

**Sri Lankan parents' attitudes towards adolescent
reproductive and sexual health education needs:
*A qualitative study***

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Abstract

Introduction: Adolescents have unique reproductive health needs when compared to adults, and the behaviours adopted in adolescence have serious implications for their later well being. Serious gaps have been found in providing sexual and reproductive health information to adolescents in Sri Lanka.

Objective: To explore the attitudes of Sri Lankan parents' towards adolescent reproductive and sexual health education, to identify current parental practices of imparting reproductive and sexual health information to their children and to identify perceived barriers parents face in discussing sexual and reproductive health issues with their children.

Methods: A qualitative study conducted using focus groups discussions in Kurunegala, Kandy, Gampaha and Colombo districts among 71 parents having an adolescent child.

Results: All parents said that it was essential to provide reproductive and sexual health education to adolescents, mainly to deter them from engaging in any precocious sexual activity and to protect children from various threats posed by society, such as sexually transmitted diseases and child sexual abuse. Generally most parents were reluctant to directly discuss reproductive and sexual health issues with their children due to cultural taboos and resultant feelings of shyness and embarrassment. However, mothers, to some extent, discussed reproductive and sexual health matters with their children, often with their daughters and sometimes even with sons. However, some parents expressed lack of knowledge to do so. Parents also indirectly educated their children on sexual and reproductive health topics by providing them with books to read. Many parents considered school and teachers to be the best source of reproductive and sexual health information for their children. Doctors too were considered by parents to be a reliable source of reproductive and sexual health information.

Conclusion: Parents considered adolescent reproductive and sexual health education as essential to protect and deter children from engaging in any precocious sexual activity. However, most parents were reluctant to openly discuss reproductive and sexual health topics with their children. In general, parents preferred outside sources, people other than themselves, such as teachers and doctors to provide their children with reproductive and sexual health information.