



## Executive Summary

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### *Background and Objectives*

1. Comprehensive and proper sexuality education helps young people develop positive values, knowledge and skills to make respectful and healthy choices about relationship and sex, which, as a result, contributes to what the Equal Opportunities Commission (EOC) has long been advocating—a sexual harassment-free and gender-equal society.
2. This Study, *A Study on Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Secondary Schools of Hong Kong*, attempts to collect solid data to paint an overall picture of implementation of sexuality education in Hong Kong, with a view to providing recommendations for the Government, schools and NGOs to map out a better overall strategy to improve sexuality education for all the youths in the city.
3. Focusing on the implementation aspect of sexuality education in Hong Kong, this Study aims at creating robust quantitative and qualitative evidence on the issue with specific objectives as follows:
  - To examine the actual implementation of sexuality education at secondary schools under Education Bureau's (EDB's) "school-based approach", including the amount of time and classes devoted to sexuality education, the manpower allocation for teaching sexuality education, the content of the curriculum, etc.;
  - To understand the views of secondary school principals and/or teachers on implementing sexuality education;
  - To study the potential challenges faced by teachers and schools in different areas during implementing sexuality education, such as resource availability, potential opposition of relevant stakeholders (such as parents), effectiveness of the guidance and training for teachers, etc.;
  - To examine the role of NGOs and other organisations which provide lessons or activities related to sexuality education; and
  - To recommend what the Government and other stakeholders should do to better improve sexuality education in secondary schools of Hong Kong.



## ***Research methodology***

4. This Study adopts a mixed-method research design with two major methods of data collection:

- i. A self-administered paper questionnaire was sent to all 473 local secondary schools (excluding ESF and other private international schools) in Hong Kong;
- ii. Five focus group discussions were conducted with principals and teachers from local secondary schools and NGO workers/school social workers who work on sexuality education related projects in Hong Kong.

5. The paper questionnaire, together with an invitation letter from the EOC, were sent to all 473 local secondary schools (excluding ESF and other private international schools) in Hong Kong by the data collection firm on 25 November 2020. Either the principal or the teacher-in-charge of coordinating sexuality education curriculum was invited to complete the questionnaire. All the valid completed questionnaires were collected by 15 March 2021. A total of **203** completed questionnaires were received out of 473 local secondary schools invited, representing a response rate of **42.9%** of the issued sample. At a 95% level of confidence, the sampling error is within **+/-5.2%**.

6. After collecting all the completed questionnaires, responded schools were randomly selected by the data collection firm and their principals or teachers were invited to participate in focus group discussions. A total of 26 discussants were recruited and a total of five focus group discussions were conducted from 9 to 27 April 2021, either remotely via Zoom or face-to-face at the office of the data collection firm.

## ***Key findings***

### **Overall situation of implementing sexuality education**

#### **Teaching modes and activities**

7. This Study found that 13.8% of the responded schools did not teach sexuality education in classrooms at all. A majority of schools (85.2%) included elements of sexuality education in the classes of different subjects, and 2.0% of schools taught sexuality education as a separate subject in the 2018/19 school year.



8. Among the responded schools which said they have included elements of sexuality education in the classes of different school subjects, majority of them said those subjects were Science/Integrated Science (81.7%, for junior curriculum) and Biology (81.7%, for senior curriculum).

### Teaching hours

9. This Study also found that the actual teaching hours allocated to sexuality education were largely inadequate. Among the schools which taught sexuality education at formal lessons, nearly half of them said they only allocated a total of **five hours or below** to sexuality education classes at junior (47.4%) and senior (49.7%) forms in the 2018/19 school year. Over 90% of schools provided 20 hours or below of sexuality education to both junior (97.1%) and senior (94.9%) forms in the 2018/19 school year.

10. Also, among the schools which taught sexuality education at formal lessons, over three-fourths of them (75.4%) said they did not have a target of lesson hours allocated to sexuality education for different subjects per year.

### Activities related to sexuality education

11. Among the 203 responded schools, over half of them said they taught sexuality education during group or individual counselling sessions (55.7%) or sharing/discussions at Form Teacher Periods (52.2%). Around one-third of them (31.0%) said they conducted talks related to sexuality education in morning assemblies. Also, there are 12.3% of schools reported that they did not organise any activities that are related to sexuality education in the 2018/19 school year.

12. As for the grade of students who joined sexuality education activities, over 80% of responded schools said their junior form students (F.1-3) had joined those activities in the 2018/19 school year, whereas fewer senior form students joined those activities in comparison. For instance, only 42.7% of schools said their Form Six students had joined sexuality education activities in the 2018/19 school year.

### Teaching scope and content

13. The three topics that were covered by most schools were “self-image and self-concept”, “friendship, dating and courtship” and “puberty”, whereas most schools did NOT cover the following sexuality education related topics:

- Sexual informed consent (59.1% of schools did not cover);
- Sexual orientation and gender identities (53.2% of schools did not cover);



- Sex, law and ethics (45.8% of schools did not cover).

### ***Manpower deployment for sexuality education***

14. Only a minority of schools (19.3%) said they had created the post of sexuality education coordinator, whereas 80.8% of the responded schools said there were no such post in their schools. Meanwhile, more than half of the schools (56.8%) said the responsibility of organising or coordinating the implementation of sexuality education lies with their Guidance Master/Mistress. Other schools said it was tasked to their school social worker (23.4%), Moral and Civil Education Master/Mistress (20.8%), Vice Principal (19.8%), etc. A small percentage of responded schools (7.3%) said they had set up a specific committee by a number of teachers for coordinating their schools' sexuality education. Yet, 6.8% of respondents said they did not designate anyone to coordinate matters related to sexuality education.

15. This Study also found that most staff who were responsible for teaching sexuality education are subject teacher (66.5%), school social worker (64.0%), form teacher (47.8%) and Guidance teacher (42.4%). Also, a small percentage of schools (5.4%) said none of their teaching staff had taught sexuality education.

16. While most schools had assigned their staff to teach sexuality education, not all of those staff had received specific training for the matter. Nearly half of the responded schools (47.6%) said their staff who taught sexuality education in 2018/19 school year had NOT taken any professional development course related to the subject.

17. On average, the responded schools had assigned 21.9% of their teaching staff to teach sexuality education, whereas only 4.7% of their teaching staff had taken related professional development courses. Furthermore, 95.3% of schools did not impose any training requirements to their staff who are responsible for teaching sexuality education.

### ***The role of external organisations***

18. This Study found that 93.1% of responded schools said they had invited external organisation to teach sexuality education in the 2018/19 school year. Among those schools, a majority of them (77.8%) invited NGOs, followed by Department of Health (55.0%), to teach sexuality education. A minority of 16.9% of schools said they had engaged religious groups for conducting sexuality education.



19. Most of the schools said NGOs are the external organisations that they most often resorted to for obtaining teaching materials for sexuality education. A high percentage of 91.6% responded schools said they “always” or “often” obtained such materials from NGOs. On average, schools allocated 8.48 hours for external organisations to teach sexuality education in the 2018/19 school year.

### ***Support for parents***

20. In general, school representatives found that parents of their students are supportive of teaching sexuality education in schools. Most of them (71.9%) said parents are “very supportive (11.3%)” or “supportive (60.6%)” and none of them said parents of their students are “unsupportive or very unsupportive” for schools to teach sexuality education.

21. Nevertheless, not many schools provided support for parents on the subject matter. Over half of the schools (56.7%) did not provide any support to parents related to sexuality education, whereas just a minority of responded schools said they “provided resources on sexuality education compiled by NGOs to parents (16.3%)”, or “discussed with parents the school’s vision for sexuality education on occasions like the Parents’ Day or meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association (15.3%)”. Only a very small percentage of schools (7.4%) said they “organised workshops to guide parents on how to explain values and behaviours on sexuality to their children”.

### ***Support for minority students***

22. The Study also identified from the focus group discussions that minority students may encounter issues related to sex and relationship that required tailored support. For instance, discussants shared that students with special educational needs (SEN) are sometimes more vulnerable to incidents like image-based sexual violence (IBSV) and require schools to provide them with individual support via case work or group counselling on the issue of sexuality education and IBSV. Some teachers also observed that cultural differences could be one of the challenges they faced while teaching sexuality education for non-ethnic Chinese (NEC) students. They pointed out that there were insufficient bilingual teaching materials and external organisations which offer bilingual activities for sexuality education.

23. As for the issue related to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT), some discussants said they had LGBT students told them that they would like to or have the need to learn more about sexuality education that covers LGBT issues. Yet, many of them found it difficult to cover LGBT issues in class as the topic remains



“controversial” in Hong Kong, or due to disagreement over the topic among their own colleagues.

## ***Views shared by school representatives***

### **Insufficient sexuality education**

24. School representatives were asked to rate whether they think sexuality education in secondary schools is sufficient. A majority of respondents (49.7%) answered “Insufficient (43.3%)” or “Very insufficient (6.4%)”. Only 3.4% of respondents answered “Sufficient”, while 46.8% of them rated “Fair”. A similar observation was found among participants of focus group discussions, who shared the following key observations: (1) students do not know how to maintain appropriate boundaries with others, (2) sexuality education taught in class is different from students’ everyday experiences, (3) students do not handle relationships well and (4) students learned sexuality education from unreliable sources like the Internet.

### **Difficulties encountered by schools**

25. A high percentage of responded schools (82.3%) said there was no time for sexuality education “as the secondary school curriculum is already jam-packed”. A significant proportion of respondents found that there was “a lack of relevant training for teachers (60.6%)”, “a lack of structured or appropriate teaching materials (56.2%)” or “a lack of sufficient teaching resources (48.8%)”. A considerable 36.5% found there was “a lack of government support or subsidies for hiring extra manpower” for teaching sexuality education.

26. Just a very few numbers of respondents think that “students are not interested in sexuality education (2.5%)” or “parents do not wish the school to provide sexuality education (2.0%)”, while only 1.5% of responded schools said that there were no difficulties encountered.

### **Views on improving sexuality education**

27. The top three recommendations chose by the school representatives from the aspect of policy were wishing the Government to:

- Widely promote the importance of sexuality education among parents and the general public (62.6%);
- Revise the existing guidelines on sexuality education in schools (61.6%); and
- Set recommended lesson hours for sexuality education in different school subjects (55.7%).



28. As from the perspective of provision of resources, the top three recommendations identified by school respondents were hoping the Government to:

- Provide schools with comprehensive teaching materials on sexuality education in different media (74.9%);
- Subsidise schools to hire non-governmental organisations to provide on-site sexuality education courses (69.5%); and
- Provide funding and incentives to encourage teachers to take relevant courses on sexuality education (64.5%).

## **Conclusions**

29. Below are some key issues and observations identified by this Study regarding the implementation of sexuality education in Hong Kong:

- a. Sexuality education in Hong Kong is largely inadequate:** This Study found that 13.8% of the responded schools did not teach sexuality education in classrooms at all, whereas 12.3% of schools reported that they did not organise any activities that are related to sexuality education in the 2018/19 school year. Also, among the responded schools, almost half of the school representatives (49.7%) said sexuality education in Hong Kong was “Insufficient (43.3%)” or “Very insufficient (6.4%)”.
- b. Insufficient teaching hours for sexuality education:** Nearly half of the responded schools said they only allocated a total of five hours or below to sexuality education classes at junior (47.4%) and senior (49.7%) forms in the 2018/19 school year. This is clearly insufficient even by the standard of Government’s 1997 Guidelines (inactive now) which suggested that a total of 36 hours sexuality education classes should be allocated to junior forms, and 30 hours to senior forms. In addition, over three-fourths of them (75.4%) said they did not have a target of lesson hours allocated to sexuality education for different subjects per year.
- c. A curriculum that is heavily focused on the physiological aspect of sexuality education:** This Study also found that most schools’ curricula of sexuality education heavily focus on the biological and physiological aspects (e.g. the mechanics of reproduction), and overlook the psychological and social aspects like healthy relationships, sexual consent, gender equality, etc. which are equally important. Majority of schools said they covered sexuality education in subjects like Science/Integrated Science (81.7%, for junior curriculum) and Biology (81.7%,



for senior curriculum), while 59.1% of schools said they did not cover topics like sexual informed consent in their classes at all.

- d. The lack of proper coordination mechanism at schools:** Only a minority of schools (19.3%) said they had created the post of sexuality education coordinator, whereas 6.8% of respondents said they did not designate anyone to coordinate matters related to sexuality education. More than half of the schools (56.8%) said the responsibility of organising or coordinating the implementation of sexuality education lies with their Guidance Master/Mistress.
- e. Teachers are not equipped with proper professional training on the subject matter:** Nearly half of the responded schools (47.6%) said their staff who taught sexuality education in 2018/19 school year had NOT taken any professional development course related to the subject. Most of the schools (95.3%) said they did not impose any training requirements for their staff who are responsible for teaching sexuality education. On average, the responded schools had assigned 21.9% of their teaching staff to teach sexuality education, whereas only 4.7% of their teaching staff had taken related professional development courses.
- f. The role of NGOs is crucial and significant:** This Study found that 93.1% of responded schools said they had invited external organisation to teach sexuality education in the 2018/19 school year. Among them, a majority (77.8%) invited NGOs to teach sexuality education. A small percentage of schools (5.4%) even said none of their teaching staff had taught sexuality education, which those schools likely relied on external organisations for teaching sexuality education.
- g. Support for parents on sexuality education is very minimal:** Over half of the schools (56.7%) did not provide any support to parents related to sexuality education. Only a very small percentage of schools (7.4%) said they “organised workshops to guide parents on how to explain values and behaviours on sexuality to their children”.
- h. Support for minority students on sexuality education needs to be enhanced:** The focus group discussions identified that minority students, such as students with SEN and NEC students, may encounter issues related to sex and relationship that required tailored support. For instance, there is an unmet demand for bilingual teaching materials and organisations which can offer bilingual activities for sexuality education.





- i. **A clear demand for up-to-date and official guidelines and recommended lesson hours for sexuality education:** A high percentage of responded schools (82.3%) said there was no time for sexuality education “as the secondary school curriculum is already jam-packed”. As much as 61.6% of school representatives would like the Government to revise the existing guidelines on sexuality education, and 55.7% of them would like to have recommended lesson hours for the sexuality education in different school subjects.
- j. **A strong plea for resources for sexuality education from schools:** A significant proportion of respondents found that there was “a lack of relevant training for teachers (60.6%)”, “a lack of structured or appropriate teaching materials (56.2%)” or “a lack of sufficient teaching resources (48.8%)”. Most of them would like the Government to provide schools with comprehensive teaching materials on sexuality education in different media (74.9%), to subsidise schools to hire NGOs to provide on-site sexuality education courses (69.5%), and to provide funding and incentives to encourage teachers to take relevant courses on sexuality education (64.5%).

### **Recommendations**

30. Based on the key findings of this Study, as well as expertise and past experiences of the EOC in advocating gender equality and comprehensive sexuality education, this Study proposes the following list of key recommendations for improving sexuality education in Hong Kong:

- **Recommendation 1:** *It is recommended that the Government should consider reactivating and updating the 1997 Guidelines on Sex Education in Schools for all secondary schools to follow. The Guidelines should also stipulate a standardised structure and recommended learning hours for elements of sexuality education in different school subjects and extra-curricular activities.*
- **Recommendation 2:** *It is recommended that schools should review and revise their own curriculum of sexuality education as appropriate, to ensure that not just biological and physiological aspects of the subject are included, but also psychological and social aspects. Topics that are currently not covered by most schools, such as healthy relationships, sexual consent, gender equality, image-based sexual violence (IBSV), sex, law and ethics should also be included.*
- **Recommendation 3:** *It is recommended that professional development training courses should be mandatory for teachers responsible for teaching sexuality education in*



secondary schools. Both schools and the Government should provide adequate resources and incentives for teachers to attend those training. They should also encourage teachers to attend refresher training from time to time, in order to keep abreast of the latest issues and development related to sexuality education, such as online dating, IBSV, online sexual harassment, etc.

- **Recommendation 4:** It is recommended that each school should set up a designated post of sexuality education coordinator, preferably at the rank of Senior Graduate Master/Mistress (SGM), to coordinate and take charge of matters related to sexuality education. The Government should consider providing appropriate funding for schools to set up such position.
- **Recommendation 5:** It is recommended that the Government should provide adequate subsidies for schools to hire NGOs to provide on-site sexuality education courses. Funding should also be granted to NGOs to develop innovative methods and up-to-date activities for teaching sexuality education.
- **Recommendation 6:** The Government should consider developing, and/or providing funding for developing, a comprehensive set of teaching materials that are structured, up-to-date, available in different media (such as short clips and multimedia/online materials), and categorised into different topics and age groups.
- **Recommendation 7:** Funding should be provided to develop sexuality education materials that are tailored for the needs of minority students, such as students with special educational needs (SEN), non-ethnic Chinese (NEC) students, or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) students. For instance, the Government should consider funding NGOs and schools to develop bilingual teaching materials and learning activities that is culturally appropriate for NEC students.
- **Recommendation 8:** It is recommended that support for parents on sexuality education should be enhanced by schools. Schools may consider providing resources on sexuality education compiled by NGOs to parents, discussing with parents the school's vision for sexuality education on occasions like the Parents' Day or meetings of the Parent-Teacher Association, organising workshops to guide parents on how to explain values and behaviours on sexuality to their children, etc. ◆