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Parents as sex and relationship educators
A local evaluation of *Speakeasy 4 Parents*

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The sexual health of young people living in Britain has emerged as a public health issue for a number of reasons. Young people are becoming sexually active at an earlier age, the United Kingdom has the highest teenage conception rate in Western Europe, and there are high rates of sexually transmitted infections among young people. One means of addressing these issues is through effective, appropriate sex and relationship education for all children and young people. Against this background, Children's Centres in Cheshire have been delivering *Speakeasy 4 Parents* courses, which have been designed by the Family Planning Association to equip parents to become effective sex and relationship educators for their children.

Study design and methods

This was a small scale-study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Speakeasy 4 Parents* course in improving participants' knowledge, skills and confidence to communicate and discuss sex and relationship issues with their children, explored from the perspectives of both parents and service providers. A predominantly qualitative approach was adopted. The study utilised three data collection methods: semi-structured interviews with service providers and parents; a focus group with parents; and a questionnaire with parents.

Findings and conclusion

There is evidence in this study that *the Speakeasy 4 Parents* courses run at Children's Centres in Cheshire have been effective, from the perspectives of parents attending the courses and professionals facilitating them, in improving participants' knowledge, skills and confidence to communicate and discuss sex and relationship issues with their children. Recruitment to courses was not easy or straightforward however, and in order to maximise the potential for *Speakeasy* courses to have an impact on local parents some thought needs to be given to ways of targeting, and engaging, parents. The involvement of dads/male carers is also an issue in that no dads attended the courses that were the focus of this study, and the women who participated articulated the view that the courses would not have gone so well if there had been men present. Therefore, if dads are to be enabled to participate in the sex and relationships education of their children consideration may need to be given to running separate *Speakeasy* courses for women and men.