

General Questions

How and why did you decide to work with boys (as opposed to only girls)?

Girls and boys lack knowledge about puberty so at this basic level it is a good idea to work with both sexes. Equally important, existing gender norms in societies not only affect girls, but boys as well. Issues surrounding knowledge and Sexual and Reproductive Health equally impact boys. Engaging boys together with girls will help both gain critical knowledge, demystify puberty, and help them realize how gendered norms have affected them and girls as well. Impactful change surrounding these stereotypical gendered norms will ultimately lead to a happier life. All of the VYAA member organizations make conscious efforts to reach both girls and boys. For example, DSW made an effort to select schools that ensured mixed representation in the presentation we heard during the webinar.

How do you target those with low literacy levels?

While some programs are designed for in-school only populations, others try to reach the vulnerable out of school youth. Save the Children's VOICES videos, for example, are designed to reach parents of VYAs with low literacy. The videos are based on emotional testimonials and are simple so parents can easily understand. The videos are in local languages and facilitators are recruited at local levels to facilitate the local sessions. During discussion and dialogue, parents do not have to read or write, just participate and watch videos of the parents of those who have adopted the behavioral change. Programs reaching out-of-school youth often are more activity-based - not using print materials or using print materials designed for low-literacy audiences - and guided by trained facilitators.

What are the main challenges of collaborating with stakeholders?

One challenge is that few partners target the VYA age group which lessens capacity for stakeholders developing/implementing VYA programming. Policymaker-stakeholders need and want evidence to show the importance of VYA investment, but often such data are not readily available as VYA data have been collapsed with data on all adolescents. Another challenge is the time it takes to devote to a program and competing priorities. Stakeholder interest levels in some subjects may create a challenge: Stakeholder interest in prioritizing interventions on gender norms and values has been known to be low. To address this, there is a need for specific and innovative interventions that are straightforward and attractive to technical program and policy-oriented stakeholders.

What about out of school youth? (if programming is in schools)

There are many programs that focus on in-school youth. It is more of a challenge to reach out-of-school VYAs as by definition, particularly in countries with universal education laws, those not in school or who have dropped out of school are often very vulnerable, eg, unmarried and pregnant, in child marriages, extremely poor and working to survive. There are some small scale efforts. Much more is needed to develop this area of life skills and sexuality education that is tailored to these younger adolescent contexts and lives.

Are any of your organizations using game-based tools to incite knowledge and change (apart from Plan)?

DSW also uses games to incite knowledge and engage youth. IRH has developed several tools and curricula that are activity or game-based that can be used in VYA programs, eg, My Changing Body, 2nd Edition. Grow up Smart. See the different organizations' websites.

Did your research/programs explore and address the underlying socio-economic factors influencing the vulnerabilities of VYA, i.e., as members of poorer households?

For DSW, parents and communities were brought on board and together as they explored ways to create a safe environment for adolescents in their communities and schools.

Questions for Individual Panelists

Susan Igras

What is the definition of VYA (age-based)? Why?

The age categorization used in the field of sexual and reproductive health is probably the main reason why we use the 10-14 year olds age grouping for VYAs; historically this is how demographic data are grouped (10-14, 15-19, etc) and 10-14 captures a broad number of younger adolescents entering and going through puberty. But puberty can start earlier, and a 9-year old could also be considered a VYA. Some have argued for variations on age categorization for this reason.

Marni Sommer

How did you decide the content for the boys in the puberty book? Especially the peer pressure elements?

We conducted 3-4 months of in-depth research with adolescent boys, parents, adults, teachers, and key stakeholders. This helped us to learn what the peer pressures are that boys face, and other content that would be of relevance to them. We also had the boys write stories about their experiences of peer pressures (along with other kinds of stories we had them write which helped us to understand more about their pubertal experiences). Selections of the stories are included in the book (and will be in all the future books in any new country), and also relevant content that emerged from the other participatory activities with adolescent boys.

How does the population of out of school youth get access to the books?

Some access it through NGO or church programs that reach young people out of school, and some access it from the girls and boys themselves who take the books home to read on their own, and also to share with out of school youth, siblings, parents, etc.

How can programs, especially those focused on youth at the individual level (such as the puberty books) engages with families and parents?

If the books are given to young people (10-14 year olds) to take home to either keep forever, or to keep for a few weeks at a time, we think that they can share the books with parents and other family members, and it helps to create more open communications between them.

During the Puberty Book Project process, what were some of the main challenges faced when collaborating with stakeholders (e.g. girls, boys, educators, religions leaders, ministries, etc.)? Were there any commonalities between countries?

The main challenges are really just reminding people that the book exists in their country so that they think to order it. In general we have found that stakeholders in all countries see the idea of teaching girls and boys about puberty (we do not cover safe sex content as we think that is a role for a different program and/or older adolescents) as a great idea, and are very supportive (particularly after they see examples of the books we have done in other countries).