

# COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

## Grounding Human Rights in Malaysia for All: Embracing Change ADVOCACY BRIEF



# COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN MALAYSIA

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a teaching syllabus on sexuality which comprises multiple aspects - from cognitive to social skills. It supports young people's sexual and reproductive health development in preparing them with evidence-based information on their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) so they are able to make informed decisions while living a fulfilling life. According to the International Technical Guidance for Sexuality Education by UNESCO (2018)<sup>1</sup>, CSE includes 8 key components; 1) relationships, 2) values, rights, culture and sexuality, 3) understanding gender, 4) violence and staying safe, 5) skills for health and wellbeing, 6) the human body and development, 7) sexuality and sexual behaviour, and 8) sexual and reproductive health. These topics are introduced with children's age progression to make it age-appropriate and are tweaked so they are relevant to the culture of the specific audience.

According to the Technical Guideline for Sexuality Education by UNESCO (2018)<sup>18</sup> CSE includes 8 key components:



In Malaysia, efforts in advancing reproductive health through education, information and services of the young people can be seen through the National Policy on Reproductive Health and Social Education (Pekerti) and its Plan of Action that was approved by the Parliament in 2009. This policy implementation was tasked on the governmental agency under the Women's Ministry, the National Population and Family Development Board (Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara, LPPKN)<sup>2</sup>. Later on, LPPKN introduced a module together with FRHAM and the Women's Centre for Change (WCC) for its Kafe@Teen Adolescent Centres for 13-24 year old urban youth and oversaw the no-longer-operating National Service Training Programme (Program Khidmat Latihan Negara, PLKN) which integrates reproductive health and social education in their programme for 18 years olds.

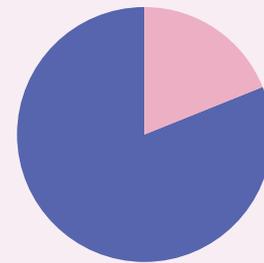
However, the glaring limitation of CSE implementation in Malaysia is that the approach to sex education is too academic and is commonly conveyed ambiguously to mitigate the shame of the topic by educators in schools.

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, (2018), International Technical Guideline for Sexuality Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/ITGSE.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Gender-Equality-In-Malaysia-.pdf>

The emphasis in Malaysia's sex education is geared towards the pros and cons of sexual intercourse rather than the many pertinent aspects of a child's sexual health and reproductive rights. The detriment of keeping these important conversations in the dark is that our adolescents eventually have to endure the consequences of unsafe sex.

According to a survey conducted by Malaysia's Health Ministry, 35 per cent of Malaysian female youths believe that having sex for the first time does not lead to pregnancy, and one in five Malaysians believe that sexually transmitted infections (STIs) could be transmitted by mosquitoes<sup>3</sup> – a disturbingly high amount for such glaringly incorrect.



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Using FRHAM's Reproductive Health for Adolescents and LPPKN's Cakna Diri module, LPPKN hand in hand with the Ministry of Health (MOH), initiated the Pekerti@School programme for 12-year old and 15-year old teens respectively. Another module was also created focusing on 16-year old teenage boys in five selected states. Independently, in the 1980s, the Ministry of Education integrated a form of sex education in secondary schools and extended the effort towards primary schools in the mid 1990s in the Health Education curriculum which later evolved to become the Reproductive Health and Social Education (PEERS) programme.

PEERS adopts a harm reduction approach where the information given is abstinence-based and fear-mongering on the 'consequences' of premarital sex. The syllabus is taught separately in several different subjects like science, biology, religious and moral education or physical education in Year 1 to Form 5 and not as a standalone subject. The topics discussed emphasise on the importance of safe sex where sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are concerned but is very limited on the topic of prevention of pregnancy where it is taught exclusively in the context of marriage. UNICEF reported that despite the numerous policies and initiatives in place, Malaysia's policies on sex education continue to lack clarity as none of them recognise the importance of having comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services which include education. During the Universal Periodic Review in 2019, it was recommended that Malaysia's sexuality education be updated in line with ITGSE.

<sup>3</sup> [https://umsc.my/umsc\\_news/teenage-pregnancy-who-is-to-blame/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202015%20survey,by%20mosquitoes%20%E2%80%93%20an%20alarming%20interpretation!](https://umsc.my/umsc_news/teenage-pregnancy-who-is-to-blame/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%202015%20survey,by%20mosquitoes%20%E2%80%93%20an%20alarming%20interpretation!)



The policies created do not complement the MOH's effort in boosting SRHR services among young people in governmental health facilities. Instead, it instills fear and judgment in youth which hinders them from seeking these crucial services. The prevalence of baby-dumping, teenage pregnancies and child marriage suggests policies on reproductive health education implemented did not benefit the targeted audience as intended, making them unaware of reproductive health services available.<sup>4</sup>

CSE plays a crucial role in addressing the health and well-being of young people. Over the last decades, evaluations of CSE programmes helped us learn how to design and deliver effective programme that improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes and promote safe and gender equitable learning environments. Yet, less than 5% of all validated development interventions ever reach scale. Most CSE interventions remain limited in duration and cease to exist after a donor funded demonstration phase. This has implications for the young people we are aiming to support. With only 5% of the \$2.5 trillion investment still required to reach the SDGs covered by Official Development Assistance<sup>5</sup>, many remain left behind. The development sector is unable to provide for sustainable universal CSE coverage with its limited resources and capacity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE WAYS FORWARD

Develop new strategies for the most critical elements of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) and widen the coverage of the existing syllabus in line with the ITGSE.

Invest in inclusive, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms on CSE implementation at different levels as well as periodic research and data collection efforts.

Introduce training and sensitisation programmes for teachers and administration departments in curriculum/education policies. Training modules for teachers implementing CSE programmes should be revised periodically to ensure they are in line with the current needs.

Create an enabling support system for adolescents to access CSE by ensuring continuous training and desensitisation programmes for all stakeholders that are directly involved in the implementation of CSE for in-and-out of schools.

Ensure adequate resource allocation for effective implementation and monitoring process of CSE programmes in terms of human resources, budget and monetary allocation.

Strengthen multi-disciplinary collaborations and efforts for CSE implementations and include/increase youth participation at all stages of advocacy, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CSE.

<sup>4</sup>FRHAM, (2018), Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Malaysian Adolescents: How Far Have We Come?, Retrieved from: <https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/->

FRHAM-ICPD-25-Final-Report-proofread-and-formatted-Jeremy-Final.pdf

<sup>5</sup><https://unctad.org/press-material/developing-countries-face-25-trillion-annual-investment-gap-key-sustainable>