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ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN HIGH SCHOOL AND HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

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Abstract:

The present study was initiated in the context of increasing demand for imparting sex education to adolescent children. This study was an attempt to understand the attitude of teachers about sex education to their adolescent children. The participants of the study was a randomly chosen one consisting of 75 high school and 75 higher secondary teachers of different school belongs to the age group of 25 to 55 years. The variable was measured using A Measure of Attitude towards Sex Education. The study concluded that there was no difference in the attitude of high school and higher secondary teachers and both of them have the same attitude of providing sex education to their students.

KEYWORDS:

Attitude, sex education, students.

INTRODUCTION

Sex is a biological term that refers to the difference between males and females and their potential for reproduction. Sexuality is a psychological term that refers to the awareness of and reaction to sex. Sexuality is a product of both the psychology and sociology of the human sex. Sexual behaviour has come to have important functions for our species beyond reproduction, primarily because it advances our communication with others and alters our own feelings about themselves. The process of the biological evolution has been supplemented by cultural evolution in the human. Sex is probably one area of our lives about which we know so little. And whatever little we happened to know about sex in bits and pieces through sources like friends, acquaintances and cheap sex books (Hoshi, 1987; Tjaden, 1988; Kumar, 1993). It is indeed ironical that while sex is such an important in our life, parents, elders, and teachers in India hardly play any significant role in providing scientific knowledge.

Since talking about sex is a taboo in the Indian society, the adolescents cannot freely approach his/her parents for guidance. Also, those who seek guidance from parents are not satisfied because the latter try to evade discussion or are not able to give to satisfactory answers. A few of them try to gather information through books, films or from friends; but a majority does not have access to such an information. Many a time, the adolescents receive wrong information and these myths and misconceptions are carried throughout their life time. Therefore, there is a need to provide adolescent with information so as to enable them to cope better with these changes.

Though there is a felt need to educate the adolescents on sex education, parents oppose such educational programs due to the fear that imparting sex education would lead to experimentation with sex. Many research studies reveal that when parents talk to and affirm the value of their children; young people are more likely to develop positive, healthy attitudes about themselves. This is also true when the subject is

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sex. Research shows that positive communication with parents and their children can help young people establish individual values and make healthy decisions. Studies have revealed that adolescent girls generally lack adequate knowledge about sexual matters and contraception which result in early pregnancy, increased pre-marital sexual activity, increased risk of STD infections including HIV/AIDS, maternal morbidity and mortality and unsafe abortions.

In 1993, a survey of 35 sex education projects conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that sex education in schools did not encourage young people to have sex at an earlier age or frequently. Rather the survey showed that early sex education delays the start of sexual activity, reduces sexual activity among young people and encourages those already sexually active to have safer sex. Researchers found “no support for the contention that sex education encourages sexual experimentation or increased activity”. If the parents were not able to provide appropriate and timely information that might “misses the opportunity of reducing the unwanted outcomes of unintended pregnancy and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases” (India together, April 2007).

The first-ever survey to study the behavioural pattern in the country which was conducted across six states has revealed the lack of comprehensive knowledge about HIV/AIDS. The survey was conducted by the Mumbai-based International Institute of Population Sciences (IIPS), in collaboration with the Population Council, New Delhi. “The demand for sex education among youth is ever growing for various reasons such as the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, early maturation age owing to improved nutritional status, delay in age of marriage and increased exposure among youth with more opportunities for interaction among young boys and girls”, Says Usha Ram, one of the coordinators of this study.

“Cutting across the states, schools or colleges are the main providers of the knowledge on the matter. The situation in Bihar and Jharkhand is more serious as less than one-tenth of young women and men have ever received any information on family life or sex”, says another co-coordinator. The youth have more acquaintance and proximity with their teachers. The data shows that of those young women and men who received any sex education, majority received it from their teachers and this is probably the reason that they consider teachers to be the best people to impart sex education. Integrating sex education in school curriculum has remained a contentious issue in the country though some states have gone ahead and included it on a pilot basis. The study further reveals that the youth residing in urban areas and educated apparently are slightly better off as compare to those who living in rural areas who have received no or less sex education. And among the young people who got information about sexual matters from any source, there was significantly low percentage of unmarried women (Indian Express, February, 19, 2008)

Debates about sex education have focused on two different approaches: “safe sex concepts” and “abstinence”. Safe sex courses encourage teens to use contraceptives, especially condoms when having sex and abstinence education which encourages teens to delay sexual activity. Abstinence is not having sex. A person who decides to practice abstinence has decided not to have sex.

Abstinence programs strongly encourage abstinence during the teen years, and preferably until marriage. They teach that causal sex at an early age not only produce serious threats of pregnancy and infection by sexually transmitted diseases, but also can undermine an individual's capacity to build loving, intimate relationships as an adult. These programs, therefore, encourage teen abstinence as a preparation and pathway to health adult marriage. They are growing up in the world in which they experiment more, make choices and take risks and learn by their own experiences than by those of others.

In a study conducted by Hovell (1994) on Family Influences on Adolescent Sexual Behaviour, it was revealed that conservative maternal attitudes about sex delay the development of sex behaviour. There is a highly charged political and social debate over sex education in middle and high school. On one side of the debate are those who believe that children in middle and high school should be provided with comprehensive sex education including information on condoms, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy and abortion. On the other side of the debate are those who believe that abstinence-only sex education should be offered in middle and high schools. Abstinence-only sex education programs promote abstinence from all sexual activity as the only acceptable standard for school age children. Advocates of abstinence only programs also believe that sexual activity outside the context of marriage promotes harmful psychological and physical effects.

One of these harmful effects is that comprehensive sex education programs promote increased sexual activity. Other study was done by Savara and Sridhar (1992) and they noted that parents and teachers act as a source of providing sex knowledge in only 16.30% of urban educated Indian men. Looking at the above, it is clear that adolescents have to be provided knowledge regarding sex and related issues. Sex education aims at helping the growth of positive feelings among children about sex, impart to children the truth that one needs love to nourish love, ensure that feelings which interfere with sex and love don't pile up inside the minds of youth.

OBJECTIVE

The major objective of the present study is to compare the attitude of high school and higher secondary school teachers towards sex education.

HYPOTHESES

1. There will not be any significant difference between high school and higher secondary school teachers in the attitude towards sex education.
2. There will not be any significant difference among high school and higher secondary school teachers based on different age groups.

METHOD

Participants

The sample of the present study is a randomly chosen one consisting of 75 high school teachers (n=75) and 75 higher secondary teachers (n=75) of different school belongs to the age group of 25 to 55 years. The participants were selected from different religions and from both sex. They belong to Thiruvananthapuram District of Kerala.

Measures

1.A Measure of Attitude Towards Sex Education (Ashmi & Jasseer, 2008)

It is used to measure the attitude of mothers and teachers of adolescent school children towards the idea of sex education. It is a 28 item five point Likert type scale. The items in the scale are presented as statements against which five response categories, viz., SA, A, U, D, and SD are given, representing strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree and strongly disagree. The internal consistency reliability of the scale using Cronbach's Alpha was found to be 0.86. The scale was found to possess both content validity and concurrent validity.

2. Personal Data Schedule: A personal data schedule was also used to collect the socio-demographic details of the subjects.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES USED

1. t-test
2. Analysis of variance

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While comparing the attitude of high school and higher secondary school teachers towards sex education, the mean scores obtained by high school and higher secondary school teachers were 107.62 and 106.25 respectively, with a corresponding t-value of 0.848, which was not statistically significant (Vide Table 1). From the calculated t-value, it was found that there was no significant difference between high school and higher secondary school teachers in their attitude towards sex education. Both high school and higher secondary teachers have similar attitude towards sex education. The finding clearly revealed that both high school and higher secondary school teachers were very much concerned about their own students in teaching proper and adequate sex education. People providing sex education have attitudes and beliefs of their own about sex and sexuality which do not negatively influence the sex education (Herold, 1984; Collins, Alagiri & Summers, 2002) and vast majority of people approved the teaching of sex education in public schools (Kirby, Peterson & Brown, 1982; Alexander, 1984; Marsman & Herold, 1986; Ogunjimi, 2006). But certain mothers were reluctant to talk about sex education to their daughters as they found embarrassing to discuss these issues (Mahajan & Sharma, 2005). The right sex education will help to make informed choices about their behavior and feel confident and competent about acting on these choices.

Comparing different age groups of high school and higher secondary school teachers towards sex education, the mean scores obtained by high school and higher secondary school teachers were 109.17, 106.52 and 104.86 respectively, with a corresponding F value of 2.04, which was not statistically

significant. From the calculated F value, it was found that there was no significant difference in different age groups of high school and higher secondary school teachers in their attitude towards sex education. All the selected age groups have similar attitude towards sex education. The findings revealed that both high school and higher secondary teachers were very much concerned about their own students in teaching proper and adequate sex education irrespective of their age.

Table 1: Results of t-test for comparison of high school and higher secondary school Teachers in attitude towards sex education

Variable	Participants	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	Sig.
Attitude	High school teachers	75	107.62	11.72	0.848	0.398
	Higher Secondary teachers	75	106.25	7.71		

Table 2: Results of Anova for comparison of three age groups of subjects on attitude towards sex education

Group	N	Mean	Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-Ratio	Sig.
1.	46	109.17	Between Group	396.60	2	198.302	2.04	0.133
2.	68	106.52						
3.	36	104.86	Within Group	14243.85	147	96.89		

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there does not exist any significant difference among high school and higher secondary school teachers in their attitude towards sex education. Both high school and higher secondary school teachers exhibited similar attitude towards sex education irrespective of their age.

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