



Commentary

Adolescents and sex education : Role of nurses

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Abstract

Mental health nurses are untapped potential resource persons for community-level activities that can foster change in society. Training of school teachers is important as often sex education classes are skipped at school or not discussed. Parents often cannot provide unbiased and scientific information to their children regarding appropriate sexual behaviours. Therefore, there is a dire need to work on this area, especially in the Indian context, where we discuss sexual health in an unwelcome and embarrassing way.

Introduction

Adolescents deal with many changes in life. There is increasing pressure at all levels across their aspects of life; there is turbulence in the physical body as there is the surge of growth hormones and mental maturation and transition into adult life therefore, the exposure to multiple things and the gradual transition is often not possible (Kar et al., 2015).

Puberty is a time when the physical body starts to mature, and children grasp the concept of

their sexuality, but during this time, their brains are still very impressionable, and they can be influenced and manipulated easily. The lack of sexual education in these times led to incidences that affect them lifelong (Scales, 1991). It is widely known that during adolescence, the children are influenced strongly by their hormones, which can lead to behavioural changes like arguments with parents, peer pressure and high-risk behaviour indomitable curiosity (Buchanan et al., 1992).

Therefore these changes make adolescents a special group needing targeted interventions. Mental and school health nurses can play an important part in primary prevention of various adolescence-specific issues. However, there is a great gap in the current health care system about the needs of adolescents (Das, 2014; Tripathi and Sekher, 2013). The most important issue is the lack of sex education in the curriculum, which leads to using unwarranted sources of information. This

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contributes to the complication of sexual health and raises the myths and misconceptions that arise during such periods.

Need for age appropriate and un-embarrassing sex education:

According to the latest research, A study conducted among south Delhi girls' in 2007 reported that they do not have adequate knowledge about sexually transmitted infections. More than one-third of the respondents found believed HIV infection was possible to be cured., about half of them believed condoms should not be available to the youth. Almost ½ of the respondents were unsure about the use of contraceptive pills and who could use them (McManus and Dhar, 2008). A study from rural Maharashtra reported that sexuality among adolescents is not acceptable. However, there was reported, bias in the perception, especially for women, it was considered unacceptable for girls to engage in premarital sex, but for men, it was acceptable (Ghule et al., 2007). A systematic review of studies from low-middle income countries reported that countries, where comprehensive sex education is curricular, have better outcomes in terms of knowledge and prevention of Sexually transmitted infections and HIV prevention (Fonner et al., 2014).

Role of mental health nurses

Mental health nurses and school health nurses can play an important part in educating adolescents and school teachers regarding sexual maturation, and safe sexual practices in a comprehensive manner. This holistic education does not disgrace and demean children's curiosity and informs them about sexual health doubts in a de-stigmatizing manner. Therefore training programs and sensitization programs not only for health care professionals but the lay persons can perhaps be very important. Mental health nurses are untapped potential resource persons for

community-level activities that can foster change in the society.

Role of school teachers

Training of school teachers is important as often sex education classes are skipped at school or not discussed as the teacher themselves are not equipped with the answers to the questions asked by students. (Fentahun et al., 2012)

Parents and sex education in Indian context

Parents often are unable to provide unbiased and scientific information to their children regarding appropriate sexual behaviours. They often have a negative attitude and unacceptably portray intimacy. This needs systematic and scientific interventions that act at social and community levels to improve misconceptions and misinformation, creating a conducive environment for adolescents to learn about positive sexual health (Ismail et al., 2015; Khubchandani et al., 2014; Nagpal and Fernandes, 2015).

Conclusion and recommendation

Sexual health remains to be a part that is not ideally dealt with in an accessible manner and also acceptable manner. With the rising mental health issues sexual health problems are a burden and a grey area where scientific and effective interventions are lacking. A very important issue needs redressal not only scientifically but also socially. It can be recommended that the health policy level and the education department should work collaboratively to bring about positive sexual health information. The appropriate sexual education during adolescence can bring about changes in various mental health and social issues and also manage issues related to gender and sexuality, sexually transmitted infections, stigma, and appropriate sexual behaviours and relationship problems.

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