



Comprehensive Sexuality Education for Addressing Young People's SRHR Status in Nepal

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Abstract

This article reflects the narrative evaluation in the domain of young people's SRHR status and need for CSE. Young people in Nepal are particularly at risk for early marriage and childbearing, as well as other SRHR-related issues. CSE is recommended as a suitable technique to deal with these concerns affecting young people. CSE is a rights-based approach to teaching the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It helps young adolescents develop the knowledge, ideas, and beliefs they need to choose and embrace their sexuality in intimate relationships on a physical and emotional level. Its promotion is proposed as a solution to assist Nepalese young in enhancing their SRHR status.

Introduction

Sexuality education is an age-appropriate and culturally relevant approach to teaching about sex and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information (UNESCO, 2009). Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality (UNESCO, 2018). It contributes to 'a fair

and compassionate society by empowering the individuals and communities, promoting critical thinking skills, and strengthening young people's citizenship' (UNESCO, 2018, p. 17).

CSE is the curriculum-based learning process of age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and scientific information on physical, emotional, and social aspects of sexuality which can be provided in-school and out-of-school (UNESCO, 2018). Comprehensive

sexuality education empowers adolescents and youths to make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality. According to the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) 2018, CSE has eight key concepts that are interrelated.

CSE is also found to be effective among children and adolescents regarding development of responsible sexual behaviors, relationships and addressing the health needs. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to develop: accurate and age-appropriate knowledge, attitudes and skills; positive values, including respect for human rights, gender equality and diversity, and attitudes and skills that contribute to safe, healthy, positive relationships.

Nepal government has also shown its commitment to include CSE in its programs in different sectors, more specifically in the education and health. Nepal is a signatory to and actively supports the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). It supports the ICPD beyond the 2014 review document which emphasized the need for a CSE. The programs of CSE are started from 2007 in Nepal and included in various levels of curriculum. National education and health-related policies include the agenda and several organizations have come ahead in supporting the government in the implementation of the agenda, however, teachers' and students' hesitation to teach and learn the contents of CSE are still a barrier in its effective implementation. Moreover, the stigma associated to sexuality contents also add further problem in the process of learning and receiving the services.

The sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) of young people in Nepal are

particularly vulnerable to a variety of issues. This article sought to highlight the critical role that CSE plays in addressing the significant SRHR situation of young people in Nepal.

Methods

The study was a desk review in which the literature on the SRHR status of Nepalese young people had been found and compiled using narrative review methodologies. This was achieved by going over past arguments, analyzing earlier surveys on the state of young people in Nepal (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006), and connecting those to CSE. Information for this study was gathered by conducting manual literature searches as well as using internet tools like Google Scholar, Pubmed, and Nepjol. The search was conducted using the keywords specified in the abstract.

Result

Youths and adolescents are seen as being at risk for sexual and reproductive health. Adolescents should openly address their sexual and reproductive health concerns or challenges with older family members, teachers, or relatives with whom they feel comfortable in order to ensure a good sexual and reproductive health status. However, because of social stigma against discussing such topics, this doesn't typically occur in Nepal.

The Government of Nepal has identified adolescents and youth as the most vulnerable, underserved groups who are at risk for a wide range of sexual and reproductive health problems, from early and unintended pregnancies to sexually transmitted infections including HIV. In 2021, 4% of all people who developed HIV infection were 14 years old and 3.86% were 15-24 years old (NCASC, 2022).

Early marriage is still a distress in Nepal. A total of 37% of girls in Nepal marry before the age of 18 and 10 percent are married by the age of 15 (Human Rights Watch & WVIN, 2023). Although the legal age at marriage in Nepal is 20 years, 41.09% women are married in between 10 to 18 years and 76.95 % by age 20 (NSO, 2023).

Similarly, early pregnancy is also a serious concern because 14% adolescent girls aged 15-19 are already mothers or pregnant with their first child in Nepal (Ministry of Health and Population, Nepal; New ERA; & ICF, 2022). It also shows that Adolescent Fertility Rate (AFR) is 71 per 1000 women aged 15-19 years and Unmet Need for FP among aged 15-19 girls is 30.9%.

Unmet Need for Spacing was 32%, the highest among married girls aged 15-19 (Ministry of Health, Nepal, New ERA, & ICF, 2017). Practices like child marriage, polygamy, dowry, system, witchcraft allegation, human trafficking, and gender preferences lead to gender-based violence against women, a large number of which belongs to adolescent girls.

Discussion

The results of many surveys indicate that Nepal's youth urgently require educational intervention. The government of Nepal appears to be paying less attention to the SRHR status of young people, which has put them at risk. The main problems among them include early marriage, unmet family planning needs, and early pregnancies. Strategic investments in adolescent health and well-being yield economic and social benefits 10 times their costs, save 12.5 million lives, prevent more than 30 million unwanted pregnancies, and prevent widespread disability (WHO, 2017). Therefore, there is a need for continued collaborative efforts for common advocacy

for CSE to address young people's SRHR. The most effective effort seems to be offering CSE in schools.

Many countries worldwide have increasingly recognized the importance of providing young people with the knowledge and skills to make responsible choices in their lives, especially when they are more exposed to sexual content via the Internet and other media. The 2030 Agenda and its global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action to leave no one behind, and to achieve human rights and gender equality for all. Mobilizing political commitment to achieve the goals of education, gender equality, health and well-being provides an important opportunity to bring CSE to children and youth everywhere.

According to UNESCO (2023) most countries have prioritized the concept of CSE at the national level and are working to strengthen its implementation. As the world community has included many programs with the aim of aligning adolescents and youth with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Government of Nepal has also tried to improve the CSE knowledge of adolescents and youth but not enough.

Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) has formulated a National Adolescent Health and Development Strategy as it prioritizes Adolescent Health and Development as a key activity. Similarly, the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023 aims to strengthen participation and reduce adolescent school dropout rates by addressing their privacy and menstrual hygiene management needs (MoE, 2016). Earlier, School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) included key policy goals and values, such as the right to education, gender parity, inclusion, and equity have guided the

preparation process and have been integrated as strategic interventions in the Plan (MoE, 2009). Also SSDP aims to promote healthy behavior of adolescents through skills based health education including HIV and AIDS prevention, hygiene and nutrition.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) of Nepal also has included CSE in the school level curriculum. In grades 4-8, CSE contents are covered in compulsory Health, Physical and Creative Arts subject. It has been kept in optional Health and Physical Education in classes 9 and 10, but the compulsory Health, Population and Environment Education has been recently removed. Due to the hesitation of many teachers and students, most of the topics in the curriculum are not taught in class, therefore, young people lack the necessary information and skill on SRHR when they actually need it.

Due to their numerous psycho-social and physical changes, adolescents and young people need to receive sexuality education. However, a majority of families in Nepal are hesitant to offer this instruction at home. Discussing sex and sexuality is frowned upon here. As a result, a systematic approach to sexuality education is needed to be delivered in a school setting (Iudici, 2015). Information is critical in guiding and altering young people's behavior, much as school instructors are crucial in imparting sexuality and reproductive health information (Acharya, et.al, 2009). In a classroom context, CSE can be taught throughout time at the right age and in a developmental order, building new knowledge on previous knowledge (UNESCO, 2018).

Due to sexual transition, peer pressure and lack of life skills, many adolescents and young people in Nepal are at various risks. They

need to be prepared for a safe, productive and fulfilling life. CSE empowers adolescents and young adults to understand themselves and others, build healthy relationships, make informed decisions about sexual and reproductive health and sexuality. It is wise for adolescents and young people to acquire this education at the appropriate age and time. Most young people lack the knowledge necessary to make responsible decisions, which puts them at risk of sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies.

Adolescents are particularly confused by their sexual and reproductive status and changes. Due to the lack of appropriate knowledge and skills, there is a possibility of falling into various difficulties if one cannot accept the sexual change positively. There is also a need for competence in the social issues of sexuality. In order to build a successful future by solving problems of this nature and making responsible decisions, adolescents need competence in various areas of sexual education.

Adolescents typically deal with one-of-a-kind issues. Their perspective of something is the root of these issues. If they receive prompt and efficient instruction from parents, teachers, or elders, these issues can be resolved. They can talk with their parents about these difficulties more effectively when there is a positive home environment. Having supportive friends around might also help them manage these issues. Every adolescent should talk to their parents or other trustworthy adults about their difficulties. This can only happen after creation of an enabling environment through sexuality education.

By covering up natural and normal bodily processes, teenagers become suspicious of life itself. Some teenagers have failed to

fulfill their responsibilities in relationships. They sometime feel failure to plan for major life events. They feel the lack of skills to connect sex with life and society. Therefore, adolescents need sexuality education.

Conclusion

Due to a shortage of sexuality education that emphasizes life skills, adolescents in Nepal face a variety of difficulties. Many young people, especially adolescents, are given confused and contradictory information, which leads to a low SRHR status. Hence, there is a growing demand for reliable information that prepares them for a safe, productive and fulfilling life. CSE addresses this demand by empowering adolescents and youths to make informed decisions about relationships and sexuality. It helps them make life-changing decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. CSE is not only the study of human physiology and sexual behavior, but is a teaching and learning process related to the development of knowledge, perception and skills of various socio-cultural and life skills-related topics. The government of Nepal has pledged to implement measures to enhance young people's SRHR status by signing a number of SRHR-related conventions. As a result, Nepal should utilize CSE to solve SRHR-related concerns and enhance the SRHR status of young people.

Declaration

Conflicts of Interest

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