

# A Conceptual Framework for Understanding Adolescence Sexuality and Significance of Sex Education

Kochumon John

**Abstract:** *The curiosity of adolescence about sex is a concrete manifestation of their more fundamental quest regarding the meaning of the “whence and wherefore” of life. Hence they have a right to an answer to their questions. The ignorance, secrecy, shame and fear, associated with sex and reproduction are incentives to adolescence to try to know everything about it.*

**Keywords:** Adolescence, sex, Sex education

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence is described as the period post the incipience of puberty which marks the period of transition of a young person from a child into an adult. It is the period wherein the physical and psychological progress of a person takes place on the basis of which the mental and physical wellbeing of an individual develops. An adolescent's wellbeing has great importance and they are required to be acquainted with and guided towards the development of positive attitudes on sexuality. To execute the purpose, this paper is an attempt towards understanding the sexuality among adolescents and it shall also examine the different attitudes of individuals associated with adolescent's sexuality and discourses surrounding the subject.

## 2. Nature and meaning of the Term Adolescence

The term adolescence extends from the Latin word *adolescere*, which means “to grow” or “to grow to maturity.” [1] According to Jones, “adolescence is the reminiscence of infancy. It corresponds to the states of infancy and childhood in being patterned into two states, the first of growth and the second of maturity.” [2] Adolescence is the period of development from the onset of puberty to the attainment of adulthood, usually between 13 and 19 years of age. [3] By and large adolescents are defined by biology, psychology and culture and historically as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood. [4] According to A.T.Jerslid, “Adolescence is a span of years which boys and girls move from childhood to adulthood mentally, emotionally, socially and physically.” [5]

The stage of adolescence is a transformational period of time, where transformation does not mean drawing a strict line of division between past and new changes but involves a shift from previous stage to next stage. Thus it can be deduced that the past developmental changes will impact the changes occurring in future. As Osterrieth has explained, “The psychic structure of the adolescent has its roots in childhood and many of its characteristics that are generally considered as typical of adolescence appear and are already present during late childhood”. The physical transformations occurring during the onset of puberty significantly impact the person's attitude and modifications in beliefs and ethics [6].

## 3. Sexual Developmental Tasks and Challenges of Adolescence

The sexual advancement and issues associated with adolescence are guided by various determinants, primarily physical and motor advancement. The adolescents undergo physical advancement at a very fast pace. In this period the development of body is at its pinnacle and finally aids the body to attain the final structure. The complete body of an adolescent undergoes considerable number of modifications and during this time period they attain sexual features [7]. In addition, the next factor is emotional advancement. During the time of adolescence, the emotional state of the individuals is in an unstable state and is underdeveloped. They express their emotional state in an inconsistent manner. The enhanced levels of sexual hormones can be instrumental in affecting the emotions of the adolescents. The adolescents are likely to react promptly to different issues without being cautious, which may lead to hazardous actions. [8]

The next factor is based on social and ethical advancement. The most evident change based on social advancement that is observed among adolescents is the enhanced impact of their peers. They anticipate self-reliance and try to put forth their own perspective. They form notions about life, undertakings and ethical values in accordance to the notions of the peer group they belong to. During the time period of puberty, the adolescents become well aware about sex. In contrast to their childhood, they prefer friends belonging to opposite sex. Adolescents are always curious to gain knowledge about things happening in their surroundings. During this time period, an adolescent observes the ethical code of conduct in a critical manner and puts forth multiple queries. The next factor is based on psychosocial advancement. The transformations associated with psychosocial advancement become evident from enhancement in the consciousness about sexuality and body image perception. In similar terms, slow sexual and biological advancement in comparison to peers may instill feelings of poor self-perception of body and self-regard. It is the significant time for gaining insight about sexuality. The methods employed to teach adolescents about sexuality and how they get introduced to sexuality is instrumental in governing their ability to form a

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healthy sexual identity. The levels of sexual hormones increase considerably during puberty, which instigates sexual arousal and desire among the adolescents. Due to these transformations, the adolescents lose stability of mind. With increment in sexual urge, the adolescents get exposed to issues pertaining to sexuality and sexual identity [9]

#### 4. Contemporary Situations and Challenges on Adolescence Sexuality

Adolescence is the time when an individual leaves behind the childhood and enters the adulthood and is marked by psychological, social, cultural transformations along with development of sexual organs and secondary sexual features. Furthermore it also includes advancement of sexual communication patterns suitable for adults within a society, inclusion of sexuality into self-perceptions and modification of role anticipation and working on them, which are the characteristics that specifically vary among children, adolescents and adults [10]. Stanley Hall explains adolescence as a time period when a person undergoes huge upheaval and anxiety and consequently becomes whimsical and emotionally unstable. [11] All of these definitions are very clear that the most transitional period between childhood and maturity, a period of storm and stress involving manifold psychological disturbances and adjustment problems. According to the biological explanations based on psychological tranquility, the adolescent is confronted with a chaotic and strong sexual drive. They experience unpredictable anxiety, stress and strain during this period of puberty and takes recourse to many activities as means of avoiding threat of sex. [12]

Adolescence is also known as the period of transition. Adolescence is a period (13-19) from the onset of puberty to the age of maturity. It is a period of rapid physical and biological changes which may lead to confusions, tensions, frustrations and feelings of insecurity. Sexual development takes place during the adolescent phase. There can occur sexual identity crisis. This crisis grows out of the adolescent's uncertainty. The expression of sexual desire among adolescence might be influenced by many factors. Because of their growing interests in sex, adolescent boys and girls seek more and more possibilities of sex. Such possibilities might be leading them to sexual misconceptions and sexual disorders. This will create many sexually transmitted diseases among the youth. Especially the drive for full sexual identity is one of the disturbing problems of the adolescence. [13]

During adolescence, the sex-based experiments and investigations get transformed into sexual activity. During puberty, the individuals are primarily concerned about sexuality not only because of the associated physical transformations but also because of the sexual image they need to project in addition to the challenges they need to overcome to be accepted as grown-ups. Steinberg posited that attaining emotional advancement has become a prerequisite for adolescents for acknowledging sexual bonding. [14] The adolescents often misinterpret the concept of sex and thus are always unclear about it. Furthermore, sharp surge in the teenage pregnancies have become quite

evident due to the new trends prevalent in sexual activities. Many teenagers get involved in sexual activities without any prior knowledge or sex-based knowledge. [15]

#### 5. The Contemporary Situation of Adolescence

According to A.J. Jersfield, "Adolescence is that span of years during which boys and girls move from childhood to adulthood, mentally, emotionally, socially and physically. [16] Donthy Rogers defines adolescence as "a process of achieving the attitudes and beliefs needed for effective participation in the society." [17] Jean piaget also defined adolescence as "the age of great ideals and the beginning of theories as well as the time of simple adaptation to reality." [18] Usually the adolescence is left to themselves without any proper education or information in this matter. The misconception and ignorance about sex spoil the lives of young generation in the long run. They experience great emotional stress and strain due to sex matters. The adolescence need to be handled carefully and be given adequate information about various aspects of their physiology, sexuality and different sex diseases. They have to be given proper education and guidance in these matters, particularly when the adolescence suffers from maladjustment and sex related issues.

As per the views of Pivar [19], the young generation should be educated on the topic of sex, that sex could be wholesome and healthy, both pleasurable and reproductive. On considering the relevance of sex education, the work of G. Stanley Hall must be viewed. The idea put forward by G. Stanley Hall transformed the aspect the world viewed the youth by identifying the definite period in every person's life called 'adolescence', the time when the sexual reproduction is possible. Hall, stressed on the desideratum for the sexual restraint during the crucial time of the physical as well as the emotional and mental development in a person's life therefore, the awareness should be imparted during this period of critical development [20]. Unfortunately sex is regarded as a taboo in many societies and a lot of prejudices and misconceptions have crept in to this field of the important human concern. Unless proper education is given the adolescence may fail to establish a sexual and social identity and never get the opportunity to mature. [21]

#### 6. Significance of Meaningful Sex Education

Michael Merson states that, "In many societies sex education for children and young adults is one of the most hotly debated and emotive issues facing educationist today. But it is high time to be refrained from such arguments. If we can explain the pros and cons of sexuality and can have open and frank discussion with young people, rapid spread of HIV can be slowed down in the society. Thus, the recommendation was taken seriously and the topic was introduced later. Sex education broadly defined is any instruction in the process and consequences of sexual activity, ordinarily given to children and adolescence" [22] The contemporary situations show a rampant rise in teen sex and illegitimacy and it distinguishes as a top of concern for the conservatives of the society. The hiking ratio of sexual exploitation as well as sexual abuse on a global level exerts

the desideratum for sex education. [23] Hence, sex education develops as a means to emphasize the relevance of sexual awareness amongst the adolescents as well as the adults. The implementation of sex education will inevitably direct the attention of exclusive affectional bonds with sex and its related issues. The need for educating the youngsters on the rightful utilization of sex is the main aim on implementing the sex education. [24]

It is also observed that traditionally, adolescents in many cultures were not given any information on sexual matters, with the discussion of these issues being considered taboo and there were significant barriers to parents-adolescents sexual communication. [25] The mantle to handle sexual conversations was attributed to parents, however, these discussions were put off till the child's marriage. With the promotion of sexual literacy, psychosocial development and well-being in adolescence and adulthood can be maintained. The absence of sex education leads to various health and social hazards, including STDs and unintended pregnancy. [26] Despite the apparent segregation, religion has failed to put sexuality in a useful context, while the communities and societies devastated by HIV/AIDS, unplanned pregnancies, sexual abuse and dysfunction. [27] The media has used this sexual disconnect created by religion and twisted it into a psychologically loaded abstraction of absurdity. The idea of sexuality has been degraded to body parts and sexual acts. But there is no organized systematic way of teaching of sex in any setting –family church or schools. [28] Pohlman and Rao critically says that "In western countries parents and schools authorities tolerate sex education largely because of fears of venereal disease and premarital intercourse and pregnancy and their faith that sex education will be a chance for the older generation to influence young people to avoid these". [29]

## 7. Scope of Sex Education

Sexual education as a field for examination reasonably contains a lot of scope. Adolescence has been discussed as a crucial period as during this time the young people become eager to get all information about the newly discovered term; the consequent sex-based trials and investigations soon convert into sexual actions. It is a time period when an individual endures extreme disturbance, unease and therefore becomes imaginative and emotionally unsound. Several studies blamed the pursuit for an identity in the fast developing world as a factor that encouraged inclination towards sexual activities in youth; this included pressure from peers, thoughtlessness, and feelings developing from irrationalism and fantasizing. They understood from their study that in their adolescence, it is necessary for the youth to toughen their basis of personal acknowledgement and gain a clear understanding of their identity by mixing the information attained through various encounters, their opinion about life and the information received from their ancestors. However, they failed to acknowledge that the society is witnessing constant transformations.

The contemporary youth is more turbulent, emotionally disturbed, more wasteful, less uncompromising and more disconnected from ethical and religious values. This suggests that modernization is responsible for the ensuing collapse of religious beliefs and qualities, encouraging

inclination of adolescents towards sexual activities in puberty. The existing studies advocated appropriate education for adolescents to stop them from thriving incorrect ideas which in turn could disturb their behavior destructively. However, corresponding addresses of sexual education have been discussed, which comprise of the education that offers inadequate information and propagates denial from sexual actions till marriage; the restraint only to the adolescents actually replicates the hegemony and gender disparity of the patriarchal society. They are rather restoring the dread of sex outside heterosexual marriage, sex outside the heterosexual household and sex without the intention to reproduce.

Adolescence is considered as one of the most crucial period of development especially in technologically progressive societies. This middle stage between childhood and adulthood is generally called as "storm and stress" years. Even according to the behavioral scientists it is indeed the stress period in our society. The adjustments required by the physiological changes linked with the puberty like measure of sex hormones, structural changes in body and its functions have been accentuated by the biological changes of body. Though there is a mutual agreement over the statement that adolescent period have adaptable issues but yet we have discrepancy in views with respect to the importance of social, biological and psychological factors. The contradictory reports of values, attitude and behavior of an adolescent is loaded in magazines, newspaper and television programs. When compared to youth of earlier generation, today's youth is more turbulent, emotionally troubled, more profligate, and less idealistic and are more detached from these ethical values. Early exposure to media has led the children to impersonate relations before or outside marriage. A proper education is required for adolescents; otherwise they'll end up flourishing false ideas which in turn could affect their behavior negatively. In this materialistic world, the genital experience curtails to the sexuality only. Some reactions have led to depreciate sex. Sexual aberrations like masturbation, premarital sex, homosexuality, pornography exists rather than the real motive of sex. In order to help the youngsters develop a decent attitude towards sex it required to provide purposeful sex education aiming at abstinence. According to Bhavana Manchanda, "Teenage pregnancies and abortion would decline dramatically if sex education is introduced in schools. Students should be Planned Parenthood, anatomy, reproduction and clear the misconceptions in a young mind. The aim should be to prepare them for adulthood so that they avoid sex related problems". [30] Initiative must be taken by society and schools in order to provide correct information about sex. Curriculum of school must contain sex education.

## 8. Evaluation and Conclusion

Sexual orientation is crucial issue of adolescence. It is essential for children to get adequate amount of knowledge about sex and love simultaneously with their physiological growth. Since there is no one systematic way of teaching sex education in any environment like in a family, school or community, sex education may have its own limitations. Adolescence are, therefore, faced with anxiety and bewildered by strong sexual urges. Micahel Merson, says,



“In many societies, sex education for children and young adults is one of the most hotly debated and emotive issues facing educationists today. If we explain the pros and cons of sexuality and can have open and frank discussions with young people, rapid spread of sexual diseases can be slowed down in the society.” [31]

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