

Growing in Confidence

Programming
for adolescent
health and
development



LESSONS FROM EIGHT COUNTRIES

WORLD HEALTH



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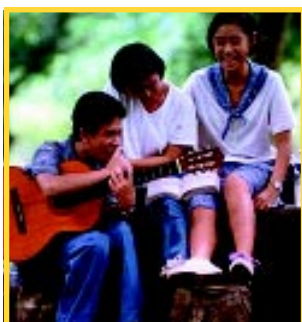
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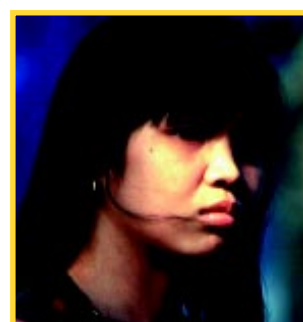
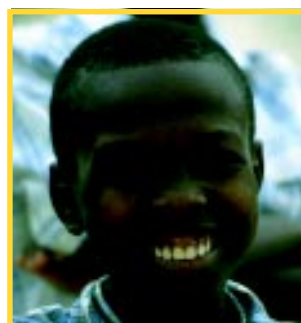
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Lessons from eight countries

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Foreword

Showing that it can be done ...

This publication is about 1.2 billion people – young people in their second decade of life. It's about helping them through the extraordinarily challenging time of adolescence. It's about sharing what we know works - to help them grow in confidence and to increase their chance of living a long and healthy life.

During the 1990s, WHO and its partners in health and development made a strong case for more attention and resources to be devoted to adolescents. We highlighted the problems - for example 7,000 young people become infected with HIV every day, 90,000 adolescents commit suicide every year. But we also stressed the opportunities - adolescents are a critical asset and at the centre of social development. We know what needs to be done. We know how to do it.

We are now witnessing significant increase in programmes promoting adolescent health. Alliances have been forged which have focused attention on the problems faced by adolescents and the resources needed to combat them.

Countries are now taking adolescent health seriously. As *Growing in Confidence* demonstrates, they are developing and implementing policies and programmes from different entry points, working through a number of sectors, and being supported by a wide range of partners.

The international community has also accepted the challenge. The focus on adolescents in the UN General Assembly Special Sessions on Drugs (1998), HIV/AIDS (2001) and Children (2002) bears witness to the growing awareness and concern from governments, and their willingness to commit to effective action.

And in Stockholm at the Global Consultation on Child and Adolescent Health and Development in March 2002, government leaders, health experts, NGOs, and children's advocates committed themselves to a world where adolescents enjoy the highest possible level of health.

If we are to succeed in the wider application of what we know, we need to develop stronger alliances between the public, NGOs, private and international bodies and with the adolescents themselves. Above all we must listen to their voices. We must learn and be inspired by the success stories highlighted in *Growing in Confidence*.

We know what to do. We must not allow this opportunity to evade us.

Dr Tomris Türmen
Executive Director
Family and Community Health
World Health Organization, Geneva

Growing in Confidence



Generation of hope

There are today more adolescents than at any time in history — a vibrant generation who will play a crucial role in the next period of human development. The 1.2 billion people aged 10 to 19 make up about 20% of the global population. As they progress to adulthood, these young people represent an enormous energy and potential for change.

For most young people, adolescence is a period of hope and optimism when they grow in confidence to adulthood. But it is also a time when unsuspected dangers and confusing messages dash hopes. As each young person matures sexually, physically and psychologically, many are uncertain of their role in society or what is expected from them. They have left behind the perils of early childhood, but are, in many ways, at their most vulnerable.

It is widely acknowledged that young people face challenges on a personal and collective level that go beyond those faced by their parents and grandparents, as traditions that governed how people grew up and behaved begin to change. For example, many of today's adolescents will marry at a later age. Every young person needs an

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effective strategy to survive and flourish during a period when young people experiment with adult behaviour. Without it, many are at risk from unprotected sex, and from the dangers of alcohol, tobacco or other substances. Adolescents are also at risk from violence, including sexual violence. For others, lack of nutrition during adolescence can damage the process of development. Life circumstances or lack of a supportive environment leads many into depression, which can expose adolescents to other risks, including the tragedy of suicide. This is the time when young people most need support and guidance, but is also the time when tensions or social taboos may inhibit them from communicating with their family or with other adults.

‘This account shows how programmers who support adolescent health and development are growing in confidence as they engage with young people and their communities to make programmes relevant and acceptable.’

The concerns of policy makers – and of young people

Policy makers all over the world are concerned about adolescents. They understand that this generation is crucial for the futures of their countries. They see that the problems of adolescents, if not addressed, can ruin individual lives and undermine communities and national development. Policy makers look at the number of young people who leave school early, without education, skills or training. They see young people living on the streets, because they have no safe and stable home. They see an increase in those whose lives are disrupted by substance abuse, including alcohol or drugs. They note the number of young girls who become pregnant when they should still be enjoying their own childhoods. They see young people drawn into violence. They see the scourge of HIV/AIDS as a massive threat to this generation

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