

## PERCEPTION OF PARENTS AND ATTITUDE OF ADOLESCENT GIRL'S AND TEACHERS TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOL

**ArpitaDebnath\***

**RajiyaShahani\*\***

---

### **Abstract**

Sex education is the provision of information about bodily development, sex, sexuality and relationships, along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and sexual health. This study was conducted to explore perception of parents about sex education and assess the attitude of school going adolescent girls and teachers towards sex education in school. Total 320 adolescent girls are selected as sample from 8 Higher Secondary Schools of Silchar town, along with 32 teachers and 48 parents. From each selected school 20 students from 10+1 class and other 20 students from 10+2 class are randomly selected for the study. Out of 8 selected schools in some schools only arts stream is available and in some schools both science and arts streams are available. Sample is randomly selected from both science and arts streams from the schools where both the streams are present. Data was collected using interview schedule. The study found that more than half of the respondents were in favour of sex education in school through their teachers but nearly one third of them did not want to get sex education in school. Less than one-third of the adolescent girls said that sex education is important because its knowledge is required to take precautions without others help. Majority of the teachers perceived that sex education should be included in the curriculum at school and nearly one-third of the teachers perceived that sex education should not be included in the curriculum at school. Majority of the teachers skip the sex education chapter.

**Keywords: Sex education; Perception; Attitude**

---

\* **Research Scholar, Sociology Department, Assam University, Silchar**

## 1. Introduction

Sex education is defined as a broad program that aims to build a strong foundation for lifelong sexual health by acquiring information and attitudes, beliefs and values about one's identity, relationships and intimacy. It is the provision of information about bodily development, sex, sexuality and relationships, along with skills-building to help young people communicate about and make informed decisions regarding sex and sexual health. It should occur throughout a student's grade levels, with information appropriate to student's development. It should include information about puberty and reproduction, contraception and condoms, relationships, sexual violence prevention, prevention of HIV and STD. Primarily, during adolescence (10-19 years) its provision is a crucial preventative tool, as it is the opportune time when young people experience development changes in their physiology and behavior as they enter adulthood (WHO,2011).The complex emotional state in which adolescence find themselves in a stigma surrounding matters of sexual nature in Indian society, makes it increasingly challenging for adolescents to attain the knowledge they need.Thus endowing the knowledge necessary to them, will help them to prevent them from risk behaviour.

Parents, who are a primary and important source of sexual health education for young people. Adolescents often look to their families as one of several preferred sources of sexual health information (McKay &Holowaty, 1998). In addition, most young people agree that sexual health education should be a shared responsibility between parents and schools (Byers, Sears, Voyer, et al., 2003a; Byers, Sears, Voyer, et al., 2003b).

According to the NFHS-3 report most of the Indian adults think children should learn about the changes in their own bodies during puberty, fewer adults think children should learn about puberty related changes in the bodies. Under half of women think girls should learn about contraception, compared with 65 percent of men. More than 60 percent of men say that boys and girls should be taught about sex and sexual behavior in school, but slightly less than half of the women feel that this is not an appropriate topic for school children. Considering the national level scenario, it is observed that in 2007, when sex education curriculum was promoted by India's Ministry of Human Resource Development, controversy developed. Some of the states like- Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh (M.P), Karnataka, Kerela, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh and Goa banned

sex education programming. (Tripathi, 2013). In M.P, the C.M. removed sex education from the state curriculum saying that it offended Indian values. A (RashtriyaSwayamsevakSangh) RSS member stated that teachers who followed the sex education curriculum could be jailed for two years on the charge of outraging the modesty of a woman. (Hindustan Times, 2007). In an article, “It states that U.P. has banned sex education keeping young minds away from such awareness, as they perceive that it may not be a very good idea.”(Times of India, 2009).

From DLHS-3 (2007-08) it is found that the opinion of the unmarried women of Assam, where 78.2 percent of the respondents from urban area felt sex education to be an important education for students and 66.3 percent of the respondents from rural area were also of the opinion that sex education is important for them. 36.8 percent urban respondents said that they have ever received sex education and 26.8 percent of the respondents from rural area have ever received sex education.

The above scenario depicts that there is a controversy of people’s perception in imparting sex education, which is an important education for adolescents. Keeping in view, the need of sex education, the present study has been carried out.

## **2. Objectives:**

- i) To explore perception of parents about sex education in school.
- ii) To access the attitude of teachers and students towards sex education in school.

## **3. Study Area:**

The study has been conducted in Silchar under Cachar district. Cachar is one of the 27 districts in the state of Assam in India, with it’s headquarter is Silchar. It occupies an area of 3,786 square kilometres. The district of Cachar is located in the southernmost part of Assam. It is bounded on the north by Barali and Jayantia hill ranges, on the south by the state Mizoram, on the east by the districts of Hailakandi and Karimganj. It is considered as one of the oldest district of the state. The main composition of people in the district are Bengali, Marwari, Manipuri, Naga, Kachari and other tribes. Hindu, Christians and Muslims together reside in the district. For the study 8 Higher Secondary Schools of Silchar town has been selected.

**4. Methodology :** This study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data has been collected from field through interview schedule. The study area of the research comprises both government and private

school. A sample of 320 unmarried adolescent girls, as well as 48 parents and 32 teachers has been selected as sample on the basis of simple random sampling. So the total sample size was 400 respondents. The study has been conducted during the month of June-August 2017.

## 5. Results and Discussions:

The results of the present research have been presented under various sections.

### Attitude of adolescent girls on sex education at schools

The attitude of adolescent girls on sex education at schools is categorized into two categories: 1) Yes, and 2) No. The distribution of the respondents into these categories is shown in table no. 1.

**Table 1: Attitude of adolescent girls on sex education at schools**

Attitude of adolescent girls on sex education at schools	No. of respondent	Percentage
Yes	213	66.6
No	107	33.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey

From the above table it has been found that more than half of the respondents i.e. 66.6 percent wanted to get sex education in school through their teachers but nearly one third (33.4 percent) of them did not want to get sex education in school. Though they get some knowledge from books, social network, magazines and friends, yet it is not sufficient for them. They want to gain more knowledge regarding reproductive health system. They even mentioned that they need such teachers, who have proper training on sex education and could teach properly on the subject matters of sex education. They also felt that sex education should be taught separately for girls and boys in a coeducation system of school.

### Importance of sex education for the adolescent girls

Awareness of sex is the most important factor necessary to lead a secure life. Sex education at this stage is very important to increase awareness about the ongoing conditions, when and how something happens and what to do if it comes to reality. The importance of sex education for the adolescent girls is categorized into eight categories:

**Table 2: Importance of sex education for the adolescent girls**

<b>Importance of sex education</b>	<b>No. of respondent</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Fell embarrassed	33	10.3
Child is curious at that time and it leads to wrong path	49	15.3
To have prior knowledge regarding sex and its consequences before indulging in it	70	21.9
It can help us to take care of our self from various sex related disease	37	11.5
It helps during the stage of puberty and adolescence	4	1.2
Its knowledge is required to take precautions without others help	83	26
People may be aware of their sexual health and think positively	26	8.1
To know our reproductive organs	18	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Field Survey

The table shows that majority of the respondents, 26 percent said that sex education is important because its knowledge is required to take precautions without others help, followed by 21.9 percent said that it is necessary to have prior knowledge regarding sex and its consequences before indulging in it, 15.3 percent were of the view that child are curious at that time and it leads to wrong path, 11.5 percent said it can help us to take care of our self from various sex related disease, 10.3 percent said that the discussion in this topic makes them feel embarrassed, 8.1 percent think that by getting the knowledge of sex education people may be aware of their sexual health and think positively, 5.7 percent think that sex education can help use to know our sex organs and 1.2 percent said that it helps during the stage of puberty and adolescence.

### **Perception of parents on sex education at schools**

The perception of parentson sex education at schools is categorized into two categories: 1) Yes, and 2) No. The distribution of the respondents into these categories is shown in table no.3.

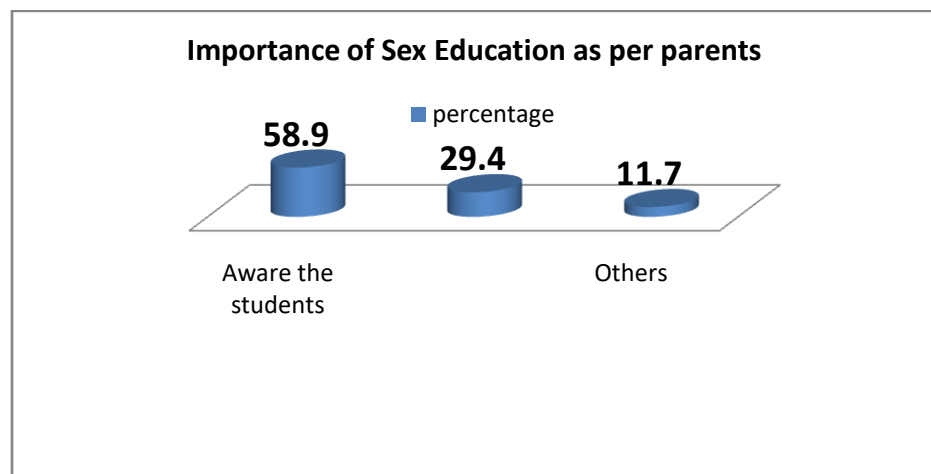
**Table 3: Perception of parents on sex education at schools**

Perception of parents on sex education at schools	No. of respondent	Percentage
Yes	17	35.4
No	31	64.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

The table represents that majority of the parent's, 64.6 percent said that they were not in favour of sex education in schools and only 35.4 percent said that sex education is necessary for the students. The parents who are not in favour of sex education stated that if girls are being taught about sex education then they will try to experience those.

A study done by Langille et.al, found that "Sexual health education should be provided in the schools" and a majority of these parents approved of schools providing young people with information on a wide range of sexual health topics including puberty, reproduction, healthy relationships, STI/ AIDS prevention, birth control, abstinence, sexual orientation, and sexual abuse/coercion.

**Fig: Importance of sex education as per parents**

The chart shows that more than half of the respondent's parents felt the importance of sex education and said it is important to make the students aware of its benefits and drawbacks, remaining 29.4 percent said sex education may provide accurate information and help them in taking good decision and 11.7 percent said it would help the students in understanding

themselves, it would direct them in right direction, so that they may not indulge in unwanted experiences like sex, drugs etc.

### **Attitude of teachers on sex education at schools**

Teachers have an important role in the development and growth of adolescents who get the opportunity to go to school. In this study, efforts were made to understand the attitude of teachers on sex education at schools, which were categorized into two categories: 1) Yes, and 2) No. The distribution of the respondents into these categories is shown in table no.4.

**Table 4: Attitude of teachers on sex education at schools**

<b>Attitude of teachers on sex education at schools</b>	<b>No. of respondent</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	21	65.6
No	11	34.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

The table shows that majority of the teachers, 65.6 percent perceived that sex education should be included in the curriculum at school and nearly one-third of the teachers perceived that sex education should not be included in the curriculum at school.

Different opinion of teachers on sex education:

One teacher expressed the opinion that school-based reproductive health programmes or sex education are necessary to improve the knowledge of in-school adolescents regarding reproductive health issues and prevalence of risky sexual practices among them.

Such programmes could either be integrated in to the existing curriculum as part of subjects being taught or as a separate subject that can be taught and examined.

Another teacher stated that sex education should be introduced into school curriculum to reduce the rate of premature parents. The societal moral standard is now dropping due to civilization. Most youths have access to pornographic materials. Hence, it is important for them to know the long and short term effect of STD.

A female teacher quoted that for her, teaching of contraceptive in school is not a welcome idea. It is like exposing the students to promiscuity. When they know the way out, they will indulge in sexual relationships more than ever before.

Another teacher said that sex education should not be included in school curriculum; rather it should be included in the hospitals under medical programmes, since we are not professionally trained on that.

### Way of dealing with sex education chapter by the teacher

The way of dealing with sex education chapter by the teacher is categorized into two categories: 1) Teach the Chapter 2) Skip the chapter and 3) Ask the student to read by themselves. The distribution of the respondents into these categories is shown in table no.5.

**Table 5:Way of dealing with sex education chapter by the teacher**

Way of dealing with sex education chapter by the teacher	No. of respondent	Percentage
Teach the Chapter	7	2.1
Skip the chapter	14	4.3
Ask the student to read by themselves	11	3.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey

The data illustrates that majority (4.3 percent) of the teachers skip the sex education chapter, followed by the teachers who ask their student to read the chapter by themselves and only 2.1 percent of the teachers revealed that they teach the chapter in class. Some of the teachers expressed fear that if they start discussing reproduction and sexuality with the students, they will lose the respect, and students will start teasing them asking some absurd questions. Besides majority of the teacher feel that they themselves need more information on sexual and reproductive health issue so that they can pass on correct information and also satisfy the queries of the students.

“I simply shelve the chapter, to avoid embarrassing questions from the students. I cannot stand teaching them about how the body functions or how HIV is transmitted.”(Smita)



Through the discussion with the teachers, they revealed that they teach physiological changes among boys and girls during adolescence and educate them about psychological and behavioral changes.

The discussions with teachers also revealed that the information provided through school curriculum regarding sex education is very little and inadequate. The teachers, who informed the respondents regarding sex education, said that the students were taught only about the anatomy of human body, reproductive organs and their functions, in the school curriculum. Apart from these, reproductive and sexual health was not touched upon.

“I avoided sex-related content and did not feel comfortable to teach because he perceived it sensitive.”(Ashish)

## **6. Conclusion**

The study has tried to assess the attitude and practices regarding sex education and to identify the need of imparting sex education in school going adolescent girls. Regarding the need of sex education among adolescents, it shows that more than half of the respondents were in favour of sex education in school through their teachers but nearly one third of them did not want to get sex education in school.

A study done by Dorle A.S.et.al, from Karnataka found only 48 percent of students favour sex education in school and it was lower than the present study. Another study done by Benzaken T et.al, shows 90 percent favours sex education.

The study finds that though half of the respondent's parents felt the importance of sex education, but their perception collided. Majority of the parents said that they were not in favour of sex education, as they thought that if girls will be taught about sex education, then they will try to experience those. So, though they felt sex education is important knowledge for their children they were not in favour, thinking of the consequences.

The study revealed that some, of the teachers expressed fear that if they start discussing reproduction and sexuality with the students, they will lose the respect, and students will start

teasing them asking some absurd questions, so they skipped the chapters dealing with sex education.

## Reference

- 1) Benzaken T., Palep AH, Gill PS. “Exposure to and opinions towards sex education among adolescent students in Mumbai: A cross- sectional survey” *BMC Public Health*, ,Vol.11, pp: 805, 2011.
- 2) Byers, S. E., Sears, H.A., Voyer, S.D., et al. “An adolescent perspective on sexual health education at school and at home: I. High school students.” *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, vol.12, pp: 1-17, 2003a.
- 3) Byers, S.E., Sears, H.A., Voyer, S.D., et al. “An adolescent perspective on sexual health education at school and at home: II. Middle school students.”*The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, vol.12, pp: 19-33, 2003 b.
- 4) DorleAS,Hiramath LD, Mannapur BS, Ghattargi CH, “Puberty changes in secondary school children of Bagalkot, Karnataka.” *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, vol.4 pp : 3016-19, 2010.
- 5) Geneva: WHO,“The sexual and reproductive health of younger adolescents research issues in developing countries: Background paper for a consultation.” 2011.
- 6) Langille, D.B., Langille, D.J., Beazley, R., &Doncaster, H. Amherst, “Parent’s Attitudes Towards School-based Sexual Health Education.” *Halifax, N.S.:* Dalhousie University, 1996.
- 7) McKay, A., Pietrusiak, M.A., &Holowaty, P. “Parents’ opinions and attitudes towards sexuality education in the schools. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*,vol: 6,pp: 29-38, 1998.