

Higher Secondary School Teachers' Attitude Towards the Implementation of Sex Education at Higher Secondary Level in Murshidabad District of West Bengal, India

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Abstract

In this study an attempt has been made to study the attitude of the higher secondary school teachers towards the implementation of sex education at higher secondary level in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, India. For this purpose, 380 higher secondary school teachers were randomly selected and attitude towards the implementation of sex education scale administered to them. To study the significance of difference between the various groups, 't' test was applied by the researcher. The overall results indicate that the higher secondary school teachers (both urban and rural) possess highly favourable attitude towards the implementation of sex education. And there is no significance difference in the attitude of higher secondary school teacher towards the implementation of sex education in relation to their gender (i.e. male and female), locality (i.e. rural and urban) and stream (i.e., arts, science and commerce).

Keyword: Higher Secondary, School Teachers, Sex Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexuality plays a crucial role in human development, involving biological, psychological, and social aspects that affect identity, well-being, pleasure, emotions, relationships, and reproduction. Therefore, sex education should encompass more than just biology or social science lessons, emphasizing the development of skills, attitudes, and behaviours, along with critical reflection on personal experiences in the realm of relationships and sexuality (Elena, *et al.*, 2014). On the other side, sex is a very delicate subject, and in the conservative and religious-based society of India, talking about sexual issues in public is frowned upon. Given this context, introducing sex education at the school level has always elicited strong opposition from a wide range of conservative Indian society (Tripathi & Sekher, 2013). In contrast, a Mumbai-based survey study which was conducted by T. Benzaken, AH Palep and PS Gill in 2011, reveals that 90% of students support the implementation of sex education in schools and whereas only 21.3% of students received sex education from their parents (Kumar & Chandran, 2020). In connection with this, another study from Jammu and Kashmir on the same issue was conducted by the P. Mahajan and N. Sharma, which reveals that the majority of parents (89%) oppose

to giving their daughters sex education, while only 3% support it (Mahajan & Sharma, 2005). In India after 1980s, for the HIV-AIDS related discourse and concerns, international organisations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF are actively urging and encouraging national education authorities in South Asian countries such as India to implement the reproductive awareness full initiatives regarding the sex education in schools (Chakravarti, 2011).

As a consequence of this, Adolescence Education Programme (AEP) was introduced for secondary and senior secondary school students in all state and central governmental schools in India in 2006 in partnership with the National Aids Control Organization (National AIDS Control Programme, 2006). Following these, the West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (in collaboration with NACO and the West Bengal State AIDS Presentation and Control Organization) introduced a textbook on adolescent sexual and reproductive health named '*Jibonshoili*' (the way in which a person or group lives) into the curriculum of all secondary schools in the state of West Bengal, India, as early as the 2006–07 session, in accordance with the guidelines of the central government

(Chakravarti, 2011). But during this period of time, different states of the country like Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Gujrat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa and Rajasthan declared the noncontinuities of sex education at school level (Tripathi & Sekher, 2013). After this, while 11 Indian states have banned it; the West Bengal try to designed a teachers manual to impart sex education at schools (Chakravarti, 2011); but it was decided by the government to stop the implementation of sex education as a part of school curriculum due to the opposition of the conservative society.

According to a 2018 report by the World Health Organization, around 370 million new cases of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) occur worldwide each year, with nearly half affecting young people. Understanding the patterns of STIs in various geographic areas is crucial for effective planning and implementation of STD control strategies. People with STIs are not only at risk of contracting HIV but also contribute significantly to the spread of STIs and HIV to others (Bhatta, *et al.*, 2023). Recognizing the significance and necessity of addressing these matters, UNESCO endorsed a program focused on sex education known as the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education in 2018 (Amina, Maryam, & Sheharyar, 2020).

Related to this, several surveys, such as those conducted by the All India Educational and Vocational Guidance Association, indicate that 54% of males and 42% of females lacked sufficient knowledge about sexual matters (Tripathi & Sekher, 2013). If students had been taught about these matters during high school, they would have gained a better understanding. Therefore, it is crucial to increase awareness and understanding among students, which can be achieved through the introduction of sex education. This underscores the importance of sex education. And here teachers can play an significant role in imparting sex education to students. Hence, it is essential to understand teachers' opinions on sex education. This study aims to evaluate teachers' attitudes toward the possibility of introducing sex education at the higher secondary level.

Critical Analysis of the Reviewed Studies

In this section, the researcher has provided an overview of the studies that are pertinent to the research problem and have been conducted on sex education and issues related to it.

Motihar's (Motihar, 2008) study provides valuable insights into the controversy surrounding sex education in Indian state-run schools. However, its reliance on anecdotal evidence and limited exploration of alternative perspectives may undermine the depth of its analysis. Moreover, this study could benefit from a more distinction examination of the cultural and political factors influencing attitudes towards sex education in India.

Toor's (Kamalpreet, 2012) investigation into attitudes towards sex education among teachers, parents, and adolescents offers valuable contributions to the field. However, its reliance on self-reported data and limited exploration of underlying reasons for attitudes may limit the depth of its analysis. Additionally, this study could benefit from a more comprehensive examination of the broader social and cultural context shaping perceptions of sex education in Punjab.

Santelli *et al.*, (John, *et al.*, 2018) research on historical risk factors for sexual assault among college students provides important insights into the role of pre-college sex education in prevention efforts. However, its reliance on retrospective reporting and potential recall bias may affect the accuracy of its findings. And this study could further explore the intersectionality of factors influencing sexual assault risk among college students.

Nyarko *et al.*, (Kingsley, Kobina, Maxwell, & Linda, 2014) investigation into parental attitudes towards sex education in Ghana offers valuable insights into cultural barriers and challenges in implementing sex education programs. However, its small sample size and focus solely on parental attitudes may limit the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, this study could benefit from a more distinction examination of the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as teachers and policymakers.

Smitha and Harrison's (Kelley & Abigail, 2013) study in rural South Africa highlights the influence of teacher attitudes on school-based sex education efforts. However, its focus on rural schools may limit its applicability to urban contexts. But on the other side, this study could benefit from a more comprehensive exploration of the broader social and cultural factors shaping attitudes towards sex education in South Africa. Bowden *et al.*, (Bowden, Lanning, Pippin, & Tanner, 2003) investigation into teachers' attitudes towards abstinence-only sex education in the United States reveals mixed perceptions among educators. However, its focus on a specific type of sex education curriculum may limit the generalizability of its findings. Additionally, this study could benefit from a more comprehensive examination of the effectiveness of different approaches to sex education. Jerves *et al.*, (Elena, *et al.*, 2014) study in Ecuador provides important insights into parental views on sexuality and sex education. However, its focus solely on parental perspectives may overlook the views of other stakeholders, such as teachers and policymakers. But this study could benefit from a more deep exploration of the cultural and social factors influencing attitudes towards sex education in Ecuador. Tripathi and Sekher's (Tripathi & Sekher, 2013) analysis of youth attitudes towards family life education in India highlights the gap between perceived importance and access to sex education. However, its reliance on secondary data

sources may limit the depth of its analysis. Additionally, this study could benefit from a more comprehensive examination of the barriers to accessing sex education among Indian youth. Lastly, Nadeem, Cheema, and Zameer's (Amina, Maryam, & Sheharyar, 2020) study on perceptions of Pakistani Muslim parents and teachers towards sex education offers important insights into cultural and religious factors shaping attitudes towards sex education. However, its reliance on self-reported data and limited exploration of underlying reasons for attitudes may limit the depth of its analysis. Additionally, the study could benefit from a more comprehensive examination of the challenges and opportunities for implementing sex education programs in Pakistan.

In light of the critical analysis of existing studies on sex education attitudes and perceptions, there emerges a clear need for an additional study angle to deepen our understanding. Specifically, while Motihar's (Motihar, 2008) study highlights the clash between traditional values and modernization, and Nadeem, Cheema, and Zameer's (Amina, Maryam, & Sheharyar, 2020) study sheds light on cultural and religious factors shaping attitudes, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the attitudes of higher secondary school teachers in specific regions, such as the Murshidabad District of West Bengal, India. Understanding the attitudes of teachers in this context is crucial for designing effective sex education programs tailored to the local socio-cultural landscape. Additionally, insights from Toor's (Kamalpreet, 2012) study on attitudes of parents, teachers, and adolescents underscore the importance of considering multiple perspectives in sex education initiatives. By focusing on higher secondary school teachers' attitudes in Murshidabad District, this proposed study can provide valuable insights into the feasibility and challenges of implementing sex education programs in a region characterized by its unique cultural and educational dynamics. Such research can inform policymakers and educators in designing culturally sensitive and contextually relevant sex education curricula, ultimately contributing to the promotion of sexual health and well-being among adolescents in the region.

After the critical analysis of these studies, researcher observed that, it becomes necessary to conduct one more study on the sex education for understanding their present scenario and status of the higher secondary school teacher towards the implementation of sex education at higher secondary level in Murshidabad district. As a result of the findings related to the critical analysis of the related literature review regarding the sex education related studies; researcher undertakes to investigate and analyse a variety of issues in order to shed light on the; *Higher Secondary School Teachers' Attitude Towards the Implementation of Sex Education at Higher Secondary Level in Murshidabad District of West Bengal, India.*

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was initiated with the following objectives in mind: (i) firstly, to investigate the attitudes of higher secondary school teachers towards the implementation of sex education; and (ii) secondly, to identify the potential differences in mean scores of attitudes towards sex education implementation among teachers based on gender, locality, and stream-related variables.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in three blocks: Suti-II, Samserganj, and Raghunathganj, located in the Murshidabad district of the West Bengal state, India. The research took place from October 17th, 2023, to January 1st, 2014. The descriptive survey method was adopted by the researcher for this present quantitative research study. Here, higher secondary school teachers of Murshidabad district, constituted the population for this study. The sample size was determined using Raosoft (Raosoft, 2024) for sample size calculation, resulting in 380 high school teachers being selected. This sample size was calculated based on a total population estimate of ~30,000, as per the Murshidabad district government portal. A margin of error of $\pm 5\%$ was applied at a 95% confidence level. At the first stage, 21 higher secondary schools were taken randomly by the researcher. And at the second stage, 380 higher secondary school teacher were selected randomly from the sampled 21 higher secondary schools from the previously mentioned three blocks. To uphold the ethical standards of the study, informed verbal consent was obtained from each study participant. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher remained unaware of the identities of the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were also strictly maintained by the researcher at every stage of the study.

For this study, researcher utilized a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (4), agree (3), can't say (2), disagree (1), and for strongly disagree (0) was used. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using *Cronbach's Alpha* value ($\alpha = 0.79$), which was validated through pilot testing involving a small group of 13 participants. This pilot testing aimed to ensure the reliability and validity of the tool. This questionnaire consists of several subsections, including: (i) socio-demographic details, comprising 7 items; (ii) attitude towards sex education, consisting of 4 items; (iii) importance of sex education in schools, with 4 items; (iv) problems in the implementation of sex education, containing 3 items.

To assess the participants' attitudes towards sex education, the researcher calculated the mean. Here, researcher set the predetermined scores where above 131 signify a favourable attitude. Subsequently, researcher also computed the group-wise mean after calculating the individual means. To determine the significance of the

difference in means between two groups, the researcher utilized the 't' test, which was calculated using MS-Excel.

Findings of the Study

Keeping in the view the objectives of the study, data was analysed and interpreted in two sections; where table no. 1 deals with the attitude of the higher

secondary school teachers towards the sex education. on the other side; table no. 2 to table no. 6 deals with the comparison of means scores of attitudes of higher secondary school teachers towards sex education in relation to their gender (i.e., male and female), locality (i.e. rural and urban), and streams (i.e., Science, Commerce and Arts).

Table no. 1: Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Attitude Score of Total Higher Secondary School Teachers towards the Implementation of Sex Education

Class Interval of Attitude Scores	Frequency (n = 380)	% of the Respondents	Cumulative Score	Cumulative Percentage
161 – 170	78	20.53%	78	20.53%
151 – 160	95	25.00%	173	45.53%
141 – 150	103	27.11%	276	72.63%
131 – 140	59	15.53%	335	88.16%
121 – 130	34	8.95%	369	97.11%
111 – 120	11	2.89%	380	100.00%
101 – 110	0	0.00%	380	100.00%
Total	380	100 %	380	100%

The table no. 1 illustrates the distribution of attitudes among higher secondary school teachers regarding the implementation of sex education. It is observed that 20.53% of teachers scored between 161 – 170, followed by 25.00% between 151 – 160, and 27.11% between 141 – 150. Additionally, 15.53% scored between 131 – 140, while 8.95% fell within the range of 121 – 130. A smaller percentage, 2.89%, scored between

111 – 120. These results indicate a predominantly favourable attitude among higher secondary school teachers towards sex education implementation. According to the predetermined criteria, scores above 131 signify a favourable attitude. As the majority of teachers scored above this threshold, it can be concluded that most possess a highly favourable attitude towards sex education implementation.

Table no. 2: Attitude of Male and Female Higher Secondary School Teachers towards the Implementation of Sex Education

Sex	n = 380	Mean	t-ratio	Significance Level
Male	233	136.43	1.79	*Not Significant
Female	147	142.35		

*Not Significant at 0.05 Level.

Table 2 displays the attitudes of male and female higher secondary school teachers regarding the implementation of sex education. The mean scores of attitudes for male teachers and female teachers are 136.43 and 142.35. The calculated t-ratio between these

groups is 1.79, which is not significant at the 0.05 level. This suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards sex education implementation between male and female higher secondary school teachers in Murshidabad district.

Table no. 3: Attitude of the Higher Secondary School Teachers of Urban and Rural towards the implementation of Sex Education

Locality	n = 380	Mean	t-ratio	Significance Level
Rural	238	149.03	1.23	*Not Significant
Urban	142	132.65		

*Not Significant at 0.05 Level.

Table 3 presents the attitudes of rural and urban-based higher secondary school teachers towards the implementation of sex education. The data shows that the mean score of attitudes among rural-based teachers is 149.03, while for urban-based teachers, the mean score is 132.65. The calculated t-ratio between these two groups is 1.23, which is not significant at the 0.05 level.

This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in attitudes towards sex education implementation between rural and urban-based teachers in Murshidabad district. Therefore, it can be concluded that regardless of the locality of their schools, teachers exhibit similar attitudes towards sex education implementation.

Table no. 4: Attitude of the Higher Secondary School Teachers of Science and Commerce Streams towards the Implementation of Sex Education

Streams	n = 380	Mean	t-ratio	Significance Level
Science	114	134.82	1.89	*Not Significant
Commerce	84	141.47		

*Not Significant at 0.05 Level.

Table 4 presents the comparison of attitudes towards the implementation of sex education between higher secondary school teachers of science and commerce streams in Murshidabad district. The findings reveal that there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores of attitudes between these two groups. Specifically, the mean score for science stream teachers is 134.82, while for commerce stream teachers, it is 141.47. The calculated t-ratio of 1.89 is not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the observed difference in attitudes is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that regardless of their academic specialization, teachers

in both science and commerce streams exhibit similar attitudes towards the incorporation of sex education in the curriculum. Possible reasons for this similarity may include common training or exposure to similar educational philosophies. However, further research is needed to explore the deeper into the factors influencing attitudes towards sex education among teachers from different academic backgrounds. Understanding these factors can inform the development of more targeted and effective strategies for integrating sex education into the school curriculum.

Table no. 5: Attitude of the Higher Secondary School Teachers of Science and Arts Streams towards the Implementation of Sex Education

Streams	n = 380	Mean	t-ratio	Significance Level
Science	114	135.09	0.213	*Not Significant
Arts	182	135.73		

*Not Significant at 0.05 Level.

Table 5 presents a comparison of attitudes towards the implementation of sex education between higher secondary school teachers of science and arts streams in Murshidabad district. The data indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores of attitudes between these two groups. Specifically, the mean score for science stream teachers is 135.09, while for arts stream teachers, it is 135.73. The

calculated t-ratio of 0.213 is not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the observed difference in attitudes is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that regardless of their academic specialization, teachers in both science and arts streams exhibit similar attitudes towards the incorporation of sex education in the curriculum.

Table no. 6: Attitude of the Higher Secondary School Teachers of Commerce and Arts Streams towards the Implementation of Sex Education

Streams	n = 380	Mean	t-ratio	Significance Level
Commerce	84	141.22	1.38	*Not Significant
Arts	182	135.63		

*Not Significant at 0.05 Level.

Table 6 provides an analysis of the attitudes towards the implementation of sex education among higher secondary school teachers in Murshidabad district, specifically focusing on those from commerce and arts streams. The data reveals that there is no statistically significant difference in mean scores of attitudes between these two groups. The mean score for commerce stream teachers is 141.22, whereas for arts stream teachers, it is 135.63. The calculated t-ratio of 1.38 is not significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that the observed difference in attitudes is not statistically meaningful. This suggests that regardless of their academic background in commerce or arts, teachers exhibit similar attitudes towards the incorporation of sex education in the curriculum. This finding underscores the importance of recognizing commonalities in attitudes

across diverse academic disciplines and highlights the potential for collaborative efforts in promoting comprehensive sex education in schools.

DISCUSSION

The findings from Table 1 indicate a positive inclination among teachers towards integrating sex education into the curriculum, signifying their readiness to address critical aspects of sexual health within the school environment. However, despite such positive results in India, teachers in religiously conservative countries like Pakistan have resisted including sex education in the curriculum (Amina, Maryam, & Sheharyar, 2020). But it is important to note the presence of a minority with less favourable attitudes in this study, highlighting the need for targeted support to ensure

comprehensive implementation of sex education programs. Moving to Table 2, the data suggests that gender doesn't significantly influence attitudes towards sex education among teachers, hinting at a general consensus or shared experiences regarding its importance. Whereas Kamalpreet Kaur's study (Kamalpreet, 2012) found that male teachers had a more favourable attitude towards sex education than female teachers did. Nevertheless, various factors like cultural norms and personal beliefs could still play a role. Transitioning to Table 3, it is evident that teachers, regardless of rural or urban placement, hold similar views on integrating sex education into the curriculum, suggesting a consistency influenced by factors like cultural norms and educational background. This trend extends across different geographic settings within the district, underscoring the importance of a brief approach to address attitudes towards sex education. In Tables 4, 5, and 6, despite differing academic streams, teachers exhibit comparable support for sex education, indicating a shared perspective regardless of specialization. This is akin to the findings of Maria's study (Maria Helena de Almeida & Duarte Goncalo Rei, 2016), where a positive attitude towards sex education among teachers was observed. This suggests that factors shaping attitudes towards sex education may transcend academic backgrounds, emphasizing the need for holistic strategies to promote its integration in schools.

While teachers may demonstrate a favourable attitude towards sex education, the educational institutions themselves also have a vital role to play. In a letter to the editor of the *Journal of Psychosexual Health* (Kumar & Chandran, 2020) in 2020, Dr. Ajay Kumar from the Department of Psychiatry, AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) offered a series of recommendations aimed at improving the implementation of sex education within educational institutions. Firstly, he suggested utilizing game-based learning formats to engage adolescents more effectively. Secondly, he proposed training peer educators, as adolescents are often more receptive to information from their peers. Thirdly, Dr. Kumar emphasized the importance of parental programs focused on enhancing communication about sex and dispelling myths. Fourthly, he highlighted the role of teacher training, advocating for comprehensive programs conducted by experts in relevant fields. Additionally, Dr. Kumar underscored the need to integrate prevention of sexual violence into sex education initiatives, advocating for systemic approaches that encompass schools, colleges, teacher training, and parent education programs.

But, before implementing strategies to improve sex education in educational institutions, it is important to identify the specific challenges faced by both teachers and students in this context (Amina, Maryam, & Sheharyar, 2020). This involves understanding where teachers may require additional support to effectively teach sex education and where students may encounter

obstacles in learning about sexual health. But these approaches will only be effective if sex education is taught in schools as part of the curriculum; otherwise, they won't make much of a difference. And the issue of parents is also significant here, because several research findings shows that parents are more interested in providing moral education than sex education (Netsanet, Tsion, Fessahaye, & Fentie, 2012).

CONCLUSION

Even if teachers have the favourable attitudes towards the implementation sex education, but the West Bengal government is in an ambiguous situation to introduce sex education in a direct and open manner, because of the conservative and customs-oriented society. Yet in the current education system of West Bengal, sex education is not included as part of the traditional school curriculum. But the central government of India is trying to aware the students through several schemes and programmes regarding the sex education. The role of the Government of India towards the implementation of sex education or life skill education is to develop and implement policies and programmes that will help young people to gain the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health life. The government also provide funding for research, evaluation and training related studies to assess the impact of sex education on young people and aware them regarding their health and well-being. But, the amount of allocated budget for related initiatives regarding sex education or life skill education needs to be increased. For example, the amount of the allocated budget was Rs 1,01,65,760/- for the related programs which were organized and funded by the central government of India in 2019 (GOI, 2019-2020).

If we try to find the answer to the question related to the implementation of sex education; Is sex education a part of the curriculum in India? we must say that it is the year 2022 and sex education is still not mandatorily as part of the school curriculum in India specially in several state; whereas *prostitution is legal in India* after the verdict of the honourable supreme court of India (Rajagopal, 2022), *but sex education is still not fully implemented by the government or judiciary* in schools. On the other side, the implementation of sex education in Indian schools at the higher secondary level has been shown to have numerous benefits. According to a study conducted by the Indian Journal of Medical Ethics (IJME), sex education has been found to increase awareness about sexual health and reproductive rights, reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unintended pregnancies, and improve the overall health and well-being of students (Srinivasan, 2020). Additionally, the inclusion of sex education in the curriculum has been shown to promote gender equality and combat gender-based violence. It also helps to break taboos and stigma surrounding discussions about sex, and empowers young people to make informed and

responsible decisions about their sexual health (Srinivasan, 2020).

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