

**Ensuring Rights and Choices
for All:**

**Practices of UNFPA China
Livestreaming Comprehensive
Sexuality Education Project in
Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan
Provinces**

2019-2020



United Nations Population Fund



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FOREWORD

With 1.4 billion people, China is the most populous country in the world. The sexual and reproductive health, rights, and choices of its people have huge implications for social and economic development. The better informed that people are about sexuality and sexual and reproductive health, the better able they will be to enjoy healthy and satisfying lives, and the more likely that China as a whole will thrive.

And yet, studies by UNFPA and others show that Chinese young people are sorely lacking in information about sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). Among the consequences of this ignorance are high rates of unintended pregnancies, abortions, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections—not to mention emotional or social impact and gender inequality.

With the funding support from UNFPA Innovation Fund and the Danish Government, UNFPA China's pilot project designed and implemented with Marie Stopes International China on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) offers an innovative solution for provision of sexuality education through live streaming to young people in remote areas.



The central innovation of this project is live streaming. Schools — especially rural schools — lack the expertise and resources necessary to teach sexuality education. By using live streaming technology, the course shares quality sexuality education curricula and instructors, and engages local school teachers and administrators for support. During the pilot project, the course was taught in 5 middle schools in Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.

The project demonstrates the value of CSE at all levels.

CSE is good for individuals and families.

Such education leads to happier family life, higher quality of life, better knowledge on SRHR, fewer unintended pregnancies and abortions, and lower rates of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. Sexuality education sets young people off in a good direction in life.

CSE is good for the country. When individuals and families have access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, that contributes to lower health care costs, higher labor productivity, and greater gender equality for society as a whole. That's good for China today — and tomorrow.

CSE is good for China's commitment to development. Sexuality education helps China fulfill two agendas that are cornerstones in global efforts for sustainable development. These agendas are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), both of which affirm universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, information and education for all including adolescents and young people.

This is an innovative CSE project that reduces cost, ensures quality, and expands accessibility. It provides a model that can now be expanded to other schools and regions nationwide.



Ms. Navchaa Suren

Representative a.i.

UNFPA China

INTRODUCTION—THE NEED

A majority of Chinese adolescents are unprepared for making decisions regarding relationships, sex, and contraception. That's the upshot of a UNFPA survey of adolescents in Yushu and Yonghe counties, and indications are that those results hold true nationwide. Among the findings of UNFPA's survey in 2019 in Qinghai Province where the CSE project took place:

- More than 90% of adolescents interviewed said that their teachers did not give any instruction on sexual and reproductive health (SRH).
- Over half of survey respondents say that their parents are their main source of information on SRH—but 90% of them have limited contact with their parents. Even when they do discuss sexuality, they don't approach "sensitive" topics.
- More than 70% of adolescents said they needed information on SRH.

- Adolescents surveyed lack even a basic understanding of their own physiology and development. They have heard only "little" about family planning, and most have no idea how to get contraceptives.



Sexuality education is something that our school has always wanted to do, but there were no opportunities until we met you. ”

— School principal (school A)

These findings are backed up by national figures, which show that 96% of young people in China do not demonstrate good knowledge of SRH.¹ As a result, adolescents are anxious, confused, and know little about their own bodies or how to navigate sexual relationships. This ignorance carries over into young adulthood.

¹ X.-Y. Zheng, G. Chen and Y.-L. Han, "Survey of youth access to reproductive health in China," *Population & Development*, no. 16, pp. 2-16, 2010.



Students participate in the online CSE session

According to the National Health and Family Planning Commission (2015), there were 13 million abortions carried out in the country in 2015. Sixty-two percent of these abortions were performed among women aged between 20 and 29. That means high healthcare costs for the country.

These numbers also bode poorly for China's progress on the

SDGs, especially goals numbers 3 (health), 4 (education), and 5 (gender equality)—and on the ICPD Programme of Action, which urges support for integral sexuality education and addressing the special needs of youth and adolescents.

If the problem is ignorance, the solution is education.

THE PROJECT

Thanks to a pilot project supported by UNFPA China on comprehensive sexuality education, over 2,300 adolescents in five schools have learned what is happening with their developing bodies, how to navigate sexual relationships, and where to turn for more information.

These young people will now grow up to be more confident and caring, with stronger relationships and healthier habits.

“ Our students never had direct access to sexuality-related education as they do now with the live-streaming CSE sessions. Their knowledge on CSE was zero! Some girls didn't know what was going on when they first got their periods. Their families wouldn't explain it to them. ”

— School principal (school D)



Students participate in the online CSE session

Students participate in the online CSE session





And that's just the beginning. This pilot project — an 8-session course taught via livestream to selected schools in Qinghai, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces — can be replicated in schools nationwide.

To conduct the pilot project, UNFPA China teamed up with our longtime partners Marie Stopes International China (MSIC) and the China Family Planning Association (CFPA), with funding support from UNFPA Innovation Fund and the Danish Government. Together, all 5 pilot schools were visited and school teachers and leaders were informed of the project and importance of the sexuality education at schools. In total 13 “tutors” or instructors, of the sexuality education courses were selected based on their interests and background and trained. The project team sponsored a three-part webinar series featuring leading CSE experts who presented on topics in sexual and reproductive health and rights — and were joined by over 500 teachers, school administrators, parents, students, and other community members.

“

Sexuality education helps young people protect themselves and live a happy life. Students should master sexuality education like they do First Aid. ”

— Teacher (school A)

UNFPA conducted the 8-session course via livestream in each of the five pilot schools. Teachers in each school assisted with technology, classroom management, and other logistics. UNFPA gathered feedback and conducted an assessment throughout the implementation phase. The interactive course contained age-appropriate information about puberty, health, sex, relationships, communication, love, family, and more.

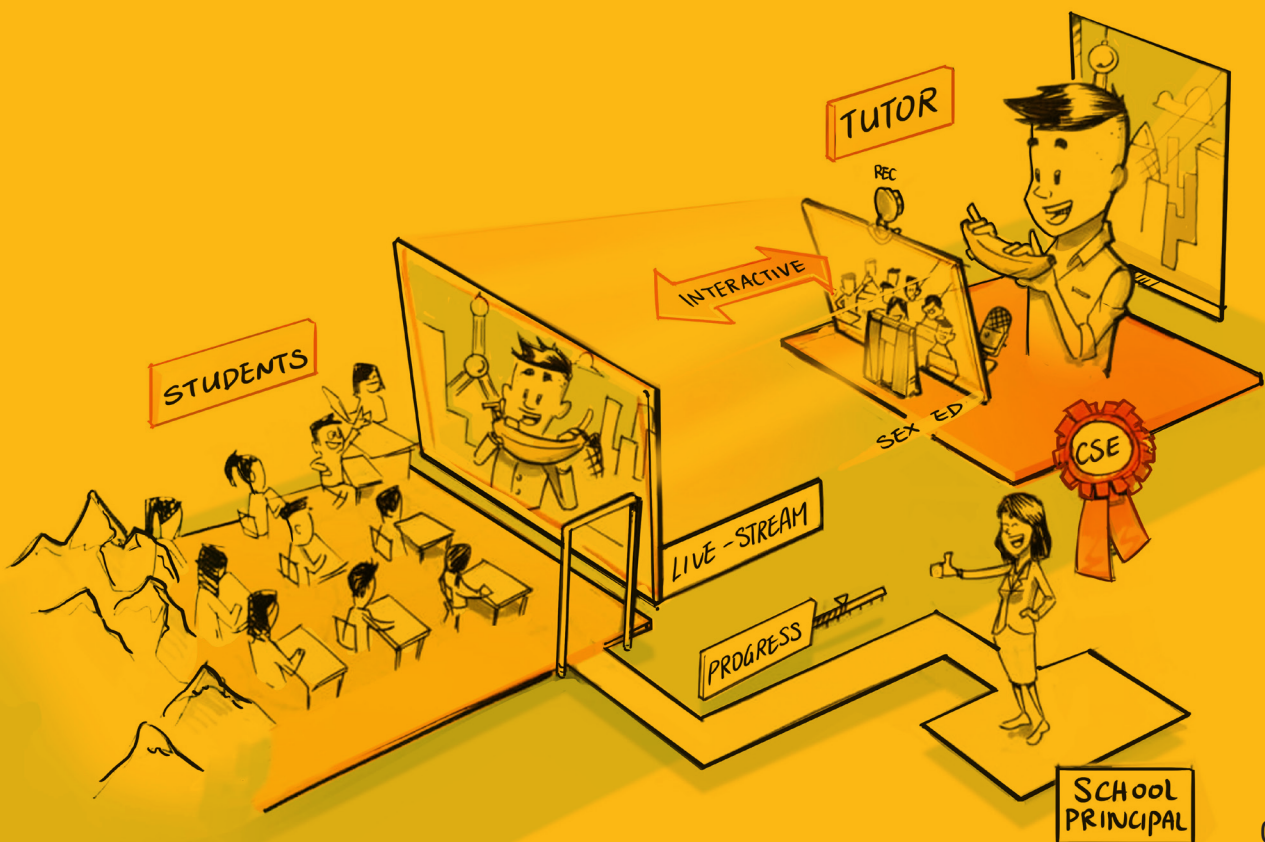
Students participate in the online CSE session





Because of this project, thousands more adolescents can breathe easier. The silence has been broken on a taboo topic that they had had little opportunity to discuss or learn about.

With the right resources, this course can be improved and expanded, so that more Chinese young people will be able to make informed choices and lead healthier and more productive lives.



RESULTS OF THE PROJECT



HIV: 80% increase in knowledge on role of condoms in preventing HIV.



PREGNANCY: Nearly 130% increase in knowledge about preventing pregnancy.



CONDOM USE: 79% of students now say they are likely to use condoms.



SAFETY: 79% of respondents can now say “no” to sex with someone.



CONFIDENCE: 25% increase in number of students who will have sex only when ready.



GENDER EQUALITY: At least 64% of students at each school had a positive attitude towards gender equality — up by as much as 15% from before the CSE course.

OVERVIEW OF 8 SESSIONS

At the center of the pilot project is an 8-session course of comprehensive sexuality education. The curriculum was developed in line with the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE), and in consultation with a national expert on CSE. Topics include:

- 1) My Puberty:** Puberty and its role in individual development, physiological development, positive body image.
- 2) Sexual and Reproductive Health:** Pregnancy, contraception, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections.
- 3) Love and Marriage:** Love, friendship, relationships, marriage, family, and the consequences of child marriage, early marriage, coerced marriage, and unwanted pregnancy.
- 4) Sex and Social Norms:** Sexual life cycle, sexual social norms, dealing with sexual urges, the sex trade and its harms, making decisions about sexual behavior.
- 5) Communication and Rational Decision-Making:** Effective communication, factors in decision-making, impact of peers and social norms, making rational choices.
- 6) Gender and Equality:** Gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender biases, gender equality, gender diversity, sexual orientation, and gender-based violence.
- 7) Staying Safe and Use of Information and Communications Technology:** Sexual violence, privacy and bodily integrity, sexual harassment, consent and refusal, defense, safe use of the internet.
- 8) Sexuality, values, and rights:** Sex, values, respect for inclusion and diverse values, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights.

THE PEOPLE—FOUR VIEWS ON SEXUALITY EDUCATION

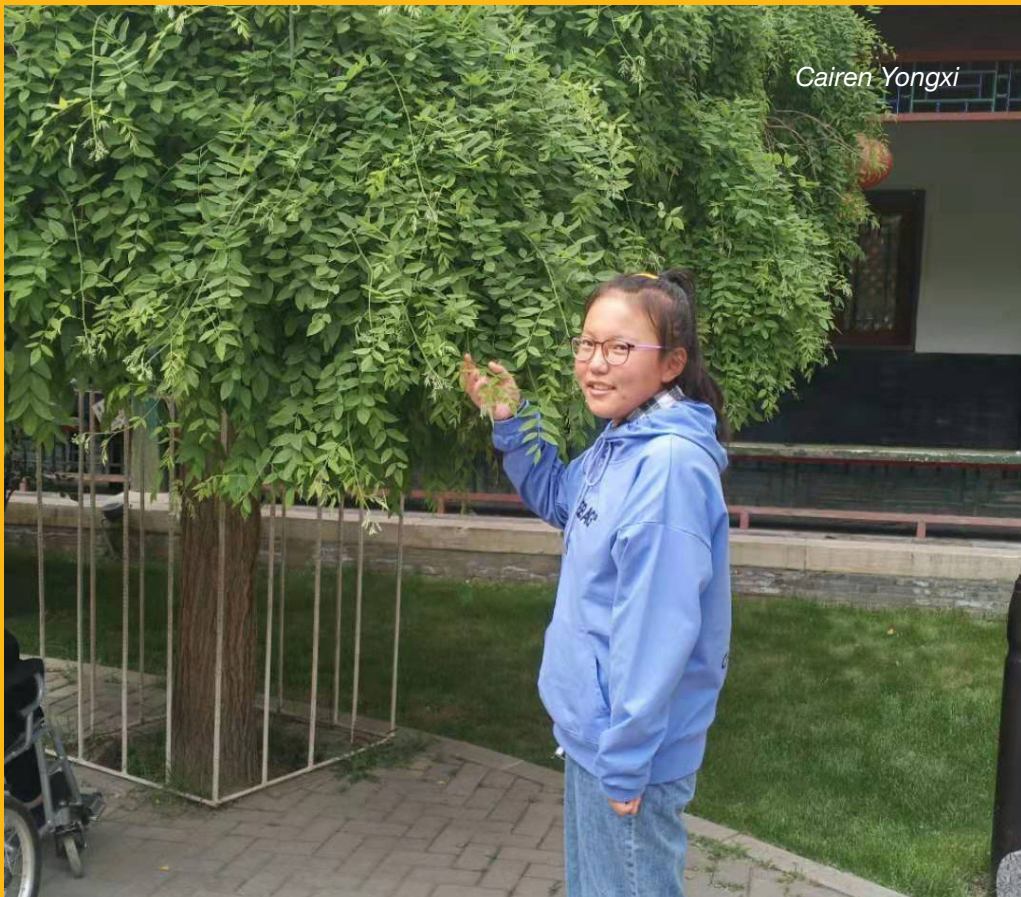
“WHAT DID YOU LEARN THIS WEEK?” Students have questions about sexuality

Recall for a moment just how confusing life can be for an adolescent. A changing body. Hormones that upend your daily life. Concerns about relationships,

disease, and pregnancy. Awkward moments with adults and peers alike. And now, an internet rife with misinformation.

It can be agonizing.

“I never talked about sex with my friends or my parents,” says 15-year-old Cairen, a 9th-grader in Qinghai. “Sexuality is a taboo topic.”



Cairen says boys are more open than girls in talking about sex. But she's never met Tu, a 14-year-old in Yunnan, who is painfully shy on the subject. "Once in a while," says Tu, "I'd talk a little bit with my friends about sex. We'd say a word or two, and then the conversation was over."

Before taking the CSE course, they both had questions — Tu about how to avoid getting HIV and other diseases, and Cairen about menstruation. Their friends had still other questions, such as about contraception and relationships.

"During the course, all our questions got answered," says Cairen. The 8-session course covers a range of topics that adolescents are eager to learn about, but feel they have no one to learn from. Another 9th-grade student reports that "the tutor gave us many examples to help us understand, so there was nothing we couldn't get."

The teachers' positive attitudes are a good example for students. "The class was good because we got to have an open, real-time interaction with the instructor," says Tu. Cairen says she liked that the course was online, "because it's not so embarrassing when the instructor is on a screen."

Yuanlai Tu



The course may or may not completely transform students, but it does achieve something vitally important: it demystifies sexuality and opens students to talking about it. “I realized that sex wasn’t as scary as I thought,” says another 8th-grade boy who took the course. And a 9th-grade girl adds, “I didn’t know how to talk about sexuality before, but now I do.”

What students learn helps those around them, too. One boy says his friend asked him, after each session, “What did you learn in class this week?” That boy’s curiosity is shared by many millions of other Chinese adolescents. With a livestream CSE course, answers are close at hand.

“EVERY SCHOOL IN CHINA”: A teacher on why sexuality education is important

“When I was growing up, I was never taught about sexuality,” says Ms. Xinzhi Hu. “So, when I became a teacher, I didn’t want my students to grow up like that.” She has been a biology teacher since 2012.

In her class one year, Ms. Hu taught a unit on reproduction and sexuality—some kids liked it, some didn’t care, some found it shameful to discuss. “A year later, I got an anonymous call from a boy who was very nervous,” she recalls. “I realized



he must have been a former student. He said he had just masturbated and asked if it was harmful. He was afraid of what might happen.” Evidently, he also had no one else to talk with.

“That was the moment I realized that teaching sexuality was important,” she says. She knew that other children had those same questions — and that they should be discussed openly in school, not just whispered anonymously to a former teacher over the phone.

When UNFPA asked for teachers to join the project, she jumped at the chance. “I’m now the focal point in my school for the CSE course, so I coordinate the teachers, test the equipment, and make sure everything runs smoothly.”

Students learned that Ms. Hu is nonjudgmental, and they asked her questions after the CSE sessions. “After the session on love and marriage, one girl wanted to talk more about how to say no to a boy who likes her but whom she didn’t like,” Ms. Hu says. “That’s something a lot of girls want to know.” Other kids want to know more about contraception, health, homosexuality, and other topics.

In other words, the course has started conversations where before

there was silence. It addresses the small questions kids have, as well as the larger concern behind those questions. “The bigger question,” says Ms. Hu, “is how to make the transition from childhood to adulthood, how to have a relationship and make healthy choices.”

Teachers like Ms. Hu are passionate about education, and students dearly want to learn. The CSE course connects those two. With more participation and more active roles for teachers, Ms. Hu can envision the project growing. “I want to see sexuality education in every school in every corner of China,” she says. “You learn something appropriate for your age about sexuality, and you are empowered.”

“THIS IS JUST PART OF LIFE”: A tutor says a good teaching style helps put students at ease

“In China, sexuality is considered a shameful or dirty topic,” says Ms. Xiaohong Shi. “Puberty, menstruation, sexuality — people won’t talk about it. But they want to learn. In their hearts, all of them are very curious.”



Xiaohong Shi

Ms. Shi should know. She's got plenty of experience. In partnership with MSIC, she has taught sexuality education to more than 5,000 students and adolescents. She's been a certified mental health counselor, social worker, and supervisor in Shenzhen since 2015. And most recently she was a "tutor," or instructor, of UNFPA's pilot project on comprehensive sexuality education.

Good course content is vital, says Ms. Shi, but so is the teaching method. "My style is easygoing and relaxed, because I want students to feel comfortable. I talk about my son, age 19, and how he wanted to learn. I make jokes and tell funny stories. I want kids to know this is just part of life."



Xiaohong Shi with students and parents

Students' most common questions, she says, are about puberty: they want to know about the physical and sexual changes they'll undergo in the years to come. They ask about love and marriage, too—can I have a boyfriend or girlfriend, will my parents allow it, how can I manage a relationship? They're also curious about how people have sex, how the sperm enters the egg, and homosexuality and heterosexuality.

"Livestreaming courses mean that more people can get access to sexuality education. Students learn from a teacher outside their own village. Offline education is effective in its own way, too. We need both."

And Ms. Hu wants to see more of it. "For the project to grow, it needs more investment, more people to take part, and more support for tutors." The most important point, she says, is the simplest: "It works."

“AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY”: A UNFPA official sees the future of sexuality education

“So many young people today are facing issues because of a lack of sexuality education,” says Ms. Navchaa Suren, Deputy Representative of UNFPA China. “Many young people don’t know the health risks of getting multiple abortions. They are not well informed

about contraception. They lack information and skills to communicate with their peers and partners.”

This lack of education leads to negative socio-economic and health outcomes that affect people in the most personal of ways.

“We have an exciting opportunity with livestreaming courses on sexuality,” says Ms. Suren. “The innovation here — the livestream technology — allows us to reach young people who would otherwise

The project team at an Innovation Boot Camp in Munich, Germany in July 2019.



not get such an education.” The pilot project focused on rural areas, but it can reach schools anywhere in the country, so long as they have an internet connection.

“We know this new approach works. Schools appreciate this resource. Students are glad to learn about an important aspect of life. And the results are clear: sexuality education leaves kids much better equipped to have scientific knowledge and healthy relationships.”

The question now, says Ms. Suren, is how to extend this opportunity to more schools throughout China. UNFPA may have co-launched the program, but the agency isn’t proprietary about it. “We want partners in the NGO sector and in government to take this and run with it,” says Ms. Suren. “We want to share what we’ve learned.”

Several lessons are clear. “We can no longer go door to door to find schools to participate, like we did for the pilot,” says Ms. Suren. “Now we have to work on a higher level.”

The project must also go deeper. “We’re targeting young people, but

young people live in schools,” says Ms. Suren. “We need to get more community involvement.”

Also on Ms. Suren’s wish is to get more involvement from students (“they’re the end-users, after all”), schools (“we need more teachers and classroom space”), and the private sector (“we have to make a case for why they should support this project, even if it doesn’t support their bottom line”).

These are the sorts of structural challenges that anyone in business or government or development can appreciate: how to grow in size and retain quality.

“Here is a chance for all kinds of partners to get involved,” says Ms. Suren. “Together, we can make a big difference.”

CONCLUSION

UNFPA learned through pre- and post-project surveys and interviews just how great the need is for comprehensive sexuality education.

Students crave reliable information about sexual and reproductive health, particularly in a context where they do not have other effective and trustworthy means to access formal sexuality education.

Teachers and school administrators lack the expertise and resources to provide quality assured and cost-effective sexuality education in their schools.

Parents want their children to learn, but many aren't available or able to teach them about sexuality. Health professionals hope to close the gaps of ignorance about sexuality.

We answered these needs in our pilot project, beaming the best instructors and curriculum directly into classrooms in five schools.

We found in our evaluation that the pilot project increased students' knowledge and confidence in understanding their bodies and having happy, safe, and healthy relationships.

We see the opportunities now.

Imagine a future where adolescents in China are taught about their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Imagine this curriculum being a natural and seamless part of young people's schooling.

Imagine it being treated with openness, honesty, and even humor.

Imagine how young people's shame and embarrassment would diminish.

Imagine how they — and the country — would flourish.

We need imagine no more. UNFPA China is committed to helping make this vision a reality.

We welcome partners to join this effort.



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