

Appendix 11: Abortion and contraception education (See Article 10)

Young people's access to reliable information and education about their reproductive health remains patchy despite the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's¹ acknowledgement that *"the lack of education about reproduction and preparation for adult life has been identified as a children's rights issue that needs urgent attention in the UK."*²

A number of Christian and anti-choice groups are also giving young people inaccurate information about their sexual and reproductive health in educational settings. For example, The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC) has told young people that a woman who has an abortion increases her risk of breast cancer and that ending a pregnancy can lead to 'Post Abortion Trauma' - an invented medical condition which is not recognised by any legitimate medical bodies.³ Some speakers also provide misinformation about contraception and fertility – which can have serious repercussions for young women's future reproductive health. (See Article 12)

Abortion is experienced by a third of women in the UK. Given the prevalence of both unplanned pregnancy and abortion, it is important that discussion of these issues is sensitive to young people's current and future experiences. In a 2010 report into the causes of repeat abortion amongst teenagers in London, researchers identified stigma and misinformation associated with abortion as a factor in failure to engage with contraceptive services following abortion. It specifically recommended that education about abortion should reduce stigma.⁴ Groups which promote an anti-abortion agenda may also promote sexist reinforcement of traditional gender roles and materials which are discriminatory to those who are not heterosexual.

For example, a slide from a Lovewise school presentation says:

"For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church...as the church submits to Christ so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands".

And a quote from their promotional materials reads:

"Marriage will be promoted as the only context in which honouring, fulfilling, secure and healthy sexual activity may take place...All other contexts including homosexual activity are damaging to mind, body and spirit".

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) www.unicef.org/crc/

² Sex Education Forum (2010) *Does Sex and Relationships Education Work? A Sex Education Forum Evidence Briefing*. http://www.ncb.org.uk/media/494585/sef_doessework_2010.pdf

³ Vasagar, J. (2012) 'Revealed: What children are being told about abortion', *The Guardian*, 23rd March 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/mar/23/abortion-what-children-schools>

⁴ Young London Matters (2010) *Young People in London: Abortion and Repeat Abortion* <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100727153309/http://www.younglondonmatters.org/uploads/documents/tpyoungpeopleinlondonabortionandrepeatabortion.pdf>

Many of these groups also have links with or signpost to ‘crisis pregnancy centres’, many of which have been found to offer women inaccurate, biased information about pregnancy options.⁵

Recommendations:

- **The Government should be offering guidance to educational establishments to ensure that children and young people are not subjected to misinformation and talks which they may find upsetting or discriminatory**
- **Teachers should be provided with sources of reliable medical information about topics such as abortion so that they are able to deliver lessons which are accurate and respectful of young people’s experiences**
- **Young men and women should have access to practical information about their sexual and reproductive health and where to go for confidential advice and treatment**

The Bill tabled by Conservative MP Nadine Dorries in 2011 is another example of these dangerous attitudes. We are glad that it was withdrawn as it called for teenage girls to be given compulsory lessons in sexual abstinence.⁶ The Bill would have required schools to offer extra sex education classes to girls aged 13 to 16, which would have included advice on ‘the benefits of abstinence’. By just focussing on abstinence education for girls, it positions girls as being solely responsible for decisions about sexual activity and boys as having no responsibility for ensuring that sex is mutually consented to and safe. This sexist approach is detrimental to both young women and young men, and goes against the ways of learning recommended by the Government, by sexual health experts, educationalists and others.

⁵ Young London Matters (2010) *Young People in London: Abortion and Repeat Abortion*. <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20100727153309/http://www.younglondonmatters.org/uploads/documents/tpyoungpeopleinlondonabortionandrepeatabortion.pdf>

⁶ Shepherd, J. and Owen, P. (2012) ‘Nadine Dorries’s sexual abstinence lessons bill withdrawn’, *The Guardian*, 20th January 2012 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2012/jan/20/nadine-dorries-sexual-abstinence-bill-withdrawn>