

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE: A BROADER VIEW OF SEXUAL HEALTH

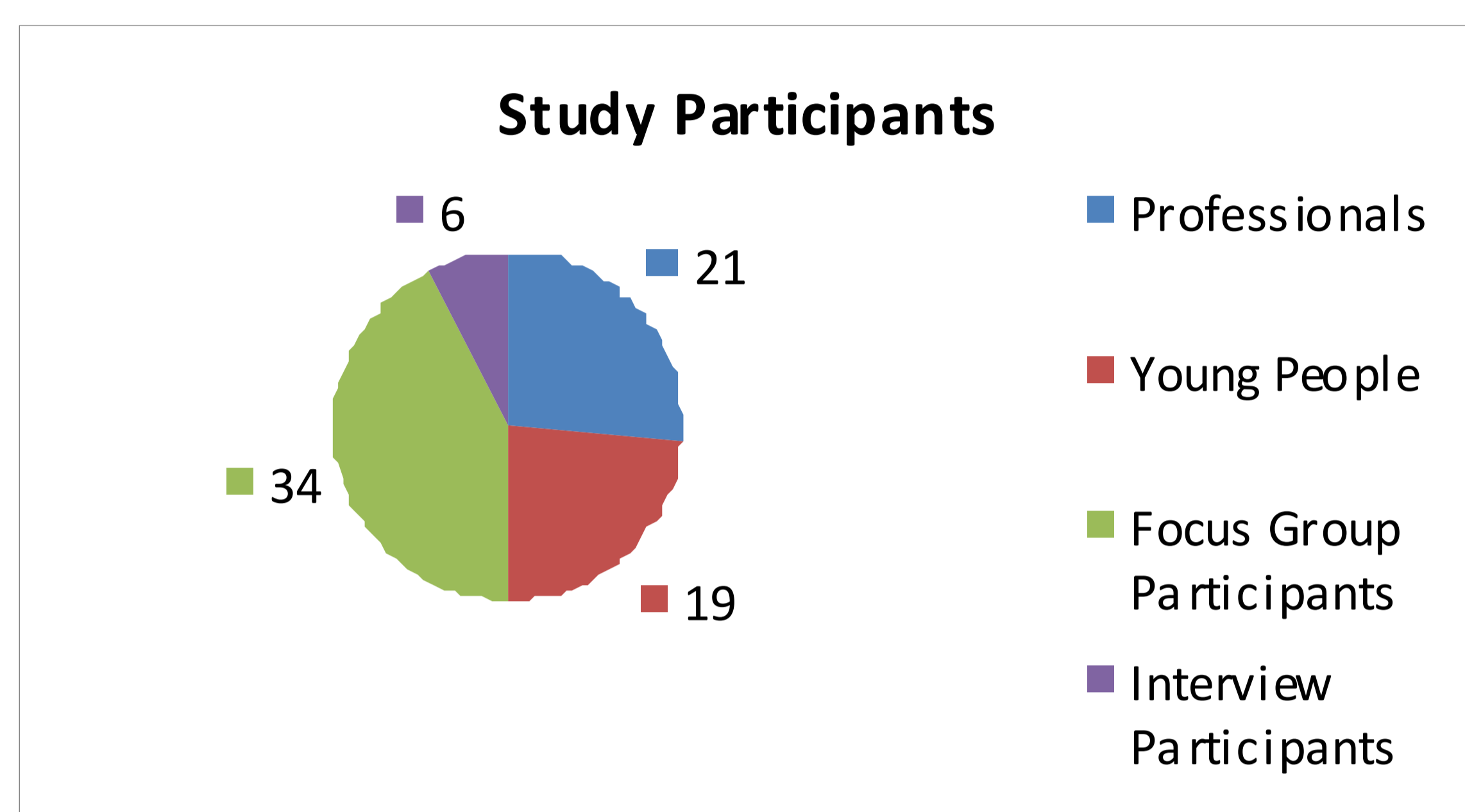


Caroline Forde

Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan (SRCC)

Abstract

This exploratory study sought to gain a detailed understanding of how we can reach out more proactively to the young people of Sligo and Leitrim in relation to making sexual health issues easier for them to negotiate. The findings indicate that sexual health continues to be a difficult area for both young people and parents, with a perceived lack of awareness and understanding associated with sexual violence in particular. Personal development programmes were deemed essential, with the value of including the topic of sexual violence in this broader view of sexual health highlighted. Complementary to interagency collaboration, which would ensure that valuable referrals are made, a number of participative and creative approaches involving young people and parents were identified.



Findings

Sexual Health as Viewed & Understood by Young People

- Young people find discussing their sexual health needs difficult
- Sexual violence was deemed particularly taboo by female teenagers
- Lack of knowledge and understanding among young people - young girls not identifying sexual violence or sexual coercion

Promotion of Informed Decision Making

- Personal development programmes - ideal means of promoting informed decision making among young people in relation to their sexual health
- Additional channels of communication - wallet cards containing useful contact details, technology and the media

Key Actors in Society

- Parents need support and guidance via programmes and information evenings
- Provision of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) viewed in a negative light
- Barriers to accessing the SRCC - existing referral pathways within organisations & perception of the name as frightening to both parents and young people
- Young people can contribute to meeting their own sexual health needs - peer education, projects and drama

Conclusion

This study sought to develop in-depth, detailed understandings of how we can better address the sexual health needs of young people in the Sligo and Leitrim area. By creating links between youth and community organisations, health services and young people, knowledge was shared and means of enhancing this knowledge identified. The study's findings have shown that there is a need to broaden both the concept of sexual health and the collaborative partnerships that have been recognised as essential to successful health promotion. This broader view of sexual health would continue to promote the recognition of the personal development aspect and also include the topic of sexual violence. While reflecting a local context, these findings have broader relevance at a national and, indeed, international level. In light of these findings, a number of recommendations are made.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the young people and professionals for contributing their time and sharing their knowledge, perspectives and experiences openly with me. Thank you also to the staff of the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan for their invaluable input, guidance and support, in particular my advisor Mary Roche and lead contact Tina Horton. Finally, I would like to thank the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Sligo General Hospital for granting ethical approval for this study.

Introduction

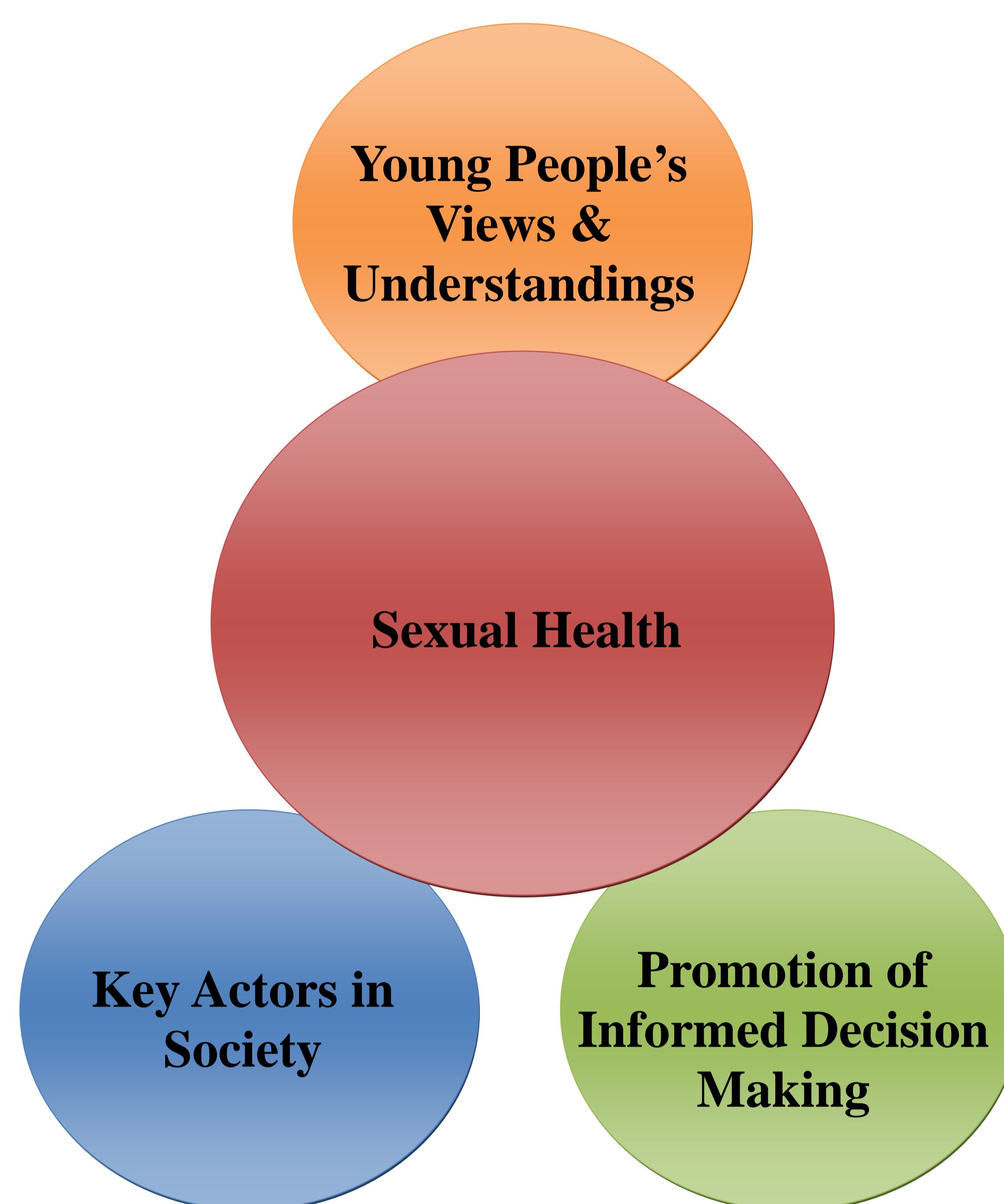
To date, progress has been made nationally and internationally in the area of sexual health, yet research¹ continues to highlight problems in this area. It is evident that improvements are needed in relation to the provision of information and advice to young people in addition to improving their access to health services, including those that address sexual violence.

This study sought to:

- explore how young people (14-21) in the Northwest view and understand their sexual health;
- identify ways in which we can better address their sexual health needs; and
- create a partnership with professionals and young people in order to realise the feasible ideas generated.

Methodology

As qualitative action research, 6 focus groups and 4 in-depth interviews were conducted with young people and a wide range of professionals who work with them in the Northwest (n=40).



References

1. Hyde, A. & Howlett, E., 2004. Understanding teenage sexuality in Ireland. Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency.
- Lazdane, G. & Lazarus, J., eds., 2004. Youth friendly health services in Europe. Denmark: World Health Organization.
- Mayock, P. & Byrne, T., 2004. A study of sexual health issues, attitudes and behaviours: the views of early school leavers. Dublin: Crisis Pregnancy Agency.
- RCNI, 2009. National rape crisis statistics and annual report 2008. Galway: Rape Crisis Network Ireland.
- Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2004. Enabling young people to access contraceptive and sexual health information and advice. Nottingham: Department for Education and Skills.
- United Nations, 2005. World youth report 2005: young people today, and in 2015. New York: Department of Economic and Social Affairs.
- WHO, 1993. The health of young people: a challenge and a promise. Geneva: World Health Organization.

For further information

The full report, *Addressing the Needs of Young People: A Broader View of Sexual Health*, can be accessed at www.srcc.ie under [News](#).