

A STUDY OF THE ATTITUDE OF TEACHERS, PARENTS AND ADOLESCENTS TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION

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This study is an attempt to investigate attitude of teachers, parents and adolescents towards sex education in relation to some demographic variables. The sample consisted of 50 teachers, 50 parents and 100 adolescents from Ludhiana district of Punjab. Descriptive survey method was used for the present study. Using convenient sampling method the data was collected. Three self-constructed attitude scales entitled 'Attitude towards Sex Education', one each for parents, teachers and adolescents were used for the study. From the results it was found that mostly teachers have favourable attitude towards sex education. Majority of the teachers reported that teachers need special training in discussing sexuality with students. Mostly parents believed that sex education would help children to be more responsible in their sexual behaviour. Findings also showed that male teachers had a significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education as compared to female teachers; Fathers showed significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education than mothers; Highly educated parents had significantly more positive attitude towards sex education than less educated parents. The results also reveal that economic status of parents has no effect on their attitude towards sex education. The attitude of boys towards sex education is significantly more favourable as compared to girls.

KEYWORDS: Attitude Towards Sex Education, Adolescents

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As per SIECUS (Sex Information and Education Council of the U.S.) sex education is a lifelong process of building a strong foundation for sexual health

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through acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about identity, relationship and intimacy. Sex education is a broad term treated as a usual topic for health education and used to describe education about human sexual anatomy, reproduction, sexual intercourse, reproductive health, emotional relations, reproductive rights and responsibilities, abstinence, contraception and other aspects of human sexual behaviour. Common avenues for sex education are parents or care givers, school programmes and public health campaigns (wikipedia.org). Sex education not only focuses exclusively on coitus and reproduction but also consider all aspects of life which are related with sexuality. Sex education is a complex topic and it is more than mere classroom instruction, because under this umbrella there are a number of related but individual goals. Among these are answering simple questions by children; supplying facts about the anatomy and physiology of the organs of reproduction; providing help and direction to boys and girls in establishing appropriate masculine and feminine roles; development of acceptable sexual behaviour; preparation for marriage; a foundation for responsible parenthood and achievement of a happy, stable family life; comprehending the issues in population control, teaching the importance of preventing certain infectious diseases; and reducing the problems of premarital pregnancies, abortions and illegitimacy (Shaffer,1960). Anything in this curriculum which informs and prepares the child for his role in life, his relationship to others, facts about health habits, personal development, interest in work etc., is unquestionably preparing him for family living and therefore can be described as sex education (McManus, 1967).

Sex education is required for adolescents to provide them positive direction, right information, which would avoid unnecessary worries and tensions. Due to access to sex education adolescents will not only have scientific knowledge about it but also have healthy attitude toward this issue because adolescence is often regarded as a period of marked sexual urgency which almost demands expression. Yet there is good ordinance that the sex drive is mainly psychological in nature (Lester, 1961). It was felt that accurate information and improved understanding of sexuality were definite to adolescents (Sherriffs & Dezelsky, 1979) and therefore amenable to education because it is the basic responsibility of education to educate children about their health, sex, organs, morality and behaviour. Parents and teachers have to be very tactful so that their adolescents do not obtain wrong information as misconceptions may lead to many sexual diseases.

Sex education is needed for freedom from sexual dysfunctions and organic disorders, to create awareness about sexual-social issues like gender discrimination, child marriage, dowry, prostitution etc. Having a programme of sex education in the schools will not be panacea for all social ills, nor will facts necessarily be a motivation for improved behaviour because adolescents

have requirement to know the truth, the right answers, and factual knowledge to counteract the fantasies and half-truths which they are getting from their peers. Education to sexuality is an extension of education for life itself. In this education the parents obviously play a unique role. The quality of child parents relationships depend on the personal growth and maturity of parents, how they view their own roles as husbands and wives, as parents and how they match each other in generosity, openness, concern and responsibility. This dynamic relationship between parents will have a decisive impact on a developing child. Sex education in the elementary, secondary school or college will never be able to replace this original education that the child absorbs from the maleness and femaleness of his parents and the quality of the relationship that exists between them.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sex education in India is need of the hour. Based on HIV Sentinel Surveillance 2008-09, it is estimated that India has an adult prevalence of 0.31% with 23.9 lakh people infected with HIV, of which, 39% are females and 3.5% are children. We have to launch programmes in the right directions, such as disseminating knowledge about sex and the dreaded disease AIDS, about its social impact etc. The primary goal of sex education is promotion of sexual and reproductive health. There is a pressing need to raise the levels of information among the young people who are embarking on sexually active life. It can help to prevent physical, psychological, marital and social problems related to sexuality. Sex education should be given or not given is always a topic of discussion among teachers, parents and community members. It is a fact that in present scenario it is much required to teach adolescents about healthy and positive sexual situations as well as life skills. However, arguments are often raised on what, when and how the message of sex education should be given to adolescents. Before taking any step towards sex education among the various parties, it is most essential to study the attitude of teachers, parents and adolescents towards sex education so that their attitude may be changed if required. It is important to have a positive attitude towards sex education in the school curriculum so that parents and teachers may feel comfortable to impart such education and adolescents can learn about sexuality without hesitation. Education should be organized in such a way that it may enable the adolescents to face and solve the problem of life. They may feel inadequate, because they are unfamiliar with the correct terminology. So, it is necessary for the school to work in close cooperation with the home. In this sense teacher has great responsibility for imparting sex education. Sex education would help students to develop positive attitude towards sex when their queries are satisfied honestly and scientifically. Adolescents have so many myths about their organic development systems, bodily changes, hormonal effects on

reproductive system, chronological maturity and its physiological impacts, when they become anxious, stressful and over pressurized, no body is their to help, guide and to explain different facts of boy-girl relationship to cope with her/his felt sexual urges. In view of all these considerations present study will highlight the attitude of parents and teachers (of the students in senior secondary classes) towards sex education.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

From review of related literature it is concluded that the importance of sex education has long been emphasized yet what is done clearly falls short of what is needed (Lester, 1961). Sex education is necessary for students and it plays a very important role in the prevention of HIV/AIDS (Tilakvathi, 1997). Sex education influences contraceptive knowledge and behaviour (Dawson, 1986). It was also found that parents were generally uncomfortable in talking to their children about human sexuality and mothers were reluctant to talk about sex education to their daughter as they found it embarrassing to discuss there issues (Reis, 1989; Shetty, 1997; Mahajan, 2005). Studies have shown that parents, teachers involved in sex education should have some special personal characteristics as well as good training and the attitude towards sex education to be encouraging in their behaviour (Kakavoulis, 2001; Badhan et al. 2002). A majority of parents, teachers and students supported that sex education should be introduced in school curriculum that will help prevent unwanted pregnancies, enhance healthy relationship between opposite sex, parental transmission of HIV/AIDS infections and STDs and toward providing the knowledge of sex interactions, consequences and responsibilities (Orji and Esimai, 2003). School and College children are positively inclined to accept formal AIDS education as a part of classroom teaching (Bhargava 2003). Thamburj et al. (2000) found that sex education will not prompt students to have sex. The study also shows that, majority of the students in public and private schools felt that sex education should be included in the curriculum.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the attitude of parents, teachers and adolescents towards sex education.
2. To study attitude of parents, teachers and adolescents towards sex education in relation to gender.
3. To study attitude of parents towards sex education in relation to their educational qualification.
4. To study attitude of parents towards sex education in relation to their economic status.

HYPOTHESES

1. There will be significant difference in the attitudes of male and female teachers towards sex education.
2. Fathers will have favourable attitude towards sex education as compared to mothers.
3. There will be significant difference in the attitude of undergraduate and graduate/post graduate parents in their attitude towards sex education.
4. Economic status of parents will have significant impact on attitude towards sex education.
5. There will be significant difference in the attitude of adolescent boys and girls towards sex education.

METHOD

Descriptive survey method of research was employed for the present study. This method was concerned with surveying, describing and investigating the attitude of teachers, parents and adolescents towards sex education in relation to selected variables namely educational qualification of parents (graduate-postgraduates and undergraduates), economic status of parents (earning more than 20,000 per month and less 20,000 per month), gender of teachers, parents and adolescents.

SAMPLE

The sample of the study consisted of 100 adolescents (50 boys and 50 girls) of three schools of Ludhiana district of Punjab along with 50 teachers of the same schools and 50 parents of these students.

TOOLS USED

Three attitude scales i.e. 'Attitude towards Sex Education, one each for parents, for teachers and adolescents had been constructed by the investigator to assess the attitude of teachers, parents and adolescents towards sex education. For scoring purposes a 5-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree (4), agree (3), can't say (2), disagree (1), and for strongly disagree (0) was used. For

PROCEDURE

The attitude scales were administered to the teachers and adolescents by researcher herself. They were explained about the purpose of the study and after establishing a good rapport and ensuring clear understanding of instructions, they were asked to respond on the scale. The adolescents were given the questionnaires to get these filled from their parents. Overall it took

two weeks to collect the data from the teachers, parents and adolescents. The attitude of teachers and parents were assessed on each item of the scale on which percentage analysis was done. After that their attitude towards sex education were compared by employing t-test on the mean scores in terms of different independent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitude of Teachers Towards Sex Education

The findings of item wise analysis showed that many teachers did not talk with their students about sexuality. Only 10% of teachers reported they had discussed sexuality with their students. Only 13% of teachers were able to use biological vocabulary while teaching. 18% were comfortable in discussing sexuality with their students. 62% of the teachers were of view that teachers needed special training in discussing sexuality with the students. 90% of teachers believe that it is important to learn how to talk with children about sexuality. 82% believe providing sexual education could prevent sexually transmitted disease. Majority (84%) believed that specific training should be given to teachers involved in teaching sex education in school. Mostly teachers (75%) showed positive attitude towards introduction of innovative methods of teaching sex education as a subject in schools. 60% believe there should be workshop on sex education. 74% teachers believe that mass awareness should be created for sex related issues. A great majority, 92% believe that there should be special counselling of sex related queries of students. 86% teachers were of the view that parents should be involved in mass awareness programs conducted in schools. 56% teachers support comprehensive approach to sex education. 72% believe that teaching information about sexuality in schools is as important as teaching, reading, writing and arithmetic. 82% teachers were of the view that there should be special committees in the school to plan and conduct activities for the students to know how to avoid STDs. 83% believe that student should be punished for using bad words. 80% think that student should learn about AIDS. 69% think that boys and girls in co-education should be taught together. 72% think that for imparting sex education magazines are the best method. 70% teachers believe that children shouldn't have access to Internet at home because it is easy source to find sexual material and wrong information related to it. Overall the teachers dominantly show positive attitude towards sex education.

Attitude of Teachers Towards Sex Education in Relation to Gender

The mean scores for attitude towards sex education regarding male and female teachers were compared by employing t-test as shown in Table 1.

Table 1**Attitude of Teachers Towards Sex Education in Relation to Gender**

Group of Teachers	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
Male	25	59.46	8.13	4.95**
Female	25	50.24	4.80	

** Significant at 0.01 level.

The mean score of attitude towards sex education for male teachers is 59.56 with SD 8.13 and for female teachers is 50.24 with SD 4.80. The t-value came out to be 4.95 which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. It implies that there exists a significant difference in attitudes of male and female teachers towards sex education. Male teachers showed significantly more favourable attitude than the female teachers toward sex education.

Hence the first hypothesis that "There will be significant difference in the attitudes of male and female teachers towards sex education" is accepted. The results may be seen in the light of finding of Kumar (2007) who showed that there is significant difference among pupil teachers in relation to gender and academic stream regarding HIV/AIDS awareness. These findings are contradictory to the findings of Badhan et al. (2002) who found that attitude towards sex education was observed as encouraging but only (70%) teachers had positive attitude towards HIV positive person and (60%) of the teacher have ever discussed the issues of HIV/AIDS with their students.

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education

The attitude of parents towards sex education was assessed on each item of the scale. The results show that 44% parents thought sexuality to be an embarrassing topic, but most (60%) also believed that sex is a basic appetite like hunger. Most participants (65%) thought sex education is too conservative in modern India while 49% believe that sex is not a moral issue. 84% feel more liberal about sex than their own parents do. The majority (72%) agreed that children do need sexual education as they are growing up, and disagreed (55%) with the idea that sexual education should be delivered only when children are grown up and ready for marriage. Mostly parents (87%) believed that sexual education would help teach children to be more responsible in their sexual behaviour, and most (72%) did not think sex education would result in more sexual activity among children. Mostly participants (80%) agreed that the parents should be the first teacher about sex education for their children. The majority parents (73%) thought that they should be more responsible than schools in providing sex education for their children. More than half of them (55%) thought parents should tell children about intercourse and contraception only when children are ready for marriage. 62% parents thought that teaching information about sex in school is as important as teaching

reading, writing, and arithmetic. 86% of them believed that if children were given a good sex education in schools, they would make wiser decisions in sexual behaviours when they grow up. However, only 37% of parents agreed that children should get information about contraception in school, and only 37% agreed that boys and girls should be combined together in classes during sex education. The majority of the parents (74%) agreed that there is too much sex on television and movies. Only 21% agreed that parents should not allow children to access the Internet at home because of how easy it is for children to find sexual material on the worldwide web.

Overall, more than 72% fathers and mothers (62%) showed favourable attitude towards introduction of sex education. More male parents than female parents have positive attitudes towards the introduction of sex education in schools.

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education in Relation to Gender

After analysing each item, mean and SD of the raw scores of all the items on attitude scale were calculated for both the parents i.e. mother and father separately. The mean scores on attitude towards sex education were compared by employing t-test. Data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Attitude of Parents towards Sex Education in relation to Gender

Group of Parents	N	Mean	SD	t
Fathers	25	70.34	4.08	4.48**
Mothers	25	62.02	7.59	

** Significant at 0.01 level.

The result in Table 2 shows that the mean score on attitude towards sex education of fathers is 70.04, which is higher than mean scores obtained by mothers i.e. 62.32. The t-ratio came out to be 4.48, which is significant at 0.01 level of significance. Thus it means that there exists a significant difference in the attitudes of fathers and mothers towards sex education. It can be concluded that fathers have significantly more favourable attitude toward sex education than mothers.

Hence second hypothesis i.e., "Fathers will have favourable attitude towards sex education as compared to mother is accepted". The results of the present study go along with findings of Reis and Seidn (1989), which shows that mothers were reluctant to talk about sex education with their wards. Selven et al. (2005) revealed that there is significant difference between boys and girls in their comfort level talking about sex with their parents, friends and other family members. Mostly male and female Indian students do not communicate with their parents regarding these issues.

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education in Relation to Educational Qualifications

To analyse the differences in the attitude of parents towards sex education in relation to their educational qualification, mean, SD and t-ratio was computed.

Table 3

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education in Relation to Educational Qualifications

Qualification	N	Mean	<i>t</i>
More Qualified (P.G)	39	68.4	2.72**
Less Qualified (U.G)	11	58.18	

** Significant at 0.01 level.

Results in Table 3 show that mean score of attitude towards sex education of graduate/post graduate parents is 68.4 which is higher than the mean score of undergraduate parents i.e. 58.18. The t-value came out to be 2.72 which is significant at 0.01 level. Thus, there exists a significant difference in the attitudes of graduate/ postgraduate parents as compared to the undergraduate parents towards sex education. It can be concluded that highly educated parents have significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education than less educated parents. Therefore, the third hypothesis, "There will be significant difference in the attitude of more educated and less educated parents towards sex education" is accepted.

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education in Relation to their Economic Status

The difference in the attitude of parents in relation to their economic status was worked out by comparing two groups of parents, (a) who earn more than twenty thousand rupees per month and (b) who earns less than twenty thousand rupees per month. The mean scores of these two groups on the attitude scale were compared by employing t-test, which is shown in table 4.

Table 4

Attitude of Parents Towards Sex Education in Relation to their Economic Status

Income of Parents	N	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>
More than Rs.20,000 per month	13	66.78	7.60	1.14
Less than Rs.20,000 per month	37	64.46	5.78	

The mean score of attitude towards sex education of more income group of parents is 66.78 with SD 7.60 whereas in less income group of parents mean score is 64.46 with SD 5.78. The t-value turned out to be 1.14, which is not significant. Thus the attitude of parents who earn more (> Rs.20,000/- per month) does not differ significantly from those parents whose earnings are

lesser (< Rs.20,000/- per month) towards imparting sex education. It means that the economic status has no significant effect on the attitudes of parents towards sex education. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis, "Economic status of parents will have significant impact on attitude towards sex education" is rejected.

Attitude of Adolescents Towards Sex Education in Relation to their Gender

The difference in attitude of adolescents towards sex education was assessed by employing t-test the results of which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Attitude of Adolescents Towards Sex Education in Relation to Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	t
Boys	50	57.70	2.41	9.88**
Girls	50	52.62	2.73	

** Significant at 0.01 level.

Data in Table 5 shows that the mean score of the attitude towards sex education of boys is 57.70 which is higher than the mean score of the girls i.e. 52.62. The t-value came out to be 9.88 which is significant at 0.01 level and shows that boys have a more favourable attitude towards sex education than girls. Thus, the fifth hypothesis i.e., "There will be significant difference in the attitude of adolescent boys and girls towards sex education is accepted". In the other words it can be concluded that there exists significant difference in the attitude of boy and girl towards sex education.

Awareness among boys was found to be significantly more than girls regarding communicability, modes of transmission and prevention of HIV/AIDS (Chakuvarty et al. 2000). Such difference may be due to the fact that girls were not expected to discuss sex-related topics. In Indian society male supremacy exists in various parts of life including freedom of speech. The sexual needs of men are justified in relatively positive terms than of women (Bhatt & Dhoundival, 1998). Sexual norms for women's sexual lives are rigid and women are often expected or encouraged to suppress their sexuality. According to traditional Indian beliefs, girls were expected to obey their parents and generally they are not allowed to discuss sex prior to their marriage. This may explain why open communication, opinion on school based sex education, and knowledge about sex related activities were lower among girls when compared to boys.

FINDINGS

1. Overall the teachers show the dominance of positive attitude towards sex education. Majority of the teachers were of view that teacher needed special training in discussing sexuality with students.

2. There exists a significant difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards sex education. Male teachers scored higher than the female teachers showing their significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education as compared to female teachers.
3. Overall, above 70% fathers and above 62% mothers showing favourable attitude towards introduction of sex education. Mostly parents believed that sex education would help children to be more responsible in their sexual behaviour.
4. The attitude of mothers and fathers of adolescents towards sex education differs significantly, with fathers showing significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education than mothers.
5. Highly educated parents (graduate/postgraduate) have significantly more positive attitude towards sex education than less educated parents (under graduate).
6. Economic status of parents have no effect on their attitude towards sex education as parents with high economic status that is earning more than 20,000 per month does not differ significantly in their attitude towards sex education from parents having low economic status that is earning less than 20,000 per month.
7. The attitude of adolescent boys and girls towards sex education differs significantly. The attitude of adolescent boys is significantly more favourable than girls towards sex education.

CONCLUSION

From the results of the study it is concluded that school teachers have a positive attitude towards sex education but they require special training in discussing sexuality with students. Male school teachers have more favourable attitude towards sex education as compared to female teachers. Majority of the parents of these adolescents are showing favourable attitude towards introduction of sex education and believed that sex education would help children to be more responsible in their sexual behaviour. The attitude of mothers and fathers of adolescents towards sex education differs significantly, with fathers showing significantly more favourable attitude towards sex education than mothers. Educational qualification of parents have positive relationship with attitude towards sex education because highly educated parents (graduate/postgraduate) have significantly more positive attitude towards sex education than less educated parents (under graduate). Economic status of parents also has no effect on their attitude towards sex education, as parents with high economic status do not differ significantly in their attitude towards sex education from parents having low economic status. Gender of school going adolescents has significant effect on attitude towards sex education. The

attitude of adolescent boys is significantly more favourable towards sex education than girls.

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