

# TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON SEX EDUCATION FOR 5 - 8 YEARS OLD CHILDREN OF URBAN DHAKA

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## Abstract

*A proper sex education fosters good values to the children. It leads to better acceptance of who they are. It eliminates the children's curiosity about their own bodies. It teaches young children how to protect themselves from abuse. Therefore, sex education is necessary. In Bangladesh, sex education is not in the curriculum as a separate subject. The pre-primary curriculum covers a few topics such as, gender and how to protect oneself from abuse and it also exists in the teachers' guide of the primary. However, the awareness of teachers of the importance of sex education and their skill to impart it to students is questionable.*

*This study was conducted to find out teachers' perception on sex education of children aged between 5 and 8 years of Urban Dhaka. The study used qualitative method, where two FGDs with 11 teachers and two in-depth interviews were taken.*

*The findings of the study identified the gaps in the teachers' understanding of sex education. Teachers' perception of sex education and its content varies with socio economic background of the students they teach. The teachers understand the need and benefit of sex education for children aged 5-8 years. They are willing to teach sex education in classes but they require institutional support to do so. Social and parental consent required to provide sex education pose the biggest challenge in incorporating sex education comprehensively in the curriculum.*

*A curriculum that tailors fit students from all socio-economic background needs to be designed.*

*Support from School Management and the Government is needed to train teachers and arrange workshops for parents. A monitoring body is needed to evaluate and monitor sex education once it is incorporated comprehensively in the curriculum.*

**Key Words:** Sex-Education, 5-8 years old children, Teachers' Perception, Urban, Dhaka.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Child sexual abuse permeates all levels of Bangladeshi society. Children are at risk of abuse or harassment in their own homes, from relatives and family friends. It is found in schools, communities and the workplace. While disadvantaged and disabled children are more vulnerable to abuse, it is not limited to them. Most children know their abuser, who is usually someone close to them [27]. In recent years, a total of 1,301 children were raped between 2012 and September 2016. The number was highest in 2016 with 521 children raped [10]. Apart from rape child abuse has seen a new height and society as a whole need to stand up for it [11].

Steps need to be taken to provide age appropriate sex education to protect children from abuse and help them to make informed decisions. It is to be noted that sex education does not necessarily mean educating student about sexual act or teach them about birth controls; it is bigger and broader than that. Healthy sex education is critical for helping in preventing sexual abuse and for increasing the chances of reporting of abuse when it occurs. With such a

healthy attitude toward sex, children can learn to make decisions about what is truly right and wrong. They can develop the vocabulary to talk to responsible adults. They can feel less shame if they have been abused. To accomplish this requires education of teachers, of health care professionals and of parents [26].

In formal education, secondary school curriculum offers a little knowledge about HIV/AIDS and human reproduction process through some courses in biology but are not discussed in detail [3]. Part of sex education is included in the pre-primary curriculum but not much emphasis is given on it [15]. Schools need to put emphasis on sex education in their curriculum from early onwards, teachers need to be trained and parents need to be active partners in this. As not enough study has been found on this issue, this study will try to understand teachers' perception on sex education for children aged 5 to 8 years of Urban Dhaka. The study targeted teachers from Urban Dhaka for FGDs and in-depth interviews to find out about their views on the importance of sex education for that age group. The results may help the policy planners to know about the required support the teachers would need to become capable sex educators and its effective incorporation in the curriculum.

## 2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study intends to explore teachers' perception on sex education for children aged between 5-8 years. The study will explore the teachers' understanding of sex education and find out the support they would require becoming capable sex educators.

By finding out about their perception on sex education and their role as sex educators, necessary steps can be taken to support them and to make sex education effective in the school curriculum.

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Most rapid development of children takes place during their early childhood. The years from conception through birth to eight years of age are critical to the complete and healthy cognitive, emotional and physical growth [25]. They have curious minds, they are inquisitive about their genitals, differences in genders and they have questions on how babies are born. To deepen their socio-emotional development and to help them make sense of the world around them, it is important to teach the preschoolers the basic sex education in the simplest way possible. If they haven't had an explanation that makes sense to them, they will use their imagination to make up reason of their own [5].

Most importantly, children need to be able to talk about their curiosities with their mothers at home and teachers in school. Mothers and early years' teachers are their first sex educators. In Bangladesh, sex is often kept hushed. They often learn through media and peers. Most often abused and molested children do not speak of the abuse.

Very few studies could be found in context of sex education in Bangladesh. A study by M. Bhuiyan in 2014 examined the attitude of Bangladeshi parents regarding inclusion of sex education in school curriculum of Bangladesh. It was found that 48.3% parents support sex education, 25% did not support sex education and rest were neutral in a sample of 120 parents. Most of the parents supported the topics of sex education which were culture oriented instead of the knowledge of sexual intercourse, abortion, taking protection for premarital activity etc. It was also found that there was significant difference between attitude of parents towards inclusion of sex education and their residence, occupation or education background[3]. In another study on impact of training of teachers on their ability, skills, and confidence to teach HIV/AIDS in classroom, it was found that trained teachers were more comfortable in using interactive teaching methods and in explaining sensitive issues to their students in HIV/AIDS classes. They were also competent in using interactive teaching methods and could ensure the participation of students in HIV/AIDS classes as part of national curriculum for high school students [10]. This suggests that training teachers in sex education can bring good outcomes.

There is not enough study done on teachers' perception of sex education for children aged 5 to 8 years in Bangladesh. This study can be a starting point for large scale study in Bangladesh about sex education and teachers' role in it. Under current circumstances there are at least two reasons for this study to be justified: 1) Policy makers can learn about teachers' understanding of sex education to initiate programmes to develop teachers as sex educators. 2) Policymakers, teachers and parents need to understand the importance of emphasizing sex education as part of the curriculum from early years.

Therefore, the result may help children to be able to protect themselves from abuse and improve their early childhood.

## 4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

### Key Question 1:

What do teachers understand by sex education?

**Sub-Questions:**

- Do teachers understand the comprehensive nature of sex education?
- Do teachers understand the age appropriateness of sex education?

**Key Question 2:**

Do teachers understand the importance of sex education for children from an early age?

**Sub Questions:**

- Why do teachers think sex education is needed for children from early years?
- Do they perceive any challenge or demerits of sex education to young children?

**Key Question 3:**

How do teachers feel about their role as sex educators for their children?

**Sub Questions:**

- Is sex an uncomfortable topic to discuss with students?
- What will help them in becoming good sex educators and what will act as obstacles?

**5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sexuality education is the process of acquiring information and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, relationships and intimacy. It develops young people's skills so that they make informed choices about their behavior. It helps them to feel confident and competent about acting on these choices. It also equips children to face developmental challenges and empowers them against the ills of abuse, exploitation and unwanted pregnancies. Mothers who are the primary caregivers should be well informed about sexuality issues [16].

Comprehensive sexuality education includes scientifically accurate information about human development, anatomy and reproductive health, as well as information about contraception, childbirth and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. It also goes beyond information, helping young people to explore and nurture positive values regarding their sexual and reproductive health. This education includes discussions about family life, relationships, culture and gender roles, and also addresses human rights, gender equality, and threats such as discrimination and sexual abuse. Taken together, these programmes help young people develop self-esteem and life skills that encourage critical thinking, clear communication, and responsible decision-making and respectful behavior [23].

According to Cath Hakanson, children from age 2 should know the names of all their body parts correctly. They should know that boys and girls are different but also the same, that some of the body parts are private and not for everyone to see. They should know the simplest and most basic concept of production and they should know that they are the boss of their bodies and they have a right to say who can touch their body in their early childhood. The easiest age to teach sex education is during children's preschool years. At that age, they are like empty sponges ready to soak up information about anything and everything [5].

Beyond just exploring their gender and what it means to be a boy or a girl, young children also begin exploring their sexuality. Even though it may seem uncomfortable or embarrassing to think about, some sexual exploration is normal and perfectly healthy for young children in the Preoperational stage of development [13].

Children often ask lots of questions about their bodies. Many questions focus on reproductive and elimination organs, as well as how babies are made. Children of this age are also interested in examining their own genitals; it is common for them to masturbate periodically as they learn how their bodies react to stimulation. Many children also engage in sexual touching behavior with children their own age, as they start to explore how they are alike or different from their friends [13].

Caregivers should try to react calmly to children's sexual exploration behavior. Each family will need to decide how best to handle these situations. However, generally speaking, it's best if caregivers can avoid reacting in a highly emotional manner, so that children can learn that sexuality is normal behavior rather than something that's "dirty" or shameful [17].

Sexuality education is one of the most debatable health education programs as far as its inclusion in Early Childhood Education is concerned. A study was conducted in order to investigate early childhood future educators' attitudes and considerations about introducing sexuality education to their future pupils. A qualitative research method: semi-structured interviews for two groups of students in the Department of Educational Studies in Early Childhood, University of Northern Greece. The results revealed that the students who had chosen and successfully completed a course about early childhood sexuality education were the ones who indicated the subject as one of the basic ones to be taught in the kindergarten [4].

A research on Teachers' perceptions of sex education of primary school children was conducted 22 teachers participated. It was found that from the participants' point of views, the school and the family are two important institutions in children sex education. However, teachers are not sufficiently competent in sex behavior education.

Inappropriate policies, resource limitations, and the family cultural structure are obstacles in sex education of children in schools. The participants believe that training approaches in sex-related topics providing sufficient resources improving knowledge and skills of teachers in the area of sex education of pupils and effective interaction between families and school authorities should be prioritized [1].

The majority of governments in Europe and Central Asia use national policies to protect the rights of children and young people to access information related to their health and well-being. Countries as diverse as Albania, Estonia and Germany have specific policies that ensure child and youth-friendly services. However, schools retain great freedom in the way in which they develop sexuality-education lessons. In several countries of Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia such as Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and Tajikistan, the protection of adolescents' sexual and reproductive health and the right to school-based sexuality education is clearly written in legislation on public health or reproductive health and rights; governmental bodies, health and educational institutions are mandated with the working out of curricula. Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and Norway have introduced age-appropriate sexuality education at pre-school age, in other words before the age of six [24].

In the Netherlands, the approach, known as "comprehensive sex education," starts as early as age 4. By law, all primary school students in the Netherlands must receive some form of sexuality education [14].

Close to 10 years after its first edition, a fully updated International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education has been published by UNESCO that advocates quality comprehensive sexuality education to promote health and well-being, respect for human rights and gender equality. It empowers children and young people to lead healthy, safe and productive lives.

The Technical Guidance is designed to assist education policy makers in all countries design accurate and age-appropriate curricula for children and young people aged 5 – 18+(UNAIDS,2018).Karin Hulshof, Regional Director for UNICEF East Asia and Pacific stated that research from around the world shows that comprehensive sexuality education in schools is absolutely the best way to prepare children for adulthood. According to his statement, there are more than one billion 10 to 19-year-olds in the world today. These children are growing up in circumstances quite different from those of their parents. They face both the benefits and risks of mobile internet access. The environment in which they are making decisions about their sexual and reproductive health is rapidly changing. In order for sex education to be effective, it needs to reach young people before they become sexually active. It needs to be age-appropriate and delivered in a participatory and engaging way that is based on science and facts [9].

## 6. METHODOLOGY

### • Research Participants:

11 teachers took part in the research. The teachers were selected purposively with the inclusion criteria that they have to teach any classes between pre-primary to Grade 3. That is, they need to be teachers of children of age group 5 to 8 years. All of them were females. The participants were from both Government Primary School and English Medium School situated in Dhanmondi and Mirpur. Their teaching experience varied from 2 to 20 years.

### • Research Site:

Teachers from English and Bangla Medium schools situated in Dhanmondi and Mirpur were taken for convenience. These areas represent the Urban Dhaka.

### Research Approach:

In this study, teachers' perception on sex education was being explored. It required in depth understanding of the participants' perspectives and data reflected the participants' perspective on the topic, hence a qualitative research was conducted for this study.

### • Data Collection Methods and Tools:

Qualitative methods, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interviews (IDI) were used to collect data. 2 FGDs and 2 in-depth interviews were conducted. One FGD consisted of 6 teachers from a Government Primary School and another FGD consisted of 5 teachers from an English Medium School. Two in-depth interviews of teachers were taken. One interview was taken of a teacher from Government Primary School and another interview was taken of Head of Pre-primary of an English Medium School.

### • Data Collection Procedure:

The Researcher approached to Principals of Schools and asked for their consent to conduct FGDs. Information sheet and consent form were developed to take prior approval of Principals of schools and participants. Prior to commencement of data collection, an appropriate relationship was established with the Principals of the Schools by the researcher in order to obtain permission and conduct the study. Two FGDs were conducted with two homogenous groups of 5 and 6 teachers consecutively. The FGDs were conducted following FGD guidelines. The entire process of FGD, beginning from meeting the participants and introductory comments to ending the FGD with

thanking took 60-90 minutes. The discussion itself took 45 to 60 minutes.

The FGD started after explaining the purpose of the study and after verbal consent was given by the participants. The length of each session was 45- 60 minutes. All information was recorded with the aid of an audio recorder with permission. Notes were also written by hand. For the In- depth Interviews, at the beginning the interviewer/researcher introduced herself to the interviewees. Two separate interviews were taken. Each interviewee was given all the information regarding the purpose of the study and then with the consent of the interviewee, the interview was taken. In the interviews divergent questions were asked and interviewees were probed to elaborate their answers and thoughts. The length of IDI was 30 minutes. The interviews were closed by thanking the interviewee. Data was recorded manually and by audio recording with the participants' consent.

- **Data Analysis:**

Data was analyzed throughout the duration of the study. Analysis begins with the first interaction with the participants. Detailed notes were taken during interviews and focus group discussion. Notes were taken of the observations seen. Voice recorder was used to record all details.

All notes had dates and was read and re-read to make sure it was eligible and organized in computer file. Voice recorder was heard several times before data was transcribed to sentences. The process is described below:

- Transcribing the data
- Reading, Memoing and Describing
- Categorization
- Interpretation

## 7. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand the perception of teachers' perception on sex education for children aged between 5 to 8 years of Urban Dhaka. The study employed qualitative methods with FGD and In-depth Interview to collect data. Two FGDs with teachers and two in-depth interviews were conducted. Participants expressed their views, thoughts, observations and experience regarding the matter. The findings are presented fewer than three main themes:

- Understanding of the term sex education,
- Importance of sex education of children from an early age and
- Teachers as sex educators.
- Demographic information of participants

The age range of the teachers was between 25 to 50 years. 4 of the teachers had Bachelors degree and 7 of them had Masters Degree. Their teaching experience varied from 2 to 31 years. They teach in classes starting from pre-primary to Grade 5. The teachers from Government Primary were from Middle Class while the teachers from English Medium School were from upper Middle Class Background. All the teachers were female.

**Table-1: The demographic details of the participants are presented in the following.**

Age	Gender	Teaches Class	Teaching Experience	Education level
36	Female	Preprimary –Grade 5	11	M.COM
51	Female	Grade 3-Grade 5	31	M.A
37	Female	Preprimary –Grade 5	9	M.Sc.
40	Female	Pre-primary	18	BSS, B-ED
38	Female	Grade 1-Grade5	18	B.A
38	Female	Grade 1-Grade 5	12	M.A
45	Female	Pre-primary	18years	MS ECD
25	Female	Pre-primary	2years	MA ELT

26	Female	Pre-primary	4years	BA English
26	Female	Pre-primary	18years	MSc ECD
45	Female	Pre-primary	20years	BA Bangla

## 8. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to explore and understand teachers' perception on sex education for children aged between 5 and 8 years in Urban Dhaka. The issues that emerged during the study discussed in this section based on the findings to draw conclusion. Lastly, some recommendations are suggested.

## 9. FINDINGS

The findings revealed that all teachers have some knowledge on sex education but it varies in degree on how much they know about the comprehensive nature of sex education. To most participants from Government Primary School, sex education for children means educating children about the genders: male and female and gender equality. That is, boys and girls are equals when it comes to performing tasks. Participants from English Medium School viewed sex education as creating awareness for children to protect themselves from abuse and molestation. But over all, the participants lack the knowledge of how sex education is integrated together with physical aspects (gender differences), emotional aspects, that is vulnerability of children when they go through the body changes and awareness they need to protect them sexual predators. Teachers' training and workshops is needed to make teachers understand the comprehensive nature of sex education. They need to know all the aspects of sex education before they can teach them to the students.

It must be also discussed that these differences in perceptions are due to cultural and socio-economic differences of the students of the two schools. During the In-depth interview with one of the teachers of the Government Primary School, the participant indicated that parents are very concerned about the safety of the girl children. Mothers often ask the girls not to sit with the boys. Boys of the school replicate what they see at home or their surroundings. They see cleaning up after playing as the job of the girls. They differentiate between the jobs of the two genders. Hence, participants from the Government Primary School emphasizes on gender equality. Participants are more concerned about creating a space where girls and boys have mutual respect and see each other as equals. In contrast, the participants from English Medium School did not voice a word about gender equality during the interview or FGD. Hence, it can be gathered that gender inequality is not an underlying issue to them. These participants view sex education as creating awareness for children about good and bad touch. The participants emphasize on teaching children about body parts and how the children should be able to protect their private parts. Government has to take these differences into account when designing curriculum that fits all schools. School Management should also arrange parenting session for the mothers to discuss with them the existing issues, how the new curriculum aims to eliminate or rectify it and mothers' view on it. Mothers need to be counselled where needed.

All the participants understand age appropriateness of sex education. The concept of what should be taught in what age is not concrete but main understanding is there. A curriculum needs to be set where the topics are well defined and set according to the understanding level of the different age groups of the children. Teachers need to be trained to clearly understand the age wise teachings of sex education. They need to be trained to teach in ways that the children are able to grasp it. It must be noted that different age group requires different teaching techniques.

When asked if sex education is in the curriculum of pre-primary education, participants from both the schools answered that it is not. Head of Pre-primary of the English Medium School who was a participant informed that she would put it after this FGD. She also informed that even though sex education is not formally in the curriculum, she has taken steps to create awareness of sexual abuse by showing the children a short film "komol" on sex abuse. It must be noted that there are parts of sex education in the national pre-primary curriculum of Bangladesh. The response of the teachers of the Government Primary School shows that teachers are not aware that the topic of how to protect oneself from abuse under shashtho o nirapotta falls under sex education or this topic is not given importance. After designing a curriculum, workshops need to be arranged to teach teachers the importance of the topics and the ways to impart it to students that they will be able to understand them. Teachers need to be made aware of the topics first. Later, monitoring must be done to see if teachers are providing sex education effectively.

The participants agree that sex education should be in the curriculum but they differ at what age it should be taught. Some believe it should be taught as late as at the age of 12 years, whereas, some believe it should be taught as early as 3 years. From personal experiences with their own children and teaching students, most participants believe that

the scenario is changing. Children learn about sex from their home, surrounding and technology way before they are adolescents. Hence, the children should be taught comprehensive sex education as per age in school from early years.

All the participants irrespective of government and private schools agree there are only benefits in teaching sex education. There are challenges but no demerits in teaching sex education. The benefits are many and includes, creating awareness, understanding of gender equality, reduce in abuse and change in social views in the future.

The challenges in incorporating sex education are many. One major challenge is parents' attitude toward teaching sex education. It was interesting to find that parents of students in English Medium School have rather conservative ideas on what their children should know about sex education. The participants discussed that a parent was offended for showing her child a movie "komol" on sex abuse. It was also suggested that if the term sex education can be change into another more acceptable term, parents maybe more open in accepting it. Parents- teachers meeting must be called before incorporating any topic that is sensitive. It is important that School Management explains the need for sex education and how it will benefit the children and protect them before teaching it to the children. It must be noted that this concept is new for parents, since they have not received sex education during their school years. Also, Government can launch campaigns to promote importance of sex education for children helping parents understand its importance.

In Government Primary schools, children of different ages read in the same class. Children of different ages have different understanding level. Hence, teaching age appropriate sex education in any one class can become a little difficult. Children should be divided according to their age during sex education class so that children of the same age receive the same knowledge.

Teachers will need support from School Management and the Government. Special trainings and workshops need to be arranged to prepare the teachers to become sex educators. It will be helpful for some teachers to attend workshops that will prepare them mentally. Topics of the curriculum need to be elaborately explained and discussed so that the teachers have full understanding of them and their importance. Trainings need to be given on teaching techniques for different age groups of children. Reading materials have to be developed. Activities need to be designed and explained so that the teachers can carry them out.

Lastly, it has to be a joint effort by teachers and family members in providing age appropriate sex education to the children. If teachers in school and parents and family members at home can be a little more vigilant, children can be saved from the traumas of childhood abuse. Along with teachers training on sex education, parent's workshop in understanding its importance is equally important. Parent's workshops can be arranged in schools by the school management.

After initiation of sex education in schools, it needs to be monitored at a regular interval that classes are taking place and sex education is being effective.

## 10. CONCLUSIONS

The present study tried to extract an in depth understanding about the teachers' perception on sex education for children aged 5 to 8 years of Urban Dhaka. Through this study, the gaps in the teachers' understanding of sex education could be identified. The obstacles in providing sex education could be identified too. The teachers could elaborately voice the support that they need in order to become sex education providers. Therefore, the purpose of the study has been achieved.

The findings of this study can help parents, ECD Professionals, School Management, teachers and even Education Ministry of the government to understand the importance of sex education, the challenges that lay ahead in providing sex education and the necessary steps to take to ensure more emphasis is given on sex education in the curriculum.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance to the current study following recommendation may be considered:

- Government should make sex education compulsory for all schools to make it an essential part of their curriculum.
- The materials should be age appropriate, starting from pre-primary till Grade 8
- Sex education provided should be uniformed in all schools. It should take into account all the different kinds of schools and the students they teach. It should be tailor fit to all.
- Trainings and workshops need to be arranged to train teachers to become sex education providers.
- Parents meeting should be called by school management to make them aware of the necessity of teaching sex education.

- Government and other organizations should come forward to create awareness and campaigns against sexual abuse and promoting sex education
- A monitoring board needs to be established to monitor and evaluate sex education classes

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