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**DAILY EDITORIAL
ANALYSIS**

TOPIC

**IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION
IN ACADEMIA**

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IMPORTANCE OF SEX EDUCATION IN ACADEMIA

Context

- With rising concerns around student well-being, gender-based violence, and discrimination, integrating comprehensive sex education into academia has become a necessity rather than a choice.

About

- Sex education broadly defined as **structured learning about human sexual development**, reproductive health, relationships, consent, and gender identity remains one of the most contested yet consequential policy questions in Indian education.
- It is defined by UNESCO as Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) as age-appropriate, curriculum-based learning on cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects.
- The debate is **not merely pedagogical**; it sits at the intersection of public health, constitutional rights, cultural sovereignty, gender justice, and institutional reform.

Why Does Sex Education Matter?

- **Promotes Mental and Emotional Well-being:** Sex education helps students understand their bodies, emotions, and relationships.
 - ◆ Reduces shame, guilt, and confusion around sexuality;
 - ◆ Encourages healthy expression of intimacy;
 - ◆ Helps prevent anxiety, depression, and identity-related distress.
- **Public Health Imperative:**
 - ◆ India has 2.4 million people living with HIV (NACO, 2022), with heterosexual transmission accounting for ~83% of cases — largely attributable to low awareness.
 - ◆ NFHS-5 (2019–21): 7.9% of women aged 15–19 were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey.
 - ◆ Menstrual hygiene ignorance drives school absenteeism for 2–3 days per month for millions of girls (WASH in Schools survey).
- **Gender Justice and Violence Prevention:**
 - ◆ **NCRB 2022:** India recorded 31,516 rape cases, with over 94% committed by persons known to the victim.
 - ◆ Consent, the most foundational concept in preventing sexual violence is not taught in any standard Indian school curriculum.
- **Gender Role Conditioning:**
 - ◆ Sex education, properly delivered, challenges the social construction of gender, the idea that dominance is masculine and submission is feminine.
 - ◆ Paulo Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressed" principle applies here: silence around sexuality maintains the power structures that enable abuse.
- **POCSO Implementation Gap:**
 - ◆ National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) data shows lakhs of POCSO cases pending — many because victims did not recognize the act as abuse due to ignorance.
- **Constitutional & Rights Framework:**
 - ◆ The Supreme Court in *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India* and subsequent judgments has progressively expanded Article 21 to include the right to health, dignity, and education about health.
 - ◆ The right to receive information is implicit in free speech jurisprudence (*Shreya Singhal v. Union of India*) & extends to information necessary for personal safety and bodily autonomy.
 - ◆ **Article 39(f):** Children shall be protected against exploitation and moral/material abandonment.
 - ◆ **Article 47:** The State shall raise the level of nutrition and health of its people.

Linkage Between Sexuality and Mental Health

- Sexuality, intimacy, and mental health are closely linked yet heavily stigmatised across societies, resulting in a culture of silence; shame and fear surrounding sex and intimacy can exacerbate mental health issues.
- Healthy sexual expression and intimate relationships contribute to emotional well-being, identity formation, and self-esteem.
 - ◆ Conversely, stigma, repression, and lack of awareness can lead to anxiety, depression, and isolation.
- The **World Health Organization (WHO)** has emphasised that **lack of bodily autonomy and freedom in sexual relationships** leads to 'immense suffering', underlining the urgency of addressing these issues through education and policy.

Role of Academia

- **Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces:** Encourage open discussions without fear or judgement;
 - ◆ Use interactive teaching methods like group discussions and reflective exercises;
 - ◆ Build trust between educators and students;
- **Curriculum Reforms:** Integrate interdisciplinary perspectives (psychology, sociology, gender studies);
 - ◆ Include topics such as consent and relationships, sexual diversity, digital sexuality and media literacy.
- **Capacity Building:** Train educators and counselors in inclusive practices. Develop culturally sensitive teaching materials.

Related Issues & Challenges

- **Culture of Silence and Stigma:** Academic institutions often avoid open discussions on sexuality and intimacy.
 - ◆ Limited courses and research on these topics reinforce marginalisation.
 - ◆ Fear and discomfort hinder meaningful engagement among students and faculty.
- **Dominance of Biomedical and Majoritarian Frameworks:** Sexuality is often reduced to medical dysfunctions, ignoring emotional, social, and cultural dimensions.
 - ◆ Pleasure, consent, and power dynamics are largely excluded.
 - ◆ Majoritarian norms marginalise diverse sexual identities and experiences.
- **Curriculum Gaps in India:** Mental health education is largely **heteronormative and cisgendered**. Sexuality is framed narrowly, excluding:
 - ◆ Consent and sexual ethics;
 - ◆ Queer identities and lived realities;
 - ◆ Structural violence and discrimination;
- **Institutional Gaps:** Limited integration of sex education in higher education;
 - ◆ Counselling services lack inclusivity and sensitivity;
 - ◆ Policies often reactive rather than preventive;
- **Gender-Exclusive Delivery:** Many existing programs focus solely on girls' menstruation, pregnancy prevention. Boys are excluded, reinforcing the notion that sexuality management is a female responsibility.

Key Government Initiatives

- **Adolescent Education Programme (AEP):** It was launched by the **Ministry of Education with NACO support**. It is implemented in secondary and senior secondary schools.
 - ◆ It focuses on HIV/AIDS awareness, life skills education, and responsible behavior and relationships.
- **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK):** It is a flagship programme that **targets adolescents (10–19 years)**.
 - ◆ It covers sexual and reproductive health, mental health, gender-based violence, and substance abuse.
- **National AIDS Control Programme (NACP):** It is implemented by **National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)**.
 - ◆ It promotes awareness on safe sexual practices, prevention of HIV/AIDS, and reducing stigma.

- **Ayushman Bharat – School Health Programme:** It is a joint initiative of **MoHFW & Ministry of Education**.
 - ♦ It includes modules on emotional well-being, gender sensitivity, reproductive health awareness.

Other Related Interventions

- **Pedagogical Interventions:** Addressing sensitive topics requires **trust-building and safe spaces**. Traditional academic detachment discourages personal engagement.
 - ♦ Use of **icebreakers and reflective exercises**. Small-group discussions to encourage participation. Linking theoretical knowledge with lived experiences.
 - ♦ These methods foster empathy, dialogue, and critical thinking.
- **Judicial and Policy Developments: The Supreme Court, in 2024** advocated comprehensive sex education to promote informed discussions.
 - ♦ **Recent Developments:** Call for **transgender-inclusive sexuality education**;
 - Pan-India guidelines addressing student suicides, recognising discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation;
 - ♦ These steps highlight the role of institutions in addressing mental health and inclusivity.

Way Forward

- **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE):** Integrate gender, consent, diversity, and rights-based approaches. Move beyond purely biomedical frameworks.
 - ♦ **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)** was conceptualized in 2018 **by UNESCO** to equip students with scientifically accurate and age-appropriate knowledge.
- **Institutional Reforms:** Introduce interdisciplinary courses on sexuality and mental health. Train educators and counsellors in inclusive practices.
- **Building Care and Allyship Networks:** Foster peer support systems and inclusive communities. Encourage sustained dialogue rather than one-time interventions.
- **Addressing Structural Inequalities:** Recognise socio-cultural and institutional oppression. Promote equity and dignity for all identities.

Conclusion

- Breaking the silence around sexuality and intimacy is essential for improving mental health outcomes. Educational institutions must move beyond stigma and adopt inclusive, dialogue-driven approaches.
- Education can play a transformative role in building a more just and equitable society, an imperative aligned with constitutional values and human rights, by fostering safe, empathetic, and diversity-aware environments.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Discuss the importance of comprehensive sex education in higher educational institutions in India. Examine its role in promoting mental health, gender equality, and inclusive development.

