

# Strategies Adopted by Parents to Impart Sex Education to their Adolescents

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**Abstract-** The present study aims at the investigation of strategies adopted by parents to impart sex education to their adolescents between the age group of 11-13 years. The sample was collected from 50 parents, 11 fathers and 39 mothers who participated in the study. Sex education program is also recommended by the UNICEF, and with the rising number of child sexual abuse in our country, it is necessary to understand if parents are well equipped with the necessary knowledge on the subject and attitude towards sex education. This brings an alarming response from the parents as well as the government where there is a blame game as to who is responsible for a situation like this. This study will also help the researcher to understand the best strategies already being used by some parents, and enable other parents to use the same.

**Index Terms-** Parents, Strategies, Sex –education, Adolescents

## I. INTRODUCTION

**H**istorical Perspectives and Sexuality Education  
England from the 19th century, there were many sex education publications, whose objective was to guide parents to educate their children. However, in school, there was very little formal sex education. If classes did take place it was in context of 'hygiene'. Then after the Second World War when the focus shifted more to the prevention of STD's and HIV/AIDS, became a major health concern in the UK at just the time that sex education became political concern. Some events, including the controversy of the 1985 Gillick case, which focused on whether parents should have the right to know if their children are being given contraceptives who are below the age of 16 years, and the growing strength of the lesbian and gay movement, led to a polarization of views on sex education, among politicians at local and national level. (Reiss, 2005) .It was likely that boys, especially if educated in a public school (i.e. fee-paying) which is staying in the school premises, may still have sometimes received warnings about the dangers believed to follow from masturbation .The 1980s continued to see an increase in the concerns for sex education. The aim was typically for students to realize the existence and extent to which gender inequality prevails. At the same time, sex education programmes increasingly began to have such aims as acquiring skills for decision-making, communication, personal relation management, parenting style and coping mechanism.

However, in India the situation of sex education varies from the perspectives of the Western countries on many lines. Sex education in India emerged, as explained by Nandini Manjrekar. (Manjrekar, 2015) The report formulated by NIRANTAR on

Sexuality Education for Young People. The sudden concern for control of population emerged in the year 1950 with the launch of the family planning programme, since over-population was considered as economically un reasonable. With the awareness that there was a large population of young people, between the ages of 18 and 25 years and that a large section of the population that is vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, the focus of education policies shifted to AIDS prevention for adolescent group. Around the year 2002, the National Population Education Programme had a special focus on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (ARSH). In the year 2006 the controversial Adolescent Education Programme (AEP) in collaboration with the National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) and UNICEF was launched.

## Need of Sex education in India

The need of the study aims at understanding various strategies employed by the parents in imparting basic sex education to adolescents.

“Sex Education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values. It encompasses sexual development, sexual and reproductive health, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, body image and gender. (States, 2000)

Sex education for school going adolescents occurs in the way we talk about body parts and its functions. Children need to be taught how to care, protect and respect their bodies. Children often develop questions like “where do i come from?” They have these questions by the time they have reached school. By grade three they would have keen interest and will have formulated some kind of theory. It is the role of the parent to educate the child n sexual health education. Parents are responsible for providing sex education to their children at an early age; however with reference to the Indian context parent find it difficult in communicating with their children on these sensitive issues. They do not know what is appropriate and inappropriate in this context. (KEARNEY, 2008)

The current situation explains that though parents are open to discussing the basic concept of sex education under various headings such as hygiene, safety and gender roles but are facing a challenge in obtaining the required guideline on “what” has to be taught to the child which is an age appropriate content.

## Target Group

In India, since the children between the age of 11-13 years are at the phase of adolescence. Adolescence is a period of life characterized by good health in which vulnerability to infectious childhood diseases is greatly reduced. However, it is during

adolescence that behavior patterns are formed, which largely impacts a person's adult health and longevity. As young people enter puberty, new health concerns arise which are related to their sexual and reproductive maturation, and the behaviors that follow. Responsible, mutually respectful and caring behavior in adolescence promotes and enhances healthy relationships, and help to promote family formation and parenthood. Adolescents experience a great deal of anxiety due to the curiosity in their mind about their sexual development and other related misconceptions. Sex education will help students to develop positive perspective and attitude towards sex education. Adolescents have a lot of confusions and apprehensions related to sex education, when these queries can be answered with the help of scientific explanations. Adolescence does have myths about their organic development systems, bodily changes, hormonal effects and certain psychological impacts when they become anxious, stressful and pressurized.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Kolkata, among the parents of adolescents between the age group of 11-13 years. The study concentrated at understanding the various strategies adopted by the parents (both father and mother) in imparting sex education to their adolescents, also the limitations faced by the parents in addressing the topic to the adolescent

### *Selection of the Respondents*

The research design used to conduct this study is the Descriptive Research Design which is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied.

According to Burns and Grove (Grove), Descriptive research "is designed to provide a picture of a situation as it naturally happens". It may be used to justify current practice and make judgment and also to develop theories. For the purpose of this study Descriptive research design was used to explicitly understand and explain the measures adopted by parents to impart sex- education to their adolescents.

Sample in this study were parents from Kolkata, whose children were studying in Loreto Day school for girls and Birla High school for boys. The average age of the parents was 40 for the Mothers and 45 years for the Fathers. The parents had their adolescent between the age group of 11-13 years. The sample was selected on the basis of the age group of the adolescents. Sample size was 50, 11 Male and 39 females. 22 had a Post graduate Degree, 26 with an Undergraduate degree and 2 of them with secondary education.

### *Sources of Data*

The data collected for the present study is from primary source essentially with the help of a semi-structured self constructed interview schedule, consisting of open ended and closed ended questions which were collected from parents of adolescents between the age group of 11-13 years across two schools in Kolkata. This is qualitative study as well as a quantitative study, which helped enhance the quality of my research. The methodology helped me get a clear perspective on my topic.

### *Tools of Data Collection*

Data for the study was collected with help of self constructed semi structured interview consisting of open ended questions and closed ended question which thereby was distributed among the chosen sample. In order to measure the attitude of parents towards sex- education, a standard tool was used.

### *Methods of Data Analysis*

Data collected from the field was analyzed using Microsoft Excel where the frequency of the number of people answering each question was evaluated as well as cross tabulation charts were made where data was broken down into subsets for comparison, along with which, the average number of responses for each question was examined. Bar graphs were constructed as well as some of the responses were quoted in the analysis of the data.

## III. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The conclusion that which can drawn from the analysis and interpretation is that firstly parents show a positive attitude.. Coming to the major conclusion of the study with regards to the strategies adopted by parents towards imparting sex education to their adolescents, show that majority of the parents prefer using verbal medium of communication to their adolescent as compared to visual mediums, parents find it more approachable and less invasive. When we talk of verbal means of communication it includes a one on one discussion with the adolescent on the various aspects of sex education, which includes their physical and emotional development and changes. It includes aspects of hygiene and safety from any sort of physical or sexual abuse, the ability of the child to distinguish between the "good and bad touch" and identify member whom they can trust and share if they are being harassed in any form. Parents included both visual as well as verbal means to impart sex education, by visual medium it includes showing them videos, or pictures to help reach out to the child in a less invasive way. Parents also used both visual and verbal means and with the help of certain Television series, introduced or made way for conversations with their adolescent about the topic. It was observed that parents found it difficult to put together the right content in sex education for their children as discussed earlier, for every parent the understanding of sex education differs. For some parents safety of the adolescent in terms of protecting themselves from being sexually harassed or abused as well as such as bodily growth and developmental changes. Some parents included hygiene as a part of sex education, especially parents with female adolescents, who have attained their puberty and started their menstrual cycle. Some parents also include aspects such as being socially aware of their vulnerability and take caution at every step. Here there is an urgent need for a frame work for parents guiding them on what exactly should be imparted to their adolescent that is age appropriate and the information shared with them should not be burdening since majority on them.

Mothers were found to be the major educators to their adolescents, though the fathers seem to be equally involved in the growth of the child, however since most of the fathers are employed they do not get the time to interact with their

adolescents. Gender of the parent did not play a role in hindering the process sex education, as fathers and others both equally share the responsibility of their child growth.

There was another interesting observation that parents prefer to talk to their adolescents on a one to one basis rather than in the presence of other family members as they feel a sense of discomfort and awkwardness while addressing the issue. This result reveals that though we have reached a state of modernization, where parents are open to new ideas and liberal discussions with their children, however somewhere down the line due to certain factors they still seem to be pulling themselves back. A subject as sensitive and important as sex education must be confronted in the open, where there should be no space for discomfort.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

To draw a conclusion from the study, though parents have come out of the stereo type and have began to approach their adolescent with sex education, be it in any context, but there is an urgent requirement of a guideline for parents to refer to, and understand the important aspect to be catered to while imparting sex education. Parents should engage in the day to day activity of the child to build a rapport at the growing age of the child so that when they have attained their puberty and are ready to be addressed, the parents should be comfortable in talking to them. As observed in the study parents seem to have an uncomfortable approach as compared to the child. Parents are the ones who feel awkwardness, however parent need to understand the urgency, in educating the adolescent on important aspects to help them be more secure and tap the right resources for information.

#### Implications

One of the major implications of the study is to further the process of research in field of adolescents education where a parent friendly guideline can be formulated to help parents in their process of educating their children. The curriculum so designed based on research will be based on the parent's preferences. The study will also help to identify the existing subjects at different classes, which will help in effective integration of the aspects of sex education. Also, there is high

need of including sex education at schools and should be imparted through classroom based activities.

#### Suggestions

As observed in the study it is necessary for the school and teachers to partner with parents and conduct workshops addressing the lack of parental knowledge on appropriate content. Parents should build a good understanding with children right from their childhood to avoid barriers in communication. The policy makers must emphasize on a conducive environment in schools for teachers to address the topic with confidence and with scientific explanations.

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