

Promoting Inclusive and Rights-Based Approaches to Sexual Health: A Collaborative Capacity-Building Project between Finland and Benin

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Introduction

Sexual health is a vital component of overall well-being, yet in many contexts it remains surrounded by stigma and silence.

In Benin, sexuality is often considered taboo both in healthcare and society at large. Sexual education is not part of the national school curriculum, resulting in limited knowledge about sexual rights, consent, and hygiene.

In maternal and reproductive health, these cultural barriers hinder both patients and professionals from addressing sexuality and intimacy. Promoting a rights-based and inclusive approach is therefore essential to build trust, ensure equity, and enhance quality of care.

Aim

The project aimed to promote inclusive, respectful, and informed approaches to sexual and reproductive health in clinical care and to strengthen the professional capacity of healthcare practitioners in Benin.

The goal was to equip midwives, physicians, and other professionals with knowledge and

practical tools to integrate sexual health into maternal care, improve hygiene practices, and reduce maternal and child mortality.

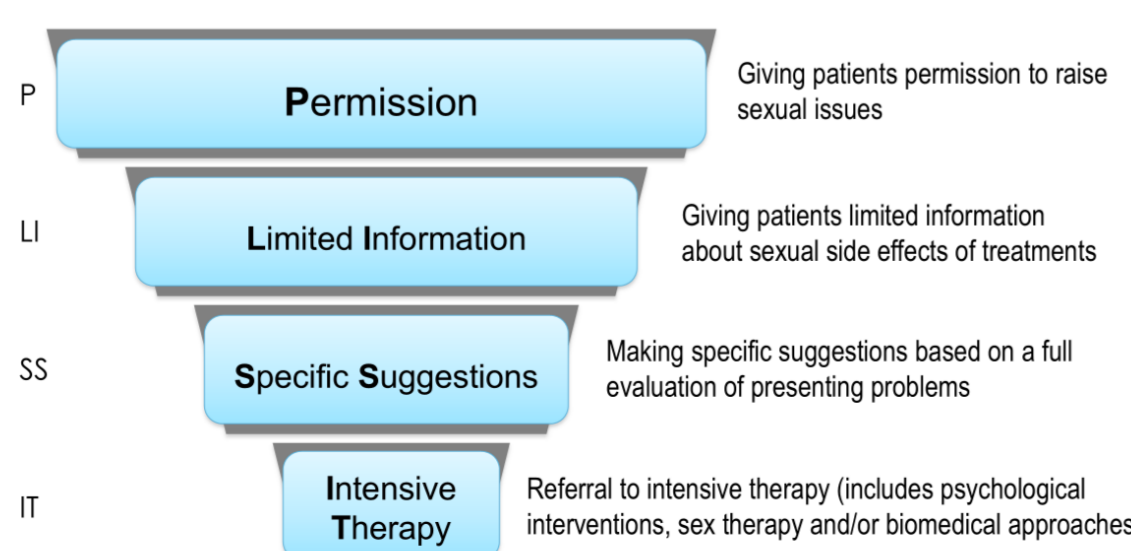
Methods

This capacity-building Mimin-project was implemented collaboratively between Finland and Benin by Finnish midwifery lecturers in partnership with local healthcare and educational institutions. The training formed part of a broader initiative to improve hygiene and maternal health. A total of 100 healthcare professionals from various fields participated. Educational sessions combined lectures, workshops, and participatory exercises addressing both basic and advanced topics—from intimate and sexual hygiene to communication about sexuality, gender identity, and rights.

The PLISSIT model was introduced as a structured tool for discussing sexual concerns

in clinical contexts. The sessions also explored sexuality through human rights and cultural lenses, emphasizing safe, respectful dialogue and self-reflection to overcome stigma and taboos.

PLISSIT Model Addressing Sexual Functioning



Results

Participants reported increased confidence in addressing sexual health issues and a stronger understanding of their connection to maternal and reproductive well-being. Many noted that prior to the training, they had received little or no formal instruction on these topics.

The program helped normalize open discussion, dispel myths, and highlight sexual health education as a preventive component of maternal and neonatal care.

Participants also emphasized the importance of introducing age-appropriate sexual

education at the primary school level to reduce stigma and promote long-term community awareness.



Conclusions

This collaborative project effectively strengthened the professional capacity of healthcare workers in Benin in maternal, newborn, sexual, and reproductive health. Addressing stigma, taboos, and knowledge gaps fostered a more open and informed approach to patient care. Covering basic areas such as intimate and sexual hygiene proved essential in supporting preventive health and preserving dignity in care.

The Mimin-project demonstrates how international partnerships can advance rights-based, inclusive, and culturally sensitive healthcare. Continued investment in such collaborations—alongside integrating sexual education into early schooling—can contribute to reducing maternal and child mortality and to normalizing sexual health as a fundamental component of overall human well-being.

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Teachers from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and the cohort from Université D'Abomey-Calavi..



Teachers from Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and the cohort from University of Parakou..