

Study finds sex education tool improves reproductive health knowledge among adolescent girls

May 30 2023



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A Marshall University study found that a virtual sex education tool improved reproductive health knowledge scores and measures of self-efficacy among adolescent girls.

The findings, published last month in the journal *Sex Education*, found that sexual health knowledge scores on a validated scale increased among participants, along with improved measures of self-efficacy regarding birth control, healthy relationships and sexually transmitted infection (STI) prevention. Notably, a greater proportion of participants reported improved confidence in obtaining [birth control](#), recognizing an unhealthy relationship and testing for STIs.

A research team at the Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine conducted a baseline assessment of sexual health knowledge among [adolescent](#) females ages 14 to 18. Participants also answered questions about [past experiences](#) with school sex education programs and self-efficacy. They then completed the online curriculum available at www.marshallteentalk.org, which covers a range of sexual health topics presented through short, animated videos. A post-survey then reassessed participants' sexual health knowledge, along with the same measures of self-efficacy.

"Adolescents use websites and [social media](#) for sexual health information; therefore, there is a great need for accurate, evidence-based online [reproductive health](#) tools," said Marshall Health Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecologist Jennie L. Yoost, M.D., M.Sc., an associate professor at the Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine and senior author of the study. "Marshall Teen Talk was designed specifically to provide local adolescents an accessible and accurate resource for reproductive health that they can trust. This study validates the website as an effective teaching tool."

In the current study, 30.3% of participants reported they had never had sex [education](#) classes in school. The online curriculum was overwhelmingly favored by study participants, with 94% reporting the information was presented in a way that was easy to understand, and 93.9% reported they would recommend the website to a friend.

In addition to Yoost, the research team included Dani Roth; Emma Nellhaus, M.D.; Morgan Ruley; Ariana Hess, M.D.; and Rajan Lamichhane, Ph.D. The team will expand future studies to include male and nonbinary adolescents, as well as partnerships with teachers. As adolescents in [rural areas](#) are less likely to seek out sexual health services, this website can also potentially serve our community by linking individuals to specific health resources and clinical needs.

Marshall Teen Talk was established in 2014 by Yoost as an after-school telehealth outreach to rural West Virginia high schools. Since that time, the program has evolved into an evidence-based online curriculum that can be completed in approximately 45 minutes and can be used as a supplement to classroom learning.

More information: Dani Roth et al, A virtual sex education tool improved reproductive health knowledge among adolescent girls, *Sex Education* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2023.2203909](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2023.2203909)

Provided by Marshall University Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine

Citation: Study finds sex education tool improves reproductive health knowledge among adolescent girls (2023, May 30) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-sex-tool-reproductive-health-knowledge.html>

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