

Sex Education for the Youths of India: Need of the Hour

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Abstract

Sex education is an urgent need for India's youth. With the advancement of technologies and the influence of social media, the environment in which they grow has changed drastically. Access to the internet, smartphones, and peer pressure has made youngsters more vulnerable, thus making them engage in activities that are not age-appropriate. Therefore, increasing the level of knowledge among young people starting a sexually active life is essential. Sex education gives the youth with correct, age-appropriate knowledge and information about sexuality and sexual health, which is vital for their well-being and survival. It also equips them with the knowledge and information necessary to develop responsible attitudes and behavior related to sex, promoting a healthy and balanced sexual life. In the majority of the studies done in India, it has been found that the stakeholders have a positive and favorable attitude towards sex education. However, its integration into the Indian educational system remains a difficult and most neglected issue. The New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) has provided a necessary change and transformation required in the education system, garnering the title of "refreshing" and "transforming." Despite its holistic and multidisciplinary approach, it stays silent on one of the key subjects, which is sex education (Singh, 2024). The paper aims to emphasize the necessity and significance of sex education in the country, as well as the initiatives the Government of India has implemented in this area. In the present paper, the researcher also discusses sex education from the perspective of NEP 2020 and the challenges of imparting sex education in the country.

Keywords: Sex Education, NEP 2020, Youths, emphasize, transforming.

INTRODUCTION

Sex education is traditionally been considered a taboo in Indian society. Individuals deliberately refrain from engaging in open and agreeable discussions about sexuality. Sex education is limited in modern Indian society in order to maintain traditional Indian values. Many individuals hold the belief that providing sex education would not only contradict religious and moral principles, but also compromise the purity and innocence of the youth. (Sharma, 2022). A recent global report by UNESCO offered a comprehensive assessment of countries' advancements in the execution of sex education. It is astonishing and alarming to see that in the terms of rules and regulations, curriculum development, and its execution, etc., India is very much lacking comparing to several other developing and smaller nations, including Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and Sudan, among others. Intriguingly, in majority of these countries, sex education starts at the primary level of education, however in India, the concept of sex education is only initiated in secondary school. Besides, there is lack of uniform and standardized laws and policies for the development,

organization, and execution of sexuality education. Less than one-third of children worldwide approved that their school provided adequate sex education. In the Indian setting, a significant 71% of young individuals residing in 17 states, aged between 13 and 30 years, have reported that they were not taught on the topic of sexuality from either their teachers or their parents (Pandey & Rao., 2023). So, there is an urgent need to raise the levels of knowledge among the youngsters who are thriving on a sexually active life.

SEX EDUCATION

Sex education is a comprehensive phrase describing the act of providing students, with information, knowledge, and skills about human sexuality, reproductive health, relationships, and sexual behavior. (Sharma, 2023). It facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of a positive perspective towards sex and personal relationships among young individuals. It empowers individuals to protect against mistreatment and safeguard themselves against STIs and HIV/AIDS (Dhastagir, 2014). Sex education, in essence, is the process of providing individuals with knowledge and

information about sex, promoting self-acceptance and body positivity, and also focuses on the important aspects of reproduction as a fundamental part of human nature (Agarwal, 2022). It is referred as a comprehensive program that aims to develop a firm foundation for lifelong sexual health by obtaining facts and attitudes, beliefs, and values about one's identity, relationships, and intimacy. (Ismail, Shahjahan, Rao, & Kevan, 2015). UNESCO (2009) defines "sexuality education as an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sex and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information."

A quality Sex Education should include information on several areas such as puberty, menstruation, sexual abuse, sexual orientation, body image, healthy sex life etc. It helps students gain the correct information, skills and knowledge in order to provide guidance in terms of making the best decisions in relationships with oneself, partners, and community etc. It also provides values, beliefs and importance of one's well-being and health and that of others. Sex education gives better

understanding with regards to the Rights and Protections of the people in sexual related matters. In today's generation, a lot of adolescents are sexually active and it is only through Sex Education that the young ones will learn and be aware of the consequences.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The present study will be an attempt on the part of the researchers to discuss on the importance of sex Education for the youth in India, to examine the government initiatives/policies in relation to sex education, and to highlight the challenges on imparting sex education, and also providing recommendations for better implementation of sex education in India.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ON SEX EDUCATION

A study conducted by Tripathi & Shekher (2013) titled "Youth in India Ready for Sex Education? Emerging Evidence from National Surveys" claim that there is a significant disparity between the percentage of women who recognize the importance of FLE/sexuality education and those who have received any form of sexuality education. Furthermore, it is evident that women who got FLE possessed

better awareness and information regarding sexual reproductive health matters compared to their correspondence. The level of knowledge and understanding surrounding FLE is higher between the knowledgeable, affluent population and the people residing in metropolitan areas. The escalating population, evolving lifestyles, and rising prevalence of HIV/AIDS pose a significant issue. Introducing sex education is a crucial measure to equip the youth with the necessary knowledge and skills to confront these difficulties. The study emphatically asserts the need to develop suitable policies on family life education in order to address the insufficient provision of scientific knowledge and training on topics in relation to family and sexual life among youngsters. It is imperative that sex education be prioritized at the national level, ensuring that it be delivered in a manner that is both suitable and culturally respectful. Adopting a flexible and inclusive strategy that places a high value on community engagement, strong policy backing, and technical innovation is necessary to sustain CSE in India. By adopting these tactics, India can create a CSE framework that encourages young

people to have respectful, educated, and healthy attitudes about sexuality (Mallick, 2024).

A study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) titled “Effects of Sex Education on Young People’s Sexual Behavior” revealed that sex education doesn’t motivate youth to engage in sexual activity at a younger age or frequently. Conversely, the study demonstrates that sex education defers the initiation of sexual engagement, lowers youth sexual activity, and promotes safer sex for those who are currently sexually active (Sood & Suman, n.d.).

Adolescent boys and girls can benefit from comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in a number of ways. Delaying the onset of sexual activity, reducing unintended and early pregnancies and the complications they cause, reducing the number of unwanted children, lowering the risk of sexual abuse, increasing the likelihood of later education completion and marriage, reducing the need for abortion and the detrimental effects of unsafe abortion, and halting the spread of HIV are some of these advantages (Shahjahan et al., 2015).

Gagan, J. (2019) conducted a study on cyber pornography and sex education. An exploratory study, found that teenagers are very susceptible to harmful consequences of pornography and should be protected from the negative impacts of this risk. The researcher came to the conclusion that sex education is urgently needed because the current state of information about sexuality is in a very dismal state. Kar et al. (2019) in their study on Sex Education in India: Why, What, When, Where, Whom? Reveal that sex education is still poorly implemented though it was clearly seen that it is the need of the hour. There has been a major resistance on its implementation in the country and the main reasons are due to unawareness and taboos associated with discussing topics relating to sexuality openly.

IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION

Sex education covers an extensive range of issues, including consent, reproductive health, gender identity, contraception, sexual violence, and puberty. This information not only allows adolescents to make better decisions for themselves and communicate more effectively, but it also helps in self-expression and the

identification of harassment or improper behavior. Not providing this vital piece of education raises their chance of engaging in dangerous sexual activities as well as seeking untrustworthy information from unreliable sources. (Singh, 2024).

The importance and necessity of sex education can be comprehended by examining the consequences that arise from the lack of education in both the school curriculum and society at large. The absence of comprehensive sexual education can have detrimental effects rather than ones that are beneficial. It can have catastrophic effects on both individual and society levels. The harmful consequences of inadequate sex education include teenage pregnancy, unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), detrimental sexual behavior, sexual violence, diminished self-acceptance, gender-based discrimination in society, compromised sexual health, and increased maternal mortality, among numerous others.

Many girls in India lack both the awareness about menstruation and the availability of sanitary napkins and proper restroom facilities. Furthermore, compounding the

issue is their lack of awareness regarding their fundamental human rights, which prevents them from asserting their entitlement to basic necessities. Another significant concern is the maternal mortality rate (MMR), which exceeded 25,000 in India in 2018 and emerged as a main reason of fatality among girls aged between 15-19.

According to UNAIDS, about 2.5 million Indians are living with HIV (2.50 - 3.00million) with an adult prevalence of 0.2% (2023). Women aged 15 to 49 HIV prevalence is 0.2 and the same for the men as well. (UNAIDS Factsheets, 2023). In India, people aged 15 to 29 make up nearly 25% of the population, yet they account for 31% of the AIDS burden (NACO, 2016). This clearly suggests that young people are highly susceptible to HIV infection.

For these and many more various reasons, it is high time for India to encourage and promote sexuality education for the young people and also uplift the welfare of the society at large.

GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES/ POLICIES ON SEX EDUCATION

In 2006, the MHRD worked hand in hand with the National AIDS Control

Organization to create the Adolescent Education Programme. Instead of focusing solely on sex education, the manual emphasizes basic life skills and themes such as substance addiction and peer pressure. When the guidebook was published in 2007, it sparked much criticism and controversy (Chakraborty & Mishra, n.d.).

The School Health Programme, inaugurated in 2018 under AYUSHMAN BHARAT, is a collaborative drive of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and the Ministry of Human Resource and Development. This opening move is aimed at both the implementers of education and health area, and it is intended to support a holistic method to various health programs and more productive learning in the school level. According to this program, two teachers from each school, ideally one teacher who is male and one teacher who is female, would be designated as "Health and Wellness Ambassadors" and would provide weekly promotion of health and illness prevention knowledge through engaging activities. These initiatives will integrate education on health, promotion of health, prevention of disease, and improved

accessibility to health services at the school level in a systemic way. Emerging social morbidities such as injury, aggression, substance misuse, risky sexual activity, and psychological and emotional illnesses will receive more attention.

In accordance with the aforementioned programme, NCERT developed a 24-week curriculum in 2020 that included a one-hour training and activity session every day to promote the well-being of students. The training materials were also developed together by the NCERT and the Health Ministry in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals - 3 (SDG-3). Dr Harsh Vardhan has specified 11 curriculum themes as well as training materials. The themes identified are emotional well-being and mental health, growing up healthy, interpersonal relationships, gender equality, values and responsible citizenship, nutrition, health and sanitation, promotion of healthy lifestyles, prevention and management of substance abuse, safety and security against violence and injury, reproductive health and HIV prevention, and promotion of safe internet, media, and social media use. Education is the single most effective strategy for achieving social

justice and equality. The NEP 2020 envisions a just and inclusive education and learning for all. It covers every discipline under the sun, including mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, yoga, architecture, medicine, literature, sports, and many more (Singh, 2024). However, it mentions nothing about comprehensive sex education, exactly like the previous two education policies. Under the umbrella of "ethical and moral reasoning," the idea of sex education has been absorbed. The idea that sex education is not required in our society has been strengthened by this strategy. In addition to demonstrating the legislators' narrow-mindedness, ignoring and failing to address this will ultimately shape how the current generation of students views the issues of sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice. This policy's short-sightedness will lead to risky decisions and health hazards by propagating and encouraging existing taboos. "Sex education" is not specifically mentioned in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 official document. It does, however, stress the significance of a thorough and all-encompassing education that include lessons on sex and reproductive

health as part of a curriculum for overall wellbeing.

there can be significant differences in the quality and extent of sex education.

STATUS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SEX EDUCATION IN INDIA

Sex education in India is approached very differently in various states and educational institutions because of cultural, social, and political factors. While some schools have started incorporating sex education into their curricula, its application varies across the nation. The majority of sex education in schools concentrates on biology rather than the more comprehensive facets of human sexuality. While some states, schools, and Boards have taken steps to provide comprehensive sex education, others have more conventional views and are reluctant to openly discuss these topics in the classroom. Regarding sex education, the Indian government has issued recommendations for schools that place a strong emphasis on content that is both age-appropriate and scientifically correct. State-by-state variations in how these standards are applied can be substantial, though. In India, there is no set curriculum for sex education. Because of this irregularity,

CHALLENGES

India is very diverse with regard to culture, beliefs, education, and various other aspects. We are reluctant to discuss sex or sexuality because to the societal taboo surrounding the topic. We believe that conversations regarding these matters should be limited to adults. Sexuality is not a topic that we talk about either at home or at school (*Joseph, 2022*). Sex and sexuality are closely intertwined with religious and moral convictions, and many cultures create a perception of sexuality as bad in youngsters. Additionally, these communities generally hold a negative stance towards sex education. In many instances, parents and teachers lack formal orientation on sexuality, resulting in their discomfort when discussing the topic. There are numerous objections to sex education that result from misconceptions and inaccurate information. However, current studies indicate that these concerns, lack substantial evidence (*Kar et al., 2017 & Joseph, 2022*). Parents and educators also express worries about determining the

appropriate age to begin teaching sexuality education. Primarily, research on sexuality and sexual health in our country is less and we now lack a comprehensive sexuality education or sex education curriculum that is grounded in empirical data. The changing governments have displayed minimal inclination towards resolving societal concerns and progressing with sex education.

Despite its importance, sex education faces several challenges in India.

1. One of the biggest challenges is societal attitudes towards sex education, which can be conservative and taboo. In many parts of India, discussing sex and sexuality is considered immoral and inappropriate. This attitude towards sex education can lead to limited access to information and inadequate awareness about sexual and reproductive health.

2. There is limited availability of sex education in schools. Despite being included in the curriculum in 2005 by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), sex education is still controversial and has not always been implemented consistently. Comprehensive sex education is not offered

in many schools, and teachers might not have the tools and expertise needed for teaching it.

3. There is lack of engagement with parents and communities. Adolescent ideas on sex and sexuality in India are greatly influenced by their parents and communities. Parents might not know enough to properly address sex education with their kids or feel awkward doing so. Strong community opposition to sex education can be dangerous because it can delay the adoption of laws and policies pertaining to gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights, which can especially affect women and girls. Teenagers may become confused as a result of this lack of involvement and receive conflicting information regarding sexual and reproductive health.

4. Another challenge is the inability of the Government to introduce Sex Education as a separate subject in the school curriculum due to various factors such cultural, religious and geographical factors.

5. There is a difficulty in introducing a uniform curriculum on sex education in India because of its diversity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Government should organize more awareness and sensitization programmes for the students, teachers and community on the need and importance of sex education.
- 2) A comprehensive sex education should be introduced through the school curriculum and provide proper training programs for teachers.
- 3) Government should see that sex education is imparted as a separate subject in the school curriculum.
- 4) Apart from introducing sex education in schools, Government should also take the responsibility of creating awareness among parents about their responsibility in providing sex education at home.
- 5) Sex education should focus on issues like HIV/AIDS education, sexual abuse, pre-marital sex, positive body image, sexual orientation and other areas that are important and necessary for the youths of the present day.
6. A state wise curriculum should be designed in such a way that it caters to the needs of the students.

CONCLUSION

It is reasonable to conclude that India still has a long way to go in this area, keeping in mind violations occurring through the digital channels as well. Given that sex education breaches also occur through digital channels, it is reasonable to conclude that India still lags behind in this area. Indeed, in a nation like India, which is subject to numerous sociocultural constraints, a total and abrupt change is unlikely. However, in order to implement a sex/sexuality education program, the Indian educational system must create a thorough and considerate plan of action that takes into account the sentiments of the people (Chakraborty & Mishra, n.d.). The curriculum should equip the children with the knowledge and abilities that they need to make better choices and decisions, communicate and interact with others in the ground of sexual belief and practice. They should be informed about the legal alternatives open to them in difficult situations, the agencies that work for the betterment of young people, their duties in safety and protection, and their right to welfare as a relationship partner. Additionally, it should also provide the

knowledge and strategies for identifying and dealing with violent partners. As a result, teaching the aforementioned will not only provide thorough sex education but also aid in reducing self-harm and fostering people's mental, social, and spiritual well-being.

For the most of people in their adolescent years, sex education is a major source of empowerment. It allows them to speak up for their individualizing qualities and identify with themselves. Teenagers' mental health is significantly impacted by sex education as well. It's crucial to acknowledge their feelings and have a conversation about them. It is the duty of the nation to provide its young people with proper education and chances to develop their personalities, both academically and otherwise.

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