

Sex: An opportunity of a vulnerability?

A study into the sexual behaviour and well-being of European youth

Forum on Sexual Health

Brussels, 13 March 2009

Margaretha de Looze



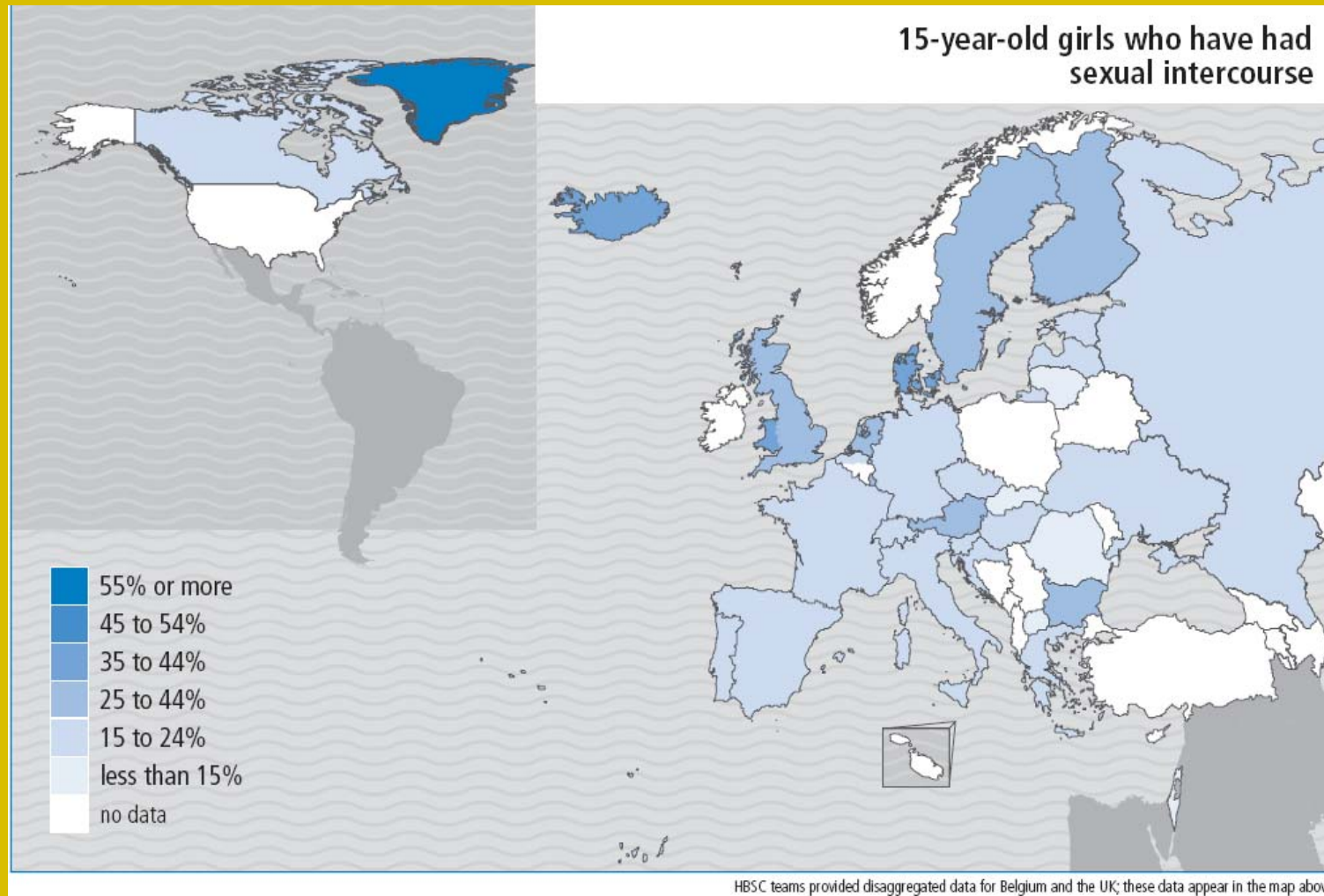
Universiteit Utrecht

The HBSC Study

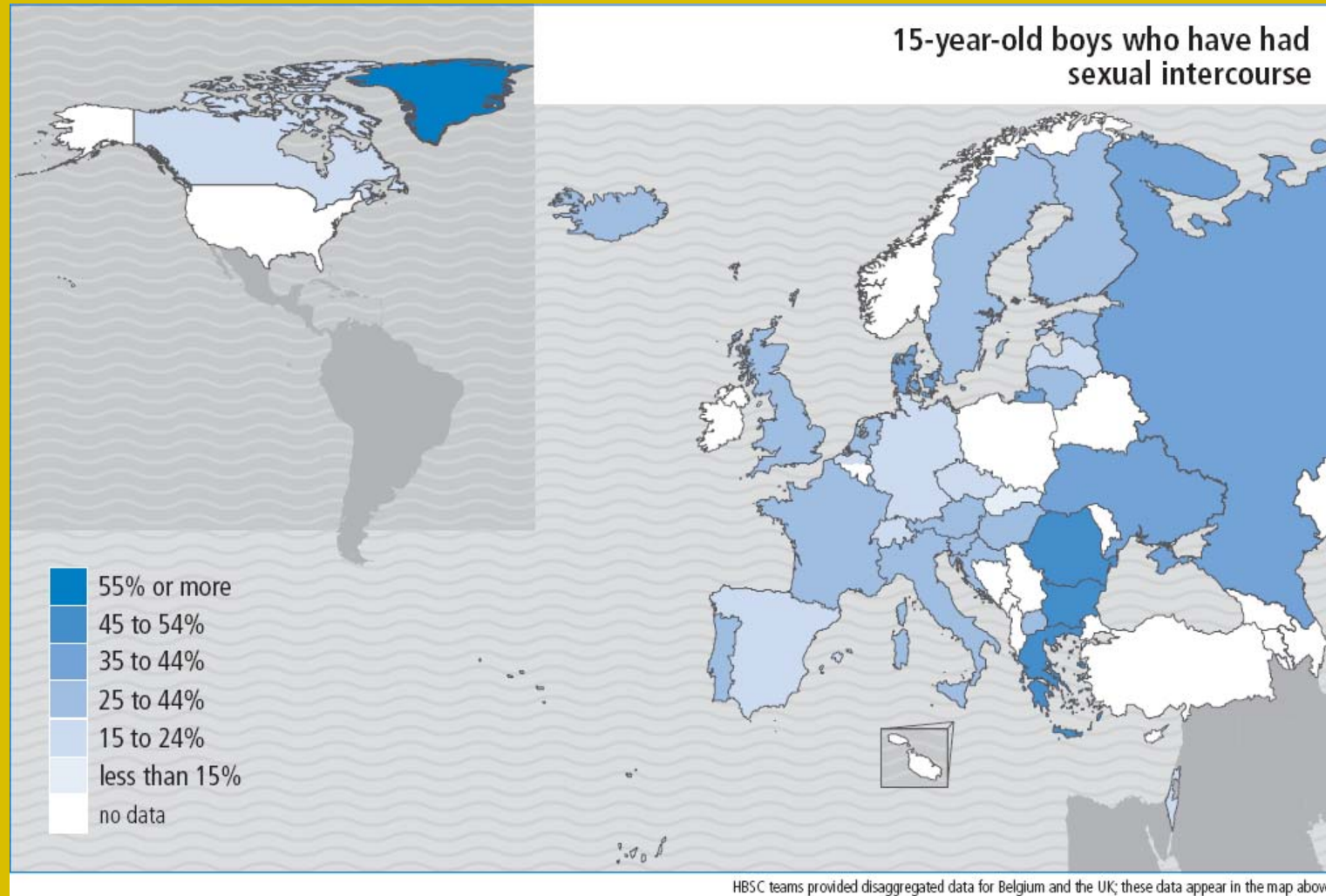
- WHO collaborative, cross-national study on health behaviours among young people (11-15 years old)
- 41 countries and regions in Europe and North America
- **H**ea**l**th **B**ehaviour in **S**chool-aged **C**hildren
 - ↓
 - Health and well-being
 - Health behaviours (incl. risk behaviours)
 - Social context of health



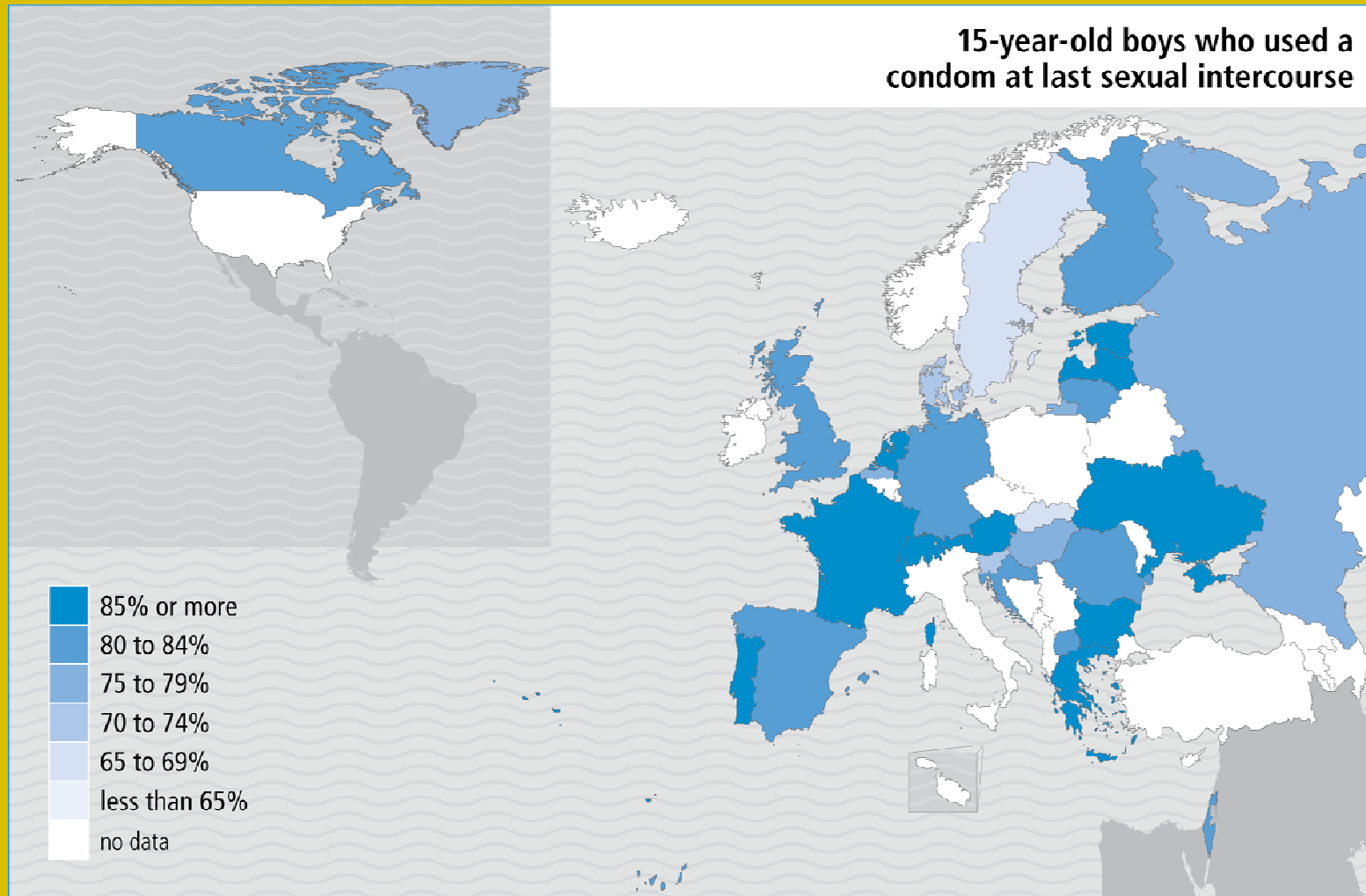
Girls aged 15 who have had sexual intercourse



Boys aged 15 who have had sexual intercourse



Condom use among 15-year old girls

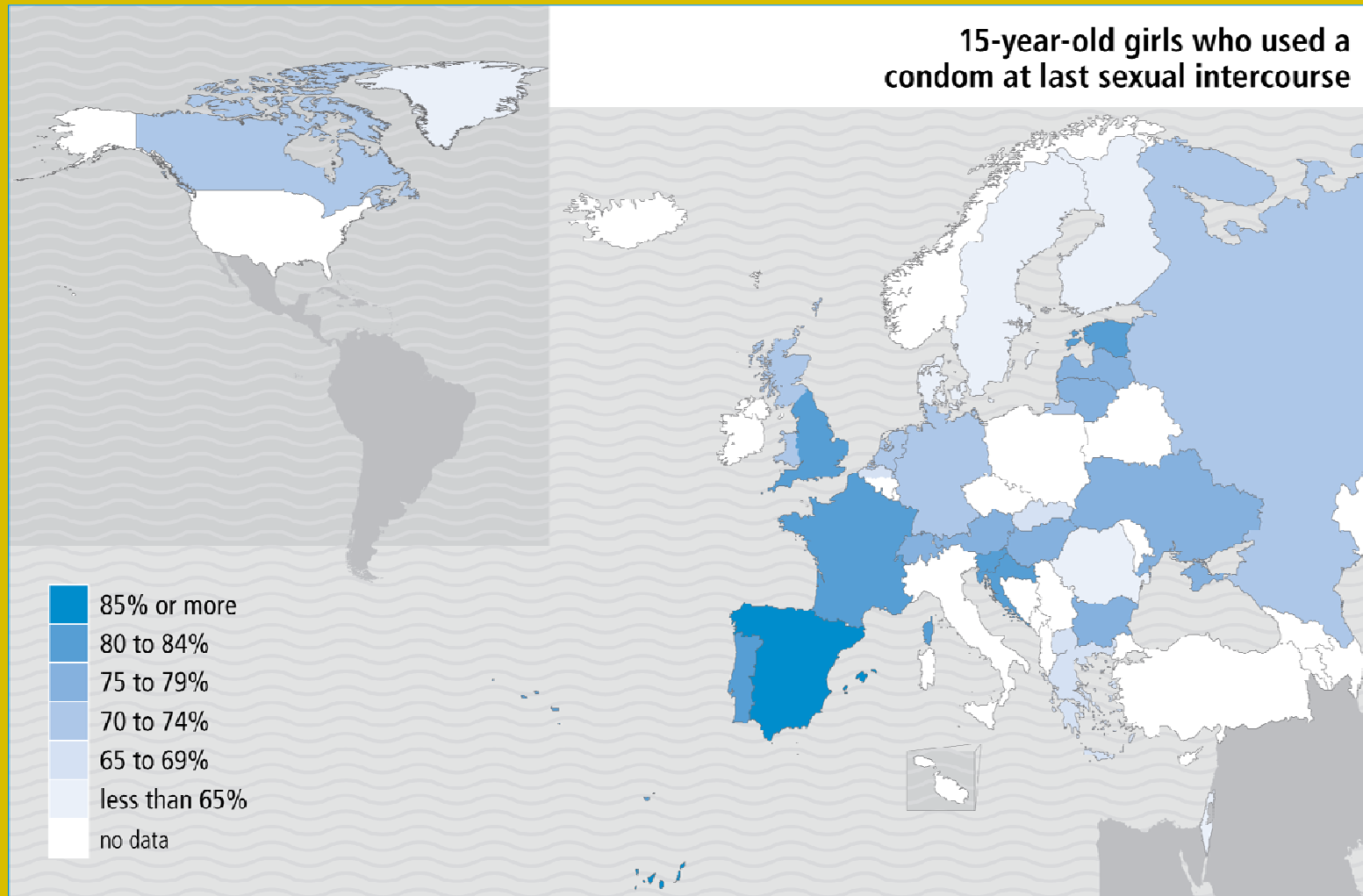


HBSC teams provided disaggregated data for Belgium and the UK; these data appear in the map above



Universiteit Utrecht

Condom use among 15-year old boys



HBSC teams provided disaggregated data for Belgium and the UK; these data appear in the map above



Sex as a Vulnerability

- Main message in research & media: Sex is DANGEROUS



Sex as an Opportunity

- Sexual health = the positive integration of the physical, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexuality
→ Part of normative development
- The development of sexuality in adolescence involves:
 - physical changes associated with puberty
 - psychological changes
 - interpersonal events

Sexual behaviour has a developmental function!

- Feeling independent, mature, time to get to know oneself, experiment, transition to adulthood, deal with emotions, happiness, fun



Sex as an Opportunity

- Motivations for sex?
 - Circumstances?
 - Subjective experience?
 - Gender differences?
- Dutch study: Sex increases feelings of happiness
 - for boys, not for girls





Steps to be taken

- More research is needed into the positive side of sexual behaviour among youth in Europe
- Policies aimed at reducing risks should distinguish more between different groups of youth



An example: Youth with a risky lifestyle



20%



Conclusion

Sex as an opportunity
Positive message
Developmental function

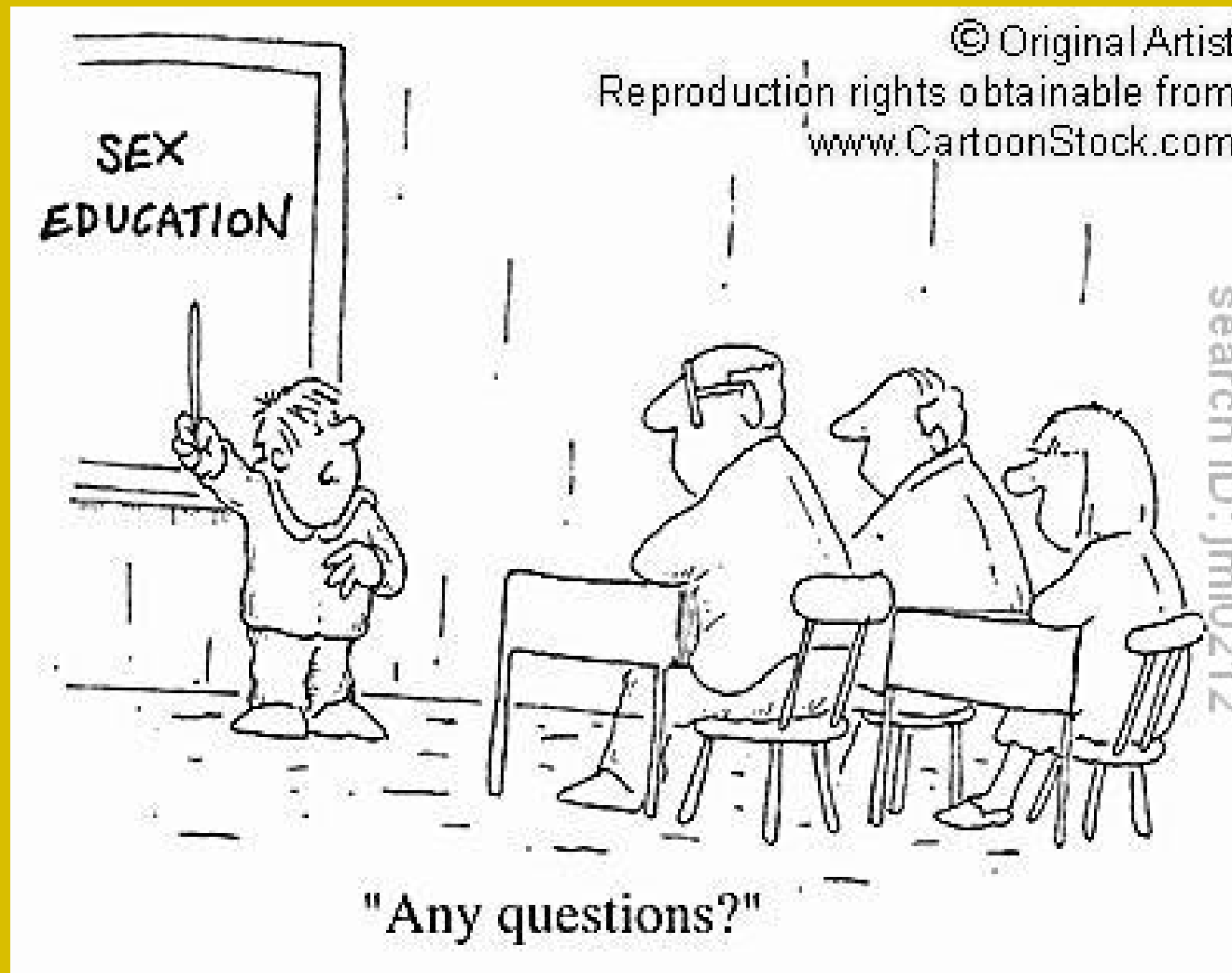
Sex as a vulnerability
Negative message
Health risks

- A more positive message is welcome
- Integrate both perspectives; create a realistic image of sexual behaviour among youth
- More research into the developmental function of sexual behaviour in adolescence
- Distinguish between different groups of youth for prevention and intervention purposes

And finally...



Consult youth themselves



This paper was produced for a meeting organized by Health & Consumer Protection DG and represents the views of its author on the subject. These views have not been adopted or in any way approved by the Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission's or Health & Consumer Protection DG's views. The European Commission does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper, nor does it accept responsibility for any use made thereof.