

***Streetwise to Sex-Wise:* Scope of Use, Effectiveness, and Evaluation**

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For more than 20 years, *Streetwise to Sex-Wise: Sexuality Education for High-Risk Youth* has been used around the globe to teach young people about sexuality. First published by The Center for Family Life Education (CFLE)³ in 1993, the second edition was expanded and revised in 2001, and a forthcoming edition will be published in 2015. With 69% of Planned Parenthood affiliates reporting that they use *Streetwise to Sex-Wise*, it is tied with the *F.L.A.S.H.* curriculum as the sexuality education resource most widely-used by Planned Parenthood affiliates.¹ Other publications by The Center, *Unequal Partners* (66%) and *Making Sense of Abstinence* (63%), rank third and fourth respectively. As Planned Parenthood represents the largest network of sexuality educators in the United States², the widespread usage of *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* by Planned Parenthood educators is particularly significant, and makes it a major

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³ The Center for Family Life Education was renamed The Center for Sex Education (CSE) in 2014. For ease of reading, this article uses the term "The Center".

resource in the delivery of sexuality education throughout the United States.

Beyond the United States, *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* is routinely purchased in bulk by organizations as far away as the New Zealand Family Planning Association. Lessons, activities, and other materials from *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* have been reprinted in publications by such leading and diverse organizations in sexuality education as the Division of Indian Work of Greater Minneapolis; the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), the Unitarian Universalist Association (in *Our Whole Lives*), and in various curricula and other publications developed by Planned Parenthood affiliates. In addition, lessons and other material from *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* has been included in the *International Encyclopedia of Sexuality* and the teacher's edition of the popular textbook *Sexuality Today*, and lessons have been translated into French and Portuguese by the International Women's Health Coalition for use their sexuality education curricula in developing nations.

Advocates for Youth lists *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* in *The Librarian's Guide to Sex Education Resources*³, and in its predecessor, *Resource Guide for Sex Educators: Basic Resources that Every Sex Educator Needs to Know About*.⁴ *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* is also recommended in the four-volume authoritative set, *Sexuality Education, Past, Present, and Future*.⁵ The curriculum earned a **unanimous** ranking of "Recommended Highly" by the Minnesota Education Resource Review Panel of the Minnesota Organization on Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Parenting (MOAPP) – an esteemed membership of professionals with expertise in sexuality

education and HIV prevention, who represent community-based and statewide organizations, including teachers, public health professionals, health educators, youth workers, and religious leaders. An excerpt from the review follows:

“The panel found the introductory sections of *Streetwise to Sex-wise* to be very strong. It contains a clear definition of high-risk youth and the rationale for focusing on these populations. The panel particularly liked the “profiles of selected high risk youth” that offer a brief sketch of the sexual health concerns of certain populations of high risk youth, including GLBT youth, youth who have been sexually abused, youth who have been sexually abusive, and pregnant and parenting teens. The panel felt that the manual would be appropriate for a broader audience than the ones targeted by the authors. They recommended its use with all youth.”⁶

In its 2007 report of recommended resources for developing small island states in the Pacific, UNICEF praised *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* and other manuals published by The Center, saying they are “collections of creative, easy to understand lesson plans and are particularly highly recommended.”⁷

Research and Evaluation

Beyer and Ogletree (1998) evaluated 21 adolescent sexuality education curricula that included sexual coercion with subtopics including “date rape, stranger rape, exploitation, unwanted touch, pressure, incest, and sexual harassment” according to the Conti and Kimmel method of evaluation which assigns a score according to the number of paragraphs containing information for each topic.⁸ According to this method, *Streetwise to Sex*

Wise scored the highest out of the 21 curricula with a 60 and the next highest score was 35.

In 2001, researchers Jane Fluhr, Roy Oman, and Ken McLeroy explored possible collaborative models between University-based evaluation teams, State Health Departments, and local program providers to collaborate in the evaluation of teen pregnancy prevention models. The authors selected three curricula for this study: *Postponing Sexual Involvement*, *Streetwise to Sex-Wise*, and *Wise Guys* and developed a survey to measure knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors following these interventions. While the study focused on the usefulness of collaboration, not necessarily the impact of the curricula, it did find that collaborative partnerships could yield more comprehensive evaluations, increased sample sizes and potential for realizing significantly significant results, and community input regarding program improvements that reflect local population needs. Their results were presented at the 2001 annual conference of the American Public Health Association, and later published in the journal *Health Promotion Practices*.^{9,10}

Blanchett and Wolfe (2002) evaluated *Streetwise to Sex Wise* regarding its effectiveness for the sexuality education needs of individuals with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities and determined its lesson plans were “very good” utilizing an adapted version of the Byrom and Katz (1991) HIV prevention and AIDS education checklist.¹¹ Of the 12 curricula evaluated, *Streetwise to Sex Wise* scored the 2nd highest on covering various subtopics of biological/reproductive, health/hygiene, relationships, and self-

protection/self advocacy and was the only curriculum to score “very good” in all 21 subtopics.

Preliminary research on *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* has been conducted by the Loma Linda University School of Public Health, Research and Evaluation Unit in Loma Linda, California. The curriculum was implemented in schools throughout the San Bernardino, California community, where the intervention audience included 87 pre-sexually active females, 89 pre-sexually active males, 44 sexually active males, and 90 sexually active females.¹² However, officials at San Bernardino County have indicated that results have not yet been published.¹³ Nevertheless, in its 2009 study on the sexual health and reproductive needs of children in foster care, the Public Health Institute named *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* as one of four promising programs for teaching children in foster care. The report noted indicated the following:

“The four main curricula we identified (*Power Through Choices*, *Streetwise to Sex-Wise*, *Reducing the Risk*, and *Safer Choices*) have all undergone some degree of evaluation in regard to curriculum effectiveness for the intended population – foster youth specifically for the first two curricula and high school students more generally for the latter two curricula. Programs considering the use of these curricula may want to review these evaluations. Until additional rigorous studies are conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of these curricula for foster and former foster youth, these four curricula, with their promising but limited effectiveness evidence, might represent the best available resources for providing or augmenting sex education for foster and former foster youth.”¹⁴

In conjunction with the Center for Research on Adolescent Health and Development at the Public Health Institute and the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Constantine, Jerman, and Constantine (2009)¹⁵ conducted research to determine the reproductive and sexual health needs of foster youth for the sexual health focus of the California Connected by 25 (CC25) Initiative. While conducting this research, the researchers recommended four curricula, including *Streetwise to Sex Wise* that “comprise the best available resources for providing or augmenting sex education for foster and former foster youth.”¹⁶

Lori Rolleri wrote *The Gender and Sexual Health Series* for Assets Coming Together (ACT) for Youth Center for Excellence, identifying the need for education regarding gender norms and sexuality. In her articles, she mentions *Streetwise to Sex Wise* as curriculum currently being evaluated by the researchers, Grose, Grabe, and Kohfeldt (2013), indicating, “that gender attitudes changed more toward equitable views which were associated with safer sex behavior.”¹⁷ These authors conducted a study in California to determine if sexuality curriculum could influence or change gender ideology and youth sexual empowerment. To the authors’ knowledge, this was the first study in the United States to integrate “school-based sexual education curriculum to sexual empowerment among youth.”¹⁸ The authors chose *Streetwise to Sex Wise* because of its “intersection of gender and sexuality...it was a unique aspect of the curriculum and was discussed in a variety of ways.”¹⁹ The authors concluded:

“Our findings demonstrated that although differences in gender ideology are apparent among boys and girls at an early age, education aimed at empowering you can shift traditional ideology in a manner that leads to empowering outcomes among both boys and girls. This is particularly striking in that the outcomes we measured might suggest that changes in attitudes and beliefs aligned with traditional gender ideology may contribute to a reduction in the negative sexual health outcomes that are currently widespread among adolescents in the United States (Pleck, et al., 1990, 1993; Sanchez et al., 2005). The current findings support the notion that curricula promoting alternative discourses about gender and sexuality may encourage both boys and girls to be more accepting of a wider range of gendered behaviors and *ultimately engage in healthier behaviors and relationships.*”²⁰

Since *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* was first published in 1993, it has been evaluated for its curriculum effectiveness regarding at-risk youth, foster youth, sexual coercion, gender ideology, teen pregnancy prevention models, and meeting the needs of moderate to severe intellectually disabled individuals. It also appears repeatedly in the research, reflecting consensus among sexologists of the value and potential the curriculum has for a spectrum of youth populations.²¹ Beyond frequent mention in the literature suggesting *Streetwise to Sex-Wise* as a resource ripe for wider use, and thus, rigorous evaluation, it is also frequently recommended by leading authorities addressing youth sexuality issues, such as Lloyd Sinclair, who made sure to include a slide in his PowerPoint that described the

curriculum as the “Best youth book” in his presentation for the Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers conference.²²

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