



Why sex education is important, now more than ever

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Adolescents in our country are growing up in a world where circumstances are quite different now, concerning the benefits and risks in life, from those of their parents or grandparents. They need proper support not only to navigate the biological, social and cognitive transitions of their life but also to prevent cases of sexual harassment and abuse which are now increasing at an alarming rate.

Sex education is an essential tool to help them learn about a broad range of topics related to biological, psychological and sociocultural perspectives of individual beings as well as a

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key intervention to prevent and reduce sexual harassment, assault and abuse. It just needs to be delivered in an age-appropriate and engaging way based on science and facts.

However, this important subject is still taboo in our conservative society due to some misconceptions or lack of appropriate knowledge about sex ed. Here are two myths that need to be addressed:

Myth: It is only about sex

Fact: Sex ed covers a wide range of issues related to health, sexuality, safety, gender norms, identity, respect, kindness, self-expression and power dynamics which are not just about sex. It teaches us about the variation in human bodies, how our bodies work and the rights that we have over our body.

Moreover, it provides adolescents with a chance to practice key skills such as decision-making, negotiation, critical thinking, leadership and communication skills. Whether

it is about maintaining better health or to explore attitudes and make informed choices in life, a proper curriculum of sex education can be worthwhile.

Myth: Sex education is not for children's ears, especially of male children

Fact: When we discuss sexual health, we don't often associate this subject with young people. But teaching them about their sexual health and well-being is much needed in an age-appropriate approach because being minors do not imply that they cannot be abused. They must understand when and how to say 'no' to unwanted and improper touch and here comes sex ed to fill up this information gap regarding consent, body rights and safety. And not to forget, it is important for both male and female children.

We have a social stigma that men/boys cannot be sexually harassed and so they don't need sex ed to learn about body rights and safety. However, the increase in the sexual assault and harassment of male children is urging the importance of providing well-structured sex education to all irrespective of gender.

Sexual harassment prevention and sex education

The continuous rise in rates of sexual harassment and violence in every phase of our society represents an alarming situation that needs to be pulled up by the roots. Due to conservatism and social beliefs, Bangladesh is yet to introduce sex ed effectively.

WeMen View, a voluntary social welfare organisation aiming to counter sexual harassment has come with some innovative approach to tackle the condition. Before stepping into more complex and detailed concepts of sex education, they are teaching children, mostly male children some essential basics to avoid unpleasant events like what personal space is and topics related to body rights and body autonomy including consent, good touch and bad touch.

Nabila J. Jalil, a founding member of

WeMen View shared some of her organisation's success stories and barriers with us as they try to fulfil the information gap about basic concepts of health and body through different workshops and activities. According to her, the success of the program was visible when children were asked to share their thoughts and experience after the series of sessions through letters. Some shared how they didn't understand before that they were somehow sexually harassed.

Children who attended these sessions also shared the tips regarding safety and security with other friends and supported the spread of these important issues broadly. Participants of such sessions now have reliable sources to know about the changes of their body and how to react to different approaches of others, unlike unsafe sources such as TV shows, movies or random friends.

Nabila shared how some teachers were relieved when they came with their proposal of sessions as they were too uncomfortable to talk with their students about these sensitive but important issues and the same goes with parents too. However, both parents and teachers happen to be the best sources of such information.

Starting the education at home

If you want to educate children of your family with basic sex education to prevent sexual harassment, here is what to do as per Nabila. Create a safe space in your home so that children can tell you about any inappropriate physical approach from someone without any fear. Teach them that none should touch some specific areas of their body and what are a good touch and bad touch with age-appropriate wordings. Also, while creating a safe space, establish the concept of consent and respect their boundaries. For example, do not hug or touch them if they don't want to or ask them before hugging them.

As a society, it is our responsibility to teach young people to protect themselves. As such, we need to move beyond taboos and acknowledge the importance of sex education to ensure a safer future for our younger ones.