

A study on behavioural differences among adolescents with and without sex education in India

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Abstract

This study addresses the scarcity of literature on sexual education and behavioral differences among adolescents in India. The aim was to explore the impact of sex education on the behavioral changes of adolescents. The sample comprised 98 school-going adolescents selected through purposive sampling and from the community using the snowball method. Tools used included a socio-demographic data sheet, the Sexual Knowledge and Attitude Questionnaire (SKAQ-II), and the Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence (SBSI) scale. Results revealed no significant difference in behavioral changes between adolescents receiving sex education and those who did not, nor were there differences in psychosocial factors. However, a significant relationship was found between sexual behavior influenced by media information, sexual behaviors with self and others, and aversion to sexuality. The study concludes that Indian adolescents continue to possess poor sexual knowledge, with the internet being a major and considered the most reliable source of information among youth. Furthermore, increased knowledge about sex is associated with a more liberal attitude toward it. The study recommends initiating sex education at the primary level to prevent adolescents from engaging in sexual activities and to overcome aversion to sexuality.

Keywords

Sexual Behavior,
Sex education,
adolsecents and
technology

Introduction

Child sexual abuse remains a taboo topic in India, surrounded by a conspiracy of silence, with many believing it to be a predominantly Western issue not prevalent in India. This is partly due to the

traditional conservative family and community structures that avoid discussions about sex and sexuality. Shockingly, statistics reveal that every second child in India experiences some form of sexual abuse, with every fifth child facing severe abuse. Alarmingly, 72.1% of these children do not

report the abuse, and 50% of the abusers are cousins, uncles, friends, or classmates. Additionally, over 80% of children choose to remain silent about the abuse, and 50% of abusers are individuals known to the child or in positions of trust. Many children may not even realize they are being abused, burying the incident as a painful and shameful secret. Boys constitute 53.07% of the victims, while girls make up 46.93%. Children aged 5-12 years account for 38.24% of victims, those aged 15-18 years account for 34.82%, and those aged 13-14 years account for 26.94%. Comprehensive sexuality education, as defined by UNESCO, encompasses cognitive, psychological, physical, and social aspects of sexuality within the teaching-learning process. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexual health as a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality, encompassing more than just the absence of illness or dysfunction.

Recent studies in Spain have highlighted deficiencies in affective sexual education among school students, who often turn to social networks and internet pornography for information, leading to early sexual activity and distorted perceptions of relationships. This can perpetuate chauvinistic and violent male attitudes prevalent in the pornography industry. To combat the egregious crimes of sexual abuse and exploitation of children, the Ministry of Women and Child Development advocated for the introduction of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012.

Sex education is a vital component of life skills education, particularly important in addressing concerns such as teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. It encompasses physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Despite the implementation of school and community-based programs in the late 1990s, discussing sex education remains taboo in many places. The introduction of Sexual Education (SE) in schools has been associated with a decrease in behaviors reflecting inequality, fewer unstable relationships, risk prevention, promotion of sexual health, and a reduced association of sexual

relations with other high-risk behaviors such as drug consumption.

Adolescents' sexual behaviors are influenced by their sexual knowledge, attitudes, and sources of influence. Sexual knowledge encompasses understanding of reproduction, pregnancy, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases (Yip et al., 2013; Joshi, 2010). Attitudes toward sexuality can be liberal or conservative (Avasthi et al., 1992). Studies in India show a lack of basic knowledge among men about fertility, maternal health, and STDs (Yip et al., 2013). Only a small percentage of youths are aware of safe sex practices (Kumar & Tiwari), with boys showing more liberal attitudes and behaviors than girls (Joshi, 2010).

Premarital chastity norms, particularly for females, limit decision-making power in sexual relationships (Joshi, 2010). Factors such as poverty, gender imbalances, and lack of education increase youth vulnerability. While knowledge about sexual health is increasing, it often remains superficial and myth-ridden (Yip et al., 2013). Early sexual activity is influenced by factors like sexual maturation, lack of sex education, declining cultural influences, and urbanization (Falaye, 2004).

Gender discrimination and stigma around discussing sex with young people contribute to risky behaviors (Miller & Whitaker, 2001; Hardee & Wason, 2004). Peers, books, and magazines have traditionally been sources of sexual information, but the internet is increasingly prominent, raising concerns about access to explicit content and its impact on sexual behaviors (Joshi, 2010; Nathan, 2007; Village, 2010).

Existing literature on sexual knowledge and attitudes predominantly focuses on HIV/AIDS, with limited research on adolescent sexual behaviors despite the backdrop of rapid social change and easy access to sexual content. Recognizing the significance of sexual needs, the secrecy surrounding sexual matters, lack of knowledge, and unrestricted access to material

and partners, there is a risk of adolescents engaging in risky behaviors. Studies on the sources of influence on adolescent sexual knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors are scarce. Similarly, there is a lack of literature on the impact of media, and even less on religion and geographical location.

This study aims to explore current sexual attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors among adolescents, as well as their sources of influence. It also seeks to examine the relationship between these psychosocial variables.

Summary of the existing literatures

Girls often lack knowledge compared to boys and may feel shy or hesitant to discuss sex education.

They are curious to learn but often rely on incorrect sources such as friends or the internet.

Cultural and religious factors can influence their perspective and interest in sex education.

Mothers should communicate openly with their children about sex-related issues.

Parents themselves often lack knowledge or information about sex education.

Teachers play a crucial role in providing accurate information in school settings.

Sexual myths can significantly hinder sex education efforts.

Some government rules and policies may restrict sex education.

Objectives of the Present study

- 1) To examine a significant difference in sexual knowledge and attitude and behaviours, among Gender.
- 2) To examine a significant difference in sexual knowledge and attitude and behaviours, among residence areas adolescents.
- 3) To examine a significant difference in sexual knowledge, attitude and behaviours, among religion.
- 4) To examine a significant difference in sexual knowledge, attitude and behaviours, among sex educated and non sex educated adolescents.

Methods

Sample consisted of 98 students selected using snowball sampling from the normal population of urban and rural areas of Kolkata, West Bengal. Students in classes VIII to XII (age range 14-18) were included. The study was conducted in English and Bengali, and students comfortable with either or both languages were selected. Only heterosexual students were included in the sample.

Tools used

Survey instrument included information about the study's purpose and informed consent from participants. Socio-demographic data such as initials of name, age, sex, religion, mobile number, area of residence, district, and educational qualification were collected. Data collection was conducted using both a paper-pencil test and a Google document version of the instrument.

Two tools were used:

A) Sexual Knowledge and Attitude Questionnaire-II (SKAQ-II): This self-administered questionnaire assessed knowledge and attitudes. The knowledge section had 35 items scored dichotomously, with a maximum score of 35. The attitude section had 20 items scored on a three-point linear scale (0-2), with a maximum score of 40. The test-retest reliability was 0.43 for attitude and 0.66 for knowledge.

B) Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence Scale: This scale assessed sexual behavior and sources of influence, scored on a five-point Likert scale. The sexual behavior section had three subsections: (a) sexual behaviors through various media sources; (b) sexual behavior with self and others; and (c) lack of interest in sexual activity. The scoring ranges for the subsections were as follows: for sexual behaviors through media, "low" (6-12), "moderate" (13-18), "high" (19-24), and "very high" (25-30); for sexual behaviors with self or others, the ranges were "low" (15-30),

"moderate" (31-45), "high" (46-60), and "very high" (61-75). The internal consistency for the items in the three subscales of sexual behaviors was Cronbach's alpha of 0.74 for sexual behaviors through media, 0.90 for sexual behaviors with self and others, and 0.60 for aversion to sexuality.

Procedure- Initially, all participants signed an informed consent form, indicating their willingness to participate in the entire study and their awareness of its purpose. Samples were selected using the snowball sampling method. Data were collected both online and offline through questionnaires, with participants also asked beforehand if they had any prior exposure to similar programs. Completing the data sheet took approximately 30 minutes per participant.

Data Analysis- After collecting all 98 responses, the mean and standard deviation of the participants' ages and domain-wise scores (such as gender, religion, geographical area, etc.) were calculated. The frequency of agreed or disagreed responses and the corresponding percentages were also calculated. Subsequently, an analysis was conducted to determine if there were any differences between the domains and to identify any relationships between sexual knowledge,

attitude, and behavior. Descriptive statistics and Inferential statistics were done using SPSS 20.

Results

The present survey was conducted in rural and urban areas of Kolkata district, West Bengal. It included 98 school-going adolescents from classes 7th to 12th in selected government and private schools across urban and rural regions. The subjects were selected based on their responsiveness and openness, resulting in a sample of 98 students aged 13-18 years. Sample consisted of more females (n = 53, 54%) than males (n = 45, 46%), with an average age of 16 years. The majority (96%) belonged to the Hindu religion, and 73% resided in urban areas. About 34% of participants had prior exposure to sex education.

Table 1 showed no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of Sexual Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior. Both genders exhibited similar sexual attitudes, with girls showing more engagement in sexual behaviors with self and others an also in sexual knowledge whereas Boys tend to score high on sexual attitude and sexual behaviour through media.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and t-test result of Sexual Knowledge, Attitude, Behaviour Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence (media, Behaviors with self and others and Aversion to sexuality) among gender (N=98)

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T –Test	Df	P- value
	Male (N=45)		Female (N=53)				
Sexual knowledge	15.73	3.32	17.54	5.86	-1.84	96	0.07
Sexual attitude	21.20	4.96	20.68	5.78	0.49	96	0.62
Sexual behaviour through media	10.27	3.35	9.26	3.44	1.45	96	0.15
Sexual behaviors with self and others	25.48	9.64	28.28	12.7	-1.21	96	0.23
Aversion to sexuality	5.73	2.97	6.26	3.04	-0.87	96	0.39

Table 2 Descriptive statistics and t-test result of Sexual Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviour Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence media, Behaviors with self and others and Aversion to sexuality) among religion(N=98)

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T –Test	df	P- value
	Hindu (N=94)		Non Hindu (N=4)				
Sexual knowledge	16.73	4.00	16.25	2.87	0.19	96	0.85
Sexual attitude	20.81	5.39	23.25	5.12	0.89	96	0.38
Sexual behaviour through media	9.71	3.42	10.00	3.91	-0.16	96	0.87
Sexual behaviors with self and others	27.34	11.52	19.00	4.24	1.49	96	0.15
Aversion to sexuality	6.01	3.02	5.00	2.71	0.69	96	0.50

A t-test was conducted to compare sexual knowledge, attitude, and behaviors between Hindu and non-Hindu participants. The results revealed no significant differences between Hindu and non-Hindu participants. Mean scores reveal

that both the groups show similar results. But Hindu adolescents showed higher engagement in sexual behaviors with self and others, while non-Hindu adolescents exhibited a higher sexual attitude.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and t-test result of Sexual Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviour Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence (media, Behaviors with self and others and Aversion to sexuality) among location (N=98)

Variable	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T –Test	Df	P- value
	Urban (N=72)		Rural (N=26)				
Sexual knowledge	17.27	5.0	15.15	4.46	1.91	96	0.06
Sexual attitude	20.38	5.73	22.39	4.00	-1.65	96	0.10
Sexual behaviour through media	9.4	3.43	10.53	3.30	-1.43	96	0.16
Sexual behaviors with self and others	26.45	11.91	28.53	3.01	-0.79	96	0.43
Aversion to sexuality	5.80	3.01	6.65	2.95	-1.23	96	0.21

Table 3 suggest that there were no significant differences between urban and rural participants in sexual knowledge, attitude, or behaviors in the present study. Urban participants tend to score high on sexual knowledge (M=17.27, SD=5.0) compare to their rural counterpart

(M=15.15,SD=4.46). Rural participants score high on sexual attitude (M=22.39, SD=4.0), sexual behaviour through media (M=10.23, SD=3.30), sexual behaviors with self and others (M=28.53, SD=3.01) and aversion to sexuality (M=6.65, SD2.95).

Table 4. Relationship between Sexual Knowledge, Attitude, Sexual Behavior and Sources of Influence-media, Behaviors with self and others and Aversion to sexuality

	Sexual Knowledge	Sexual attitude	Sexual behaviour through media	Sexual behaviors with self and others	Aversion to sexuality
Sexual Knowledge	1				
Sexual attitude	-0.19	1			
Sexual behaviour through media	0.18	0.21*	1		
Sexual behaviors with self and others	0.23*	0.05	0.57**	1	
Aversion to sexuality	0.16	0.14	0.1	0.32**	1

***Significant at 0.05 level**

**** significant at 0.01 level**

Table 4 shows positive correlation between sexual knowledge and sexual behaviors with self and others($r=0.23$, $p<0.05$), suggesting that adolescents with higher sexual knowledge may be more likely to engage in sexual behaviors. There is a moderate positive correlation between sexual behavior through media and sexual behaviors with self and others($r=0.57$, $p<0.01$), which indicates that adolescents who engage more with sexual content in media may also exhibit more

sexual behaviors with themselves or others.It was observed that due to adolescents' increased use of technology there is an association between sexual attitude and sexual behaviour through media($r=0.21$, $p<0.05$). The moderate positive correlation between aversion to sexuality and sexual behaviors with self and others($r=0.32$, $p<0.01$) suggests that adolescents who are more averse to sexuality may engage less in sexual behaviors with themselves or others.

Table 5- Comparison of Sexual knowledge, attitude and behaviour among sex educated and non sex educated adolescents.

Variable	Sex Educated		Non Sex Educated		T value	df	p value
	M N=33	SD	M N=65	SD			
Sexual Knowledge	17.87	5.52	16.12	4.52	1.69	96	0.1
Sexual attitude	19.84	5.21	21.44	5.42	-1.40	96	0.16
Sexual behaviour through media	10.18	2.60	09.49	3.77	0.94	96	0.35
Sexual behaviors with self and others	26.93	8.69	27.03	12.66	-0.04	96	0.97
Aversion to sexuality	5.67	2.60	6.20	3.20	-0.83	96	0.41

Table 5 shows no significant difference between adolescents receiving sex education to their counterpart who have not received sex education.

Discussions

This study aimed to assess the knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding sex education among adolescents and to identify the need for sex education in school-going adolescents from urban and rural areas of Kolkata, West Bengal. Adolescence is a crucial period of development, making individuals more vulnerable to exploitation. Adolescents need to understand how to protect themselves from HIV/STDs and premature pregnancies, for which sex education is crucial. It should enable individuals to enjoy sex and relationships based on positive knowledge, mutual respect, trust, negotiation, and enjoyment. Imparting correct information about sexuality is crucial and should begin at an early age, providing age-appropriate knowledge about puberty, sexuality, modes of transmission, and prevention of sexually transmitted infections.

In the current study, female participants demonstrated greater sexual knowledge and aboys more liberal attitude toward sex (Kacha et al., 2019). However, previous studies by Kacha et al.

(2019) and Sidi et al. (2013) found no significant difference in overall knowledge between males and females. In contrast, Baumeister et al. (2000) found that men have better sexual knowledge and attitudes than women. This difference may be attributed to the empowerment and protection rights of women. Findings of the present is supported by Kacha et al. (2019) and Sidi et al. (2013).

The current study revealed that participants residing in urban areas exhibited greater sexual knowledge compared to those in rural areas, with no significant difference observed in knowledge related to religion. This finding is consistent with the observations of Sidi et al. (2013), who also found no difference in sex knowledge between rural and urban areas. The discrepancy in results may be attributed to a lack of sensitization programs for sex education in both rural and urban settings.

Due to the lack of proper implementation of sex education in schools and the taboo surrounding the topic among parents, there have been no significant differences between adolescents receiving sex education and their counterparts. Despite government initiatives to make sex education compulsory in schools, gaps still exist.

More comprehensive and strict adherence is needed at the state and central levels to integrate sex education into the curriculum, similar to history and other subjects.

Participants in the study showed deficits in sexual knowledge and conservative attitudes in certain areas, indicating a need for improvement through proper sex education. Sex education is necessary because young people often feel unable to discuss their sexual concerns freely with family members. Although society has become more liberal in discussing and promoting sex education, further plans are needed to increase sexual knowledge.

With the advent of technology, information is easily accessible to millennials at their fingertips. This easy access has benefited many. Regarding sources of information on sexual matters, the majority of participants gathered information from the Internet. This finding is consistent with a study by M'Imaita (2005), which found that adolescents accessed information through media that included pornographic content, dressing and fashion, sex styles, and contraceptive use. The Internet has become a prolific source of both sexual information and pornography, which is difficult to regulate. Movies are also considered an important source of information but can perpetuate misconceptions about romance and normal adolescent sexuality. While less than half of the participants obtained information from newspapers, magazines, and books, Joshi found that peers, books, and magazines were the most frequently used sources of sex information. The advent of electronic media in various forms has led to a shift towards using the Internet as the primary source of information, replacing traditional print media.

The findings on sexual behavior of adolescents show high indulgence in sexual behaviors, with many using Internet, television, and reading materials to fulfill their sexual desires. This indicates a trend toward using more electronic media for sexual gratification, highlighting the need to regulate information in these media for healthy attitudes and behaviors.

The findings indicate a high level of indulgence in sexual behaviors among adolescents, with a majority using the Internet, television, and reading material to fulfill their sexual desires. They engage in activities such as chatting on social networking sites, making friends on websites discussing sexual matters, and using SMS/MMS for sexual satisfaction. This trend highlights a shift towards using electronic media for sexual gratification. There is a need to regulate the information in these media to promote healthy attitudes, accurate knowledge, and positive behaviors.

Regarding sexual behaviors with self or others, the average score suggests a high level of indulgence. The use of technology increases the likelihood of abuse and bullying. In the modern era, relationships have become fragile, leading to emotional turmoil and possibly aversion to sexuality. In terms of interest in sexual matters, participants indicated their engagement in sexual behaviors, lack of aversion to thoughts about sex, and a continued interest in sexual behaviors.

This study provides a ground to promote proper sex education in India for several reasons:

There is a lack of accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health and reproductive rights among adolescents. Proper sex education can bridge this knowledge gap and provide young people with the information they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health.

India faces significant challenges related to sexual health, including high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), teenage pregnancies, and unsafe abortions. Sex education can help mitigate these issues by promoting safe sexual practices and responsible behavior.

Sex education can empower individuals, especially women and girls, by giving them the knowledge and skills to make informed choices about their bodies and sexuality. This can help reduce vulnerabilities to sexual abuse and exploitation.

In many parts of India, there are deep-seated taboos and cultural norms surrounding discussions about sex and sexuality. Sex education can help break these taboos and promote open and healthy conversations about these topics.

Lack of sex education can lead to misconceptions and myths about sex, which can contribute to risky behaviors. Proper sex education can dispel these misconceptions and promote accurate understanding.

The Government of India has recognized the importance of sex education and has made efforts to incorporate it into school curricula. However, these efforts need to be strengthened and expanded to reach a wider audience.

Education empowers adolescents to make informed decisions about their sexual health and behaviors. It helps them understand the consequences of their actions and encourages responsible decision-making.

Sex education can address gender stereotypes and inequalities related to sexuality, promoting gender equality and empowering individuals to make choices that align with their values and preferences, regardless of their gender.

Therefore, it is crucial for the government to initiate proper sex education in India to promote sexual health, empower individuals, and address challenges related to sexual health and reproductive rights.

Limitations of the Study

The study had a small sample size, and participants were hesitant to give consent. The education background of parents and child-rearing practices were not considered. Self-reported data may be biased, leading to both over reporting and underreporting. The data may be influenced by individual and cultural factors, as well as myths.

Conclusion:

There were no behavioral differences among adolescents who received sex education and those

who did not. This indicates the need for a more comprehensive approach and age-appropriate information. It is crucial to impart sex education at an early age.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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