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# Creating awareness on sex



Volunteers handing out free condoms to visitors during the event.

**A recent talk and exhibition was the perfect opportunity to enlighten students on a subject that is often considered sensitive.**

By **PRIYA KULASAGARAN**  
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**S**EX is still a provocative word in Malaysian society, and numerous reasons have been given to avoid discussions on the topic.

But Franz Joseph von Hoffer thinks it is about time we stopped sweeping the issue under the rug.

"We can't talk about sex openly here because it's too 'sensitive' a topic, but it certainly wasn't too sensitive for ancient religious scholars, who wrote entire canons on sexuality," he said.

"Repressed sexuality tends to build up and manifests as social ills in society, so it's important to talk about it in a frank manner."

A lecturer from Help University College's (HELP) American Degree Programme, Franz added that it was unethical to restrict access to sex education.

"I'm not advocating for those under the legal age to have sex, but looking at how rampant 'baby dumping' is, it's a fact that it happens.

"To me, endangering an unborn child is a much worse crime than the act of pre-marital sex," he said.

Franz was one of the speakers at "Sex It Right", a sex education campaign organised recently by communication students from HELP.

Held at the institution's campus in Kuala Lumpur, the one-day event was a response to the recent news and debate on sex education in schools.

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"We realised that many students are not aware of sex education, so this is the perfect opportunity for us to educate and create awareness amongst them," said the event's organising chairperson Lisa Anne Santa Maria.

Kicking off the event was a mini-exhibition, which included tongue-in-cheek facts on safe sex, video screenings of the correct ways of putting on condoms, as well as a colourful wall filled with pictures of sexually transmitted diseases.

Disfigured body parts aside, the highlight of the day were the series of talks on various aspects of sex and PT Foundation representative Celeste Parins focused her talk on the spread of HIV and AIDS.

"Asia currently accounts for 15% of the total of people living with HIV in the world, but research suggests that we should expect a tsunami of new infections in the coming years.

### Right platform

"In Malaysia, we have an average of eight new HIV infections a day and there are currently 87,000 people living with the virus," she said.

Parins added that education is the best platform to help people make safer decisions to prevent the spread of the disease.

"We've even simplified the ways you can keep yourself safe to the 'ABC of preventing sexually transmitted infections' - abstinence, be faithful, and if you can't do either, use a condom," she said.

Meanwhile, ruumzNation Sdn Bhd chief executive James Chong Kar Yaw dropped by to promote the AIDSaware campaign, which aims to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS prevention.

"All you have to do is upload a message, picture or video on social networking websites such as Twitter or Facebook from now till May 16," said Chong.

"We're aiming for a total of 13,000 messages, which will all be compiled for display on a remembrance wall at the Bukit Bintang area on the AIDS Memorial Day in May."

Amusing the audience with his frank manner, gynaecologist Dr Allan Teh gave a detailed account of the human anatomy and the different methods of contraception available.

"Also, it may feel embarrassing to go to a doctor when you feel that's something going wrong 'down there', but please do so.

"To avoid such a situation in the first place, it's best if you keep yourself protected, as not all sexually-transmitted diseases are treatable," he said.

Although she only had 10 minutes to speak, Assoc Prof Dr Mary Huang Soo-Lee of UPM's Medical and Health Sciences Faculty had no problems getting her message across.

Her opening words were enough to make the audience squirm in their seats; "Looking

at these figures, I don't know what's wrong with today's young people – why aren't you protecting yourselves?"

The facts Dr Huang presented, mostly based on the Global Sex Survey 2009 carried out on 201 young Malaysians, are indeed alarming.

One in four males said that they didn't use condoms because they were not the ones who risk getting pregnant, while 20% of the females said they didn't use condoms because their partners did not want to.

Additionally, 60% of the respondents found it hard to talk about condoms before having sex for the first time.

Citing the case of the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia student who died during childbirth in her hostel last year, Dr Huang added that people needed to change their mindset to curb social ills.

"Can you imagine the fear and agony that the student must have gone through because of one mistake?

"We are all responsible for her death, because prejudice is the main reason lives are lost."



Students viewing pictures and other items on display at the exhibition.



**Franz:** Repressed sexuality tends to build up and manifests as social ills in society.