Role of Education in Diminishing Exploitation

Our presentation was focused on the topic of education under the broader theme of exploitation. This included some definitions of exploitation and a sharing of a few online resources that are available to youth.

A definition of exploitation was given by one child as “It’s when you feel like you do not have the option to say No”. The definitions of sexual consent in Canada (under Criminal Code legislation) were described as there had been changes in 2008 to provide greater protection to young people against sexual exploitation.

The Criminal Code legislation changed to increase the age of consent for sexual activity from 14 to 16 years. Non exploitative sexual activity was defined as no involvement of prostitution of pornography, no relationship of trust, authority or dependency (eg coach, spiritual leader, teacher, principal, guidance counselor, family member). There could be close-in-age exceptions in that a youth 12 or 13 can consent to sexual activity with peers within a 2 year age difference and a youth 14 or 15 years of age when the age difference is no more than 5 years. Children younger than 12 years can never consent to sexual activity with anyone.

Cybertip.ca, run by the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, was presented as an exemplary source of information on sexual exploitation. This organization aims to reduce child victimization in Canada by operating a national tip line and providing educational resources to youth and their families. On average, approximately 3000 reports are received per month related to issues such as child pornography, online luring, child trafficking, and prostitution.

One of the issues that both B.C. and Toronto youth highlighted at Shaking the Movers was to be more engaged in addressing exploitation, which also implies being aware of their rights according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Cybertip.ca is successful in this regard as it presents material very clearly and in a child/youth-friendly way. A specific feature that added to this practicality and clarity were the menus of links to information written as first person descriptions of common exploitation situations. It is an overall informative, accessible, and important place for children and young people and others to go to report sexual abuse or exploitative materials found on the internet or if they themselves are being exploited online.

Another resource that was recommended as a reliable source for information on all aspects sexual health (including birth control measures and sexually transmitted infections) was SexualityandU.ca with recognition that there are all kinds of unreliable and even harmful sites on the internet on these topics. The site is run by the Society of
Obstetricians & Gynecologists of Canada and was voted one of the top 10 Canadian Consumer Health sites in 2014.

These kinds of online resources are appealing to young people because social media is so familiar to them and they are guaranteed anonymity when researching sensitive topics. As internet use becomes an increasingly integral part of the daily life and culture of young people, there will be more of a need for online resources on preventing and addressing exploitative situations.

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June 5, 2016