

INFORMED DECISION-MAKING AS THE KEY TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH



TNO innovation
for life

Pregnant women can do a lot to protect their unborn children. But sometimes, the greatest protections occur long before pregnancy. In developing countries, women often don't have access to good, easy-to-understand information about reproductive health. In fact, many don't even know that family planning is possible. TNO and its partners aim to change that, with an approachable, low-cost programme aimed at empowering young people to make informed decisions. And giving them every opportunity to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

NEW INSIGHT BREAKS OLD PATTERNS

In developing countries, women are often caught in a circle of poverty. Without adequate information or the right to make their own informed choices, they marry early and bear many children. They often depend on their husbands to decide about sex and reproduction. If an unmarried woman becomes pregnant, she is often ostracised by her family and community. Studies show that these young people are ready for change. With the right evidence-based tools and interventions, they can be empowered to make better decisions about their reproductive health and their own futures.

PROVEN METHODS, EFFECTIVE TOOLS

TNO's 'Pregnant, Yes or No' programme combines small-group discussions with resources to reach young women and men in an impactful way. Since young

people feel most comfortable interacting with their peers, the programme focuses on group discussions: the 'Group Care' model. As they talk about health, nutrition, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), alcohol/drug use and more, young people learn how the decisions they make today impact their lives tomorrow. In the safe, facilitated Group Care environment, they feel more comfortable asking questions, and dismissing the stigmas and discomfort usually related to talks about sex and reproduction.

Evidence-based programme materials – such as websites, flyers and discussion materials – are presented in a way that is attractive to young people. They are open to the public, to reach young people who haven't participated in the programme. Fun elements, like games and quizzes, keep students engaged, which improves learning and retention. Topics include



pregnancy and childbirth, pregnancy planning, preconception, STIs, maternal health, anti-conception, and other topics tailored to the group's needs.

EARLY EDUCATION FOR REAL IMPACT

'Pregnant, Yes or No' was developed as part of TNO's ongoing efforts to improve health in all stages of life. Studies show that the first 1,000 days of a child's life can have a life-long impact on his or her health and well-being. So, the decision of whether – and when – to conceive is a crucial part of ensuring that those first 1,000 days are as optimal as they can be.

Research shows that effective care for mothers and babies begins long before conception. 'Pregnancy, Yes or No' focuses fully on reproductive health at an early age. With culturally sensitive, needs-based education, young people can learn that the decision whether or not to conceive – and all of the crucial decisions and consequences that follow – can be influenced more positively. The programme gives them the tools they need to make thoughtful, well-informed decisions.

LOCAL RELEVANCE, GLOBAL IMPACT

'Pregnant, Yes or No' was implemented in the Netherlands, after evidence showed that Dutch young people were not well informed about their options, decisions and responsible actions related to pregnancy, STIs and reproductive health. TNO collaborated with the Royal Dutch Organisation of Midwives (KNOV) to

address the issue and develop the programme. It resulted in a 23% knowledge increase about preconception and STIs among Dutch participants.

After successful implementation in Dutch secondary schools, the programme was piloted in Suriname, where reproductive health and teen pregnancies are a serious concern. After implementation of the programme, approximately 80% of the students reported that they learned more about teenage pregnancy and motherhood, foetal growth, lifestyle topics and more. Around 90% of participants described the discussion groups as instructive, clear and enjoyable. Both in the Netherlands and in Suriname, participants demonstrated higher levels of understanding and knowledge retention, and 89% of the students would recommend the programme to their friends.

REACHING VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

TNO is seeking local and international partners interested in bringing the power of this effective reproductive health programme to young people in low- and middle-income countries. With support and training, healthcare workers develop excellent competencies to help young people – especially young women – make informed decisions about their reproductive health, family size and futures. The programme can help eliminate the shame often related to discussions about reproductive health and sexuality, and allow young people to understand their

options, their rights and their responsibilities.

TNO is sensitive to the religions, cultures and traditions that play a crucial role in the lives of many people in developing countries. 'Pregnant, Yes or No' can be entirely customised and adapted to cultural and religious contexts. TNO works in co-creation with relevant stakeholders to blend these contexts with the specific health needs of a community.

The availability of the open resources, such as websites, make the informative content accessible to a much wider audience of young people, even those who have not participated in the programme. TNO can help ensure effective implementation, in collaboration with local professionals and organisations. Working together with partners, TNO can provide the models for sustainable and financially feasible up-scaling, to ensure a long-lasting impact in a region.

Do you want to empower young people in a developing country to make informed decisions about their reproductive health? Contact TNO to find out how.

TNO.NL

FIRST 1,000 DAYS

First 1,000 Days aims to give children the best possible start in life, regardless of where they are born. Together with the WHO, Harvard University, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and more, this TNO initiative offers innovative solutions.

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