

SEX EDUCATION: AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF PAKISTANI ADULTSBushra Imtiaz¹, Dr. Shehla A. Yasin*²**Original Article**

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ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, the word sex is a taboo word, and discussing sex-related matters is considered obscene; in such a situation, the provision of sex education is a big no for most people especially the elderly. The non-availability of sex education can lead to unpleasant consequences like STDs, an increase in rape cases, sexual assault, etc. It is important to sex-educate people because sometimes even married couples are not aware of the intricacies. The above-mentioned situation led to conduct the current study. The main objective was to explore the perception of adults about sex education and to find opinions over what age should sex education be provided (if it should be). 235 purposively selected participants were provided with an open-ended questionnaire. The obtained data were further thematically analyzed using content analysis. 75% of participants were of the opinion that sex education should be taught in schools main reason highlighted was that provision of correct knowledge can help sort out increasing sex-related issues. 25% of participants disagree as it is against religion and every child is unique and has a different mindset. 71% of participants were of the opinion that sex education should be given the at high school level because it's the age of maturity and sensibility. The majority believed co-education is not appropriate for sex-education provision.

Keywords: Good/bad touch, Harassment, Reproductive health, Sex education, STDs

INTRODUCTION

Sex education is usually misinterpreted as pornography or instruction regarding how to do sex. This misconception is the main reason that most of the people in our society are reluctant to listen or talk about it. Sex education is not solely related to sexual activities, but it also caters a broad variety of topics related to bodily development, sociological, psychological, and physiological aspects of sexual response, sexuality, and reproduction. It contains information about puberty, hormonal changes and influences, abstinence, contraception, sexual violence prevention, body image, gender identity, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Alford, et al., (2008). Sex education should be provided through trained teachers in an age-appropriate manner because it is a normal natural part of human development.

Sex education does not only include instructions regarding human sexuality, but their emotions and their responsibilities as well, it also includes sexual reproduction activity and health and many such issues regarding the sexuality of a human being (Stanger-Hall & Hall, 2011).

Sex education starts from toddlers where we teach them about good touch and bad touch and create comfort zone with parents so that kids can more confidently share about their experiences, it also tells them how to react against harassment.

Sex education aids in understanding puberty changes and teaches how to cope with stress and new development of sexual desires (Parenthood, 2021). If we talk about female puberty in Pakistan, we found out many of women are not fully aware of menstruation and hygiene linked to it. According to tribute News 79% of Pakistani women don't manage periods hygienically (Ullah, 2017). We can't ignore male puberty too which is mainly left unheard in our community. The study conducted in Pakistan over knowledge of pubertal change in boys shows half of them had no idea about the pubertal age. 73% of them felt ashamed and hypersensitive over physical changes (Huda et al., 2017).

During teenage years, a teenager does try to explore new things and perform new activities that may be linked with satisfying their sexual needs. At that age teaching your child about ethics and morality is necessary. A study conducted in Pakistan reveals that a vast majority of women considers that the problems in their marrying life are due to the lack of information about reproductive health and they blamed gap in mother-daughter communication a reason for these issues. They further wished that their mother should have discussed such matters with them (Yasin, et al., 2013).

Having basic information about sexually transmitted diseases and teen pregnancy and how to avoid it is also important, but in Pakistani society it is not encouraged to discuss such things. A report finds out that there is a significant lack in knowledge and awareness regarding STD's (Aijaz & Mehraj, 2020). Awareness regarding family planning and modern contraceptive in Pakistan should also be spread. Findings reveal that majority population knew about contraceptive methods, but its usage is very low (Mustafa et al., 2015).

Most sexual assault and violence are committed by people who know us well, those who have some sort of relationship, where it should be focus over relationships and empathy that is important for reducing sexual violence and prepare for meaningful lives and relationship (Tatter, 2018). The presence of respect is very vital for a healthy relation, whether love relationship or marriage.

Pakistan's society and culture is enriched with norms and ethics that do not allow sex education (which is considered immoral). This could be one of the major reasons of an increasing rate of child sexual abuse and adult sexual abuse. In this research we are trying to find out the perception of Pakistani adults over sex education which is taken as taboo in our society.

Kamuren, et al., (2017) in their research aimed to find out students' perception regarding sex education in Kenya. It shows that students have no idea about school-based sex education. It's only taught in biology and home sciences. The authors recommended proper sex education in curriculum.

Teacher's perception regarding sex education in Urban Dhaka for primary students was explored. In conclusion teachers need training in order to understand comprehensive sex education. There are differences in perception of different students at different schools due to cultural and social-economic differences (Aresfin & Chowdhury, 2019).

In Ethiopia similar research have been done over people's attitude and perception toward sexual education. Results showed positive attitude of 95% teachers and 80% students regarding sex education in school. Moreover, it was recommended that appropriate age for sex education is from primary till age of 25 (Fentahun, et al., 2012).

OBJECTIVES

1. To find out perception of adults about sex education.
2. To find out opinion over what age should sex education be provided and in which manner.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The current study is important because of its emphasis on a taboo topic which is important to discuss because this is one such phenomenon that people are curious to know about and absence of proper education leads towards wrong avenues like pornography etc. The research tends to explore perception of parents, teachers and students about sex education. What is appropriate age (In participants' perception) to provide sex education. How and through whom it should be provided. The research would be a valuable addition in indigenous literature as there is dearth of information.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**Social Learning Theory**

Children learn from their environment which consists of many influential characters by which child observe and develop their behaviors. According to Social learning theory there are two factors that develop behavior which are environmental and cognitive. Theory proposed by Bandura in 1977 focuses over observing factors by which a child get influenced by mere presence in their surrounding such as parents, TV, teacher and peer group. They all play major role in personality development, and we learn all social ethics, norms, values, gender, and sexuality from them. These factors are always present with the child, so these factors affect the core development of a child (Mcleod, 2016).

Social learning theory shows that sexual behavior is influenced by our personal knowledge, attitude and environmental influences. Most of youth modeled media for sexual activity which can be positive or negative. It is crucial to provide sex education that turns in positive sexual behavior for example one's ability to say "no" over pressure to have sex.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES**Research Design**

A qualitative research design was used to explore the perception of adults about sex education in Pakistan.

Sampling Strategy

235 questionnaires were collected from male and female through survey method purposive sampling technique was used. Participants were selected from different colleges, universities or housewives. The age range was above 20.

Research Participants and their Inclusion Criteria

The data were purposively collected from $n= 235$ participants which include 110 men and 126 women from which 75.7% were from 20-25 age group only 26 lies in 26-31 and 23 participants from 32-37 age group. 181 were married and 42 were unmarried. Education ranged from Intermediate to Masters. 89 were undergraduate, 42 were intermediate and 94 participants were categorized in Masters. Research included participant above age 20 married or unmarried and belonging to any profession (students, teachers, housewives etc). Both gender male and female were included.

Tools of Data Collection and Procedure

A self-developed, open-ended questionnaire was used which consisted of questions regarding the perception of participants about sex education. After departmental permission, the informed consent and permission of participants was taken. The data were collected in person and online.

Data Analysis

Quantitative content analysis was used to analyze data. And results are presented in the form of categories and percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants were asked firsthand if sex education should be provided or not. The responses and reasons for those responses are in the table below:

Table 1

Perception of the Participants about Sex Education as Part of the School Curriculum

Prevention from sexual exploitation and bad experiences	Will enhance teenage urges
Recognition of predators	Mishandling of immature children
Awareness of good/bad touch and bodily changes	It is against religion
Awareness about sex and Rape	Enhance curiosity will result in illicit relationships
Prevention of misleading information, sexual harassment, and STDs	Every child should learn and grow on their own
Helpful in being responsible adults & good citizens	Diversion from positive things
Know how about body functioning	Provoke to experience it
Helpful in debunking taboos and promoting positive attitude	Academic institutes will ruin innocent minds

Results indicated that 75% of the participants stated that sex education should be provided and should be a part of the school curriculum whereas 25% said it should not be provided.

The five main reasons described by those who agreed that sex education should be a part of school curriculum, were determined that it should be age appropriate. It should be clear that what is to be taught at primary level and what is at secondary level. Further reasons were described as follows:

Firstly, it helps an individual know about good and bad touch which can save him or her from being sexually molested or harassed at even young age. When students are progressively taught about a notion that is stigmatized, it lessens their curiosity and stops them from indulging into harmful practices. Secondly, getting educated from authentic sources is much fruitful than learning about same thing from dark webs. Thirdly, having proper sex education shall help people understand their physiological body needs and changes and it will help them tackle those changes with understanding. For the psychological part, curiosity and scarcity of information leads to frustration and aggression in an individual which again can lead him into indulging in immoral or

illegal activities. Lastly, it is one of the biggest social taboos in our society which needs to be broken before many more people become victims.

25% participants think it should not be part of curriculum and their reasons were as follows. Most of the people believe it's too early to teach children about something that they are only going to experience in later life. Others believe it can further develop their curiosity and interest leading to various sort of harmful practices. While responding to the appropriate age of imparting sex education the participants responded as follows:

Table 2
Perception of the Participants about the Appropriate School Level for Sex Education

Primary	Secondary	High school	University level	At the time of marriage
The level of discussion should be rationalized with age.	Right time as hormonal changes occur here.	Here children can understand mature topics and act responsible	They will feel comfortable at this age.	Only need to know about sex before marriage.
Basic knowledge about good bad touch should be taught in primary level	Taught them about puberty so they know how to handle it.	At that age necessary to prevent them from falling into the traps of porn.	They know the difference of sexual education & can understand the merits & can apply in his life too.	There is no need to taught at early stage, it will only make them curious and may lead to sin
They should know about Harassment and informed consent at that age	Needs to be educated about the urges developing within the kid	Seems legit here	Students become mature enough to digest.	Before marriage you need to learn about it
Self-awareness needed at the young age	Better to educate them than mislead as at that age students discuss these things.			
	It is the age of desperation & learning			

Responses were divided into 5 stages. 'At school level' people who described primary level as appropriate for imparting sex-education mainly believed that students should be taught and

warned as early as possible and later on they can keep getting on a more organized sex education.

42% People believe it should be taught at secondary stage. Here main focus lies on puberty. Physiological body development accompanied with major hormonal changes requires a good understanding of sexual aspects of body which also targets the triggered curiosity of children regarding sex at this level. Apart from that, physical harassment factor is also taken into consideration.

The highest percentage falls into category of high school i.e., 71%. Maturity and sensibility, both were considered in terms of psychological and biological aspects. Participants were of the opinion that by the time of high school, students are mature enough to process the information and act sensibly. Further, by that time, they are aware of the causes of various bodily changes occurring within them.

13 % people find it more reasonable to begin the sex education at university level solely because students are mature and responsible by that time. 4.7% opt at the time of marriage because it is only then when sex education is needed not before that time. The other finds it fit to provide sex education split into stages and with each advanced level taught at advanced stage. Further participants were asked if Sex-Ed should be taught in a uni-sex group or co-sex group, and they responded as follows:

The responses indicated that 56.4% of people believe that it will be more comfortable as some may not feel confident in front of the opposite gender. *'This will also lessen any hesitation so students can inquire and understand more easily and eliminate any element of mischief'*. It should be more gender-focused and should emphasize over gender-specific issues. For some people, a barrier of respect should also be maintained. Some parents may also be reluctant to allow their young ones to get sex education in co-groups.' On the other hand, according to 43% of the participants, sex education should be in mixed-gendered groups as it further aids the whole purpose of eliminating the stigma around sex education. The more it is normalized and not considered inappropriate, the lesser sex will be glorified as some forbidden pleasure. *'This promotes healthy talks and will end the element of curiosity and will also help both genders to understand the primary biological urges.'*

DISCUSSION

Majority of the participants preferred that sex education should be taught in schools as its necessary for young children whereas others disagreed based on religious basis participants believes that as it is against religion and individual differences between children. Majority supporting the notion of imparting sex education in schools is in line with Ali et al. (2006) study where 72% participants supported the idea of sex education. It also reflects that with passage of time people in Pakistan are having change in mindset.

Majority participants (71%) suggested to impart sex education in high school based on maturity and sensibility of children whereas 42% People believe sex education should be taught in secondary schools because it's the major time of hormonal changes and bodily changes. Many a participants considered it as an ongoing process which should be handle at every stage according to level of child maturity. A study by Lieberman and Goldfarb (2020) supported findings stated that there should be comprehensive sex education which start from kindergarten and should be taught in stages same as other subjects.

Do sex education be taught to single-sex mostly people support the idea of single-sex education as it will be comfortable for both sexes and they will be able to understand concepts more elaborately. Still, other 43% think that there shouldn't single-sex education as "the whole point is removing this barrier and hesitation and promoting healthy talks about sex education". There is no literature available supporting or rejecting this finding.

CONCLUSION

The research indicates that most participants were highly positive regarding sex education and that it should be taught in schools. Though talking about sex-related matters seems shameful in our society but results show that Pakistani adults are looking for sex education. Some action research should be conducted to find ways of incorporating sex education into the curriculum. It would be helpful for children in getting authentic information via the right medium. But care should be taken that it may not become a cause of manipulation or abuse.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to COVID-19 all data collection was done online which might have hindered collection of more substantive data. A large number of people were not ready to talk about it and did not participate in research, yet many who participated were in favor of sex education further studies should analyze the topic considering demographics. The opinion of elderly people could not be taken which may have provided different results and an intergenerational comparative study could also yield interesting results.

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