



Pleasure Matters

In February 2022, **The Pleasure Project** and the **World Health Organisation** jointly published a systematic review¹ that for the first time answered the question:

“What is the added value of incorporating pleasure in sexual health interventions?”

What did we find?

Prioritising pleasure, rather than the fear of danger or disease, increases the likelihood of safer sex.

Sexual health programs that include sexual desire and sexual pleasure improve knowledge and attitudes around sex and increase condom use, as compared to those that do not.

Pleasure-inclusive sexual health increases sexual self-esteem, sexual self-confidence and safe choices.

Taking all the available evidence into account, we recommend that agencies responsible for sexual and reproductive health consider incorporating sexual pleasure considerations within their programming.

How did we come to our conclusions?

We carefully followed the existing data.

Our extensive global analysis identified 33 unique interventions targeting sexually transmitted infection and HIV risk reduction from 2005-2020. It covered research that compared ‘pleasure’ and ‘sex positive’ approaches to the usual type of sexual health messages that people are used to, such as using fear or risk to try and change behaviour. We found studies in the USA, UK, South Africa, Brazil, Nigeria, Spain, Singapore and Mexico.

Researchers from WHO's Department of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research, The Pleasure Project and co-authors concluded that continuing to avoid the subject of pleasure in sexual health and education will lead to a misdirection of funds and we call for a fundamental re-think of how interventions are run, in order to reduce infections and save lives. >>

¹A systematic review is a study of studies. It attempts to collect all existing evidence on a specific topic in order to answer a specific research question. Authors create criteria for deciding on which evidence is included or excluded before starting the systematic review. A meta analysis, also numerically pools the results of the studies and arrives at a summary estimate, in this case condom use'

Who noticed the results?

This key piece of pleasure evidence really got noticed! The research results featured in over **59 international press articles**, with 2.3 million points of engagement across diverse platforms.

Our ask

Acknowledge that pleasure is a key reason we have sex—we have sex simply because it can make us feel good.



Recognise that pleasure is important, stop stigmatising it. We can have safer sex if we know how to have good sex.



Include sexual pleasure in your sexual and reproductive health interventions to make it more effective—it saves lives.



Teach sex education classes that focus on how to achieve pleasurable safer sex, or learn condom use skills that focus on people's ability to feel desire if you want to improve sexual health and well-being.



Research the impacts of including pleasure within Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights, with different populations.

What's next?

Reach out to **The Pleasure Project Team** for technical support.

Learn how to incorporate a pleasure-based approach to sexual health and education, using **The Pleasure Principles**.

Endorse the Pleasure Principles like **these organisations** have done.

Read the **World Association of Sexual Health 2021 Sexual Pleasure Declaration**.

Read the full study **here**.

#PleasureMatters

the
pleasure
project.



World Health
Organization

