

# Cultural Sensitivity and the Negative Impacts of Non-Education of Sexuality among Teenagers in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract**— *This paper intends to discuss on the problem that whether being extremely culturally sensitive have barred elders from educating on sex to the children and whether having a proper knowledge on sexuality at the proper age would protect the teenagers from using unethical sexual behaviours.*

*It is mainly objected to inquire whether non education of sexuality at the proper age would lead to experiment sexuality in unethical means. Further the paper intends to evaluate whether the extreme cultural sensitivity of the Sri Lankans have resulted in non-education of sexuality openly, investigate whether educating adolescents of sexuality will make them aware of what sexuality is, examine whether educating of sexuality will change the current position of youth where they tend to seek for unethical means to experiment on sex, expound the importance and effectiveness of teaching of sexuality in the school education, suggest to introduce sex education in a proper way in the schools.*

*The study is conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Questionnaires were used to collect primary data, along with the interviews. Secondary data collected from books and newspapers along with the web based journals.*

*It is the expectation of this paper to research on whether educating of sexuality properly would change the mindset of the teens and will change the present situation.*

**Keywords:** Teenagers, Cultural Sensitivity, non-education of sexuality.

## I. INTRODUCTION

“If we are to make an impact on children and young people before they become sexually active,

comprehensive sexuality education must become part of the formal school curriculum, delivered by well trained and supported teachers” as stated by Michel Sidibé, UNIADS Executive Director, sex education is an important knowledge that should be given to the teenagers in order to train them to face the challenges that is in the society.

The problem in Sri Lanka is that, since we are a highly culturally sensitive country, it is neither taught in the schools nor being educated by the parents. Nevertheless, it is a factor that every teen should aware of, when they step in to their adolescence where they experience numerous changes in their body and mind.

As a matter of fact, parents are rather reluctant to discuss or educate their children on sexuality. The reason behind is not that the parents do not want their child to be educated on sexuality, but the social and cultural background of the Sri Lankan society.

As Sri Lankans, who have a unique culture, we treat our elders, especially parents sacredly. As a practice, we worship our parents and do not even talk loud in front of the parents. This culture that has taught us to respect our elders and parents is also the result of drawing child and parent apart. Even though it is believed that the mother is closer to the child and there is a bond that have enabled child to talk about anything and everything with the mother, according to the survey that was conducted have shown that the results are otherwise.

It is the truth that the parents are the first teachers of the child. Yet, with the culture that is prevailing in Sri Lanka, even for an adolescent child, parents are reluctant to educate on sexuality education. And also, even the children do not prefer to learn on the specific subject of sexuality from the parents, since they are shy and reluctant to be open on such a subject with their parents.

There are evidences that propose the fact that there has been many attempts to overcome the problem of non-education of sexuality by introducing the subject in the school curriculum since 1999 (Hettiarachchi et al 2008). Yet they have been unsuccessful, because the teachers are reluctant to teach in detail. Again, it is a result of our culture, which considers that sexuality as a secret.

Nevertheless, despite the facts on culture, which regards sexuality as a secretive, it is a necessary fact that it should be taught by any mean possible, to overcome the problems that the children are facing today.

## II. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct the research, it was utilised both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The research was limited to the geographical area of central province and the sample group was limited to the school attending students of age 16 to 19, parents and teachers. The students were selected from the schools randomly, from the grades of 10, 11, 12 and 13. Teachers and parents were selected randomly.

Based on the data collected, it will be analysed the knowledge on sexuality among the teenagers and adverse impacts of not having the proper knowledge. Further their ideas on the cultural sensitivity too will be analysed.

The collection of data and its analysis process was conducted in accordance with the hypothesis of: Non education of sexuality at the proper age, because of the cultural sensitivity, has impacted adversely the lives of the teens; that they experiment on it in using wrongful methods.

### A. Primary Sources

In collecting primary data, questionnaires were distributed among the students and interviews were also conducted with the selected group of students. Further, interviews were conducted with the parents, teachers and police inspectors.

The distributed questionnaire composed of 15 questions; both close ended and open ended questions and the questions that required explanations.

The selected sample of students composed of 200 students selected from both rural and urban schools and tuition classes. 20 students out of the selected sample group were interviewed. 25 teachers were interviewed which included 3 school Principals and 2 Vice Principals. 10 parents were interviewed in the course of gathering data. The OIC Women of Matale Police station was interviewed in order to gather data from the security sector of the country.

### B. Secondary Sources

Secondary data were collected from the books, news papers, web based journals, web articles, e-books and previous research articles.

Data were specifically gathered from the researchers conducted by the UNICEF and UNESCO on the specific subject area of Sexuality Education. Further the web based articles were referred to gather data specifically on the position of the international arena. Paper articles were referred in order to gather data on the current situation of the Sri Lankan society. Books were also referred in the course of collecting data.

## III. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to our knowledge, there have only been very few researches on the topic of sexual education for the teenagers in Sri Lanka. Most of the researches have been conducted by the UNICEF affiliated with the NIE.

The National Survey on Emerging Issues among Adolescence in Sri Lanka is one of the major works that was conducted by the UNICEF Sri Lanka in 2004. The document mainly discusses on the matters that the adolescence face as a whole. Not only on the education of sexuality, but also on the other factors such as wellbeing of the adolescence and the factors resulting in addicting to the drugs and tobacco. The document discusses on the topic of sexuality as knowledge on reproductive health and the knowledge and the attitudes on STD/HIV/AIDS and further their knowledge on the sexual behaviour. Furthermore it also have discussed on the sexual abuses that the adolescence face. Also, it has discussed on teens having sexual experiences which apparently the first time is an experiment. But it has not identified it as an adverse effect. However, there are both

heterosexual and homosexual experiences by the teens.

Even though it has discussed on the matters that the teens are facing during their adolescence, it has not discussed as to whether the parents are not educating their children on the sexuality because of the cultural background of Sri Lanka. But it has recommended in the recommendations that the education should be given to the teens through the school curriculum. Further it has identified that the current school curriculum contains a chapter on the sexuality education, yet it is not been properly taught by the teachers.

The Sri Lankan Parent's Attitudes toward the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Education Needs – a study done by Doctor P.K.S Godamune, have discusses on the parent' views on educating their children on sexuality. The study shows that the parents prefer educating their children on the subject of sexuality because they believe that it will deter precocious sexual behaviours. Furthermore, it is believed that it will protect the child, reduce curiosity and provide accurate information. The study has further discussed on the parent child relationship on discussing the matter related. And specifically it has discussed on the cultural barrier that bar the parents from discussing on the sexuality with their children. It has also suggested that the school curriculum should contain a chapter on the sexual education. But the research have not discussed on the adverse impacts of the non education.

'Effectiveness of an Educational Intervention on Sexual and Reproductive Health Education Directed at School Teachers in the Kalutara District' by Hettiarachchi et al is a research that was conducted in affiliation with the Ministry of Health and the Education Department, in the District of Kalutara. The research has been conducted in 5 phases. It has been the aim of the research to study whether teaching of Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) would have educational and psychological improvement in the student on the SRH. It is in fact the study has been a success and has come to the conclusion that the school is the best place for the education of the SRH.

Nevertheless the study has not paid its attention on the cultural impacts that has resulted in children being non educated on sexuality by

parents. And to conduct the research the SRH education was done by the well trained teachers. The question that arises is that whether the teachers that is in the other schools to teach on adolescence and the SRH are well trained as the teachers that were used in conducting the study.

The book 'Uda wu yawuwanaya' that has been published by the Ministry of Education of the Sri Lankan government affiliated with the UNFPA and WHO, is a direct publication for the education of teens on the changes that happens in the adolescence physically and psychologically. The book contains on the changes that happen physically and psychological from the start of the age of adolescence. It specifically and briefly discusses and presents in the simple language every minute detail that the teens should know as a teen. The starting from the hormonal reactions to the structural differences of the body is discussed. Furthermore the adverse impacts that would result due to non education of sexuality is also been discussed.

But the problem that occurs is whether they have been properly distributed among the children and whether the students have been taught on what the book contains. Nevertheless, a fair attempt has been taken to educate students on the sexuality, by the book.

The Health Science syllabus that is for the grade 10 and grade 11 students also contain a chapter as 'Yowun wiye wenasweem walata sarthakawa muhuna demu', in the text book prescribed for the Grade 11. The chapter systematically discusses and presents on the changes that occur in the youth body and a sub topic under the main chapter also discusses on the prevention of the sexually transmitted diseases. Further it also contains a chapter on the sexually transmitted diseases and having proper relationships in the proper manner by the chapter of 'Saukyawath Lowakata Piyawarak'. The chapter has discussed on the disease and the ways and means that they are transmitted and the ways that it could prevent transmission of the diseases.

Even though there are chapters that discuss on these matters, the problem lies in whether they are being properly taught in the school. It is in fact most of the time since both the student and the teacher feel embarrassment it only skim through

the chapter rather than teaching it. Further, Health Science is a bucket subject where the students can choose whether to study or not. Therefore, the students who do not select the subject have no way of studying it. Therefore it again suggests the fact that cultural barriers are there that bar the education process.

Even though there are limited number of literatures on this topic in Sri Lanka, there are studies that have been conducted in the Asian countries in order for its development by the UNICEF, UNESCO, WHO and other organisations in order for the development and promotion of the education of sexuality to the teens at the proper age.

And most of the European countries educate their students with proper means and methods of sexual education in the proper age that is in teen age. But since the research is limited to Sri Lanka it will not discuss on the foreign country's attempts on teaching it to the teens.

Rather than the research studies on this particular subject, it is the news papers and magazines that reports mostly the unreported cases on teen unethical sexual behaviours. In the magazine articles that were referred such as 'Diyaniya' and 'Lankadeepa' reported cases that the teens have faced for problematic situations such as being pregnant, being raped and abused because they are not properly educated on the sexuality and the society. The papers however request the parents to educate their children on the sexuality since the schools do not properly educate them on the subject. According to the cases that are being reported by the news papers are woven around the girls that are being abused. The cases are reported with the recommendations of the Police Women and Child Protection authority.

In summary, it is in fact that the number of researches that have conducted on the matter is less. The National Survey on Emerging Issues among Adolescence in Sri Lanka is one of the major works that was conducted by the UNICEF Sri Lanka in 2004 is one of the leading document on the subject of teen sexual education mainly discusses on the fact such as the hormonal changes that happens in the body of the teens, the experiences that they conduct such as heterosexual and homosexual experiences,

reproductive health and the sexually transmitting disease. However it has not discussed on the parental attitude on sexuality education for the teens. In contrary to the former literature, The Sri Lankan Parent's Attitudes toward the Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health Education Needs – a study done by Doctor P.K.S Godamune have studied on the parental attitude on the subject matter and have discussed on the cultural barrier between the parent and the child. The study 'Effectiveness of an Educational Intervention on Sexual and Reproductive Health Education Directed at School Teachers in the Kalutara District have covered section of education on sexuality in the school curriculum. The study has however lead to the result that the school is the best place to give proper education on SRH. The book 'Uda wu yawuwanaya' that has been published by the Ministry of Education of the Sri Lankan government affiliated with the UNFPA and WHO is a direct publication to the school children on the psychological and physical changes that happen in the adolescents' have been discussed from the hormonal reactions to the structural differences of the body. Amongst all the literature that was referred to, the chapters of 'Yowun wiye wenasweem walata sarthakawa muhuna demu' and 'Saukyawath Lowakata Piyawarak' are the easiest accessible sources that the teens have to study on the sexuality in the adolescents. The two chapters have discussed on the subject matter in simple and explicit manner. But the problem lies with the teaching of the subject. Finally, the paper articles that are published in the news papers 'Diyaniya', 'Lankadeepa' and other papers contain the problems that the teens have faced because of their unawareness and lack of proper knowledge on the subject matter.

When going through the literature review it is in fact even though the Sri Lankans prefer giving sexual education to the teens through the school curriculum, it has been a failure since there are no trained teachers. Because of the cultural barriers, the parents are also reluctant in teaching their children on sexuality; all of which ultimately results in adverse impacts.

This research paper will discuss on whether the non education of sexuality is a result of the cultural background of the country, and does it result adversely in the lives of the teens.

#### IV. KNOWLEDGE ON SEXUALITY AMONG TEENAGERS

According to the survey that was conducted among the students show that more than 55% of the student population have the knowledge on what sexuality is, out of which, the male students' knowledge on the sexuality is rather higher than the female students.

The interviews that were conducted suggested the fact that the female teens have gained most of their knowledge from the mother after they attained puberty. The mothers mostly stated that it is the duty of a mother to educate a girl on facts such as menstruation and the changes in the body, when a girl attains their puberty. Nevertheless, the parents also stated the fact that in accordance with the culture of Sri Lanka, it is difficult to teach on such a subject openly to their children. Parents who are from rural areas stated that; since they are Sinhala Buddhist people it is not morally acceptable discussing them with their children. But the parents from the urban areas suggested that even though it is difficult to discuss on sexuality with the children, it is a necessary factor to be discussed.

As the parents suggested that it is necessary to teach it to the children, out of the 20 teachers and 3 principals and 2 vice principal who were interviewed, except 1 principal, 1 vice principal and 1 teacher; 2 principals 1 vice principal and 20 teachers suggested that it is necessary to teach the students; teens, on sexuality in order to overcome the problems that are faced in the current society.

Even though the interviews that were conducted suggested that the parents prefer educating children on the sexuality, the data evaluation shows that the students who are aware of sexual education were educated by the teachers, rather than the parent. Further, it is not through the formal educational system, but rather informal systems. Figure 1 shows the percentages of modes that the students have learnt on sexuality.

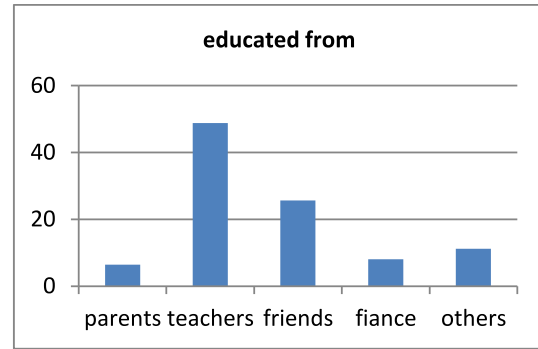


Figure 1

This shows that the teachers are the best mode to communicate on a subject as sexual education, because this figure shows that the students are rather open with the teachers, and the teacher is an effective source of distributing knowledge.

The survey conducted in order inquire on whom the education is preferred to gain shows that through teachers have been preferred by most students. Yet, parents were also preferred by the students too.

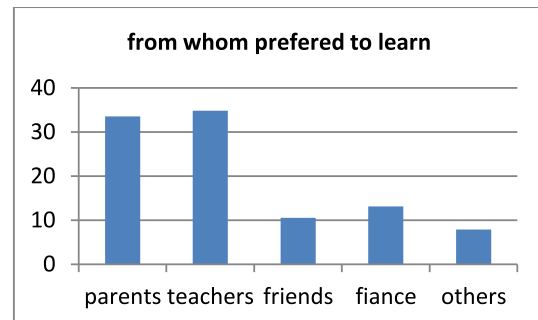


Figure 2

Out of the students who answered the questionnaire, 35% have suggested that the teacher is the best mode of communicating on a topic like sexual education while 34% suggested that the parent, specifically the mother, would also be the best person. Therefore, it suggest that, still the children are close and open to the parents and they expect such knowledge from the parents. Further, the survey also found that almost 80% teens prefer their parents teaching on sexuality.

The interviews that were conducted suggested that, many girls wished that their mothers would have taught them on the sexuality at the proper age, that they would have been able to be secure themselves from the problems that they faced day to day. And some accepted the fact that if they have had the knowledge that they have currently, they would have not have had affairs in the unnecessary age.

It should also note the fact that a considerable amount of teens have got the knowledge on sexuality by their fiances.

Apart from the fact that a considerable amount of teens have knowledge on sexuality, still they suggest that the knowledge should be given at the proper age.

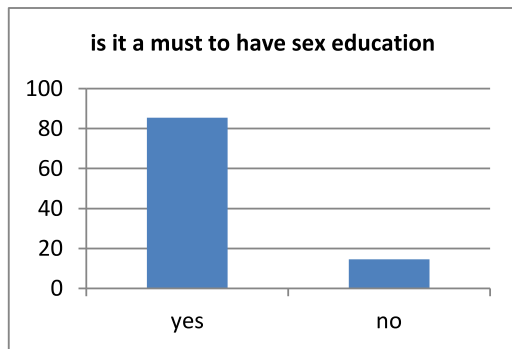


Figure 3

The above figure shows that above 80% of the students prefer that the sexual education should be given. The percentage of which suggests that it is not necessary is rather low, i.e. 14%. Further out of the teachers who were interviewed, 88% suggested that the sexual education must be given to the students properly.

#### V. IMPACT OF CULTURE

According to the survey conducted, around 80% of teens prefer that the parents should educate them on the sexuality. Yet, there is only around 8% of teens have educated from the parents. When inquired the reason for the parents not being open on the fact of sexuality education to the children was a result of the cultural background of the Sri Lankans, more than 80% of the students accepted the fact that it is due to the cultural background of the Sri Lankans.

Godamune (2011) have presented that there is a certain psychological gap between the parents and the children because of the cultural norms of the Sri Lankans.

It was posed the question whether the teens would prefer if there was a different culture which would have enabled the child to discuss on such a matter with the parent, 70% of the teens stated that they prefer if the culture was different. The most classic reasoning that the students have given on their answer is that, understanding among children and parents and parents educating the children on sexuality would lessen the problems that the teens face today and that there are other cultures that have such family backgrounds. Further, they have preferred that the most appropriate person to teach on sexuality as mother. Furthermore, it is believed that since the unknown is being known, teens will not seek strangers help in learning on such factors.

The students that have answered otherwise have based their answer on mostly culture based factors. That is, they consider that it would harm the culture, that the respect towards the parents would vanish. Furthermore the rather classic reasoning is that it is because children are rather shy in discussing them with the parents and they also believe that the parents might be embarrassed when discussing such factors. Yet, it should be noted that the parents should educate their children systematically; that in a way that does not draw the parent rather apart.

#### VI. ADVERS IMPACTS RESULTED DUE TO NON-EDUCATION OF SXUALITY

The most common result is teen pregnancy. And it should note the fact that it is the female teens that face most of the problems rather than the male teens. According to D. Karunarathna, OIC Women's of the Matale Police Station, the problem are mostly faced by the girls, and the reported cases are also on girls. The reason being, under the Penal Code of Sri Lanka, sexual intercourse with a girl or a boy below the age of 16 years is considered as a child abuse, even though the consent is there by the child. The law regard it to be a crime. According to her, the cases that were reported were mostly elopements, or having sexual relationships with the teens with the consent. Yet, because of the law, it is the crime of

rape. There are approximately 32 cases that have been reported in the year of 2014.

#### A. *The reasons for unethical sexual relationships*

As the study and the interviews suggests the reasons for unethical sexual behaviors does not only result because of the non-education of sex, but also because of other factors such as social media, un conditional access to the internet resources, mobile phones, television, pornography, magazines, family problems and love affair. Mostly it was suggested that inability to control the feelings is also another factor that results in engaging in unethical sexual behaviors.

### VII. SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Godamune (2011), Thalagala et al (2004) proposes that if the school education could educate the teens on the sexual education, it would be preferable. It should also train well the teachers in order to provide education on the sexuality properly (Hettiarachchi et al 2008).

The survey also provides that the teens prefer if there is a proper education system on sexuality in the school curriculum. Further, it was proposed that the students should be educated on it either in the year of 16 or 17 (Grade 10 or 11) as a compulsory subject, because it is now only taught for the selected group of students who chose Health Science as a bucket subject.

However, it is preferred that the school education system should have a method to educate teens on sexuality properly.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

The conclusion that could be arrived according to the analysis of the data is that, the parents does not discuss on the subject of sexuality, nor they teach on the subject of sexuality, because of the cultural background of the Sri Lankans. The reason being, the culture have created a psychological distance between the parents and the children as it comes to the subject of sexuality, because it is considered that the topic of sexuality is a secretive topic.

Yet, according to teens, it is believed that it is the duty of the parents to educate and made their child aware of such matters at the proper age in order to overcome the problems that they face when they enter to the society.

Furthermore, the study suggests that the teacher is the best mode to communicate a matter such as sexuality to the teens, since the interaction between the child and the teacher is rather close in some aspects, rather with the parents.

Therefore sexuality is a necessary factor that every teen should be aware of, yet, it is not been discussed with the parents due to the social and cultural background of Sri Lanka. But, it can be suggested that inclusion of the sexual education in the school curriculum would help in overcoming the problems that are faced today.

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