

FERTILITY AWARENESS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS: A PILOT PROGRAM IN SANTIAGO, CHILE.
Myrna Seidman, M.A., M.P.H.; Pilar Vigil, M.D.; Hanna Klaus, M.D.; Stan Weed, Ph.D.; Jeannette Cachan, M.P.A.

The more than one billion adolescents in the world today, coupled with high adolescent birth rates, makes adolescent reproductive health an important public health concern. Adolescents need basic information about their sexual and reproductive health to make responsible decisions.

A two-year Fertility Awareness program conducted in Santiago, Chile, involving close to 500 students in eight junior and senior high schools, helps adolescents understand their fertility and reproductive potential as a basis for responsible decision making about sexual activity.

The program utilizes a curriculum called Teen STAR (Sexuality Teaching in the context of Adult Responsibility). It provides teachers with a knowledge base on the physiological and biological aspects of human fertility, and a tool to communicate more effectively with their students. The teachers supported institutionalizing the curriculum school wide. Students felt that the knowledge they gained on fertility helped them to understand and cope with their biological and emotional changes and their relationships with peers and adults. They related the knowledge they gained to their own experiences and choices, and recommended expanding the program, particularly to younger age groups. The evaluation also shows widespread acceptance of the program among administrators and teachers, parents and students. It also shows benefits for students in knowledge, skills and behaviours.