

Who we really are...

Addressing Stereo-Typical Images of Young Men

As young men we are expected to 'automatically' take control, know about sex, assume responsibilities and make decisions. We are not given information and as a result we make mistakes. We are not careless and do not have bad intentions, yet we are often blamed for unhealthy sexual practices and the spread of STDs and unintended pregnancies!

(Chrisjan Appollus, NAPPA, Namibia)

In Latin America, our actions and thoughts are greatly influenced by machismo, so as men, we are not allowed to express feelings of love, tenderness or fear.

(Fernando Ruiz Vallejo, 18, Profamilia/Colombia)

Understanding how society views sexuality is very important because it influences the behaviour of young people. The accepted expressions of 'masculinity' often mean that young men are not expected to talk about their weaknesses, mistakes or concerns nor about love and relationships. On the contrary they are expected to show a bold and experienced attitude towards sexuality. Young men are reluctant to question these values and often hide their own insecurities and fears; this is often the beginning of the cycle of unsafe sexual habits and practices.

(Omari Muhani, 22, UMATI, Tanzania)

Challenging negative social and cultural norms

Rigid cultural habits can often over-ride the practice of informed SRH choices. For example if a young man shares his decisions with his wife and supports her in her household responsibilities, his family may reproach him and convince him that such behaviour is a sign of weakness and his wife's domination. He will have to be very strong to practice values contrary to what he was brought up believing in.

(Yassin Mponda, Tanzania)

From: *X-press newsletter*, International Planned Parenthood Federation, www.ippf.org.

Overcoming taboos around talking about sex and sexuality

- Parents do not talk to children about sex or sexuality because of a fear that it might lead to promiscuity!
- Religious and social expectations which do not accept sexuality before marriage and promote abstinence as the only choice for the young people do not reflect their realities!
- The idea that 'respectful' young men and women should withdraw from any sex-related discussions, as they are inappropriate, sinful and unnecessary leads to dangerous and uninformed decisions!
(Solomon Obeng, Ghana)

Organizations must talk more about Sexuality and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights rather than only about family planning. Language has a great effect on the mindsets of young people and on their attitude and willingness to get involved.

(Achint Verma, Bhopal, FPA India)