



IS THERE MORE TO SEXUALITY EDUCATION THAN AVOIDANCE OF HIV AND PREGNANCY?

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Abstract

Objectives

- To probe and locate the position of Sexuality Education in our Indian Education System.
- To explore what all is included in the curriculum, under Sexuality Education and how is this exceedingly important concept disseminated to the youth.
- An attempt to map the journey of sexuality as a human reality in Indian Education.

Method

Review of related literature covering up documents issued by NACO, NCERT and other leading agencies w.r.t. Sex Education or Sexuality Education or Adolescent Education.

Outcomes

The study clearly demonstrated the myopic vision of government and educational agencies w.r.t sexuality as major emphasis is on reproductive system, how to avoid adolescence pregnancy, facts about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A cursory mention of myths and misconceptions, gender roles, substance abuse and reproductive and sexual health can be found. A complete ignorance to sexual orientations and gender roles challenging heteronormativity, child sexual abuse, gender neutral rapes, and socio-emotional journey of an adolescent from childhood are clearly evident.

Implications

Suggestions and implications can be brought out for government, educational agencies, teachers and parents to give up instructional pedagogy and include many such unmentioned unheard voices.

Keywords: Sexuality Education, HIV/AIDS, Sexual health, Abuse.

Prevailing Nomenclatures Intertwining Education and Sexuality

There is a vast variety of nomenclatures used across the globe exemplifying the relationship between education and sexuality and hence linking the two together. Some of the most commonly used ones are Population Education, Sex Education, Family Life Education, Adolescence Education, Reproductive Health Education, AIDS Education, Abstinence Only Programme, Puberty Education etc. But the nomenclature that the authors of this article are working with is Sexuality Education.

The working definition of sexuality given by WHO (2006a) is:

‘...a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all of these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.’

After deep analysis of all the above mentioned nomenclatures, authors decided upon Sexuality Education due to the wide scope and areas covered under the term 'sexuality'. All other prevailing nomenclatures had myopic vision and were restricted to one or the other key themes, but did not cover the entire arena of Sexuality.

According to Lal (2014), ‘Sexuality Education is not about teaching children how to have sex or promote use of condoms among teenagers. It is about implementing a well-researched, age appropriate, culture sensitive, life skill based educational framework that will empower and enable our children to safeguard and defend themselves against sexual vices of the society and make informed judgment’(Lal, 2014).

Tracing the History of Sexuality Education in India

India pioneered the use of sexuality education through art and literature. About 2000 years ago, Vatsayayana wrote his research based treatise 'Kamasutra'. Its content is not merely 'sexuality' but philosophy and spirituality too. Kamasutra remained the basis of sex education till the Ritikala (1600 A.D. to 1850 A.D.) in Hindi Literature. In this period, a section of society was dominated by women who used to provide sex education. For centuries artists, have painted and sculpted



Kamasutra on paper and walls. Khajuraho, Ajanta, Ellora, and Konark provide evidence for this. Our past mirrors openness in collating sex knowledge and imparting sex education whereas our present has fallen prey to shallow mindedness. Sex education got recognition in the 1970s when people started visiting hospitals for problems like unwanted pregnancies, incompatible marriages, and dissatisfaction with sex. Its importance was further recognised with the outbreak of AIDS and its incurable nature, it gave a new sense of urgency to 'appropriate sex education' at proper life stage.

Table-1, Developments in the Area of Sexuality Education

1921	Curriculum for 'Sexual Hygiene' was rejected by the education board (Shankar and Shankar, 1978).
1991	More than 3 lakh people in 150 countries were found to be infected with AIDS, Indians were the largest in number (UNESCO, 1991).
1992	The Indian Science Congress recommended 'introduction of sex education in schools'.
1993	NCERT's national seminar on Adolescence Education: Three components of AE for the school curriculum were identified viz. Process of growing up, HIV/AIDS and Drug Abuse.
1994	The international conference on Population and Development, Programme of Action highlighted issue of 'reproductive health'.
1996	'Adolescence Education' was based on the report of national seminar organised by NCERT under National Population Education Programme.
2000	National Population Policy identified adolescents as underserved population group.
2000	Population and Adolescence Education: A Training Package prepared by CBSE.
2001	The National AIDS Prevention and Control Policy emphasised 'HIV/AIDS education be made more specific to adolescents'.
2002	The National Health Policy underlined 'the need for Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) to be integrated into school health program'.
2003	The National Youth Policy emphasised 'the need for health information and services for improving quality of life among the youth'.
2003	The X Five Year Plan (2003-2007) recognised AE as an important 'school education programme'.
2003	An NGO Nari Raksha Samiti filled Public Interest Litigation and acquiesced that 'sex education in school curricula could play a role in checking the rise in rape cases' and suggested making sex education in schools compulsory.
2005	Supreme Court pronounced the judgment that 'sex education in schools cannot be brought under the ambit of fundamental rights by making it part of the right to education'.
2005	The Union Human Resources Development (HRD) Ministry launched in collaboration with NACO, an educational programme known as the Adolescence Education Programme (AEP).
2009	A parliamentary committee on petitions rejected the new education program proposed by the Ministry of HRD.

Need of Sexuality Education in the Indian Context

"..... The sex education that I stand for must have for its object the conquest and sublimation of the sex passion...."
(Mahatma Gandhi quoted in Parliamentary Committee Report, 2009)

The above mentioned quote was used by 'The 2009 Parliamentary Committee Report' to justify that sex education goes 'against the ethos of our society and would uproot the cultural values that we've cherished since the Vedic Age'. The report further suggested to totally injunct Sexuality Education from school curricula and substitute it with education on cultural heritage, morality and yoga.



The committee report overlooked the reality of present day children who are growing up in a highly globalised and technologically reformist society where online media comprises boundless autonomy. Youth increasingly find the western ways of living more alluring. They are increasingly becoming sexually active and are exposed to host of risk factors.

The following facts will show the graveness of this issue:

- As per government of India Census (2011), ‘every fifth person in India is an adolescent (10-19years) and every third is a young person (10-24years)’ (Census 2011). The World Population Prospects-The 2012 Revision by UN (2013) reports that India has world’s second largest adolescent population (10-19years), that is, about 236.5 million.
- A study conducted by Shashikumar in Pune schools report that ‘about 30.08% of boys and 17.18% of girls reported having had sexual contact’ (Shashikumar et.al, 2012).
- Raj and Dougal (2014) state that ‘27.5 million women in India are affected by rape, of which 24% are adolescent girls. Only 1 % of all rapes are reported to find place in national statistics’ (Raj and Dougal, 2014).
- As per Trafficking in Persons Report 2013, ‘more than 200,000 young women and children fall victims to sex trafficking in India every year and are pushed in to a sex industry which constitute roughly half of the world’s 28 million sex slaves’ (Trafficking in Persons Report, 2013).
- UNICEF (2010) reports that child marriage is rampant in the country, ‘47% of girls are forced to be sexually active before the age of 18 years’.
- In our country, 40% girls in the age group of 15-19 years are married. 27 million children are born to mothers who are less than 19 years of age (Panikar and Lalita, 1997).
- A study commissioned by the Indian Ministry of Women and Children Development and carried out by UNICEF and Prayas revealed that ‘53% of children between the ages of 5 and 12 have been sexually abused. Most often this abuse was perpetrated by parents, legal guardians or close members of the family. Further, the study disturbingly notes that more than half of all cases of sexual abuse and rape go unreported’.
- A study of data from the telephone helpline run by TARASHI, an NGO in Delhi, reveals that most of the males and the females who call do not have even basic knowledge about sexuality and they suffer from all sorts of misunderstandings and myths (TARASHI, 1999).

These statistics provide a concrete ground to counter argue the sham arguments resisting sexuality education.

Current Positioning of Sexuality Education in Indian Curriculum

Education aims at autonomy and the greatest possible degree of informed, responsible choice. Sexuality Education should enable people to be aware of the full range of possible sexual behavior and values, so that they can meaningfully choose how they themselves will behave. However, sexual needs can never be considered in isolation, hence a ‘sexually educated’ person must logically be one who understands how to resolve the conflicts between needs and others, who is able to understand and take into account the need of other people. Therefore, moral, cultural, social, psychological factors must be a part of sexual autonomy. ‘Sexuality Education must aim at fostering the attitude and insight into the sexual feelings and needs of people involved’ (Rogers, 1974). It must also aim at teaching people how to communicate about their sexual feelings in scientific and appropriate vocabulary. It must aim at getting people to the stage of forming their own moral principles and not just adopting principles of others, as that would make them less autonomous and foster people’s ability to be alert, sensitive to situations where they ought to stop and have confidence in their own judgments by teaching to an appropriate level, facts about human biology, intercourse, conception, venereal diseases and adopting a completely positive approach to Sexuality Education, instead of grudgingly throwing a few tidbits of information in an atmosphere of moral gloom in a country where discussion of sexual culture has an almost ritualistic nature in their invocations and practice that lie between the instructional mode of the Kama Sutra and Gandhian efforts to erase desire.

It is important here to understand the different struggles and comparison of Comprehensive Sex Education versus Abstinence Only Curriculum in context of Sexuality Education. Former provides the right knowledge about the different aspects of human development, relations, individual skills, sexual behaviours, health, society, culture and many for such aspects to be discussed further. Whereas the latter advocates the passing on of the basic ethical values of the society, unmarried youth must be told the right decision for the sexual behavior will be not to become active or instructional processes of reproduction and avoidance of Sexually transmitted diseases to the youth through ‘Sex Education’.

Analyzing the journey of Sexuality Education in Indian context reveals the importance given to Abstinence Only Curriculum in the initial three decades of the introduction of the concept. It is very recent that a slight shift towards the Comprehensive Sexuality Education can be witnessed in the documentation and materials being developed by national level agencies. Although implication and successful transaction of such content still remains a far-fetched dream.

Since the beginning of the International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo, 1994 and the Beijing Conference on Women and Development, 1995, elaborate discussions were made on population, development, sexuality,



HIV/AIDS and gender related issues which brought forth worldwide support and concern to address specifically the adolescent issues and needs. Education in human sexuality which had from the very beginning faced strong opposition from all spheres of the Indian society, including Educational agencies, parents, teachers and state was finally done away by HIV in 90s.

The process of including Sexuality Education Programmes and later known as Adolescent Education Programmes by national level educational institutes of India such as CBSE, NCERT, SCERTs of many states in collaboration with other organizations like NACO, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA for MHRD with UGC and many other governmental and non-governmental initiatives gave birth to curriculum and basic materials which laid complete emphasis and revolved around informing students about the process of reproduction, disadvantages of early pregnancy, how to avoid adolescence pregnancy, contraceptives, sexual abuses and their avoidance, facts about HIV/AIDS, avoidance of sexually transmitted diseases. A cursory mention of myths and misconceptions, gender roles, substance abuse and reproductive and sexual health can be found.

Quality transaction of the above mentioned issues, training of teachers and even after training the embarrassment that they face while discussing issues related to sexuality, planning and implementation of the prepared material is not rested upon any one body are some of the grass root level hardships faced by any such initiative taken.

Myopic Vision of the Current Curriculum

It is essential to apprehend education concerning sexuality as a phase of character education, or the education of personality-of the whole child. This broad conception is made necessary because of the very conditions which have forced the schools to give thought to such education. The education contemplated is thus a social and a socializing process. Both in its operations and in its result, it reaches far beyond the boundaries of the person. It is education in both mental hygiene and social hygiene. According to Gruenberg (1940),

‘Sexuality Education means vastly more than instruction concerning the facts of reproduction as biological or physiological principles, avoidance of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), avoidance of early pregnancy and refraining from HIV/AIDS. It means instruction, of course, but far beyond that it is a comprehensive and progressive process of education calculated to bring about the socially desirable adult practices and attitudes necessary to insure the establishing and building of rational judgments. Sexuality Education must therefore, be developed as an organic part of the entire educational programme. It must not be considered as a special and isolated bit of curriculum, to be taught at a given time and then dismissed a finished’.

Absence of these issues and any intention to include these in Indian version of Sexuality Education makes it myopic in vision and implementation, leading to faulty results.

Some critical aspects of Sexuality which must be discussed with students during their education attainment and which find absolute no mention in Indian curriculum include,

- The place of universal sexuality at all levels of life, distinctive human accompaniments; psychic and social. Social changes creating new customs, standards and relationships, the significance of sexuality education: Positive phases: Better adjustment, greater self-realization and better family life. Negative phases: avoidance of dangers and difficulties
- There is no mention of legal sexual disorders and abuses like rape, gender neutrality of rape illustrating the fact that the victim of rape can be a non-female individual as well. Paedophilia and Child Sexual Abuse which includes a forceful sexual act between a child and someone elder and Incest, leading to enhancing the importance of a counsellor in schools providing help on sexual matters too.
- In recent highly globalized tech savvy Indian society where access to Internet can open up a complete world with just a click, discussions related to Pornography, cyber-sex and authenticity of information found on internet, is not touched upon at all.
- Educating the masses about the world of sex workers, safe sex practices, dignity of their labour and not looking at them as sinners or criminals, child and human trafficking which makes innocent people a victim and leave them in a state of utter powerlessness are completely ignored.
- Discussion on sexuality must not be instructional in nature, encouraging students to refrain from any sexual desires, but historical, cultural and religious basis of sexuality including its presence in art forms, literature, architecture, poetry and dance forms must be discussed neutrally.
- There is hardly any attempt to educate students about sexually diverse groups of our society, including Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders, Queer, Intersected, Asexual and other sexual minorities, sensitize the peers to



the needs and diversities of sexual minority section of the school, making LGBT students comfortable in their skin by informing them about the natural and scientific reasons behind the diversity in their sexual identity, no help is been given to LGBT students, while they are exploring their sexual identity and form negative self-image and platform to question and challenge stereotypical notions about LGBT community is not been provided under such initiatives.

- Normative heterosexuality is rather explicitly enforced by the culture of the most schools. Heterosexual behaviour and language are integrated and normalized within school culture to such a degree that they have become the natural and often considered the “neutral” school environment or culture. This normative heterosexuality promoted by hidden curriculum does not only represses and stigmatizes same-sex interactions, but also dictates a carefully gender-scripted form of heterosexuality. Sexuality Education by no means challenges this heteronormative culture.
- An integrative approach versus isolated items of instructions and participation of stakeholders like parents, state, educational institutions and the students themselves.
- Biological aspects of sexuality: growth and development, reproduction in various forms of living things including plants and animals, the evolution of sexuality, relation of sex to heredity, sex determination: maleness, femaleness and sexual/ gender diversion.
- Physiology and hygiene including physical and mental health of the student
- Psychological aspects of sexuality: Progressive organic and psychic differentiation including sexual orientations and stages including autoerotic, homosexual, heterosexual. Rise of new interest and impulses, theories of substitution and sublimation; practical management, specialization of individual interests and tastes, physical eroticism, masturbation- its meaning and its management, need for liberation, development of responsibility and autonomy.
- Sociological aspects of sexuality: the family: antiquity and evolution, importance for the individual and for society, the monogamic ideal, the changing family patterns including conflict of cultures and interests, persistence of traditions, domination of elders, problems of personality adjustment, challenges to family as an institution in the form of divorce, sexual diversion and gender transgression, impact of economic forces upon the family: changes status of women, prolongation of youth, postponement of marriage, problems of courtship and marriage. New issues and choices like why marry? The increase in divorce rate, why have children? Home or career. Negative factors and pathology includes ignorance and lack of training, persistence. Public and personal health problems; maladjustments derived from sexuality, mental hygiene and educational concerns includes need for creative activities and self-assertion, opportunities for recreation and social activities, need for guidance and counsel, venereal diseases (Gruenberg, 1940).
- Education must prepare for social costs like population control and illegitimacy, morality, aesthetics, laws w.r.t age of consent and sexual offences.

Cursory mention or complete absence of the above mentioned themes made the author question the intent and the planning going behind the planning committees and executive bodies. It's high time that our youth is instructed to refrain from desires or instructed into the information of process of reproduction and AIDS avoidance. Transaction of issues of sexuality must be done in interesting ways including integrated approach, group discussions, role plays, establishment of a Sexuality Education Counselling Cell, review of local community and school environment on regular basis followed by development of plan of action and methodical evaluation and review of Sexuality Education programmes and finally modification and coordination of the programme must be strengthened.

Conclusion

Sexuality education is a life-long process related to the needs and concerns at various stages of an individual's development in the life cycle. It is concerned about the attitude towards sex, self-identity, self-integrity and interpersonal relationship. Furthermore, it is liberating oneself from fear, misconceptions, shame and accepting one's being in entirety. Age-appropriate education to children regarding issues of embodiment and sexuality can help them escape guilt and fear that often accompanies sexual abuse, confused gender identity, body image, erotic dreams and empower them with the right information and skills.

A comprehensive sexuality education curriculum is the need of the hour. Long neglected issues of sexuality like sexual orientations, gender roles challenging heteronormativity, child sexual abuse, gender neutral rapes, and socio-emotional journey of an adolescent from childhood along with previously documented issues need to be given thoughtful attention in curriculum planning.



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