



Review Paper

## Comprehensive Sexuality Education

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### Abstract

This review paper provides a comprehensive overview and analysis of the topic of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), discussing its importance, the challenges it faces, and the impact it can have on young people's lives. It reviews existing evidence, societal attitudes, and cultural practices related to sex education, as well as the consequences of the lack of it. The paper aims to inform and persuade by synthesizing information from various sources and highlighting the need for a structured and inclusive approach to sex education.

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A few months back, a news article surfaced about a brother who murdered his sister accusing her of sexual intercourse. He mistook her first menstrual bleeding or menarche as a sign of her sexual intercourse. This points towards the lack of sex education in our country. Evidence shows that young adolescents, across cultural settings, commonly express stereotypical or inequitable gender attitudes, and such attitudes are mainly reinforced by family, peers, schools, and community<sup>[1]</sup>. Schools often skip the biology lessons on the human reproductive system and tell students to read it themselves. Female teachers often conduct secret lessons for girls during lunchtime, teaching them how to hide their menstrual pads from their male classmates. Another

common version is seen in shops when the shopkeeper wraps the sanitary pads in the newspaper as if menstrual cycles, which play a pivotal role in the continuation of the human race, are something to be hidden. Do these same shopkeepers sell condoms wrapped up? Is menstruation a taboo? Many Indian customs prohibit menstruating women from religious ceremonies and consider them untouchable. A few years back, a case was reported from Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu that a young girl died on the night of a cyclone. The authorities had already issued a notice regarding the cyclone. Her family made her sleep in a kutchi outhouse used for agricultural purposes because she was menstruating, while all the other non-menstruating girls in that

village spent that horrifying night in the safety of their pukka houses. Indian mothers are less tolerant of the use of menstrual cups. The main reason quoted is that it results in loss of virginity. The concept of virginity was created decades back to make sure that the children born are legitimate. But now, the concept is used to measure the purity of a female when the whole concept of virginity is a myth. The custom of bleeding on a wedding night is hindering mothers from allowing their teenage daughters to use menstrual cups. The underlying problem is not the ignorance of elderly females, but the family's enthusiasm for checking white bedsheets after the wedding night. The only solution is sex education. This knowledge would help to dispel myths and misconceptions.

Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) has emerged as a vital approach to giving young people accurate, age-appropriate information about sexuality and their sexual and reproductive health. The United Nations' technical guidance recommends that Comprehensive Sexuality Education should be, based on an established curriculum, tailored for different ages; continued through childhood to adolescence to lifelong [2]. It fosters empowered decision-making to equip our young generation with the skills necessary to make responsible choices about their bodies, relationships, and sexual activity. It goes beyond mere biology and embraces a comprehensive framework that covers a wide range of topics, including but not limited to respect, gender identity, consent, and bodily autonomy; anatomy, puberty, and menstruation; contraception and pregnancy; and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. This type of learning would establish the foundation for healthy relationships[3].

Comprehensive Sexuality Education places significant emphasis on gender and sexual orientation, promoting understanding, acceptance, and respect for diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Young minds should be informed about their sexual and reproductive rights and the importance of informed decision-making. It also emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, open communication, and consent in relationships. It helps young people develop the skills needed to establish and maintain healthy, respectful relationships. By educating about gender diversity, gender-based violence, and the rights of marginalized groups, Comprehensive Sexuality Education disrupts traditional gender norms and advocates for equality. Its ultimate vision is to create a society that is more inclusive and accepting. Comprehensive Sexuality Education should be ideally started at the age of 5, provided by multiple sources including parents and family members, teachers, trained social workers, and counselors who work with young people. Evidence consistently shows that high-quality sexual education delivers positive health outcomes [4]. Comprehensive Sexuality Education tackles essential subjects such as body image, self-esteem, and emotional well-being, supporting young individuals in cultivating a positive self-image and effectively managing the emotional obstacles that may arise during their sexual development. By equipping them with the necessary knowledge, it aids in preparing and navigating the physical and emotional changes that accompany growth, while also guiding seeking assistance when needed. These comprehensive efforts

subsequently minimize the risks of violence, exploitation, and abuse, while empowering young people to recognize and effectively respond to instances of abuse. Controversy surrounds Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Critics argue that it promotes promiscuity or undermines cultural values. Generations have considered sex education as reading Kamasutra or watching porn. It was heartbreaking to see that in social media, many Indians put forward the proposal of having a labor room in schools when the government tried to incorporate sex education into the curriculum. There is clear evidence that promoting abstinence-only-until-marriage (AUOM) will pull them more toward risky sexual activity [5]. Comprehensive Sexuality Education does not encourage early or risky sexual activity. Evidence shows that young people are more likely to initiate sexual activity later when they are better informed about sexuality and their sexual rights. According to the observation of WHO, children start to explore their bodies through sight and touch at a relatively early age [2]. In an age-appropriate manner, Comprehensive Sexuality Education seeks to dispel misconceptions about masturbation and educate individuals about their bodies, boundaries, and privacy. Comprehensive Sexuality Education is a crucial tool for empowering young people with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. It is an investment in the future, ensuring that the next generation grows up equipped to lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

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