

Delivering Comprehensive Sexuality Education to Students with Disability in Special Schools in Fiji

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Abstract : Objectives: The Reproductive and Family Health Association of Fiji (RFHAF) and Family Planning Australia are working together to introduce quality comprehensive sexuality education into Special Schools - which are schools for students with disability. Sexual and reproductive health information is needed by students with disability attending Special Schools. Children with special needs go through the same changes as able-bodied children. The Fiji Disability Inclusion project is a three-year project that started in 2015. One of its objectives is to increase exposure to comprehensive sexuality education for primary and secondary school students with disability. Method: A baseline survey was undertaken with 72 students with disability; it included questions about puberty, sexual health, and relationships. 34 teachers also completed a survey about their views of sexuality education and confidence in delivering it. Consent was facilitated by running information sessions with teachers and parents. The process of gaining consent and completing the surveys was designed to be accessible to students with disability. Given the sensitive nature of reproductive and sexual health, and the potential vulnerability of young people with disability, ethical considerations were important in the design and implementation of the surveys, and ethics approval was obtained. Results: Findings from the surveys suggest that students have mixed knowledge and awareness of sexual health issues. Most teachers reported a need for their students to learn about sexuality and relationships. A positive outcome of conducting the surveys was that RFHAF staff reported they have developed skills and confidence in communicating with young people with a range of disabilities. They have a greater understanding of what students want to learn, and what teachers feel is important. Conclusions: These survey findings will assist RFHAF in developing comprehensive sexuality education programs that are relevant and accessible to students in Special Schools, and to develop an appropriate professional development program for teachers. Findings may also be applicable to other Special Schools when developing sexuality education programs. The education programs developed for students as part of this project, and the professional development programs for teachers, may be relevant to other countries.

Keywords : comprehensive sexuality education, delivery, sexual and reproductive health and rights, special schools

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