycle method	29%	35%
Withdrawal	33%	34%
Female condoms	32%	26%
Morning-after pills	12%	15%
Cleansing body after sex	12%	10%
Contraceptive path / injection	8%	7%

Note: Respondents chose a maximum of 3 methods.

Policy recommendations

Based on observations of the current state of Hong Kong's sex education and the views and expectations of students, we believe that students deserve a more comprehensive sex education, which can only be realised with the effort and support from various stakeholders. Here are six policy recommendations to improve sex education in Hong Kong.

Recommendation 1

The Government should update its guidelines on sex education and amend laws on sex-related crimes

The Education Bureau should publish a set of guidelines on the learning objectives and topics at different stages, effective methods and modes of teaching, and a suggested number of teaching hours. In compiling these guidelines, the Education Bureau should consult local sex education organisations and policy documents citing international standards (such as UNESCO's "International technical guidance on sexuality education"), while considering the needs and expectations of students. Ideally, these guidelines should be renewed every five years to reflect changing social landscapes and attitudes towards sex and relationship.

Authorities should develop a more precise definition of "consent" in the law. A poor understanding of sexual consent could harm people in relationships, and even lead to instances of sexual assault and rape. In a 2019 report, the Law Reform Commission recommended the adoption of a statutory definition of consent, as "freely and voluntarily (agreeing) to the sexual activity" and having "the capacity to consent to such activity". This definition would not only provide clarity and certainty in a legal context, but also promote the right to bodily integrity, which is central to consent. If the Government were to clarify the idea of consent and put emphasis on the concept in sex education guidelines, teaching consent to young people would be easier for teachers, sex education practitioners and parents. Secondary school students, especially boys, would have a firmer grasp and clearer understanding of what counts as consent.

Recommendation 2

The Government should assist and require schools to develop policies related to sex education

The Education Bureau and organisations such as the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong should help schools develop a written sex education policy which suits the schools' missions and the students' needs. The policy should outline what topics to be taught and at which grade, how the policy was produced and would be kept under review and updated, and who delivers sex education. Schools should also consider students' preferences when designing their sex education policy, whether it be through surveys or anonymous suggestion boxes. To ensure openness and transparency, schools should make the policy publicly available to parents and other stakeholders to read.

Schools should be required to develop policies regarding sexual harassment, sexual abuse and pregnant students. These policies should provide clear definitions, the school's official stance, how students can seek help, and how the school resolves and reports these incidents. Schools should make the policy publicly available to parents and other stakeholders to read. The policy should be kept under review and updated.

Recommendation 3**The Government should provide more training and funding to support sex education in schools**

The Education Bureau could require schools to arrange for teachers to take Professional Development Programmes related to sex education, especially those whose work involves sex education, such as Values Education, Moral and Civic Education, guidance and discipline, counselling, and sex education teachers. Schools could require these teachers to attend a certain number of sex education training courses every one to two years. The authorities could also discuss with the relevant faculties of local universities regarding the possibility of providing sex education training for teachers-in-training. Relevant NGOs should arrange for social workers to take sex education courses.

The Quality Education Fund should include sex education as one of its Priority Themes to encourage more schools to apply for funding for sex education programmes. The Fund should also upload information of past sex education programmes on its Cyber Resource Centre website, for other schools to take reference. In the long run, the Government should set up funding schemes for sex education programmes.

Recommendation 4**Hong Kong Education City should provide more learning and teaching resources and platforms to discuss sex education**

Hong Kong Education City (hereafter EdCity) should collaborate with the Education Bureau, the Department of Health, the Family Planning Association of Hong Kong, the Equal Opportunities Commission and other sex education organisations, to enhance and create more learning and teaching resources. The One-stop Portal for Learning and Teaching Resources could add a new category related to sex education and include related resources, for easy access by teachers. More resources on various topics (including more controversial ones such as LBGTQ issues) and material in different languages could be uploaded.

EdCity could collaborate with sex education organisations to host seminars on sex education, for teachers to exchange views on how to conduct sex education. EdCity could provide online platforms and forums for teachers to discuss their teaching experience online.

Recommendation 5**Schools should improve curriculum design and content based on students' needs and preferences**

Schools should enhance students' understanding of sex-related laws. Schools should emphasise the legal consequences of underage sex and teach all students, regardless of age and gender, to protect their personal autonomy and respect the consent of others. This could involve learning how to reject or accept sexual advances, how to interpret whether someone has given sexual consent or not, and how to effectively communicate when facing unwanted pressures to have sex. Schools should improve students' understanding of the sex-related crimes in the Crimes (Amendment) Ordinance 2021, especially the publication and sharing of intimate images without consent.

Schools should enhance students' media literacy, teaching students to discern inaccurate online information and refer to reliable sources (such as social workers and sex education websites) for information regarding sex and relationships. Schools should train students to distinguish the fantasies portrayed in sexually explicit material from the realities of real-life interactions.

Schools should devote more time to discussing the topic of handling relationships with students and offer additional support for those who are facing severe relationship issues. Teachers could discuss how to form and maintain romantic relationships, and the relationship between sex and love.

Schools could include more content on sexual activity for older students, such as facts about sexual intercourse, the legal age of consent and discussions on whether or not pre-marital sex is acceptable. Schools could consider offering practical advice on contraception and safe sex, such as teaching how to use a male condom.

Schools should not shy away from questions from students regarding LGBTQ issues. Schools should minimise prejudice and discrimination against others, and promote values of respect, tolerance and equality.

Schools could consider conducting sex education activities in small classes or for boys and girls separately. This could create a safe space for students to ask questions and express their views, encouraging participation in activities. Teachers and other sex education providers can better understand their students' attitudes and misunderstandings, so that these inaccuracies can be rectified.

When choosing external educators, schools should take into account the mode of teaching, the level of interaction of the activities, and whether the content is engaging and suits the needs of students.

Recommendation 6**Schools should work with other stakeholders to improve sex education and prevent sex-related crimes**

Schools could host seminars and workshops for parents, inviting sex education organisations to talk about the sex education needs of children at different ages, and how to answer these questions. Schools could distribute such information through regular online newsletters for parents, offer parenting guidelines and even recommend useful websites or books.

For young people who have committed sex-related crimes, their schools may work closely with the police and NGOs to mitigate the punishment for less serious offences. In particular, the police could more readily exercise discretion to administer a caution to the juvenile offender in lieu of initiating prosecution. Such cases could be transferred to NGOs, so that the juvenile offender may receive counselling and support. In the long run, various stakeholders should strengthen communication to prevent juvenile sex-related crimes.

About Us



Thought Leadership on Youth Development

MWYO is an independent think tank that focuses on youth issues in Hong Kong. Our work spans across research studies and surveys, advocacy and education, and training and capacity building. We actively engage and work with everyone who has a stake in the positive outcome of young people's development: youth, parents, headmasters, teachers, social workers, employers, civil society leaders, governments, and political parties. Our mission is to be a thought leader in all aspects of youth development in Hong Kong.

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