

Sex: An opportunity of a vulnerability?

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

Forum on Sexual Health

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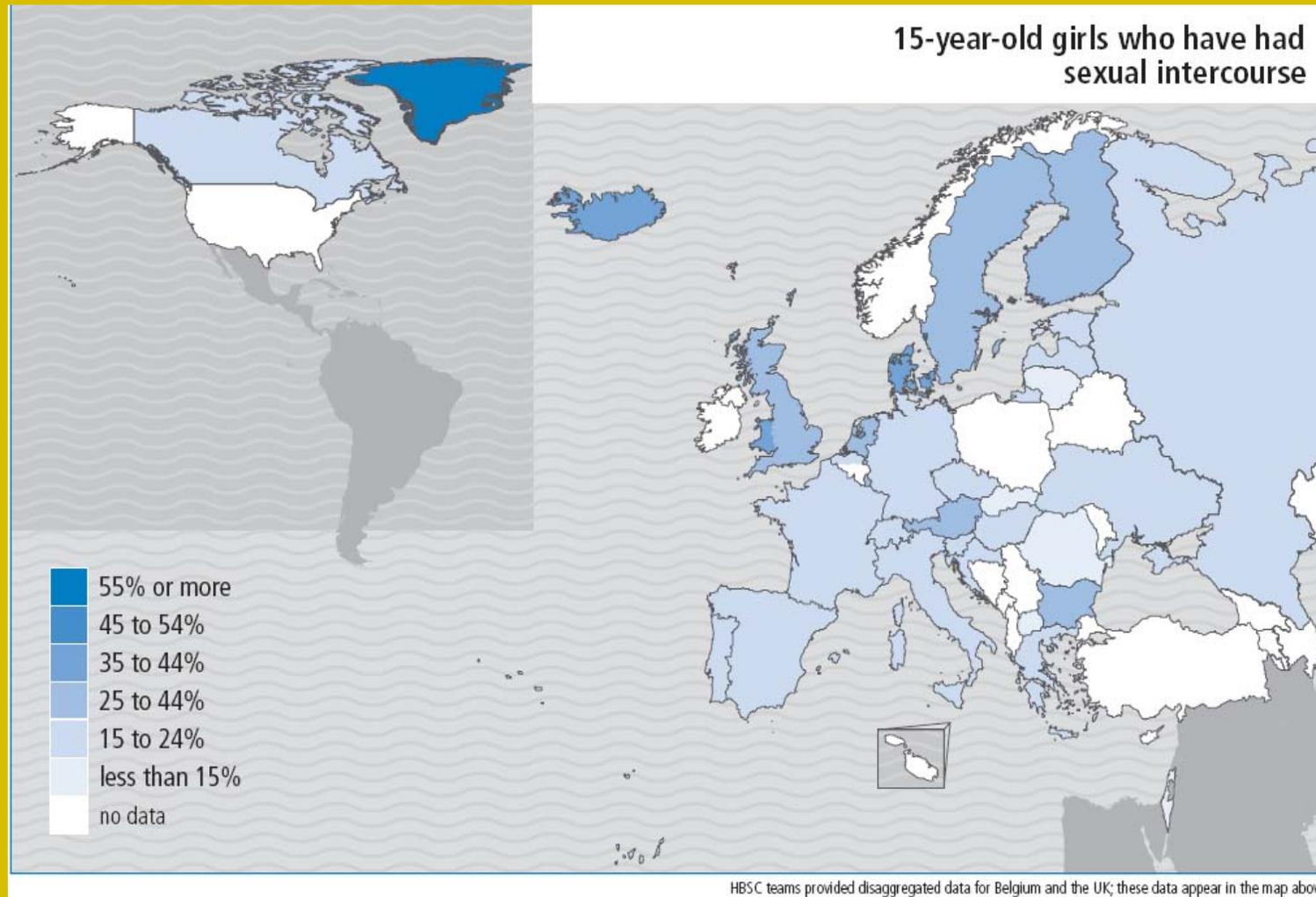
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The HBSC Study

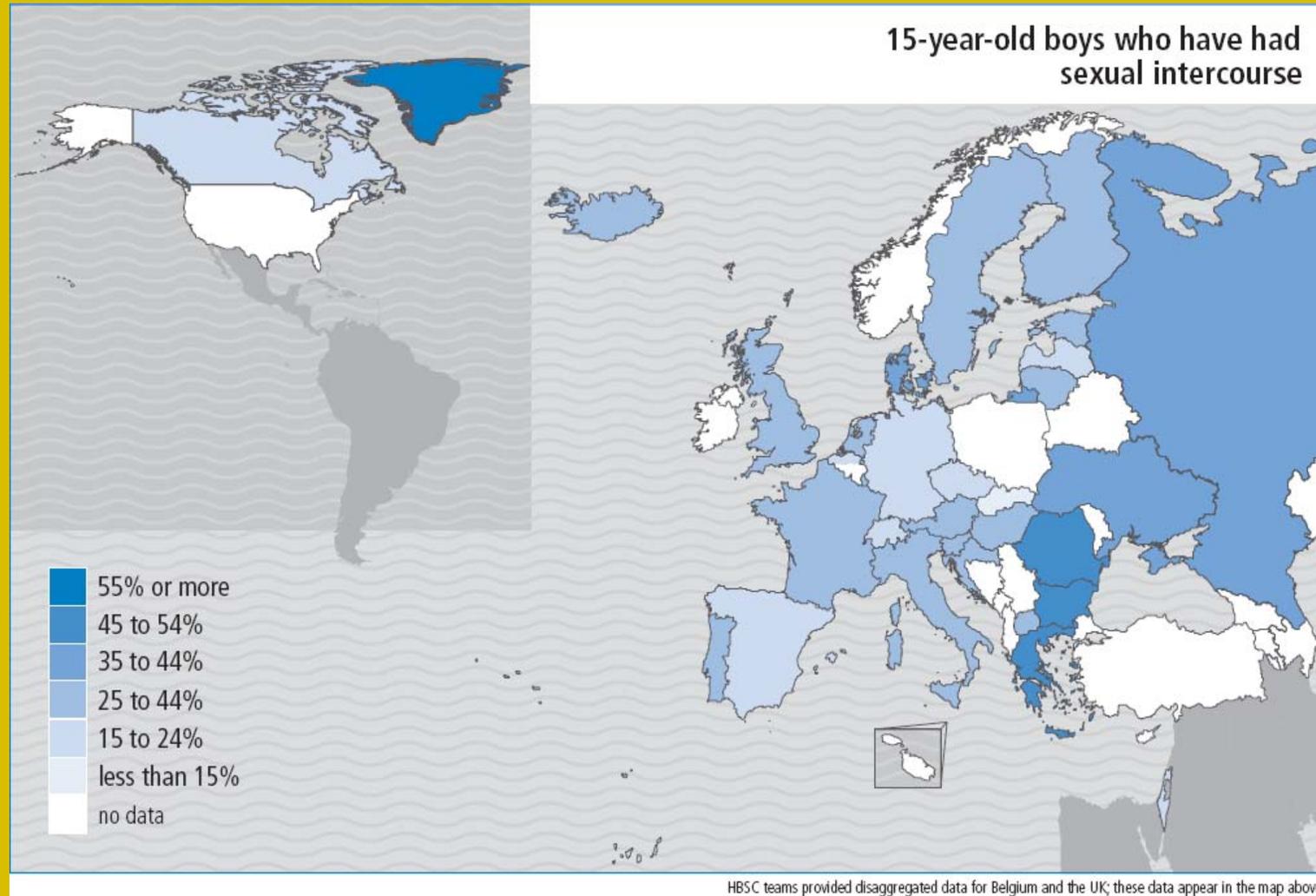
- WHO collaborative, cross-national study on health behaviours among young people (11-15 years old)
- 41 countries and regions in Europe and North America
- **H**ea**l**th **B**ehaviour in **S**chool-aged **C**hildren
 - ↓
 - Health and well-being
 - Health behaviours (incl. risk behaviours)
 - Social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



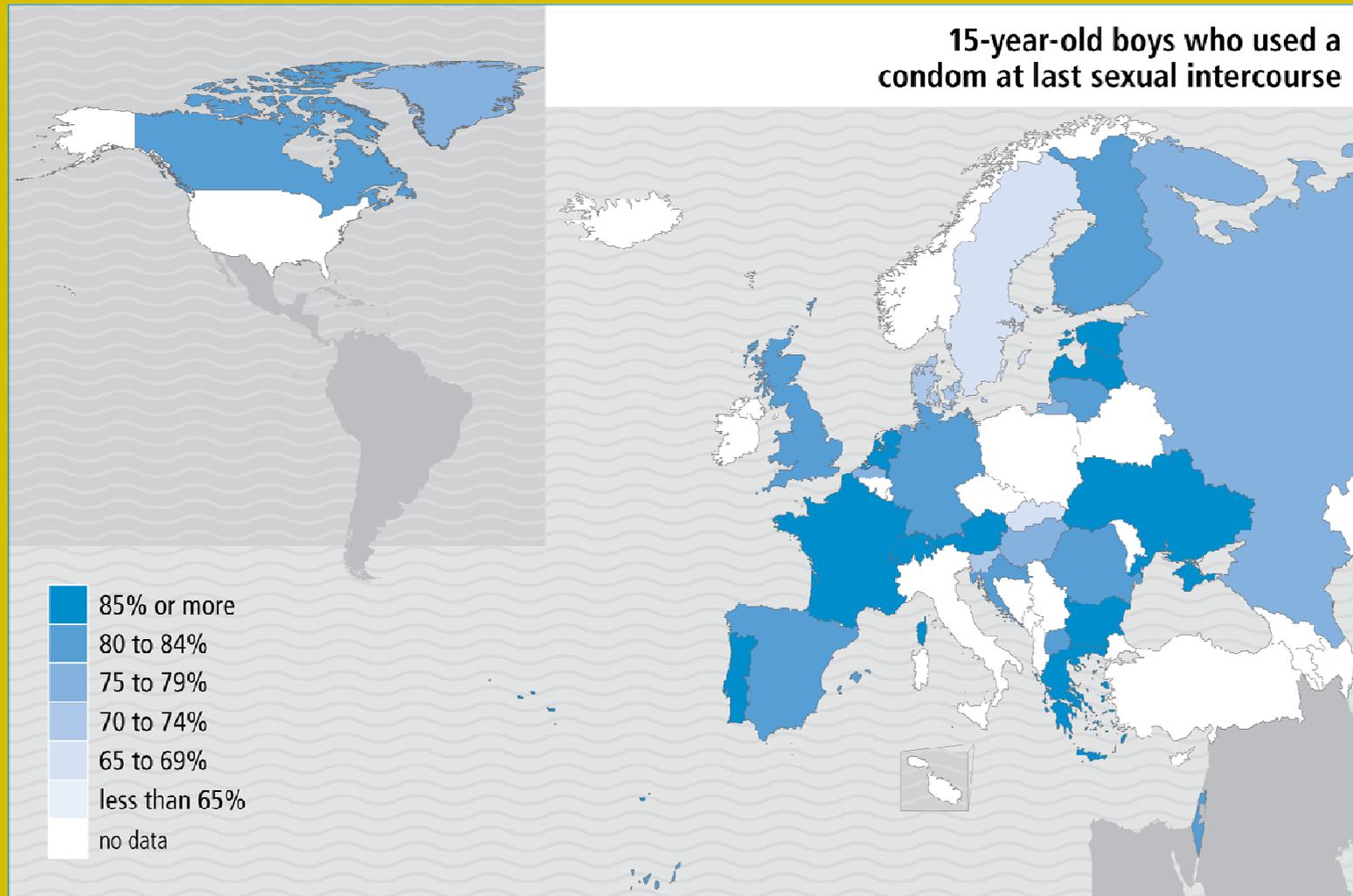
Girls aged 15 who have had sexual intercourse



Boys aged 15 who have had sexual intercourse



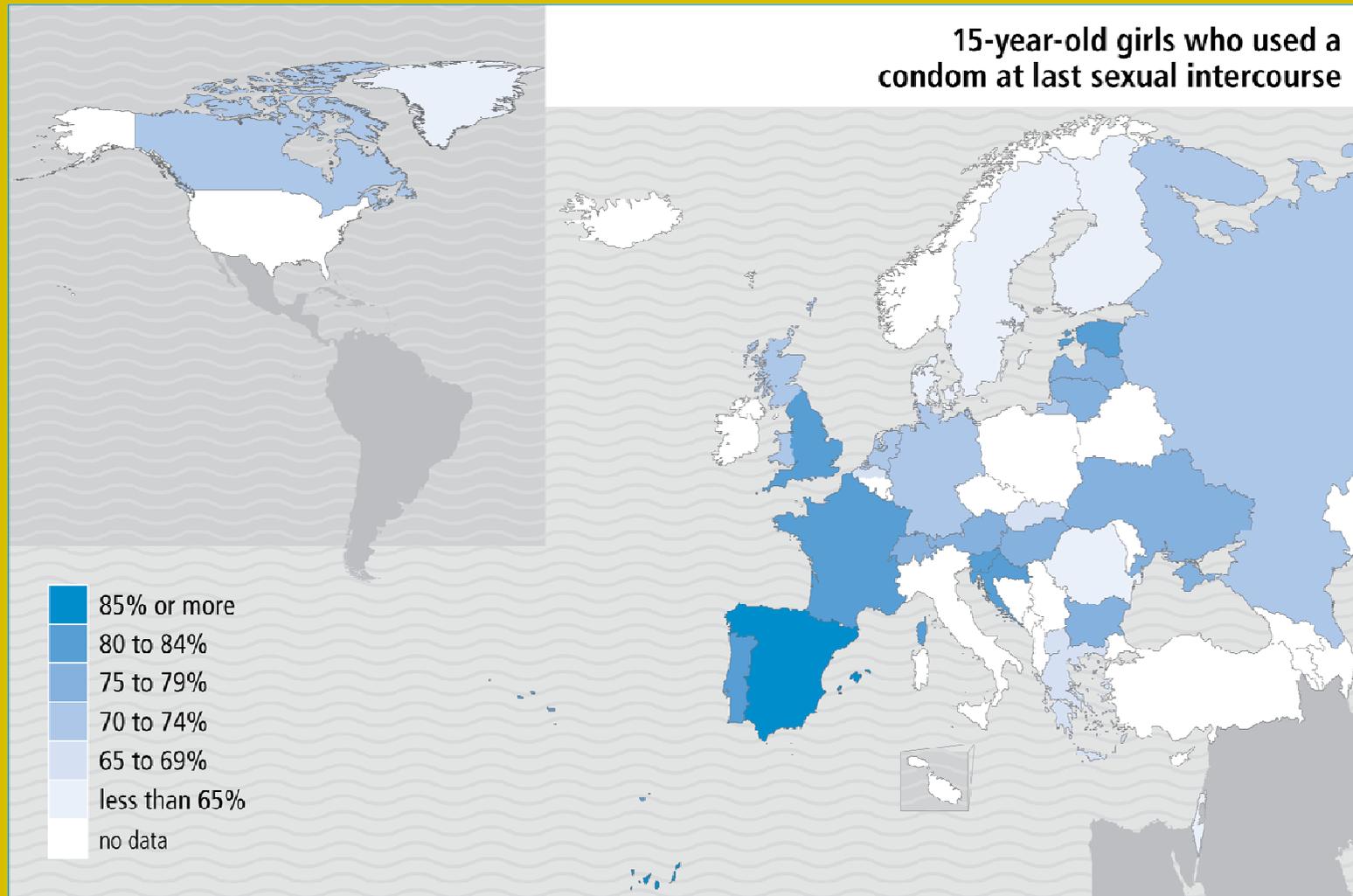
Condom use among 15-year old girls



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



Condom use among 15-year old boys



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



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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

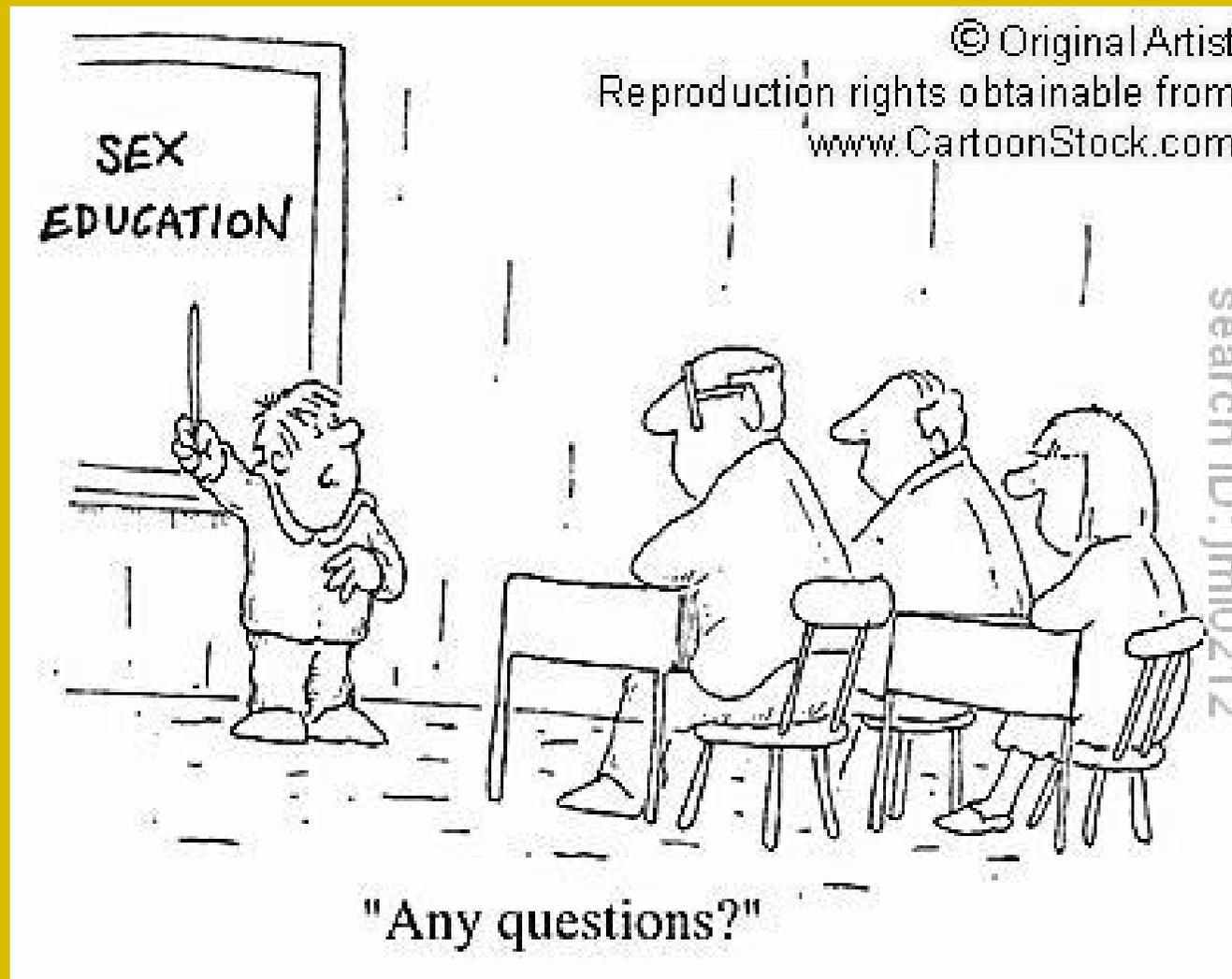
Sex as a vulnerability
Negative message
Health risks

- 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



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