A CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHIC PROJECT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO EXPLORE LOVE, 
SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS WHEREVER THEY LIVE IN THE WORLD.
Secret Questions

Unsafe sex before marriage is not easy to deal with in our society. Is reproductive knowledge out of reach for young people? They are unable or make no attempt to learn about it. They all have secret questions. I think reproductive knowledge is so complicated.

Viet Nam

FOREWORD

This collection of photographs and stories from young people in Europe and the developing world comes from an innovative education project – Zoom in!. This project was designed for use by European teachers and youth facilitators to help adolescents understand sexual and reproductive health issues in the developing world, and most especially those affecting young people.

In addition to learning and talking about these issues, the creative element of that project – the photographs and stories - is used as a way of encouraging young people from around the world to share their thoughts and concerns over their own sexual and reproductive health and rights, and to learn about those of their peers.

In this way, the project has raised awareness and provoked thought and discussion among young Europeans of some of the more challenging issues do to with sex, sexual and reproductive health, and associated rights.

The most powerful and unique feature of this project has been the inclusion of the voices of young people from developing countries. Thanks to our association with locally based NGOs, we were able to ask them to approach young people in their respective countries and invite them to participate in this project as a way of getting their voices heard. Youth leaders worked with up to 50 adolescents in each country, introducing and discussing sexual health issues, and encouraging them to think about what concerned them. They were then invited to express these concerns through photography and stories.

Despite the fact that most of these young people were provided with disposable cameras to work with, we have been extremely impressed by the quality of the images and especially by the honesty and frankness of many of the stories. Some of the young participants seemed to find it easy to say what they wanted, whereas others were clearly not used to being asked to express themselves. This guardedness, in itself, says a great deal.

We could not have managed to produce such an interesting and effective project without this input from our young developing world participants and the partner NGOs. We would also like to thank the European Commission for having the imagination to fund this project.

Marie Stopes International
World Population Foundation
Latvia’s Association for Family Planning and Sexual Health “Papardes Zieds”
YouAct: The European Youth Network on Sexual and Reproductive Rights
DON'T LET THEM DOWN

The largest ever generation of adolescents is approaching adulthood in a world that is changing rapidly. Many of these young people are facing new opportunities and challenges as they grow and develop with the love and encouragement of their families, teachers and peers.

But far too many adolescents, especially in the developing world, are having to deal with the harsh realities of poverty, isolation and lack of appropriate support. Many have to focus on survival rather than education. At a time when their bodies and minds are changing and developing, they may be facing violence, sexual abuse or coping with sexually transmitted infections such as HIV. For girls, this time can be especially difficult as a result of discrimination, limited access to education, child marriage, early pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

Young people all over the world need to be able to make informed choices and have a right to responsible and fulfilling experiences when it comes to sex and relationships. Yet limited access to youth-friendly services and information, lack of sex education and cultural taboos provide acute barriers to realising these rights and are putting lives at risk.

The world has recognised the right of all people to access appropriate information and services, yet sexual and reproductive health remains drastically under-funded. An extremely vulnerable group within this already marginalised sector, adolescents and their sexual health are shamefully far down the international agenda.

Young people need an enabling and encouraging environment in which their concerns are listened to, their needs provided for and their rights respected. Governments and international aid agencies must recognise that young people are active agents of their own lives and with the right support will be able to help themselves and their peers. The time has come to provide that support. No society can afford to lose such a resource.

Unplanned pregnancy

Of the two evils, choose the less. She had two choices: to have a backstreet abortion or to leave the baby in the hands of the father as soon as she gave birth. Eventually she chose not to abort because she was afraid she might die, which can be caused by unsafe abortion.

Before she was in this position she was brilliant and intelligent, but then she failed to be self-reliant and bowed to peer pressure. Now she is suffering the consequences.

Zimbabwe
Sold!

Most girls earn their parents money through arranged marriages. This photo I took is one example of the many girls who have been victims of this.

Because of the high levels of poverty in the country, most parents feel they can lift themselves out of the poverty cycle by giving their daughters to men (no matter how old they are) to marry in exchange for money. The girl in the photo was being given to somebody a lot older than her by her parents.

The man she was being married off to would become her rightful owner and Mulenga couldn’t escape. She could cry “Help! Help!” but all she could hear were the birds chirping and she wished she was in the safety of her own bedroom. Unfortunately the old man who wanted her was not going to let her go. He lifted up her skirt and raped her shamelessly. “You think refusing to marry me was a good idea, huh?!” he shouted. When he was done with her, he zipped up his trousers and was on his way, locking the door behind him.

Mulenga was deep in thought, lamenting the current events in her life. The man who repeatedly raped her already had five wives and wanted Mulenga to be his sixth. Mulenga’s father had accepted the proposal, but Mulenga had been very saddened by the news and had refused outright. Her mother, having been the victim of an arranged marriage herself, had sided with Mulenga but had very little real say in the matter. Her father had tried convincing his young daughter to marry the man who was old enough to be her grandfather, but when she tried to refuse, he packed up her belongings and forcibly handed her over to him.

Zambia

In Spite of Romance

We used to go walking along the sea at night, look at the stars for hours and laugh and talk about everything. Ralph was my best friend.

One night we went to a party. The music was terrible and the young people were drunk. It was as if I was in the wrong place at the wrong time, so I decided to leave. When I was close to the bus station, Ralph called me and asked me to stay. It was a cold winter night, but my friend had run out to me in his thin T-shirt. He told me that he was not going to let me go. I looked into his eyes angrily and asked, “Why?”

“Because you are the most perfect girl in the world and I will not let you go!”

“Ralph, let me go! Now I have another reason to leave.”

“Alright then. I’ll let you leave, if this is what you want.”

Latvia
An Abandoned Child

This child of two has been abandoned by her 15 year old mother Susan after the child’s father refused to take responsibility. He said that at the young age of 16, he was unable to look after an infant. Susan hopes a Good Samaritan may take care of the child.

Uganda

I Make My Own Choice

I’m a 17-year old girl and I live in the Netherlands. In my culture I can make my own decisions. Also about who I love.

My boyfriend and I are expecting a child. We made the decision for me to become pregnant together. We are not married yet, we will do that later. My parents support my decision 100 percent even though they realise that it will be hard. But they will be there for me and that gives me strength.

My friends were a different story. I lost many friends because of my pregnancy. They were afraid of the truth, but I did get to know who my real friends were.

I make my own choices. Nobody else chooses for me. I choose who I love, who I marry and who I caress.

Netherlands
“Montu, please draw the cart for a while. I am tired.” Montu began to draw the cart slowly. He is the youngest of six brothers and sisters. His elder two sisters are married and the third one... well, nobody knows how she is or where she is.

It happened like this. Montu was six then. One day an unknown and very warm hearted woman came to his mother and said, “Sister, your family seems to be suffering with poverty. Why don’t you give Shahana to me? I will organise a good job for her in the garments industry. She will live and dine with me. Whenever you want to come and see her, you are always welcome in my house.” Montu’s father took the opportunity and let Shahana go.

After few months, Montu’s elder sister went to Dhaka and found the address that women provided was false and there was no trace of Shahana. She seemed to have vanished into thin air. The police officer said that they had a few other similar cases. The woman actually was member of a gang related with women trafficking, trading girls abroad as sex workers. The younger the girl, the better the price.

Montu’s father walks along the road as his son draws the cart. A deep sigh comes from his heart for Shahana, his long lost little girl.
The Posters

Every day on the way to college I saw the posters in the streets. These posters were full of over-exposed female figures. I knew that these movies were a bad influence, but to be honest, I could not deny my interest in them.

One day, one of my classmates whispered in my ear, “Mate, fancy going to the cinema hall? Yes, to see that movie.” At first I said no. But my interest in the forbidden eventually triumphed. After watching the film, I felt something very strange inside my body.

After going back home, I was unable to concentrate on my studies. During the night those half naked women filled my dreams. After that, it was a regular occurrence that I would dream of porn films and feel sexually aroused. My will to do the same was becoming irresistible.

Finally, one day I had my first sexual experience, paying only 50 takas. I enjoyed it very much. From then I could not stop myself going to the brothel again and again. But something was wrong with me and one day I discovered that I had become a victim of a sexual disease.

Now I am living alone with the curse. If I had been lucky enough to have had somebody tell me at the beginning that my desire for sex and my sexual feelings were natural, I could now be married. But you see I didn’t keep myself safe and I have paid the price. I pray no other adolescent might suffer like me.

Let’s Think

“HIV/AIDS, family planning and reproductive health are part of a western agenda and no one, particularly young people, should have to worry about them.”

This is the general perception regarding these very crucial issues in Pakistan. But I appeal to young people to think about these very critical matters and take positive steps to acquire complete and correct information.

Advisors

My girlfriend and I wanted to start sexual relations, but neither she nor I knew how to do it. Neither of us wanted to ask other people: not our friends nor our parents.

So we decided to watch erotic movies and learn from them. In these movies no one shows you how to use condoms or other means of contraception, therefore, we didn’t think that they were important.

Later, at school, we found out how important it is to take care of yourself and your beloved partner.
Our Cultural Heritage

Zambia as a country has an abundance of cultural characteristics. With more than 70 tribes, she is not devoid of rich traditions. Time has shown us, however, that some traditional practices are abusive and inhuman.

Young girls have been the object of exploitation for years. As the weaker of the two genders (or so it seems) females have been subjected to sexual, verbal and even physical abuse all in the name of tradition. Our traditions were meant to inspire good but all they achieve now is the spreading of fear, repulsion and disgust in the minds of those who see them for what they are - a nightmare.

The nightmare for a girl child begins when she is born into a family and she is either laughed at or scolded because she lacks male genitalia and is what her brothers are not - a female. Tradition dictates her dress, everyday speech, manners and temperament. She realises too late that tradition abuses her and names her male siblings and the entire male population of her tribe “princes”. So much for being female.

As the years go on, the young girl’s life becomes even more difficult. Puberty, which is supposed to be the peak of youthful life, a time full of joyous anxiety and sweet anticipation, proves to be the horror of all horrors. As soon as a girl comes of age she must be circumcised and without reason or emotion, the very people she looks to for guidance and instruction turn into monsters overnight, and wickedly carry out their duties to tradition.

Female circumcision is cruel and unreasonable. It not only damages proper reproductive health, but also leaves emotional scars never to be erased on the minds of innocent, unknowing young females.

The initiation ceremony focuses on teaching the young girl about womanhood and the duties of a woman. The purpose it really serves is that of putting the woman under such rigid circumstances and restrictions that make life so unbearable that the way of least resistance is that of unquestioning obedience to a series of dictators (her father, brothers, uncles, husband and sons). The cycle is unending and gets trickier to handle with the advancement of years.

Zambia

A Fern Blossom

The traditions of the Latvian nation are very ancient and rich. For centuries Latvians have celebrated various annual festivities where men and women have significant roles. One special festivity is the summer solstice, called Jāņi.

Jāņi is celebrated in June on the shortest night of the year. Each girl wears a home-made wreath of flowers. Men wear a wreath of oak leaves. Since ancient times this festivity has worshiped light and the sun, therefore everyone stays up all night long and waits for sunrise. There is a belief that on this night fern blossom comes into flower. Many young couples seek to find it. There is no proof that anybody has found it but you will hear people say that children who are born in March are the children of Jāņi.

In Latvia only some schools have introduced the subject of health studies that teaches and discusses sexual relations and the significance of contraception.

Latvia
Little Feet

After “serving customers”, I tiredly fell down on the couch. I had heard that my lady had received two more good looking girls. Glancing at the old, bad bed, I was surprised to see the small feet of those girls poking out of the blanket. Probably they were the “new goods”. By their feet, I guessed they were about 16 or 7 only. What a pity! They seemed to be the same as me five years ago, cheated to come here and forced to “serve guests” five or six times per day and treated like animals. They reminded me of my life. Why are the destinies of women like us so miserable?

Viet Nam

“I hope my European peers will learn through our stories and photos - how we hard we toil in difficult conditions but keep a smile on our faces”. 
Desire to Know More

Poverty to me means ignorance. My family was never educated. My parents worked day and night and never had time to talk with us. I could say that I grew up on the streets where everything happens. You meet people who influence you and teach you bad things. I grew up with drug addicts, prostitutes, thieves and with information that made me fall 10 times deeper and harder.

I now have HIV/AIDS, an incurable condition, a depressing disease, but worst of all now no one wants to be my friend. No one touches me or talks to me. I am now dedicated to spending my life thinking about poverty and ignorance.

Mexico

Think About Your Actions

Tim is 15 years old. He attends a public school in the south of England. At his school he is very popular and attractive to the girls. He likes going out drinking with his friends and as a result he has slept with a lot of girls. However hopes to find a loving partner with whom to have a relationship with, where sex is not the most important thing.

Shortly after his 16th birthday and on a night out in town he meets Julie. She is a girl of similar age but goes to a different school. They get on well and soon become girlfriend and boyfriend. A couple of weeks later Tim begins to feel unwell. He goes to the doctors and eventually finds out he is HIV positive.

He now worries about what he’s going to do. He’s afraid of telling his new girlfriend because she thinks he is a virgin. When he tells her she takes it as an act of betrayal and doesn’t trust him anymore. Tim regrets his old ways and can’t cope with the thought of a break-up.

UK
Peer Pressure

I was a normal girl just like any other, except in my “friendship” group I was the only virgin. All of my friends were always talking about sex and I was left out because I basically didn’t have anything to say. The girls in my class were always teasing me and trying to offend me by calling me a stupid virgin and saying I would die as one. I was annoyed at myself as I wanted to be like them.

One Friday night my friends invited me out. I was all dressed up. They said it was going to be the best night ever. The taxi we were all going out in came to my front door. I went out, sat in the taxi and was talking to my friends. They had brought drink with them.

We got to the club. Their boyfriends were there too. I was the only girl in our group who didn’t have a boyfriend, because mine had finished with me because I wouldn’t have sex.

We were all drinking. I went to the toilets and when I came back my friend Jessica offered me another drink.

I was dancing with a boy and we were having a good time. He bought me a few drinks but he had spiked one. At the end of the night he asked me to his place, I agreed because I was so drunk.

The inevitable happened; we slept together. The next morning I woke up regretting what had happened and feeling dirty and used. Why did I want to be liked so much that I had allowed myself to act against all that I felt to be right?

UK

And Thus We Live

I am Eti and I have a friend Tania. I am 14 and she is 15. We were students at the same school. After the death of my father I was compelled to abandon my studies and began to work in a garments factory. Our fate was bound together. Just a year later, Tania’s father got married again and she joined me in the garments factory and now we each earn 1200 taka a month.

We have to pass some ruffians bullying us on the way to work. They are the local musclemen, everybody fears them.

One holiday, we were out beside the lake. Suddenly two of the hooligans came towards us. We were trembling with fear. One of them said that he loved Tania and wanted to marry her. He threatened to throw some acid at her if anything went against his will. Tania almost fainted with fear. I whispered to her, “Don’t worry, I am here.”

Now, we are closed in our shabby room even during our holidays. I think growing up is a curse in itself for girls. We will be bullied; we will be paid lower wages and all of this because we are girls. Is there any end to these dark days?

Bangladesh
Teenage Pregnancy

Avoid pregnancy
When you are still a teenager
When you fall pregnant: Who will take care of you and the child?
Will the father of the pregnancy accept it?
Will you still go to school and plan your future
Will you know if you do not have HIV?

Resist sex
Protect yourself and think of the future

Zimbabwe

Value Yourself... Use Protection

There was a couple - a young girl named Lisa, 15, and a young man named Dean, 19. They had been together for about a year and things seemed great.

Recently, however, Dean persuaded Lisa to have unprotected sex. They had previously had sex with protection and Lisa was reluctant to have unprotected sex but with persuasion and a few drinks she agreed. She really enjoyed it and they continued to do this.

After a few more nights of sex Lisa went to the doctor to check if she was pregnant. To her shock and anguish she got the results back and found out that she was. She told her boyfriend straight away.

He left her saying he didn’t want or feel as if he could handle having a child. Lisa now feels stuck and she doesn’t want to tell her parents as they didn’t even know she was having sex and are very protective over her. She has no-one to turn to.

UK

Patricia’s story

Patricia is 17 years old. She used to escape from school and go to night clubs with her boyfriend John. Today, she came to visit John to inform him that she had missed her period for two months now. John denied being responsible for her pregnancy and locked her out of the house.

She is now worried about how is she going to tell her parents, and what is going to happen to her education. Schools expel any girl they find pregnant.

Uganda
Afraid to look Into The Future

In this photo a boy can be seen on a building site. His clothes are not only dirty but torn. His body is covered in dust. This boy, like so many boys of his age across the country, has to work for his survival.

As a result of his tiring work, he is unable to concentrate at school and it becomes impossible for him to understand what he is studying. The end result is that he starts failing his exams or getting marks he does not deserve, which results in his family being angry with him and society considering him as a failure and good for nothing.

He needs help but he is ashamed to ask for it. He lowers his head in despair as he imagines the life he is going to lead if no one comes to his aid. As a result of his low self esteem, he ends up sleeping with prostitutes and contracts HIV. Due to a lack of knowledge he continues spreading the disease.

Many youth are in this situation, they hold their heads down, afraid to look into the future. They have dreams and visions which they cannot achieve on their own. They did not choose to be born into poverty but they have to overcome it with the help of society.

Zambia

“...I felt deeply touched by Zoom In! I believe it really can help build awareness among adolescents about themselves.”
Play Safe

In my childhood, I used to play with balloons. This is a really safe game which doesn’t harm or endanger anyone. Although I am now a youth I still enjoy the use of balloons – condoms, to protect me from HIV and sexually transmitted infections and keep me happy and healthy.

Pakistan

Variety

In the Netherlands, there is no taboo about sex. In many stores you can buy different types of condoms in various sizes. Condoms are not only a form of contraception, they are also used as toys.

Netherlands
Pigeons

I have seen and admired a flock of white pigeons fed on paddy grain and praised for their beauty. But it is not only a flock of white pigeons, as there is also a black one hiding in a corner. It appears to have been spurned and driven out of its flock. This makes me think about HIV-infected people who are also spurned, discriminated against and shunned, even seriously insulted, because in many people's opinion, HIV only infects people with promiscuous lifestyles.

Often HIV-infected people do not really know what to do, except stand alone and view the outside world with regret for one careless mistake.

Viet Nam

Together You Stand Strong

At my school, together with three other girls, I placed the HIV/AIDS epidemic on the agenda. HIV/AIDS is also common here in Western countries and it's still taboo to talk about it. We tried to break this taboo by organising a theme day, in which we focused on the issue in a lot of different ways.

After the theme day students raised money for the fight against HIV/AIDS. We raised 22,000 Euros and showed that as a school if you want to reach your goal, you must stand strong together. We didn't save the whole world from HIV/AIDS but we did show that as young people we can make a meaningful contribution and that every contribution counts.

Netherlands
Love

Love - we are all longing for love! Many people say that we are too young and cannot understand what it is. However, I think everyone has their own understanding of love, and people of every age have their own needs.

China
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