**Teachers often embarrassed, awkward when teaching sex ed, outside experts preferred, say students globally**

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DOING the wild thing, the birds and the bees, the horizontal tango ...

Sex is one of the trickiest topics at school — and teachers are often awkward and embarrassed when it comes to talking about it, according to students.

Young people believe teachers can be unsuitable to tackle sex education due to a lack of training and openness on the topic, researchers say.

Many would prefer sexual health experts to deliver the classes, as pupils can also be left red-faced discussing personal matters with teachers they know and see every day.

**HAVE YOUR SAY: SHOULD SEX ED CLASSES BE TAUGHT BY HEALTH EXPERTS?**

The findings stem from an analysis of 55 qualitative studies tapping into the views of young people around the world — including Australia and New Zealand — about sex and relationship education in schools between 1990 and 2015.

Other criticisms included that sex was portrayed as a ‘scientific’ rather than enjoyable activity, says the paper, published today in the online journal BMJ Open.

Male students were turning to pornography to find out how to perform as sex education did not teach them enough what the act involves, it said.

“Students reported that teachers seemed unable to discuss sex frankly and responded unsatisfactorily to questions,” the paper said.

“Since credibility was related to the ability to talk frankly about sex, embarrassed teachers were deemed incapable of teaching (sex education).”

Most of the students were aged between 12 and 18 and responses were similar around the globe.

Researchers said one of the biggest issues was that schools treated sex ed like any other subject, despite the unique challenges.

In mixed sex classes, for example, young men feared being humiliated if they weren’t sexually experienced and might cause disruptions to hide their anxieties.

Females felt harassed by males if they engaged in discussions and had their sexual reputations attacked.

Stereotyping was also common, with women depicted as passive, and men as predatory.

Schools seemed loathe to accept some students were having sex, the paper said, leaving them “out of touch”.

But the researchers said there was likely to be opposition to suggestions that teachers should not be the ones to teach sex and relationship education.

Specialist sex ed teachers could help make students more comfortable.

Education Department spokesman Steve Tolley said sex education was covered during teacher training and schools were given resources and support.

Schools could hire external agencies to work with teachers but their approach must fit with government policy and the student’s needs, he said.

“Sex education is part of the Victorian curriculum and therefore schools and teachers are responsible for ensuring it is taught,” he said.

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