

Background and Context: I was born and raised in Sicily, the southernmost Italian region with the highest incidence of absolute poverty¹. Growing up, I received no sex education in school because of Italy's failure to mandate a Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)² curriculum. Not having access to reliable information led me to fear my body and, with it, my own self. Unfortunately, my experience is a shared reality in Sicily. In Italy, sexual and reproductive health³ (SRH) is handled by "consultori" - offices comparable to Planned Parenthood. Sicily falls behind national standards, with an estimated regional trend of 1 consultorio per 27.000 inhabitants⁴. Since the few existing consultori lack economic and internal resources, they can only reach 2% of the adolescent population⁵. Given the scarce resources available through education and planned parenthood, it is then not surprising that in 2019 Sicily recorded the fourth-highest HIV incidence in the country⁶ and that cases of Syphilis nearly tripled between 2011 and 2016⁷. The scarce data available highlights abysmal public health surveillance and monitoring.

Community Partner: Founded in 2014, Maghweb is a Sicilian non-profit organization that seeks to promote social change through education and communication. The organization has substantial grassroots work, an established social media presence, and a motivated team with well-rounded experiences. Thanks to projects like "Palermo è Fimmina" ("Palermo is a Woman") and "Non è un Veleno" ("It is not Poison"), Maghweb is a reliable source of SRH information among young Sicilians. While Maghweb has attempted to raise awareness on SRH through schools, these institutions have been difficult to reach and reluctant to collaborate. When asked how the Davis Project for Peace could support their efforts, Maghweb said they hoped to train a cohort of Sicilian sex educators to fill the knowledge gap left by schools and consultori. Until now, the economic and internal capacity necessary to bring experts and trainers to Sicily had rendered the project not feasible. I hope to contribute to Maghweb's vision by taking advantage of my learnings and previous experiences to build the project. At Macalester, I have taken courses on international public health and adolescent SRH and researched the challenges Minnesotan public schools face with the implementation of CSE. As a teaching assistant, I have also planned and hosted in-class workshops on public health-related topics.

Project Proposal: This project aims to improve sexual health outcomes in Sicily by enhancing the availability of and access to SRH information among young Sicilians. It is distinct from other sex-education boot camps in two ways: first, it targets educators. By equipping 30 local youth workers and teachers with training on adolescent SRH, it aims to improve long-term access to education instead of focusing on a single cohort. Recent studies suggest that this approach can effectively help young people achieve better health outcomes and maintain healthy behaviors⁸. Second, it is designed with a culturally sensitive approach in mind. SRH programming has demonstrated improved health outcomes when complemented by community building and attention to local norms and practices⁹. Maghweb and I intend on using our contextual knowledge to design a curriculum that addresses stigmas and barriers unique to

¹ Istat. (2019). *La povertà in Italia*. https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/06/REPORT_POVERTA_2019.pdf

² "A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality" (UNESCO).

³ "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being in all matters relating to the reproductive system (UNPF).

⁴ Ministero della Salute. (2008). *Organizzazione e Attività dei Consultori Familiari Pubblici in Italia*.; Regione Siciliana. (2017). *Consultori Familiari in Sicilia - Analisi dei Dati Strutturali e di Attività*. Assessorato della Salute.

⁵ Supranote 4.

⁶ Notiziario dell'Istituto Superiore della Sanità. (2019). *Aggiornamento delle Nuove Diagnosi di Infezione da HIV e dei Casi di AIDS in Italia al 31 Dicembre 2019*.

⁷ Regione Siciliana. (2019). *Malattie Sessuali*.

⁸ Szucs, L. E., Andrzejewski, J. D., Robin, L., Telljohann, S., Pitt Barnes, S., & Hunt, P. (2021). The Health Education Teacher Instructional Competency Framework: A Conceptual Guide for Quality Instruction in School Health. *The Journal of school health*, 91(10), 774-787.

⁹ Ine Vanwesenbeeck, Ilse Flink, Miranda van Reeuwijk & Judith Westenberg (2019) Not by CSE alone... Furthering reflections on international cooperation in sex education, *Sex Education*, 19:3, 297-312, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2018.1530650

Project Title: Sicilia conSenso: Making Peace with Our Bodies by Teaching Consent.

Sicily. Alongside an intensive training seminar, the project entails sharing content on Maghweb's social media platforms. In doing so, we hope to keep communicating with our youth about their SRH needs to gain insight on how to better train the adults.

I. Implementation & Timeline¹⁰:

Activity description	Outcomes	Outputs
Project Management. (April-July 2022). The community partner and I discuss expectations/objectives and draw up specific quality standards.	Ensure that the project is implemented according to the foreseen timeline and that the budget is managed efficiently.	Performance indicators, Final Report.
Needs Assessment. (April- June 2022). Maghweb's communication experts and I design social media content (videos, infographics, posts) on SRH related topics. We deliver the content through Maghweb's Instagram channel "Palermo è Fimmina" to gather insights on which topics young people want to learn about. We will also plan 2 events to distribute educational pamphlets on SRH and talk directly to youth about their needs. We will use this knowledge to inform the development of the curriculum.	Improve young people's knowledge on SRH by providing easy-to-understand, readily available, fact-based information; enhance Maghweb's role as a trusted actor in the community.	N. 2 spot events, N. 12 contents (short videos, infographics, illustrations, short posts, etc.), N. 500 pamphlets.
Call for experts. (May 2022). Identify and contact experts (therapists and/or sex educators). Together, draw up a lesson plan for the training.	Develop a fact-based yet culturally sensitive curriculum that addresses: theoretical knowledge, context-specific stigmas/tabooes, and informal education methods and strategies.	N. 2 external experts selected; Curriculum draft.
Selection of the trainees. (May - June 2022). Publicize the training among youth workers (YWs) and school teachers in Palermo (emails, phone calls, meetings). Open call for applications and select participants.	Reach a broad network of teachers and YWs; broaden the audience for Maghweb's work and encourage future collaborations.	N. 30 selected participants
Training of trainers. (July 2022). Participants undergo a 2-day-long intensive seminar. The experts, the Maghweb team, and I deliver a series of lessons and workshops.	Equip a cohort of teachers and YWs with the knowledge and the tools necessary to educate youth on SRH.	2-day-long intensive seminar
Follow-up. (July 2022 - January 2023). Maghweb's project manager administers an online survey to participants to assess the outcomes of the training.	Monitor whether the training led to new enterprises tackling adolescent SRH. Assess strengths and weaknesses of the project.	Questionnaires

Peacebuilding & Sustainability: Just in 2021, 10% of all femicides in Italy took place in Sicily¹¹. This project hopes to contribute to long-term peace in Sicily by helping to mitigate the soaring rates of sexual coercion, gender-based violence, and intimate partner violence. We expect that more consistent access to sexual health education will lead to a decrease in dating violence and intimate partner violence, as well as promote positive attitudes toward relationships and human sexuality¹². This project is a first step to building a Sicily that is both free from violence and conducive to physical, emotional, and sexual well-being.

¹⁰ In the event of a new COVID-19 outbreak, the project can be held remotely.

¹¹ La Repubblica. (2021). *Violenza sulle Donne, in Sicilia i Casi Aumentano ma la Regione è Inerte*.

¹² Goldfarb, F. S., & Lieberman, L. D. (2021). *Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education*. The Journal of adolescent health : official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine, 68(1), 13-27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.07.036>