

2.4 UNESCO Sex Education Guidelines

Background: In 2009, international sex education guidelines designed to reduce the rate of H.I.V. infections among young people around the world were proposed by UNESCO, an agency of the United Nations. An updated version was issued in 2018. The guidelines initially provoked a wave of criticism from conservative and religious groups, many based in the United States.



They argued that the guidelines exposed children to sexual information while they were too young to fully understand, promoted pre-marital sex and abortions, and violated parental rights. Proponents of the guidelines argued that in the absence of a vaccine to prevent AIDS, education was the most potent weapon against the spread of the disease. In 2009, UNESCO officials estimated that only 40% of young people aged 15 to 24 had accurate knowledge of how HIV/AIDS is transmitted and that people in this age group account for 45% of all new cases of the disease. They also argued that there was no evidence that sex education contributed to increased or earlier sexual involvement. One reason for the 2018 revised guidelines was because “in some parts of the world, two out of three girls reported having no idea of what was happening to them when they began menstruating and pregnancy and childbirth complications are the second cause of death among 15 to 19-year olds.”

Instructions: Examine the updated international sex education guidelines developed by UNESCO (<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0026/002607/260770e.pdf>, accessed November 6, 2018). Write a 1,000 word essay commenting on the guidelines and the problems they are intended to address and your view of the issues in the debate, including your response to both critics and advocates of the guidelines.