

Thursday, 26th June 2025



RCSI

Debunking the Myths

The Science Behind our Sexual Health

Advancing Youth Sexual Health Education in Ireland Through Evidence-Based Practice

Elisa Belmonte

Research Communications Project Manager,
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Taighde Eireann
Research Ireland



RCSI
UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE
AND HEALTH
SCIENCES



THE
ROTUNDA
HOSPITAL
DUBLIN

Who We Are

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Project co-lead



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Project Collaborator



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Project Administrator



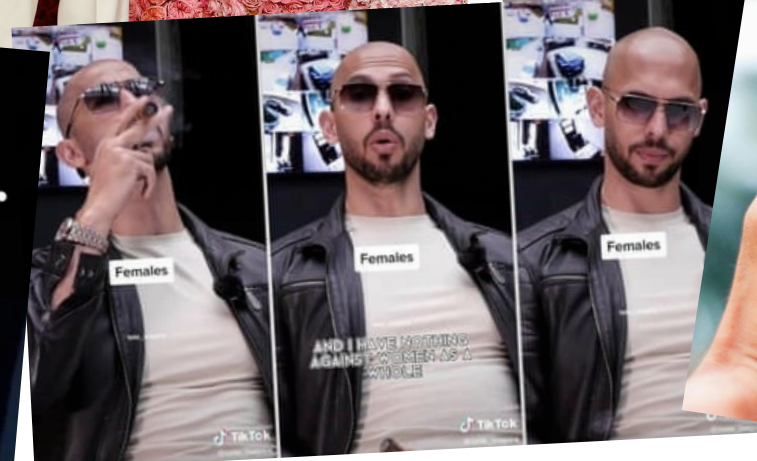
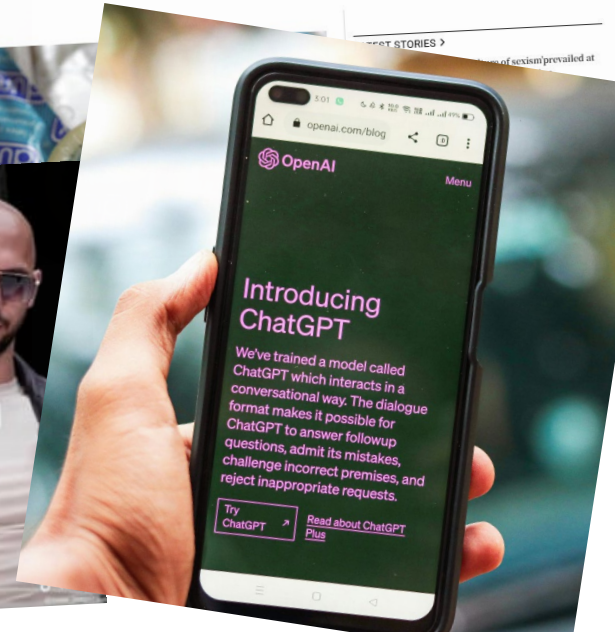
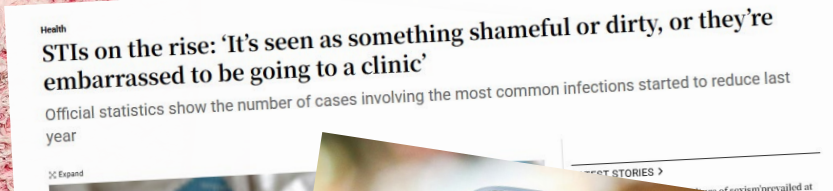
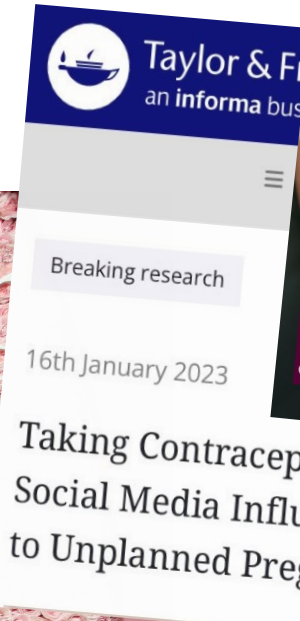
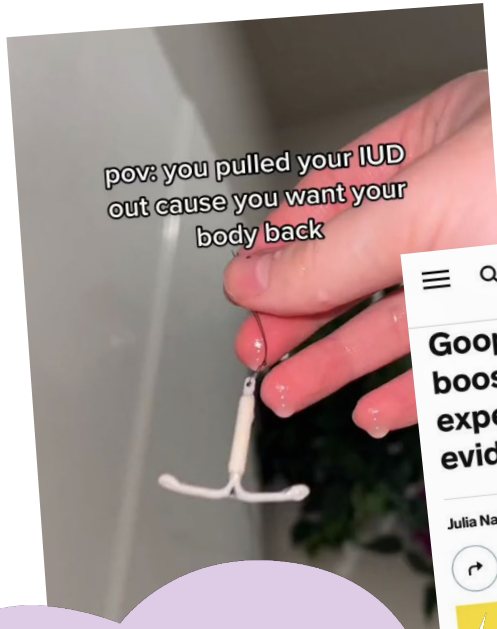
Hollie Byrne

Outreach co-ordinator,
RCSI Department of Obstetrics
and Gynaecology

Elisa Belmonte
Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, RCSI



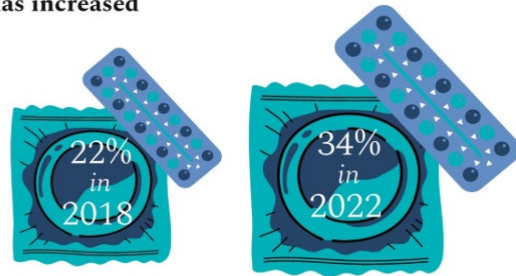
Background



Irish context

HBSC Ireland 2022 findings show that...

The number of children who did not use contraception the last time they had sex has increased



Main Study: Menstrual Health and Period Poverty

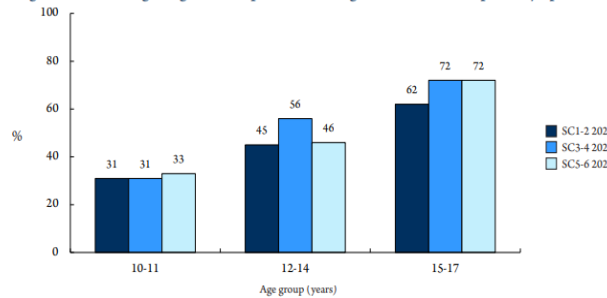


Menstrual Health and Period Poverty*

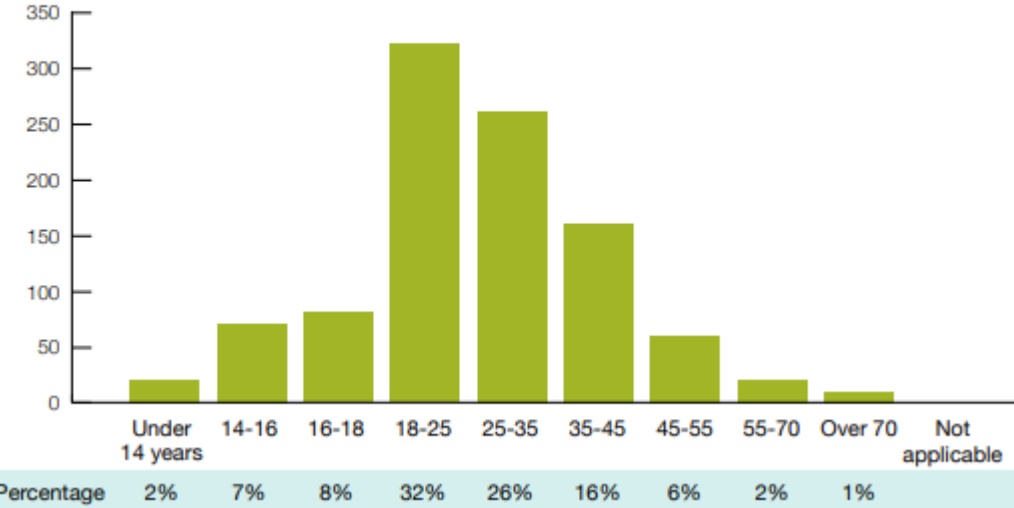
Missed school as a result of period symptoms

Overall, 60% of girls who have begun to menstruate report ever missing school as a result of period symptoms. There are statistically significant differences by age group and social class. Older girls are more likely to report ever missing school as a result of period symptoms than younger girls. Girls from the middle social class group are more likely to report ever missing school as a result of period symptoms than girls from other social class groups.

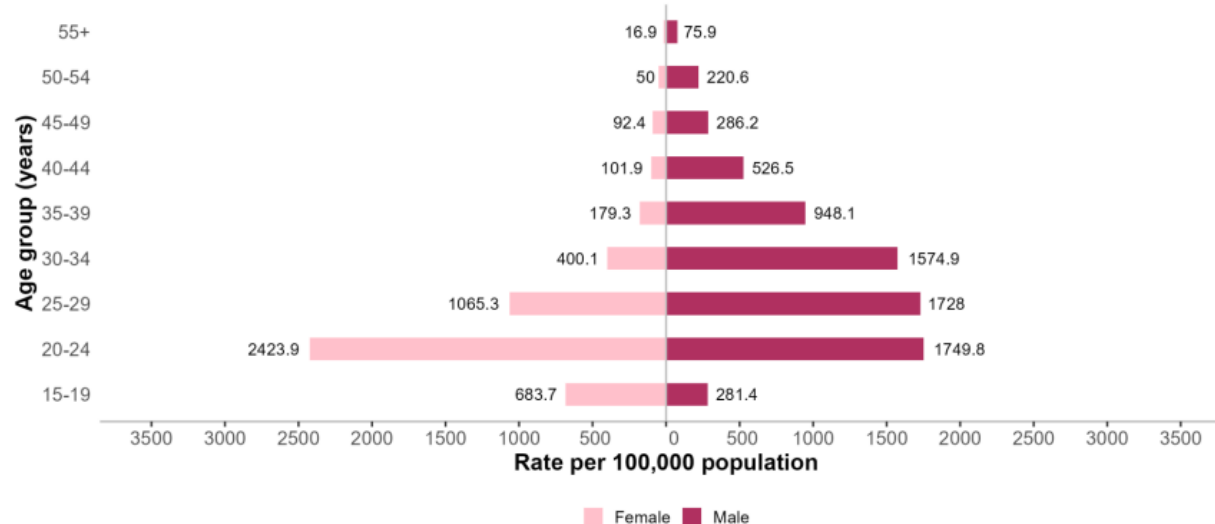
Figure 62: Percentages of girls who report ever missing school as a result of period symptoms



Age of Attendees



SATU Annual Report 2024



HPSC, Cases by age and gender for chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, herpes simplex(genital) LGV and trichomoniasis and Mpox in 2024

While the majority of the surveyed cohort (92%) agree that **“Even if you have given consent, you can change your mind at any time”**.

A significant minority of younger men (29%) aged 18-24 believe that **“Once you have consented, you can’t really change your mind”**.



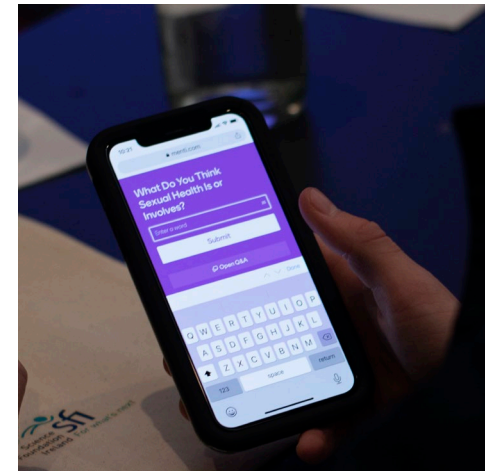
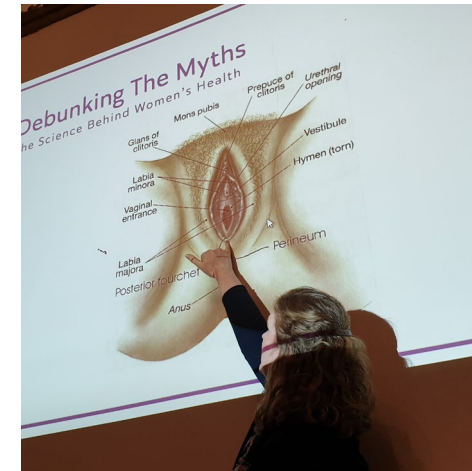
Male & female attitudes to sexual consent, DRCC’s ‘We-Consent’ campaign 2024

Our Evidence-based Approach

Debunking the Myths - The Science behind Our Sexual Health is a Research Ireland-funded, expert-led sexual health education programme for Irish teenagers, their parents, and teachers.

We discuss sexual health with teenagers and debunk associated myths in a safe and unbiased environment, through a multifaceted approach that includes expert-led workshops, curated educational resources, and targeted social media campaigns.

Elisa Belmonte
Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, RCSI



DEBUNKING
THE MYTHS

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Sexual Health Resources

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Debunking TheMyths

THE SCIENCE BEHIND OUR SEXUAL HEALTH

An expert-led sexual health education outreach programme of interactive workshops for senior cycle secondary school students in Ireland.

LEARN MORE

Vulva

Hpv
Vaccine

Periods

STIs



Resources

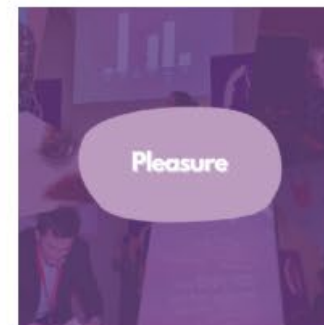
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Contraception and Prophylaxis

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Pleasure

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Note...

debunkingmyths_

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262 posts

1,172 followers

558 following

Debunking The Myths

Debunking the Myths: Science Behind Our Sexual Health, an SFI-funded sexual health education project developed by the... more

linktr.ee/debunkingmyths_



Gender&Sexu...



Sexual Assault



Consent



STIs



Contraception



HPV



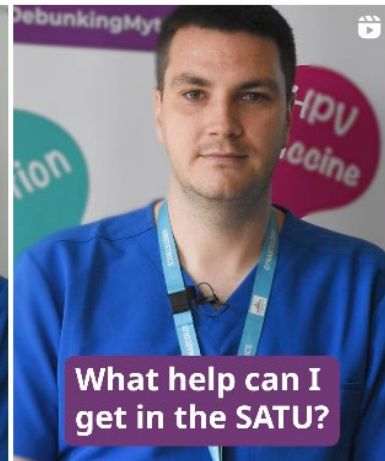
HIV

POSTS

REELS

SAVED

TAGGED



Aims and strategy of Debunking



Counteract Misinformation

Tips on how to identify fact vs fiction and point them to reliable sources of information about their sexual health.



Enhances the RSE Curriculum

Designed by academics, medical professionals, and science communicators, incorporating insights from regular teen focus groups to ensure content meets their needs and interests



Reduce Stigma

That impacts students' confidence in talking openly about sexual health-related topics



Access to Health Professionals

Experts in obstetrics, gynaecology, general practice, contraception, infectious diseases and consent



Empower Informed Decision-making

To discuss sexual health openly and confidently with friends, family or medical professionals.



Addressing Comfort Levels

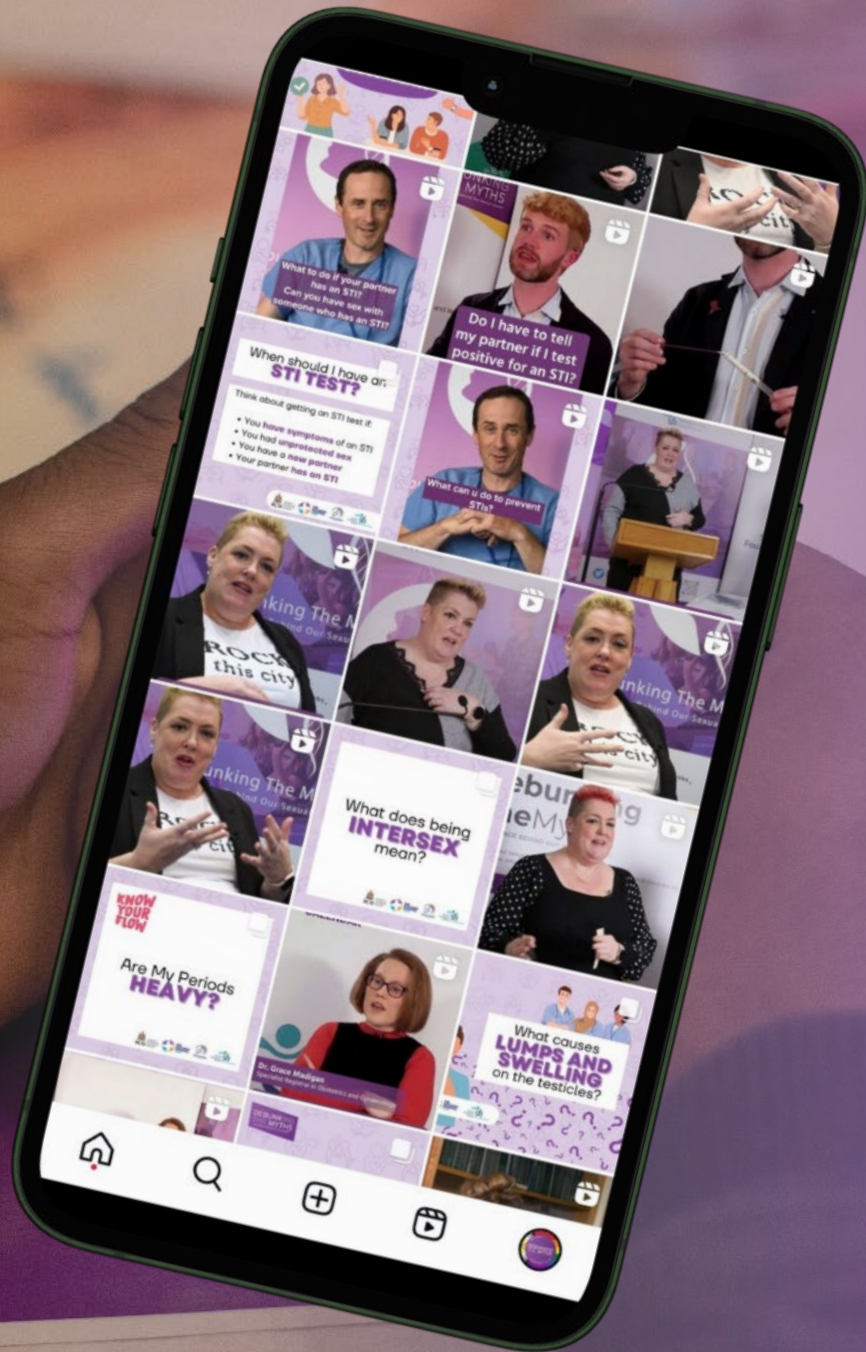
Students: May not feel comfortable discussing sexual health with teachers.
Teachers: May lack confidence in advising on sensitive/medical issues.

Topics

- **ANATOMY, PUBERTY & MENSTRUATION**
- **FERTILITY**
- **CONTRACEPTION**
- **PLEASURE**
- **SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS**
- **GENDER AND SEXUALITY**
- **CONSENT**
- **SEXUAL ASSAULT / SATUs**

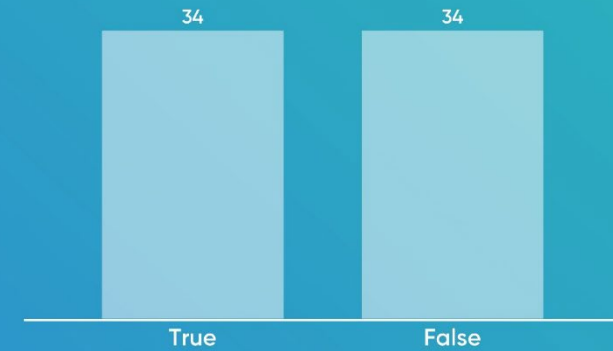
By leveraging healthcare professionals' experience and knowledge, we deliver a positive and extensive programme to teenagers in an inclusive, unbiased and non-judgemental environment.





I Can Predict A Safe Time In My Menstrual Cycle So I Won't Get Pregnant

Mentimeter



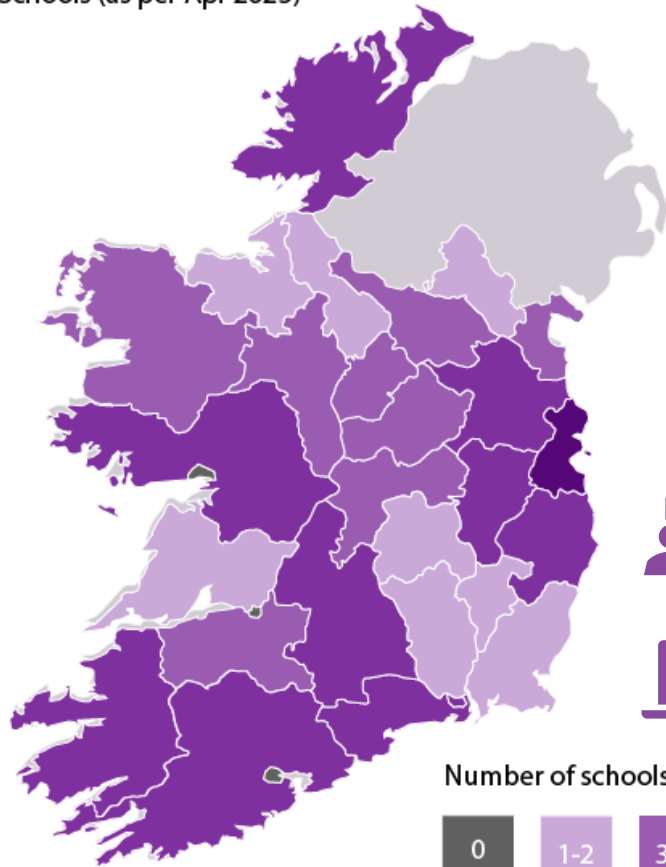
DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

The Science Behind Our Sexual Health

Debunking in numbers

To date, *Debunking the Myths* has reached a total of **166 schools** across the Republic of Ireland.

2022-2025 Schools (as per Apr 2025)



30 in-Person Workshops
hosting **3,720 students**



6 Live Online Workshops
hosting **13,988 students**

Number of schools:



All 26 counties were reached
In total, **17,708 students**
attended either online or in-
person.



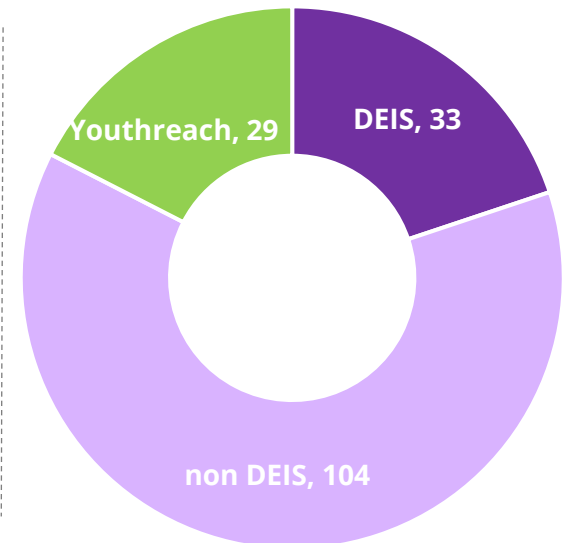
All Girls schools



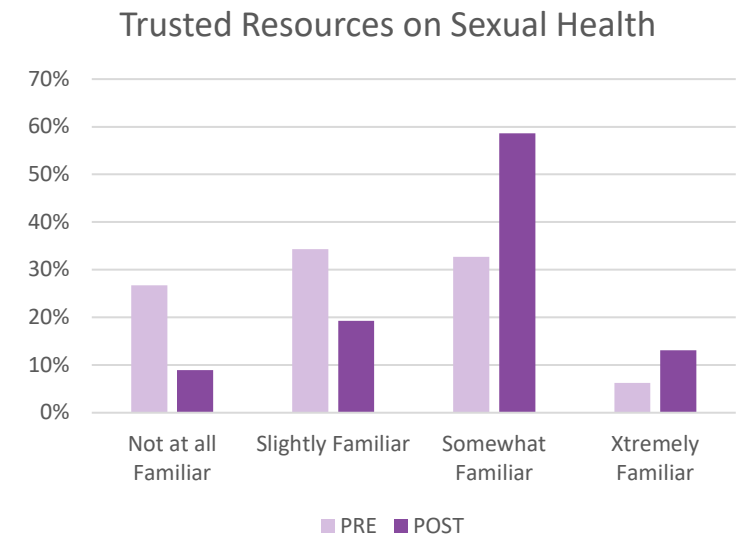
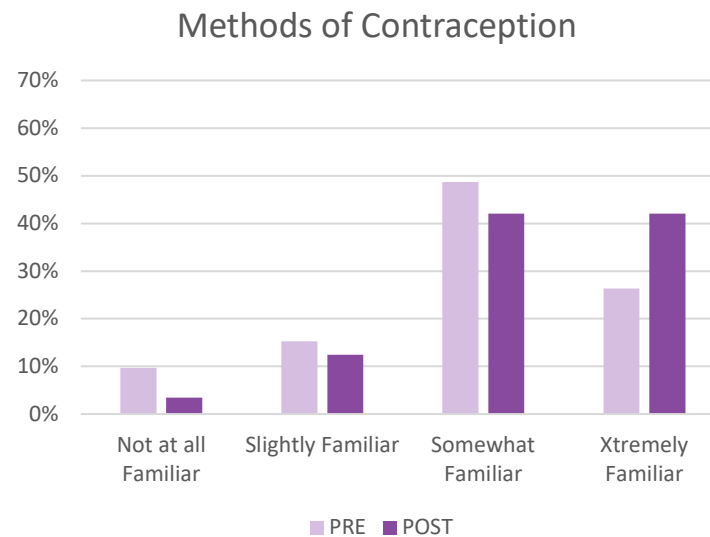
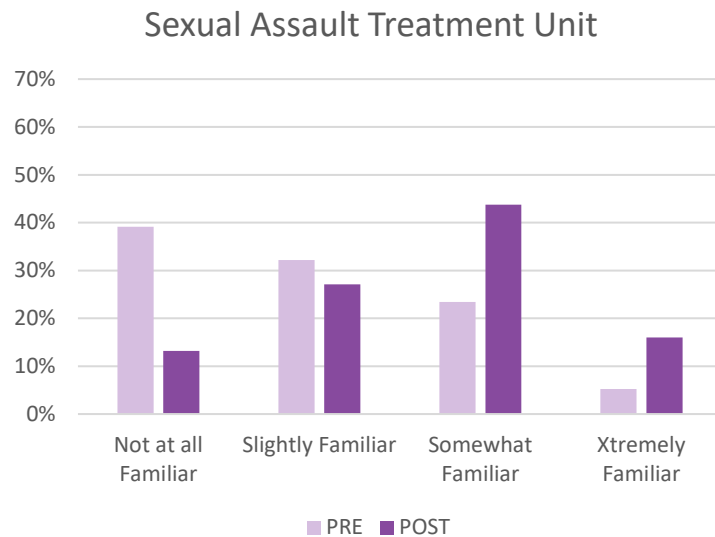
Mixed schools



All Boys schools

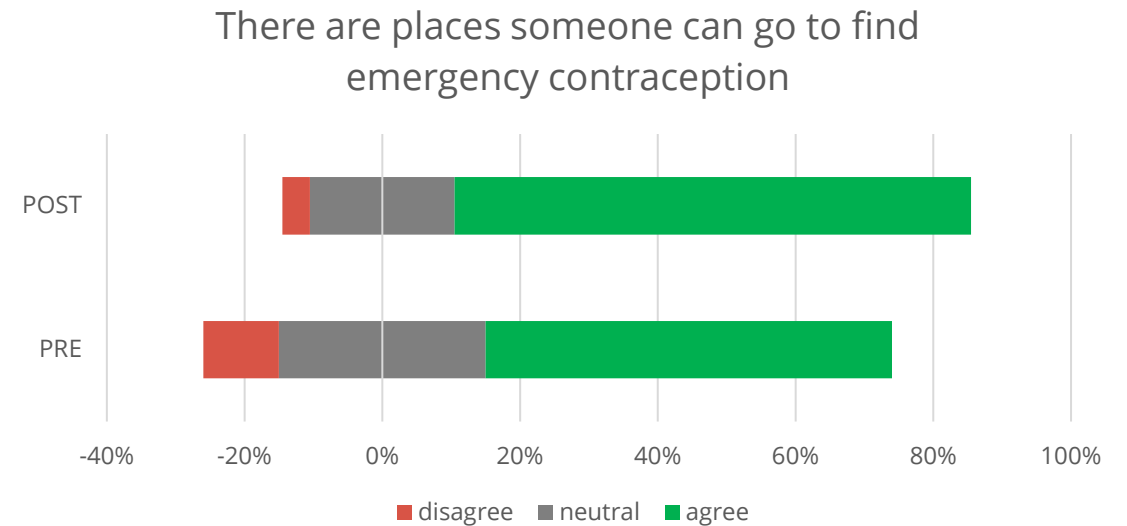
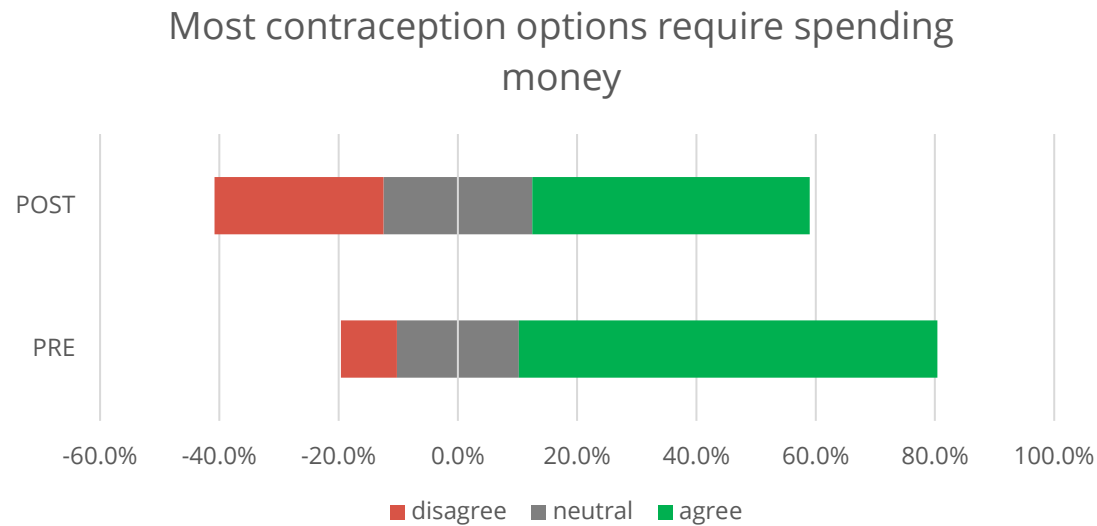


Evaluation (n=827)



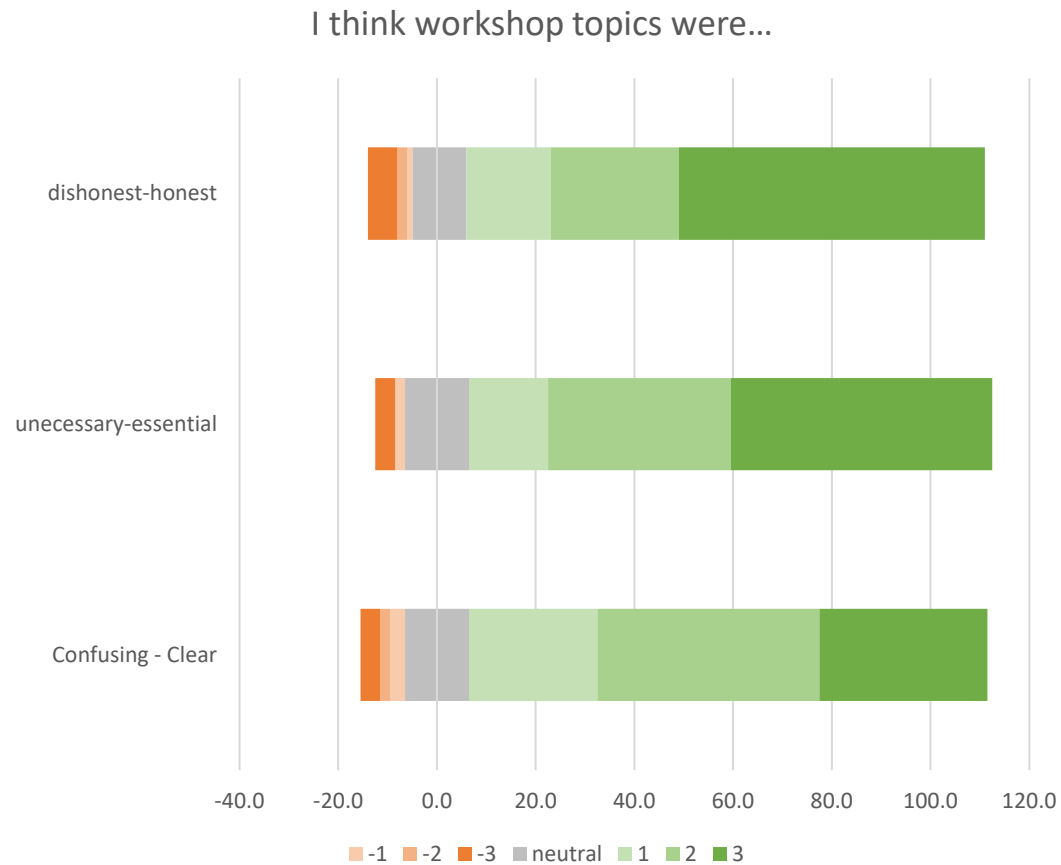
Students' reported familiarity with topics addressed significantly increased ($p < 0.001$)

Evaluation (n=827)



Students' awareness of practical emergency contraception resources significantly increased ($p=0.001$), while perceptions of cost as a barrier decreased ($p < 0.001$)

Post-Event Evaluation (n=160)



Students' feedback

*I think that it's great that we are being educated in such a clear and honest way. [...]
I really appreciate the work that has been put into this workshop and I hope that it continues for years to come.*



Teachers' feedback

This workshop is invaluable to our pupils; the TV presenter/lifestyle show format means it is dealt with in an open, mature manner. I think it is one of the most vital workshops in our TY [...]. I cannot rate it or recommend it highly enough especially when it is delivered in such a professional, transparent manner as pupils tend to listen better to outside voices where they are not embarrassed

I think as SPHE teachers you know are expected to have a lot of knowledge and expertise around such a vast range of topics.[...] for me it's a complement, and particularly [having] professionals talking about stuff that they're qualified and they know inside out.

Future Plans



4 in person workshops scheduled for Q3 2025



Consistently updating our website with resources for teachers and students



Social Media Campaign to celebrate World Sexual Health Day, 4th September 2025



Expanding our workshop for parents



Developing topic-specific workshops gender & sexuality, fertility).

The team behind Debunking are passionate about sexual health and making health research accessible to teenagers. Our aim is to future proof *Debunking The Myths* to make it a permanent fixture in second level education.

DEBUNKING THE MYTHS

The Science Behind Our Sexual Health

Thank you!

get in touch



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