

New research highlights challenges of teaching sex education in New Zealand

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New Zealand secondary school teachers' perspectives on teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education

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Credit: University of Canterbury

University of Canterbury-led research has shown teachers experience significant barriers teaching Relationship and Sexuality Education, including lack of time and the subject not being prioritized in New Zealand schools.

University of Canterbury (UC) [health education](#) expert Dr. Rachael Dixon has collaborated with Family Planning and the New Zealand Health Education Association on a nationwide survey of secondary school teachers' perspectives on teaching Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The findings, released in a report today, show that while there are positive aspects to teachers' RSE practice there continue to be gaps, especially when it comes to giving rangatahi access to the 12-15 hours of RSE recommended by the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office.

Teachers reported major barriers including lack of time, access to [professional development](#), prioritizing the subject, and an inconsistent approach for RSE in schools. Many teachers commented that the majority of senior students do not have meaningful RSE.

Dr. Dixon says she wasn't surprised by the findings. "We knew from past research and evaluation that relationships and [sexuality education](#) can be inconsistently delivered in schools. Our research findings have reinforced this by indicating that, despite many teachers wanting to deliver best practice relationships and sexuality education, too many young people do not have access to effective and responsive learning at [secondary school](#) in this important part of the curriculum.

"We hope that the report will enable teachers to reflect on their practice and consider how relationships and sexuality education in their schools can be responsive to their learners' needs," Dr. Dixon says.

While the survey shows that almost all teachers report teaching a wide range of topics, including consent, a disconnect has been clearly identified and young people believe RSE is not meeting their needs.

Family Planning Chief Executive Jackie Edmond says this survey supports calls from [young people](#) for better relationships and sexuality education in schools. "It's unsettling to find through this survey that not much appears to have changed since the last report on RSE, and [teachers](#) are telling us they need support.

"We have an excellent set of guidelines on how schools should teach this area of the curriculum, but there are too many barriers and challenges to ensuring high quality and meaningful RSE that meets the evolving learning needs of our rangatahi," she says.

More information: Summary of the report for teachers:
[familyplanning.org.nz/media/30 ... ort-for-teachers.pdf](https://familyplanning.org.nz/media/30...ort-for-teachers.pdf)

Summary of the report for general audiences:
[familyplanning.org.nz/media/30 ... general-audience.pdf](https://familyplanning.org.nz/media/30...general-audience.pdf)

Full report: [www.familyplanning.org.nz/medi ... -rse-survey-2022.pdf](https://www.familyplanning.org.nz/medi...-rse-survey-2022.pdf)

Provided by University of Canterbury

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