

# PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL TEACHERS REGARDING INTRODUCTION OF SEX EDUCATION IN SCHOOL CURRICULUM - A CROSS SECTIONAL STUDY IN PUDUCHERRY

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## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Sex education in school is considered as an effectual way to boost the understanding of students knowledge regarding sexual transmitted infections, unintended pregnancies, abortions etc. There has been a lot of defiance in introducing sex education in school curriculum. There are conflicting interests among teachers regarding sex education and hence this study was designed to understand their perception regarding sexual education and its introduction into school curriculum.

**Methods:** A cross sectional study conducted among 93 teachers from five randomly selected government high schools at urban region of Puducherry from March to April, 2022. All teachers who consented to participate in the study were included. Pre-tested self administered structured questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. Descriptive analysis was done to describe the socio demographic characters and Chi-square test was performed for assessing the association between perception and knowledge with different demographic variables.

**Results:** Total 93 teachers participated in the study among which 70(75.3%) were female teachers and 23(24.7%) were male teachers. Major source of information regarding sex education to school students came from media with 69(74%) followed by internet. 68(73%) teachers believed that sex education will definitely alter the sexual behavior of teenagers. 82(88%) teachers were in favor of introducing sex education in school curriculum. The most appropriate age to introduce sex education according to the teachers was 15-16 years. 82(88%) teachers believed that sex education will definitely benefit students in their

future. Educational status of the teachers was found to be statistically significant in introducing sex education in school curriculum (p=0.008)

**Conclusion:** The teachers had the perception that sex education will definitely alter the student's sexual behavior. Teachers had a positive approach towards introduction of sex education in school curriculum and its beneficial consequences on students in their future life.

Keywords: sexual transmitted infection, reproduction, adolescent, curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

Sex education has a broader spectrum which includes human sexual anatomy, reproductive health, rights and responsibilities, sexual reproduction and intercourse, sexual orientation, family planning and contraception, sexual pleasure and abstinence, decision making and principles, dating, relationship, communication, sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and their prevention and birth control methods.[1] School provides an appropriate environment for teaching sex education as large number of children can be reached there. But the main concern is that the skill based learning activities are being neglected as teachers teaching sex education primarily focus on passive forms of learning.[2,3] Sex-related issues are often prohibited subjects for discussion and its restriction can be seen extending into education system. Lack of access to comprehensive information regarding sexual health among vulnerable adolescents remains critical leading to silent spread of sexually transmitted diseases.

The word adolescence is derived from Latin word which means "to grow to maturity" since adolescence is the period where there is remarkable speed of transition in life takes place which is more appreciated in the physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral aspects.[4,5] It's apparently true that knowledge of sex education will educate adolescents against sexual discrimination and sexual abuse as well as safeguard them from sexual infections that could hinder their well being. Also the knowledge of sex education provides effectual social relationship between the genders. Providing adolescents with knowledge and skill in making appropriate choice on their sexual lives is of paramount need in achieving national adolescent health and educational goals.[6]

In majority of the developing countries, sex education has been part of the curriculum in primary schools.[7] However many literature works provide information that most of the teachers lack adequate training to offer education on sexuality.[7-9] Moreover in formal education, school curriculum provides meager knowledge on HIV/AIDS and human reproductive system through biology courses which are not discussed in detail.[10] More priority should be focused in schools on sex education from early onwards, adequate training to teachers from superficial biological aspects towards a more inclusive program. In developing country like India where there exists lot of taboos in the society, sex is a sensitive subject which has restrictions to discuss openly and in south India this topic is not explored much. Teachers are

primarily considered as successful agents in promoting sex education as their perception regarding the topic will help to improve the existing deficiencies on adolescent reproductive health in the country. Hence the present study was designed to assess the perception of school teachers regarding introduction of sex education and its consequences in school curriculum with an intention to improve their reproductive health and reducing the risks of harmful sexual practices.

## METHODOLOGY

A School based cross-sectional study was adapted to assess the perception of school teachers regarding introduction of sex education and its consequences in school curriculum. Adopting simple random sampling technique, five government high schools were selected at urban region of Puducherry. The study was conducting from March to April 2022. Ethical clearance was granted by the ethical committee of Aarupadai Veedu medical college (AV/IEC/2021/062). All teachers who consented to participate in the study were included. The sample size was calculated using a statistical formula for estimation of single proportion by assuming that 94.7% of the teachers have positive attitude toward school sex education with 10% non-response rate. [11] The confidence interval and relative precision were taken as 95% and 5% respectively.

A structured questionnaire with three sub-sections including socio-demographic variables (5 items), knowledge regarding sex education (5 items) and perception of sex education in school curriculum (5 items) was used for data collection. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked by Cronbach's Alpha value with the cut off of 0.7. The data were entered and analysed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive analysis was done to describe the socio demographic characters of the study participants. Chi-square test was performed for assessing the association between perception and knowledge with different demographic variables. The P value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant results.

## RESULTS:

Total 93 teachers participated in the study among which 70 (75.3%) were female teachers and 23 (24.7%) were male teachers. 57 (61.3%) of the teachers had educational degree above graduation while 36 (38.7%) had minimum graduation qualifications. The mean age of the study participants was  $39 \pm 9$ . Table 1 showed that major source of information regarding sex education to school students came from media (TV/Cinema) which constituted 69 (74%) while internet was the second common source at 61 (65%). Information through friends and parents followed at 42 (45%) and 29 (31.2%) respectively. 28 (30%) teachers believed that sex education was limited only to reproductive anatomy while 65 (69.9%) of them were aware of what sex education content includes.

Table 1: Opinion of teachers about source of information and meaning of sex education (N=93)

Characteristics	N (%)
1. Source of information for sex education to school students	
Friends	42(45.2)
TV/Cinema	69 (74.2)
Internet	61 (65.6)
Magazines	20 (21.5)
Posters	14 (15.1)
School	25 (26.9)
Parents/Guardians	29 (31.2)
Others	8 (8.6)
2. Sex education practically means educating someone about	
Reproductive Anatomy	28 (30.1)
Contraception	10 (10.8)
Family planning	7 (7.5)
Sexual activity	19 (20.4)
Safe sex	12 (12.9)
All of the above	65 (69.9)

Table 2 shows that 73% of teachers believed that sex education will definitely alter the sexual behavior of teenagers and among these, 73% of female teachers had stronger credence regarding sex education compared to male teachers (p value-0.036). Nearly half of the teachers were not confident in delivering sex education while 58% did not have any idea regarding any formal sex education program. 88% of the teachers were in favor of introducing sex education in school curriculum and 88% of them believed that sex education will definitely benefit students in their future.(Table 3)

Table 2: Knowledge of School teachers regarding sex education (N=93)

Table 3: Perception of School teachers regarding sex education(N=93)

Indicators	Categories	Total	Age		P value	Gender		P value	Education		P value
			<45 years	>45 years		Male	Female		Graduation	Above graduation	
Should sex education be	Yes	82 (88.2)	25 (83.3)	57 (90.4)	0.571	19 (82.6)	63 (90)	0.615	27 (75)	55 (96.4)	0.008*

Indicators	Categories	Total	Age		P value	Gender		P value	Education		P value
			<45 years	>45 years		Male	Female		Graduation	Above graduation	
Will sex education alter teenager's sexual behavior?	Yes	68 (73.1)	24 (80)	44 (69.8)	0.586	17 (74)	51 (72.9)	0.036*	23 (63.9)	45 (78.9)	0.165
	No	4 (4.3)	1 (3.3)	3 (4.8)		3 (13)	1 (1.4)		3 (8.3)	1 (1.8)	
	Don't know	21 (22.6)	5 (16.7)	16 (25.4)		3 (13)	18 (25.7)		10 (27.8)	11 (19.3)	
Do you have appropriate knowledge to conduct session on sex education?	Yes	32 (34.4)	9 (30)	23 (36.5)	0.301	10 (43.5)	22 (31.4)	0.45	10 (27.8)	22 (38.6)	0.47
	No	47 (50.5)	14 (46.7)	33 (52.4)		11 (47.8)	36 (51.4)		21 (58.3)	26 (45.6)	
	Don't know	14 (15.1)	7 (23.3)	7 (11.1)		2 (8.7)	12 (17.2)		5 (13.9)	9 (15.8)	
Are you aware of any formal sex education program?	Yes	21 (22.6)	9 (30)	12 (19)	0.493	5 (21.7)	16 (22.9)	0.946	9 (25)	12 (21.1)	0.71
	No	54 (58.1)	16 (53.3)	38 (60.3)		14 (60.9)	40 (57.1)		19 (52.8)	35 (61.4)	
	Don't know	18 (19.3)	5 (16.7)	13 (20.7)		4 (17.4)	14 (20)		8 (22.2)	10 (17.5)	

introduced in school curricula?	No	5 (5.4)	2 (6.7)	3 (4.8)	0.343	2 (8.7)	3 (4.3)	0.262	4 (11.1)	1 (1.8)	0.468
	Don't know	6 (6.5)	3 (10)	3 (4.8)		2 (8.7)	4 (5.7)		5 (13.9)	1 (1.8)	
If yes, from which standard it should be introduced?	Primary	13 (15.9)	5 (20)	8 (14)	0.343	5 (26.3)	8 (12.7)	0.262	6 (22.2)	7 (12.7)	0.468
	Middle	46 (56.1)	11 (44)	35 (61.4)		8 (42.1)	38 (60.3)		15 (55.6)	31 (56.4)	
	High school	23 (28)	9 (36)	14 (24.6)		6 (31.6)	17 (27)		6 (22.2)	17 (30.9)	
Will introduction of sex education give school a bad reputation?	Yes	3 (3.2)	0 (0)	3 (4.8)	0.093	2 (8.7)	1 (1.4)	0.195	2 (5.6)	1 (1.8)	0.036*
	No	84 (90.3)	26 (86.7)	58 (92)		19 (82.6)	65 (92.9)		29 (80.6)	55 (96.4)	
	Don't know	6 (6.5)	4 (13.3)	2 (3.2)		2 (8.7)	4 (5.7)		5 (13.8)	1 (1.8)	
Will you be able to deliver a class on sex education if asked to do so in the school?	Yes	21 (22.6)	7 (23.3)	14 (22.2)	0.658	4 (17.4)	17 (24.3)	0.455	6 (16.7)	15 (26.3)	0.429
	No	52 (55.9)	15 (50)	37 (58.8)		12 (52.2)	40 (57.1)		23 (63.9)	29 (50.9)	
	Don't know	20 (21.5)	8 (26.7)	12 (19)		7 (30.4)	13 (18.6)		7 (19.4)	13 (22.8)	
Will sex education in school promote sexual activity among students?	Yes	2 (2.2)	0 (0)	2 (3.2)	0.514	1 (4.3)	1 (1.4)	0.243	1 (2.8)	1 (1.8)	0.014*
	No	63 (67.7)	22 (73.3)	41 (65.1)		18 (78.3)	45 (64.3)		18 (50)	45 (78.9)	
	Don't know	28 (30.1)	8 (26.7)	20 (31.7)		4 (17.4)	24 (34.3)		17 (47.2)	11 (19.3)	
Will sex education in the school help students in future?	Yes	82 (88.1)	27 (90)	55 (87.3)	0.614	19 (82.6)	63 (90)	0.044*	29 (80.5)	53 (92.9)	0.177
	No	2 (2.2)	0 (0)	2 (3.2)		2 (8.7)	0 (0)		1 (2.8)	1 (1.8)	
	Don't know	9 (9.7)	3 (10)	6 (9.5)		2 (8.7)	7 (10)		6 (16.7)	3 (5.3)	

## DISCUSSION:

It is been globally estimated that one in every five people are in the age group between 10 -19 years of age and it's the developing countries that caters 85% of this cohort adolescents.[12] Being neglected on health priority which has developed as a concern regarding sexual behavior resulting in increase in sexual and reproductive ill health among young people.[13] Openness regarding sexual education to young people has been found to be a protective factor encouraging them to be more sensible and follow healthy behavior and considerably delayed sexual debut which was one of the major perception of teachers in introducing sex education in school curriculum.[14] Studies also found that sex education will definitely promote the sexual health of students[15] which is similar with the present study finding where 88% of teachers believed it would have positive impact among students in their future while 73% also believed that it would alter the teenagers sexual behavior in a rightful path. This positive attitude of teachers is mostly contributed to their educational status and experience, who can perceive the depth and need for the current situation.

Sex education being a powerful and sensitive topic that deals with emotions, feelings and reactions is usually being neglected or taught in aspect accordingly to the perception of the teachers covering superficially, the biological aspects mainly. But the focus now has shifted in many countries where more comprehensive program that divulge sexual health more in the dimensions of physical, emotional, social, intellectual and spiritual.[16,17] Globally the attitude of teachers vary according to the geographic distribution, custom, religion, facilities, support from management and government in implementing sex education. Study conducted in Nigeria by Mohammed showed majority of the teachers had negative attitude in introducing sex education due to the presence of hindering factors like cultural belief and religious aspects.[18] But in the present study, teachers had positive attitude towards sex education. 73% believed that sex education will alter the behavior of students in a positive way while 82% were in favor of introducing it into the curriculum and around 88% of the teachers believed that sex education will contribute to the wellness of the students in the future. In the present study educational status of the teachers was found to be a significant determinant of positive attitude to sex education ( $p < 0.05$ ) and significantly female teachers adhered to the fact that sex education will alter the teenager's sexual behavior ( $p < 0.05$ ) which is similar when compared to the Portugal study where the attitude of the female teachers was higher compared to male teachers.[19]

The above mentioned fact was supported by studies conducted in various parts of the world which emphasized that most of the faculties had positive attitude and preferred to induct sex education into the curriculum for the benefit of the students.[11,19-21] They believed that the appropriate age to deliver sex education was around 15-16 year where some studies believed to be as early as 10-12 years of age.[9,11,19-21] Age for introduction of sex education was still debatable as some teachers felt students were too young and unprepared for it while the need for it was recommended as early as primary classes by studies conducted in developed

countries.[22,23] Fear ragged among teachers that introducing them to sex education will lead students to immorality and promiscuity among students.[11,21,24]On the contrary in the present study 63(67.7%)teachers opine to the conclusion that introduction of sex education in the curriculum will not lead to indulgence of students into sexual act and around 84(90.3%) teachers believed that the reputation of the school will not be affected anyway because of exposing students into sexual education. Study done in Ethiopia [11] considered the experience of teachers since they concluded that teachers having more than 4 years of teaching experience had a positive attitude towards sex education while in the present study only the qualification nature of the teachers were recorded.They believed that the likely source for students to have knowledge regarding sex education was through means of television, cinema, friends etc.Some studies have indicated that parents too contribute in enhancing knowledge on sex educationto their children which is more similar to our study findings.[9,25,26]

From the review of literature it was very obvious that the teachers were reluctant in conducting sexual education classes as they felt shy to speak openly, some felt that they were unprepared with the content of the topic and availability of materials in teaching the students.[7,11,27,28] These results were concurrent with the present study where only 50% of the teachers were prepared to talk about it and only 34% had the thorough knowledge over the content of the topic for teaching.Lack of proper training for the teachers has been cited as the main reason for their reluctance in conducting sex education sessions for students.[7,9,24,29,30] In a study done at Uganda,[29] teachers considered conducting session on sex education as a burden and teachers felt that they had no government commitment in conducting sex education programs. Few studies have also pointed out lack of school and community support in this regard.[28,29]Some studies have shown that teachers have some experience regarding sex education which was highest in a Dutch study accounting to 92% but when it came to understanding comprehensive nature of sex education, their understanding lacked completeness.[9,31] Surprisingly the attitude of female teachers were more in favor of sex education and its implementation into school curriculum which was similar to the present study.[19] This fact is surprising to the normal scenario just because female teachers are quite reserved when compared to their counterpart in delivering or opening up the topic to students. Fewstudies revealed that male teachers had a substantially more favorable attitude than their female counterparts.[32-34]

## LIMITATIONS

The study was restricted to only five high schools in urban area. Urban students have more access to other sources of information such as internet; media etc. while rural areas may have different socio cultural standards that may influence perception and attitude of school teachers regarding sex education.

## CONCLUSION:



This study reflects that most of the teachers had the perception that sex education will definitely alter the student's sexual behavior but there was definite gap when it came to delivery of sex education in schools. Their positive attitude and perception regarding sex education among teenage students is highly priceworthy. It was observed that teachers had a positive approach towards introduction of sex education in school curriculum and its beneficial consequences on students in their future life. The incorporation of sex education in the school curriculum will be a zestful change in education and health care of our nation.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS :

In line with the current study the following recommendations may be considered

1. Sex education in government schools is important part to be included in curriculum.
2. It should be tailor fit for all schools considering their age and need, consisting of appropriate material, starting from middle school level.
3. Mandatory training for school teachers in providing sex education sessions to students.
4. Need to establish separate monitoring board to monitor and evaluate sex education classes.

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#### AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION:

Author 1: Dr. VineeshHarikrishnan collected the data and helped in writing the paper.

Author 2: Dr. Prasad Thirumal conceived, designed the analysis and wrote the paper.

Author 3: Dr. Arundaniel Jayakumar contributed the data analysis tool.

Author 4: Miss Sevvanthi Kumar performed the analysis.

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