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Attitude Of Secondary School Students Towards Sex Education in Jaintia Hills Districts of Meghalaya

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Abstract

Sexuality education is emerging as a crucial area in the country. It is clearly evident that sexuality education is viewed as a socially forbidden topic and also a controversial subject in India, where people still refrain from speaking very openly. However, Sex education is necessary and important, as it equips the students with the right knowledge and information which can in turn help them be more responsible in making healthy and informed decisions with regard to their sex life. The study investigates the attitude towards sex education of secondary school students with demographic variables such as class, district, and age group. The study utilized a descriptive survey method with 215 secondary school students, using stratified random sampling technique. A scale namely "Attitude scale towards Sex Education" (ASTSE) developed and standardized by Dr. (Smt) Usha Mishra (2008)" was utilized. Findings showed that significance difference exist in the attitude of the students towards sex education with regard to class and district. However, no significant difference exists in the attitude of students towards sex education in regard to their age group. Based on the findings, various suggestions have been provided for better implementation of sexuality education in Meghalaya.

Keywords: Sex, sex education, attitude, sexuality

Introduction:

Sex education has always been a controversial topic in the Indian society. Individuals tend to avoid talking or discussing sexuality in an open space. Sex education has been very limited in contemporary India. Many people believe that if sexuality education is to be provided it will not only go against the religious views of the people, but it will also endanger the innocence of the young people. Sex education focuses on teaching and instruction of various matters concerning human sexuality, also the biological aspects of human body, rights and responsibilities concerning reproductive wellness, abstinence and contraception. It helps the young individuals to gain knowledge and develop a positive attitude towards sexuality and interpersonal relationships. It also facilitates them to protect oneself from mistreatment and also guard themselves from sexually transmitted diseases

such as HIV/AIDS. Sex education gives a clear and better understanding in relation to the sexual rights of the people. In today's generation, many young individuals are sexually active and through sex education it will help them learn and be more aware of the circumstances and consequences they are likely to face. Sex education plays a critical role in developing an individual's personality and shapes them to become the person they are. It helps them make better decisions by adopting a rational frame of mind instead of relying on their impulse. Lack of sex education and healthy discussion around sexual activities is one of India's main concerns that we are still failing to take adequate actions for (Chakraborty & Mishra, 2022). Sex education is very necessary for adolescents to acquire positive direction and right information related with sex. It will also help them avoid unnecessary worries and tensions. Due to access to sex education adolescents will not only have scientific knowledge about it but also have healthy attitude towards this issue because adolescence is often regarded as a period of marked sexual urgency which almost demands expression. It is very essential that sex education becomes compulsory in school activities or syllabus as it is seen as a solution to problem surrounding teenagers (Lalnunfeli, 2015). Kumar et al (2017) revealed that students who are on higher age group and also from urban area and private school supports sex education and was found to be significant. Lalremruata (2019) in his study reveal that the attitude of the students is very good in relation to sex education. Raju & Uprety (2021) in their study "Attitude towards Sex Education among Secondary School Students and Teachers of East Sikkim" and found that there is no significant difference in the attitude of students with regard to their class. Siva et al. (2021) in their study reveal that students in higher classes have a more favourable attitude towards sex education.

Sex Education is often an overlooked study area of study in the educational framework of India. It is viewed as a taboo, and parents are reluctant when it comes to discussing about it at home. Many youngsters are susceptible to risky behaviour such as sex before marriage, sexual misconduct and unplanned pregnancy. Meghalaya also faced an equal share of problems because of no coverage on sex education in its school curriculum. According to various news reports in 2024, out of the 100% pregnant women in Meghalaya, 10% are teenagers, also, the state has witnessed the rise in HIV/AIDS every year showing no indication of slowing down and the highest affected districts are East and West Jaintia hills district. They bear 60% of the HIV/AIDS burden in Meghalaya. Considering the fact that sex education is regarded as a controversial subject explains that implementing sex education is an utmost necessity in the state. Considering all factors, the researchers felt the need to find out the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education in Jaintia hills districts of Meghalaya. Based on the above literatures, the objective of the study is to find out the significant difference in the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education with regard to their classes, district and their age group.

Sex education is an essential tool to help the young ones learn about a broad range of topics related to biological, psychological and socio-cultural perspectives of individual beings as well as a key intervention to prevent and reduce sexual harassment, assault and abuse. The fact that this important subject still remains as a taboo or a controversial subject in our society due to misconceptions, myths or lack of appropriate knowledge about sex education shows that there is a crucial need to impart sex education in schools, communities etc. It is high time for the concerned authorities to consider it an utmost important area to be taught in schools and colleges.

Materials and Methods:

In accordance with nature, the objectives and hypotheses of the study, descriptive survey method was used. The data was collected and analyzed quantitatively. Therefore, a quantitative research design was employed for the study. The population of the study comprises of 15,160 secondary students in both the districts *(DSEO, 2023).* Using stratified random sampling, the samples were selected and was stratified on the basis of Class, District and Age group with a total of 215 samples.

"Attitude scale towards Sex Education" (ASTSE) standardized by Dr. (Smt) Usha Mishra (2008)" was used to find out the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education. It is a 5-point Likert scale and has 32 statements with 16 positive items and 16 negative items.

Results and Discussion:

Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation; inferential statistics such as independent sample t-test, and one way ANOVA was employed to analyze the data.

Table 1: Mean, SD and t-values of secondary school students' attitude towards sex education with regard to their class

Class	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-value
IX	109	109.01	8.33	1.21	4.458** (p=0.00)
X	106	114.43	9.45		

***Significant at 0.01 level*

Table 1 shows that, regarding the attitude of secondary school students, the obtained p-value stands at 0.00 which is lesser than 0.01. Hence, the null hypothesis *(Ho1 (a))*: *there is no significant difference in the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education with regard to their Class (Cl -IX & X)* is rejected. Thus, differences exist between class IX and class X students. Also, from the above table, it is found that Class X students have higher attitude towards sex education. This finding aligns with the study done by Siva et al. (2021) where students from higher classes have a more favourable attitude towards sex education. However, a study conducted by Raju & Uprety (2021) produce contradicting results, where no significant difference was found with regard to their class.

The probable reason can be because Class X students are generally older and more mature and also the content covered in their curriculum. For instance, several topics related to sex education is covered in the subject Health and Physical Education, biology offered a more detailed lessons on the physical aspects of humans. Also, the state government has often organized awareness programs at the school and community level on several topics related to sexual health like HIV/AIDS and programs on menstrual health for girls. Such coverage has made the students more exposed to sex education and thus make them have a favourable attitude towards sex education.

Table 2: Mean, SD and t-values of secondary school students' attitude towards sex education with regard to their district.

Class	N	Mean	SD	SED	t-value
West	116	114.06	9.49	**1.22**	4.208** (p=0.00)
East	99	108.90	8.25		

***Significant at 0.01 level*

Table 2 shows that, regarding the attitude of secondary school students, the obtained p-value stands at 0.00 which is lesser than 0.01. Hence, the null hypothesis *(Ho2 (b))*: *there is no significant difference in the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education with regard to their district* is rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference on the attitude of secondary school students from West and East Jaintia hills district. This variations in terms of the students' attitude towards sex education between the two districts may be explained due to the differences in socio-economic and developmental difference. Given the fact that west Jaintia hills is more advanced and developed which may have provided the students better access to educational sources and a wider exposure to media and awareness programs and these factors may have influenced the openness of students towards sex education. On the other hand, East Jaintia hills is mainly rural, with less exposure to media and awareness program, may have affected the students' attitude towards sex education.

Table 3: Summary of one-way ANOVA: Attitude towards with regard to their Age group

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	132.205	2	66.103	.764	.467
Within Groups	18335.916	212	86.490		
Total	18468.121	214			

From table 3, it is evident that the F-value which is .764 which is shows that it is not significant at 0.01 level of significance. The table also shows that the mean scores of secondary school students' attitude towards sex education does not differ. Thus, the null hypothesis *Ho3 (c) There is no significant difference in the attitude of secondary school students towards sex education with regard to their Age* is accepted, which signifies that there is no significant difference in the attitude of the secondary school students with regard to their age group. The study conducted by Kumar et al (2017) yield a contradicting finding where the higher age groups students have a higher attitude towards sex education. This finding shows that age alone may not be a decisive factor that can influence the attitude of the students towards sex education. The Probable reasons may be due to the advancement of technology, easy access to internet and social media, also peer pressure may have somehow influence their perception and acceptance towards sex education. As seen today, most teenagers have access to smartphones and are very much active in social media where contents related to sex education are easily available and within reach. This may have played a significant role in influencing their attitude towards sex education.

Conclusion

Sex education is an area that is considered to be sensitive and a taboo for discussion in India and the state of Meghalaya is no exception. Though several studies have been conducted all over India, very limited studies have been done in Meghalaya with regard to sex education. The findings show that students who are in class X have a higher attitude towards sex education in comparison with the class IX students. It was also revealed that students who are studying in schools located in West Jaintia Hills Districts have higher attitude towards sex education as compared to students who are studying in schools located in East Jaintia Hills Districts. And lastly, no significant difference was found in the attitude of the secondary school students with regard to their age group.

Based on the findings, the present study highlights the importance and needs to implement a class and age-appropriate approach to sex education in the state. By implementing sex education at all levels of education, it can help bridge the gap in terms of the student's knowledge with regard to sexual related matters. By involving the teachers, community, healthcare experts, the schools can create a better environment where they can provide proper knowledge and accurate information to the students. Ensuring equal access to comprehensive sex education to all students is very much important as it helps them make informed, healthy and responsible choices.

Suggestions

Based on the result of the study, few suggestions are provided for better implementation of sex education-

1. The State Department of Education should introduce comprehensive sex education in all levels of education, in order to bridge the gap among all classes and age group of the students.
2. The concerned department should also ensure that the curriculum in relation to sex education must be inclusive in nature and cater to the needs of the students.
3. Specialized training on teaching sex education is to be provided for the teachers by the Department of Education of the State.
4. The Health and Family Welfare Department of the state should intensify awareness and sensitization program on sex education specifically targeting the areas in East Jaintia Hills where are located in remote areas.
5. Collaboration between the community, school and heath care center at the district level should be encouraged.

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