



THE PLEASURE PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

This session explored how and to what extent pleasure was discussed in the different partnerships. With a focus on the Get Up Speak Out (GUSO) programme, the session discussed the challenges, but also successes in taking a pleasure perspective. The session highlighted lessons that might strengthen the pleasure perspective in future SRHR partnerships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE DISCUSSION

WHAT ARE CHALLENGES IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- In many communities, pleasure continues to be seen as something mainly men are entitled to. Especially in communities where Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C) is prevalent, and thus women's desire is highly controlled and reduced, it is important to start a conversation on sex positivity while addressing underlying gender norms. In similar vein, there is a divide on how sex and sexuality are discussed for men and for women. There are thus gendered dynamics to integrating a pleasure perspective that should be better understood, and will be different for each community and groups within communities.
- The concept of pleasure might be understood in different ways by young people across the globe. Participants highlighted examples from, for instance, South Asia where sex was not so much seen as a pursuit of pleasure but rather as a biological need. Whereas in other countries, young people strongly associated sex and sexual pleasure to marriage. Taking a pleasure perspective can thus not be a standardized approach, but requires knowing and engaging with the community's and the young people's perspectives.
- None of the participants in the session have explicitly worked on non-binary perspectives of pleasure. One person mentioned to do trainings for teachers to talk about sex-positivity for non-binary people, but this was faced with a lot of backlash.

WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES USED IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- An exercise during the session amongst participants showed that while pleasure was not always fully embedded in all programmes, most participants did address pleasure through using sex positive language and training educators to be more sex positive.
- Approaches taken to include a pleasure perspective included focusing on pleasure for all and consent. These entry points could also be used to address non-binary pleasure, potentially avoiding backlash (see above).
- Strategies on consent usually focus on the right to refuse to have sex. It is indeed fundamental to agree that everyone needs to consent to a sexual activity and that they can change their mind any time they want. While doing so, the approach can also be switched around to talk about when and how to say 'yes', i.e. learning to express when you are interested. This switch could encourage a more sex positive approach, while still supporting the importance of being able and allowed to refuse sex.
- Recent efforts by Share-Net Netherlands members have been to produce a [Sexual Pleasure Checklist](#) to (self-) assess to what extent sexual pleasure is integrated into programmes.

WHAT ARE BEST PRACTICES/LESSONS LEARNED IN THE PARTNERSHIPS RELATED TO THE TOPIC?

- Sexual pleasure and sex positivity go hand-in-hand. However, violence and safety should continue to be addressed as well. This includes safety from sexual violence and coercion, as well as safe sex. Bridging the gap between talking about pleasure and health and safety concerns will have a positive impact on people's sexuality. It is furthermore important engage young people in making the connection between pleasure, exploitation, their consequences, and what constitutes positive sexual experience.
- In speaking about sex positivity and sexual pleasure, it is important to know the socio-political implications of using these terminologies in a given society, and to know how to frame it so it might become more acceptable and appropriate.
- [Research on integrating sex positivity approaches](#) in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Ghana and Kenya highlighted that young people expressed a need for more information on sexual pleasure, and that educators need more support on integrating sexual pleasure in CSE.
- Pleasure is not a universal feeling or concept with a universal definition. What is pleasurable for someone might not be the same as someone else. Furthermore, pleasure has a gendered aspect which also needs to be considered. It is, therefore, important to use participatory approaches among (young) men and women to define and understand how pleasure is understood, and how it might be addressed in order for everyone to enjoy the highest attainable standard of sexual well-being and pleasure.

