



SEXUALITY, INFORMATION  
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH & RIGHTS

# Irish Family Planning Association

Quarterly Bulletin on Sexual and Reproductive Rights in Ireland

Volume 2 Number 2 June 2010

Welcome to the latest edition of the Irish Family Planning Association's newsletter

## IFPA News & Projects

- The IFPA's dance4life Team at Africa Day
- 12 Women a Day Travel to Britain for Abortions
- Launch of Act Now for 2015
- Women Deliver Conference Focus on Action

## National

- Research Update: Sex Education Not Good Enough, Say Students
- New HSE Policy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender Based Violence
- Survey: Majority of Northern Ireland's Gynaecologists Want Change to NI's Abortion Laws

## International

- California: Sound Policy Crucial in Reducing Teen Pregnancy
- IPPF Guide For Young People Living with HIV
- G-8 Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

## FOCUS On

- Medical Update on HRT, by Dr Caitriona Henchion, IFPA Medical Director

## IFPA People

- A Day in the Life: Anita Butt, IFPA Training & Education Coordinator
- IFPA in the Past: Karen Kiernan, Former IFPA Programmes Officer

## The IFPA's dance4life Team at Africa Day



*The dance4life team get the crowd going at Africa Day*

The IFPA's dance4life team took part in the highly-successful Africa Day Event in Dublin in May, which was hosted by Irish Aid. Over 12,000 people enjoyed a free, family-focused afternoon in Iveagh Gardens in Dublin to celebrate all things African. The dance4life team were there to mobilise the audience with its hip hop dance drill and passed on messages about the battle against HIV and AIDS. "dance4life participated in the Africa Day to showcase the message: Start dancing. Stop AIDS. You can take responsibility and still have fun", explained Ann Kennedy, coordinator of the dance4life programme. dance4life is an international initiative which aims to inspire, mobilise and unite young people in the battle against HIV and AIDS. The programme uses dance, music, film and workshops to help young people engage in the issue of HIV/AIDS and their own sexual health. The programme is offered to schools and youth organisations free of charge, by the IFPA. See more pictures from the event at [www.ifpa.ie](http://www.ifpa.ie)

## 12 Women a Day Travel to Britain for Abortions

IFPA has welcomed the small reduction in the number of women who travelled to England and Wales for abortion services last year. Figures released in May by the UK Department of Health show that in 2009, a total of 4,422 women providing Irish addresses had terminations in England and Wales. This represents a drop of 178 on the previous year. IFPA Chief Executive Niall Behan said: "While this trend is a step in the right direction the harsh reality behind these statistics is that every day 12 women must embark on a journey to Britain to access safe and legal abortion services. These figures are compelling evidence of the need for domestic-based abortion services in Ireland. The Government's failure to face reality means that women's and girls' rights are being denied on a daily basis. The criminalisation of abortion has little impact on abortion rates; it merely adds to the burden and stress suffered by women experiencing crisis pregnancies. Since 1980 we know that at least 142,060 women travelled to Britain for abortion services. This figure highlights the hypocrisy of Ireland's laws on abortion, which are among the most restrictive in the world." For more information see [www.ifpa.ie](http://www.ifpa.ie)

## Launch of Act Now for 2015

The IFPA is one of over 60 Irish NGOs signed up to the Act Now on 2015 initiative which aims to cement the Irish Government's commitment to spend 0.7% of GNP on overseas development aid by 2015. NGOs are calling on the Government to put in place binding interim targets for the aid budget and to meet these targets, beginning with the budget in December 2010. Launching the campaign earlier this month former Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald said: "if we are to end extreme poverty, it is vital that all countries, rich and poor alike, deliver on the promises they have made." The IFPA is joining with other Irish NGOs to call on the Irish Government to get on track and deliver its commitments on overseas aid. Even in these difficult economic times we must honour this commitment to people living in poverty; people who need our support now more than ever. For more information see [www.actnow2015.ie](http://www.actnow2015.ie)

**Act Now**  
**on 2015**  
Deliver Ireland's Aid Promise

## Women Deliver Conference Focus on Action



Senator Fiona O'Malley address Women Deliver Conference

Ireland was one of 146 countries represented at the Women Deliver 2nd Global Conference in Washington earlier this month. Delegates heard how although maternal and newborn mortality rates are dropping, the work is far from done. Every year between 350,000 and 500,000 women die from pregnancy-related causes. Almost all of these deaths (99%) occur in the developing world. President of Realizing Rights and former Irish President Mary Robinson said the international community must “take a more human rights approach to tackling maternal mortality”. At the event Senator Fiona O'Malley, Chairperson of the Irish All Party Interest Group on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Health, Population & Development, spoke about how modern contraception has been a catalyst for social change in Ireland. Other speakers at the conference included Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-Moon, Director General of the World Health Organisation Dr Margaret Chan and musician Annie Lennox. Women Deliver participants pledged to keep up pressure on finance ministers to fund efforts to fulfil Millennium Development Goal No. 5 — to reduce maternal mortality and

achieve universal access to reproductive health. An IFPA representative attended the conference as part of a delegation from International Planned Parenthood Federation member organisations. *See more at [www.womendeliver.org](http://www.womendeliver.org)*

## NATIONAL NEWS

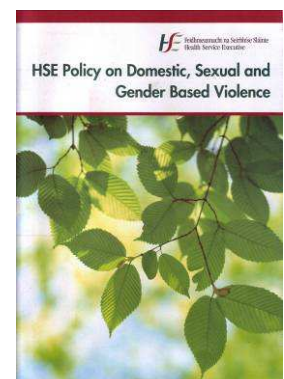
### Research Update: Sex Education Not Good Enough, Say Students



The poor implementation of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in Irish schools was highlighted in new research released in May. The study, carried out by young people from the Dáil na nÓg Council, under the guidance of a professional researcher, found that almost three-quarters (74%) of senior cycle students (5th, 6th and transition years) received no sex education in 2009. In 32% of the schools surveyed RSE is being taught as part of religion, 21% through Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE), 6% through biology and 1% through home economics. 91% of students felt that it was important or very important to learn RSE in school and 39% highlighted that RSE classes are not helpful in the way they are currently being taught. Key recommendations from the young people surveyed included mandatory teaching of RSE and better training for teachers, who according to the report “often do not take RSE seriously and are embarrassed or afraid to talk about sex, in some cases for religious reasons”. *For more information see [www.dailnanog.ie](http://www.dailnanog.ie)*

### New HSE Policy on Domestic, Sexual & Gender Based Violence

A multi-agency and cross-sectoral approach is key to addressing domestic, sexual and gender based violence, according to a newly-published HSE policy document. Recognising domestic and sexual violence as a global health issue and a leading cause of death of females aged 10-44 years, the publication sets out the work of the HSE in this area for the next three years. According to the document: “A health-focused analysis of domestic violence and/or sexual violence is crucial, not only because the consequences of such violence require a significant amount of healthcare system resources, but most importantly because the health care system is often the route through which victims seek to access supports.” The policy focuses on delivering on eight goals to address domestic and sexual violence. *See the report at [www.lenus.ie](http://www.lenus.ie)*



## Survey: Majority of Northern Ireland's Gynaecologists Want Change to NI's Abortion Laws

An academic survey of Northern Ireland's gynaecologists indicates that the majority do not support the current abortion law as it stands. Many also said they would carry out abortions under certain conditions. The research, carried out by Colin Francome, Emeritus Professor in the Sociology of Health, at Middlesex University, had a response rate of 88% of gynaecologists in Northern Ireland. 57% of respondents said they would support liberalising the current abortion law. Asked what conditions under which they would personally carry out abortions, 70% said they would be prepared in the case of foetal abnormality and 49% said they would where the woman has been raped. The survey also revealed that: 68% of NI gynaecologists agreed that abortion should be legal when the woman had been raped and 73% wanted free abortions for Northern Ireland women forced to travel overseas for the procedure.

## INTERNATIONAL

---

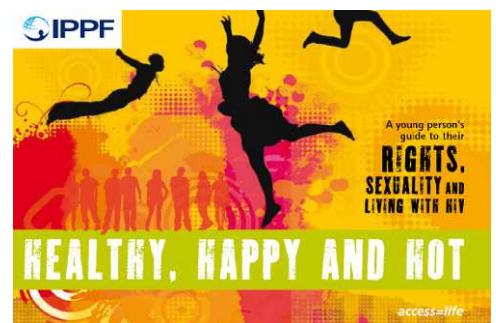
### California: Sound Policy Crucial in Reducing Teen Pregnancy



New research from the Guttmacher Institute has found that comprehensive sex education, health care services and counselling were key factors in reducing teen pregnancy in California, which in 1992 was the highest in the United States. Between 1992 and 2005 this rate declined by a dramatic 52%. Guttmacher's analysis credits this record decline to the state's aggressive and evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention efforts dating back to the 1990s. Heather Boonstra, author of *Winning Campaign: California's Concerted Effort to Reduce Its Teen Pregnancy Rate*, details how California is the only state in the US that did not accept federal government funding for abstinence-only programmes and cites the state's provision of confidential contraceptive services to low-income teens. "California's success demonstrates that policies matter — both in allotting the necessary resources and in ensuring that the right types of information and services are available," she said. *For more see [www.guttmacher.org](http://www.guttmacher.org)*

### IPPF Guide For Young People Living with HIV

International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) has recently published a guide for young people living with HIV to help them understand their rights, and live healthy, happy and sexually fulfilling lives. Young people living with HIV may feel that sex is just not an option, but this need not be the case, according to International Planned Parenthood Federation. The organisation has produced a guide called 'Healthy, Happy and Hot', which is designed to support young people living with HIV to increase sexual pleasure, improve health, and develop strong intimate relationships. It explores how human rights and sexual well-being are related and suggests strategies to help them make decisions about dating, relationships, sex and parenthood. *See more at [www.ippf.org](http://www.ippf.org)*



### G-8 Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

A multi-billion aid package was unveiled at the G8 summit earlier this month to combat infant mortality and improve maternal health. Known as the Muskoka Initiative, it aims to accelerate progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, the reduction of maternal, infant and child mortality in developing countries. Together G 8 leaders have committed five billion U.S. dollars over the next five years towards achieving these aims. Women's health leaders expressed disappointment, however, that the Muskoka Initiative failed to recognise safe abortion as a critical element of women's healthcare access or make direct reference to access to contraception. Prior to the summit the IFPA was one of 100 international women's and reproductive rights organisations to call on the G8 leaders to address family planning and abortion care in the maternal and child

health initiative. Unsafe abortion remains one of the leading causes of maternal mortality in developing nations. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), nearly 70,000 women worldwide die from unsafe abortions annually and millions more are injured, many permanently. Prior to the G8 Summit Senator Fiona O'Malley, Chairperson of the Irish All Party Interest Group on Sexual and Reproductive Rights, Health, Population & Development, attended the 6th Annual G8 Global Parliamentarians Summit in Ottawa. The meeting gathered together 100 parliamentarians from 50 countries to discuss the issue of maternal health and MDG 5. During the two day summit, parliamentarians from around the world were unanimous in their message to the G8/G20 Heads of State and Governments: "No Woman should lose her life in the act of bringing a new life into the world."

## FOCUS ON

---

### Medical Update on Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT), by Dr Caitriona Henchion, IFPA Medical Director



*Dr Caitriona Henchion, IFPA  
Medical Director*

Following well-publicised scares surrounding the use of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) in 2002, there is still a significant reluctance among doctors to prescribe such products. The scare, prompted by initial findings of the Million Women Study (MWS) and the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), centred on links between HRT and an increased risk of breast cancer, heart attacks and strokes. These two studies have progressed and subsequently went on to provide far more detailed information on the risks associated with HRT.

New guidelines on the prescribing of HRT released by the Irish Medicines Board (IMB) in April in its Drug Safety Newsletter are based on the most recent review of the products – the EU Core Summary of Product Characteristics (Core SmPC) for HRT. This is the third revision of its kind and was initiated to provide the most accurate information on the latest evidence regarding the risk of HRT in relation to breast cancer, ovarian cancer, endometrial cancer, coronary artery disease, stroke and venous thrombosis, based on the latest evidence from the WHI trial and the MWS.

According to the IMB, the Core SmPC revision states that "the risks of HRT are likely to outweigh the benefits for the majority of women above the age of 60 years and the risk is lower in women taking HRT during premature menopause".

In addition the summary, according to the IMB, "includes clearer evidence that the risk profile in women without a uterus using oestrogen-only HRT is more favourable than that associated with combined HRT".

*The IMB summarised the conclusions of the review as follows:*

- **Breast cancer:** There is uncertainty regarding the increase in the incidence of breast cancer in oestrogen-only HRT users, given that low or no risk was observed in many recent studies including WHI. The WHI trial indicated that there is a lack of increase in the risk of breast cancer in users of oestrogen-only HRT compared with combined HRT.
- **Endometrial cancer:** In the MWS, no risk was observed in users of combined sequential or continuous HRT.
- **Ovarian cancer:** There is possibly a small increase in risk in users of combined HRT.
- **Coronary artery disease:** An increase in risk is likely to be found only in combined HRT users, not in oestrogen-only HRT users. The risk increases with age.
- **Stroke:** Data from the WHI trial show the same increase in risk of stroke in users of oestrogenonly HRT as in users of combined HRT, which is independent of duration of use.
- **Venous thromboembolism:** A contra-indication of known thrombophilic disorders has been considered necessary. There is new evidence from the WHI trial on risks associated with oestrogen-only HRT, including a lower risk of VTE compared with combined HRT.

HRT is a treatment which provides excellent relief for women suffering from menopausal symptoms. It can, in the words of women themselves, "give them back their lives". Based on the IMB's latest recommendations, the IFPA would advocate its use where indicated following a careful risk assessment by doctors.

HRT prescribing has dramatically reduced in the last decade and it seems that this reduction is related to scares from the initial findings of the above mentioned studies. It is important that doctors do not write off products entirely because of initial study findings. Doctors need to keep up to date and change practices if appropriate.

*For more information see the IMB's Drug Safety Newsletter - 36th Edition (01 April 2010) available on [www.imb.ie](http://www.imb.ie)*

## A Day in the Life: Anita Butt, IFPA Training & Education Coordinator



Anita Butt, IFPA Training & Education Coordinator

The IFPA promotes the right of all people to sexual and reproductive health information and services. Key to this mission is providing training and on-going education about sexual and reproductive health to a range of groups and organisations.

At the heart of all the training programmes offered by the IFPA is the message of safe sex. We aim to provide everyone who participates in our programmes with the knowledge and tools to keep themselves and those they care about healthy sexually.

My role as the Education and Training Coordinator is to lead the wide range of training programmes that the IFPA offer. In a typical week we run on average 5 training sessions. Courses include basic sex education for teens, a programme for young people with disabilities and a course designed to help parents talk to their children about sex and relationships.

One of the programmes run by our department is the skills4life workshops, which forms one part of the dance4life programme, offered by the IFPA. This is a once-off five-hour comprehensive sexual health session which is delivered as part of the relationships and sexuality education curriculum at Irish second-level schools. Topics covered include STIs, contraception, negotiation and self esteem, human reproduction, HIV/AIDS and its global impact, prejudice & discrimination against

people with HIV and a condom demonstration.

Working with young people is very satisfying. During these sessions I am keenly aware that we are bridging the big gap between the patchy relationships and sexuality education delivered in schools and the many questions that young people have.

Through our Speakeasy project, we seek to bridge another gap. This eight-week course gives parent and caregivers the tools, knowledge and confidence to talk to children about relationships, growing up and sexuality.

A wide range of groups have participated in this programme since it was launched in 2008 – a group of parents from an Educate Together School, mothers from a local travelling community centre, parents from Irish Autism Action, and young mothers living with addictions. Regardless of age, background and knowledge of sexual health, most of the parents from these groups report increased knowledge and confidence.

Most recently a group of fathers are enrolled on this course. It's really rewarding when you hear fathers in the session saying they would like their daughters to approach them and would like to learn how to talk to their daughters about relationships and sexual health.

As well as co-ordinating and delivering training, the department deals with requests for training and resources. We are regularly approached by people who work within the wider health care sector, non-profit organisations, local schools, and the HSE for assistance.

One of our most popular resources is the IFPA contraceptive display kit, which comprises a range of contraceptive samples (including a condom demonstrator), a detailed handbook as well as information leaflets on STIs and safe sex.

I also receive regular requests about our comprehensive range of education and training resources from multilingual sexual health leaflets and contraceptive factsheets to comic-style sex education booklets for young people.

One of the most exciting projects for the department at the moment is our new disability and sexuality programme. Responding to numerous requests to provide training to support workers, parents and people with intellectual disabilities, the department has designed a new programme aimed at people with intellectual disabilities and their parents and carers. This programme will be rolled out in September.

The best part of my job is to see people who have had little or no sex education, or access to non judgmental information and support, walk away from a session, content, respected and fully informed. *For more information see [www.ifpa.ie/eng/Education-Training](http://www.ifpa.ie/eng/Education-Training)*

**IFPA in the Past: Karen Kiernan, Former IFPA Programmes Officer**



*Karen Kiernan, Former IFPA Programmes Officer and current Executive Director of One Family*

I worked as the IFPA's first Programmes Officer in the areas of advocacy and communication in the late 1990s until I became Director of One Family – a transition that would not have been possible without three years of challenging work and a strategic approach.

Working at the time with Tony O'Brien (then CEO) I learned a huge amount in my role about sexual and reproductive health issues, campaigning tools, media and the righteous anger of disenfranchised anti-choice youth.

One of the wonderful aspects of being part of the IFPA was the immediate connection to a global family through the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and I had some amazing opportunities working with them. One of the big issues was supporting sexual and reproductive health in the developing world using a rights-based approach. This work is now mainstreamed into the IFPA agenda but at the time we were only beginning to get involved in the area. Our involvement with EuroNGOs, a European coalition of NGOs working in reproductive and sexual health, meant that we were an important part of the development of a shared approach by both family planning and population organisations to the needs of developing countries.

I participated in the Irish contingent of a two week study tour to Uganda and Zambia in 2000 where we brought politicians and journalists to see first hand what the sexual and reproductive health issues were for ordinary women and men. As it is now, HIV and AIDS were the major challenge and the devastation we saw was hard to comprehend. We saw evidence of a generation of parents being lost as grandparents, particularly women, cared for large numbers of orphans on pitifully little. The ability to plan your family and to have sex safely without the risk of infection was plainly obvious and the Oireachtas All-Party Group on All Party Group on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Population and Development was formed out of this trip. The IFPA continues to serves as secretariat of this informal group.

A debate about whether rape was possible was raging in Zambia during our visit and I have fond memories of former senator Mary Henry MD taking some senior male politicians to task about their cavalier approach to the issue. We saw a clear gender divide amongst the politicians we met on this issue and of course it was only a brief ten years or so previously that we had a similar debate in Ireland.

Former MEP Mary Banotti became the UNFPA Ambassador for Ireland and we developed an information pack for use in development education, which was seen very positively by other organisations working in the field. The other area that I got to work extensively on was abortion rights. In 2000 the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution chaired by Brian Lenihan, published its Fifth Progress Report on Abortion. This report informed the establishment of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency and led to the 2001 referendum that fortunately was narrowly defeated.

Then as now the IFPA was the leading critical Irish voice in relation to the current state of laws, policies and services in relation to supporting women and couples with crisis pregnancy, particularly those who need to access abortion care. This critical voice led to several long years of regular clinic demonstrations, the occasional clinic invasion but ultimately to a much-needed cease and desist order resulting in less harassment of clients.

We introduced the first version of [www.ifpa.ie](http://www.ifpa.ie) in my time and embraced the potential of clients and members to communicate with the organisation by email.

Working with the committed and talented staff in the IFPA is an abiding memory for me and I look forward to your 50th anniversary as it seems certain that the organisation will continue to be a critical and important voice in Irish society.

***Karen Kiernan has been Executive Director of One Family since 2001. One Family is the leading provider of specialist family support services for one-parent families in Ireland, having been established as Cherish in 1972. See more at [www.onefamily.ie](http://www.onefamily.ie)***



**CODE OF CONDUCT ON  
IMAGES & MESSAGES**

*The IFPA is a signatory of the Dóchas Code of Conduct on Images & Messages  
For more see [www.dochas.ie](http://www.dochas.ie)*