

# Example of sexual health and youth policy youth policy regarding sexual health es...

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## **Introduction**

Sex is a very sensitive topic. For some countries, especially those that are characterized by extreme levels of conservatism, discussing sex or any topics or issues related to it in public is considered taboo. In most western countries however, the topic of sex, and not exactly the act of doing it, is viewed quite differently. Most educational institutions offer complementary sex education classes to students, which are usually those in the secondary and tertiary school levels. In the United States for example, this practice is considered both legal and ethical. But nonetheless, there is still a significant portion of the population, comprised mostly of parents, who are against the practice of exposing children, the students, to sexual education. As usual, there are two opposing sides in this argument. There are those who believe that it is only proper for students to be taught about sex and sexual education at school than in any other place and there are also those who believe that even though the practice may have been already legalized, it still remains immoral or unethical to teach children about sex, even for academic and sexual awareness purposes. Some just do not care about the issue. The objective of this paper is to discuss the most common issues related to the policy that allows children of school ages to be educated about sex, focusing on the legal and ethical aspects of the issue. Questions like whether it is indeed moral or ethical for educational institutions to administer such practice, even for the purpose of education and sexual awareness. A thorough review of related literatures which will be extracted from academic sources will be conducted to support the statements, assumptions, and conclusions that will be disclosed in this paper. Based on the information

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gathered, the author will take a side on whether it is really appropriate for individuals in secondary and tertiary education levels to receive instructional materials and discussions related to sex education.

Sexual health is an important aspect of an individual's overall health and social well-being. It goes hand in hand with physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health in characterizing whether a person is indeed healthy or not, as opposed to the traditional definition of being healthy or health which suggest that health is synonymous to the absence of any disease, impairment, or pathology.

The World Health Organization (2013) defines sexual health as “ a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction, or infirmity; Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence; for sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.” This official definition set by the WHO sets a new standard of health. And policy makers in countries where sex education is allowed apparently believe that the introduction of sex education and awareness to people at an early age would lead to positive sexual and later on, overall health outcomes, possibly even on a national level.

Sex education on the other hand, according to Perez (2010), “ is a broad term used to describe education about human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, and other aspects of human sexual

behavior.”

These definitions should serve as the jumping boards or capitals in discussing the ethical and moral appropriateness of the issue—for the government as well as the educational institutions to administer sex educations to their students, knowing that a significant minority of parents and guardians are still not comfortable with the idea.

## **Discussion**

In what ways do the policies in place around the policy issue selected reflect particular values, ideas, and perhaps the vested interests of policy makers and powerful stakeholders taking the various social theories into consideration?

In line with this question, there is one good way how national policies regarding the administration of school sex education reflects values, ideas, and the interests of the people and policy makers and that way involves the comparison of countries that allow and actually require the inclusion of sexual education in the course syllabi for as young as primary school students. One way to look at it is that countries who have laws and acts that allow and encourage the inclusion of sex education in topics to be discussed while at school exhibit openness in discussing the traditionally taboo topic of human sexuality to their young while other countries that prohibit the implementation and execution of such acts and processes, respectively, still exhibit the traditional mindset when it comes to discussing topics related to human sexuality with their young .

It can also be viewed from a perspective that western countries acknowledge

the fact that there will always come a time when their young would be forced to expose themselves to such issues and so hiding them from things with sexual innuendos and even direct sexual implications, would only be a futile attempt to delay their exposure . Instead, they try to prepare their children by educating and making them responsibly aware of human sexuality.

Countries that choose the other way around on the other hand may think that it would be better to expose these things to their children (or vice versa) when they already have the right mindset or at a predetermined level of mental maturity because they believe that by that time, their youths would already be able to absorb all information about humans sexuality more reasonably and responsibly. Other factors such as cultural and communication barriers may have actually hindered different countries from arriving at a common viewpoint for this particular issue of whether it is really appropriate to administer school sex education or not.

There are actually a variety of reasons why policy makers consider issuing mandates and bills requiring children to be educated about human sexuality even in stages that are earlier than usual. The worldwide prevalence rate of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome), for example, is one of the main reasons. Policy makers, especially those who work in the state-appointed health department, or in the case of the United States, the office of the Surgeon General, have come up with the conclusion that one of the best solutions to minimize the HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus), the virus responsible for AIDS, infection rates, is to make the people aware how the virus is transmitted from one host to another, and how to minimize or ideally eradicate risks of being infected. Sex education has been used by

government health departments in countries where it is a mandate, as one of the main avenues in making the public aware of the different health implications of poor sexual health and practices. Issues such as abortion and family planning are also usually tackled in sex education classes. In a way, these countries use the implementation of sex education bills not only to educate the children about human sexuality but also to raise their awareness of the various dangers related to an unhealthy sexual lifestyle, and other things that should be avoided when engaging in any sexual activity, at a young age. These rationales only serve as a reflection of how these countries are so eager to be creative and liberal in protecting its citizens (against sexually-transmitted diseases), helping them progress (through family planning), considering their social and cultural perceptions all at the same time.

How do the policies in place around the issue selected contribute or do not contribute towards resolving the underlying issues/problems they are meant to resolve?

In the past, teenagers used to be educated about sex—the act of inserting a male’s penis to a woman’s vagina, and human sexuality in general, through social influences. It has been rare in the past and up until now for parents to educate their own children about human sexuality by themselves. Research has actually proven that most children acquire their knowledge and experience about human sexuality and behavior from their peers, and via social media avenues such as the newspapers, radio programs, television shows, and internet media . Adult role models in television advertisements and other media platforms continuously bombard the children, even those

who are younger than those who go to primary schools, with information about human sexuality. That alone gives them an idea about what sex is, usually even without the parents or guardians' knowledge or consent. It may well be classified as a subconscious phenomenon. The fact is that kids get educated and aware of what sex is way earlier than what most people think or intend to. In a world where there is an overflow of information, thanks to the newly-developed media devices, and the very potent medium, the internet, the uncontrolled process of information about sex reaching the minds of the young have become more complicated, and even harder to control.

In a study authored by Ramirez (2008), the perceptions of 386 students, 94 teachers, and 10 parents, arranged into three separate groups, were assessed and analyzed using self-administered structured questionnaires, and a structured interview process. The objective of their study was to determine whether the administration of school sex education would really lead to significant benefits on the targets' (which would most likely be the students) sexual health. Another objective was to qualitatively assess each group's attitude towards and perception of school sex education. At the end of the study, the author concluded that all study participants from the three different groups present with favorable attitude towards and perceptions on the administration of school sex education provided that the content of the school sex education courses would be limited depending on the targets' age, level of maturity. The school sex education for primary school students for example, should be limited only to sexual abstinence and other less sensitive topics related to human sexuality .

The different possible purposes of the policy that allows for the delivery of sex education courses in primary, secondary, and tertiary educational institutions have been established: safety against the possibility of transmitting STDs, family planning. In a nutshell, the role of this policy is to equip the youths with the appropriate knowledge to make informed decisions should they arrive at a point wherein they would be ready to explore their sexuality, and have sex themselves; and also to make them aware of the different possible consequences of being sexually active, and how it participating in such activity may affect their health, life, and well-being in general. This policy contributes by instilling to the youths the type of mindset that implies they should not have sex until they are ready to face the possible consequences or repercussions of such actions, or until they are ready to handle it morally, ethically, and responsibly. The purpose of the policy allowing educational institutions to educate the youth about human sexuality was never to keep the idea of sex or sex itself, the main process by which human beings reproduce, out of their reach because at one point or another, policymakers, parents, and teachers know that ignoring the fact that these children would benefit from a comprehensive education about human sexuality would only worsen the situation and could therefore lead to more problems than their minimization .

## **Conclusion**

Despite the ongoing debate in countries that still do not have a policy that permits the provision of sex education courses to students, the question whether it is ethical, moral, and appropriate to do allow the young to explore



the various areas of human sexuality remains unsettled. The moral and ethical aspect of the issue will always vary from one culture to another. Most westerners may believe that there is nothing wrong about exercising the provisions of the policy while most easterners may still linger on to the traditional mindset about the issue. But based on previous studies about the topic, it is clear that sex education could indeed help the young in a lot of ways, be it in terms of protecting and making them aware of various STDs and how they can prevent a transmission, in terms of future family planning, or in responsibly handling sexual relationships and maintaining their sexual health.

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