

Understanding sex education in china

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ABSTRACT

Sex education is urgently needed in China to resolve sex related social problems. This paper aims to make suggestion for future SE model in China through examine previous studies and analyze current social problems. Conclusion is that future SE should stress on gender inequality, empower girls within a sexual relationship and support young male who has suffer from sex crimes; more knowledge concerning LGBT should also be incorporated; SE in rural areas should be the priority.

Keywords: *Sex education, China, cultural values, social prblems*

1. INTRODUCTION

In China, the importance of sex education (SE) has been omitted, and influenced by traditionally held conservative values, SE was absent. Serious consequences follow: teenage pregnancy, teenage abortion, increase rate of sexually transmitted disease, unequal sexual relationship, etc. Fortunately, the significance of these consequences has finally caught people's attention. Parents' awareness of educating their children sexual knowledge is on a rise. An increasing amount of age appropriate books regarding sex education have been published. However, despite such positivity, existing social problems and cultural values adds complexity to this process. Furthermore, previous sex education models are mostly carried out in Western developed countries which might make them unfeasible in China. This paper will comprehensively exam existing social problems in China and provide suggestions of how a future SE model should take into consideration.

1.1 Sex education

A successful SE should not only teach adolescents the basic sexual structures[Pregnancy, contraception, sexual organ anatomy, sexual illness, etc.], but also assist them to form a healthy and positive sexual moral and psychological status (Feng 2012).

The two most acceptable SE approaches are comprehensive sex education and abstinence-only sex education. Both approaches aim to provide adolescents with comprehensive understanding of sexual activities while they differ in their fundamental goal. CSE (Comprehensive sex education) aims to promote "safer sex" and reduce sexual activities among adolescents. AE (abstinence-only sex education) focus more on teaching youth to abstain from overtly sexual behavior with another person and eliminating these sexual behaviors (Ericksen and Weed 2019). The importance of contraception

methods such as condom and birth control pills are normally a focus for CSE while most AE usually do not promote or demonstrate the use of condom or contraceptive methods (Ericksen and Weed 2019). Despite the difference in the fundamental objectives, actual implementation of the two approaches usually involves various degree of the core values and methods of the other one.

1.1.1 Sex Education in China

As a nation upholding traditional values that contradict to open discussion of sexual topic, SE is almost completely lacking. Nine out of ten teenagers report that they have never had conversation regarding sex with their parents, and over half of the students in a study targeting Shanghai undergraduate student reviews that over half of the students never received school-based sex education(Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020). The existing SE in school is limited only to human anatomy. The standards of a healthy sexual morality and the importance of contraception was never taught in most schools. Though there have been social programs recently to educate on sex, the effectiveness is still limited. the absent of school and family-based SE make watching pornographies an access for adolescents to fulfill their curiosity and gain what they believe "correct sexual knowledge". The violent sexual message and male dominate sexual relationship conveyed imposes a wrong interpretation of sex on teenagers. According to Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh (2020), 9% of males in their study believed that forcing a partner to have sex is acceptable and 101 (3%) of females agreed with this. Another study in Shanghai among 1099 undergraduates showed 2% and 5% of boys and girls, respectively, had encountered forced sexual intercourse (Shu et al. 2016) (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020). Note that without proper SE defining what is acceptable and what is intolerant regarding a sexual relationship, participants might not interpret forced sex as forced sex therefore the actual rates might be higher (Zou 2018) (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020).

Traditional Chinese values regarding gender [Women should become housewife, be understanding and supportive to their husbands, be respectful to mother and father in law etc.] that endowed women a lower social status than men are another contribution or cause of these results. Even though such belief has been downplayed by cultural dissemination and rise of general education level, its sequela still remains to be effective. The violent male dominant value conveyed through pornographies and the conservative gender value reinforce each other and continue to impact teenagers even after they transform into adults. Domestic violence is a possible remnant of the unhealthy sexual values adolescents have formed. This paper will not look deep into the relationship of unhealthy sexual value involving gender equity and domestic violence, but their correlations are worth pondering.

1.1.2 Sex crime

One severe consequence of the absence of SE is Child molestation. In 2018, there are average 7 cases of child molestation happening per day (Liu 2018). Child molestation are often omitted because youth lacks basic sexual knowledge and were unable to distinguish between normal body contact and inappropriate sexual contact. To eliminate sexual crime on youth caused by ignorance, “girls protection plan” was implemented since 2016. The program builds up an ecosystem to establishment children's self-protection awareness. It provides designed SE lectures to cooperating elementary schools, propagate to parents the importance of SE to increase their awareness of guardianship and prevention, and train teachers to lecture their students with education of sexual safety precautions (Liu 2018). Undeniably the intention of the program is positive, however, it needs to be ameliorated. The greatest defect of the program is that its singular focus on female youths. While sex crimes regarding children are not only limited to female, the program should target male youths as well. In fact, legislation regarding female and male youth are unequal. There is no exiting law regarding male youth rape, but only on molestation [Any sexual activity beside direct sexual intercourse such as kissing, oral sex, etc.

1.1.3 Sexually transmitted disease

From the once concealed country to the second largest economy in the world, China has experienced rapid socioeconomic transition in the past three decades (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020). Foreign cultures and exotic values flourished the mind of the youth. Traditional values withhold have been questioned for the first time. Obviously, China wasn't prepared for such mental changes in the younger population. To safely incorporate the much more opened view on sex, Chinese adolescents need to raise their sexual awareness and receive proper SE. However, conservative traditional view of sex that it

should not be a topic to be openly discussed makes this difficult to achieve. The absence of comprehensive SE and blindly accepting the new sex values led to significant consequences. A study indicates that 13.8% never-married sexually active females aged 15 - 24 years in Shanghai had had an unintended pregnancy, with 99.0% ending in abortion (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020)(He and Blum 2013). Furthermore, an recent increase in the incidence of HIV/AIDS in this age group, specifically among university students was observed (National center)(Li, Jiang, and Zhang 2019) (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020). According to the National Center for AIDS/STD Control and Prevention, from 2011 to 2015, the number of university students infected with HIV increased by 35% annually, reaching 3236 in 2015 (Zou et al. 2018) (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020). If a comprehensive SE were given to adolescents, teaching them the importance of using a condom to prevent disease transmission, the data are likely to be lower.

1.1.4 Regional difference

Another aspect when considering SE in China is that education resources is regionally unequally distributed. Urban areas have far better education opportunity in terms of quality and quantity.

The awareness of giving youth SE in rural areas is extremely lacking as well. A study examines the family awareness of giving sex education to children in Sichuan discovered that in Parents of young children in rural areas of Sichuan province have poor awareness of sex education, and the proportion of parents who have never conducted sex education for children is high (Zhang 2020). However, rural areas actually demand more SE.

One consequence of the rapid urbanization in China is left-behind children [Children in rural areas left behind by their parents who move to cities for higher salaries to support the family] in rural areas. There are currently at least 61,025,500 left-behind children in rural areas. Accounted for 37.7% of rural children and 21.88% of national children(Left behind children 2015). The absence of parenting and comprehensive education for these youths cultivated dangers threatening their health and even life. Some has developed hospitality toward the world. The crime rate of left-behind children is accounted for 70% of juvenile crimes, and it has displayed a rising trend(Left behind children 2015). Unhealthy environment left-behind children live in makes proper SE urgently needed to prevent them from committing sex crimes or protect them from sexual harms. No previous studies have been done to exam how should SE improve or what should it focus more on for children growing up in this different setting. Further researches concerning this needs to be done to decide what a comprehensive SE should be like for rural areas.

1.1.5 LGBT

Most existing SE program does not involve homosexuality because traditionally it is not accepted by the cultural values. However, the expanding HIV epidemic among men who have sex with men (MSM) in China has forced LGBT health issues into the open (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020)(Burki 2017). A national report in 2017 showed that homosexual transmission accounted for 26% of all new cases of HIV, and among students, 82% were homosexually transmitted (Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020)(Disease Control). In one study of students from Nanjing, 95% of 156 positive HIV tests were from MSM(Lyu, Shen, and Hesketh 2020)(Li et al. 2020). To prevent these consequences from keep damaging the health of adolescents, future SE would need to incorporate more aspects of homosexual knowledge.

2. FEASIBILITY

2.1 Teenage Pregnancy And SE

According to WHO(world health organization), pregnancy of adolescent aged 10 -19 are defined as teenage pregnancy(Nagandla and Kumar 2020). Such phenomenon is prevalent on a global scale, but especially extensive in developing regions. Approximately 12 million girls aged 15 - 19 years and at least 777,000 girls under 15 years give birth each year in developing regions (WHO 2020). The most fatal direct consequence of teenage pregnancy are complications during pregnancy and childbirth that are the leading cause of death for 15 - 19-year-old girls globally (WHO 2020). Nevertheless, the consequences are not limited to complications, teenage pregnancy is accompanied by social and economic consequences as well. However, research filed of the effectiveness of sex education and teenage pregnancy in China is completely blank. In order to predict what affects would SE has on teenage pregnancy in China, studies targeting developed countries in North America and Europe will be used.

In the past 20 years, teenage pregnancy on a global scale has decreased by 11.6% (2020), though it remains controversial the causation of such decrease, one publicly accepted explanation is the increase in awareness of giving SE to adolescents- many nations and regions enforced laws to provide sex education for teenagers. Despite that the result of later study by Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty (2008) seems to confirm this explanation, other studies conducted on the relation of teenage pregnancy and SE suggests negative or ambivalent correlation. For instance, the result of a cross-nation examination of relationship between mandatory SRE (sex and relationship education) and teenager pregnancy rate in 45 develop and commonwealth European countries found evidence that SER mandates are associated with increase in teenager pregnancy rate (Paton, Bullivant, and Soto 2020). The result of study conducted by Sabia (2006) indicate that

there is no significant correlation between SE and teenage pregnancy. It is unknown why the results vary, Paton, Bullivant, and Soto (2020) provide an explanation that those previous studies indicating positive or no correlation were exclusively conducted within one country while their research examined the relationship from a global perspective. Thus, it is reasonable to conjuncture that the effectiveness of SE differs regionally.

Another noticeable difference when figuring the cause of the difference in results of these studies is that in Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty' s study, they had two control group for participants receiving SE-participants receiving comprehensive sex education and participants receiving abstinence only sex education. According to their results, only in former case that a significant decrease in teenage pregnancy has been observed. The latter, surprisingly, showed no association. Clearly, it can be can drew from Kohler, Manhart, and Lafferty' s study that the type and degree of SE plays a different role in reducing teenage pregnancy. Other studies cited above did not clearly define which type of SE was implemented into their research. Based on previous studies, a unite conclusion cannot be reached on the correlation between SE and teenage pregnancy because different conditions were applied in each study. It could only be speculated that the degree of effectiveness of sex education on adolescents heavily depends on regional difference and the type of SE carried out.

It is worth considering whether these results could be applied to predicting the effectiveness of SE in China, since such studies targeting China are completely lacking. Even though studies cited above include several nations and regions, it is still limited to developed western countries which are fundamentally different from China. Nevertheless, it can still be concluded that to assure the effectiveness of SE, China needs to establish a unique model based on social circumstance and its culture.

3. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

China is lacking school or family based comprehensive SE for adolescents, and the existing SE cannot resolve the complexities derived from social problems. The absence of SE has made pornographies an access for children to fulfill their curiosity regarding sexual knowledge. Without proper education, the violence, abnormal, and gender inequity messages conveyed through pornographies would be recognize by youth as the standards of a proper sexual relationship. Furthermore, male dominate pornographies reinforces the traditional value that men have higher status than women, therefore led to forced sexual activity, unbalanced sexual relationship, and even domestic violence. Gender equity does not only favor male, regarding child molestation, another consequences of lacking SE, the most well-known program to combat it focuses primary on female youth, and there is no existing law to protect young males from rape. Lack of

comprehensive SE in China also led to increasing cases of teenage pregnancy, teenage abortion, and sexually transmitted disease. Most existing SE programs doesn't offer SE regarding homosexuality, which recently accounts for a great proportion of transmutation of sexually transmitted disease.

These social problems add complexity when designing a comprehensive SE for Chinese adolescents. However, their impacts cannot be ignored. From previous studies examine the correlation between SE and one prevalent sexual problem- teenage pregnancy, it can be inferred that its effectiveness is based on the type of SE given. Therefore, future SE in China should stress on gender inequality, empower girls within a sexual relationship and support young male who has suffer from sex crimes, and more knowledge concerning LGBT should also be incorporated. Lastly, SE in rural areas should be the priority.

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