

Parents', Students' and Teachers' Understanding of Sexuality Education

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Abstract

School-based sexuality education is regarded as an effective way to increase young people's understanding of sexually transmitted infections including human immunodeficiency virus infection, unintended pregnancies, abortion, violence, infertility, gender, sexual orientation, etc. This article identifies different perspectives of comprehensive sexuality education in our school's strategy of teaching sexuality education especially from parents, students and teachers, and to identify the need for CSE in the Nepalese context. This paper has used primary data of qualitative nature. The data were collected from a school's students where twenty students from grade nine, ten mothers of the students, and three HPE teachers from different schools were selected for study purpose. The collected data were analyzed following thematic approach. Based on the study, the curriculum was not found sufficient for providing sexuality education. Topics related to human rights, gender equality, and sexual and gender diversity were not addressed sufficiently. The teaching method was found to be heavily lecture-based, while the class environment was not comfortable for many students. Data show that providing school-based comprehensive sexuality education can be challenging. Teachers need adequate training to revise their sexual attitude and biases, highlight gender and sexual rights, and promote instruction that makes use of students' critical thinking skills.

Keywords: Parents, teachers, health education, sexuality education, adolescence, students

Introduction

Education is the foundation of social transformation and behavior change (Castles, 2001; Chakraborty Saikat and others, 2018). Sexuality education is the most important aspect of human life. Adequate provision of sexuality

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education can have an impact on an individual's position. Providing sexual and reproductive health education can help reduce sexually related diseases (Glasier and others, 2006). Adolescence is characterized by thoughtful emotional and behavioral disturbances that make them reluctant to discuss sexuality (Hughes Nathan and others, 2020). Adolescents are shy about asking questions related to sexuality and reproductive health in the classroom and at home due to cultural barriers and obstacles which creates many problems in their adulthood (Farahani, 2020; Pokharel, 2020; Pokharel, 2019). In particular, girls suffer more than boys due to barriers and obstacles in the community in Nepal (Shrestha and others, 2013). Adolescence is a unique stage of human development, but traditional health indicators often ignore the areas specified for adolescence (Cryer-Coupet and others, 2020; Singh and others, 2021).

Adolescents spend most of their time in school. Adolescents experience psychological and emotional problems as they grow and develop (Odgers and Jensen, 2020). Such problems are not easily detected by teachers and parents. If not taken care of in time, it can lead to various complications such as anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, substance abuse, educational difficulties, and suicide commitment (Merrell, 2008; Michelson and others, 2020). Sexuality education provided by the school has become an important subject that helps to get rid of various problems (Xiong and others, 2020; Stein and others, 2018). In the process of growing up, adolescents gradually gain knowledge about the human body, attitude to it, type of its values, its intimate relationships (Pokharel, 2020; Larson and others, 2002). When adolescents look for answers to sexual-related curiosity, they are not satisfied with school and family. They have been forced to seek answers via the internet, magazines, and websites (Jones and Biddlecom, 2011). In this study process, it can be detrimental if they are chosen incorrectly. Therefore, age-appropriate sexuality education is important for children for their healthy and successful life.

There are many developmental stages in human life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence is the period of 10-19 age group. This is a period of change; and it is a sensitive time when they can also develop unhealthy habits that create many problems in their adult life (Smit and others, 2020). In particular, this is neither the period of childhood nor adulthood; so it is a transitional phase. Adolescence is an important period of physical, psychological, cognitive, and emotional development as well as sexual and reproductive maturity (Assari, 2020). Lack of positive decision-

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making can lead to adolescents attempting suicide because adolescence is a transitional period and is fraught with major changes in their physical, mental and emotional conditions. Adolescence is further divided into two more sub-stages, which are early adolescence and late adolescence. The age of early adolescence starts between ten to fourteen years and later adolescence from fifteen to nineteen years (Liang and others, 2008; Curtis, 2015; Lehalle, 2020). Therefore, school plays a pivotal role in providing sexuality education to adolescents.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is an essential way to educate young people about their rights and sexual health. It also focuses on improving public health and contributes to sustainable development (Boonstra, 2015; Francis, 2010). However, UNFPA's operational guidance for CSE, 2014 explains CSE as, 'A rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education for young people, whether they are in school or out of school'. Based on this definition, school is the most important place for gaining knowledge about sexuality (MoH, 2014).

In the context of Nepal, Curriculum Development Centre (Ministry of Education) 2005 says that in grades 6-8 (students in the age of 11-13 years), health, population and environment subjects are taught at the lower secondary level, and the secondary level (grades 9-10, students in the age of 14-15 years) (Acharya and others, 2018). The term 'sexual and reproductive health' (SRH) is limited to reproductive health and sexual health only, but not introduced explicitly. Going through the curriculum we can see that the materials are not operated from the perspective of information or rights, but it is only driven "as a curriculum of health education". In Nepali society, like in other Asian countries, it is forbidden to talk about sex and sexuality (Adhikari and Tamang, 2009). SRH is always overlooked as a narrow perspective, as school based sexuality education remains a challenging matter (Roudsari and others, 2013). So it is even more challenging for young people to talk, explore, and learn. It seems equally challenging for children, teachers, and parents to talk about sex and sexuality and to hear from both sides (Regmi and others, 2008; Elliott, 2012). Lack of interaction between teachers and students, inability of teachers to deliver the curriculum properly, and lack of communication between parents are the reasons as to why students cannot learn sexuality education. There have been no positive changes in the behavior of the adolescents (Acharya and others, 2019; Aviles and others, 2006). The purpose of sexuality education programs, especially for young people and children, is not only to raise awareness about sexual

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behavior and sexual abuse but also to help prepare them for happier sex life. Therefore, the broader objective of all sex-oriented educational programs is to improve and promote the health of students (Sanjakdar and others, 2015).

Adolescence itself forms the basis of adulthood. Maturity without good information and reliable skills makes the journey of life difficult. That's why sex education is needed to make this journey easier, more secure, and healthier for young people around the world (Piaget, 1972). In the context of Nepal, the educational context of CSE in institutional or community schools is narrow, which is deadly for adolescents.

Even though many initiatives have been taken informally in sexuality education, it has not reached the group of adolescents, as proved by the number of mothers under the age of 18 (MoH, 2014). Students are not able to learn according to the curriculum due to ineffective teaching. Lack of teaching skills, various socio-cultural values, myths, superstitions is creating barrier to the process of learning and teaching sexuality education (Francis, 2010; Pokharel and others, 2006; Shrestha and others, 2013). So, Teaching is the best way to connect teachers and students but teaching sexuality education has been affected by embarrassment, myths, superstitions, taboos, misconceptions, and socio-cultural beliefs.

This study finds out the understanding of parents, students, and teachers regarding school-based sexuality education, and attempts to identify the need for CSE for adolescents in the Nepalese context. This study hopes to address the gaps in the literature and focuses on parents' 'understanding of sexuality education and current needs, elucidates students' perceptions, and even reflects the teacher's experiences. Therefor eall three aspects of the experience of teachers, students, and parents have been explored and detailed.

Methodology

The researcher chose a private school for selecting the students. Twenty students from grade nine participated in an interview. Ten parents (all mothers) were interviewed on their understanding of sexuality education. Three HPE teachers from three different schools were selected for in-depth interview. One was a female teacher and the other two were males.

The researcher prepared three different semi-structured interview guidelines for teachers, students, and parents. All interviews were transcribed and 4

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themes were created. Thematic analysis was performed to identify patterns or themes within the qualitative data (Clarke and Braun, 2014).

As sexuality education is a sensitive matter, approval was sought from the Nepal Health Research Council.

Results

The analysis identified four main themes from the data, as discussed below.

- Parents' views on school-based sexuality education
- Taboo and myth as the obstacles to teaching and learning sexuality education
- Sources of students' knowledge about sex education
- Need and importance of sex education

Parents emphasize that sexuality education should be given before the onset of puberty. As they stressed, children are better informed than the parent generation regarding sexual content because of adolescents' internet access. If sexuality education had been plentiful in school, interest in unwanted material would not have increased and such unsafe sexual activity would not have occurred. When asked about sexuality education, a mother's statement below shows that she knew nothing about it, but it was a much-needed education for her children because myths and taboos still rule society.

"I have no idea about this matter; my daughter also rarely shares these matters with me. It is a very important and essential need for adolescence. Today they understand sexuality education through various new technologies".

These words indicate that for socio-cultural reasons and superstitions, parents do not openly discuss their children's sex and sexuality. Teachers say that young people are more interested in sexuality, even in their body changes. Adolescents are forced to look at the Internet because they cannot learn sexuality education according to the curriculum from the school. A teacher said that he was ashamed to teach reproductive health in the classroom, especially the sexual content.

"Our culture, values, and beliefs are not conducive to teaching adolescents and it is a barrier to learning sexuality education. We know that young people have a

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curiosity about sex and sexuality, but social and cultural reasons also do not allow us to talking openly. Even parents tend to think of school as a responsibility. I also feel that my cheeks and ears were red when I have to be taught about male and female reproductive organs. So adolescents may be looking for their curiosity on the website". (Male teacher)

This sentence suggests that the school curriculum is the main source of knowledge about sexuality education. When a teacher delivers the content according to curriculum rubrics, students will learn appropriately. If they learn properly from school, they will not need to depend on other sources. Instead of the curriculum sources, their sources of learning sexuality education are, friends, the internet, and the websites. Since school is unable to deliver adequate knowledge, adolescents are compelled to seek sexual information from outside resources like these.

"Sexuality education started in grade six and we got general information about sex and sexuality; like adolescence, sexuality education, reproductive organs, adolescence and development of change, etc. I got a lot of information from the school's curriculum and peers. I have been watching websites if I feel any curiosity about any subject in detail" (Student)

Although the teacher said that he would not only use the lecture method to teach sexuality content but other methods as well like poster, pamphlet, audio-visual materials, etc., only lecture method was used according to the student.

"He has used the lecture method to teach and before finishing the class he used to ask some questions for evaluation."(Student)

These words indicate that they received information about sexuality education from the school's curriculum. They also said the course would be sufficient if only what was in the curriculum was easily achieved. He said that for general curiosity, we should search for internet websites ourselves. That they are not satisfied with the information they get from the school and can be seen from the fact that they are forced to use the internet.

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"I've learned about sexuality education and violence, gender-based violence, and sexual harassment from the school curriculum. I have also known about the complications of pregnancy, duration, and delivery. I think this course is inadequate for us because of the general information we have to search for the internet and website" (Student).

There is still the existence of taboos, myths, embarrassment, and superstitions in our society about sexuality. So, people cannot speak openly about sexuality. There is still a narrow mindset in the society. People think that sexuality education is an education just to teach about sexual intercourse. Especially, menstrual taboos with social-cultural aspects among Nepalese society generally create confusion among adolescent girls who have the first experience of menstruation. Discrimination exists between boys and girls, and especially girls are victimized more than boys from this.

"Yes, how can a parent teach such a thing? They will learn by themselves later. Who taught us? The responsibility of teaching sexuality education is still with the school. Our children spend most of their time in school" (Mother).

The participants agreed that as everyone needs to have positive thoughts, girls should be equally empowered through school curricula and teaching. It has been repeatedly advocated that educating a girl child is educating the whole family, while educating a male child is educating just one person. It shows the need and importance of educating children in various aspects of sexuality; but there is a lack of skill to deliver the content of delicate (sensitive) matters.

"Adolescents should be educated about sexuality education. It helps them to be empowered. If they are educated about sex and sexuality, they can understand violence, harassment, and assault. It helps them easily share their sexual problems with their parents, friends, and siblings. I have a son and a daughter. The daughter always shares about the basic events and activities that take place at school but my son rarely tells. Even if a mother teaches her son something, it will be difficult" (Mother.)

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These words suggest that every parent should know that sexuality education is important. Only they are latent; and they feel the need for a helpdesk, mailbox technique to address adolescents' queries. It's not easy to share curiosity with family, friends, siblings and so much has been learned from the internet.

"Human life needs to acquire knowledge that minimizes negativity in society. In that too, sexuality education is indispensable for us. We need to create an environment where we can interact easily. Helpdesks or the mailbox technique should be kept in every school to collect adolescents' curiosities. Hygiene, physical and environmental health is taught but these studies do not provide adequate knowledge of internal sexuality education and sexual health". (Student)

The researcher started asking questions about teachers' qualifications because the literature shows that anyone teaches health education without training and proficiency. The researcher found one teacher from a population background and another from health education background. The teachers said that the preparation before entering class would be completely updated, but did not have the opportunity of training. They agreed that lack of sexuality education may lead to bad incidents every day. They also said that sexuality education is the weapon to prevent such bad incidents. Many things seemed to be the same for teachers including preparation, use of teaching materials, student participation, etc. It was found that a female teacher was more liberal than a male teacher.

"My students are also curious about sexual and reproductive health. I prepare my classes from various sources like books, journals, internet, etc. Usually, I use lecture method in classroom, but sometimes I also use demonstrations including poster, pamphlets, etc. Society is facing many challenges due to acid attack, rape, and harassment during adolescence. This education is highly recommended for adolescents but the government is preparing to remove it from our curriculum without any recognition; this is not a good thing, we should try to rebel against this move. Health education has kept a very small chapter in our curriculum. This means CSE is

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keeping a narrow path, which is a basic human need."
(both teachers)

Thus, although the teacher tries to show that he is perfect, there is a lack of training. The student's verbatim and the teacher's verbatim do not match. Other teaching materials do not seem to fit. The teaching process seems to be heavily based on lecture methods.

One more thing said by the male teacher differently is noticed in this statement: *"I've been teaching for five years and I haven't found it easy to study as an adolescent."* (Male teacher) This sentence indicates that there is no adequate training and counseling for teachers in sexuality education. Therefore, teachers are feeling shy even after five years of teaching; and the curriculum has not reached the students properly. Therefore, the behavior of adolescents does not change as expected. From parents' point of view, the following statement draws particular attention:

"As parents, we are also concerned. Sexuality education given in school is not complete. So the behavior of our children does not show that they are learning this thing from school. Instead, it would be more effective to use NGOs in schools. Schools should also formulate strict policies regarding the provision of sex education. There should also be an orientation programme for parents as well. Government or NGOs should provide adequate training for teachers" (mothers).

In this way, parents are concerned about adolescents' sexual behavior. Parents are not getting complete satisfaction from the sexuality education given by the school. There have been no changes in the child's behavior that should have occurred after learning. There seems to be an argument that schools should have a strict policy on sexuality education.

Discussion

As found in the study, students argue that sexuality education should be given before puberty because young people are affected by globalization and access to the Internet whereby their curiosity about sex and sex-related contents has increased. This requires the guidance of a teacher. The girls who get good nutrition start menstruating at the age of 10-11 years. Therefore, sexuality should be taught before the onset of puberty so that

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adolescents get right information before they the start menstrual cycle. The fact that sex education should be taught before the onset of puberty is linked to the findings of a study by Pound and others (2016). Sexual information obtained by adolescents online is a matter of concern for parents and school teachers. Due to globalization and the growing influence of modern culture, traditional values and cultural aspects are major factors affecting sexuality education in many Nepali youths (Acharya and others, 2019). If no effective sexuality education programme is designed, developed and implemented in time, this internet learning of young people can become a risk factor for unsafe sexual practices. Pound and others (2016) noted that young people use the Internet to find sexually explicit materials and to obtain pornographic sites. It promotes sexual exploitation and violence.

Sexuality education cannot be implemented in developed and developing countries in the similar manner. UNESCO (2009) mentioned that school management plays an important role in implementing programmes. Similarly, leadership and management help in the full implementation of sexuality education and address the needs of the adolescents (Acharya and others, 2019). Strategies such as strengthening policies, providing sexuality education by trained teachers, parental involvement, training parents, respect for sexuality, sexual orientation, promoting gender equality, are also useful for implementing effective sexuality education in schools. Similarly, the role of teacher is most important in the classroom; and teachers must be committed to teaching more sensitive issues including sexuality related matters of curriculum in schools (Xiong and others, 2020).

In Nepal, sexuality education policy is not practically implemented in the classroom. Teacher Guides of sexuality education have been made; but they are not found in practice. That is why students are not able to learn well from sexuality education. The distribution of sexuality education is inadequate (Measor and others, 2012). Parents play a pivotal role in young people's sexual health attitudes and behaviors. However, this does not seem easy for Nepali parents. They feel reluctant to talk to their children about SRH issues due to social and cultural factors (Acharya and others, 2019) . However, this study found that mothers were more likely to discuss sex and sexuality with their children than their fathers. Previous studies have also found that mothers feel more comfortable in discussing sexual health information with their children than fathers in the Chinese context (Liu and others, 2011).

Most mother participants also emphasized the need for the school to work with outside agencies in partnership with non-governmental organizations

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(NGOs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) to improve the effectiveness of school sexuality education programmes. There is little research into sexuality education in schools. This is the subject of investigation because society, family, and nation feel the lack of sexuality education, directly or indirectly.

Conclusion

SE has been considered the most important subject for youths/adolescents, mothers, teachers and students; so, it should cover all its key concepts in the curriculum; and it can help to replace a negative approach to teaching and learning sexuality. Understanding the importance of sexuality education should be relevant, and appropriate with clear progressive pathways that allow students to learn critically. All teachers teaching sexuality education should be given appropriate training that helps break myths and superstitious beliefs towards sexuality education. CSE programmes should be delivered by well-trained and supportive teachers which will be very helpful for adolescents. Schools and policymakers also need to develop partnerships. People from the local community should also be included in the programme for advice. This will make it easier for parents involved in the design and delivery of sexuality education programmes. Teachers should use not only lecture method in sexuality education but also make use of teaching strategies like the use of media, stories, the relevant websites, informal discussions, etc. Since mothers can easily communicate with their children, the government should provide proper orientation about sexuality education for mothers. Teacher training is the most important weapon to reduce the societal myths and taboos. It creates a comfortable platform for parents, teachers and students in teaching, learning and implementing sexuality education easily. Despite knowing how much this education is needed in Nepali society, proper situation has not yet been established due to various myths. After all, youths are the pillars of the country. Their health promotion is in the hands of the country's curriculum policymakers.

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