

# **Teaching Practices of Sexuality and Relationships Education in Tasmanian Schools**

Centre for Human Movement  
Faculty of Education



---

# **Teaching Practices of Sexuality and Relationships Education in Tasmanian Schools**

February 2009

Centre for Human Movement  
Faculty of Education



---

# Teaching Practices of Sexuality and Relationships Education in Tasmanian Schools

---

## Acknowledgement

This report was funded by the Department of Health and Human Services for the Sexual Health Reference Group

The final report was written and prepared by

Dr. Dean Cooley and Dr. Karen Swabey  
Centre for Human Movement  
Faculty of Education  
University of Tasmania

Published February 2009  
Copyright Department of Health and Human Services and University of Tasmania  
*Permission to copy is granted provided the source is acknowledge*

## Contents

Table of Tables .....	6
Table of Figures .....	7
Executive Summary .....	9
Aims .....	11
Objectives .....	11
Recruitment .....	11
Survey .....	12
Results .....	14
Demographic Data .....	14
Teacher Specialisation .....	16
Research Question 1: Current Teaching of S&R in Schools .....	18
Presence of S&R Education in Schools .....	18
Time Allocated to S&R Education .....	20
Responsibility for Delivery of S&R Education .....	22
Grades Taught S&R Education .....	23
Factors Related to the Non-inclusion of Sexuality and Relationships in the Curriculum .....	25
Barriers to Completing Professional Learning .....	26
Research Question 2: Teachers' Attitudes Regarding S&R Education .....	27
Impact on Behaviour .....	27
Teachers' Preferences of Time Allocation to S&R Education .....	29
Teachers' Attitudes Regarding who Should Teach Sexuality and Relationships .....	34
Primary School .....	34
Secondary School .....	36
Senior Secondary .....	38
Research Question 3: Professional Learning Needs of Teachers for S&R Education .....	42
Teachers Attitudes Towards Cognate Discipline Content for S&R Relationships Education .....	42
Additional Areas for Inclusion in Sexuality and Relationships Content .....	47
Discussion and Recommendations .....	50

## Table of Tables

Table 1. <i>Sample Representation by Postcode</i> .....	14
Table 2. <i>Teacher Numbers by Funding Source for School</i> .....	15
Table 3. <i>Teacher Sample by School Type</i> .....	15
Table 4. <i>Teacher Age by School Type</i> .....	16
Table 5. <i>Teaching Area / Specialisation</i> .....	16
Table 6. <i>Allocation of Teaching Time per year by School Type</i> .....	21
Table 7. <i>Allocation of Teaching Time per year by School Organisation</i> .....	22
Table 8. <i>Grades Exposed to S&amp;R Education in Primary Schools</i> .....	23
Table 9. <i>Grades Exposed to S&amp;R Education in Secondary Schools</i> .....	23
Table 10. <i>Grades Exposed to S&amp;R Education in Senior Secondary Schools</i> .....	24
Table 11. <i>Factors Relating to why Sexuality and Relationships Education is not Taught in School</i> .....	25
Table 12. <i>Barriers to Teaching Sexuality and Relationships Education in Schools</i> .....	26
Table 13. <i>Teacher Attitudes Towards the Impact of S&amp;R Education Content on Young Peoples' Behaviour</i> .....	28
Table 14. <i>Frequency of Teacher Attitudes Towards the Time Allocation for the Teaching of S&amp;R Education</i> .....	29
Table 15. <i>Additional Specialists Who Should Teach S&amp;R Education</i> .....	41
Table 16. <i>Additional Areas for Inclusion in Sexuality and Relationships</i> .....	47
Table 17. <i>Factors Inhibiting Teachers' Engagement in Professional Learning Associated with Sexuality and Relationships Education</i> .....	48
Table 18. <i>Additional Areas for who Should Teach Sexuality and Relationships Education</i> .....	49

### Table of Figures

Figure 1. Presence of sexuality and relationships education in school by school type .....	18
Figure 2. Presence of sexuality and relationships education in school by school organisation.....	19
Figure 3. Distribution of time devoted to teaching content related to sexuality and relationships education.....	20
Figure 4. Distribution of time devoted to teaching content related to sexuality and relationships education by school organisation. ....	21
Figure 5. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the impact of that the content of sexuality and relationships education has on young peoples' behaviour. ....	27
Figure 6. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the impact of that the content of sexuality and relationships education has on young peoples' behaviour by school organisation. ....	28
Figure 7. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in early primary school years. ....	30
Figure 8. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and.....	31
Figure 9. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in secondary school years. ....	32
Figure 10. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in senior secondary school years.....	33
Figure 11. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of primary classroom teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education. ....	34
Figure 12. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of primary health and physical education teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	35
Figure 13. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of secondary teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	36
Figure 14. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of health and physical education teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	37
Figure 15. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of senior secondary teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	38
Figure 16. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of senior secondary HPE specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	39
Figure 17. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of senior secondary health and physical education specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships. ....	39
Figure 18. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of senior secondary health specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.....	40
Figure 19. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of anatomy and physiology based subject content in sexuality and relationship education. ....	43
Figure 20. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the impact of that the content of sexuality and relationships education has on young peoples' behaviour by school organisation.....	43

Figure 21. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of relationships subject content in sexuality and relationship education.....	44
Figure 22. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of contraception subject content in sexuality and relationship education.....	44
Figure 23. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of safe sex subject content in sexuality and relationship education. ....	45
Figure 24. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of sexual transmitted infections subject content in sexuality and relationship education.....	45
Figure 25. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of sexual health subject content in sexuality and relationship education.....	46

---

### Executive Summary

A survey of Tasmanian teachers reported on the current teaching practices, attitudes towards and professional learning needs in relation to sexuality and relationships education. Teachers reported that sexuality and relationships education was present in over three quarters of schools. Where sexuality and relationships education was present, teachers reported that a small amount of time was devoted yearly to the teaching of the subject and that a large portion of teachers were untrained to teach the subject content. In terms of when children were exposed to the subject content, teachers reported a broad range of grades from grade 1 to grade 12, although, this exposure was scattered amongst grades. Overwhelmingly, teachers felt that the content of their sexuality and relationships education had little impact on their students' behaviours. This lack of impact is linked to a lack of professional learning opportunities, lack of allocated time, and an unwillingness to tackle some of the content associated with sexuality and relationships education. Teachers reported broad agreement with the concept of sexuality and relationships education being taught across grade areas (although this support was not unanimous), a need for increased time, and a broadening of content available in professional learning days. Recommendations arising from the results were;

#### *Recommendation 1:*

Sexuality and relationships education to be provided in a consistent, sequential and comprehensive way in all Tasmanian schools.

---

#### *Recommendation 2:*

Teaching about sexuality and relationships education to be supported by consistent policies at the system (Department of Education, Catholic Education and Independent Schools) and school level.

#### *Recommendation 3:*

The Sexuality Education Scope and Sequence developed by the Department of Education as part of the Health and Wellbeing Curriculum to be implemented in all government schools, and supported by age appropriate curriculum materials.

#### *Recommendation 4:*

Teachers to be provided with training in sexuality and relationships as part of their undergraduate education and ongoing in-service professional learning. This training to include material on how to engage with students about sexual health and relationships.

#### *Recommendation 5:*

The work of teachers to be supported by the availability of in-school support to teachers and students from external specialist sexual health educators.

---

### Aims

The aims of this project were:

- (1) to identify current teaching practices in this area;
- (2) to identify Tasmanian primary and secondary school teachers' attitudes towards sexuality and relationships education; and
- (3) to identify education and professional learning needs to assist them in their role.

### Objectives

It is currently not known to what extent sexuality and relationships education is being delivered in Tasmanian schools. Responsibility for incorporating sexuality and relationships education into the school curriculum rests with the individual school. The purpose of this study was to ascertain whether sexuality and relationships education in schools is common, which grades it is being delivered in, how many lessons are devoted to the subject, whether current education and professional learning options are meeting the needs of teachers, and whether teachers feel supported teaching the subject within their schools.

### Recruitment

The Chief Investigators approached each educational organization with a request to distribute a letter and an information sheet inviting all teachers in Tasmania to participate in the survey. On receipt of the letter, the Department of Education stated that each school principal would decide whether or not to circulate the letter amongst staff. Responses from Independent and Catholic Education organisations indicated a resistance to the aims of the study. Subsequently, these organisations refused to send the letters directly to principals but allowed the Chief Investigators to send letters to each school principal asking them to distribute the letter at their will, but not the questionnaire.

---

Due to the organisational resistance, the research team decided to adopt an alternative method to gain a higher response rate. This was a web based questionnaire. Letters sent to schools indicated the web address for the survey and the procedures for completing the questions. All on-line surveys contained a consent form. All participants had to check a box on the consent form to proceed to the survey.

All principals of schools in Tasmania were sent a package of letters with a covering letter asking the principal to distribute the information letter to teachers. The letter to teachers included information about the aims of the study, issues of ethics and confidentiality, and how to access the web site. The letter invited teachers of health, sexuality and relationship-based subjects to participate in the survey.

### Survey

In this study the chief investigators took a quantitative approach to gaining information. The decision to take such an approach was based on costs, both financial and human resources, associated with a mixed method analysis. Moreover, it was determined that a quantitative approach would gather a broad spectrum of views across school types (primary, secondary, & senior secondary) and school organisations (independent, catholic and government funded). Obviously such data lacks richness to the end product when compared to those offered by either a qualitative or mixed method approach. To offset this negative, a number of open response sections were provided to participants to expand upon their numerical responses. These responses have been categorised into themes/ concepts for ease of reporting. The questionnaire was constructed from the literature and with the advice and assistance of an expert panel from the following organisations: Family Planning Australia; Department of Health & Human Services; Department of Education; and the University of Tasmania. Teachers were not required to provide their name or any data which would identify them in the survey. Data provided by respondents was captured and automatically entered into a password protected Microsoft Access data base and held on the UTAS secure server. At the completion of the survey period, all data was removed

from the University server and stored in an encrypted file on a non-internet connected hard drive. All data was checked and cleaned and analysed using SPSS for Windows Version 16.0 and Stata Version 8.0. Initial data analysis consisted of a search for evidence of multiple-entries by single users. This search revealed no evidence of multiple entry users.

## Results

### Demographic Data

The response rate to the survey was low. There were 204 respondents, compared to the 9500 people registered as teachers by the Tasmanian Teacher Registration Board in 2006-2007 (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Sample Representation by Postcode*

Postcode	Region	Frequency	Percent
7000	South	18	8.8
7002	South	8	3.9
7004	South	2	1.0
7005	South	15	7.4
7007	South	9	4.4
7010	South	34	16.7
7011	South	6	2.9
7018	South	25	12.3
7030	South	1	.5
7212	North	1	.5
7236	North	5	2.5
7248	North	10	4.9
7250	North	39	19.1
7256	North	9	4.4
7307	North	4	2.0
7315	North	2	1.0
7320	North	14	6.9
7470	North	1	.5
	Total	203	99.5
Missing		1	.5
	Total	204	100.0

Additionally, the Tasmanian Teachers Registration Board (2006-07) report indicates that only 7644 teachers are employed full time across the three educational organisations. The number of respondents to the survey (N=204) represents only 2.5% of the total population (N=7644), however, at the present time there are no figures on the number of teachers who service teach into subjects that include health, sexuality, or relationship-based content. Thus, this percentage is misleading as it could be far higher if the number of teachers in this area was known.



One respondent did not supply a postcode. Of the remaining sample (n=203) the sample is somewhat oversubscribed with urban southern regional teachers who represent 58% of the sample population.

All data related to gender, educational organisational affiliation, and school type deviate to some degree from predicted (expected) results. The deviation for education organisation affiliation (Table 2) was small and attributed to chance ( $\chi^2=3.11$ , (df2),  $p=.21$ ).

Table 2  
*Teacher Numbers by Funding Source for School*

	School Type			Total
	Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	
Government	32	76	20	128
Catholic	6	33	0	39
Independent	15	16	6	37
Total	53	125	26	204

The deviation from expected values associated with gender representation (Table 3) were not by chance, with females responding more than three times the frequency of males ( $\chi^2=65.26$ , (df2),  $p=.0001$ ). Similarly, a cross tabulation between organisational type and age (Table 4) revealed that the deviation from expected values was not due to chance ( $\chi^2=65.26$ , (df6),  $p=.0001$ ) with teachers aged 45 and over, and teaching in secondary schools representing the largest section of the sample group, followed by primary teachers and then senior secondary teachers.

Table 3  
*Teacher Sample by School Type*

		School Type			Total
		Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	
Sex	Male	17	25	7	49
	Female	36	100	19	155
Total		53	125	26	204

As shown in Table 4, teachers who are aged 55 and over, represented the largest portion of the sample, followed by teachers aged <35 years of age.

Table 4  
*Teacher Age by School Type*

		School Type			Total
		Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	
Age	<35	16	37	0	53
	35-44	2	9	5	16
	45-54	1	48	0	49
	55+	34	31	21	86
Total		53	125	26	204

### Teacher Specialisation

In terms of teacher specialisation associated with teaching of sexuality and relationship content in schools, participants were asked to identify their primary speciality associated with their teacher training (Table 5).

Table 5  
*Teaching Area / Specialisation*

	School Type			Total
	Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	
English	6	34	1	41
Mathematics	17	28	2	47
Science	24	69	20	113
Society and Health	8	32	0	40
Health and Wellbeing	35	66	6	107
Arts	6	10	5	21
Technology	9	16	0	25
Vocational and Applied Learning	6	8	0	14
Other	1	27	5	33
Total	53	125	26	204

Teachers who identified with the core discipline area of science were the largest group to respond to the survey followed by teachers who self-affiliated with the discipline of health and wellbeing or health and physical education.

## Research Question 1: Current Teaching of S&R in Schools

### Presence of S&R Education in Schools

Participants indicated if sexuality and relationships education (S&R) existed in their school as a subject in the curriculum. Of the 204 teachers who completed the survey over 90% (n=187) indicated that S&R education was identifiable in their school curriculum (Figure 1).

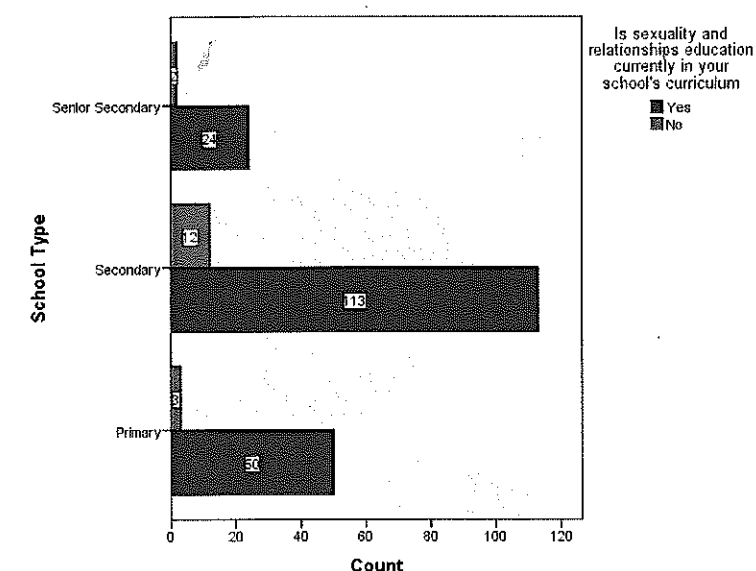


Figure 1. Presence of sexuality and relationships education in school by school type

In terms of the number of responses per school type, high schools indicated a higher percentage rate of schools where S&R education was not identifiable (9%), followed by senior secondary (8%), and primary schools (6%). A cross tabulation between school type revealed that the deviation from expected values was significant ( $\chi^2=20.66$ , (df2),  $p=.0001$ ).

In terms of the presence of S&R being identifiable in the school curriculum, there was a discrepancy between school systems (Figure 2). Department of Education schools had the highest incidence of S&R education, followed by the Catholic Education and then the Independent School System. A cross tabulation between school organisation type revealed that the deviation from expected values was significant ( $\chi^2=.34$ , (df2),  $p=.86$ ). Separating out each

school type, reveals a similar trend. For primary schools across school organisation the deviation from expected values was due to chance ( $\chi^2=.29$ , (df2),  $p=.52$ ), and for high schools the deviation from expected values was also due to chance ( $\chi^2=.28$ , (df2),  $p=.86$ ). The low response rates for the senior secondary college schools prohibits any meaningful statistical evaluation. Independent schools had the second highest incidence of S&R education. There is a low incidence of S&R education at the senior secondary level across all systems.

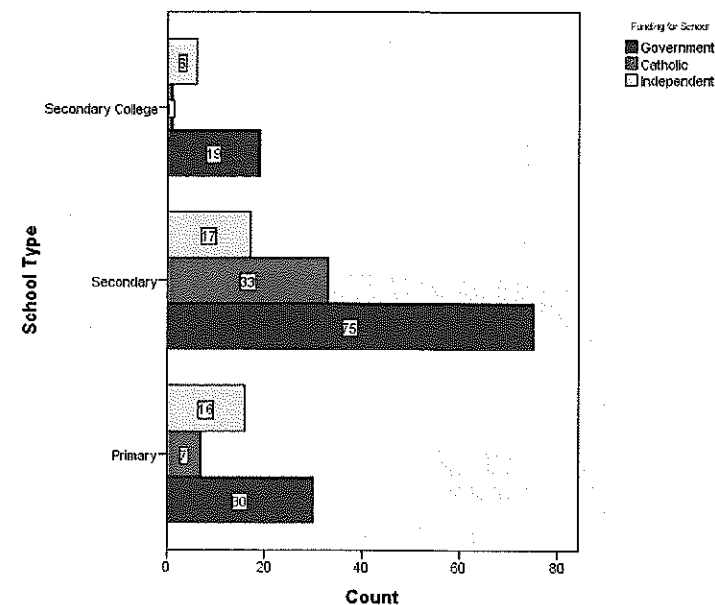


Figure 2. Presence of sexuality and relationships education in school by school organisation.

A note of caution should be applied to these figures as multiple teachers from single schools could have completed the survey. This procedure would thus over-inflate any statistic related to the existence or otherwise of S&R in a school curriculum.

In terms of the percentage of school organisations without an identifiable S&R education, Catholic Education recorded the highest percentage (15%), followed by Department of Education (8%), and then Independent (2%).

### Time Allocated to S&R Education

Teachers who indicated that they were currently teaching S&R education in their schools were asked to indicate the total amount of time devoted by the school to the area. Of the teachers who indicated that their schools did currently have S&R in the curriculum, 33% reported that 7-12 hours per year were devoted to S&R education (Figure 3). Just over 8% of teachers indicated greater than 12 hours were devoted to issues with S&R education.

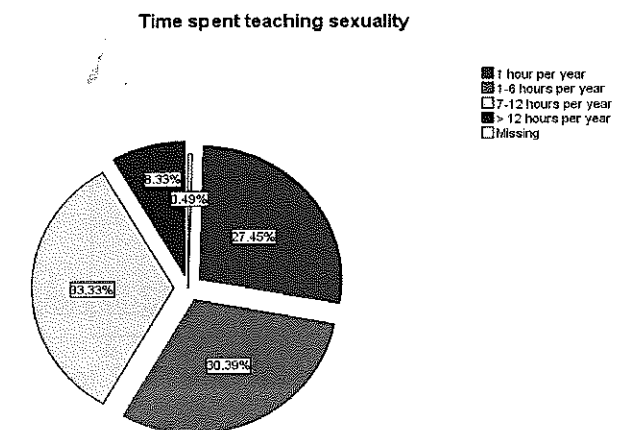


Figure 3. Distribution of time devoted to teaching content related to sexuality and relationships education.

In a breakdown of time allocated to S&R education spent by school type (Figure 4), it appears that secondary schools devote the greatest amount of time to teaching content related to S&R, with senior secondary schools the least amount of time.

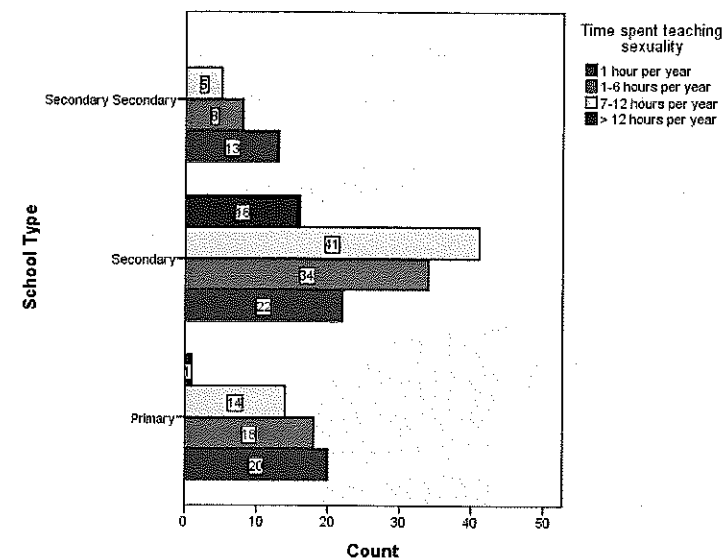


Figure 4. Distribution of time devoted to teaching content related to sexuality and relationships education by school organisation.

Of the 55 schools where teachers indicated that S&R education was allocated only 1 hour per year, secondary schools represented the highest percentage (46%), followed by primary schools (33%) and then senior secondary (23%). Similarly, secondary schools represented the highest proportion of schools who offered over 12 hours of S&R education per year (Table 6).

Table 6  
Allocation of Teaching Time per year by School Type

	1 hour per year	1-6 hours per year	7-12 hours per year	> 12 hours per year	Total
Primary	20	18	14	1	53
Secondary	22	34	41	16	113
Senior Secondary	13	8	5	0	26
Total	55	60	60	17	192

In terms of percentage of representation by school organisation, 63% of these schools were Department of Education funded, 20% funded by the Independent system, and 16% funded by Catholic Education (Table 7).

Table 7  
Allocation of Teaching Time per year by School Organisation

	1 hour per year	1-6 hours per year	7-12 hours per year	> 12 hours per year	Total
Government	35	35	36	12	118
Catholic	9	8	15	5	37
Independent	11	17	9	0	37
Total	55	60	60	17	192

#### Responsibility for Delivery of S&R Education

In terms of the delivery of S&R education in schools, teachers who indicated that S&R education was taught in their school indicated who was primarily involved in the delivery of S&R education. Primary school teachers indicated that 37% of teaching was completed by classroom based teachers with 43% taught by specialist HPE teachers, with others at approximately 12%. Secondary teachers indicated that, 63% of S&R education was taught by HPE specialists, followed by 21% of specialist secondary teachers, and 9.4% of generalist secondary teachers. Senior secondary teachers indicated that 35% of S&R education was delivered by senior secondary specialists, followed by 15% delivered by HPE teachers, with 24% delivered by others.

### Grades Taught S&R Education

Primary school based teachers indicated which grades in their respective schools were exposed to S&R education (Table 8). All grades from 1 to 6 were identified, although only 1.9% of teachers indicated that S&R education was taught to students in grade 1. Only 18.9% of teachers indicated that grade 6 students received S&R education, with 35% and 30% of teachers indicating that grades 5 and 4 received S&R education respectively.

Table 8  
*Grades Exposed to S&R Education in Primary Schools*

	Percent
Grade 1	1.9%
Grade 2	13.2%
Grade 3	18.9%
Grade 4	30.2%
Grade 5	35.8%
Grade 6	18.9%

Secondary school teachers indicated an even spread across grades for exposure to S&R education (Table 9). Interestingly, secondary teachers indicated that grade 9 class groups were the most exposed to S&R education, with only 71% of teachers indicating that S&R education was delivered to this cohort in their school.

Table 9  
*Grades Exposed to S&R Education in Secondary Schools*

	Percent
Grade 7	62.4%
Grade 8	63.2%
Grade 9	71.2%
Grade 10	62.4%

Approximately 62% of teachers indicated that grades 7, 8, and 10 were exposed to S&R education. For senior secondary, there was a fairly even split across grades (Table 10).

Table 10  
*Grades Exposed to S&R Education in Senior Secondary Schools*

	Percent
Grade 11	53.8%
Grade 12	61.5%

For senior secondary schools, measuring exposure to S&R education is problematic because of students elect to complete units. Nonetheless, 53% of senior secondary teachers indicated grade 11 students had exposure to S&R education, with 61.5% indicating that their schools had S&R education for grade 12.

### Factors Related to the Non-inclusion of Sexuality and Relationships in the Curriculum

Teachers who indicated that their school did not currently have S&R education in their curriculum were asked to indicate which reasons they felt contributed to the non-teaching of the subject in their schools (Table 11). Teachers were able to select more than one response. A cross tabulation of responses showed that the *subject being too controversial or sensitive*, *no professional development*, and *S&R not being a curriculum priority* were the major three reason why S&R was not presently taught.

Table 11  
*Factors Relating to why Sexuality and Relationships Education is not Taught in School*

	Funding for School			
	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
Too controversial / sensitive	0	3	4	7
No professional development for teachers	2	2	2	6
Not a curriculum priority	3	2	0	5
Parent / community objections	0	2	2	4
Timetabling problems	2	0	1	3
Too many competing subjects e.g. study skills etc.	2	1	0	3
No time available / time constraints	2	1	0	3
Lack of available or willing teachers	1	0	1	2
Difficulties monitoring quality of content and deliver	1	0	1	2
No support materials available	0	0	1	1
Total	13	11	12	36

### Barriers to Completing Professional Learning

Teachers who were not currently teaching S&R education and who preferred not to teach the subject were asked to identify barriers that prevented them from teaching the subject (Table 12). Teachers who indicated that they currently taught S&R education did not complete this question. Teachers indicated that *S&R education not being a curriculum priority* as the major barrier to them teaching S&R education followed by the perceived *controversial nature of the area* and *parent and community objections*.

Table 12  
*Barriers to Teaching Sexuality and Relationships Education in Schools*

	Percent
Not a curriculum priority	15.8%
Too controversial / sensitive	13.2%
Parent / community objections	13.2%
Timetabling problems	13.2%
Lack of available or willing teachers	10.5%
No professional development for teachers	7.9%
Too many competing subjects e.g. study skills etc.	7.9%
Difficulties monitoring quality of content and deliver	7.9%
No time available / time constraints	7.9%
No support materials available	2.6%
Total	100.0%



## Research Question 2: Teachers' Attitudes Regarding S&R Education Impact on Behaviour

Teachers' responded to a question using a four point scale (1 = no impact to 4 = high impact) which asked them to rate how much influence they believed the content that they taught in subjects related to S&R education had on the behaviour of young people. Teachers who indicated that they did not currently teach S&R education were excluded from the analysis.

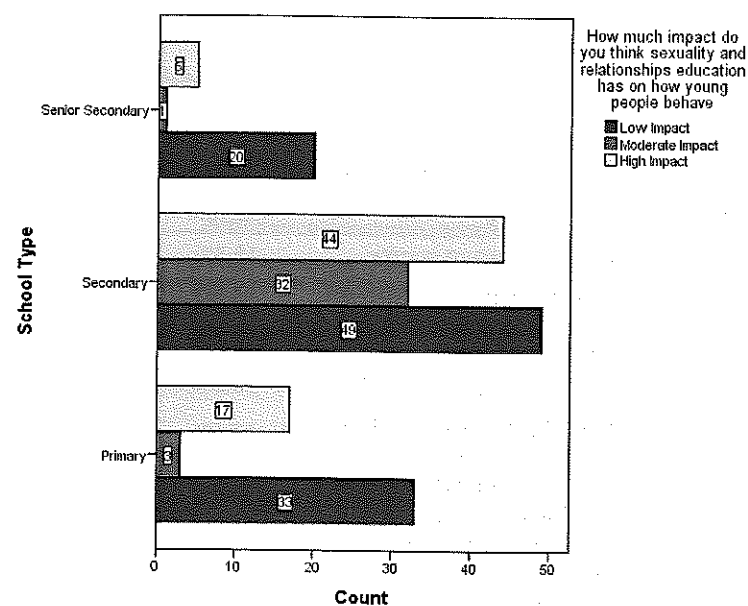


Figure 5. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the impact of that the content of sexuality and relationships education has on young peoples' behaviour.

Across the board, there was a high frequency of teachers who indicated that they felt the content of S&R education had a low impact on students' behaviour. Secondary teachers were somewhat split with similar frequencies indicating low and high impact (Figure 5). In terms of differences existing between educational organisations, 54% of teachers from government funded schools reported that they felt S&R education had low impact, with 28% reporting that the content had a high impact on young peoples' lives (Figure 6). For teachers within the Catholic education system, the results were similar, with 58% and 24% respectively. Just over a fifth of teachers within the

Independent organisation reported that S&R education had a high impact (21%), with 11% believing that such education had a low impact.

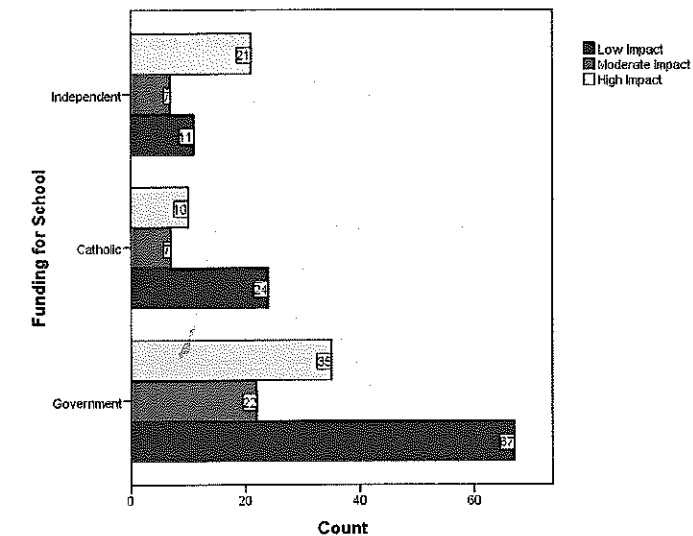


Figure 6. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the impact of that the content of sexuality and relationships education has on young peoples' behaviour by school organisation.

Mean, standard deviation, and confidence intervals (95%) were calculated for the question and are reported in Table 13. Overall, teachers rated the impact of the content that they use to teach S&R education as moderate ( $M = 2.82$ ). Secondary teachers perceived that S&R education had the highest impact, with primary and senior secondary staff indicating a lower estimate of impact respectively. This difference between groups was significant ( $f = 4.77$ ,  $p = .009$ ), although the effect size between groups is small ( $\eta^2 = .06$ ).

Table 13  
Teacher Attitudes about the Impact of S&R Education Content on Young Peoples' Behaviour

	Mean	Std. Deviation	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Primary	2.69	.93	2.44	2.95
Secondary	2.96	.86	2.80	3.11
Senior Secondary	2.42	.80	2.09	2.74
Total	2.82	.89	2.70	2.94

### Teachers' Preferences of Time Allocation to S&R Education

Teachers were asked to indicate their preference for how much time should be devoted to the teaching of sexuality and relationships (Table 14). Just over half (59%) of teachers reported that more than 12 hours per year should be spent in teaching S&R. Just over 6% of teachers indicated that it should not be taught in schools.

Table 14  
*Frequency of Teacher Attitudes towards the Time Allocation for the Teaching of S&R Education*

	1 hour per year	1-6 hours per year	7-12 hours per year	> 12 hours per year	None. It should not be taught in schools	Total
Primary	0	8	9	29	7	53
Secondary	6	10	31	73	5	125
Senior Secondary	3	3	0	18	2	26
Total	9	21	40	120	14	204

Teachers were asked to name the most appropriate grades for young people to be taught S&R education. For ease of calculations, grades were categorised into lower primary, upper primary, secondary, and secondary college.

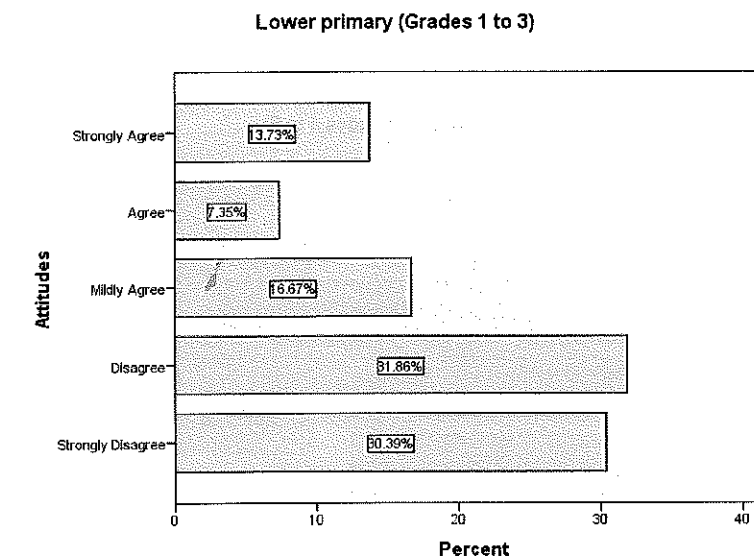


Figure 7. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in early primary school years.

Interestingly, nearly 65% of teachers indicated disagreement to strong disagreement with the teaching of sexuality and relationships to young people in the lower primary grades (Figure 7). Conversely, 20% indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the subject content being taught in lower primary grades.



Teachers seemed to be more comfortable with S&R education being taught to upper primary school young people (Figure 8). Attitudes from disagreement to strong disagreement for the teaching of S&R education in the upper primary school grades was only recorded in approximately 25% of respondents, with nearly 40% indicating agreement to strong agreement.

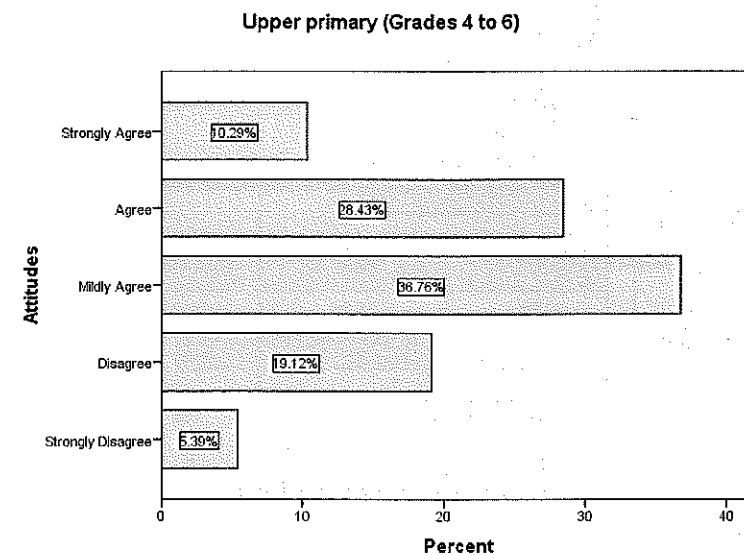


Figure 8. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in upper primary school years.

Interestingly, nearly 16% of the teachers surveyed indicated that they felt S&R education should not be taught in secondary school, but overwhelmingly 83% indicated that they mildly agreed to strongly agree that the subject area should be taught in secondary schools (Figure 9).

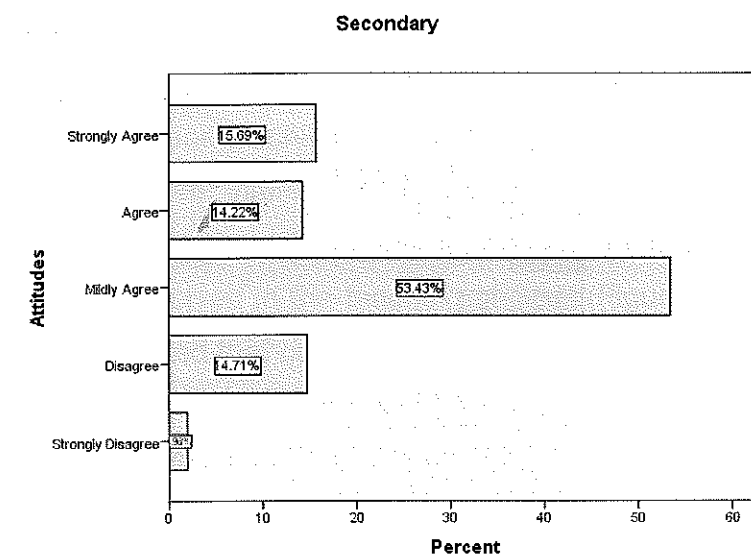


Figure 9. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in secondary school years.

Teachers' sentiment about the teaching of S&R education was extremely variable for senior secondary years (Figure 10). The trend of disagreement with teaching of S&R education in certain sections of the school area extended to senior secondary schools, where nearly 63% of teachers indicated disagreement to strong disagreement with the concept of S&R being taught in senior secondary years. Only 15% of teachers reported agreement to strong agreement with the concept of S&R education being taught in senior secondary schools.

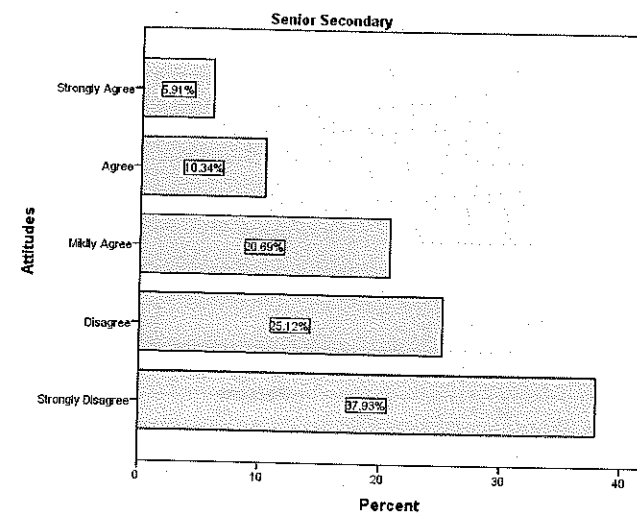


Figure 10. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the teaching of sexuality and relationships education in senior secondary school years

### Teachers' Attitudes Regarding who Should Teach Sexuality and Relationships

In terms of who should be primarily responsible for the teaching of the S&R education, teachers reported their feelings for specific specialist teacher groups.

#### Primary School

Teachers were asked their opinions as to which specialist teacher group should be responsible for teaching S&R if it was taught to young people at primary school. Just over half of the teachers surveyed reported attitudes ranging from mildly agreeing to strongly agreeing that specialist classroom teachers should be involved in the teaching of S&R (Figure 11). Only 10 per cent of teachers indicated that outside providers should be the sole deliverers of the subject, with 23% indicating a first preference for some combination of teachers and outside providers. Interestingly, only 2.6% indicated that outside providers should not be involved in the delivery of the subject.

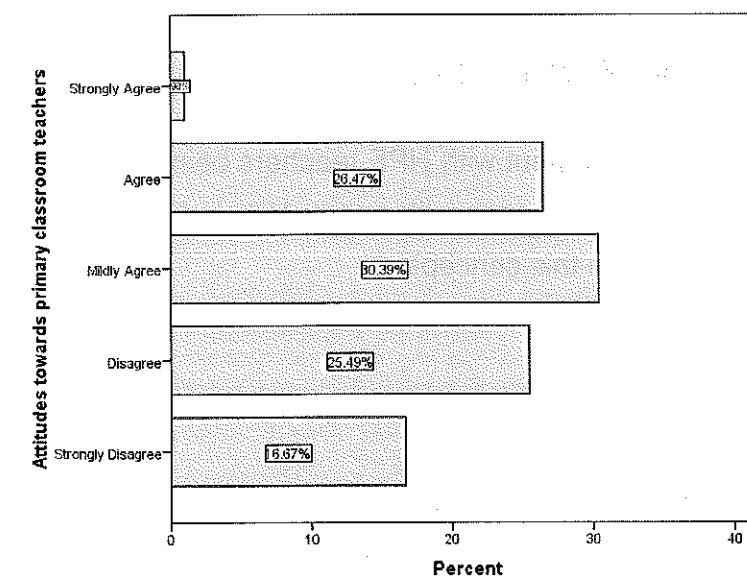


Figure 11. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of primary classroom teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education.

Nonetheless, 40% of teachers indicated disagreement to strong disagreement with the concept that classroom teachers should be primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education, with nearly 70% of teachers indicating agreement to strong agreement with the concept that primary based health and physical education (HPE) teachers should teach S&R (Figure 12).

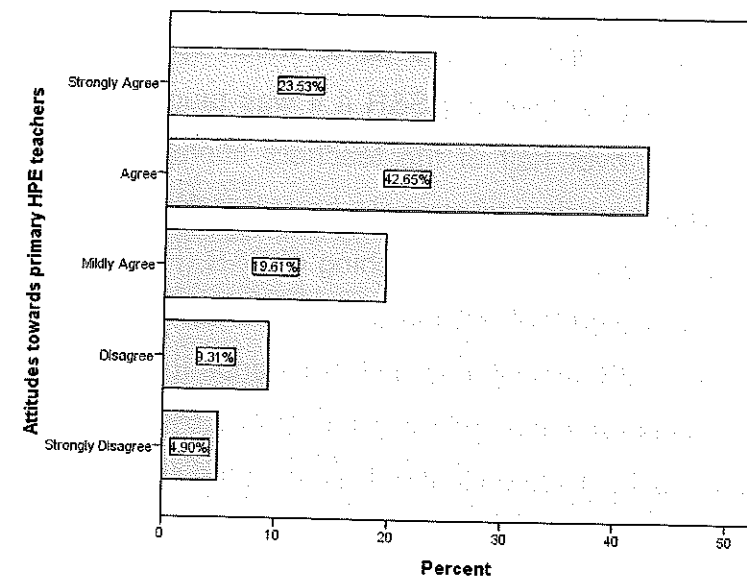


Figure 12. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of primary health and physical education teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

There was some disagreement with HPE teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education with nearly 15% indicating disagreement to strong disagreement with this concept.

### Secondary School

In terms of which teachers should deliver the S&R education content in secondary schools, 34% of teachers indicated agreement with the concept that the secondary classroom based specialists (i.e., maths, science) should be primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education (Figure 13).

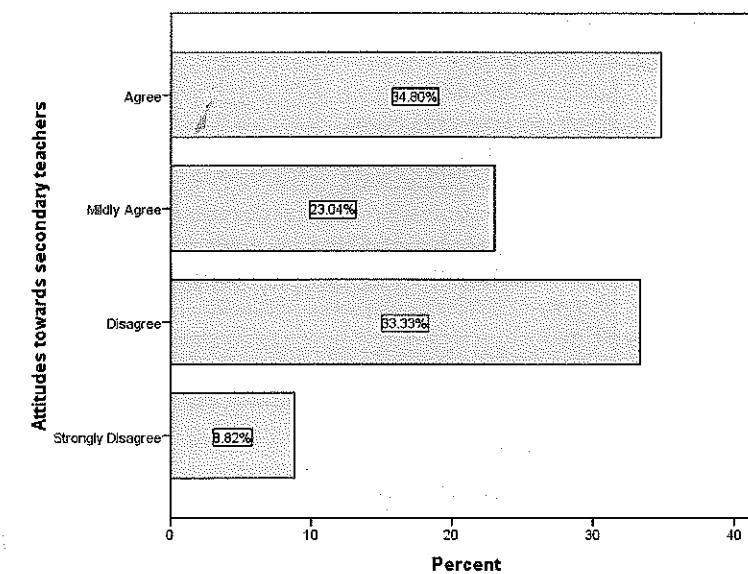


Figure 13. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of secondary teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

Interestingly, less than 1% of teachers strongly agreed that secondary classroom teacher specialists should teach S&R education. Of all teachers, 60% indicated mild agreement to strong agreement that secondary HPE teachers should be primarily responsible for the delivery of S&R education (Figure 14).

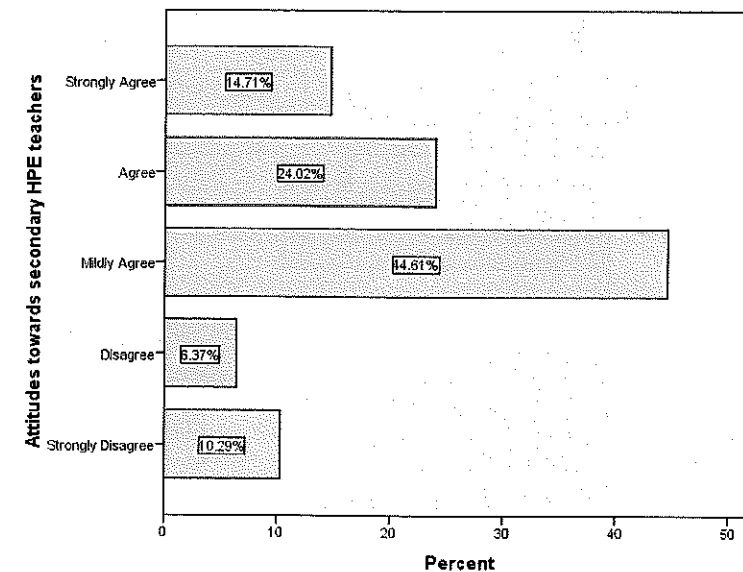


Figure 14. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of health and physical education teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

### Senior Secondary

In terms of which teachers should deliver the subject content in senior secondary schools, nearly 65% of teachers indicated disagreement with the concept that specialist senior secondary teachers should deliver the subject content (Figure 15).

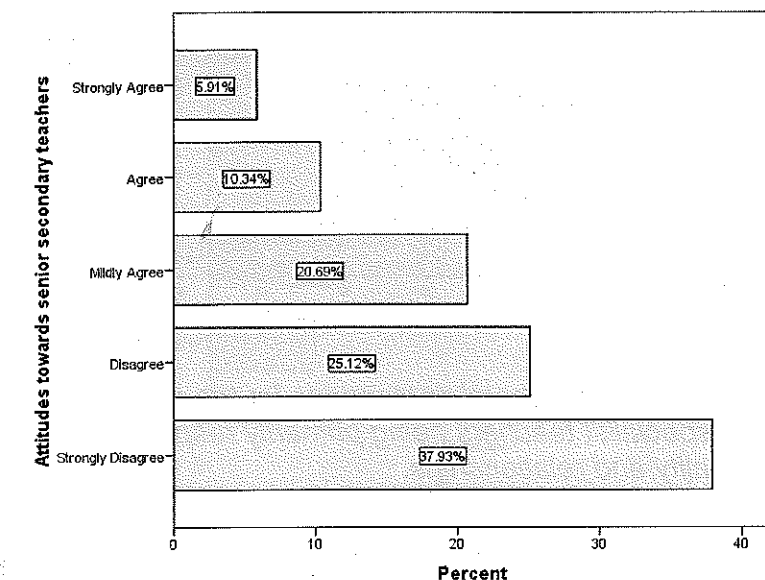


Figure 15. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of senior secondary teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.



Nonetheless, 35% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the concept that specialist teachers should deliver S&R education (Figure 16).

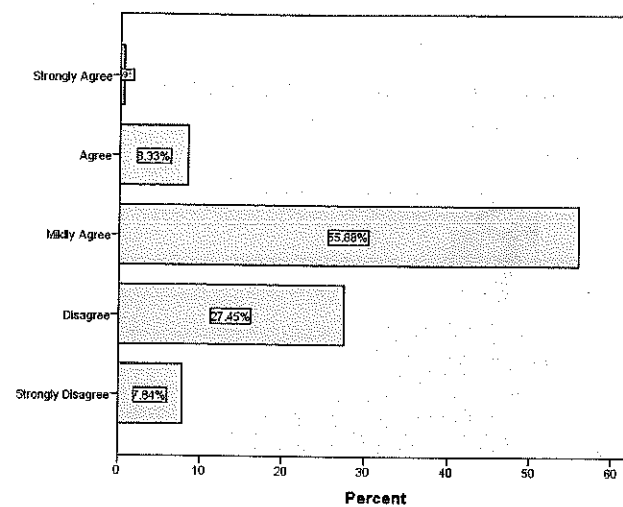


Figure 16. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for the efficacy of senior secondary HPE specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

Nearly 62% of teachers reported favourable attitudes ranging from mild agreement to strong agreement with the concept that senior secondary HPE teachers should be primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education (Figure 17).

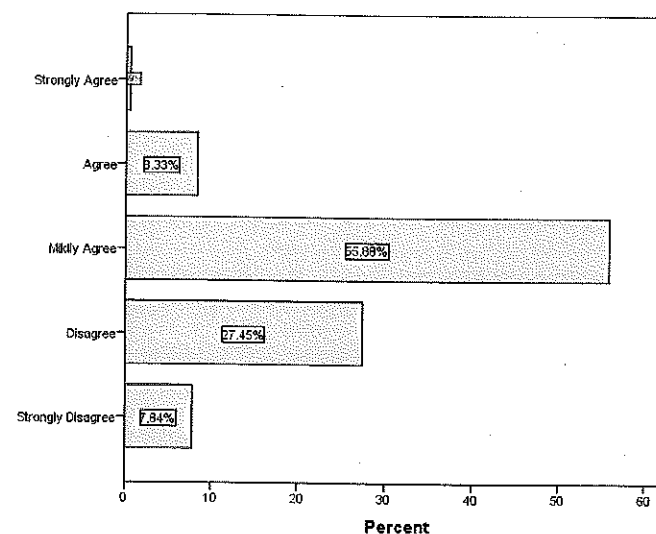


Figure 17. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of senior secondary health and physical education specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

Similar to the result for HPE teachers, nearly 50% of teachers reported favourable attitudes ranging from agreement to strong agreement with the concept that senior secondary health specialists should be primarily responsible for the teaching of S&R education (Figure 18).

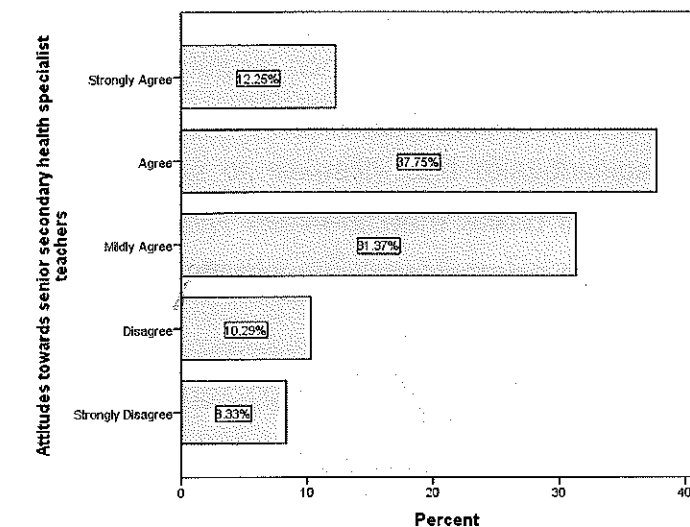


Figure 18. Distribution of teachers' perceptions for efficacy of senior secondary health specialist teachers being primarily responsible for the teaching of sexuality and relationships.

In the open section of responses (Table 15), participants were asked to name any other group of teachers or specialists who should be primarily involved in the teaching of S&R education. A number of views (n=104) were written, although these views were not tied to any specific grade level. The responses were clustered into similar theme areas to allow for ease of interpretation.

Table 15  
*Additional Specialists Who Should Teach S&R Education*

Additional content theme	Number of citations
Members of the family unit	65
Experts in each field – trained teachers not generalists	54
Staff who have relevant tertiary qualifications	34
Pastoral care teachers	23
External Health Agencies	14
Specialist sex educators	14
Staff who have had relevant and sufficient Professional learning	2
Community services	1

### Research Question 3: Professional Learning Needs of Teachers for S&R Education

All teachers were asked a series of questions related to professional learning opportunities. In the first question teachers were asked to give their preferences for inclusion of certain cognate discipline areas into S&R education to provide some understanding of future content. In a second series of questions teachers responded to the reasons why they had not attended professional learning days in the area of sexuality and relationships education in the previous 12 months. Finally, teachers were asked to indicate what barriers prevented them from attending professional learning days.

### Teachers Attitudes Towards Cognate Discipline Content for S&R Relationships Education

Teachers responded to a series of questions about the content material that should be included in S&R education based subjects. Teachers responded using a 6 point scale (strongly agree, agree, mildly agree, disagree, strongly disagree, & unsure). All teachers responded to this question. Overall, teachers were supportive of the content that was identified in the questions related to what content should be included in S&R education. Information in figures 19-25 indicates the attitude of teachers towards each cognate discipline area. No group differences were examined although this data could be extrapolated if needed. Of interest is the data connected to anatomy and physiology related to reproductive systems, where nearly 45% of the cohort strongly disagreed with the teaching of this information (Figure 19). Similarly, reproduction (43%) content received a high negative response. The results for these two subject areas may reflect an attitude that these more mechanical aspects of sexuality and relationships are not considered central or core to the area. For all other cognate discipline areas there was a spread of scores with the majority of teachers indicating agreement to strong agreement with their inclusion.

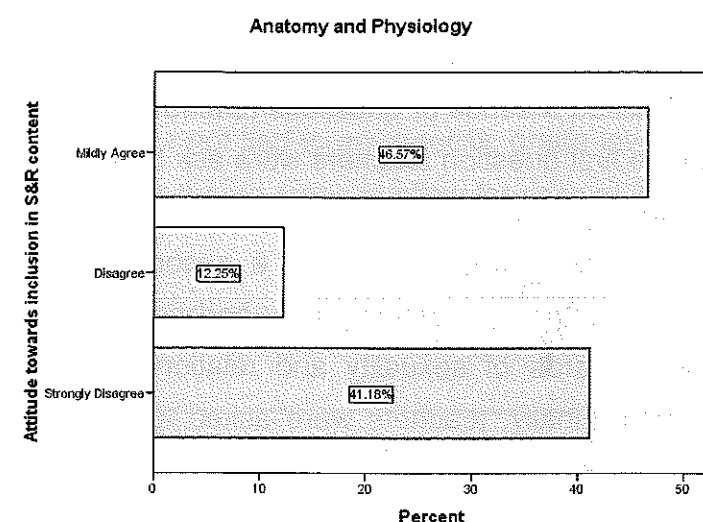


Figure 19. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of anatomy and physiology based subject content in sexuality and relationship education.

Fifty three per cent of teachers indicated that anatomy and physiology based content should not be included in S&R education based units (Figure 19). Agreement (mildly agree) accounted for only 47% of the sample.

Over 40% of teachers indicated attitudes from disagreement to strong disagreement that reproduction content should not be included in S&R education (Figure 20). Nevertheless, nearly 60% agreed that reproduction content based content should be included in S&R education.

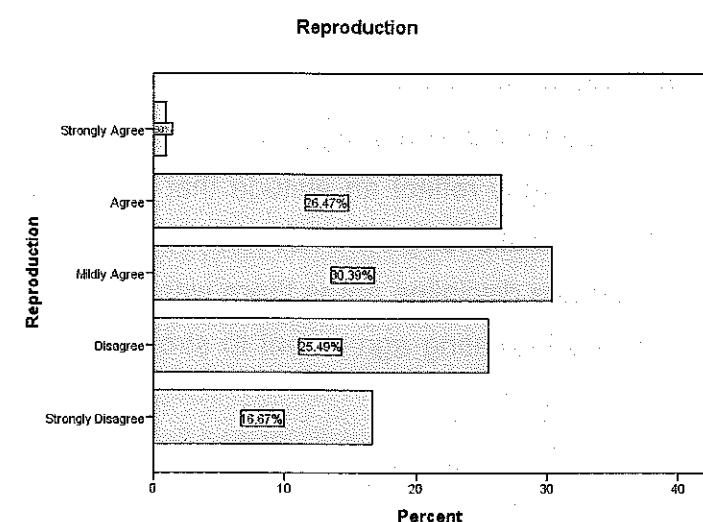


Figure 20. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of including reproduction content material in sexuality and relationships education.

Nearly 80% of teachers reported attitudes ranging from mild agreement to agreement that relationships based content should be included in S&R education (Figure 21).

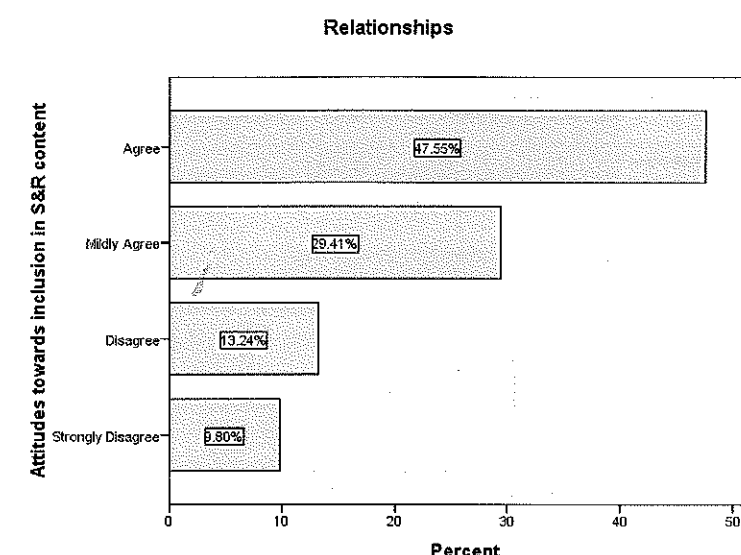


Figure 21. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of relationships subject content in sexuality and relationship education.

Just over 70% of teachers mildly agreed or agreed that contraception based content should be included in S&R education (Figure 22).

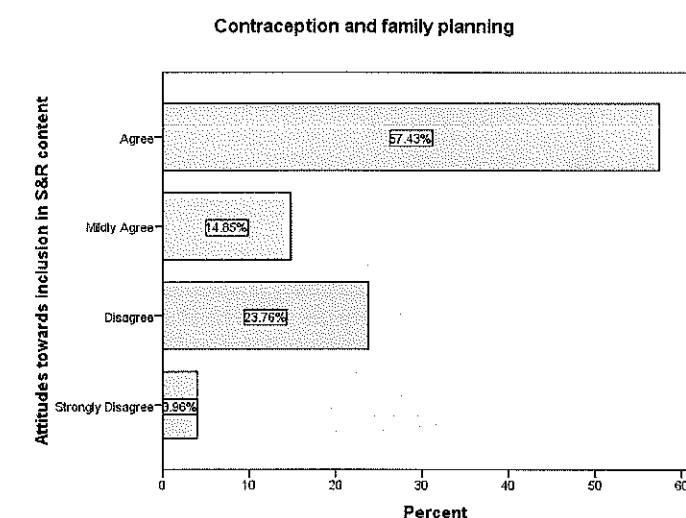


Figure 22. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of contraception subject content in sexuality and relationship education.



Similarly, just under 80% of teachers reported mild agreement or agreed that content related to safe sex education should be included in S&R education (Figure 23).

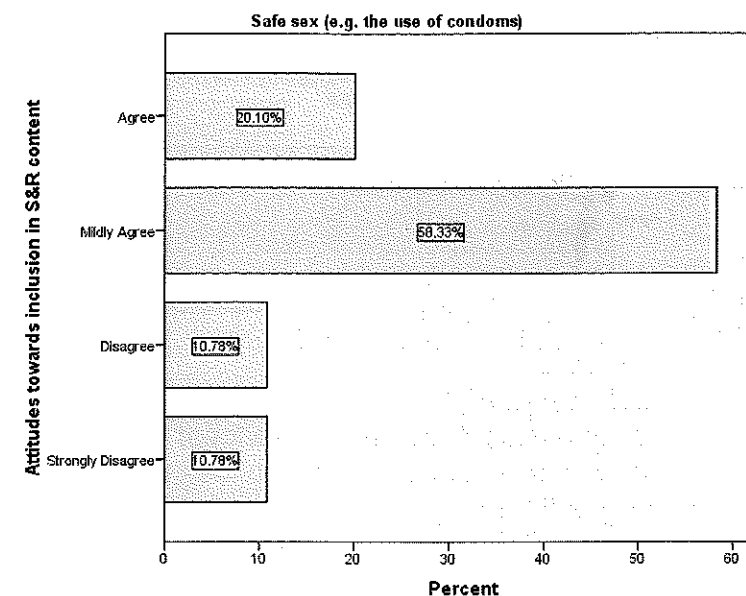


Figure 23. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of safe sex subject content in sexuality and relationship education.

Sixty five percent of teachers (Figure 24) reported some form of agreement that content related to information about sexually transmitted infections should be included in S&R education.

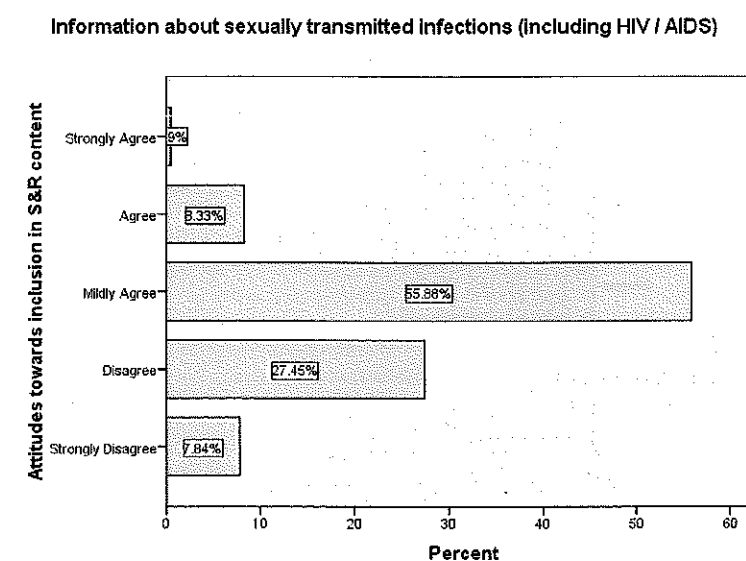


Figure 24. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of sexual transmitted infections subject content in sexuality and relationship education.

Nearly 80% of teachers reported mild agreement to strong agreement that content related to sexual health education should be included in S&R education (Figure 25). Areas of sexual health such as cervical cancer, breast screening and men's health were identified as examples of the material that would be included in this area.

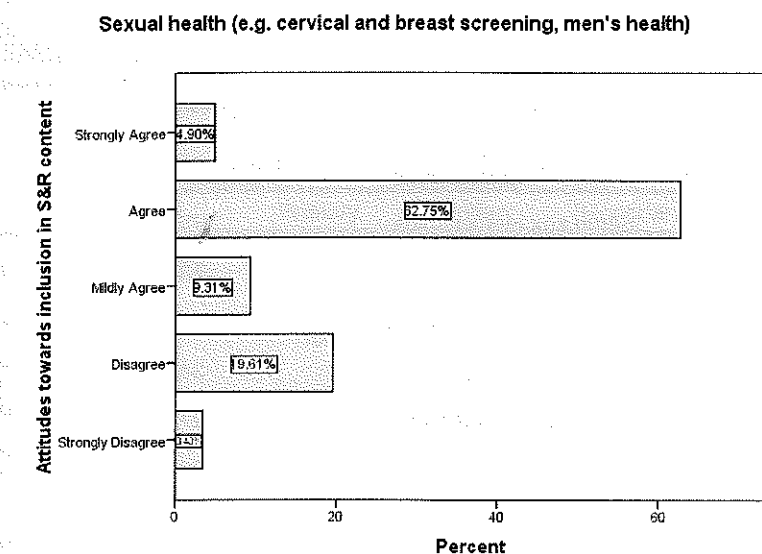


Figure 25. Distribution of teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of sexual health subject content in sexuality and relationship education.



In an open ended response section, teachers were invited to make comment on other areas that they felt should be included in the content related to S&R education. Responses were coded into similar themes for ease of reporting (Table 16). The highest number of citations related to same sex relationships, followed by decision making, violence against women, and date rape.

Table 16  
*Additional Areas for Inclusion in Sexuality and Relationships Content*

Additional content theme	Number of citations
Same sex relationships	103
Decision making	73
Violence against women	45
Date rape	34
Natural contraception	27
Violence	26
Celibacy	25
Consent	23
Knowledge of law	3
Harassment - sexual	2
Age of sexual activity	1
Female and natural cycle	1

In response to a question regarding the reasons for non-attendance at professional learning days in the previous 12 months, teachers responded to multiple factors (Table 17). Teachers were able to respond with multiple choices.

Table 17  
*Factors Inhibiting Teachers' Engagement in Professional Learning Associated with Sexuality and Relationships Education*

	School Type			Total
	Primary	Secondary	Senior Secondary	
Resources (costs)	41	41	13	95
Lack of training / professional learning	32	17	15	64
I am comfortable just using the resources	15	25	9	49
Family Planning teach some aspects	2	12	10	24
My school is not supportive me undertaking professional learning in this area	12	3	7	22
Support from principal / school community is low	13	6	2	21
I already know the subject matter	7	8	5	20
Not part of my duties	0	15	3	18
Centacare teach some aspects	0	9	6	15
Youth Health Team responsible for S&R	0	4	5	9
School Chaplain takes S&R	2	2	0	4
Against philosophy	0	2	0	2

Cross tabulation of results indicated that cost of resources were the biggest barrier to obtaining professional learning, followed by a lack of opportunity to access professional learning, then teachers feeling comfortable with the present resources and materials already used in classes. The types of

resources (monetary or non-monetary) were not separated in the questionnaire. Interestingly, some teachers indicated that the impact of outside agencies teaching into schools was another reason not to update their skills.

In an open ended response section, teachers reported additional professional learning and teaching materials that they currently used in the teaching of S&R education. These are reported in Table 18.

Table 18  
*Additional Resources Used to Teach Sexuality and Relationships Education*

Additional Content Theme
Toner - Sex Education Activities
Marieb - Human Anatomy and Physiology Tool Box items
Talking Sexual Health
Pride and Prejudice
Judith Campbell/Jill Gollick - Sexuality Resource Book
Police
ClickView
Family Planning
Talking Sexual Health
Bounce Back
Mpower Girls
Oddgirl Out
Queen Bee Wanna Be

## Discussion and Recommendations

The first of the three aims of this research was to identify the current teaching practices associated with sexuality and relationships education. There are a number of comments related to achieving this first aim. First, the negative attitudes associated with some of the educational organisations were surprising to the researchers. This negativity extended not only from the organisational arms of some organisations but also to individual schools and teachers. Some of the reluctance to participating in the survey could be attributed to the number of surveys of sexuality and relationships education that have been or were currently being undertaken. We know of two that had been undertaken in the previous 12 months (Family Planning and a PhD) to this particular survey. At some level there needs to be coordination of such surveys so that educational institutions do not suffer from survey burnout.

Second, stemming from the first point, the lack of cooperation with educational organisations prevented any conclusions being definitively drawn because of the difficulty associated with drawing a stratified random sample.

What conclusions can be drawn about current teaching practices? We would speculate that given the difficulty of engaging educational organisations in promoting the survey, there is degree of antipathy towards the subject area.. Given the limitations of the data collection process, it is welcomed that nearly three quarters of teachers were able to identify that their schools had sexuality and relationships education. Nonetheless, given this high figure, the amount of time allocated to the teaching of the subject area is of concern. Only 8% of teachers indicated that they spent over 12 hours per year delivering content related to the subject area, with nearly a quarter indicating less than one hour per week. Even with the limitations of the present data set, this is not an encouraging sign for the teaching of the subject area. More worrisome is the spread of this time, with the majority of time devoted to secondary schools, and limited time in both primary and senior secondary schools.

Third, there is concern regarding the expertise of the people involved in the delivery of S&R education. To the best of our knowledge, most teachers enrolled in Tasmanian schools have been trained either through the University of Tasmania or (given the age of the population) through the Tasmanian Institute of Technology or the Tasmanian College of Advanced Education. The only course that delivers specific identified training in health education is the Human Movement course or the previous related degrees (B.Ed Human Movement/Physical Education). Moreover, given the recent emphasis on literacy and numeracy programs, the reduction of specialist curriculum officers for the area has reduced the opportunity to keep current professionals up to date with knowledge and pedagogical skills. Given that nearly 37% of S&R education was delivered by classroom specialists in primary schools, and 30% by specialist or generalist secondary teachers, there could be doubt raised about the amount and specialised nature of their knowledge related to content and pedagogical practices for health.

Fourth, despite the emphasis of health in schools, there is concern regarding when children are exposed to S&R education. While there is a spread across all grades, this spread is sketchy at best. For example, only 16% of respondents identified that S&R content was taught to grade 6 students. Similarly, the percentages of grades exposed in high and senior secondary years were also somewhat low. We would suspect that given the increasing incidences of sexually transmitted diseases in Tasmania and the need for educational based programs, the low exposure rates to grades across schools would be a hindrance to the effective delivery of sexuality and relationship education.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1:

Sexuality and relationships education to be provided in a consistent, sequential and comprehensive way in all Tasmanian schools.

#### Guiding actions in accepting the first recommendation:

- the teaching of the subject area be identified as a specialist area with teachers who deliver the content specifically trained in up to date pedagogical practices; and
- a curriculum framework to be adopted by all schools

### Recommendation 2

Teaching about sexuality and relationships education to be supported by consistent policies at the system (Department of Education, Catholic Education and Independent Schools) and school level.

#### Guiding actions in accepting the second recommendation are:

- lobbying the Education Minister to increase the mandatory teaching of various aspects of S&R education to grades to ensure uniformity across the state, and
- senior curriculum officer (s) and specialist providers to determine which age or groups (or grades) are best targeted for S&R education;

### Recommendation 3:

The Sexuality Education Scope and Sequence developed by the Department of Education as part of the Health and Wellbeing Curriculum to be implemented in all government schools, and supported by age appropriate curriculum materials.

#### Guiding actions in accepting the third recommendation are:



- 
- some review be undertaken of the content of material provided to schools to ensure that it reflects best practice;
  - professional learning opportunities for teachers.

#### Recommendation 4

Teachers to be provided with training in sexuality and relationships as part of their undergraduate education and ongoing in-service professional learning. This training to include material on how to engage with students about sexual health and relationships.

Guiding action in accepting the fourth recommendation is:

- lobbying the Education Minister and the Tasmanian Teachers Registration to set compulsory training units for pre-service teachers.

#### Recommendation 5

The work of teachers to be supported by the availability of in-school support to teachers and students from external specialist sexual health educators.