

Building a Healthier Future: Proposing Sex Education in the Indian Curriculum

Ms Simran Sharma

Ms Ananya Agarwal

Ms Palak Misra

CHRIST University, Delhi, India

Ms Wasuddha Tikmani

Ms Gunja Bhatt

Vanita Vishram Women's University

Education is a powerful medium to bring about reform among the youth masses of India. Quality education is an important goal in sustainable development, but the scope of quality education has been exclusive to sexual education, especially in India. Given the current situation of sexual violence and misconduct in India, it is evident that there is a dire need for Sex Education for the masses. The present research is a survey study in which a sample of 234 Indian college students between the age ranges of 18-23 years was chosen. The sample was collected using a convenient sampling method via Google Forms. In this study, the authors measured the sexual and reproductive health knowledge of university students and found a serious lack of awareness regarding sexual and reproductive health practices. For instance, on average 14% of participants did not know any contraceptive methods for women or men. A whopping 82% of participants have never had a sexual examination while being sexually active. Several other instances were seen in the survey results, and hence the authors introduced a foundation course on sexual education that can be recommended to the education authorities. This course will be a compulsory paper for all freshers in their first semester of undergraduate studies and possibly extend the proposed model to the high school curriculum. The authors have introduced modules on sexual orientation, reproductive health, physical awareness, sexual violence and consent, sexual health and masturbation, cultural norms about sex, and more. This paper will have high applicability because, if the course is adapted to the educational system, there is a chance that this course can make the youth aware of several sexual problems, leading to safer sex, a reduction in

sexually transmitted infections (STIs), a reduction in sexual violence cases, and fewer teen pregnancies. “In future research”, the authors can also address the menstrual hygiene problems faced by young girls in large parts of the country.

Keywords: Sex Education, Sustainable Development, University Level Application¹

Introduction

India - a nation of youth, is experiencing notable shifts in societal norms and cultural values. Discussions regarding the value of Sex Education have drawn plenty of attention in recent years, especially in the context of Indian college students. It is crucial to address the requirement for holistic Sex Education in order to provide college students with the knowledge and abilities that will help them appropriately navigate sexuality, reproductive health, and relationships in light of ever-expanding access to information and the rapidly altering social landscape. There is an urgent necessity to bridge the gap on sexual health, sexuality, contraception, psychological aspects of relationships, and STIs. Historical cultural norms have previously restrained us from openly talking about sexual well-being but now is the time to acknowledge the empowerment that Sex Education will bring to college students.

It is noteworthy that India has the world's poorest sexual well-being and reproductive health records according to the census 2018. By offering thorough Sex Education to college students, we can enable a generation that is better equipped to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health and is more tolerant of sexual diversity. Sex Education aims to provide a judgement-free and welcoming environment that supports discussions of healthy sex and promotes consent, content relationships, and the prevention of undesirable consequences.

Sex Education has been an indispensable part of many educational programs throughout the world but has not been fairly represented in the curriculum of educational institutions in India. Sex Education, or sexual education, is a very effective educational matter. The subject doesn't just

¹ Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ms Simran Sharma, Ms. Wasuddha Tikmani and Ms. Ananya Agarwal, CHRIST (Deemed to be University), Delhi, India.
simransharma98.ss@gmail.com

educate about the knowledge regarding sex or sexuality, rather, it offers an understanding of sexual and reproductive rights, achieving high standards of sexual health, and making good decisions about one's sexual life (Banerjee & Rao, 2022). Constructing a curriculum that includes sexual orientations, the importance of sexual pleasure, and the role and influence of media in shaping young minds about their ideas and expectations towards sexual intimacy can help students become aware and make informed decisions regarding themselves. At the same time, it would ensure that students can take good care of themselves and are educated about the basic functionality of their bodies. It would also ensure that students become more sensitive towards others and can acknowledge the differences that exist among individuals.

Review of Literature

Adolescent health and wellness have been increasingly gaining importance in India. The Health and Wellness curated by the Government of India for students aged 10-19 years is a step in that direction (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, 2018). The need for gender focused, comprehensive and pro-LGBTQIA+ sex education has also been highlighted by (Banerjee & Rao, 2022). These research studies support our need to extend the same importance and concern to sexual attitudes, sexual health and sexual behavioural practices of young adults.

Menstruation and Reproductive Health

The understanding of menstrual hygiene is not only important at the adolescent level but it needs to extend into adulthood as well. Research in India on menstrual hygiene revolves around adolescent girls. It was noted that more girls in urban areas were using sanitary napkins and had more awareness about menstruation than girls located in rural areas (Paria et al., 2014). Even when it comes to awareness about sexually transmitted diseases it has been observed that people lack awareness and information about these diseases. A study conducted on secondary school adolescent students in South Delhi concluded that more than one-third of the total students did not have an accurate understanding of HIV (McManus & Dhar, 2008). Additionally, grave results from a study by (O'Sullivan et al., 2018) also highlighted that one-third of the participants believed that a comprehensive understanding of concepts was not strong in the current sex education curriculum of India. Therefore, it becomes imperative to provide people of all genders about their reproductive health to enable them to make healthier choices as young adults.

Sexual Orientation and the Role of Media

The ancient Buddhist and Hindu texts such as Arthashastra and Kamsutra have references to same-sex behaviour. However, there is still a negative connotation attached to same-sex attraction and relationships in India (Bhugra et. al, 2010). In Indian cinema, the portrayal of homosexuality is evolving with the changing times. However, while it is understandable that movies are made to make money, their influence on society cannot be denied (Bhugra et. al, 2015). The reach of social media makes it accessible for people to share and gain any information. Therefore, the media representations of gender and sexuality seem to play an important role in accepting and validating different gender identities that exist. Data collected by (Sathyanarayana Rao et al., 2015) also asserts that 88% of the male and 58% of the female students in colleges in Mumbai agreed that they had no exposure to sex education through their parents or colleges and hence had no option but to resort to media forms like magazines, pornography, etc. for information.

Sexual Pleasure and Consent

It should be noted that as young adults, there is always a choice that people can make to exercise their sexual freedom. Hence, sexual relations must be consensual and not coercive. Healthy sexual behaviours must focus on the safety of all the people involved in the activity.

To understand the importance of sexual pleasure and consent, a research study explored how University students in the UK perceive the importance of consent. It was noted that the parameters regarding the perception of consent changed concerning the nature of the relationship, the assertiveness of the parties, and the arousal (Hills et al., 2020). Research conducted on sexual pleasure in emerging adults reported that there was no or negligible impact of Sex Education on healthy sexual behaviours and consent. A reason for this could be that Sex Education in the USA focused on STIs or Abstinence. This provided the researcher with an insight that the role of Sex Education is not to provide answers in every situation but to provide tools to make informed decisions in their interests and the interests of the parties that are involved (Dorman, K. 2017).

Objectives of the study

1. To measure the level of sexual and reproductive awareness among university students in India.

2. -To highlight the current representation of Sex Education in Indian universities.
3. -To ensure that adults are aware of basic topics that could ensure sexual health and awareness.

Methods

The investigator has used a survey research approach to understand the current scenario of sexual and reproductive awareness. Once the data was collected, it was used to write a conceptual paper in which the authors propose a course curriculum for Sex Education for undergraduate first-year students.

Sample and Procedure

The sample comprises 234 college students from post-undergraduate and master's levels in the age group of 18-23 years who are currently residing in India. The sample was selected with the convenience sampling method, meaning anyone willing to participate in the research study was invited and sent a Google Form with the survey details. The form was divided into three sections. The first section aimed to collect basic demographic details like age, gender, city, and region of residence (rural, suburban, or urban), the second section aimed to collect responses in accordance with the attitudes that participants had regarding sexual well-being and reproductive health; and the third section was for debriefing. In total, apart from demographic details, there were 17 questions that sought to measure awareness of different aspects of sexual well-being and reproductive health. All the questions were to be answered with yes or no options. Informed consent was obtained before the survey.

Inclusion Criteria

- Age groups of 18-23 were included in the study.
- Students currently residing in India were included in the study.
- Students who knew the English language were included.
- Students who have Indian nationality were the only ones included.

Exclusion Criteria

- Individuals over the age of 23 and under the age of 18 were excluded from the study.
- Students residing outside of India and enrolled in universities abroad were excluded from the study as well.
- Students of non-Indian nationality were excluded from the study.
- Non -English speaking populations were excluded.
- No exclusion criteria were put in place for gender, sexual identity, or educational programs.

Results

The survey conducted had 17 questions, each of which captured a different aspect of sexual and reproductive awareness.

Table 1: Results of the Sexual & Reproductive Health Survey

Factors Measured	<i>% of response YES</i>	<i>% of response NO</i>
Knowledge of the legal age of consensual sex	93.6	6.4
Various contraceptive methods for men.	83.3	16.7
Various contraceptive methods for women	88.5	11.5
Knowledge of various sexual Orientation	86.8	13.2
Knowledge of Menstruation	99.1	0.9
Awareness of Alternatives for sanitary napkins	88	12
Knowledge of PCOD/PCOS	82.5	17.5
Perception of Masturbation as healthy	91	9
Awareness about methods of abortion	42.7	57.3
Importance of consent	94.9	5.1

Knowledge of the difference between porn sex and real sex	85.9	14.1
Awareness of pregnancy during the period	73.5	26.5
Sexual examination experience	17.9	82.1
Awareness of sexually transmitted diseases	98.7	1.3
Knowledge of sex addiction	94	6
Awareness of porn addiction	97.9	2.1
Knowledge of various sexual activities	79.1	20.9

Discussion

The results show a disparity in the knowledge of the individuals. While discussing and analysing the results, it is important to keep in mind that this is a small and homogenous sample that is mostly collected from the urban area. While the results might seem skewed towards the positive, which means most students have high sexual and reproductive awareness, this is not so. The data was collected from 234 students; 83.3% of the sample comes from urban areas. An All-India Survey on Higher Education by the Ministry of Human Resource Department and the Department of Higher Education in 2015-16 noted that a total of 3,45,84,781 students enrolled in higher education that year. Out of this, a vast majority of 2,74,20,450 students are enrolled in undergraduate programs, which is a sweeping 79.3% (Ministry of Human Resources Development & Department of Higher Education, 2015, p. 10). Hence, the results the authors received represent a small fraction of the total population. However, (Seno, 2017) asserts that college students agree to be more aware

of sexual and reproductive health related problems if they had some exposure to sex education in their early years.

In the present survey, it was observed that 93.6% of participants were aware of the legal age for consensual sex. However, (Pitre & Lingam, 2021) talks about how the legal age for consensual sex and other legislative measures have a huge impact on the protection of social norms and the perception of young adults towards sex. It also influences their perception of the patriarchal views of sexual relationships, further deepening the gender problems.

An average of 15% of students do not know about several contraceptive methods for both men and women, which is a huge number of students. Knowledge of contraceptives is important to avoid STDs and unplanned pregnancies among college students, which can be life-altering events for these students. (Pazol et al., 2015) agree with the current argument that a lack of contraceptive education can have a huge impact on the use of contraceptive methods. One out of five women is diagnosed with PCOD/PCOS (Pruthi, 2019), and yet about 17.5% of students in our sample did not know about the disorder. This condition can have major health effects like hormonal imbalance, obesity, and an irregular menstrual cycle.

Teenage or unplanned pregnancies can be very difficult for these young students to manage on their own. If any youngster plans to get an abortion, they probably don't have enough knowledge about the same since our survey suggests that about 57.3% of students do not know how to get an abortion. It is always safe for the student to completely avoid getting into this situation, but if they do and they don't know how to get an abortion, the female might be in a life-threatening situation because of an unsafe abortion, which might have a long-lasting impact on her general health and reproductive system. (Munakampe et al., 2018) have pointed out how the lack of knowledge of contraceptive methods and safe abortion methods can lower the access to the same, impacting the sexual and reproductive health of the young adult population.

About 26.5% of individuals do not know that a female can get pregnant with unsafe sex during her menstrual cycle. This is a staggering number because this number can lead to several unplanned pregnancies, which are undesirable. Almost 82% of individuals have never had a sexual examination, which probably also implies that they don't know how to get

one done. This might lead to a greater number of STDs among teenagers and young adults.

(Mukherjee, 2020) in her news article has rightly put how people take sex education to its face value and believe that it is being propagated to teach children how to have sex. Several leaders have condemned the idea of sex education because they believe that sex comes naturally to people and there is no need to teach the same. However people seem to ignore that sex education encompasses several dimensions of sexual behaviour such as consent, sexual abuse, sexually transmitted diseases and gender related concepts like gender identity and expression as well. It is absolutely essential to sensitise children about issues faced by all genders and how there can be different biological experiences for different sexes. To highlight the dire need of sex education we would also like to bring up a recent case in Mumbai, India where a brother brutally tortured and killed his sister after mistaking her period stains for bleeding after sex (Sharma, 2023). This is one of the several cases that caught the media's attention and there have been and will be several more if we don't promote and execute a well-rounded, comprehensive sex education curriculum for college students promptly.

To conclude the discussion, the authors can say that Sex Education is very important for our youngsters to be safe and healthy. To avoid undesirable sexual contact and protect themselves if they indulge in any sexual activities. A focus is given to sexual and reproductive education by (Pazol et al., 2015) and it was highlighted that education interventions can help increase awareness and access to safe sex practices in general. The introduction of a Sex Education curriculum in higher education will help us guide our youngsters to a safer and healthier future.

Proposed Course

Sexual Orientations & Gender

Objectives

- To educate students about multiple sexual orientations.
- To increase awareness among students about gender identities.
- To sensitise students and promote acceptance of different identities.
- To help students be better allies for the LGBTQIA+ community.

- Familiarise students with the legal aspects relating to the topics covered in the module.

Topics to be covered

1. Heterosexual Relationships
2. History of Queer
3. Homosexual relationships
4. Asexuality
5. Bisexuality & Pansexuality
6. Intersex
7. Transgender community (AFAB, AMAB)
8. Different types of Gender identities (Men, women, non-binary, agender, binarism, cis-gender, gender-fluid)
9. How can you be better allies?
10. Legal Aspects

Menstrual and reproductive health

Objectives

- To provide credible information about menstrual health.
- To educate students about different disorders related to menstrual and reproductive health.
- To introduce students to various aspects of reproductive health.

Topics to be covered

1. Terms related to menstruation
2. Different types of Sanitary Products - Sanitary Napkins, Tampons, Menstrual Cups, Cloth pads etc.
3. Menstrual Hygiene
4. Different Disorders - PCOS, Endometriosis, Erectile Dysfunction, Amenorrhea, Vaginismus and the other sexual disorders recognised by DSM-V-TR
5. Pregnancy & Abortion
6. Reproductive Cycle - ways you can/cannot get pregnant
7. Contraceptives - for everyone
8. Methods to confirm pregnancy
9. Safe ways to get an abortion
10. Legal aspects of abortion

11. Add recommended readings for individuals who want to carry their baby
12. Importance and process of sexual examination

Sexual pleasure

Objectives

1. To highlight of the importance of consensual sex among adults
2. To normalize the idea of sexual pleasure
3. Providing credible information about sexual fantasies

Topics to be covered

1. Consent- Types of attraction concerning consent
2. Orgasms
3. Sexual pleasure
4. Masturbation - a healthy practice
5. Oral sex
6. Anal sex
7. Sex toys
8. Fantasies & Fetishes - within the legal preview?

Influence of Media

Objectives

1. Helping students build realistic expectations about sexual activities
2. Debunking myths around sex portrayed in mass media
3. Helping students identify misrepresentation of different sexual orientations and gender identities
4. To create a space that promotes inclusive representation in mass media
5. Guiding students to have a healthy and responsible social media presence

Topics to be covered

1. Expectations and Addiction - Porn
2. Myths about the portrayal of sex in mass media- Lack of representation of female pleasure, Lack of representation of same-sex couples

3. Misrepresentation of different sexual orientations and gender identities in mass media
4. Social Media as a source of information
5. How to find credible sources
6. How to create inclusive content responsibly

Ethical Considerations

In the current research study, the following ethical considerations are incorporated. Informed consent was obtained from all participants via Google Forms. Before filling out the questionnaires, the participants were given all the necessary information about the purpose of the study, and digital signatures were taken for the same. The confidentiality of the clients was also ensured. All the data was stored in a secure manner on a Google Drive with limited access for the authors. The right to withdraw was ensured for all the participants during and after their participation. No deception was incorporated.

Implications

Incorporating Sex Education into the curriculum of college-going students can have several significant implications that can positively affect their lives and well-being, some of which are:

- It helps in improving sexual health outcomes and providing awareness by equipping college students with authentic information about STIs, contraception, and safe sexual practices, thereby promoting healthy sexual outcomes.
- Aids in the reduction of unintended pregnancies as it not only includes the knowledge of contraceptives and birth control methods but also of family planning
- It helps identify, maintain and develop healthy relationships by emphasising the importance of consent, communication and mutual respect in intimate relationships
- Helps enhance sexual diversity and inclusivity by incorporating information regarding sexual orientations and gender identities, thereby enhancing an inclusive and accepting environment.
- Sex Education leads to a confidence and empowerment boost by dispelling myths and misconceptions and helping students develop communication skills and decision-making abilities.

- Helps prevent sexual violence and harassment by addressing topics related to boundaries and how to recognize and prevent sexual violence. As well as creating a culture that actively prevents sexual violence, supports survivors, and promotes a safe and respectful environment.
- To enhance decision-making skills regarding critical thinking and sexual behaviour, in turn enabling students to make informed sexual choices based on personal values, beliefs and goals.
- To dispel myths and misconceptions about sex and sexuality and provide accurate and evidence-based information.
- To promote inclusivity and diversity and create a safe, conducive, and non-judgmental environment for students to explore and understand sexual orientations and gender identities.

Limitations & Suggestions

Here are some limitations and challenges that the authors faced, and further research can be done keeping these in mind:

- Limited homogenous sample; The entire sample consisted of individuals from urban or suburban regions. Since the form was online, the population without technical resources did not get a fair chance to participate in the research survey.
- Several mediums of teaching can be used for different modules in the proposed course.
- Cultural differences in India among several regions might be a hurdle to implementing a uniform curriculum all over the country.
- Implementation of the proposed course can be difficult because of the stigma around sexual activities. Acceptance of the course by the masses will be the major hindrance to execution.

Conclusion

Proposing a module to teach the basics of Sex Education to university students can be beneficial in a variety of ways, especially as most students enter the age of consensual sexual relationships. Talking about concepts such as consent, pregnancy and abortion, menstrual and reproductive health disorders, contraceptive methods, and menstrual health is very important in today's times. Including Sex Education and awareness in the curriculum can provide a holistic foundation for the concept of quality education that can be imparted to university students.

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