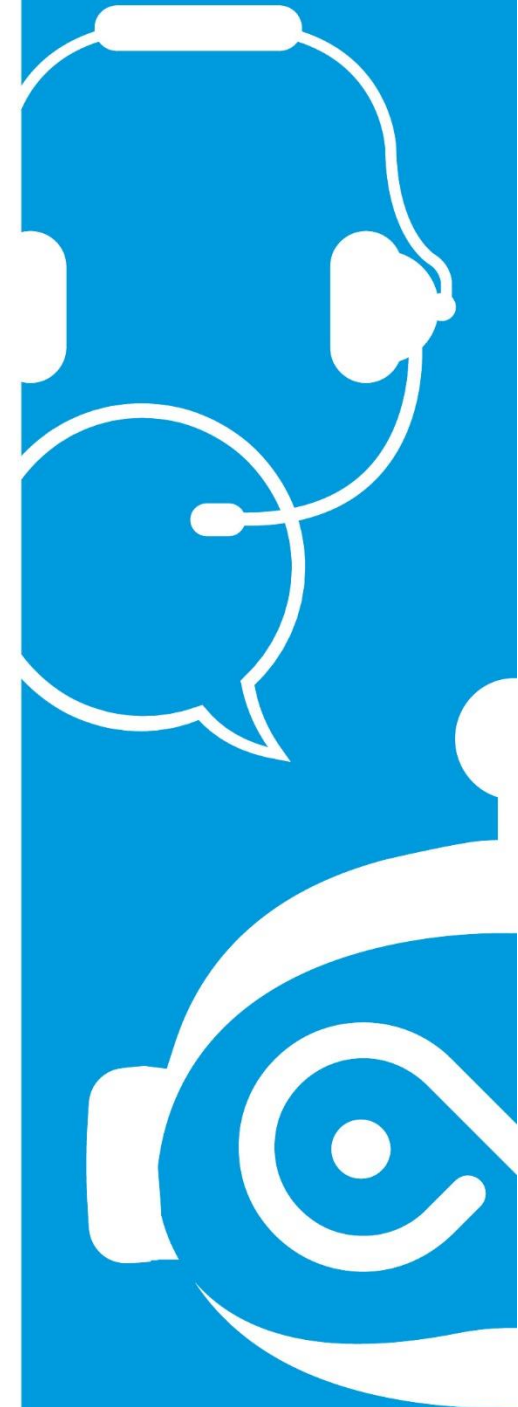




MISCONCEPTIONS & MISINFORMATION: GENDER EXPRESSION

What is it?

Misconceptions and misinformation about gender expression are **digital phenomena**, which appear in the form of perpetuating myths and misunderstandings on this topic by way of insinuations, exaggerations, biased interpretation of facts, and their distortion, as well as direct falsehoods. In the digital age, it is an especially dangerous phenomenon due to the speed and reach of disseminated information. Myths that have evolved around issues of gender expression reveal several issues related to a lack of knowledge about the subject of gender, as well as actions inconsistent with current knowledge and research in the field of sexology and SRH.



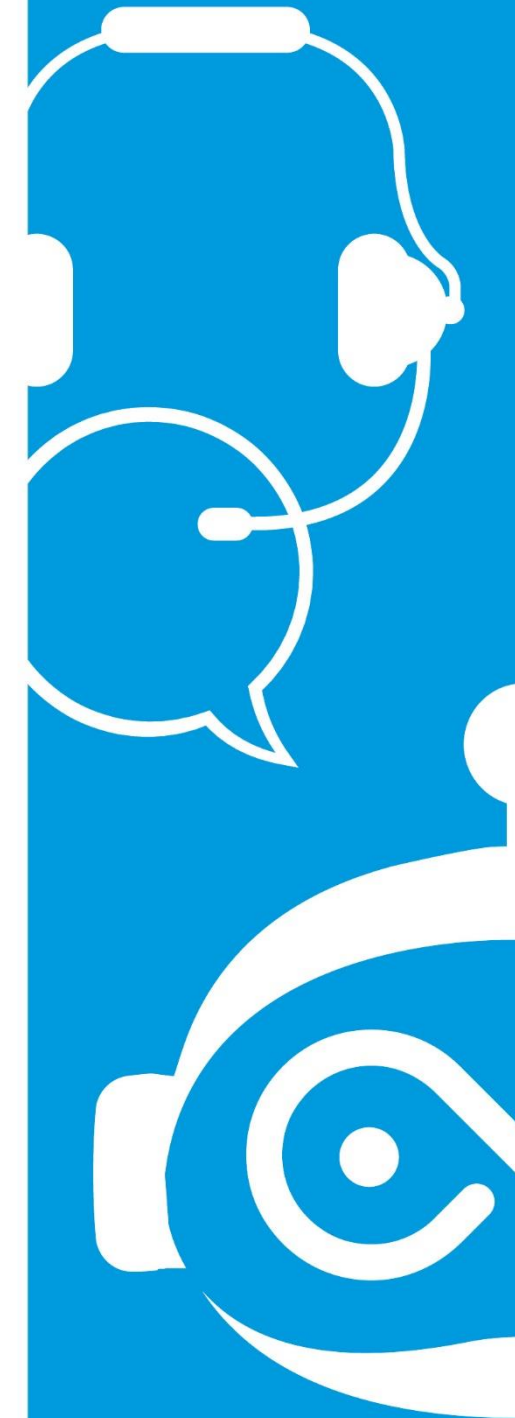
How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Misinformation gives the illusion of knowledge but places the end user in the position of not being able to verify the reliability or truthfulness of the information transmitted to them. This can be especially dangerous for young people who don't yet have enough knowledge and experience to verify the information they receive. If young people feel they need to conform to a specific stereotype they see on the internet, based on very narrow and often untrue ideals, it will not only affect their body image but also their self-confidence and overall self-esteem.

Gender stereotypes can promote unhealthy and outdated attitudes that restrict diverse self-expression. Children and young people may believe they must live in a certain way to fit into the boy of being a stereotypical "girl" or "boy", leading to making decisions in their SRH that do not align with their needs.

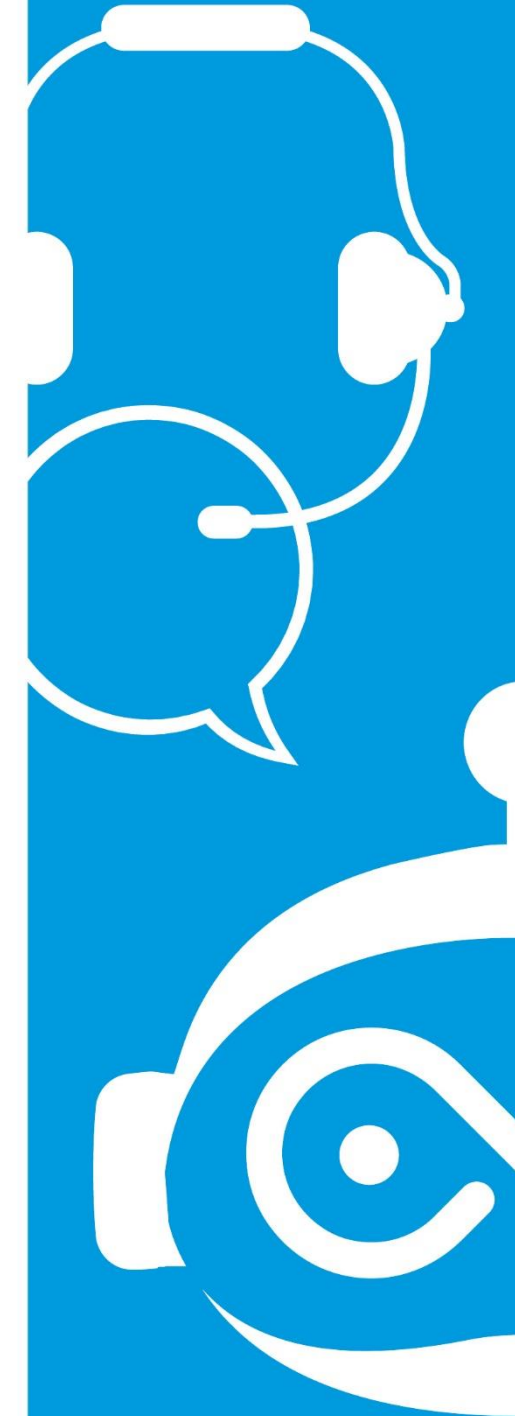
For those questioning their gender expression or sexuality, we often encounter the concept of minority stress. People who are part of a sexual/gender minority experience a unique burden within their group, stemming from the experience of social stigma. There is a likelihood that such stress will exceed their individual coping resources, resulting in mental and physical health problems, including sexual health issues.

Minority stress is not only the experience of violence or discrimination but also the constant anticipation of such experiences in the future, internal negative beliefs about oneself, and concealing one's gender identity. It becomes challenging to talk about a sense of safety and satisfaction in sexual matters



Supporting youth's sexual & reproductive health in the digital age: BEST PRACTICES

under these circumstances. This is especially dangerous for young people during adolescence and identity exploration when it comes to different facets pertaining to their gender expression, such as how they would like to present themselves to the outside world in terms of their name, wardrobe, and other matters.



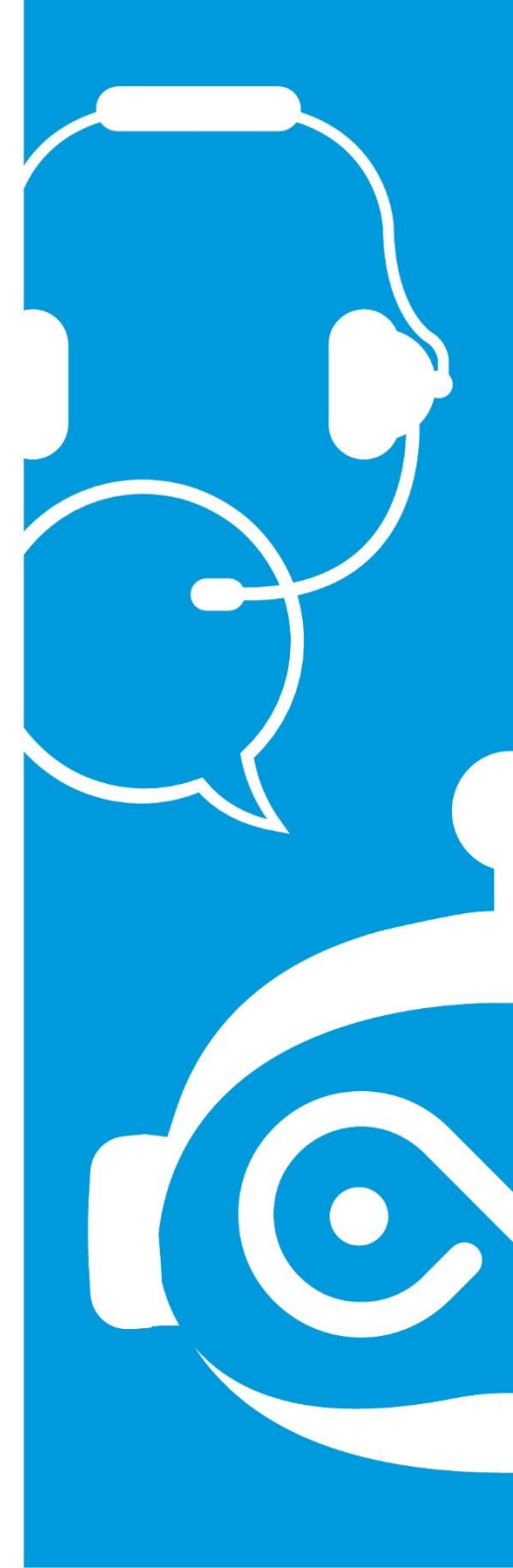
What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

- Promote practices of critical evaluation of the images presented to youth and how they can verify information. Suggest reading scientific articles, checking sources, and following current research.
- Point out to youth which tools may be used for manipulation (such as social media posts), as they are often used to disseminate misinformation.
- Be open and transparent in discussions about gender expression and discuss the impact of stereotypes promoted on the internet.
- Ensure that young people seek the opinions of experts, of which there are many on the internet.
- Emphasise the need to be an 'ally' to those who are gender minorities by responding to and supporting those who they witness being maligned or discriminated against due to their gender expression.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- Misconceptions & misinformation: LGBTQI+ issues
- The presence of 'safe spaces' online for underrepresented groups
- Misconceptions & misinformation: Reproductive health and anatomy



Further reading:

- Papadopoulos, Linda. "How to Help Your Children Respect Gender Equality Online." *Internet Matters* (blog), July 20, 2021. <https://www.internetmatters.org/hub/esafety-news/how-to-help-your-children-respect-gender-equality-online/>.
- Rothe, Claudia, and Georg McCutcheon. What will Happen if I Use my Voice? Interview by Nina Jankowicz. Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2022. <https://www.boell.de/en/2022/11/21/what-will-happen-if-i-use-my-voice>.
- Sakowski, Łukasz. "Transaktywiści Zachęcają Dzieci Do Zmiany Płci i Dezinformują Na Jej Temat." *To Tylko Teoria* (blog), August 2, 2023. <https://www.totylkoteoria.pl/transfuzja-tranzycja-dezinformacja/>.

