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**The Singular Standpoint of Sex Education: An Overview**

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**ABSTRACT**

Throughout the world, especially in advanced nations, notably much work has been done in the field of sex education. There are research studies and reports published by different agencies working in and on this field. However, in developing countries, very few studies have been carried out in the domain of sex education due to significant social constraints. The conservative societies, at most of the fronts, look at sexuality and related issues with extra sensitivity. At large, people also prefer to avoid it. Therefore, against all such traditional odds, this paper highlights the significance of not only studying but talking about issues related to human sexuality. This paper is a review of the studies in the field of sex education.

**Keywords:** *Sex education; Sexuality; Society; School curriculum.*

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**Introduction:**

Sex education in the form of a critical study provides suggestions to both parents and children to understand the term 'sex' in a wholesome perspective. Since school is part and parcel of the society, it also needs to aware students (mostly individually) from all viewpoints. Karmel [1] has exquisitely explained the two concepts: 'sex information' and 'sex education'. By sex education, the author means imparting of moral and ethical value judgments concerning sex and personal relations in a school setting. It includes terms like masturbation, petting, pre-marital sex, sexual intercourse and other ethical questions.

On the other hand, sex information means imparting of biological and mechanistic data without prescribing how all this happens. It presents all the related information as it is by nature as a normal process without any ethical consideration. It explains how 'sex information' can be provided in schools without any hindrances, whereas 'sex education' cannot be imparted because of various cultural (or religious) reasons. Sex information can be treated at par with other subjects like science and mathematics. However, sex education comparatively is more sensitive. There is a typically fixed attitude towards sex education, but it varies from individual to individual when it comes to sex information. Suppose sex education is included in the school curriculum. In that case, it is challenging to make teaching, selection of teachers, content, pedagogy, training, the attitude of teacher towards sex education, various questions need to be answered, but they are challenging to deal with. Karmel, through his findings, suggests that schools should treat sex as they would treat other topics like digestion or respiration. No more, no less, sex information should be provided in such a way that it should be integrated with day to day curriculum. We have to deal with the concepts related to sexuality as per the level and age of children with care and attention. Slowly we need to aware children about sexualities when they reach an approximate age. We have to start teachings related to the functions of sexuality in common ways like what we do with other biological processes. We need not be panic, and we have to take the subject of sex like other disciplines. We must put fixed values aside and impart all relevant information regarding sex as a normal function like other natural processes. The only important thing to consider is that we need trained professionals to teach the subject while clearly understanding the difficulties associated with it. There are several dimensions to this discipline. It may help in dealing with parents and their expectations from their children and vice versa. Karmel's study would directly benefit a researcher to find out whether parents are okay with sex education, or they want to limit to sex information only.

**Validation through Studies:**

Carrera [2] carried out a critical study aimed to know the importance of sex instructors (sex education teachers) and their impact on education in schools. The primary objective of this study was to see the role and effect of sex education instructors in schools. Do they need particular expertise, and does it influence in the teaching of sex education effectively? This study was conducted in the United States of America, and a historical background was taken into consideration to support the argument. A researcher can get to know through such a study about the methods adopted for researching the field, as Carrera focused more on content analysis and a detailed historical perspective to reach to the ground level. It has been found that with the progression and development of society, sex education has become more and more critical.

Furthermore, as such to tackle it, various policies were framed after conducting various surveys. The trend showed that schools require trained sex teachers. Teacher training becomes one of the fundamental components of the school curriculum. Following a correlation with the proficiency of teachers similarly special teachers is the demand of the schools to provide sex education in professional patterns, keeping in view all the constraints like gender, culture, religion,

taboos, and myths in society. The teacher should positively differentiate the teachings of biology from the teachings of sex education at large. As Carrera points out that the teacher of sex education needs to be a super teacher, one may agree or disagree with this viewpoint. Nevertheless, the findings of his study suggest that we need to provide specialised training modules to the concerned teachers so that sex education can be imparted successfully.

The study conducted by Guttmacher Institute [3] aimed to know the web of sex education in different countries. The primary objective was to see the spread of sex education in various schools. The scenario calculated by the study was opposite to right. It was found that schools still lag far behind in introducing the teaching of sex education in schools. Although there are different charters and rules to provide ample awareness and knowledge related to every domain of the health still, the dimension of sex has been by and large ignored. Sex education, rather than necessary, is being treated as an exception and compulsion in most of the schools. The survey conducted by some investigators throughout the world discovered that few countries are treating sex education as one of the compulsory subjects in their curriculum, some are completely against. Some places in the world are even facing difficulties to make it legal. The situation is more or less similar across the globe. In developing nations, both population and sex education is beginning to be treated as desirable; it is either being planned or experimented with putting in proper shape. The major thrust is good health, parenthood, adequate development and freedom. In some countries, it is being enforced to control population explosion and to provide mass awareness so that different obstacles can be comprehended and issues can be resolved at large, China being the prime example.

Most of the countries throughout the world are now treating sex education an essential part of the curriculum. They recognise that it helps to aware children in dealing with some serious issues regarding their sexuality. Contrary to it, most of the Muslim countries are not in favour of imparting it before university level. In the developed world, Europe is the leading region in providing proper sex education. Sweden was the first country to establish sex education legally and made it compulsory. Taking the positive aspects and results from Europe now most of the developed nations like America, Germany, and Japan are following the same trend of making it compulsory from elementary level to benefit ordinary people at ease.

The study done by Guttmacher Institute reflects that the places where sex education is made legal and compulsory are gaining more and more benefits and those countries that are yet to come under the shade of this umbrella need to be part of this programme. There is an emphasis that sexuality affects the health of a person (mentally as well as physically). However, the nature, contents, curriculum, and pedagogy varies from country to country, but the message is expected that the health of an individual is the prime importance for a nation. To have a good awareness of sexuality means to have good health and vice versa. Thus the primary preference must be given in providing awareness about the same.

Kellogg and Stepan [4] emphasised that before the Second World War much about sex education was not discussed but soon after the war was over a dramatic change occurred and it became one of the main issues worldwide. Sex education became a concern for all nations. There was a need for making of a sound constitutional and legal framework to provide sex education with its basic structure. They highlighted the legal aspects of sex education. One of them was related to taboos in society concerning the discussion of sex with children. Should we (or why should we) avoid discussing sex with children? There is, of course, a need for constitutional and legal aspects for sex education. Kellogg and Stepan surveyed (area wise) in the UK, and found out the difference of opinions from one area to another. Some were in favour of making sex education compulsory, and some straightway opposed. The trends were different from country to country. In religious states, it was objected by and large. Some of the significant legal issues which were found are: obscenity, it was stated that open talk on sex with children may lead to adverse effects and may promote immorality. So, different legal procedures were established to control obscenity, and it this also varied from country to country. Legal provisions are usually made keeping in view the religious sentiments of the people. Another critical aspect, the study of Kellogg and Stepan looks at, is parental rights. It is vital whether parents object or accept the framing of constitutional rights in favour of sex education. There could be a conflict between the rights of parents and children. Mostly, while framing legal procedure, countries would keep in mind the rights of parents while ignoring the rights of children at large. The trend has changed now as most of the parents are with the rights of children, and for them, they want more freedom. Keeping in view all this, it is evident that legal procedures are an essential agent for sex education, and one should favour them as per the need of the society.

Herold and Benson [5] conducted a study on 1618 teachers of secondary schools from the fields of home science economics, guidance and physical education. The data was collected through mailed questionnaires, and only 1049 questionnaires were received back. The study highlighted the difficulties that teachers face while providing sex education like maturity level of students, diversity of backgrounds, previous knowledge and exposure to sex education, student shyness, and inadequate teacher preparation. Besides this, 91% of sex educators agreed that parents do not provide necessary information to their children regarding sexuality, and 51% expressed their interest in providing sex education. The physical education teachers expressed more interest than home economics and guidance teachers. The study

concluded that family is not an active and responsible agency in providing enough awareness and information related to the importance of sex-related issues.

Goldman and Goldman [6] conducted a study that focused on different sources of sex information that are available to the child from various sources. The significant findings of the study are that most of the children are reluctant or embraced to approach parents for issues related to sexuality. It is one of the main problems, and it has forced children to consult different sources that may or may not be useful. With the advancement and keeping in view the sensitive nature of the subject into consideration, it has been found that most of the children are habitual in using negative information.

Cull-Wilby et al. [7] conducted a study on the relationships between sex education in schools, knowledge of sex and student gender. Six schools were randomly selected. 20% of eighth-grade students were selected randomly from each school. Twelve (8+4) teachers were taken who were teaching health education to these students, and also an equal proportion of gender was taken as per the population representation. One hundred eighty-one students were selected, but 41% did not receive permission to take part; hence only 106 were available. One was further eliminated, and finally, 105 remained total sample. Formal interviews and questionnaires were used for data collection. The main area of the study was existing health class, content, teacher demography, and sexuality-related terms like puberty, anatomy, birth control etc. Students who were provided with health teachings answered more questions correctly in comparison to others. They were also more confident and enthusiastic. The results were in favour that those students who received more sex education are far ahead to those who were devoid of that. The more sex education, the more knowledgeable and confident students were seen. It was observed that social taboos play an essential role in sexual conflicts as we impart knowledge as per sex, i.e. female knowledge to girls and male knowledge to boys that has adverse effects.

Singh [8], in her study, stressed that sexual health education does have a positive impact on adolescent pregnancy. It promotes relevant choices about sexual health. Moreover, there is confirmation that system, outline providing support, and comprehensive views may interact differently from one socio-cultural circumstance to another virtually in reducing levels of sexual activity. She believes that in most parts of the country, there is a confusion that sex education may lead to more increase in sexual activity that is adverse, and there is no such correlation found. She concludes that it is the unawareness in such communities that are going through this taboo that sex education increases sexual activity. However, in contrast, sex education has been found in using more appropriate ways of taking care of one's sexual health and other needs and desires.

Marsman and Herold [9] conducted a research based on a sample of 130 mothers of the sixth, ninth and 12th-grade students from Canada. There was not much difference concerning the teaching of sex education, but opinions differed regarding values education. As per their investigation, till the 1960s, there was no concept of sex education. Also, society was not in its need. However, suddenly after this period, the trend changed, and there were cases reported which showed an alarming increase in the number of sexual incidents and the need was felt in the society to provide sex education for the survival of humanity and ethics. While conducting the survey, they found that there is universal support for sex education, but there is no consensus on what should be the content and nature of the subject. One more common thing they observed was that most of the respondents avoid discussing terms like masturbation and sexual intercourse. The study also found that myths like sex education will lead to promiscuity are baseless as the findings were opposite. Another result from their research is the attitude of literate mothers against the traditional approach of sexuality towards their wards as most of them were open and free to discuss sexuality with them. They also found that age plays another vital role concerning attitude towards children for providing sex education and sexuality awareness.

By and large old age parents were more conserved regarding the discussion on sexuality with children. Whereas, younger parents were more open to discussing the issues with their children. Four schools (two elementary and two high schools) were selected, and a questionnaire was used as a tool for the collection of data. It was mailed to 308 females to support random sampling. 42% of respondents replied, and the ratio was impressive as 39% from 6th grade, 32% from 9th grade, and 28% from 12th-grade mothers replied. It shows how important sex education is at the elementary level. More responses were received from the age group 30-45. The majority was not satisfied with sex information, and awareness from parents and only 13% were to some extent in favour of parental support. The results were found that majority believes in introducing sex education in schools and that too from the elementary stage. However, the content and nature should be as per the norms and cultural aspects. Most of the parents were not satisfied with their sex education and information, and hence they strongly advocated and favoured the teaching of sex education in schools.

Kotva and Schneider [10] observed that there is a communication gap between adolescents and parents in dealing with sex-related issues. It has been found that why adolescents and their parents fail to engage in meaningful communication about sexual matters. The central reservations of mothers for not discussing sex and birth control were that the discussion would be embarrassing. Mothers believed that children would not take them seriously. They did not want to invade the teenager's private life. Also, they had apprehensions about answering the child's question on sex or

AIDS. Similarly, adolescents were unwilling to talk to parents because of embarrassment; a concern with the invasion of their privacy; belief that mothers are not interested in listening to them and a feeling that they already know enough. These hindrances may be consequences of the parent-child relationship.

Ku et al. [11] found that most of the teenage men who had received formal education on HIV/AIDS, birth control, and resisting sexual activity used condoms. The analysis revealed an association between sex education and decreased number of sexual partners, lower frequency of intercourse, and increased condom use. The effects were found to be significant even after potentially confounding variables such as age, ethnicity, and religion were controlling. The development of skills for resisting intercourse was found to be particularly important in reducing sexual activity. They concluded with an opposite analysis of what parents or community members typically fear about sex education (including AIDS) that it may increase sexual activity.

West and Hunter [12] conducted a study that primarily aims at the attitude of parents towards sex education and type of school, based on sex. The main objective of the study was to establish a relationship between attitudes of parents towards the development of children, academic excellence and parental perception in different schools viz, boys only, girls only and mixed schools. Eighty-two parents from six primary schools were approached for the interview. Only 72 parents were successfully interviewed. 44% of parents belong to boys, and 56% of parents belong to girls. In another study, 361 parents from 18 secondary schools were approached. Two hundred eighty-nine interviews were carried out. 51% of parents belong to girls, and 49% belong to boys.

The results from mixed schools (in which all the children up to 11 years of age study together) convey that there is no need to separate them. These schools prepare children for a better life. These are also better for boys as girls exert a civilising influence on them. For girls, they provide better facilities as compared to separate schools. They believe in the principle of equality. The results from girls' only schools reveal that they promote more personal and academic confidence, encourage girls to study science and other technical subjects. However, in the age group 11-16, girls develop differently from boys, so they need different treatment. From parents (mixed schools) 67% feel that there is no reason to separate schools, 58% believe that mixed schools prepare children better for adult life, 49% think that mixed schools are better for boys, 36% feel mixed schools are better for girls. Parents from secondary school teachers, 8 out of 10 felt no need to separate schools. Perception of parents about girls' only (primary) schools, 47% believe these schools provide better chances for girls to opt carrier of choice. Secondary schools: 34% support that such schools offer more self-confidence and more development opportunities. Two third of the parents felt no need to separate schools at age 11 and more than half felt that mixed schools prepare children better for adult life. The results that were obtained were quite contrary. Most of the parents from both primary schools and secondary schools believe that mixed schools prepare children for a better life and also girls get a better chance of exploring themselves by gaining access to better facilities. Although there were some of the opinions that girls-only schools provide a better opportunity for academic freedom and choice of subjects. Nevertheless, at large, maximum support was in favour of mixed schools.

Braverman and Strasburger [13] reported that the risk posed by unprotected sex in young people is directly proportional to the lack of sexual awareness, and the solution for such incidents is the providence of proper sexual awareness among children from appropriate age. Sex education in that context will have manifold benefits. Paulussen et al. [14] found that teachers' adoption and implementation of HIV programmes is dependent on their beliefs about the interest and enthusiasm of students, the feasibility of the classroom procedures and their ability to deliver the curriculum. Provision of clearly documented lessons which are useful in the classroom has been found to impact on the confidence and skills of teachers to deliver the courses as planned. Ongoing engagement and support of teachers played an essential role in their ownership of the curriculum. Teachers are in favour of such a curriculum that has scope for sex education.

Similarly, Nduati and Kiai [15] found that the attitudes towards sex in general and pre-marital sex, in particular, is influenced by socio-cultural factors that include customs and traditions of the society within which individual lives. The culture in which an individual is raised determines to a large extent how sexuality is viewed and expressed. Some cultures require that the matters related to sexuality are held sacred and can only be discussed during certain occasions in one's life, for example during initiation ceremonies (before marriage) and only delivered by specialists within the particular community. Traditionally the education to the youth, especially as regards sexuality, is provided by the grandparents and aunts to specific age groups just about to get into marriage.

Meekers and Ahmed [16] found that adolescents reported teachers, peers and parents to have the most influence on their attitudes towards their sexual behaviour, and schools have the most potential to provide relevant and accurate sexual and reproductive health information. Furthermore, there are apparent differences between males and females about the level of education and sexual behaviour. Males with secondary education were more likely to be sexually active because they make more attractive partners while females in school are less likely to be sexually active. Parenting concerning sex education helped in achieving a 100% success rate for high school graduation or continuation.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) [17] reflects that Adolescent girls are at high risk for reproductive health problems and their adverse consequences. They are vulnerable to sexual assaults, rape, prostitution, malnutrition, unsafe abortion and reproductive tract infections (RTIs) including sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. An ever-growing body of data reveals that early sexual initiation can lead to tragic social, economic and health consequences.

Sanjakdar [18] carried out a study learning sexuality that deals with the perception of different people (Muslims) towards sex and sexuality. The aims, content and the delivery of sexuality education remain subject to considerable disagreement, as the perceptions of parents, teachers, and the government vary. Most of the support is seen in favour of schools being treated as the responsible agency for sex education. It is found that although sexuality and sex education is the need, still because of differences in culture (religious barriers), it has become impossible to introduce sex education in letter and spirit. The WHO working for health education makes this more necessary by introducing the notion of sexual health. As per them, sexual health includes feelings, actions, emotions, and thoughts, physical and mental health. This definition relates sexuality with biological, psychological and social aspects of an individual.

Most of the children attain the age of sexuality during school times that means we have to aware, train and impart them sex education in schools, and this can be done through effective strategies only. Sex education should be the concern of schools as it directly affects the psychological, physical and social health of a child. Due to sudden and abrupt changes, children may get involved in the wrong ways of the finding of their sexuality. Only appropriate sex education can put them in the right direction, and schools are only relevant agencies for the same.

Majority of schools in Australia started formal sex education in the early 1970s to address serious concerns and to keep children healthy. The administration took appropriate measures to accommodate the needs of all. The study by Sanjakdar highlights the perception of youth from Muslims towards the introduction and need of sex education. It tries to find out the opinion of the majority of Muslim population towards the same. What children know and what children want to know about sexuality. Muslims, irrespective of religious identity, must not hesitate in disseminating information about masturbation, kissing, homosexuality, intercourse, desire, love etc. Their attitude is otherwise completely different from what it is supposed to be (even as per their religious text). They usually avoid discussion(s) on such issues whereas they could always refer to the *Quran*, which has the answer to all questions about human life.

Hamilton et al. [19] conducted a research study in the field of sex education in middle schools and high schools. They conducted an experiment in 32 high schools where a sample of 5000 students was taken to know the attitude of students towards sex, intentions to have sex, and self-perceived ability to engage in safe behaviours when in sexual situations and how sex education can aid them. The main aim was to know how important sex education is for health. The study believes that children should effectively use knowledge before going for any sexual activity. The similar content of a course on sex education becomes irrelevant because culture varies from place to place. There is a need of framing proper and useful content to support the need of children. Sex education should be incorporated into the curriculum with specific, clear objectives. Sex education should be included as an academic subject so that it can be useful in providing desired results. The results showed that due to the goal-oriented techniques employed by health education teachers, students showed a complete change in their attitude. They became more interested in taking care of their health, showed increased knowledge, more positive attitude towards delaying of sexual activity, a decreased intent to engage in sex, better communication with parents, more care and rejection of sexual desires.

### **Recent Trends:**

Latest studies have shown a significant change in the attitude of the stakeholders. De Luca Barrusse and Praz [20] highlighted the emergence of sex education as a result of the debate in western Europe and the United States. It shows the relevance of the discourse on sexuality. At least it is a sign of venturing into an area not looked after in the past. Even if it starts with the efforts and intentions of the developed world, it would surely guide the rest of the nations. It is also closer to the Foucauldian expression of the relevance of talking about sex in public while dechaining it from institutional chains. The focus has also been extended towards a discussion on the queer. Drazenovich [21] points out the significance of the 'queer pedagogy' while maintaining the visibility of LGBT people and the relevance of their movements.

Hall et al. [22] reflect on the state of sex education in the United States. For them, sex education means a topic in the field of public health. As a developed country, the US has always prioritised the health of the citizens in terms of all aspects. Even in the late 90s, sex education was adopted as 'a singular approach to adolescent sexual and reproductive health'. Bailey and Graves [23] talk about gender in relation to education. They argue that gender remains a central force in organising social connections and learning processes. West [24] underlines the relevance of 'consensuality' in sex. While defining rape, he discusses the concept of consent and coercion. Children must realise and be sensitive about it. Heller and Lindberg [25] have looked at the trends in adolescent sexual behaviour, along with their health and education.

They observed a significant change in everybody's sexual behaviour. The reasons could be the HIV crisis and its awareness because of which younger people are getting less involved in sexual activities. In this case, spreading awareness could be an informal step towards educating the masses on sex and related activities. Chronaki [26] points out the fact that younger generations have different experiences with media. They are free to learn, and they are exposed to sexual content available on the internet. He refers that 'sexting' also falls within the domain of academics, and there is a need to ensure that children are safe online. It shows the significance of sex education in every day (growing) life of children.

### Conclusion:

Since most people (parents, youth and society in general) believe that education about sexuality empowers children to deal effectively with sexual matters, therefore, sex education must be a compulsory course in educational institutions, mainly primary, middle or secondary schools. It will surely help the youth to make healthy decisions (regarding sex) in their life. It holds a singular standpoint for sex education. However, there are concerns like parents as well as children are uncomfortable with the topic of 'masturbation', 'sexual intercourse' or even 'erection'. Trained teachers can take up such discussions as part of the formal education programme. There are opinions that it will also minimise unwanted pregnancies and health issues related to sex. In the absence of the guidance by a trained teacher and an all-inclusive sex education program, children and youth will misinform themselves through illicit and proscribed sources.

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