

Final Report: Tackling repeat unwanted conceptions amongst young people in the UK

Education For Choice is a project within the UK young people's sexual health charity Brook. Education For Choice is dedicated to ensuring that young people have access to evidence-based education on pregnancy choices and impartial support with pregnancy decision-making.

In September 2013 we were awarded a grant of 4216 EURO from the European Society of Contraception and Reproductive Health. The funded project ran from March 2014 to July 2014. As the full amount requested was not awarded, the original project was scaled down somewhat to allow maximum impact for the amount awarded.

Introduction

One in three women in the UK will have an abortion during their lifetimeⁱ and over a third of those women will experience more than one abortion. The latest statisticsⁱⁱ show that the percentage of women under 25 accessing more than one abortion is 33% in London (higher than the England average of 26.9%) and peaks at 39% in Croydon (in South London). Newspaper headlines highlight 'repeat abortions' but there is little information available to young people and the professionals who work with them on why someone might have more than one abortion, and the safety of doing so. In our experience, some young people and professionals mistakenly believe that there is a 'limit' to how many times you can access abortion free of charge through the NHS (National Health Service).

This project set out to gather information on 'repeat abortion' through a literature review and focus groups with young people in the borough of Croydon. The aim was to collate background information and best practice in this area, and to educate young people and professionals on contraception and abortion. Brook aims to include young people in everything that we do, so young people's views were sought on this issue, and their insights were fed into the professional training days to improve future practice.

Educational workshops on contraception and abortion were provided to young people. Professionals in Croydon (and Bexley, which also has a high rate of 'repeat abortions') were trained on providing educational group work, and one-to-one support to young people.

The research led to the production of a document on 'repeat abortion'ⁱⁱⁱ which was shared with professionals in Croydon and Bexley, and also uploaded to the Brook website where it is now available as a free download.

The research

One key piece of existing research which was used in the project was 'Young People in London: Abortion and Repeat Abortion'^{iv}. Interviews with young women in London show that the myth that abortion can lead to infertility was strong, and could lead to some

young women neglecting to use contraception after a first abortion. The research also shows that stigma relating to abortion could affect young women's access to services, and their feelings after abortion. The recommendations of this research – that young women be given better access to non-judgemental and accurate information on abortion, and that professionals be better trained to identify those 'at risk' of unintended pregnancy and support them, were key to this project's aims.

Other research reports used included 'Who presents more than once? Repeat abortion among young women in Britain'^v, and 'Experiencing Terminations in Croydon 2011'^{vi}.

As well as giving accurate, up to date information on contraception and abortion, the project sought to de-stigmatise abortion amongst young people and professionals; to challenge the notion that having more than one abortion was 'negative' or would cause health problems, whilst also supporting professionals to provide education and information on prevention of unwanted pregnancy.

The information gleaned from the research part of the project was used to produce an easy to read FAQs document for professionals, and was included in a tailored training day for those working with young people.

A blog-post written about the project^{vii}, including some of the young people's views, has been viewed over 300 times. The FAQs document has been sent to a number of individuals working in sexual health services, and is now available online as a free resource so will have impact beyond the time-frame of this project.

Work with young people

Educational workshops were delivered to over 60 young people in two colleges in Croydon. These young people were aged 14-28, most were female, and in accordance with the ethnic make-up of the borough, were from a range of ethnic backgrounds. At Croydon College our facilitator spoke to Health and Social Care students, and at Cressey College, a group of girls in 'alternative education' who have been excluded from mainstream schooling.

The young people were asked to complete a short 'quiz' to assess their existing knowledge about abortion and contraception, then following an educational session, were asked to answer the same questions again. These questions can be viewed at the end of the report (1).

59 young people completed the first survey, and 57 completed the second. Following the educational session the majority of young people showed an increased level of knowledge. For example, before the session, 36 people thought abortion was more dangerous than childbirth, afterwards, it was just 7. The numbers can be seen at the end of the report (2).

Young people's comments included:

"I gained new knowledge - it was very interesting"
"I found the session really interesting. I would recommend it to younger people"

"This lesson was very important, where it opened my mind more, very useful information"

"Very well explained"

"Powerpoint and presentation was really useful. Now have a clear understanding of the topic."

Overall, the young people reported a positive increase in knowledge and understanding following the workshops, and were keen to ask questions about the topic.

Immediately after these sessions our facilitator carried out focus groups with smaller numbers of students. These garnered useful insights into young people's views on various methods of contraception, barriers to accessing contraception, and suggestions for improving sexual health messaging and education including:

"I think if they had more information on it younger, it would make them (young people) think, oh yeah I do have to use protection so it would make them see a bit more sense."

"Make it a bit more real, them pamphlets are a bit boring."

"If people have more knowledge of what contraceptions are out there, and the risk, and the potential of not getting pregnant by using one of them, I feel like they would have more information and knowledge, so they wouldn't need to have an abortion every time."

"I don't think there's enough (sex education) in schools, 'cause my head teacher at my last school, he stopped everything, hated the idea of it, so he stopped getting the sexual health clinic bus in, he stopped everything 'cause he didn't agree with it, and actually then, the rate of pregnancy in our school went up. So it does just show that there's not enough information out there."

"Tell teenagers about contraception through videos, so they can just watch it – when people give me leaflets on the street I just throw them away, or just put it in my bag and it will stay in there for like a year!"

These comments were fed through to professionals and will also be used to inform future work at Brook. For example, we are keen to find funding to support short films showing young women talking about their chosen contraceptive method, having discovered that a lot of the young women in the focus groups relied on their peers for this information.

Professional training

Three full days of training were provided to 40 professionals working with young people in Croydon, and also Bexley. These professionals were given up to date information on abortion and taken through exercises which allowed them to examine their own values and practice. All but one of these participants rated the training at 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of meeting the aims – which can be seen at the end of the this report (3). The participants estimated that in total they were likely to reach over 10,000 young people

through their work – meaning that such a course is likely to have a huge impact in the borough. Some sample quotes are below:

“I can give informed advice as the facts on abortion are now very clear to me, I am now able to reflect more about different personal values and attitudes which might impact on practice” Social Worker

“I feel more confident in my ability to advise young people” Youth Worker

“Abortion is now on my curriculum for young people” Youth Worker

“I now feel more confident to deal with a young person with an unwanted pregnancy” Youth Worker

“I have learnt a lot about the issues surrounding abortion and feel better equipped to help others” Nurse

“I work with young people who may have unplanned pregnancies and now I will be more comfortable discussing their options with them” Social Worker

Conclusion:

We are pleased to see that young people and professionals in Croydon have seen an increase in knowledge resulting from this project. Not only a better grasp of factual information about pregnancy, contraception and abortion but also of their own values. We hope that the training provided to youth workers, nurses and social workers in Croydon and Bexley will have an impact on the thousands of young people they work with in the future. The document which was produced as a result of this project will be available to professionals in the UK and beyond for years to come. We intend to use the findings from this project to implement future work reducing abortion stigma and increasing young people's understanding of contraception and motivation to reduce their risk of unwanted pregnancy.

Costs:

The project costs were just slightly over budget (18.86 EURO)

COST	EURO
Staff costs	2800
Travel and subsistence	112.6
Print document	208.21
Design document	265
Training materials	237.05
Management and Operation	612
Total	4234.86

1. 'Quiz' for young people:

QUICK QUIZ – before we begin

In the UK, 1 in 10 women / 1 in 3 women will have an abortion at some point in their life.
Abortion is safer / more dangerous than giving birth.
The morning after pill is / is not a type of abortion.
Having an abortion does / doesn't mean you will find it difficult to have children later in life.
The rate of young people getting pregnant and the rate of young people having abortions is getting higher / lower in the UK.
In England you do / don't have to pay for contraception.

What is your? Age: Ethnicity:
 Please circle: Female, Male, Intersex, Trans*, Other, Prefer not to say
 Sexual orientation: Prefer not to say

QUICK QUIZ – after the session, do you know the facts?

In the UK, 1 in 10 women / 1 in 3 women will have an abortion at some point in their life.
Abortion is safer / more dangerous than giving birth.
The morning after pill is / is not a type of abortion.
Having an abortion does / doesn't mean you will find it difficult to have children later in life.
The rate of young people getting pregnant and the rate of young people having abortions is getting higher / lower in the UK.
In England you do / don't have to pay for contraception.

Any comments?

2. Young people's quiz responses showing increased knowledge:

	1 in 10 women have an abortion	1 in 3 women have an abortion	Abortion is safer than giving birth	Abortion is more dangerous than giving birth	The morning after pill is a type of abortion	The morning after pill is not a type of abortion	Having an abortion does mean you'll have trouble getting pregnant	Having an abortion doesn't mean you'll have trouble getting pregnant	The teenage pregnancy rate/abortion rate is getting higher	The teenage pregnancy rate/abortion rate is getting lower	In England you do have to pay for contraception	In England you don't have to pay for contraception
BEFORE	27	23	20	36	16	37	13	38	47	7	3	52
AFTER	2	53	46	7	5	50	7	50	7	49	6	49

3. Professional training evaluation:

Stated aims	Didn't meet the stated aim					Completely met the stated aim
Raise awareness and understanding of the issues relating to teenage pregnancy and abortion so that practitioners are able to provide education and support that meets young people's needs.	0	1	2	3	4	5
To enable professionals to facilitate constructive discussion of pregnancy options with their clients and to support them in informed decision-making and contraceptive planning.	0	1	2	3	4	5

To explore the causes of repeat unintended conceptions and identify effective practice to reduce their incidence.	0	1	2	3	4	5
To facilitate reflection of personal attitudes and values and how they impact on professional practice.	0	1	2	3	4	5

i http://www.rcog.org.uk/files/rcog-corp/Abortion_Guideline_Summary.pdf

ii https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/319460/Abortion_Statistics_England_and_Wales_2013.pdf

iii http://www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/EFC/EFC_FAQaboutrepeatabortion.pdf

iv <https://www.bpas.org/js/filemanager/files/tpyoungpeopleinlondonabortionandrepeatabortion.pdf>

v <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21724621>

vi http://www.cvalive.org.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=mGv9C_2_CJo%3D&tabid=554

vii <http://educationforchoice.blogspot.co.uk/2014/06/young-people-and-repeat-abortion.html>