

Concept, need and importance of sex education at school level

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Objectives

On completion of the topic, one should be able to understand:

- the meaning of the term adolescent in India
- the concept, need and importance of sex education at school level
- the consequences of unsafe and safe sex

TEXT

Introduction

India is the largest democracy in the world. In absolute terms, India is the fastest growing country globally with 18 million people added annually. It is a nation of contrasts, diversity and tremendous development potential, with a society that is multilingual and multi-religious with a multitude of castes, ethnic groups and cultures. The number of adolescents aged between 10 to 19 years is increasing and comprises over one-fifth of the population. Adolescent girls have limited choices and are caught in the cycle of early marriage, repeated pregnancies and childbearing.

Awareness of sex is the most significant factor necessary to lead a secure life. Usual educational practices are very simple to learn, but we cannot consider sex education on the same line. It comprises physiological, psychological and social issues, especially when we think of including it as a part of academic syllabus. As these complications occur, a question may arise in the mind of people about the need for sex education provided to the children. When children reach teenage level, lack of sex education may lead them to the unusual behaviour. If not corrected at the exact time, it may generate problems of immature misbehaviours in life of these children.

In India, most of the young girls lack good nutrition, early childbearing, reproductive health complications and difficulties of adolescent physical development. Anaemia is one of the primary contributors to maternal mortality (maternal mortality is five times higher in anaemic women) and is associated with the progressive physical deterioration of girls aged 10-19 years. Nutritional deprivation, increased demand of her body, excessive menstrual loss, and early/frequent pregnancies all aggravate and exacerbate anaemia and its effects. For the

young boys they face different set of problems and have needs, equally sensitive as those of girls. However, the entrenched patriarchal familial, societal, institutional practices in India and their own geographical areas and cultures do not allow them to express their problems and needs easily. Their issues and concerns require acknowledgement and response which is empathetic and positive.

Definition of Adolescence

By definition, the term, adolescence, is applied to the lifespan, usually between 10 to 19 years, in which children undergo rapid changes in body size, physiology and psychological and social functioning. This is the net result of surging hormones and social expectations designed to foster the transition from childhood to adulthood. True to the literal meaning of the term in Greek the word *adolescere* means “to grow and to mature”. The sentinel occurrence during the period of adolescence is “rapid growth”, not just physical and biological (sexual) but also emotional, cognitive, psychological and social. On the other hand, adolescence has been described as the transition period in life when an individual is no longer a child, but not yet an adult.

According to UNICEF adolescence is the beginning of the onset of puberty and defined as “the sequence of events by which the individual is transformed into a young adult by a series of biological changes”. Arbitrarily, adolescence is divided into three phase: early, middle and late adolescence. Early adolescence refers to age 10 to 13 years, middle adolescence to 14 to 16 years and late adolescence to 17 to 20 years.

Concepts and objectives of sex education

The term 'Sex Education', also known as sexuality education or sex and relationships education, is widely used to depict education about reproductive system, sexual interaction and other facets of human sexual behaviour. It is the procedure of gaining knowledge and developing mind-set as well as ideas about sex, sexual identity, human relations, closeness, gender roles, contraception methods and prevention of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD). It is important that adolescence should be familiar with the purpose of providing education at the school level in order to develop an open and healthy approach towards sex and sexuality in order to assist them to make well-thought judgments.

Introducing sex education at school level always attracted objections and apprehensions from many quarters. Family life education (FLE) or Sex education refers to a broad programme designed to impart knowledge/training regarding values, attitudes and practices affecting family

relationships. It aims to develop the qualities and attitudes on which successful family life depends. The education that provides knowledge on physical, social, moral, behavioural, and psychological changes and developments during puberty is termed as Adolescent Family Life Education. It teaches the adolescents about the role of boys and girls in family and society, responsibility and attitude of boys and girls towards each other, etc. within social context.

The main objectives of Sex Education can be broadly described as follows:

- 1) To develop emotionally stable children and adolescents who feel sufficiently secure and adequate to make decisions regarding their conduct without being carried away by their emotions.
- 2) To provide sound knowledge not only of the physical aspects of sex behaviour but also its psychological and sociological aspects, so that sexual experience will be viewed as a part of the total personality of the individual.
- 3) To develop attitudes and standards of conduct which will ensure that young people and adults will determine their sexual and other behaviour by considering its long range effects on their own personal development, the good of other individuals, and welfare of society as a whole .

Adolescent Sexual Behaviour and its Consequences

During adolescence period most young people initiate sexual behaviour and have many misconceptions and myths related to sexual and reproductive health. There are numerous myths attached to sexuality and reproductive health that are at the root of High Risk Sexual behaviour in this particular age group. In addition many mental health and social problems that is anxiety, depression, poor body image, stigma and suicides etc. may result from myths about body image, erectile dysfunction, illegitimate pregnancy and sexual problems for example premature ejaculation. Most adolescents lack relevant information and skills to practice safe sex. This situation has its impact not only on adolescents or young individual but also on their families and the society.

Following are the consequences of unsafe sexual behaviour among adolescents:

1. Early pregnancy and parenthood (early marriage and sometimes “out of wedlock”)/extra marital relationship.
2. Higher percentage of low birth weight (LBW) babies and increased infant morbidity and mortality
3. Abortions and its related complications
4. Reproductive tract infections/Sexually transmitted infections(RTI/STI) including HIV/AIDS

Consequences that are more in adolescents even if it has been “safe sex”

1. Emotional impact – guilt, stress, anxiety, suicide
2. Social impact – Stigma (especially if unmarried)
3. Economic impact – hindrance to academic and career progression

Emotional, social and economic impact may be more in case of adolescents even if it is safe sex because they are not mature enough to handle these consequences.

Need for Sex Education

Sex education is a very important subject that every child has to be aware of. It is intended to decrease the hazards of negative results from sexual behaviour such as unwanted or unplanned pregnancies and infection through sexually transmitted diseases. The general need of sex education is to eradicate the lack of knowledge and wrong ideas about sex by creating right attitude among the adolescents. Commonly, schools and colleges are considered as the main hub for creating awareness on sex education.

Lack of sexual health education (i.e., Information PLUS Skills) contributes to the health and psychosocial problems of the adolescents. They are likely to be curious yet ill-informed, bold yet vulnerable and have numerous myth related to sexual anatomy and functioning. Many adolescents adopt high risk behaviour due to the numerous myths and lack of skills- especially ability to negotiate and to deal with peer pressure effectively.

Importance of sex education at school level

School provides a natural entry for reaching adolescence with health education and services. School is an ideal place to screen for or treat a range of common illnesses. But on the contrary, schools are short of resources and teachers have neither the training nor the resources to deliver health education on top of their existing workload. To turn this around requires effective training to build the motivation and skills of staff, and may require outside support for sex education lessons. Some successful schemes train young people as peer educators in schools. It is also ensure that services provided at school have community support. Many head teachers are concerned that they will open themselves to criticism if they provide services for the student. Efforts among the school and community are required to ensure that such moves are supported.

Sex education should also include social and moral behaviour, proper attitudes and values towards sex, love, family life and interpersonal relations in the society. Due to growing incidences of HIV/AIDS, RTIs/STIs and teenage pregnancies, there is a need to impart sex education among youth. The problem of over-population also demands family life education,

including family planning as a priority, as many of the young people are about to be married and should be aware of the responsibilities they have.

Sports and Sex Education

The course physical education and health based on physical activities is conducted to help students develop both physically and psychologically. The course is very much in common with sex education which is a good channel for boys and girls to communicate. As a consequence, the middle school students should realize the feasibility to introduce sex education to the course and explore measure to put that into practice. The sport teachers should make use of the course as a platform to cultivate student's right attitude towards sexual health education. Detailed discussion will be made to explore the feasibility of introducing sex education to the physical education, which is expected to promote the development of sexual health education. Sex education is an important demonstration of the idea of modern health. With joint efforts, the middle school students knowing the essence of sex as a science will move toward maturity happily and healthily.

Sports and Sex Education are closely related. Because, when we talk about them we may remember our childhood days when we used to play dolls together, we used to play different types of games without thinking that we are of different sex. When we grew up we can differentiate the difference between boy and girl. This is how sex and gender difference emerged. Apart from male (Boys) and female (Girls) there comes a third Gender, difficult to say either male or female. Due to more male hormone girls behave just like boys and some boys due to more female hormone behave like girls. Due to these factors, now in the international arena or regional and national arena many legal or illegal controversies are occurring, such as male under disguise play women football, female though like male play female athletics etc. So, sometimes medical examination and sex determination checkup is needed and a different type of sex scandal also happens from time to time.

Conclusion

Sex education imparts gradually the essential information about conception, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. It is a continuous process of developing attitudes, values and understanding regarding all situations and relationships in which people play roles as males or females. Growth and development during adolescence is a Bio-psychosocial process characterized by physical, psychosocial and cognitive changes taking place together but at different pace. These changes may not occur at the same chronological age in different adolescents and this may

cause concern in them. So, this is the right time to take up the appropriate counselling and awareness, so that timely referrals can be made.

Summary

Awareness of sex is the most significant factor necessary to lead a secure life. Usual educational practices are very simple to learn, but we cannot consider sex education on the same line. It comprises physiological, psychological and social issues. Introducing sex education at school level always attracted objections and apprehensions from many quarters. Family life education (FLE) or Sex education refers to a broad programme designed to impart knowledge/training regarding values, attitudes and practices affecting family relationships. . It aims to develop the qualities and attitudes on which successful family life depends. The education that provides knowledge on physical, social, moral, behavioural, and psychological changes and developments during puberty is termed as Adolescent Family Life Education.

FAQ:

Q1. Who are adolescents?

Ans: Adolescence is applied to the lifespan, usually between 10 to 19 years, in which children undergo rapid changes in body size, physiology and psychological and social functioning. According to UNICEF adolescence is the beginning of the onset of puberty and defined as “the sequence of events by which the individual is transformed into a young adult by a series of biological changes”.

Q2. How can you divide the stages of adolescents literally and by age?

Ans: Adolescence can be divided into three phases: early, middle and late adolescence. Early adolescence refers to age 10 to 13 years, middle adolescence to 14 to 16 years and late adolescence to 17 to 20 years.

Q3. What is sex education? Give the main objectives of sex education.

Ans: Sex education is widely used to depict education about reproductive system, sexual interaction and other facets of human sexual behaviour. It is the procedure of gaining knowledge and developing mind-set as well as ideas about sex, sexual identity, human relations, closeness, gender roles, contraception methods and prevention of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STD).

The main objectives of Sex Education can be broadly described as follows:

- 1) To develop emotionally stable children and adolescents who feel sufficiently secure and adequate to make decisions regarding their conduct without being carried away by their emotions.
- 2) To provide sound knowledge not only of the physical aspects of sex behaviour but also its psychological and sociological aspects, so that sexual experience will be viewed as a part of the total personality of the individual.
- 3) To develop attitudes and standards of conduct which will ensure that young people and adults will determine their sexual and other behaviour by considering its long range effects on their own personal development, the good of other individuals, and welfare of society as a whole .

Q4. What are the consequence of unsafe sexual behaviours among the adolescents?

Ans: Following are the consequences of unsafe sexual behaviour among adolescents:

- Early pregnancy and parenthood (early marriage and sometimes “out of wedlock”)/extra marital relationship.
- Higher percentage of low birth weight (LBW) babies and increased infant morbidity and mortality
- Abortions and its related complications
- Reproductive tract infections/Sexually transmitted infections(RTI/STI) including HIV/AIDS

Q5. Why do we need sex education at school level?

Ans: The general need of sex education is to eradicate the lack of knowledge and wrong ideas about sex by creating right attitude among the adolescents. Commonly, schools and colleges are considered as the main hub for creating awareness on sex education.

The importance of sex education at school level is that sex education could include social and moral behaviour, proper attitudes and values towards sex, proper attitudes and values towards sex, love, family life and interpersonal relations in the society among the adolescents. School provides a natural entry for reaching adolescence with health education and services.

Q6. What are the consequences of safe sex?

Ans: Following are the consequences of sexual behaviour among adolescents, even if it has been “safe sex”

- Emotional impact – guilt, stress, anxiety, suicide
- Social impact – Stigma (especially if unmarried)
- Economic impact – hindrance to academic and career progression

Emotional, social and economic impact may be more in case of adolescents even if it is safe sex because they are not matured enough to handle these consequences.

Glossary

Anaemia: A deficiency of red blood cells

Nutritional: Of or relating to or providing nutrition

Adolescence: the time period between the beginning of puberty and adulthood

Puberty: The time of life when sex glands become functional

Conception: The act of becoming pregnant; fertilization of an ovum by a spermatozoon

Contraception: Birth control by the use of devices or drugs or surgery

Chronological: Relating to or arranged according to temporal order

Morbidity: The relative incidence of a particular disease

Mortality: The ratio of deaths in an area to the population of that area

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