

**KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES OF ADOLESCENTS ABOUT
SEX EDUCATION**

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INTRODUCTION

Learning about sexuality is a life long process and a fundamental part of every person's socializations. Sex education helps adolescents to be aware of their sexual facts and knowledge that is necessary for responsible behaviours and attitudes towards sex for a healthy sexual life. Such education helps adolescents to reduce their risk of potentially negative outcomes.^(1, 2)

Sex education is described as the education about human sexuality such as, the anatomy and the physiology of the reproductive systems, the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty, sexual relationships, reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases .e.g. Genital herpes, Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, Syphilis, Hepatitis B virus (HBV), Hepatitis C virus (HCV), human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other aspects of human sexual behavior like moral, spiritual and cultural aspect. Sex education should be started before puberty by parents, caregivers or added in school programs.^(1, 3, 4)

All over the world there are 33.4 million people living with HIV/AIDS in 2008, 31.3 million adults and 2.1 million children younger than 15 years. Approximately two-thirds of these people live in Africa, another 20 percent live in Asia and 13, 000 of them lived in Egypt. Approximately 6.000 young people (under 25 years old) become infected with HIV every day. HIV/AIDS is one of the causes that increase adolescent's mortality rate. There are more than 25 million people with HIV/AIDS have died since the first AIDS cases were identified in 1981. In 2008 alone, HIV/AIDS caused the death of approximately 2 million people world wide.⁽⁵⁻⁹⁾

A number of objectives of healthy people 2010 address issues of human sexuality, pregnancy prevention and STDS and HIV prevention. These issues are important for the health of adolescents. Therefore, it is imperative that adolescents have age- appropriate sex education before becoming sexually active.⁽¹⁰⁾

Introduction

There are many programmes about sex education all over the world, World Health Organization program and the American Academy of Pediatrics supported early sex education for adolescents to delay the onset of sexual activity and increase safer sexual practices. In the last decade, a recent federal survey of the department of health and human services in the United States reported a decline in sexual activity among adolescents whose ages range from 15 to 19 years. ^(11, 12)

All developmental theories supported the belief that adolescence is a special time for sexuality development with the arrival of puberty, hormonal changes to both sex that lead to an increase in sex drive. Adolescents need to receive a comprehensive sex education program to enhance the decision making for their reproductive health. Thus, they should be provided with information about anatomy, physiology of sexual organs like internal, external genital organs and their functions, the physical changes associated with puberty to have a positive body image, decrease their stress accompanied with dramatic puberty change and to decrease their levels of anxiety. ⁽¹³⁻¹⁶⁾

Sex education has been recognized as one of the basic human needs which should be addressed by the health members to adolescents in health and illness. Adolescents get their information about sexuality from a wide range of sources .e.g. friends, advertising; television, magazines, leaflets, books and websites. Some of these may be inaccurate for their age. ⁽¹⁷⁻¹⁹⁾ Hence, they need support and care during their transition to adulthood. A pediatric nurse can play a crucial role as sex educator for children, adolescents, and their families. She has to help parents to answer child questions according to their level of understanding and developmental age .She can also provide specific, confidential, culturally sensitive, and nonjudgmental counseling about key issues of sexuality . ⁽²⁰⁻²⁴⁾ Therefore, the aim of the present study is to assess adolescents' knowledge and attitudes about sex education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sex education

Sex education provides adolescents with the information they need to understand their bodies and gender roles, developmental changes such as puberty, menstruation and sexual reproduction. The main goal of sex education is the promotion of sexual health by providing learners with opportunities to develop a positive and factual view of sexuality and sexual health. It helps adolescents to be aware of their sexual facts and knowledge that is necessary for responsible behaviours and attitudes towards their sexuality (Kirby, 2002c).^(15, 17)

Definition of sex education

Sex education is described as the education about human sexuality such as, the anatomy and the physiology of the reproductive system, the physical and emotional changes associated with puberty, sexual relationships, reproduction, sexually transmitted diseases .e.g. Genital herpes, Gonorrhoea, Chlamydia, Syphilis, Hepatitis B virus (HBV), Hepatitis C virus (HCV), human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other aspects of human sexual behavior like moral, spiritual and cultural aspect.^(1, 4, 18)

The need for sex education

Adolescent behaviour is often of greater concern to the community as adolescent's health. The health related behaviour has the greatest emotional and political concern. Adolescents have access to neither accurate information nor health services related to sexuality. Therefore, millions of adolescents' worldwide are at risk of potential negative outcomes from sexual behaviour, such as unwanted pregnancy, and infection with sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS⁽²³⁾ Imparting education in sexuality is one of the most significant contributions that can be made to the human society. This is due to the following important reasons:

Review of literature

1. Sexuality has a deep and significant value throughout the human life cycle regardless of gender, economic status, nationality or religion.
2. Men and women need to be educated in order to develop the skills necessary for making rational and responsible decisions related to sexual and reproductive behaviour in the context of their particular society.
3. Adolescents get their information about sex from different sources such as friends and mass media. This information may be incorrect and could have bad effects.
4. Adolescents experience a great deal of anxiety emerging out of a lack of knowledge of sexuality, myths and misconception.
5. Adolescents need not only information but also an adult to help them alleviate their anxieties about their body image and to guide them in coping with newly felt sexual urges.
6. A teenage girl needs information and an adult to guide her when she gets her first menstrual period and to deal with her body changes.
7. Sex education helps adolescents to develop positive values and attitudes toward sexuality.
8. Adolescents who are comfortable with their own sexuality and have an understanding of their bodies and their feelings would develop self - confidence and self- esteem.^(4,18)

Theories of sexuality

The development of sexuality is often considered a task of adolescence .The reality, however, is that sexuality begins to develop from the time of conception and often continues throughout life. Sexuality represents an amalgam of gender role, gender identity, physical characteristics, hormonal influences, society's expectation, peer and parental influences and cognitive, psychological and moral development superimposed on actual experiences.⁽¹⁶⁾

The theoretical starting- point in studying adolescent sexuality and sex education is that sexual behaviour and sexuality are at least in part made and shaped aspect of the sexual self which is considered natural and involves learning. Social construction theories claim that

Review of literature

people learn scripts for sexual behaviour, as they do for other forms of behaviour from primary and secondary socialization. Sexual behaviour is socially scripted behaviour drive (Gagnon and Simon 1973).Based on this view, the notion of the natural is inevitably problematic whatever attitudes or actions may be deemed natural, on this account, deeply affected by social process. Social scientists argue that people " feel sexual experiences in their physical bodies but it is not simply accessible to them as bodily sensation." How they make sense of it depends on the culture in which they live: the stories, scripts and attitudes circulating in their society. People learn to interpret their bodily sensation through the scripts available to them, choosing some and rejecting others that are also constrained by their society.^(25 - 27)

Sexuality, like other aspects of life, work or culture, is gendered. Learning about sexuality is integral to learning about gender; it forms a central plank in the notion of gender identity. Gender identity will, in turn, affect the characteristics and practices of sexuality. Feminist psychoanalytic socialization differs significantly for men and women, so that they are higher for women than for men. Young people are simultaneously undergo significant changes in the development of their sexuality and their gender identity. The dynamic relationship obtained between the two processes can make it difficult to disentangle and make sense of adolescent's reactions. Sexuality is a prime connection point between the body, identity and social world, so adolescents can be expected to react strongly to the messages they are offered during socialization because they relate to the core aspects of identity.⁽²⁶⁻³⁰⁾

Sexuality is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes feelings, attitudes and actions. It has both biologic and cultural components. It encompasses and gives direction to a person's physical, emotional, social and intellectual responses throughout life. Each person is born as a sexual being. Consequently, his or her gender identity and gender role behaviour evolve from and usually conform to the society expectation within that person's culture.^(15, 31, 32)