

An Analysis of the Development of Sex Education in China

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Abstract:

In contemporary China, despite growing awareness and attention to sexual education issues, the promotion and popularization of comprehensive sexual education remain hindered by deeply ingrained conservative attitudes that have persisted for millennia. These attitudes have led to sub-optimal outcomes, including limited access to accurate information and resources, which can negatively impact public health and social development. This study examines the historical development and current state of sexual education in China, as well as the various challenges that hinder its advancement, through an analysis of regionally gathered data. The study highlights the regional disparities in sexual education across China. Urban areas tend to have more progressive attitudes and better access to resources than rural regions, where conservative views and limited infrastructure can further restrict the dissemination of vital information. These disparities underscore the need for tailored approaches that address the specific needs of different communities. To overcome these challenges and optimize promotional efforts, the study suggests several key strategies, including formulating relevant policies by the government, managing relevant courses in schools, and parents' understanding of related knowledge. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that promoting and popularizing sexual education in China will lead to improved health outcomes, greater gender equality, and a more informed society overall.

Keywords: Sex education; education resources; cultural sensitivity

1. Introduction

As one of the most populous countries, the sexual and reproductive health of the Chinese people is important not only for China but also for the global community. Knowledge about sexual health can help individuals make informed decisions about their health and relationships. China's sexual education has gone through a process from relative conservatism to gradual openness. In traditional Chinese society, sexual topics were often regarded as taboo and seldom discussed in public, which also influenced the development of sexual education. The development trend of sex education in China is toward a more comprehensive, scientific, and professional direction, but it also faces many challenges, such as how to balance traditional culture and modern concepts, and how to overcome the shortage of teachers [1]. With the development of society, these problems are expected to be solved gradually. This article analyzed the topic of sex education from four dimensions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Development

Sex education for Chinese teenagers has mainly gone

through three stages, namely, the confinement stage of sex education (1949-1977), the initiation stage of sex education (1978-1987), and the development stage of sex education (from 1988 to now). In different stages of development, there are many scholars, researchers, and practitioners who are trying to promote Chinese youth sex education step by step forward [2].

2.1.1 The first stage--the closed phase of sex education

In the early 1950s, China in terms of sex education, through in the library or bookstores provided sexual knowledge books, for people to learn and understand knowledge, therefore, China's sex education was not completely a closed state, but encouraged people to learn, to understand knowledge in this aspect.

In 1957, Comrade MAO Zedong, then chairman of the Communist Party of China, proposed at the third Plenary Session of the eighth CPC Central Committee that a birth control course could be taught in middle school. Under the premise of the support of the national leaders, the sex education curriculum will naturally unfold smoothly with the promotion of the policy, although during this period, the ancient conservative ideas of the Chinese people will play a certain restrictive role in it.

In March 1963, the National Health Science and Technol-

ogy Planning Conference was held in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During this period, Premier Zhou mentioned that medical workers must impart adolescent sex knowledge to boys and girls, to ensure that more and more teenagers can use scientific knowledge to protect themselves [2].

2.1.2 The second stage--the budding stage of sex education

In 1978, the Ministry of Education issued a full-time ten-year middle school “physiological health outline” (trial draft), this draft mentioned adolescent physiological health, late marriage and family planning and other content that must cause enough attention. And the relevant knowledge that must be physiological in the arrangement of teaching content. In the middle school stage, the school should start the relevant courses in physiological health, and in the high school stage, the teaching content should involve late marriage and family planning [2].

2.1.3 The third stage--the development stage of sex education

At this stage, the policy on sex education was also formalized, as a form of law to regulate the implementation of sex education for adolescents. Secondly, a large number of monographs, books, and publications on sex education are also available to a wide range of readers, playing a role in popularizing the entire population. At the same time, the investigation of sex education is also gradually carried out, to conduct in-depth research on sex education through these survey results, and better and steadily promote the practice of sex education [2].

2.2 Policy Development

Given the above data, the Chinese government has put forward a series of policy measures in terms of sex education, aiming to improve the level of sexual health of adolescents and promote their all-round development. Here is a brief overview of Cornerstone policies.

Firstly, in 2021, The State Council issued China’s nine-year Plan for Child Development from 2021 to 2030 (the Outline of the “Healthy China 2030” Plan), which suggests that sex education should be included in the basic education system and quality monitoring system. The plan highlights the need to improve the effectiveness of sex education and to guide parents or other guardians to provide appropriate sex education based on the age and stage of the child’s cognitive development [3].

The second is the implementation of the revised Law on the Protection of Minors, which for the first time wrote “sex education” into the legal provisions. Among them, the law stipulates that schools and kindergartens should provide sex education to minors.

Furthermore, the policy of sexual enlightenment education, through legislative means, clearly stipulates the necessity and importance of carrying out sexual enlightenment education for teenagers, standardizes the content, methods, and procedures of such education, and guarantees the rights of teenagers to sexual education. At the same time, the legal punishment for sexual assault and sexual harassment has been strengthened to protect young people from sexual assault [4].

Finally, through the combination of school education, sex enlightenment education is incorporated into the school education curriculum system. It aims to teach students correct sexual knowledge and concepts through classroom education and campus culture construction. To guide students to develop healthy sexual psychology and sexual behavior habits.

3. Barriers to Full Roll-Out

In the process of comprehensively promoting sex education, the Chinese government will still encounter various difficulties. Although China has made great progress in the popularization of sex education, it still faces many challenges, such as insufficient teacher resources, huge differences in parents and social attitudes, and unequal distribution of educational resources.

3.1 Cultural Barriers

There are significant challenges in providing comprehensive and age-appropriate information to young people, as many parents and educators still consider talking about sex to be a taboo subject, and some parents believe that sex education should wait until their children reach puberty.

On the one hand, the stigma attached to discussing sexual health and relationships is often rooted in deep-rooted cultural or religious values that view such topics as private and inappropriate for public discussion. Parents and teachers who hold these views may feel uncomfortable or even forbidden to start talking about sex, fearing that they may be crossing moral or ethical boundaries. This reluctance can lead to gaps in knowledge and understanding, leaving young people ill-prepared for the challenges and responsibilities associated with sexual development. On the other hand, those who advocate delaying sex education until adolescence argue that young children are not mature enough to understand the complexities of sexual relationships and the consequences that come with them. Introducing these concepts too early, they argue, may encourage early sexual behavior or expose children to information that is irrelevant to their current stage of life [5].

3.2 Uneven Distribution of Educational Resources

One significant challenge in providing comprehensive sex education is the uneven distribution of educational resources between different regions. This disparity can result in a lack of necessary teachers and teaching materials in some areas, particularly in rural or underprivileged communities [6]. The imbalance in resource allocation means that students in these regions may not receive the same quality of education as their peers in better-resourced areas.

3.2.1 Lack of training

Without proper training, this means that teachers may not be equipped to address the various needs and problems of students. This will lead to incomplete or inaccurate information, which is undoubtedly disadvantageous to students. Especially in some areas, qualified teachers who can effectively conduct sex education are extremely scarce, such as remote mountainous areas, and even teachers can transmit wrong information [7].

In turn, a high turnover of educators may exacerbate this shortage, as a lack of good-quality teachers makes it difficult to maintain consistent and high-quality teaching. In addition, schools in disadvantaged areas may lack up-to-date textbooks, multimedia resources, and other materials, and this scarcity limits the depth and breadth of information available to students.

In addition, some teachers have received specialized training that enables them to communicate sensitive information more effectively. These educators are better equipped to approach issues and discussions in a sensitive and informative manner. However, there are still many teachers who do not have the opportunity to receive formal training, making it difficult for them to provide courses properly. In particular, many teachers feel uncomfortable or lack confidence in sex education, which may be due to personal beliefs, lack of training, or social taboos surrounding the topic, leading to their reluctance to teach sex education, thus showing that teachers' attitudes and professional competence have a significant impact on teaching effectiveness.

3.2.2 Attitudes toward sex education

Teachers' attitudes toward sex education can influence their willingness and ability to teach the subject. If a teacher feels uncomfortable or has negative views about discussing sexual topics, they may inadvertently communicate these feelings to their students, potentially undermining the educational goals. Moreover, regular professional development opportunities can help improve teachers' comfort levels and teaching skills. However, the availability of such programs varies widely, and some

teachers may not have access to ongoing training, leading to inconsistent quality in instruction.

3.3 Inconsistent Curriculum Standards

The lack of uniform teaching materials and curriculum standards makes the content and quality of sex education uneven. In some areas, teaching materials may focus more on physical health, such as the anatomy of the reproductive system, the menstrual cycle, etc. Others may include more on emotional health, gender equality, prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies [8].

3.4 Social Prejudice and Misunderstanding

Social prejudice and misunderstanding have also become a major obstacle to the promotion of sex education. Many schools and parents have misunderstandings about sex education, believing that it will encourage teenagers to engage in inappropriate behavior, so they have not found appropriate teaching methods, resulting in unsatisfactory promotion effects.

In particular, although the importance of sex education has been recognized at the national level, there may be resistance to its implementation at the local level, so it is not coordinated to maximize the effectiveness of this publicity.

4. Solution Measure

Given the above obstacles, this article has come up with relevant policies to solve these problems better.

4.1 School

4.1.1 Systematize the provision of formal courses

Schools can incorporate sex education into their teaching plans through a formal curriculum system to ensure that students of all ages have access to appropriate sex education, such as by teaching physiological knowledge, including the structure and function of the reproductive system, physical changes during adolescence, enhancing students' awareness of self-protection, and teaching them to recognize and respond to situations of sexual harassment and assault. Access to resources for emergencies should also be made available.

Additionally, schools need to help students understand how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases (such as HIV, gonorrhea, syphilis, etc.) and the risks of unwanted pregnancy. At the appropriate age, information on contraceptive methods, including the proper use of contraceptives, should also be provided to reduce the rate of unwanted pregnancies among adolescents. Schools should also teach healthy values through these programs, emphasizing respect for personal boundaries, gender equality, and

the importance of healthy relationships and relationships. And train students to have a sense of responsibility and self-protection ability, so that they always learn to make wise choices.

The training of teachers should also be included. Regular professional training should be conducted for teachers to ensure the accuracy and rigor of the teaching contents, and the effectiveness of sex education programs should be evaluated regularly, feedback should be collected and necessary adjustments should be made to better achieve the ideal teaching objectives.

4.1.2 Appropriate teaching methods

Schools can provide students with a better understanding of complex concepts and situations through interactive learning methods, such as role-playing and group discussions. Lectures, seminars, and other activities should also be organized regularly to invite professionals to explain sexual health knowledge. And create a non-discriminatory, inclusive school environment that supports students of different sexual orientations and gender identities [9].

Schools can provide psychological support services for students by opening special psychological counseling rooms, especially for those who may suffer from sexual violence or discrimination, to better pay attention to the physical and mental health of students, and do regular psychological counseling and regular follow-up.

4.1.3 Family cooperation

Schools should strengthen home-school cooperation, communicate with parents about the importance and specific content of sex education, and work with parents to maximize its popularity. Schools should also be aware of and ensure students' mental health through regular parent-teacher meetings or individual interviews.

4.2 Parents

4.2.1 Active communication

Parents should establish open and honest communication with their children and let them know that they can ask any questions about sex at any time. Encourage children to express their feelings and concerns, and give corresponding support and suggestions, which can help children to establish a healthy interpersonal relationship and gender equality values. Also, keep an eye on your child's emotional health and teach them ways to seek help in the face of stress or difficulty, thereby further helping your child develop a healthy self-image and foster positive body perception. Parents should also emphasize the importance and responsibility of sexual behavior through positive communication.

4.2.2 Provision of accurate information

Parents should provide their children with scientific and accurate information to help them understand the basic knowledge of body changes, physical hygiene, contraceptive methods, etc. According to the child's age and development stage, gradual in-depth introduction of relevant knowledge. For example, when the child has just entered the youth development period, parents can help the child learn and understand the relevant knowledge through the corresponding books, network resources, and other media. As children grow older, parents should also supervise and guide their children to properly use the Internet to obtain relevant knowledge and teach them how to identify reliable sources of information, to ensure the accuracy of information [10].

4.2.3 Demonstration behavior

Parents should model their behavior for their children, such as respect for their partners, the way they handle conflict, etc., to better demonstrate how to display healthy boundaries and communication skills in relationships. At the same time, parents should support the school's sex education curriculum, participate in school activities or meetings, and work with teachers to ensure that their children receive comprehensive sex education. If the education provided by the school is not adequate, parents may consider supplementing with other resources or looking for external programs [11].

4.3 Government

4.3.1 Formulation of relevant policies

A legal and policy framework is in place to ensure that sex education is part of the school curriculum, that schools are urged to complete the implementation of such courses, and that the effectiveness of sex education programs is regularly assessed and policies are reviewed and updated to standardize the content and standards of education and ensure that it is scientific, comprehensive and in line with international best practice [12].

In addition, the Government should establish a reporting mechanism for sexual harassment and assault to provide timely support and services to victims. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are also necessary to ensure the quality and effectiveness of sex education programs, to make results data transparent, to present results and effectiveness openly and transparently, to increase public confidence, and to promote full information.

4.3.2 Provide financial support

Governments need to provide financial support for sex education programs, including the development of textbooks, teacher training, and program implementation, and

fund sex education programs by non-government organizations and community-based organizations through public budgets. The funding of the government has greatly reduced the financial pressure of sex education publicity and greatly enhanced the feasibility of project implementation.

4.3.3 Promotion and Publicity

The Government can use various media platforms and publicity campaigns to raise public awareness of the importance of sex education. Regularly participate in media cooperation, produce and broadcast public service advertisements and programs about sex education, so that more people can understand and learn related knowledge through online resources. At the same time, better encourage community participation in sex education programs, such as holding public lectures and workshops, and working with non-government organizations, community groups, and other stakeholders to promote sex education.

4.3.4 International cooperation and exchange

The government should actively participate in international educational exchanges and cooperation programs, learning from the successful experiences and best practices of other countries. It is also necessary to share research results and technical support with other countries and regions [13]. To promote gender equality and respectful diversity education, reduce gender discrimination and stereotypes, and provide support and resources for students with different sexual orientations and gender identities.

5. Conclusion

In recent decades, with the development of society, China's sex education policy has been constantly updated, and the relevant aspects have become more and more comprehensive. This paper analyzes the evolution of China's sex education policy through literature, focusing on the difficulties encountered by the Chinese government in the implementation of universal education, as well as the difficulties encountered in the promotion of sex education through the cooperation of school education, family education, and government measures. The development of the right values, not just in sex education, is a dynamic and ongoing process, and the events related to sexual behavior in society escalate and evolve accordingly, so the author's research also needs to keep pace with the times, To gradually update and gradually improve the whole policy on

sex education.

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