



## A QUANTITATIVE INQUIRY OF PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS OF PAKISTANI ADULTS ABOUT SEX EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*Sex education is an important subject as it is a form of awareness about self, understanding physiological and psychological changes (which physical changes cause), and how to react towards those changes. But in many under developing countries including Pakistan people are not comfortable discussing such topics especially if it is to be discussed with youngsters. Interestingly so many times adults themselves are not well aware of the facts as the information they receive is either through myths and misinterpretation of facts or through unreliable or exaggerated sources like pornography etc. This lack of information is responsible for many unfortunate happenings in society like child sexual abuse or rape.*

*This background is the main reason for conducting current quantitative research to identify people's perceptions and awareness level regarding sex education. This research is important to see the impact of sex education on the next generation and how it can be helpful in reducing the growing rate of sex-related issues. Moreover, to find out the perception of adolescents regarding sex education. Survey method was the technique of data collection in the current study. A purposive sample of 235 men and women with an age range of 20 years and above was gathered. The results were hopeful as people reflected positivity towards sex education and they consider it can help decrease sex-related crimes in Pakistan. The majority of participants felt that imparting sex education is the parent's responsibility. The study has implications for parents, teachers, school counselors, and institutes dealing with crime prevention and control.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, curriculum, puberty, sex education,*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Physiological needs are basic need of every person and a human necessity. According to Maslow's Hierarchy one of the foremost and major needs of our body are Physiological needs that are biological requirements for human survival, e.g., food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep. Maslow considered physiological needs the most important as all the other needs become secondary until these needs are met (McLeod, 2020). Like other physiological needs, sex is also a basic need that is important not just at the individual level, but societal continuity is also linked with it. Sex education helps in the prevention of intimate partner violence and child sexual abuse, having healthy relationships, understanding sexual diversity, and improving social/emotional learning (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021).

It's not just limited to human sexuality, but it includes reproductive life, rights, responsibilities, and health, and emotional relations as well (Ehsan et al., 2019). It's a must component and acquiring knowledge about it and addressing related issues is also necessary. Not only will the failure to fulfill such needs can disturb your personality but a lack of knowledge can also have an adverse effect. Thus, it's important to provide accurate knowledge about risks to sexual health and how to prevent unhealthy and undesired outcomes (Singh et al., 2005).

Sex education programs serve basis for long-lasting sexual health as the information provided helps acquire values, beliefs, and attitudes about one's identity at the personal level and healthy relationships and intimacy the at social level. Absenteeism or ineffectiveness of these programs can yield serious/negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Ismail et al., 2015).



Sex education is considered a stigma in underdeveloped countries and in Pakistan being a religious and traditional culture, it is considered inappropriate to discuss such matters openly with children and sometimes even between adults as well so there is no scope for imparting sex education in Pakistan. On the contrary due to the non-availability of this, many become victims of sexual assault and many of them develop illicit sexual relationships that can increase the rape and sexual assault cases (Imtiaz & Yasin, 2023) which further leads to unnecessary fear and terror. This also applies in the case of children these days due to the rise in pedophiles (Shah, 2020). Moreover, it's the belief of the majority of Pakistanis that providing sex education is like giving people a chance to involve in sexual activities as in Pakistan it is a taboo topic to discuss. Though research indicates that sex education programs, especially the ones based on parent-adolescent communication can be effective in the reduction of HIV and STDs. It further helps decrease sexual risk-taking (Kirby, 1999).

But if we see statistics related to marriage 25% women get married at the age of 15-19 and 60% get married at the age of 20 or 24 due to the lack of sex education there are increased chances of sexually transmitted diseases, and unwanted pregnancies which further lead to abortions and increasing rate of mother and infant mortality (Sathar & Ahmed, 1992). Moreover, a lack of authentic knowledge is associated with illicit sexual relations for which both individual and society pays the price.

To fulfill the gap in knowledge people are usually tend towards the internet, the dark web, pornography, and other such avenues (Ehsan et al., 2019) which is responsible for the social decline in terms that unethical behaviors and normal relationships also impact negatively because of these fantasized and over exaggerated exposure. Further, sex education and information provided through internet is not always accurate. They are just sucking the knowledge on internet, and no one is there to point out whether it's right or wrong. So, getting it by yourself without any consultation would do more harm. Hence it would be absurd not to discuss sex education with children and clear out their misunderstandings and how actual sexual life goes that is quite different from the available drama (fantasies) the on internet (Rothman et al., 2020).

Educating people with accurate facts and figures can be useful for making our society understand the importance of sex education. After the increasing rate of rape, sexual harassment and abortion incidents and the flawed development of sexual activities it is vital to change the existing perception of the masses. We should not ignore the situation around us or start educating our children about sexual education and teach them the difference between right and wrong. But the question here is if our society is ready for this education and how people perceive the phenomenon.

The current research is about opinions and perceptions of Pakistani society about sex education which consist of two parts; how much awareness prevails about sex education, and does our society needs sex education and is ready to get that?.

#### **Significance of study**

Educating the masses and especially youngsters about sexuality and sexual health is indispensable for avoiding many social and psychological traumas. Usually, Pakistani people take religion as a plea to stop educating their children about sexuality, but Islam is a religion that cleared every matter of life. It teaches us how to lead righteous life according to the pattern which also includes sexual life, sexual behavior, and hormonal changes (puberty) as well. Islam works over ethics and morality that teaches us to lower our gaze whether it's men or women and taught us to take care of our private parts and also mentions punishment for immoral and adulterers. Not only this but it also taught us every issue regarding puberty; what happens, how to deal with it, and also provide woman relief in their menstrual days. It talks about sexual health and bonding of partners and that their build-up relationship can be the only way to help them sexually. Islam emphasizes the importance of Nikkah and also focuses on a healthy relationship between husband and wife. The current research is also important as it focuses on adolescents' views and perceptions rather than teachers and parents. It also includes a retrospective analysis of their knowledge of sex education at the time of puberty. Moreover, the study also discusses if our next generation needs sexual education and in which context. A number of researches have been conducted related to this topic worldwide whereas we found less work done regarding this topic in Pakistan. The study intended to explore How much knowledge participants acquire about sex education and how comfortable they will be if such a



curriculum will be designed for them or their children. Can sex education be helpful in reducing sex-related issues?

#### Objectives

1. To explore participants' extent of awareness about sex education.
2. To find how much comfortable adolescents are in discussing sex related matters.
3. To explore the perception if sex education helps in reducing growing rate of sexual issues.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

A research has been conducted in Kenya, which aimed to find out students' perception regarding sex education. Descriptive survey was designed to be used for research to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Findings shows that students have no idea about school-based sex education. It's only taught in biology and home sciences. Researchers recommended proper sex education in school curriculum (Kamuren, Kamara & Natabo, 2017)

Teacher's perception regarding sex education in Urban Dhaka for primary students was explored. The study focused over teacher's perception and understanding about sex education and to explore the support they would require becoming capable sex educators. The qualitative research explored that all teachers have limited knowledge about sex education to some degree but overall participant lack in knowledge. Researchers recommended teachers training in order to make teachers understand comprehensive sex education (Aresfin & Chowdhury, 2019).

In Ethiopia similar research have been done over people's attitude and perception toward sexual education which included both qualitative and quantitative method. The study was conducted from teachers and students and results showed positive attitude of 95% teachers and 80% students regarding sex education in school. Moreover, they commented that it should start from primary till age of 25 (Fentahun, et al., 2012).

In Sweden a qualitative research was conducted over with adolescents of both genders to find out their concepts regarding learning of sexual education and related relationships. It was concluded that many topics which students consider important were not present in sex education. Students had to look elsewhere for information. Teenagers declared it as the most important subject that should be discussed in school (Unis & Sällström, 2019).

Another research has been done in Nigeria. The study's aim was to find out about adolescent knowledge and attitude about sex education moreover examine their moral sexual behavior. The descriptive research design of the survey was used with 200 participants from secondary school. Results showed that female has more consciousness than male about sex education. It also appeared that both genders equally need correct and appropriate knowledge regarding sex (Adewumi, 2019).

In Pakistan, few researchers worked on the perception of parents and teachers about sex education. A study was conducted in Sindh regarding sexual health education and available services. A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 200 young people. In conclusion, 25% of respondents complained that sexual health centers are too far away. Moreover, education and services regarding sexual health in Pakistan are unsatisfactory and inadequate (Talpur & Khowaja, 2012).

A cross-sectional research with 743 students belonging to 13-19 years age group was done in India which focused on school-going adolescents. The aim of this study was to identify the awareness and attitude of sex education of participants. The results show the majority of adolescents were in favor of sex education. Also, they think sex education can reduce the occurrence of AIDS they advise that doctors should provide this awareness (Kummar, et al., 2017).

In the above studies, the focus was on adolescents' and teachers' perception in another research parents' perception regarding sex education was analyzed, a qualitative research was conducted in Australia with parents, teachers and children. Interviews and focus groups were conducted. It is concluded that primary age is key age to develop ethics and respect regarding sexuality and relationship. The majority of participants think it is an important component and they want it to be collaborative with families too (Robinson, et al., 2017)

All of the studies discussed above show that nowadays people do have sex education, but they lack adequate and proper sex education as educators. Moreover, it shows a positive attitude of



adolescence regarding sex education as they are willing to know many aspects that are absent in the curriculum.

### **Theoretical framework**

A question raises if sex education is necessary how come it affects our personality traits and do this hype been proved by any theories? So here are some theories which highlight the importance of sex education.

### **Psychosexual theory**

Human personality develops in a series of phases that start from childhood. Freud directly connected them with pleasure-seeking zones known as erogenous zones. According to his theory, most of the development takes place till the age of adolescence. In the development of personality, early experiences play a major role if there is a conflict left at any stage it will cause a defect in personality which can be recognized later in life. But if those urges are fulfilled it will result in a healthy, better, and successful personality. Freud also thinks that inappropriate parenting can result in negative outcomes for a child's personality (Cherry, 2020).

In a broader context the theory supports the importance of childhood and a smooth transition from one stage to another is key to peaceful development. If the children are not well educated on the relevant topic it will negatively affect their personalities and lives in future aspects.

### **Banking model of education**

Freire's theory explains two kinds of curiosity i.e., spontaneous curiosity, the curiosity and quiver of a conscious body for getting knowledge regarding any subject which starts at the age of puberty. Thus, adolescents who are not sexually engaged; also get curious about their growing bodies which was elaborated by Freire and others as critical curiosity that motivated teenagers to try to "unveil reality". Critical curiosity helps understand systems of oppression but also motivates one to challenge such systems (Clark & Seider, 2017).

The above theory suggests that humans are always curious about new things, and they are always eager to learn as well. When a teenager hits puberty he/she finds changes in his/her body. So they are curious about the changes and they go in depth about these changes where they find some pleasurable activities which could adversely affect them as they are not educated about the subject so they don't look for right or wrong they just go for it. Such activities adversely affect their mental and physical health. That is the main reason why sex education is necessary if these teenagers are educated before about the subject, they won't go on the wrong paths to satisfy their needs or urges.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

A quantitative research design has been used.

### **Sampling strategy**

235 questionnaires were collected from male and female adolescents through survey method which were selected from different colleges and universities. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used as the method is easy for accessing subjects which helps in collecting data conveniently.

### **Tools of Data Collection**

A self-developed, questionnaire was used for data collection. The questions were extracted from different foreign questionnaires about sex education. All questions were Likert-type to collect opinions and views of people. Totally 21 questions were asked four were linked to personal information 17 were quantitative questions with options.

### **Procedure**

After departmental permission the informed consent and permission of participants was taken. The collection of data was done by sending questionnaire through online medium with help of social media platform such as Instagram, Facebook etc.

### **Analysis**

The results of the research were statistically analyzed using SPSS.



### RESULTS

A total of 235 completed questionnaires were received. The majority age range of the participants was 21-25 years which include 110 men and 126 women. Ninety percent of the participants were literate. From collected data following results were computed.

#### Reliability

The Cronbach’s Alpha was found to identify the scale’s reliability. The value of Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.66 which shows the moderate to high reliability of scale.

First of all, the participants were asked that how comfortable they are discussing sex related matters with doctors, parents, siblings and friends and results are indicated in bar graph below:

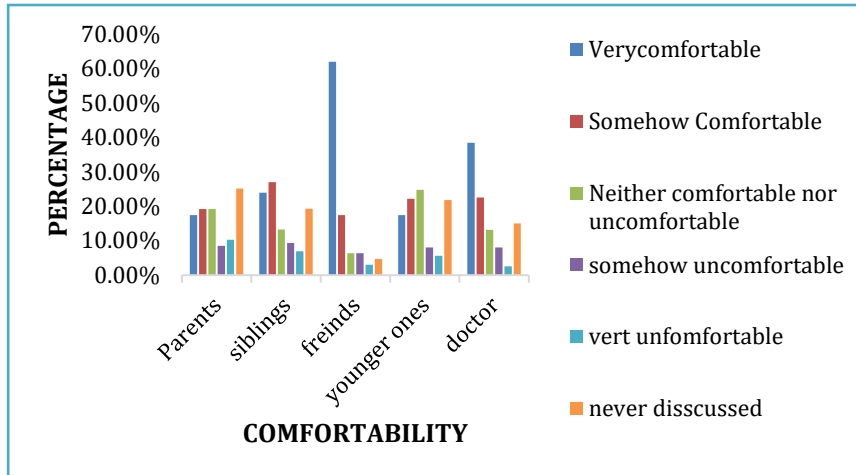


Figure 1. Bar chart presenting comfort level of participants in discussing sex related matters.

The above trend clearly shows that participants are most comfortable to friends which are 79.50% on the other side it is observed that only 17% are very comfortable while discussing to their parents. Other than friends the high trend is seen in doctor column that shows that our population is somehow comfortable discussing sex related matters with their doctors which is about 60%.

If we focus over second trend, the level of comfort seen in younger ones and sibling’s column shows that 27% person people think that they can’t be so comfortable with younger ones or siblings. So data indicates that participants were uncomfortable while discussing matters with family and with younger ones, this can be attributed to shyness and cultural barrier which hinders open communication.

One of our objectives was to find out that how much our participants were aware about sex education. The awareness level was further divided into subcategories naming reproduction system, family planning, sexual violence, STDs, safe sex and self-defense tactics. Bar graph is used to show the awareness level of participants.

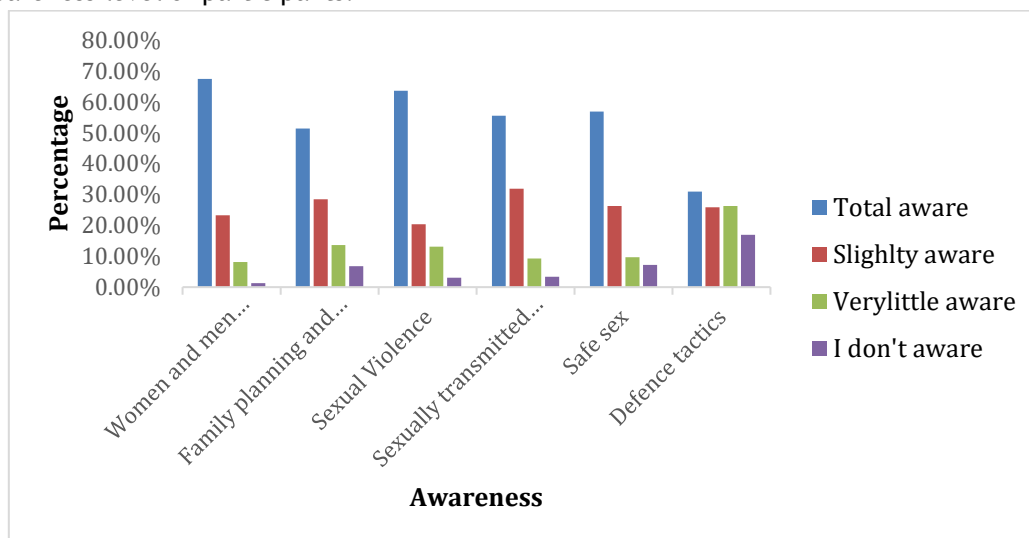


Figure 2. Bar chart presenting awareness of participants regarding sex related matters



The above figure clearly shows that participants are quite aware of subjects been asked 68% are totally aware about women and men reproductive cycle and 51% about family planning and abortion. It is also seen that more than 55% are also aware of violence and safe sex. Lower awareness appeared on self-defense tactics; 30% people marked total aware and 25% slightly aware. Further 26% and 16% of participants were aware of STDs and sexual violence which is quite alarming percentage. Another question was asked from participant if they think rape, sexual harassment, STDs, teen pregnancy and sex myths can be reduced if sex education been provided. The bar graph indicates the results as follows:

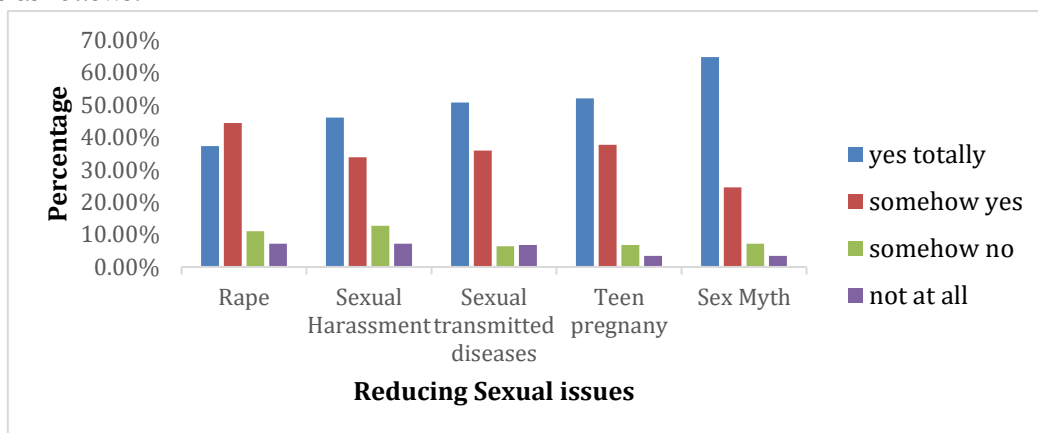


Figure 3: Can Sex-Ed help in reduce growing rate of sexual issues?

Above bar graph shows that 37% of people think that rape cases will totally reduce if sex education will be provided because people will be aware and able to defend themselves. 11% of participants think no and 7.2% said it’s not at all possible. For sexual harassment 46% strongly favored that it will decrease due to sex education whereas 33% participants slightly favored the concept. 20% of participants thought that sexual harassment rate won’t be reduced by sex education. In next column sexual transmitted diseases trend show more than 86% participant think it will reduce if education been provided as many people don’t know its causes and preventive treatments so here sex education can play a vital role in reducing STDs. Same trend been seen in teen pregnancy again 89% people think that sex education will help in this regard but the question yielded a lot of debate as many participants were of the opinion if we taught teen how to safe from pregnancy they will indulge in illicit sexual activities. Sex related myths is major dilemma that need to be resolved there are many myths that create more chaos here 65% strongly agree and 25% agree that sex myth can be busted through proper education but still again 10% of population thinks that sex education won’t be helpful. After that people were asked how they perceive sex education and the most frequent responses are presented in next figure.

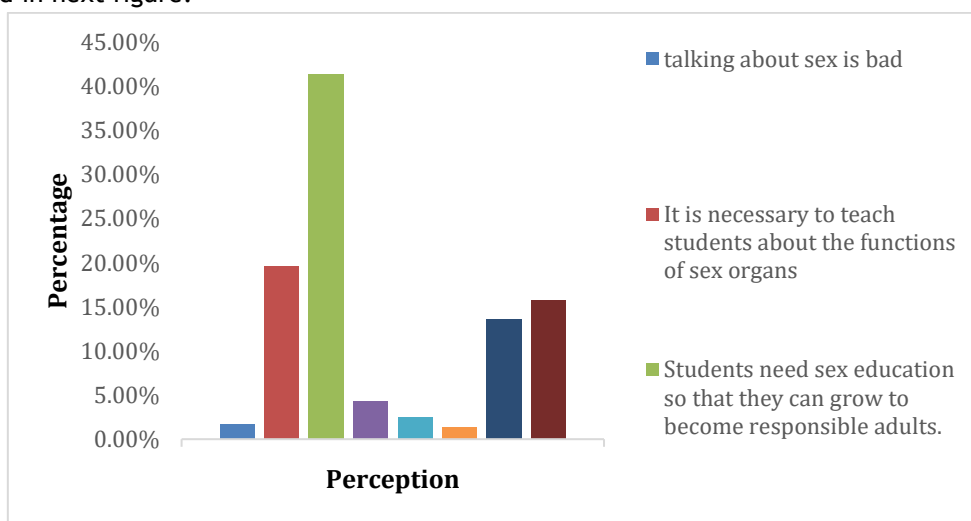


Fig 4: Perception about sex education



The highest trend 41.30% ( $n=97$ ) was seen that students need sex education so that they can grow to become responsible adults. The second highest trend 19.60% ( $n =46$ ) believed that it is necessary to teach students about functions of sex organs,

15.70% ( $n =37$ ) participants were of the opinion that students feel shy to discuss about human reproductive system with their parents. Further, 13.60% ( $n =32$ ) of participants said that discussion about how to have a healthy relationship with the opposite sex should be the part of sex education class. Very few of them 4.2% ( $n =10$ ) perceived that learning about family life and sex education will encourage students to have premarital sex, 2.9% ( $n =7$ ) of participants believed that sex education in school is against religion and 1.7% believed that talking about sex is bad and how to prevent pregnancy should be taught during sex education class.

The next figure depicts participants’ opinion about what should be included in curriculum of sex education.

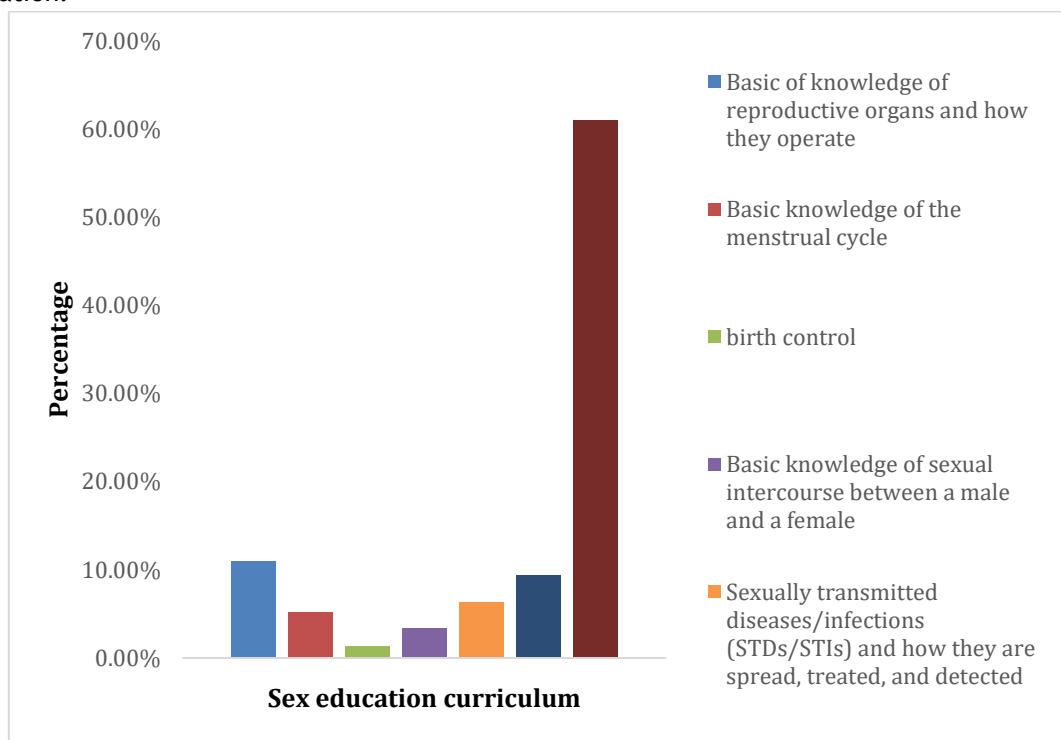


Figure 5: Bar chart presenting participants’ opinion about sex education curriculum.

Figure 5 reveals that highest percentage of participants 61.0% ( $n=144$ ) indicated that ‘basic knowledge of reproductive organs and how they operate and basic knowledge of the menstrual cycle, should be included in curriculum of sex education. 9.34% ( $n =22$ ) believed that consent, rape prevention and socio-cultural factors that relate to sex should be part of the class. Basic knowledge of reproductive organs and how they operate was selected by 11.0% ( $n =26$ ) of the participants, 5.1% ( $n =12$ ) of people said basic knowledge of puberty and 6.4% ( $n =15$ ) said knowledge about how sexually transmitted diseases/infections spread, are treated and detected should be a part of sex education. Basic knowledge of sexual intercourse and healthy sexual relationship was chosen by 3.4% ( $n =8$ ) of. Only 1.3% ( $n =3$ ) chose male and female contraceptives whereas 2.5% ( $n =6$ ) chose none of the above-mentioned options.

Next they were asked who should be in charge of sex education and the responses are as follows:

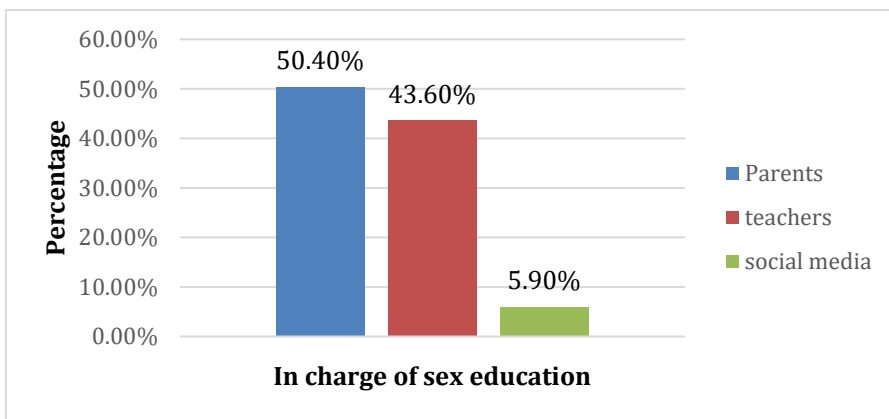


Figure 6: Perception about in charge of sex education

50.40% of people think parents should impart sex education to children as parents are closer to children and will be better able to deliver this information. On the second out of 236; 103 participants think it should be done by teacher as children are not so comfortable with parents regarding such matters. Only 5.90% thinks that social media should be in charge as it is the mostly used thing these days.

Then the participants were asked if they were aware about puberty and physiological changes related to puberty?

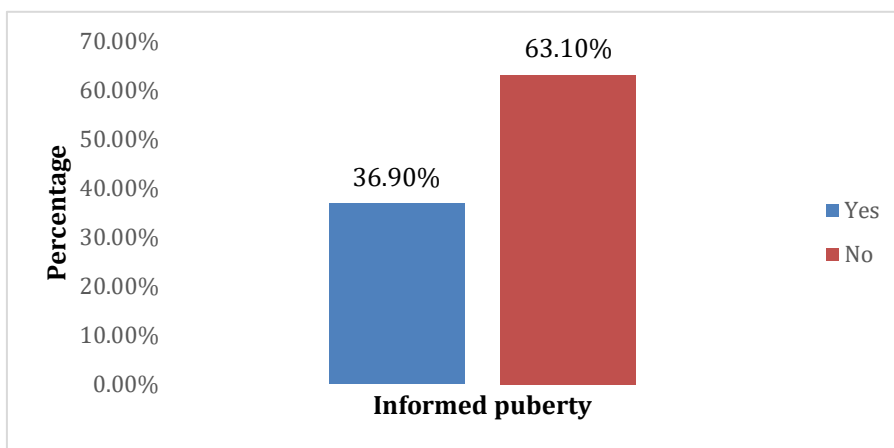


Figure 7: Level of awareness about puberty

Above charts clearly present that more than 60% of our participants were unaware regarding puberty and bodily changes at the time when they were actually experiencing it only 36% answered yes (they were informed).

At the last it was asked from participants that if they get sex education how comfortable they will be getting it.

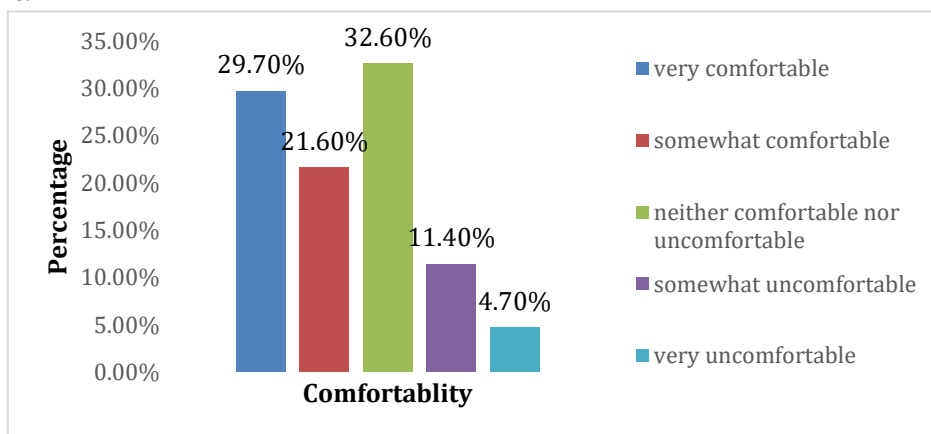


Figure 8: How comfortable would you feel attending sex-ed class?





The above figure shows that around 50% of participants considered themselves comfortable if they get sex education and most likely are positive regarding getting sex education. Only 15% of them think they will be uncomfortable getting sex education. Whereas 33% participants were not sure if they would be comfortable or not.

To explore the gender differences in participants' comfort level while getting sex education two independent samples t test was used and the results are as follows:

**Table 1 Independent sample t-test for measuring gender differences in comfortably attending sex education.**

Variable	Men		Women		95% confidence interval of the difference			
	M	SD	M	SD	t	p	LL	UL
Comfortability	2.11	1.14	2.66	1.11	-3.74	.000	-.84	-.26

Results showed significant difference in comfortability of males and females in attending sex education class. Mean scores indicate that women are more comfortable attending classes regarding sex education. The effect size *Cohen's d* = 0.48 indicated medium effect.

### DISCUSSION

The present study is based on the perception of adults about sex education. We tried to cover three aspects first is there a need of including sex education in curriculum and what kind of? Further will it help in reducing growing rate of sexual issues? Secondly with whom participants can comfortably communicate sex related matters? Our third aspect was to find out how much aware Pakistanis adults are regarding sex related matters.

The first result shows that participants are more comfortable with friends and doctors but are most uncomfortable with their parents most of them never discussed with their parents. A study by Ali et al., (2006) also supported the findings that parents are uneasy discussing sex related matters with their child that make uncomfortable for both children and parents. A study conducted in USA shows that children are more comfortable with parents discussing about sex related matters. The reason behind it can be social diversity between USA and Pakistan (Guzman et al., 2003).

Secondly, findings clearly show that participants are quite aware of basic subjects related to sex education for example 70% of participants were totally aware about women and men reproductive cycle and 49% about family planning and abortion. They were also aware of violence, safe sex and STDs to some extent. Literature review approves that Pakistani are more aware about sexual reproductive cycle, but this study covered only female participants (Latif, et al., 2018). Another study reveals that 68% of participants were aware of reproductive parts and reproductive cycle (Ali et al., 2006) thus the literature supports our findings.

Next the results clearly indicate that participants were positive that sex ed will help out in resolving sex crimes or offenses. The results are in line with a study of American Academy of Pediatrics (2016) which revealed that sex education has been shown to help preventing and reducing the risks of adolescent pregnancy, HIV, and sexually transmitted infections for children and adolescents with and without chronic health conditions and disabilities in the United States. Breuner et al., (2016) also stated that higher rate of teen pregnancies, STDs and STIs and sexual abuse can be reduced by the help of sex education.

Perception about sex education was next and findings shows that more than 80% of participants think that students need sex education. The results were supported by two researches which show that higher percentage of people are in favor of sex education (Fentahun et al., 2012; Kumar et al., 2017) There were different opinions regarding what should be part of sex education curriculum. 64% people select all matters i.e., reproduction, family planning or safe sex, consent rape and basic knowledge of puberty also STIs, STDs and sexual intercourse. Literature approves some of segments mention above approximately 82% of respondents indicated support for programs that teach students about



both abstinence and other methods of preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Similarly, 68.5% supported teaching how to properly use condoms (Bleakley, 2006). The difference in our and literature findings are due to cultural difference in our society even basic knowledge about sex related matters is not being shared with youngsters because of being tabooed topic and above-mentioned things (abstinence etc) are at next level.

About half of our participants indicated that parents should impart sex education to children. Literature supports these results according to Child Health Nursing Research more than 50% of the participants responded that primary sex education for young children should be the responsibility of the parents (Shin et al., 2019).

Next result shows that majority of participants did not have any information about puberty beforehand. Ali et al. (2006) also reported that majority of girls have been not informed regarding puberty, but males were informed by their peers before it occurred. Another study stated that two third of girls have no prior knowledge regarding menstruation, but boys do know puberty and body changes before it occur (Population council, 2019). In our study gender specific analysis was not conducted and over all participants claimed no knowledge.

About 50% of participants claimed to be comfortable in getting sex education but still other half were not comfortable receiving sex education. Thomas (2016) stated that around the world 50 studies show that students were not comfortable receiving sex education. Further they explained it as shameful and embarrassing education.

The last result showed difference in women and men's comfort level while taking classes of sex education. It has also been seen women are more comfortable than men. A study conducted by Eva and Lefkowitz (2002) reveals that women talk more about sex than men. Moreover, they are more comfortable than men in discussing sex related matters. The findings support our results that women are more at ease for getting sex education.

## CONCLUSION


The research indicates that most participants were aware about sex education related stuff and their perception was highly positive regarding sex education that it should be taught in schools. More than 60% people think that parents should be in charge of that. Research also shows participants' agreement that sex education helps in reducing growing rate of sexual related issues or crimes. Though talking about sex related matters seems shameful in our society but results show that Pakistani adults are looking for advancement in our studies. The result reveals that women are more comfortable than men in attending sex education.

### Limitations & recommendations

Due to COVID-19 all data collection was done online which might have hindered collection of more substantive data. A large number of people were not ready to talk about it and did not participate in research which limited the number of participants in study. Further some action research should be conducted to find ways of incorporating sex education in curriculum. It would be helpful for children in getting authentic information via right medium. But care should be taken so that it may not become a cause of manipulation or abuse.

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