

Explore: Ideas for youth involvement in research



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This toolkit is part of IPPF's *Inspire* pack, which offers standards, guidelines and self-assessment tools on a variety of strategies and activities that contribute to rights-based and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health programming for young people.

Profile

Turning young people's ideas into reality ... exploring the issues



Introduction to *Explore*

Sex, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health are important issues in the lives of most young people. Young people can play a key role in developing programmes on sexual and reproductive health in their community or society. Involving young people can ensure that programmes, activities, information and services are appropriate and relevant.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) believes that working in partnership with young people should not be restricted to peer education, but should take place at all levels of project development and implementation. For many years young people have been participating in IPPF's programmes as peer counsellors and educators; however, the commitment to get young people involved in needs assessments and research is relatively new. Now that youth participation is enshrined in IPPF's Adolescent/Youth Strategic Framework we recognize that there is a need for a toolkit to support Member Associations in their efforts to involve young people in this crucial part of programme development.

Explore supports all IPPF Member Associations and other organizations to organize effective research projects in partnership with young people from different backgrounds. It was developed after extensive work with a diverse range of young people from Ghana and Kenya.

IPPF has a long history of working with young people and having young people right at the centre of its programme and policy formulation. However, most of the initiatives on the ground traditionally remained adult-led, and we wanted to implement a project which focused on young people's sexuality, carried out by young people. This came to fruition in April 2005, when IPPF commissioned a study called 'Participatory Rapid Assessment on Sexual Decision Making Among Young People' in Kenya and Ghana.

The purpose of this study was to involve young people as **researchers** and not only as a study object. Young people were assigned to design research questions, research methods and also carried out the research themselves. This new method of gathering data on young people's sexual decision making gave a quite different set of data, compared with earlier, adult-led studies. The process evaluations show that young people felt more confident when talking to researchers they could identify with. The more confident research setting created better, more open and honest discussions, and out of this process new and deeper perspectives were gathered.

This toolkit provides you with a guide on how to organize a similar research project, involving young people as both designers of the research and as researchers. Outcomes of such a project will include empowerment of the young people involved, new research findings from the young people participating in the research and new experiences of youth involvement programming for the initiating organization.

How can *Explore* work for you?

Explore can help you:

- to find out about the sexual and reproductive health needs and concerns of young people in your community
- to think of ideas to create better conditions for young people's sexual and reproductive health
- to convince people who play a key role in developing programmes on sexual and reproductive health in your community to involve young people in project and service planning



How to use *Explore*

Explore uses a step-by-step approach showing how to involve young people to help you get a clear picture of:

- the situation of young people in your community
- the real sexual and reproductive health needs of young people
- what is being done to address the needs of young people
- what they would like to change in your programmes and activities

This toolkit will help to turn young people's ideas into reality by giving them the opportunity to identify the needs and wants of their peers in their community.

This toolkit shows you:

- how you can make youth participation happen in research and needs assessment
- how existing or new youth groups can be selected and trained to do research through a variety of methods
- how you can work together with young people using this process to improve your programmes and activities
- how using this approach can support you to create better conditions, messages and approaches which reflect the realities of young people's lives

Participation

Young people as a force for change ... exploring democratic principles

Youth participation – key concepts

Young people have begun to see themselves as a force for change rather than simply recipients of products from programmes. The terms 'youth participation' and 'youth involvement' emerged in the 1990s, recognizing that young people should not only be targets but also agents and initiators in sexuality work.

Young people themselves are experts on youth issues and how young people live their lives, and therefore they should be seen as stakeholders with valuable insights. If young people work with adults to define youth issues, this will give a richer perspective, rather than adults taking on this role by themselves.

Furthermore, young people have a special ability to communicate with other young people. Projects focused on young people will benefit from having young people themselves in leading positions. If such an environment is established, the young people that the project is targeted at will identify with it more and respond to it more.

Youth participation cannot be reached fully just by involving young people as field working deliverers of information and/or supplies. It is important to look at how young people can be integrated into all aspects which affect a programme or initiative. Such integration, if implemented, must always be based on mutual respect, equal rights and responsibilities. It also implies that all actors must have equal opportunities and capacities to take up whatever challenges are posed by an initiative on sexuality and young people.

Youth participation is never an easy option; it is not a way to use young people's voluntary work to get something done for nothing. It is a way to make programmes more empowering and effective, sustainable and rights focused. However, it does require actual support by the staff and through programmes.

To make youth participation successful, organizations need to understand that:

- young people need to feel valued
- young people should not be used as cheap labour
- turnover of young people is a given, not a problem
- youth participation is not about handing over all the work or responsibilities
- youth participation needs continuous listening and learning
- competent adults with the right attitude towards young people and youth participation need to be involved in the process



Situations where young people can participate include, but are not limited to:

- proposal development
- programme management and coordination
- research – data gathering and analysis
- evaluation
- fundraising
- advocacy
- consultation
- education and service provision

From The Right to Participate – IPPF's youth policy

IPPF encourages Member Associations to support young people and ensure they receive practical skills and knowledge so they can participate to the best of their ability in society. IPPF and Member Associations are urged to take the following into account in their work with young people.

When Member Association programmes and services are being designed, implemented and evaluated, every effort should be made to involve young people and ensure they have real decision making power.

Member Associations and Regions are strongly urged to attain at least 20 per cent of young people on their decision making bodies in line with IPPF's Governing Council structure.

The participation of young people should be built around the equal partnership of young people and adults.

Young people need to be supported to participate in all of the above through the provision of resources (material and financial), information and training.

Member Associations should not discriminate on the grounds of age, especially in approving applications for membership of the Association, providing information or services, in recruiting staff or in any other aspect of the Association's work, subject to local law. Indeed, Member Associations should make efforts to actively recruit young people as members of the Association.

For more information: See IPPF's self-assessment tool on youth participation – *Participate* – for more details on youth participation and to identify areas for improvement.

Perspectives

Young people are sexual beings ... exploring the nature of sexuality

Young people's sexuality

Young people are sexual beings. Many of them express sexuality by being sexually active; others do not. Many young people choose to become sexually active because they find pleasure in it; some are coerced into it. Whatever the situation, young people's sexual activity is not free of health risk – both physical and psychological. This is the starting point for the vast majority of programmes and initiatives regarding young people and sexuality.

Health professionals are often asked to define the needs of young people related to sexuality. While their contribution is of course valid, they tend to define young people's sexuality from just a health perspective and, in doing so, miss the fact that young people also find pleasure and fun in sexuality. Young people who have been educated in sexual health will know about health risks and methods for prevention, but we have to bear in mind that their reasons for having sex have nothing to do with health.

Whether sexually active or not, young people want to feel comfortable about their bodies and their sexuality including the physical, intellectual, social and emotional aspects. Their sexuality occurs and develops in the context of their family, peer group and community. It is important that we embrace the issue of enjoyment and fulfilment. Young people should have the tools they need to enrich their art of loving. Love is not a prerequisite for pleasure, but enjoyment must be built on joint agreement and respect.¹

The popular belief that young people are risk-taking pleasure seekers who live only for the present tends to be reinforced by the uncritical use of the term 'adolescent' in the specialist psychological and public health literature and research. This term tends to homogenize and pathologize our understanding of young people and their needs. Many programmes, including research, tend to encourage an over-emphasis on the negative aspects of sex – unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, AIDS – rather than positive aspects such as intimacy, sexual love and pleasure. Young people often see through this kind of unbalanced approach. As a result, they may reject all that adults have to say, seeking guidance and role models from peers and from the media. It is vital, therefore, that adults should help young people to learn about their own sexuality in a way that endorses both sexual pleasure and safety.

1 Katarina Lindahl, RFSU, ICPD +10 Global Roundtable, 2004.

Process

Principles and methods ... exploring youth-led research



How did the concept of youth-led research emerge?

IPPF has a long history of working with young people and having young people right at the centre of its programme and policy formulation. However, most of the initiatives on the ground traditionally remained adult-led. When we set out to explore the factors which influence the sexual decision making of young people from an entirely young people's perspective in two selected countries, we wanted to try out a new and innovative approach of youth participation and empowerment. We also believe that young people are likely to talk about their sexuality in a different way with other young people, compared to the way they talk to adults. That is the reason why the process of this research was as important to us (if not more!) than the outcomes.

The idea of the proposed research project was based on two underlying principles:

- The first principle was to develop a positive and pragmatic approach to explore the sexual decision making process of young people and the factors influencing it.
- The second principle was the active participation and involvement of young people in planning, designing and carrying out programmes and in all related decision making.

The primary *objectives* of the project were:

- to uncover the extent and the process of sexual decision making by different groups of young people
- to raise awareness of the critical issues of sexuality, sexual decision making and safer sex for young people
- to improve the capacity of the Member Associations to involve young people in identifying and addressing the sexual and reproductive health issues of young people

Process and outcomes

After the selection of the two countries, initial orientation sessions were organized at the beginning of 2005 with the nominated young researchers from Kenya and Ghana. There were 10 researchers from each country representing different regions. The orientations were organized by the Family Planning Association of Kenya and the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana with support from IPPF Central Office and a local consultant.



Protocols

Designing a youth-led research project ... exploring the process

Planning a youth-led research project

It is important to plan well before the research is implemented to ensure the support of the organization in the process and to have comprehensive terms of reference about the roles of the young people and adults to be involved. The purpose of the research and the use to be made of the findings should be clear to both the young people and the adults. There should be a competent coordinator to steer the process. This facilitator should have extensive knowledge of research methodologies as well as youth participation and should be a firm believer in the capabilities of young people.

Recruiting young people as researchers

The young people involved as researchers need to be on track with the research issues and be good youth-to-youth communicators in the local settings. With such criteria, a relevant youth perspective on the research questions design provides important safeguards. A good suggestion on where to start can be to look for young people within existing programmes, for example among peer educators. An important recruiting criterion would be that the young researchers should join the process voluntarily and should be convinced about their personal benefit from the process. A balance of age and gender among the researchers, depending on the target respondent profile, would be helpful.

Note: When selecting young people as researchers we must include strategies to avoid biases, based on (among other things) religion, values and beliefs, and promote a diverse representation of young people.

Preparation and training

Even if the young people selected have a good orientation on the research issues and youth-to-youth communication, there might be a need for capacity strengthening and uniform understanding about 'how the research should be carried out'. Furthermore, the youth researchers themselves must be able to define what kind of research questions they themselves consider valuable to find answers to.

The orientation of young researchers has several purposes including capacity strengthening and skill building, but the main objectives should be to **discuss, agree and finalize** the research process and prepare and support the youth researchers. Adequate time should be allotted to discuss all the issues of concern to the researchers including value clarification, personal beliefs, judgments and a shared understanding and definition of the concepts. Skill building sessions should incorporate several activities such as group work, role plays and games to promote learning through action rather than one-way communication, presentations or lectures on methodologies.

We learned that, whenever possible, it is beneficial to conduct the orientation in a residential setting, to create a space where the discussions can continue beyond the agenda in a more relaxed and informal way. This also gives the opportunity for valuable personal bonding within the research group which, in turn, builds trust and a sense of unity to benefit the research work.

For more information: See Appendix 1 for the suggested orientation sessions and exercises.

Preparing and conducting research

When preparing and conducting research, regardless of method, some practical issues should be taken into consideration. You need to start by defining *what* you want to find out, and *how* – what kind of research questions should be used, in what setting should the questions be asked (for example, individual, in focus groups) and how should they be put forward (wording, tone and so on) and then

how should the answers be documented into data (should they be written, recorded etc)?

In a research project on youth sexuality, identification of key sexual and reproductive health and rights issues of concern to young people should guide the question design. Because of the diversity of young people, it is of course crucial to establish a common understanding not only of the issues, but also the values affecting the perception of such issues. Moreover, when shared concepts have been established, priorities must be set so that the research can be more focused, rather than looking superficially at too many issues.

This process must take place at a point where all the youth researchers and other key stakeholders are present (for example, at a training workshop). The purpose is to identify what specific issues within the broad area of 'youth sexuality' (or whatever your chosen area might be) you want to focus your research on.



The thematic areas identified in Kenya and Ghana were:

- sexual and reproductive health problems identified by young people
- factors influencing young people's decision making on sexual and reproductive health issues
- homosexuality (understanding young people's views and opinions on homosexuality)
- sexual and physical violence: young people's awareness of incidences of forced sex/rape in the community
- current and preferred sources of information and services
- the impact of the media on young people's decision making on sexual and reproductive health issues

When the research team has identified thematic areas it is time to define *which groups* (respondents) the research should look at. If, for example, our over-arching ambition is to find out about young people's sexuality it will be useful to look in more detail at specific groups in order to learn more about their sexuality and how their life situation might affect their sexuality. For example, we can expect sexuality to be perceived differently by young people in school and young people out of school, and by young people without children and young people who are also parents themselves.

Furthermore, some kind of criteria need to be used to define respondents. For example, if the research project aims to study youth sexuality and wants to find out specifically about certain groups of young people (for example 'lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth' or 'young mothers'), and perhaps compare them, you will need to define respondents who are young *and* belong to one of your chosen groups. In addition, you need to make sure that there is some kind of balance in gender and numbers: you cannot have 24 young males from one group and 124 females from another – that will not be comparable.

For more information: See Appendix 4 for the sub-groups chosen in Kenya and Ghana.

Defining methodology and research questions

In researching youth sexuality there are of course a large number of methods which can be used to gather data.

In Kenya and Ghana, the survey consisted of a questionnaire distributed to 260 youth respondents and 22 focus group discussions with young people. The focus group discussions were facilitated by two youth researchers with different skills, paired up during each focus group discussion. (There were 20 youth researchers in the project altogether.) The data collection was done over two weeks.

This is of course just an example. During the orientation a variety of research methodologies should be shared and, if possible, practised briefly. The researchers should then choose the method or methods they are most comfortable with and most confident using.

Using qualitative and quantitative data

It is important to discuss the types of data, data collection tools and methodologies right at the beginning (we did it at the initial orientation) and agree on using those which the young people are most confident with.

Quantitative data are typically **numbers** and qualitative data are **non-numbers**. Words, texts, pictures, videos, photos etc constitute qualitative data. So tools like focus group discussions, picture reading and interpretation exercises would provide qualitative data.

Quantitative data are statistically more reliable and easier to generalize whereas qualitative data are rich, in-depth, giving contextual vision but cannot be generalized with the same degree of certainty as quantitative data.

However, in social research these two apparently polarized types of data are mostly utilized together. In our case, the questionnaire developed by the young researchers contained both quantitative (for example 'How old are you?') and qualitative (for example 'What in your opinion are the consequences of teenage pregnancy?') responses. The focus group discussions provided entirely qualitative data. It should be noted that all quantitative data have its basis in qualitative judgments and all qualitative data can be (and are) categorized and described as numbers.

Points to consider ...

- **Qualitative research** involves analysis of data such as words (for example from focus group discussions), pictures (for example video) or objects (for example an artifact).
- **Quantitative research** involves analysis of numerical data.
- Overly focusing on the debate of 'qualitative *versus* quantitative' frames the methods in opposition. It is important to focus on how the techniques can be integrated as in most social research initiatives.

In research (on young people's sexuality, among other study topics) it is often useful to use both *qualitative* and *quantitative* methods. A qualitative method aims at going deep in understanding a respondent's answers but there is seldom enough time to do qualitative research in a large group. A quantitative method on the other hand can deal with larger groups and hence more respondents; the downside is, of course, that you cannot engage in dialogue on the answers which might be misinterpreted.

For more information: See Appendix 2 for sample questions.

Examples of methods for gathering data include:

- questionnaires
- interviews
- focus group discussions
- anonymous questionnaire (people are given the questionnaire, and they fill it in themselves and put it in a box)
- putting together statistics on prevalence of, for example, sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies in a certain area, within a specific (youth) group

When you have decided what method(s) to use, you must also consider how to implement the method – for example how will you disseminate questionnaires so that they find their way to your respondents? How will you get them back? Will this involve costs (stamps, petrol, paid work) and, if yes, is there a budget for that?

When planning for field studies, remember to keep the following in mind:

- Budget for costs to cover travel expenses and other field work-related costs.
- Field work will always produce unexpected situations – make sure you prepare for a group of possible different scenarios (from 'worst case scenario' to 'minor error scenario').
- Include debriefings during the data collection process to give an opportunity for youth researchers to reflect on their work and discuss situations where the work couldn't be carried out as expected, and give an opportunity for them to process research situations that felt uncomfortable.

Furthermore, make sure to facilitate a detailed debriefing workshop when the data collection is finished. It will give youth researchers a chance to analyze the process more extensively and draw conclusions on, for example, how the methodology might have had an impact on the answers.

Focus group discussions in research on youth sexuality

According to youth researchers, focus group discussions are often characterized by being very deep, detailed and personal. Even though the discussions are in a group format, they sometimes feel like individual interviews. Youth researchers feel that they are able to ask questions that are usually considered too personal to put forward, for example 'Have you ever had an abortion?' As a comparison, in other research that question is usually phrased as 'Do you know anyone who has had an abortion?' The experiences from research on youth sexuality carried out by youth researchers reveal that many questions will not be given the same responses if adults ask the questions.

For more information: See Appendix 3 for a summary of a focus group discussion guideline.

Analyzing the data

When transcribing focus group discussions, and analyzing questionnaires and transcriptions, make sure you involve the youth researchers to ensure that any specific findings or nuances are captured and retained. This is particularly important when decoding the data. The youth researchers should be involved at all stages of the analyzing process, including selecting the methodology for analysis and interpreting the collected data. For voluminous data it is better to use a computerized data analysis package. However, if specialized software is used,² make sure no data are lost and the data entry is uniform. When the analysis is completed, the youth researchers should be given the opportunity to comment on the findings to make sure that no misinterpretation has taken place or that nothing of importance is missing. It is good practice to keep the raw data (such as questionnaires and transcripts) handy until the report is finalized in case cross-checking is needed to clarify any doubt or confusion.

Writing the report

As with the data analysis process, the youth researchers should take part in writing the report of the project. In that report, their experiences of conducting the research should be included together with their analysis. In this way, the report will not only give the actual data and the results (which in themselves are very interesting), but will also provide valuable information for the reader on *how* that data and those results came to be. Furthermore, the report will then provide answers to *if* and *why* the findings of the youth researchers are any different from findings in research conducted by adults.

For more information: See Appendix 4 for an example of research findings.

Reporting back to Member Association staff

When the report is finalized, its findings should be distributed within the Member Associations running the project. That information should preferably be presented by the youth researchers to the Member Association staff. In doing so, this creates an enabling environment for the young researchers and an opportunity for Member Association staff to directly ask the researchers questions sparked by the findings and, in addition, this will provide an opportunity for a continued youth-adult partnership in the future. Therefore a presentation on findings by the youth researchers, followed up by distributing a hard copy of the report, might be useful. The coordinator of the process should always be available during the reporting back to clarify further details on the process, methodologies or findings if necessary.

Member Associations should take findings from youth-led research into serious consideration. It is valuable because the research uses methods designed specifically for the youth groups in the study, and is undertaken by young people who are themselves members of the stakeholder group.

² We used SPSS to analyze the data from the questionnaires.



Challenges and solutions in conducting youth-led research

Many challenges are involved in research, especially in the crucial stage of data collection. What happens if 50 per cent of the questionnaires are not returned, or if four out of 10 focus group discussions are cancelled because no-one showed up? These are examples of scenarios we can prepare for, and they should be planned for. In our examples, solutions could be to collect the questionnaires in person (or even waiting while they are filled in) and to make the focus groups as accessible as possible by arranging them close to where potential participants usually spend their time, or providing refreshments or a small allowance for participants.

It is therefore vital to have flexibility within your research project, to allow for any unexpected challenges that might emerge. It should be up to the youth researchers to decide how such a structure should function, as long as the structure is flexible enough to offer solutions to a range of scenarios.

The key point to remember here is about identification: in other words, if respondents can identify with the youth researchers, this is likely to lead to better and richer answers.

Role of adults

Another challenge to a project involving young people as researchers stems from credibility – both adult researchers and other involved adults must give their moral support, show respect for the youth researchers and be ready to assist them if necessary, just as they would assist other adults. This implies that the research project must be anchored on all relevant levels in the organizations facilitating the project. The adult coordinator should be someone who believes in the capacity of young people and is able to give guidance rather than instructions. Without such a person's involvement, the whole process might collapse as the idea of involving and empowering youth researchers does not mean that all the responsibilities should be loaded onto their shoulders beyond their capacity. This capacity building component is a major task for the adults involved in the process.

Support must also be put in place for the youth researchers to enhance their abilities to do field work. The logistics should also be planned to help them do their job in a hassle free way. When planning for a youth research project we must take into account costs for transport, accommodation and other field work-related costs. Young people working in partnerships with adults and within adult organizations often, sadly, tell the story that such provision is uncommon. Researchers' work can be highly affected by practical issues such as 'Is there transport to where we are meeting with the focus group?' If there is no transport, the focus group discussion might be shorter or even cancelled altogether, because the youth researchers didn't get there on time. If there isn't a place to stay overnight when needed, youth researchers will seriously think twice about whether they should go at all, and so on.

During the research process, keep these points in mind:

- prepare for different challenges and problems that might emerge during the process
- adults in the project must be supportive – morally, politically and with resources to make the research possible

Youth-adult partnerships in research

A youth research project will always involve people of all ages, as initiators, donors, programme officers, researchers, consultants and so on. It is of key importance that young people and adults establish a working environment based on partnership.

In youth-adult partnership research, the following factors should be acknowledged by all partners involved, young people and adults alike:

- acknowledge strengths and limitations: learn from each other
- be clear about your expectations
- set up clear and transparent lines of communication

- ensure equal control of the research process
- create an atmosphere of mutual respect
- incorporate lessons learned from working together in your future work

Role play and other practical exercises provide a useful forum to discuss and practise these concepts, with the aim of reaching a good working and research environment.



Preliminaries

Do's and don'ts checklist for youth participation ... exploring good practice

Do's

Planning and orientation stage

- ✓ Identify a competent coordinator to steer the process. This person should have extensive knowledge of research methodologies as well as youth participation and should believe in the capacity of young people.
- ✓ Send out the concept note about the proposed research to the young people in advance.
- ✓ Plan the initial orientation carefully. Take time to discuss the content, time frame and structure with the young people and staff beforehand. Be flexible. Evaluate the quality of the orientation after the event.
- ✓ Explain the purpose of the research and the outcome (for example 'a toolkit within a resource pack' in our case) at the beginning of the orientation.

During the orientation

- ✓ Clarify expectations, personal values and judgments; discuss principles for working together; stereotypical assumptions about young people and adults; concepts and definitions in relation to the research issues; and the importance of being non-judgmental during the research process and how to achieve this. Also talk about data collection methodologies; interviewer's codes of conduct; basics of communication skills in the research context; accessing respondents; and explaining respondents' rights.
- ✓ Support young people to finalize the questionnaire and the focus group discussion guidelines.
- ✓ Organize mock sessions to identify strengths and weaknesses in the research protocols and discuss and amend them in the group if necessary.
- ✓ Plan the logistics well. Discuss the number of days required, travel costs, per diems and/or honoraria with the youth coordinator and young people in advance to follow normal organizational practice as well as respecting the young people's efforts.
- ✓ Discuss the workload and time management in groups – do not overburden young people, particularly the volunteers who would undertake the research while carrying on with their other jobs and responsibilities.
- ✓ Consult researchers on the resources they need and organize them accordingly. Provide necessary financial resources and equipment as needed and supply them in good time.
- ✓ Spell out the expectations from the researchers clearly at the outset.

Research and data collection stage

- ✓ Build in adequate time for data collection.
- ✓ Pilot the questionnaire with a small sub-group and amend as needed.
- ✓ Ensure the coverage and sub-group representation reflects agreements made during the orientation.
- ✓ Ensure that consultants or staff involved in the research on behalf of the Member Association/ organization are accessible to the researchers at any point to troubleshoot in cases of difficulty, to answer queries or if they come up against a problem.

Post-research stage

- ✓ Organize a debriefing workshop with all researchers to discuss their experiences and lessons learned from the process.
- ✓ Explain the next steps (data analysis, collation, report layout and dissemination).
- ✓ Acknowledge the contributions of the researchers.
- ✓ Include the youth researchers in the report writing team.
- ✓ Share the draft report with the researchers for comments before finalizing it.

Don'ts

- ✗ Never impose a methodology that the young people are not comfortable using, even if you think it is the best in the situation.
- ✗ Try to avoid over-representation of one region, age band or gender in the group of researchers.
- ✗ Try not to impose your language or location preference onto that of young people in conducting the research.
- ✗ Try not to organize the orientation, focus group discussions and reporting back sessions in the organization's premises which might inhibit the openness of the discussions.

Perceptions

Youth researchers' perceptions and recommendations ... exploring experiences

This section summarizes youth researchers' perceptions and recommendations after completing the research project (based on the project in Kenya and Ghana).

What worked well in this research process as opposed to adult-led research?

- Young people were able to talk to people of similar ages more comfortably than adults. The young researchers were viewed as 'us' rather than 'us and them' by the respondents. The respondents were open – with an anticipation that interviewers of the same age would not expect 'set behaviour' from them (for example, one respondent said that what he liked best was that the interviewer accepted it quite 'normally' that he had three current sexual partners at age 17). Not being judgmental enabled a lot of the respondents to feel comfortable.
- Involving a variety of sub-groups of young people (including drug users, disabled people, teenage mothers, street children, young people living with HIV) enriched the data for the research as well as providing valuable exposures to some of the researchers who had never interacted with any 'vulnerable group'.
- Starting focus group discussions with general questions and then going into sensitive ones led to a better discussion.
- Anonymous surveys worked well in combination with focus group discussions.
- Simple language and words familiar to the young people in the questionnaire and in the focus group discussion topic guide were easier to understand and explain.
- In the interviews, the young people set the format almost as a form of dialogue led by the topic guide they developed rather than strictly following the order of a questionnaire as normally done in surveys. This helped long interviews to be 'as easy as a chat' – as described by one researcher.
- Respondents were motivated to share their experiences: for some of them, this was their first ever opportunity to discuss specific issues about sexual and reproductive health and rights with anyone.
- The youth researchers provided a safe space to discuss sexuality as a 'fun' factor rather than a 'guilt' factor for the young people they interviewed. The respondents appreciated being listened to without judgmental comments or expressions.
- The interviews and focus group discussions also helped to pass on information on issues related to sexuality, and encouraged young respondents to use local services.
- This research provided an opportunity for the researchers to share experiences with peer youth educators from other regions and to make new friends.
- Carrying out the research locally, in familiar settings, encouraged potential respondents to take part in interviews and focus group discussions.
- Focus group discussions worked better than one-to-one interviews as some young people, too shy to speak at first, opened up after listening to others in the group.
- Having the opportunity (through the briefing meetings at the end of the survey) to express honestly what went wrong and learn from it.
- The selection of researchers from different regions of the countries helped to get a broad representation among the youth researchers.



Surprises, unexpected outcomes and lessons learned from the research experience

- **Level of trust/confessions:** Young people sharing personal information and fully trusting the interviewer.
- **Understanding:** Lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive health issues. Many young people knew about condoms, but not other contraceptives.
- **Poverty:** Seeing consequences stemming from poverty, such as single mothers forced into sex work.
- **Drugs:** The level of drug use, particularly among young women and street kids.
- Interacting with people of various **sexual orientations** as many of the youth researchers involved in the project had never previously held an in-depth discussion with gay or lesbian young people.
- **Sexual activity:** Young people being sexually active at a very early age (10–13); greater female disclosure; young women who married very young having sex with other men outside their marriage; unprotected sex being common among street children.
- **Gender:** Females preferred talking with males about sexual and reproductive health issues and vice versa.
- Many young people not being aware of available **local services**, while expressing a desire to access services in their own areas.
- **Disabled people** freely expressing their feelings about sex and sexuality.
- Teachers **sexually abusing** girls in school settings.
- Mothers pushing daughters into **prostitution** due to poverty.

Added value of being a young researcher

- More adults and young people showing interest in their work.
- Involvement in other research projects and public talks following their participation in the youth research project.
- Learning more about the young people in their own surroundings.
- Becoming role models to their peers.
- Gaining the opportunity to travel to other regions and experience the difference in youth behaviour.
- Understanding that young people without a great deal of education are capable of doing research.
- Bringing the ideas and views of young people to light rather than relying solely on what adults think of young people.
- Gaining confidence to work with people they thought would be difficult to work with, such as drug users, HIV positive young people, orphans and other groups.

Recommendations from young people on how to reach excluded groups and groups with specific needs

The researchers experienced difficulties in reaching some of the target groups they had set themselves, such as HIV positive young people, very young orphans (10–14-year-olds), street kids and other groups. At the end of the research process, they recommended the following steps to proactively integrate these groups into youth programmes which, according to them, are mostly made up of marginally 'privileged' young people like themselves.

- Make youth centres/services welcoming to all, for example having physical access for wheelchairs, as well as non-judgmental and welcoming staff.
- Organize focus group discussions with excluded and vulnerable groups to find out about their needs and wants, and act accordingly.
- Organize special activities and programmes involving excluded and vulnerable young people to make them aware and interested in youth centre programmes.
- Involve local authorities for financial and moral support.
- Train young people to deal with specific excluded and vulnerable groups.
- Be honest about services offered, and know beforehand where to refer people if necessary.

Recommendations from young people on how to enhance youth participation and empowerment

- Involve young people in project planning and proposal development – rather than just implementation.
- Support a career path for young people with long-term involvement in youth activities.
- Support and systematize recruitment and placement of interns.
- Organize short courses for skills development of young people.
- Support young people's participation in various youth forums, regional, national and international conferences and Member Association exchange visits.
- Assist young people with opportunities to coordinate new projects and programmes, facilitate training courses and to become trainers themselves.
- Involve young people in electing their leaders at all levels and create transparency in selecting youth representatives by IPPF and its Member Associations.





Partnerships

Views of adult partners ... exploring how the partnerships worked

What did the adult partners say?

This was a process experienced for the first time for most of the staff involved from Member Associations in Ghana and Kenya, the Africa Regional Office and IPPF Central Office.

Here is what some of them said about the process:

"We adults always think of the ease of analysis while developing a topic guide – the learning for me was how the young people structured and worded the questions to ease the flow of the interviews and focus group discussions – it was simple and unique."

"I think in most of our work with young people we cannot resist tailoring the process ourselves – but this is the first time I have witnessed something led and owned entirely by young people and I am impressed with the outcome."

"We (adults) have their (young people's) best interest in us – but they still know their needs better."

"The topic guide reflected the openness of the respondents – I can never expect to get quite the same sort of data with adults interviewing 10–14-year-olds!"

"They are so innovative!"

The bottom line – young people involved in research projects should be:

- trusted
- listened to
- treated right
- taken seriously!

References

Further reading ... exploring the literature

This section lists some of the resources we found particularly useful.

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Appendix 1

Outline of orientation ... exploring the agenda

Day 1	Agenda item	Expected results
9–9.30am	Getting to know each other and deciding on next day's rapporteur	Get to know each other and understand the objectives of the orientation
9.30–10am	Clarifying expectations	Express what we would like to get out of the orientation
10–10.30am	Principles for working together	Agree on how to create a good learning environment
10–10.45am	Tea break	
10.45–11.45am	Generation game	Explore assumptions about young people and adults
11.45am–12.30pm	Sexuality and me Sexual decision making and young people (sexual orientation, diversity etc)	Discuss personal values about young people's sexuality and sexual decision making (including choice of partners, contraception etc) Look at core factors influencing sexual decision making of young people from varied backgrounds and circumstances
12.30–1pm	Definitions	Define concepts and definitions of sexual and reproductive health
1–2pm	Lunch break	
2–3pm	Talking sex	Explore boundaries when discussing sexual matters
3–3.30pm	Identifying and overcoming barriers	Become aware of obstacles young people face and how to address them
3.30–3.45pm	Tea break	
3.45–4.30pm	Personal values and being non-judgmental	Identify personal values about sexuality and recognize different groups of young people and their needs; identify ways of being non-judgmental
4.30–5pm	Feedback on day's work	
Day 2	Agenda item	Expected results
9–9.30am	Recap of day 1 and deciding on next day's rapporteur	
9.30–10am	Understanding operations research	Understanding the process of operations research
10–10.30am	Ways of collecting information	Explore different ways of data collection – identify pros and cons in relation to our research
10.30–10.45am	Tea break	
10.45–11.15am	Code of conduct in data/information collection: do's and don'ts	Introduction, explaining the objectives, language, closing etc
11.15–11.45am	Accessing respondents	Agree on the sample size and composition, number of respondents to be reached by each young person
11.45am–12.15pm	Difficult issues	Understand the complexity of collecting information on sexuality and sexual decision making
12.15–1pm	Approaches to avoid	Understanding leading, ambiguous, double negatives etc

1–2pm	Lunch break	
2–2.30pm	Rights of the respondents	Objectives of the study, anonymity, confidentiality etc
2.30–3pm	Communication skills	Getting the data collection right
3–3.30pm	Data/information recording	Agree on proper way of recording data; keeping an eye on usage
3.30–3.45pm	Tea break	
3.45–4.45pm	Research issues	Identifying sections and major issues (under each section) to include in the research
4.45–5pm	Feedback on day's work	

Day 3	Agenda item	Expected results
9–9.30am	Recap of day 2	
9.30–10am	Finalizing sections and research questions	
10–10.30am	Finalizing the method mix	
10.30–10.45am	Tea break	
10.45am–1pm	Drafting the questionnaire and guidelines	
1–2pm	Lunch break	
2–3pm	Mock one-to-one interviews, focus group discussions, games and other methods to be used in the research	Revising approach, wording and so on
3–3.30pm	Feedback in plenary	Agree on the approaches, draft questionnaire and guidelines
3.30–3.45pm	Tea break	
3.45–4.15pm	Finalizing next steps and timeline	
4.15–5pm	Wrap up and closing remarks	

Note: As mentioned in the 'Preparation and training' section on page 8, the ideal orientation would run over four or five full days. Feedback showed that participants found the three-day schedule shown here a bit rushed.

Sample exercises used in the orientation workshop

Exercise 1: Generation game

Purpose

To explore the assumptions we make about young people and adults.

Method

Facilitator asks for six volunteers, making sure that there is a balance of gender and age, and divides them into two groups.

The first group mimes the three main characteristics that are commonly attributed to **adults by young people**. The participants not taking part in the game have to guess them. The second group does the same, but represents the characteristics attributed to **young people by adults**.

At the end of the game the facilitator highlights the fact that we make many assumptions about adults and young people. Facilitator should stress that:

- we need to be aware of when we are making them
- we need to be careful that the assumptions we are making do not negatively affect our programmes

Exercise 2: Sexuality and me

Purpose

To clarify values on sexuality issues.

Method

Each participant is asked to pick a piece of paper from a hat with a message on it and asked to read it out loud and say what they think about it. Others then discuss/debate the views expressed.

Examples of messages

- Abortion is evil.
- Condoms must be promoted among young people from the age of 10.
- Homosexuality is natural.
- Sex is fun.

The facilitator then summarizes the different views expressed and emphasizes the importance of being non-judgmental during the research interviews and group discussions.

Exercise 3: Talking sex

Purpose

To experience what it feels like to talk personally about sexuality issues.

Method

You will need envelopes and cards with questions (one question for each card) for every pair of participants.

Divide the participants into two groups, in pairs or in a carousel facing each other. Give each pair a set of cards with questions about their sexuality. Ask one of the pair to pick a question at random and to give it to their partner to read. If both agree to answer the question then they tell each other their answers. After a while ask participants to change their partners and repeat the exercise. After three changes, hold a plenary discussion on what makes you feel comfortable or uncomfortable talking about personal sexual experiences.

Example of questions

- Do you think sex is important?
- Were you ever disappointed because you only wanted to kiss and the person wanted penetrative sex?
- What do you like/dislike about pornography?
- Do you ever talk about your own sexual experiences?
- Have you ever had a sexually transmitted infection?
- What do you think about masturbation?
- If someone of the same sex fell in love with you, how do you think you would you react?
- Can you tell your partner what you like/dislike about making love?
- Do you always use contraceptives when you have sex?
- How do you feel about sex workers?

Exercise 4: Rights of respondents

Purpose

To understand that respondents in research have rights: for example about their participation and whether or not they want to answer specific questions.

Method

Break the researchers into smaller groups of three or four and ask them to consider themselves as respondents and think about what rights they have in relation to:

- asking the purpose of the research before agreeing to participate
- logistics of the interview/group discussion (timing, place and so on)
- refusing to answer certain questions or asking for the interview to be cut short

One person from each group then reports back on the discussion to the whole group. Issues raised are discussed and summarized by the facilitator.

Make sure that the following rights are discussed:

- confidentiality; and the right to remain anonymous
- purpose of the research
- knowledge about interview methods and feedback on findings
- details of expenses they can claim (transport, refreshments and so on) for participating in the process
- to have/not have others around them during the interview/group discussion
- to stop when they want to
- to revise information given and go back to earlier questions during the interview
- to allow/not allow the discussion to be recorded
- to be able to express their personal opinions

Exercise 5: Codes of conduct for the interviewers/ researchers

Purpose

To understand acceptable behaviour norms as an interviewer/researcher.

Method

Ask the researchers to pair up. One person acts as the interviewer and the other as a respondent. Ask the interviewer to ask three questions in a way he/she thinks is not right. The respondent answers/tries to answer or refuses to answer the questions as he/she thinks fit.

Ask the pair to discuss the following:

- according to the interviewer, what was done wrongly (consciously)?
- according to the respondent, what was done wrongly?

Identify the issue from the discussion and note on a flip chart.

After all the groups have presented their views, summarize the codes of conduct of an interviewer/researcher. Make sure that the following are discussed:

- how to start an interview/group discussion
- explanation of the purpose of the research and how the findings will be used
- explanation of the mode of data collection (recording etc)
- explanation of the rights of the respondents (confidentiality, anonymity etc)
- importance of clear, unambiguous questions in simple language and commonly understandable words
- importance of going at a pace which is comfortable for the respondents
- importance of remaining non-judgmental and recording the discussion verbatim rather than rewriting the words spoken by the respondents

Appendix 2

Sample questions ... exploring the issues

In this Appendix you will find some examples of the categories of questions with some sample questions which were developed by young people in Kenya and Ghana. Contact us at IPPF for the full questionnaire.

Background questions

- How old are you?
- Where do you live?
- Are you currently in school? Etc.

Sexual activity, pregnancy and abortion questions

- Do you currently have a boyfriend/girlfriend?
- Have you ever had sex?
- How old were you when you first had sex?
- Did you or your partner use a condom the last time you had sex?
- If you feel like having sex, what do you do?
- What are the consequences of teenage pregnancy?
- Have you ever had an abortion?
- What are the dangers associated with unsafe abortion?

Sex, sources of information and services questions

- Where did you first hear about sex?
- What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'sex'?
- Where have you got your current information about sex from?
- If you had the choice, where would you prefer to get this information?
- Have you ever visited a youth centre for sexual and reproductive health services?
- What do you think needs to be done to improve the quality of services at the youth centres?

Safer sex questions

- What does 'safer sex' mean to you?
- Can you tell me which diseases a person can get from having unprotected sex?

Self-affirmation questions

- Would you be comfortable going to find/buy condoms?
- Do you think you could abstain from all sexual relations?
- During the past three months, have you ever discussed reproductive health or sex with your partner?

The questionnaire designed by the young people also included questions on sexual violence and coercion, sexual orientation, drug and alcohol abuse, and poverty and economic hardship and its relationship to sexual decision making.

Appendix 3

Example of focus group discussion guideline ... exploring the topics

Some sample topics and sub-topics/questions from the focus group discussion guideline developed by the young people are presented below. For a full version please contact us at IPPF.

Young people's sexual and reproductive health

1. What are some of the problems that young people in this area face? *(Probe for problems related to sex matters.)*
2. What are some of the factors that influence young people's decision making on sexuality? *(Probe for details on factors at different levels such as individual, peers/friends, family/household and community/society.)*

Sexual orientation/diversity

3. Have you ever heard of the word 'homosexuality'? *(Probe for details on understanding of homosexuality.)*
4. What do you think of homosexuality or of those who have sex with people of the same sex? *(Probe for views, opinions and perceptions.)*

Information and services

5. Where do you get information on matters related to sex in this community? Is this information adequate? *(Probe what other information may be needed.)*

Concluding/general questions

7. Do you think the media plays a role in influencing young people's sexual decision making? *(Probe for details.)*
8. What is your opinion about young people's sexuality?

Appendix 4

Research findings ... exploring the results

Most important factors influencing sexual decision making among young people in Kenya and Ghana

- Media
- Peer pressure
- Alcohol/drug abuse
- Poverty/inability to meet basic needs
- Orphan-hood
- Relationship with parents/adults around

Sub-groups contacted

- Different age bands (10–14, 15–19, 20–24 years)
- Boys/girls
- Rural/urban
- Married/unmarried
- Teenage mothers
- Employed/unemployed
- In school/out of school
- Living with parents or not
- Sexual orientation
- Physically challenged
- HIV status

Major findings

- Higher level of comfort and trust in discussing sexuality with young people rather than adults.
- Young people felt that presenting oneself as a victim of sexual coercion may get a more favourable response from an adult rather than openly admitting that they had sex voluntarily.
- Seven in 10 young people participating in the research had had sex by age 18.
- Of those who had already had sex, 42 per cent had it before age 15.
- First voluntary sexual encounter: 76 per cent in Kenya and 82 per cent in Ghana.
- 17 per cent of respondents said they were coerced into sexual activity.

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Explore: Ideas for youth involvement in research

IPPF is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

Young people can play a key role in developing programmes on sexual and reproductive health in their community or society. Involving young people can ensure that programmes, activities, information and services are appropriate and relevant.

This toolkit shows you how you can make youth participation happen in research and needs assessment. It uses a step-by-step approach showing how to involve young people to help you get a clear picture of the situation of young people in your community; the real sexual and reproductive health needs of young people; what is being done to address the needs of young people; and what they would like to change in your programmes and activities.

This toolkit will help to turn young people's ideas into reality by giving them the opportunity to identify the needs and wants of their peers in their community.

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