

## The risk of contracting STIs due to the lack of sex education

El riesgo de contraer ITS por falta de educación sexual

O risco de contrair ISTs frente à carência da educação sexual

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#### Abstract

The aim was to analyze a compilation of scientific articles that address a lack of knowledge regarding Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), which is caused by the neglect of sex education. An integrative literature review was carried out based on the data contained in the Virtual Health Library, where the following descriptors were used: "sex education, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Adolescent". In all, after selecting the filters, 5,253 journals were found and following the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 9 were selected. It was observed that educational actions are fundamental for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, since they avoid the risk of contracting STIs. The school should consider sex education as a cross-cutting theme in school curricula, as well as engage in dialogue with parents and family members, seeking to establish a social support network.

Descriptors: Sex Education; Sexually Transmitted Diseases; Sexual Health; Adolescent; Disease Prevention.

#### Resumén

El objetivo fue analizar una compilación de artículos científicos que abordan el desconocimiento sobre las Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual (ITS), que es ocasionado por el descuido de la educación sexual. Se realizó una revisión integrativa de la literatura a partir de los datos contenidos en la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud, donde se utilizaron los siguientes descriptores: "educación sexual, Enfermedades de Transmisión Sexual, Adolescente". En total, tras seleccionar los filtros se encontraron 5.253 revistas y siguiendo los criterios de inclusión y exclusión se seleccionaron 9. Se observó que las acciones educativas son fundamentales para la promoción de la salud sexual y reproductiva de los adolescentes, ya que evitan el riesgo de contraer ITS. La escuela debe considerar la educación sexual como un tema transversal en los currículos escolares, así como entablar un diálogo con los padres y familiares, buscando establecer una red de apoyo social.

**Descriptores:** Educación Sexual; Enfermedades de Transmisión Sexual; Salud Sexual; Adolescente; Prevención de Enfermedades.

## Resumo

Objetivou-se analisar um compilado de artigos científicos que abordam sobre uma carência de conhecimento referente a Infecções Sexualmente Transmissíveis (ISTs), que se faz pela negligência da educação sexual. Foi realizada uma revisão integrativa da literatura com base nos dados contidos na Biblioteca Virtual de Saúde, onde foram utilizados os seguintes descritores: "educação sexual, Doenças Sexualmente Transmissíveis, Adolescente". Ao todo, após a seleção dos filtros, foram encontrados 5.253 periódicos e seguindo os critérios de inclusão e exclusão, 9 foram selecionados. Foi observado que ações educativas são fundamentais para a promoção da saúde sexual e reprodutiva dos adolescentes, uma vez que, evitam o risco de contrair ISTs. A escola deveria contemplar a educação sexual enquanto tema transversal nos currículos escolares, bem como realizarem a interlocução com pais e familiares, buscando o estabelecimento de uma rede de apoio social.

**Descritores:** Educação Sexual; Doenças Sexualmente Transmissíveis; Saúde Sexual; Adolescente; Prevenção de Doenças.



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#### Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescence and youth as a period that lasts between 10 and 24 years. This generation is significant, representing, in the 2010 census, 36.89% of the Brazilian population. This period is marked by important changes, in which the human being undergoes several transformations, both in the physiological and psychosocial scopes, in addition to an evolution of their sexuality, which are accompanied by confused feelings and desires that were once unknown<sup>1-3</sup>.

Puberty is one of the most complex periods of human experience, since young people are looking to understand themselves, and having to deal with the crises that accompany development. Youth is prone to impulsive acts as a physiological issue, as their brain is still maturing. This is the phase in which most individuals begin their sexual lives, thus gradually discovering their bodies and their desires. Faced with this discovery and exploration, the subject finds himself vulnerable to his impulses and desires, thus assuming risky behaviors<sup>4</sup>.

It is noticed that communication and the existence of truthful information during this phase of life are important, as they help them to adopt safer sex behaviors. With the information age, it is assumed that some search for this content on the internet, but they will not always obtain information in the most correct way, since, according to the Ministry of Health (MH), fake news is interpenetrated in our society. From this perspective, the lack of information correctly can collaborate in facilitating the transmission of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)<sup>3,5</sup>.

According to MH, STIs are transmitted mainly through sexual contact, without using a condom, with a person who is infected. It is noted that they are a public health problem, since the adherence to condoms and the lack of correct information for prophylaxis are low. The MS also highlights the aggravation of this fact in adolescence due to the lack of knowledge and difficulty in approaching the issue at this stage of life. Sexual health refers to the

ability of individuals to enjoy and express their sexuality, free from impositions, violence or discrimination, without the risk of contracting STIs<sup>6-8</sup>.

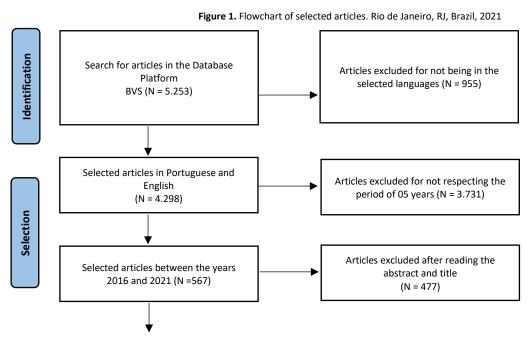
From the study analysis, the young population is more susceptible to this type of infection due to the propensity to risk behavior, such as drug use, school delay and history of sexual abuse. According to the Ministry of Health, there is a higher prevalence of HIV cases among young people aged 25 to 39 years. With this, the extreme importance of teaching young people to prevent themselves is highlighted, but it is also considered equally important to guide them on what to do when prevention fails. It is evident that the individual suffers from several influences that shape his behavior, with the family having a prominent role in this process<sup>3,8,9</sup>.

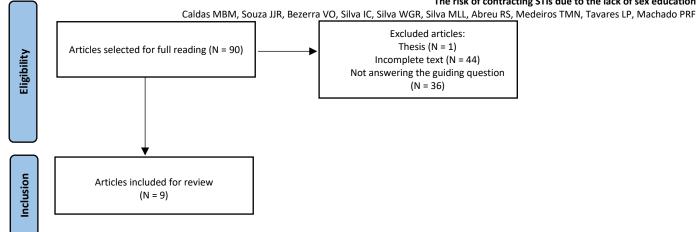
The relationship of young people and their families is an important factor in sexual health. Evidenced in the study, many young people do not talk to their families about this subject, as it is still a taboo topic in society. With this, there is a difficulty in obtaining adequate knowledge and the clarification of your doubts. It is understood that the school has an important role in the education and training of its students, however, in Brazil, there is no legislation that regulates sex education in schools, however there are documents that guide its insertion and practice, such as the Parameters National Curriculums (PCNs)<sup>3,6,7</sup>.

The objective of this study is to point out the negative impact that the lack of sex education brings, especially in relation to the increase in sexually transmitted infections in young people.

### Methodology

The current study was carried out through an integrative review (IR), with the main objective of analyzing the synthesis of scientific knowledge in previously published literature on the subject, which consists of the lack of sex education on Sexually Transmitted Infections.





The integrative review allows you to summarize and analyze content scientifically through a few steps. The steps are identification of the theme and selection of the guiding question, establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria/search in databases, identification of pre-selected and selected studies, ordering of selected studies, analysis and interpretation of results and synthesis of knowledge on the topic addressed in the study.

Data were collected in August 2021, on the Electronic Database Platform Virtual Health Library (BVS), using the following Health Sciences Descriptors (DECS): "sex education AND Sexually Transmitted Diseases OR IST AND Adolescents OR Young People". A total of 5,253 articles were found, therefore, criteria for inclusion and exclusion of literature were established<sup>10</sup>.

Using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 955 articles were excluded because of the language outside the criteria, 3,731 were excluded for time exceeding 05 years, 477 were excluded after reading the abstract and title, 1 excluded for being a thesis, 44 for incomplete text and 36 for are off topic, resulting in a total of 9 eligible articles. The choice platform and inclusion and exclusion criteria are expressed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Flowchart, contained in Figure 1.

## Results

It is noted that the systematic review has a significant amount of recent articles, from the years 2016 to 2021, studies that have students and adolescents in general as their research scenario. National publications corresponded to 90% of the selected articles, with the northeast region prevailing with approximately 55%, then the southeast region with about 30%, the central-west region with 10%. There were no related articles in the other regions. This relationship is proportionally interconnected with the amount of academic production in these regions.

There was only one international publication developed in the United States. Seeking to achieve greater organization, the articles selected to compose this study were categorized in relation to the Level of Evidence by applying the Oxford Center for Evidence-Based Medicine Evidence Scale (Chart 1).

It was found that 5 of the 9 articles chose to carry out a Case-Control Study, which is in classification 3B because it is a research in which participants are selected from affected and unaffected individuals, thus verifying the number of individuals exposed to some risk factor. There were also isolated articles classified as 2A, 2B, 1B and 1A.

Chart 1. Summary of selected results. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil, 2021

Title	Authors	Year	Data base	Level of evidence	Summary of results
New digital media interventions for sexual health promotion among young people: a systematic review	Erin Wadham, Clare Green, Joseph Debattista, Shawn Somerset e Adem Sav.	2019	MEDLINE	2A	Outcome evaluation focused on upstream behavioral determinants of infection risk, with an emphasis on knowledge and practice of condom use. These behavioral attributes ranged from actual reported use to self-efficacy of condom use.
Conhecimento de escolares sobre infecções sexualmente transmissíveis e métodos contraceptivos	Marcela Estevão Brasil, Fabrício Bruno Cardoso e Lauanna Malafaia da Silva.	2019	BDENF- Enfermagem	3В	It turns out that most students said they knew at least one way to prevent pregnancy. It is pointed out, about what sexually transmitted infections are, 15.7% did not know how to answer; 22.9% said they did not know any means of prevention; 24.2% declared that they were not aware of the aggravations if not treated and 41.9% of the interviewees said they thought it possible to be contaminated with some, without being aware of this fact.

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Promoção da saúde sexual e reprodutiva de adolescentes: educação por pares	Marks Passos Santos, Anny Giselly Milhome da Costa Farre, Maycon Santana Bispo, Leilane Barbosa de Sousa e Déborah Danielle Tertuliano Marinho	2017	BDENF - Enfermagem	3B	It was observed that the themes most addressed during peer education were Sexuality and STI/HIV/Aids, according to the participants, are subjects little understood by adolescents. As it was carried out by people of the same age and conviviality, the approach was seen as positive.
Conhecimento de estudantes adolescentes sobre transmissão, prevenção e comportamentos de risco em relação as DST/HIV/AIDS	Ana Raquel Cortês Nelson, Richardson Augusto Rosendo da Silva, Fernando Hiago da Silva Duarte, Nanete Caroline da Costa Prado, Danyella Augusto Rosendo da Silva Costa e Jose Rebberty Rodrigo Holand.	2016	BDENF - Enfermagem	3B	The article showed considerable levels of ignorance regarding the transmission, prevention and treatment of AIDS, and clarified some risk behaviors that make the young population vulnerable to STIs/AIDS.
O conhecimento e o ensino sobre doenças sexualmente transmissíveis entre universitários	Eneida Lazzarini de Castro, Tânia Alencar de Caldas, André Moreno Morcillo, Elisabete Monteiro de Aguiar Pereira e Paulo Eduardo Neves Ferreira Velho.	2016	MEDLINE	2В	Up to 18 years of age, 65.3% of men and 65.8% of women had initiated sexual activity. Research has shown that young people are starting their sex life at an earlier age, and that information campaigns need to take place earlier.
Adolescentes escolares acerca das DST/AIDS: Quando o conhecimento não acompanha as práticas seguras	Jéssica Kelly Ramos Cordeiro, Marquiony Marques dos Santos, Linda Kátia Oliveira Sales, Ildone Forte de Morais e Gláucya Raquel Souza da Fonsêca Dutra.	2017	BDENF - Enfermagem	3B	The adolescents interviewed in question did not have the necessary knowledge about STD/AIDS. Some worrying signs were observed, such as the early onset of sexual practice.
Conhecimento de adolescentes relacionados às doenças sexualmente transmissíveis e gravidez	Rebeca Aranha Arrais Santos Almeida, Rita da Graça Carvalhal Frazão Corrêa, Isaura Letícia Tavares Palmeira Rolim, Jessica Marques da Hora, Andrea Gomes Linard; Nair Portela Silva Coutinho e Priscila da Silva Oliveira.	2017	BDENF - Enfermagem	1В	From the analysis emerged themes such as: Sexuality and sex education; Understanding of risk behaviors; Knowledge of STI/AIDS; Knowledge and practices of prevention. The need for educational prevention actions for adolescents was revealed, as the lack of information contributes to their vulnerability.
Saúde sexual e infecções sexualmente transmissíveis na adolescência: uma revisão integrativa	Letícia de Souza Alves e Ricardo saraiva Aguiar.	2020	BDENF - Enfermagem	1A	The result is given through the prism table, in which all the results are interpreted, through comparison of data portrayed in the articles selected for use.
Percepção de adolescentes sobre sexualidade e saúde reprodutiva: a escola como espaço para a educação sexual	Luciana Uchoa, Raylane da Silva machado, Juliana de Castro Nunes pereira, Angélica de Godoy torres lima, Suzana Santos da Costa e Vanderlei Folmer.	2019	IBECS	3B	Among the young people who participated in the research, 18 males and 20 females, the vast majority pointed to condoms as the main method of protection against sexually transmitted infections, given that it is the most discussed in the public health service, but the knowledge gap about contraceptive methods is evident.

# Discussion

Through the analysis of the studies, it was possible to observe that Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) are more prevalent among people aged 14 to 29 years. It is possible to affirm that, in general, the adolescents' perception of these infections is inadequate, since, when questioned, they showed little knowledge about this subject and about what risk behaviors would be and what they would be. Thus, there is a need to have environments that favor effective communication and that they become aware 11,12.

In a study carried out with 220 students from a public school, 40% of young people had already started their

sexual life, above all, 14% of these young people were between 14 and 15 years old. Thus, the concern with the sexual and reproductive health of this public is due to the early onset of sexual activity. Associating this factor, with the multiplicity of partners and misinformation, there is a favoring of situations of vulnerability for health, such as unplanned pregnancy and the development of the contagion of STIs<sup>13,14</sup>.

It is noticed that young people in social vulnerability with an unstable family situation, exhibit more accentuated risk behaviors than young people with a better socioeconomic situation. Young people who had and those who did not have STIs were compared. The first group had a



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higher percentage in terms of school delay, did not live with both parents, domestic violence, suffered sexual abuse and did not use condoms during sexual intercourse<sup>15</sup>.

In addition, most do not have information from their parents due to taboos about sexual activities. The importance of this factor in the life of a young person is undeniable, since they recognize that the responsibility to inform them is also part of the family. It was evidenced that having parents as a source of information about sexuality, STI/AIDS prevention, contraception and feeling comfortable to talk about sex life is positively associated with the consistent use of contraceptives<sup>12,15</sup>.

Despite recognizing the importance of parents' coresponsibility and the importance of family participation in the subject, the adolescents also mentioned school as a fundamental factor in sex education. It was pointed out that the teacher is the first option among adolescents regarding sources of information on STIs, confirming their importance in the natural role of sex educator in the school environment<sup>12</sup>.

In order to help teachers in schools, the data reinforce the inclusion of health professionals as a primary instrument for sexual education work. In order to promote educational prevention and guidance, aiming to help students deal with sexuality responsibly and to minimize the aggravations caused by a sexually acquired infection<sup>3,7</sup>.

The school is seen as an ideal place for the construction of new knowledge, with the academic environment being the main communication platform with regard to the prevention of these infections. Therefore, there is a lack of projects aimed at sex education in schools regarding the awareness of adolescents about the risks of engaging in sexual intercourse without adequate preparation and its health consequences. The active participation of young people is essential for the success of this endeavor 11,16.

In addition to the school, there are other environments where sex education can be promoted, as shown by a study that shows an action carried out in a Catholic Church, developed by young people in order to make this population aware of STIs. It was possible to observe the importance of their active participation for the construction of knowledge. It is noted that the participating adolescents felt more comfortable and open to this discussion when the subject was presented by their peers. This approach was considered positive, as it expanded the knowledge of educators and the target audience<sup>16</sup>.

In another study carried out with adolescents from a public school, it can be noted that the lack of knowledge about the spread and treatment of STIs was alarming. The general understanding of their mechanism of action can be considered deficient, since most participants had superficial knowledge. There is no in-depth science on care related to sexual practice and the use of contraceptives, although adolescents have shown some level of understanding<sup>3,13</sup>.

Knowledge is important in preventing these diseases, but it is not enough to be aware of the need to use condoms. In one study, 94% of high school students assessed

were aware of the benefit of condom use, but only 34% reported using it all the time. The information in this area must be as accurate and complete as possible, so that the individual can be aware of the risks to which they are exposed and that may also affect third parties in their sexual practice<sup>3,13</sup>.

The advancement of technology has brought changes in the way information is transmitted, there is an infinity of untreated and limitless content found on the internet, a place where teenagers spend most of their time. According to a survey carried out in a public school in Rio Grande do Norte, 60% of students stated that they sought knowledge about STIs and contraceptive methods on the internet, which makes them vulnerable, liable to obtain inadequate information<sup>15,17</sup>.

On the other hand, digital media have a high educational potential, due to their widespread use and ease of access. A systematic review found that digital media interventions had significant potential to improve the knowledge of people aged 13 to 24 years, particularly in relation to HIV and other STIs. Also according to the study, it is possible to defend the great potential of digital media to engage and support the sexual health of young people<sup>17</sup>.

It is clear that educational actions are fundamental for the promotion of sexual and reproductive health of adolescents, since they avoid the risk of contracting STIs, and also allow young people to have acquired an understanding of the risks of teenage pregnancy. In this way, it is understood that digital media, as they are part of the daily lives of young people, have an importance in this role. In addition, the school should consider sex education as a cross-cutting theme in school curricula, as well as dialogue with parents and family members, seeking to establish a social support network<sup>12,17</sup>.

### **Final Considerations**

Through the literature selected for the scientific basis of the current study, it was concluded that the knowledge of young people in an active sexual life about contraceptive methods and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections is scarce. The lack of knowledge regarding this issue is caused by the neglect of sex education, a considerable portion of adolescents obtained their first dialogue and contact with the methods of preventing pregnancy and STIs in the school environment, a contact that was not consolidated in the family context and in health services.

It was also observed that there is a deficit between what was discussed in the educational environment and the effectiveness of the use of condoms in the sexual act, requiring interventions that have as their main objective the reduction of STIs. In view of the above, the relevance of the nurse professional as an educator and propagator of knowledge is perceived through the implementation of programs such as health at school, which aims to empower young people about knowledge, in addition to enabling professionals to promote the concept of grounded self-care by Dorothea Orem's nursing theory.

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