

Making a Case for Sexuality Education in India

The Zero Period Survey



Foreword



Seema Bansal
Partner and Director –
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Boston Consulting Group

Our world is becoming a more and more complex space to navigate. This is all the more real for the youth, as they move out of the protective cocoon that childhood offers them and don't yet have the benefit of the maturity that adult-life brings. Stepping into adolescence is perhaps one of the most challenging phases of any person's life. The pace of change is rapid – internally within oneself; and externally within the immediate as well as the larger context that one lives and operates in - and often confusing. How does society provide the necessary scaffolding that the young need through this phase? How do we offer them information, knowledge, perspective, insights, safe spaces to talk and safety nets to fall back upon?

One of the critical elements that youth struggle with at this life stage is understanding sexuality – physically and emotionally. On one hand this continues to be an uncomfortable topic at home and in school and on the other there is increasing evidence that sexuality education is helping countries achieve specific sustainable development goals and interlinked goals of quality education, well-being, gender equality and human rights.

In this, the role of the school, the teacher, the peer group – basically the entire education system - in which a child spends nearly 33% of their waking hours cannot be undermined. National Education Policy, 2020, creates significant focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Life Skills. Although sexuality education finds no direct mention in the new National Education Policy, the launch of the

Foreword

Health and Wellness Curriculum and related Ambassador Initiative in February 2020 is an important signal to the education system.

While the broader narrative is seeming to fall into place, there is currently inadequate action on the round. Lack of resources, unstructured approach and limited teacher sensitization inhibit implementation in terms of breadth and depth. What this needs is a pause and plan effort. A fresh look at the curricular frameworks in place, the resources available in terms of experts, learning materials as well as the nature of the classroom transaction and discourse. The pandemic and related school closures affords an opportunity to reflect on these and restart the schools with these new tenets.

In this context, this report can play a tremendous role.

To begin with, it spotlights on hard facts and data from the respondent survey, the urgency of the issues. But more importantly, it presents a practical roadmap. The Zero Period's three-pronged approach of active advocacy, de-stigmatization initiatives in schools and training existing school teachers for grassroots implementation recognizes that the delivery of sexuality education is an ecosystem intervention. By involving all stakeholders (government, schools, non-profits and parents) in the field and delivering a sustainable, accurate and age-appropriate curriculum, it equips children with the right knowledge, attitude and skills to become more empowered, empathetic and informed human beings.

This report is a tremendous resource for CSE advocacy by other civil society organizations as well as government institutions to make a case for sexuality education in schools. Recognizing that the complexity and heterogeneity of India's education system inherently requires a broad set of stakeholders across public-, private- and social-sectors to be involved, this report creates a shared public good to foster a conversation and related action on a topic that is long overdue.



Reviewer's note



Radhika Mittal

Director & Founder of Super
School India

Growing up is not easy. When we are children, everybody is enthusiastic about preparing us for the challenges we will face after school like getting a job. But how about the challenges children are facing during school years? The Zero Period report, through its survey, successfully captured the lives and curiosities of students in urban India during their adolescent years, like experiencing mental/physical changes of puberty, the associated shame and confusion, sexual/gender-based bullying in schools, sexual exploration, gender identity, rights of the LGBTQIA+ communities, and other salient issues. Additionally, it accurately weaved in an explanation of how sex education in schools can support young Indians in not only navigating their adolescent years, but in also having healthy adult lives.

It is noteworthy that every observation made in the report is data-driven, which also helps in dispelling various myths and concerns around sex education. The report is, for most parts, inclusive of the sentiments and challenges faced by queer children. Furthermore, it has drawn a vital link between adolescent years, sex education, and mental health. They have also recognized the limitations of the survey. Through this report, principals, teachers, parents and decision-makers in education bodies will further be able to understand why the role of schools must extend beyond traditional academics, and why schools are best placed to deliver sex education content.

Reviewer's note

Based on my own experience at Super School India of delivering regular sex education to school students, I believe it not only helps them in having a positive, shame-free relationship with their own bodies and all of its natural processes, but it also instills awareness of and respect for people of all genders and sexualities. This is crucial in a country like India that is rife with rape culture, gender-based crime, gender disparities, and sexual health concerns. I have witnessed children transform from using homophobic slurs to becoming allies of the queer movement. After receiving our sex education workshops, students have gone from claiming 'no means try again' and other problematic notions of romantic interest to understanding consent, boundaries and how to respectfully express attraction and accept rejection. And many more positive stories of change.

To school management and teachers, and other stakeholders like parents - I urge you to provide your unwavering support to The Zero Period's program approach of training school teachers to deliver sex education modules. It, like any other new task, is not bereft of its challenges, but it is a worthy journey to embark on. After all, we all only want the best for our children, and introducing regular sex education in schools is the next necessary step towards providing a progressive and holistic school life.

Radhika



Voices from the ecosystem

Kanchan Khandke
Principal, Mayo
College Girl's School



" I would like to congratulate Zero Period for their in-depth analysis of the state of sexuality education in the country, as well as the misconceptions and prejudices that people carry about the same. My compliments to Ms. Joshi and Ms. Tripathi for their insightful study of a topic which people in India have always viewed as a taboo topic.

" The Zero Period has done a remarkable job by building this report, which talks about the urgent need for sex-ed in Indian schools. Their data driven analysis has the potential to open eyes of many schools who avoid this matter because of the taboos around it. It can push us all to have a hard look at what we have been unable to address for a long time. Kudos to the team!



Anil Sharma
Principal, Birla Vidya
Mandir, Nainital

Dr Vijay Datta
Principal, Modern
School, Barakhamba



" Sexuality Education aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being; and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. My best wishes to the team for making efforts to bring it to more and more children to make this world a better place.

" A great report. While COVID left us all in the dark, education did not stop. And soon, we will return back to the same school, and students will start living the same lives. We want to ensure that the "new normal" is nothing like the "same old". This report definitely sheds light on an important piece of education we have been overlooking. A well-designed sex-ed course can help us achieve that.



Ramesh Joshi
Principal, LKSEC,
Gotan, Rajasthan

Shankar S. Adhikari
Principal, The Rajkumar
College, Rajkot



" I would like to congratulate and thank The Zero Period for choosing to research on a case study for Sexuality Education in India and I wholeheartedly root for it. The Pandemic has further robbed the students to interact with teachers who as their research proves, are their proven source to educate them on issues sensitive like mensuration, sexual harassment and more.

Voices from the ecosystem

Divya Shah,
Soft Skills Trainer,
Naandi Foundation



"The report is very comprehensive, and the analysis throws the light upon the dire need for CSE not only for adolescents but also for teachers and parents in India, irrespective of demography. I appreciate the efforts of the team in conducting the survey in a holistic approach. As the survey is conducted in the time of pandemic; it surely provides a new perspective and ideas of delivering CSE in challenging times.

"I believe the work by The Zero Period is commendable in bringing an Indian context research about need for SE in India. I have been working in this field and can support this report for being authentic. I hope this brings some insight for educational institutions to include this curriculum & give educators & professionals a chance to bring about a sustainable change in the society



Shivli Shrivastava
Co-Founder &
Director, Shivtensity

Nilima Achwal, Founder,
The Female Founders
Lab & Iesha Learning



"The Zero Period brings together a comprehensive analysis of the situation of sex education in India and creates a compelling vision for a future where all students have access to a holistic, taboo-free, and positive sexuality and gender education.

"The Zero Period survey has opened space for the Sexuality educators and organizations to come forward and stand firm on their belief that providing sexuality education to the future generation would create a more equal and safer state. The report prominently displays the need and the drawbacks that our current system faces, which helps educators and concerned bodies to take steps in the most suitable direction.



Kavya Bhola
Founder-Director,
TARA Foundation

Mohita and Aastha
Co-Founders, The Yellow
Umbrella Foundation



"The survey conducted by the Zero Period is exemplary and a great milestone in understanding why it's important to implement SE in schools. The survey has attempted to study parameters like understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity along with period shaming and effects of bullying, all of which have the power to cause trauma in a child's life.



Contents

Foreword	02
Reviewer's Note	04
Acknowledgements	10
Abbreviations	11
Introduction: Breaking the Silence	12
Survey highlights	14
At a Glance: The Global Scenario of Sexuality Education	16
The Zero Period Survey	22
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About the Survey• Scope of the Survey• Methodology and Demographics• Survey Results and Inferences	
The Way Forward	40
About The Zero Period	43
Appendices	44
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study Limitations• Reference Material• Glossary	

Acknowledgements

This report shall be deemed as the breeding ground for The Zero Period's origination and its mission to enable sexuality education in India. Naturally, the contribution of each person who saw value in the report's objective and shared their inputs has been greater than they may realize. So, we would like to take this moment to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved with us along the way.

We would first like to thank Seema Bansal, Partner & Director- Social Impact at Boston Consulting Group for her faith in our work and words of appreciation for the report. We also want to thank Radhika Mittal, Founder & Director at Super School India for her meticulous review and encouraging statement about the value of this report, published herewith.

We extend this gratitude to Kavya Bhola, Nilima Achwal, Shivli Shrivastava, Divya Shah, Mohita Munot and Aastha Narang-- who have not only been doing this work for longer than us, but also took the time to review this report and share their thoughts on its value in the sexuality education ecosystem of India. Special gratitude goes to Kanchan Khandke, Anil Sharma, Dr. Vijay Datta, Ramesh Joshi and Shankar S. Adhikari who shared their encouraging words of appreciation for the report and its potential value in the Indian education system, published herewith.

A special thanks goes to Yash Jain, Jyothi Menon and Ridhima Kukreja for their voluntary and remarkable contribution while the report was being synthesized. This gratitude further extends to Pia Malia, Smriti Sharma, Dhruv Khosla, Sampada Bajaj and Pranav Mittal for reviewing the initial drafts and providing us their insightful feedback.

History of all great works is a testament to the fact that active, everpresent support of one's immediate environment can enable unfathomable strides. Our families and friends have been constant pillars of strength and encouragement, without whom we wouldn't have dared to dream big. Especially during a pandemic, this simple fact stands true to life more than ever before.

We thank and appreciate each one of them, as well as the over 2000 respondents who took our survey and shared their personal experiences, which made this report a reality.

Abbreviations

SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
SRR	Sexual and Reproductive Rights
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
UN SDG	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
RKSK	Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram
AFHC	Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS
WHO	World Health Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
EI	Education Index
NIH	National Institute of Health
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education
ICCW	Indian Council for Child and Welfare
NCERT	National Council for Educational Research & Training
MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NACO	National AIDS Control Organization
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and more
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau
POSH	Prevention of Sexual Harassment
GDI	Gender Development Index
HDI	Human Development Index
RH	Reproductive Health
DoE	Department of Education

Breaking the silence

Introduction

India is the second most populous country in the world today; with over 30% of its culturally diverse population which consists of adolescent and young people between ages 10 to 24.¹ With this young demography, India has naturally faced many challenges along its path towards social development. Among many of these challenges, however, lies a deep-seeded issue of knowledge, awareness and acceptance of gender, sex and sexuality education for its youth.

Many young people— in India and across the world— approach adulthood faced with conflicting, negative and confusing messages about sexuality— that are often exacerbated by embarrassment and silence from adults, including parents and teachers.² Especially in a traditionally laced country like India, societal attitude towards these subjects discourages open; informed discussions, leaving the natural curiosity of its youth in the hands of equally unaware peers; and now, the internet.

Seeking information from unregulated and unreliable sources causes more harm than good to young, impressionable minds. This problem is further aggravated by lack of political will and bureaucratic clarity on existing programs that intent to bridge the gap of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) and Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in Indian schools. Experts in the field add that for a country like India, with its literacy and cultural challenges, even addressing the subject of sexuality and sexual rights in schools can potentially entail political backlash.³ Instead of advocating for its normalization, we see life-skill development and healthcare programs are often promoted by the government, to cushion the effects of this controversial terminology.⁴ India has taken concrete legislative steps to tackle sexual harassment, child abuse and other child-related crimes. However, there is international recognition of the fact that the only path to minimize the number of such issues & enhance socioeconomic development in the long run, countries need active, accurate and mandatory education on gender, sex and sexuality— starting from an early age.² Moreover, delivering CSE in schools singlehandedly helps countries meet multiple UN SDG goals.

A significant body of evidence shows that implementing a CSE programme can enable children to develop– accurate and age-appropriate knowledge, attitudes, skills and positive social values to develop safe and healthy relationships in life.² A CSE programme, contrary to conservative belief, also includes aspects of imparting human values, tolerance, upholding moral and societal dignity- which is provided over and above knowledge regarding SRHR. A sustained, age-appropriate integration of Sexuality Education (SE) within a schooling curriculum is vital for its long-term success.

Keeping these facts in mind, this report has been developed to lay evidence for the existing need of a comprehensive model of sexuality education in Indian schools. The report has been divided into two broad segments. The first segment presents some interesting case studies of different nation and their journey in nationally mandating sexuality education. The second segment provides a detailed analysis of the Indian scenario on sexuality education, wherein we also present the results and inferences from The Zero Period’s Survey. We conclude by highlighting some key recommendations for what an ideal SE delivered in India should entail.

Disclaimer and trigger warnings:

This report contains statistical survey results and written content on gender-based bullying and harassment (page 30 & 31) sexual bullying (page 31) sexual experiences due to peer pressure (page 33) sexual harassment and sexual assault (page 34 & 35) and teacher bullying (page 36)

Sexuality Education contributes towards UN SDGs



Survey highlights

71%

respondents did not receive any form of sexuality education during their schooling years

66%

women respondents did not know about menstruation before Class 6

42%

respondents who experienced sexual harassment were below age 12
However, only 11% knew what sexual harassment or abuse meant by then

76%

respondents who experienced sexual harassment during schooling years were unable to recognize it

43%

respondents faced some form of bullying from their teacher(s) in school

63%

respondents who experienced sexual harassment in school agreed that their mental health was negatively impacted due to the same





The Global Scenario of Sexuality Education

A cross-country comparison

The Global Scenario of Sexuality Education

The selection of the seven countries for this review is based on assessing their HDI perimeters— such as their Education Index, Gender Development Index, Government Expenditure on Education (as a percentage of their GDP), HIV prevalence rate, among others— in comparison to India's indices. Apart from Norway, which has topped the HDI 2020 rankings, the other six are a part of the G20 nations, along with India. Moreover, the history, intervention and current status on a national sexuality education curriculum in the following seven countries gives us an interesting glimpse of the diverse ways in which sexuality education has evolved and is being implemented across the world today.

United Kingdom

History & Status: Sex & Relationship Education (SRE) was made compulsory from age 11 onwards in UK in 1999 under the PSHE framework. The curriculum was previously revised in year 2000, till recently done again in September 2019. Despite facing political opposition, England revised its RE curriculum for primary schools & SRE curriculum for secondary schools, made mandatory by the UK Government.⁵

Curriculum: The 2019 revised version of RE and SRE involves teaching children about reproduction, sexuality & sexual health. While some parts of the SRE curriculum are mandatory as a part of the national curriculum for science, parents can choose to withdraw their children from other parts. Schools are free to determine how to deliver the curriculum as issued in the Statutory Guidance by the Department of Education (DoE) of UK- which serves as a comprehensive guide on step-by-step teaching approach for children.⁵

Known Drawbacks: It is inferred from the Statutory Guide issued by DoE of UK that the guidelines give local schools huge autonomy to ideate & implement RE and SRE model as per parental provision on study material, and community acceptance of the curriculum. This executive autonomy, though recognizably necessary on a national level, can potentially come in the way of delivering a well-rounded RE and SRE class for every student.

Japan

History & Status: Japan's SE was at the forefront in the 1990s. However, its evolution regressed due to multiple controversies. Campaigns to stop SE erupted after people learned that a school was teaching mentally-disabled children about sex using songs and dolls in 2003. The Tokyo Board of Education revised its handbook on SE in 2004, emphasizing age-appropriateness and mental fitment. In 2018, however, an incident regarding contraception and abortion class given to junior high school children occurred, which led to further backlash. These unfortunate events led to the status of SE in Japanese schools remain unclear to this day.⁶

Curriculum: The ambiguity on having a nationally mandated curriculum posed as a limitation to this report. Through articles and testimonials of experts in the field, we infer that the National Curriculum Standards does not include sufficient information about biological and scientific facts of reproduction. Moreover, information regarding gender roles through textbooks is claimed by industry experts to be "highly misinformed and misaligned with UNESCO CSE Guide Standards".⁷

Known Drawbacks: Apart from the drawbacks mentioned above, SE in Japanese schools is lacking in sufficient number of hours devoted towards it in schools where its implemented. Moreover, it has also been reported that male faculty, which is often responsible to conduct it as yoga and physical education teachers, refrains from diving deeper into SRHR topics due to the sensitivity around this subject.⁷

Germany

History & Status: Sex Education has been part of German school curricula since 1970. However, since 1992, the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) and state authorities are by law assigned to implement and conduct SE. When to begin and which topics to emphasize on for different age groups may differ, depending on the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs of the respective state. This multisectoral approach ensures high quality SE for different age groups.⁸

Curriculum: SE in Germany is known to be comprehensive—including physical, emotional, social & interpersonal subjects. “Soft” topics such as gender equality, sexual diversity & Sexual Reproductive Rights (SRR) became prominent in schools after 2005. Special focus is laid on consent, effective communication and use of contraception for post-adolescent children. Comic books on SRH and teacher support through counselling institutions enables an all-round effective implementation of SE.

Known Drawbacks: In recent years, teachers and experts alike have come forward to recommend teacher training courses for all states, so that a teacher can feel more comfortable talking to children about rather “hard” topics such as sexuality, sexual orientation, sexual harassment, etc. More emphasis on this can better an already credible curriculum within the country.

China

History & Status: In 2010, the State Council issued the Outline for the Child Development in China, which required schools to incorporate SRH education into their compulsory curriculum. Although, as of 2018, no national curriculum requirements exist that covered the full range of SE topics that are internationally recognized. New efforts, however, are being made to promote SE through the Healthy China Initiatives— recognized by WHO and UNICEF in 2019.^{9,10}

Curriculum: A study conducted by UNFPA in 2018 showed that Chinese schools adopted an integrative model for SE— with no set frequency for teaching SE; nor specific number of hours allocated to it. The SE taught in schools covers topics related to SRH, self-esteem, sexual differences, heterosexual relationships and self-protection. The report also indicated towards insufficient coverage of topics such as violence, gender, sexual behaviour and orientation, birth control and abortion.¹⁰

Known Drawbacks: Apart from the lack of a fixed curriculum, two significant shortcomings that the UNFPA study revealed were the lack of specialized teacher training, and insufficient teaching resources. Less than half of the teachers reported having a written syllabus, or a teachers’ guide or other teaching materials for SE in their schools.¹¹

South Africa

History & Status: In 1995, the South African Department of Education developed the National Policy on HIV/AIDS Education, following the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the country, to create and implement a Life Skills Curriculum in schools. However, only later in 2013, the Ministers of Education and Health along with representatives from 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa affirmed a landmark commitment to support SE and SRH services for adolescents and young people.¹²

Curriculum: South Africa does not have a widely adopted, detailed, scripted curriculum for SE. However, it has Curriculum & Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) for four different grade levels, R-3; 4-6; 7-9 & 10-12 Grades. These specify broad topics to be covered during each grade, with number of hours allowed for different topics. CAPS broadly cover topics of gender rights, STDs, HIV care, cultural values, peer pressure & abuse.¹² In 2018, UNESCO implemented the O3 Program (Our Rights, Our Lives, Our Future) in Africa with an aim to implement its CSE model in Sub-Saharan Africa.¹³

Known Drawbacks: The CAPS model misses out on a wide range of important subjects like healthy ; unhealthy relationships; chances and consequences of pregnancy; methods of contraception; sexuality; skills of self-defence; STI testing and RH. While CAPS provide guidance to teachers, there is an absence of resources to strengthen teacher’s awareness. They find it challenging to conduct classes appropriately as their students come from diverse backgrounds, age groups and religious affiliations.

USA

History & Status: From 1960s onwards, public support for sexuality education in schools began to gain widespread support in USA. After various non-governmental efforts, it was only in 2009 that the US Government budgeted \$190 million towards Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) and Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP).¹⁴ Today, 39 out of the 50 states and the District of Columbia mandate SE and/or HIV education. However, there is no federal policy requiring instructions on comprehensive sexuality education.¹⁵

Curriculum: Lack of a nationally mandated curriculum has resulted in wide disparity in execution of CSE across USA. However, it's important to note that non-government organizations have made tremendous efforts in ensuring children receive medically accurate information through their SE programs. In January 2012, a consortium of organizations – The Future of Sex Education Initiative (FoSE) – published its National Sexuality Education Standards for K-12. In 2015, Planned Parenthood developed a 3-year middle school curriculum (Get Real), which was also added to the list of effective evidence based programs.¹⁶

Known Drawbacks: Despite widespread public support, particularly from parents, there is no nationally mandated curriculum for SE, which remains to be the biggest roadblock in ensuring every US child receives accurate and age-appropriate information. Lack of a nationally implemented curriculum provides excessive autonomy to states in the ideation and implementation of effective CSE within its schools. For example, only 17 states require the SE curriculum to be medically accurate. Out of 50 states, 36 states and the District of Columbia allow parents the option to remove their child from SE instructions. 6 states require only negative information to be provided on homosexuality and/or positive emphasis on heterosexuality, and so on.¹⁵

Case study: Norway is a leading example in delivering quality sexuality education

Norway, published the Interim Model Curriculum for Elementary Schools as early as 1971 (for age groups 7-16), which went beyond “human reproduction” to also include sexual desire, masturbation, homosexuality, contraception, family planning, abortion and venereal disease. The Model later concretized in 1974.¹⁷

SE in Norway is called ‘Seksualundervisning’ and is integrated into the curriculum, mainly through Biology lessons. Parents cannot withdraw their children from these lessons. Biology teachers & school nurses are responsible for its implementation in schools. The topics covered for pre-adolescent children are society, relationships, diverse families, puberty, friendships. Post tenth grade, topics such as intercourse, STIs, contraception and avoiding unwanted pregnancies are taught. The government has educational programs to guide teachers in planning their lessons as well.¹⁸



NORWAY

Enforced mandatory Sexuality Education as a part of school curriculum in 1971

Looking at India

4 in 10 transgender people faced sexual abuse before turning 18 years of age¹⁹

109 children in India are sexually abused everyday²⁰

1 in 3 women has likely experienced intimate partner violence in India²¹

99% of Juvenile apprehended for crimes are boys²²

88 rape cases were reported in India everyday in 2019²³

37% parents reported their child has been cyberbullied in India²⁴

50% maternal deaths in India happen among women aged 19-24²⁵

87% of HIV transmission in 2015-16 was due to unprotected sex²⁶



Despite having the largest adolescent population in the world, India has one of the most complex histories with providing sexuality education to its youth. SE in India has sifted through many cultural and political obstacles over the last five decades. The need to introduce SE in schools was first brought up in 1976, at a seminar held by Indian Council for Child and Welfare (ICCW), where attendees urged to de-shame the subject, and get families and teachers involved in its implementation.²⁷ However, it was much later in 2006, that a formal establishment of Adolescence Education Program (AEP), developed and implemented by MHRD, NCERT, NACO and UNFPA was launched.

The AEP model aimed to “provide young people with accurate, age-appropriate and culturally relevant information; promote healthy attitudes and develop skills to enable them to respond to real-life situations effectively.” AEP entailed a systemic top-down approach of advocating, training and implementing an overall life-skills education program, along with knowledge around HIV/AIDS and its prevention. It targeted secondary and senior secondary school students.²⁸ However, it is important to note that AEP did not set out a clear objective to provide CSE, but addressed issues within the same with a stronger focus on developing life skills. Its revised conceptual framework addressed gender equality and SRHR. However, its examples are limited to heteronormative frameworks, and could have reinforced gender-based stereotypes.²⁹

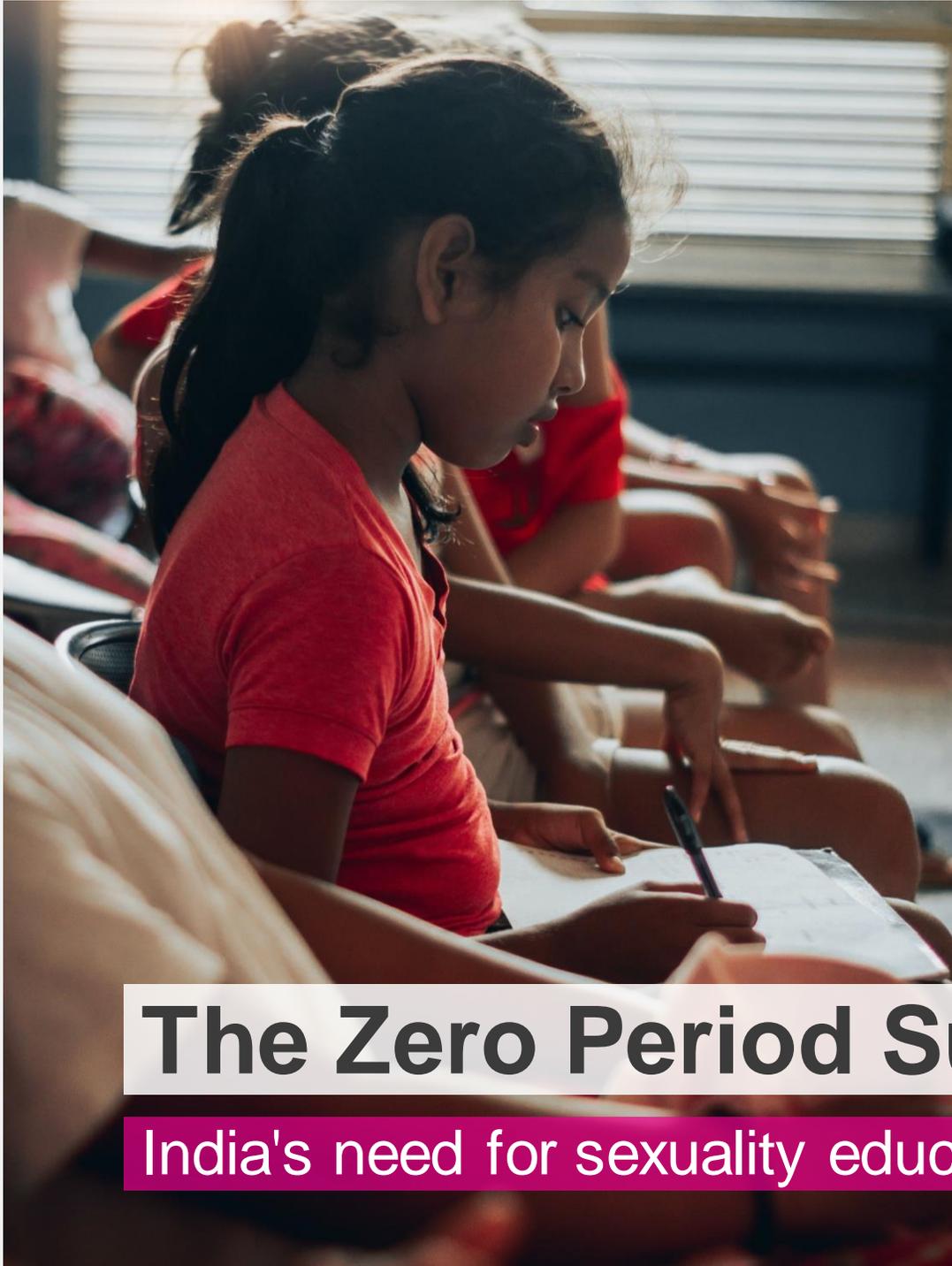
This model— though barely comprehensive in its content and approach as per international standards— ran into many bureaucratic controversies since its inception. 12 state governments banned its implementation in 2007. Some argued that it causes innocent children to be curious about sexual matters, mentally corrupt them, and harm the Indian culture.²⁹

Such deep-rooted opposition from schools, families and communities came in the way of nationally mandating the AEP curriculum.

In 2014, the National Adolescent Health Mission (NAHM) launched the ambitious Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) programme, envisaging a converged approach to address adolescent health, by linking peer educators to the Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics (AFHC). RKSK concentrates on health promotion amongst adolescents by addressing nutrition, SRHR, violence, substance abuse, NCDs and mental health through a peer-based learning model. The School Health Program of 2018 is aligned with RKSK.³⁰

The Government of India launched its National Health and Wellness Curriculum or Ambassador Initiative in February 2020, which falls under the School Health Program of its Ayushman Bharat Scheme. This curriculum was jointly formulated by MoHFW, MHRD, and NCERT; and it includes a comprehensive list of topics within sexuality education such as emotional and mental wellbeing, SRH, sexual violence and many other important concepts. It is said to be rolled out in a phased manner for secondary and senior-secondary schools.³¹ Although the curriculum lags in meeting complete SRHR goals, the resource material for classroom teaching and ambassador training is yet to be formalized.

This goes to show that despite nationally recognized value of sexuality education, efforts towards its implementation have been ad-hoc, and have come with no safeguard against public backlash. The COVID-19 pandemic only makes matters worse. We do not know when students will be returning to schools. Hence, the dream of a nation-wide sexuality education class for all its youth continues to remain a huge and urgent challenge for India.



The Zero Period Survey

India's need for sexuality education

About the survey

The survey conducted by The Zero Period presents a need assessment report, to understand and capture the reality of sexuality education in India. Given the lack of a nationally implemented curriculum in India, this survey was primarily built with four focus areas:

1. **Baseline scenario of sexuality education in India:** Existing scope of sexuality education currently provided by different types of Indian schools
2. **Experiences through self-discovery:** Experiences of school graduates while they discovered their own gender, sex & sexuality as children
3. **Harassment during school years:** Specific experiences with harassment, bullying, stereotyping, etc. during their schooling years
4. **Interdependence of various aspects of student-life:** Correlation between sexuality education, mental health, and overall learning experience of a student

The aim of the survey was to lay evidence through capturing real-life experiences of school graduates, so that they can provide personal account of their experiences around these subjects during schooling years. The survey report attempts to make a cogent case for sexuality education in India; highlighting the various ways in which it can benefit a student's overall schooling experience, by making them more equipped to handle daily-life experiences in a better, more informed manner. The following section presents the results of this survey. By summarizing the data received through the survey, we infer the extent to which schools have already made efforts to include some aspects of sexuality education in schools, as well as highlight various existing gaps in delivering a comprehensive SE curriculum: one which is consistent, scalable and includes both teachers and students.

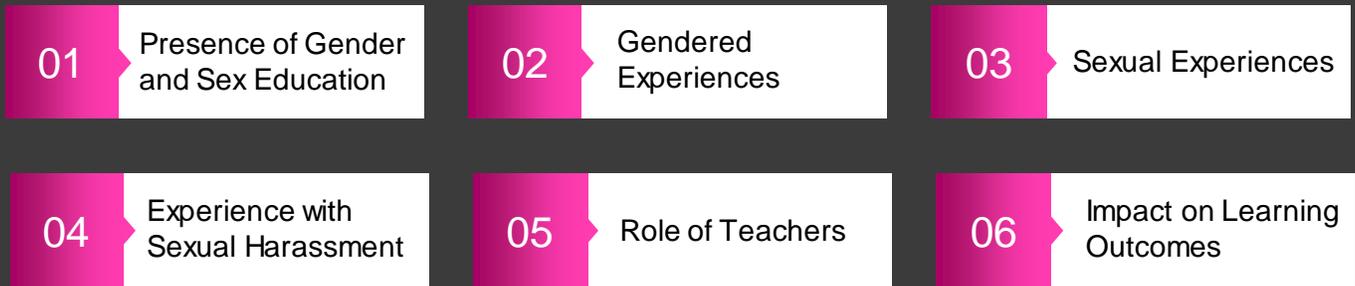
The survey entailed an elaborate questionnaire- primarily targeting young audience which graduated from their schools less than seven years ago. This questionnaire was circulated through digital sources only. It was designed to include hard, and often intimate questions regarding its respondent's experiences around these subjects during schooling years.

Scope of the survey

This survey was inspired by and broadly structured on the basis of the seven key concepts of teachings highlighted in UNICEF's Comprehensive Sexuality Education Guide of 2018. The final layout of questioning within the survey was kept more relevant to the Indian audience and India's cultural realities. It was ensured that the survey maintains anonymity and inclusivity. The team encouraged diversity during its digital outreach. The questionnaire does not deflect towards any form of class or culture interrogation of its respondents. It took respondent's consent to use their details for aggregating results. It also included trigger warnings wherever necessary, along with ensuring no question was marked mandatory to answer.



Sections of the Survey Results

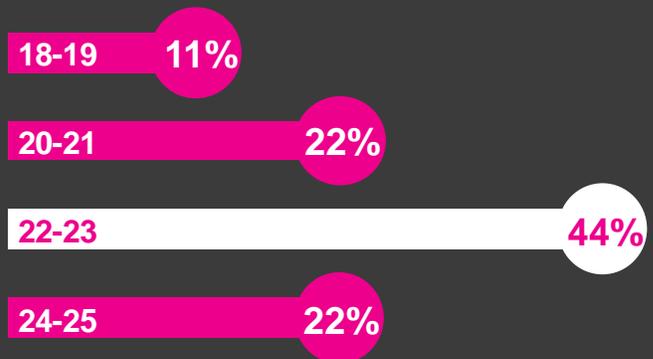


Demographics

Total respondents: 2,051



Age



City³²



To analyse the results of the survey, the information received per respondent was aggregated and bifurcated in aforementioned demographic segments, to study and highlight gaps that reflect a lack of Comprehensive Sexuality Education for students of different gender, sexual identities, geographical location and school ownership. The findings of this study have been divided into six parts. The first part lays evidence for the existing scenario of Sexuality Education in India in the past seven years; which is followed by four parts which summarize findings for particular target groups. The last part presents respondent's views on how the lack of sexuality education impacts student's mental health, and consequentially their overall learning experience in school.

Presence of Gender and Sexuality Education

One of the elementary features of this survey was to assess the current existence of sexuality education in India, via its respondents' experiences during their schooling years over the last seven years. Questions were designed to understand the exposure school students have with the concepts within sexuality education delivered in their schools, and how it varied across cities and among students with different gender and sexual identities.

Sexuality education classes or workshops (Excluding menstrual care workshops)

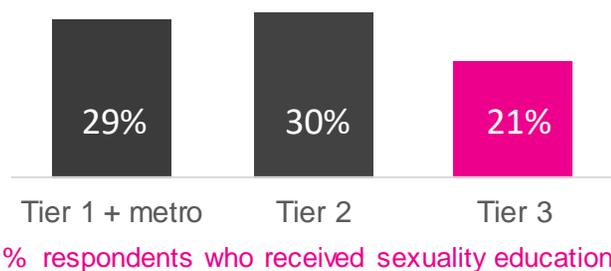
Figure 1.1: Students who received sexuality education



Despite governmental and civil society efforts over the last decade, the survey results show that out of the total number of respondents, less than three in ten respondents received some form of school authorized sexuality education during their schooling years. This data also points to whether respondents' school was accepting of the need of sexuality education.

The lack of a nationally mandated SE curriculum in India leaves onus of its delivery on independent school authorities.³³

Figure 1.2: City tier division for presence of sexuality education



We observed that respondents from Tier 1 and 2 cities were marginally more exposed to some form of sexuality education in schools than respondents from Tier 3 cities. Moreover, the form of SE received by the reported 29% of the respondents remains subject to wide variability due to lack of any nationally recognized, age-appropriate study material on the subject.

Abuse prevention training

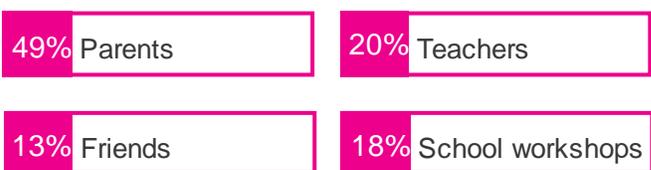
This analysis reflects that one in every two respondents was not given adequate abuse prevention training in school, leaving them susceptible to not knowing what to do in case such situation occurs.

Figure 1.2: Students who received abuse prevention training



Of those who were aware of what sexual abuse means, more than half of them got the information through non-institutional or informal sources like their parents and friends.

Figure 1.3: Sources of abuse prevention training



In 2017, NCERT made an effort in this direction and issued guidelines to publish infographic description of Safe Touch & Unsafe Touch in all its books.³⁴ However, live workshops by teachers or experts on this subject have yet not been mandated in India. Therefore, children are left to voluntarily understand this crucial aspect regarding their own sexual security.

Menstrual care workshops

Menstruation— commonly known as periods— is the most widely known biological process which, ironically, is also kept the most concealed in the daily lives within many conservative communities. It has had a history of stigmas attached to it. Be it religious, social or cultural, women and men may feel ashamed to address it openly with the other sex.³⁵ Although menstrual awareness & use of sanitary means of managing menstruation has seen a lot of advocacy over the last few decades, it still remains an inherently embarrassing subject to be brought up with young children. A 2019 study titled ‘Menstrual hygiene management among Adolescent Girls in India’ found that only 48% girls were aware about menstruation prior to their first period.³⁶ Adolescent years- age 10-12 years old is generally when menstruators menarche. Our survey showed similar results, where we observed that about three out of five menstruators did not receive formal menstrual awareness workshop before they first started mensurating, leaving them privy to embarrassment, fear and resentment towards their bodies due to lack of biological knowledge in early adolescent years.³⁷

Our findings reflected the same gap, identifying that 66% of menstruators did not know about menstruation till class 6th

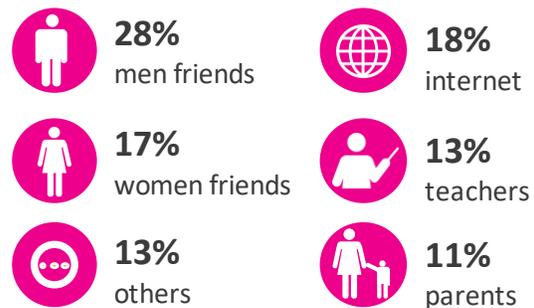
No access to menstrual hygiene is the fifth biggest killer of women in the world.³⁸ National Family Health Survey of 2015-2016 estimates that of the 336 million menstruating women in India, only about 121 million (roughly 36%) women are using sanitary napkins, locally or commercially produced, which implies the rest 64% have no access to, or are unaware of sanitary importance of menstrual management.

Figure 1.4: Women who received menstrual care workshops



Another interesting aspect that the survey attempted to observe was men's experiences with menstrual awareness. During schooling years, almost half of all men respondents agreed that they discovered menstruation either via men friends or internet. This could lead to misinformation and shame due to a natural curiosity on the subject. Schools should ensure menstruation awareness lessons are hosted for all gender groups alike.

Figure 1.5: Sources through which men found out about menstruation



The survey also aimed to capture their natural response to discovering menstruation.

We found out that almost 10% boys felt uncomfortable with this knowledge, however, 40% were curious to know more.

Half of all men respondents agreed feeling that if they asked their menstruating friends about it, they may hurt their sentiments. This also indicates towards a similar trend: a high degree of subconscious social hesitation and discomfort boys may feel towards a normal biological phenomenon.

Self-defense workshops

Figure 1.6: Women who received self-defense workshops



Although self-defense workshops are not a part of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum, it plays a crucial role in a child's sexual security preparedness. Countries all across the world recognize its importance for school children of all age groups. The survey results show that more than half of its women respondents received school-hosted self-defence workshops. This is a positive reflection of the recognition given to training on self-defense as a part of daily living.

Voices from our survey

“ I am not a quick or physically active person generally, so I was not sure how a self defense workshop will help me when it was conducted in my school. After taking those lessons, I realized that defending oneself is more than just a physical skill. It teaches you how we can be more aware of our surroundings, and helps us feel more confident rather than scared in difficult situations.”

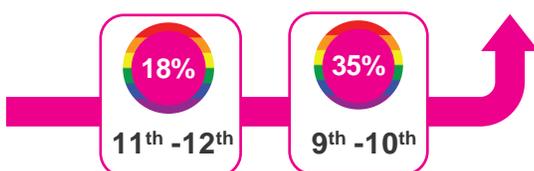
Gendered Experiences

Even today, the most widely misunderstood concept of human psychology and anatomy is gender and sex. The survey intended to recognize the importance of gender-based understanding, issues related to it, and navigating these subjects in adolescent years. The survey captured respondents' personal experiences with understanding concepts of gender; sex; stereotyping; physical, sexual and gender-based bullying during schooling years.

Discovering forms of sexual orientation

Due to long-established social and cultural inhibitions, sexual orientation has been widely known to be monotype in nature— only recognizing heterosexuality, or opposite-sex sexual attraction as “normal”. Media’s portrayal of exclusive heterosexuality, along with political, religious and community representatives publicly standing against other forms of sexual orientation are also probable causes for this. Only recently in 2018, India decriminalized homosexuality. However, same-sex marriages are still not legal in India.³⁹ Homosexuality continues to be a crime in 70 countries.⁴⁰ Sexual orientation among humans is multifaceted. However, in India, this knowledge is yet to reach children through the right sources in an age-appropriate manner.

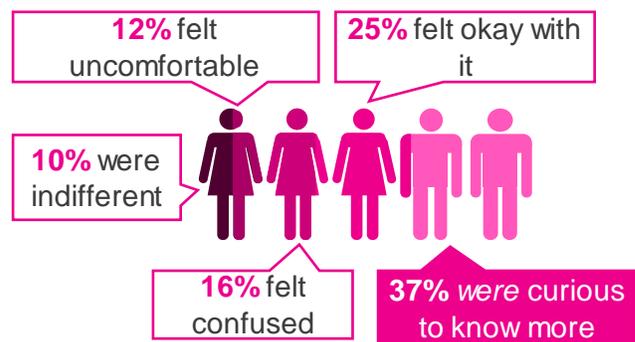
Figure 2.1: Percentage of respondents by their class, who found out about non-heterosexuality after class 8th



Our survey results show that about two out of three students found out non-heterosexuality after age 15 (class 9th), but in non-classroom settings. We also observed that 77% of respondents who identified as non-heterosexual felt attracted to someone before this age.

This disparity highlights an unfortunate scenario— children whose sexuality is other than heterosexuality, are left alone to deal with feelings of self-doubt and confusion, and may also be shamed or bullied for their sexuality till teenage years, if not well into their adulthood.⁴¹ Formal education on these subjects in schools at the right time, along with guidance on managing society & their reality is one of the most urgent needs for a healthy mental development of children with any sexual orientation.

Figure 2.2: Initial response to discovering different forms of sexuality



As we see above, a total of 62% respondents during schooling years were either "okay" or "curious to know more" about this subject. This indicates that if students discuss traditionally unconventional subjects in a formal setting, they will be guided towards the correct information which will help bust any myths. Additionally, it will also help them understand why historically these got termed as taboo subjects, making them more empathetic towards their own community.

Discovering transgender identity

Identifying as a transgender individual in India has been long associated with various discriminatory customs and social stigmas. As one’s gender preference is a way of expressing their identity in society, children who show signs of being transgender are highly discouraged by their families, rooted in the fear that their child

will face societal exclusion and bullying in schools and workplaces.⁴² This discouragement can sometimes result in feeling unaccepted starting very early in life, further translating into chronic mental distress, depression and tendencies of self-harm.⁴³

Figure 2.3: Class in which students understood the meaning of transgender



Note: 2.9% of respondents still did not know the meaning of transgender

Our survey results indicated that only 9% of all respondents found out about transgender identities before adolescence.

However, 60% of all respondents found out about transgender identity, which is the third form of gender identity recognized by the Supreme Court after class 8th.

Period shaming

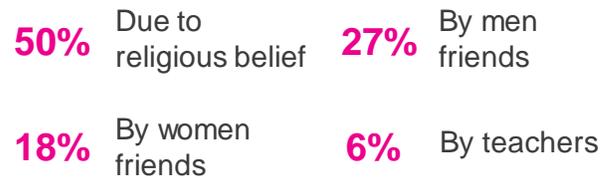
As a result of the grim social realities around menstruation in India, our survey identified almost one in every three menstruator respondents who has been shamed for being on their periods by their family, friends or teachers. Of these respondents, almost half of them were shamed due to religious beliefs at their home. Second-most common perpetrators of shaming in a young girl's life are uninformed young men peers. We also identified that fellow women friends, as well as school teachers can

Figure 2.4: People shamed for being on periods



also shame girls for their period health. This data highlights a pressing problem—periods, although the most natural milestone of a girl's pubescent health, can be a matter of societal shame and vulnerability among young girls.

Figure 2.5: Forms of period shaming experienced by respondents



Note: Respondents could choose more than one option

The only way to work through this stigma is to address it in a formal setting with all children alike—guiding them to better understand prevalent social stigmas around it, and making them aware about how they can negatively impact a young girl's outlook towards herself.

Gender related bullying

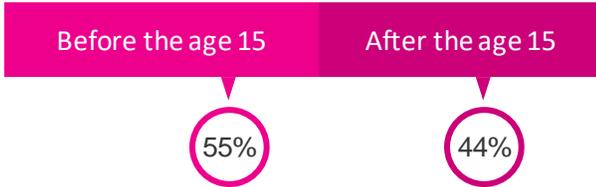
Bullying—either physical, gender or sex-related—is a common feature among adolescents. Uniquely, its perpetrators and victims are often children of the same age. In 2017, a study reported about 42% children experience bullying in schools.⁴⁴ In this survey's context, we define gender-related bullying as using casual, gender-stereotyping slangs and slurs with the intent to disrespect another individual. Often times, kids are unaware why certain language may be foul, and mimic their peers or adults who use the same to degrade others.

Our survey identified about 55% knew about gender-based slurs used to bully someone, before age 15.

This is surprising because at one end, students may not be fully informed of gender and sexual identities due to lack of accurate and informed lessons. However, when they are uncomfortable with children who may look or behave differently, they tend to verbally bully them using negative or insulting rhetoric.⁴⁴

The only way to mitigate this is by informing children early-on about the harmful impacts of gender-based bullying on one's mental health, and teaching them to be comfortable with their differences.

Figure 2.6: Age split of respondent who faced gender bullying in school



Note: 1.1% respondents chose 'not applicable'

Sexual bullying

In this survey's context, sexual bullying was defined as sexually shaming someone, sexually suggestive teasing, and social exclusion due to one's sexual appearance.

Figure 2.7: Proportion of respondents who faced sexual bullying in school



Almost two out of five respondents agreed that they had experienced this form of bullying during their school life. Sexual bullying is particularly dangerous, because these children are already exposed to misinformation due to lack of formal mentoring on this subject. Hence, its victims also feel excluded, confused and ashamed more than an average bullied child. To top this, because this issue is not openly discussed, children may hesitate more to share this experience with adults in their lives.

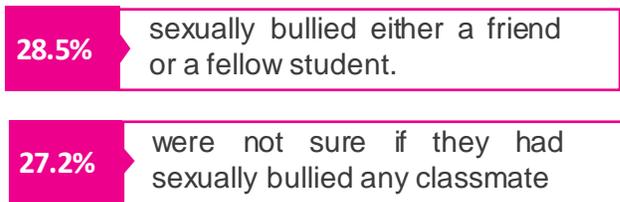
We identified that two out of five respondents who were sexually bullied, accepted that their mental health was negatively impacted due to it

A very integral part of this survey was to identify both the perpetrators and victims of negative sexual experiences for a child during their schooling years. We asked our respondents if they had ever inflicted any form of sexual bullying on their peers and classmates.

Voices from our survey

"I think there is age when boys are going through confusion about adolescence and want to know more, but there isn't anyone to exactly guide them. Only friends or internet is the guidance. For periods never learnt anything from anyone. Researched for my curiosity to better understand and can provide support to women when they are in pain or pms-ing."

Figure 2.8: Proportion of respondents who inflicted sexual bullying in school



Their honest responses helped us capture more than one in four respondents who had sexually bullied someone while they were in school. On probing further, we identified more than half of these respondents themselves felt sexually bullied too. This data reveals a very important point: students who suffer sexual bullying can also be perpetrators of the same. The only known way to detangle this psychological web is by informing children about the harms of this behavior at an early age, and ensuring that support is given to victims of such events.

Our survey found that 52% of respondents who used sexual slurs, themselves felt sexually bullied in school.

Figure 2.9: Respondent breakdown for those who have sexually bullied someone



While investigating these numbers, we also wanted to highlight the gender and sexual identities of students who have perpetrated sexual bullying. We saw that more than half of them were heterosexual men, and about 30% were heterosexual women. Moreover, children who belong to the LGBTQ+ community least tended to perpetrate this behaviour.

We infer here that sexual bullying prevention training should not be limited to boys, as children of all gender identities can potentially indulge in such behavior. Training regarding this should be given to all students at par.

Gender stereotyping in schools

Since early childhood, social and co-curricular activities have been inherently “assigned” to children on the basis of their gender identity. Examples of commonly known “masculine activities” include sports, whereas “feminine activities” include dance, arts and craft, etc. While growing up, these segregations can come in the way of a child fully exploring their potential beyond academics.

To observe this among our respondents, we mapped that across all genders. LGBTQ+ students were comparatively more bullied by peers and teachers to participate in activities opposite to their gender identity. Among men, however, this disparity was more pronounced.

This data also reveals that unfortunately, gender roles and stereotyping usually has a stronger grasp on boys, who ultimately feel more vulnerable to peer bullying if they don't portray “masculine” tendencies. Among women, those who identify as a part of the LGBTQ+ community are the more bullied, when it comes to not conforming to gender-stereotypes through co-curricular participation.

Voices from our survey

“ I think, I could share an experience of mine where we used to bully this guy in school for feminine qualities a lot, which I feel really ashamed about now. But, back then, we used to do it constantly.”

Figure 2.10: Women bullied for showing interest in masculine activities

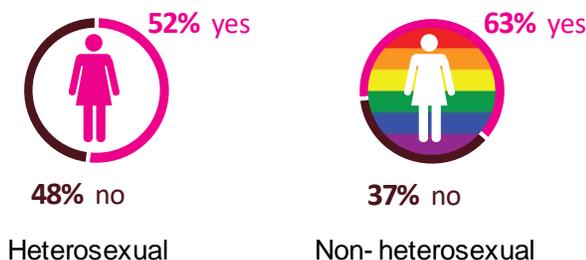
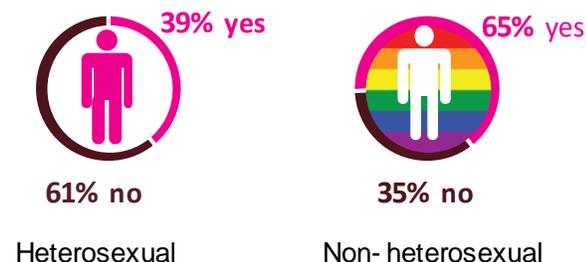


Figure 2.11: Men bullied for showing interest in feminine activities



Sexual Experiences

Perhaps the biggest taboo that airs around sexuality education, is that it teaches children about sex. Talking about sex with children tends to “provoke them to indulge in sexual activities at an inappropriate time and manner.”⁴⁵ However, as a matter of fact, sexuality education implemented across the world shows that this has never been the case. In fact, teenage pregnancy rates, illegal abortions and juvenile harassment cases have been the least where SE has been implemented.⁴⁵ Although encompassing many facets, SE addresses reproduction, sexuality, and sexual health in age-appropriate manner.

SRHR is an exponentially more challenging subject to be addressed in India. SRHR entails knowledge on assault, harassment, sexual violence; to physical attraction, bodily changes and sex. Due to cultural constraints, children are left to deal with these range of topics without any roadmap. In this section, we dive deeper into more nuanced sexual experiences of our respondents, on these matters.

Sexual attraction and peer pressure

Onset of puberty brings about many new physiological changes in growing children. Discussing these changes with children in a formal, guided setting makes them more aware of what they are experiencing, hence giving them more control over their body and mind.⁴⁵ Due to lack of knowledge, new feelings of attraction may be confusing and embarrassing.

Figure 3.1: Impact of peer pressure



Out of 18% respondents who felt peer pressure to indulge in sexual activities, 28% indulged in intercourse during schooling years.

This vulnerability can have many consequences, one of which is peer influence or coercion. In some extreme cases, such influence can lead to unprotected sex, STD infections and at times, even to pregnancy and illegally performed abortions. Of the total number of respondents who confirmed facing peer pressure, almost one in every three of those students had sexual intercourse during schooling years.

First sexual experience

In India, consensual sexual activities among teenagers was not openly discussed a few decades ago as much as it is today. Media portrayal and internet has given some room to this conversation between adults and teenagers with access to it.⁴⁶ However, despite the increased exposure, long-standing social inhibitions in families and classrooms have only increased children's curiosity, with little to no personal guidance given by adults in their lives.

Figure 3.2: Sex and use of contraception



Here, we identified more than one in every ten men respondents had sex during school life, starting from grade 6. In contrast, less than one in every ten women respondents had sex then.

This reflects a perennial problem of our society vis-a-vis the education system: the lack of open conversations to address sexual desires and help teenagers make informed decisions. Lack of this acknowledgement can be highly counterproductive in some cases, like the data here has shown.

Experience with Sexual Harassment

Discovering the concept of sexual harassment

Before the age of 12	89% respondents didn't know about sexual harassment
Before the age of 12	42% respondents experienced sexual harassment

A common misconception prevalent in our society is that talking to children about sexual harassment at an early age can disturb them and make them feel uncomfortable with the world.

Here, we observe that 42% of respondents were reportedly sexually harassed before they entered the adolescent age. In contrast, we see that only 11% of all respondents knew the meaning of sexual harassment and related crimes before this age. This knowledge mostly reached them post adolescence or in late teenage years. This data highlights a key problem: lack of information provided on sexual harassment and its identification. Concepts like consent, managing personal boundaries, and bystander empathy are as important as sexual-security training for children.

Experience with sexual harassment

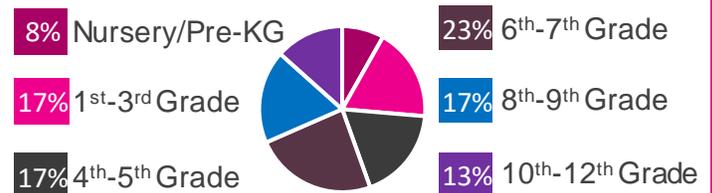
A key feature of this survey was to map how prevalent sexual harassment has been among school students over the last decade. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), from 2008 to 2018, there has been a steep rise

in reported child sexual abuse cases.

In 2018, close to 35% of all reported crimes against children were related to sexual abuse.⁴⁷ NCRB also stated that about 109 children are sexually abused daily.²⁰ In our study, we were able to map 37% of all respondents who identified themselves as victims of sexual harassment during their schooling years. The demographic disparities among them were more startling—women & LGBTQ+ respondents experienced it in higher numbers than men and heterosexual respondents did. Questions on this subject were only open for those who agreed experiencing sexual harassment during school. Our analysis covered age of experience, recognition in the moment, seeking help afterwards, and long-term mental impact after such an experience.

Grade of first sexual harassment experience

Figure 4.1: Grade in which respondents experienced first sexual harassment



This data highlights the grim reality regarding the prevalence of harassment across age groups. We observe that the probability of



respondents experiencing sexual harassment across their schooling life is broadly consistent throughout all classes—with 8% respondents reportedly experiencing it in pre-primary school, and the highest number of respondents experiencing it before or during puberty (classes 6th-8th).

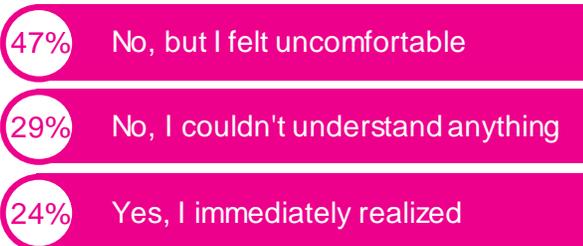
Recognizing sexual harassment

Figure 4.2: % of respondents who were not able recognized sexual harassment



The nature of sexual abuse can be such that its victims may not always recognize the abuse while it is happening, thus rendered helpless to act on it. This is true especially among younger children. Here, we observed how our respondents acted in the face of such situations when they were younger.

Were you able to recognize sexual harassment when it happened?



Almost one in every two respondents who experienced such a situation agreed to feeling uncomfortable but did not know what was happening.

Almost one in every three respondents did not know what was happening to them while they were harassed. Less than one in four were able to at least realize they were being subjected to harassment. Despite the ever-growing number of child sexual abuse cases, we still have inadequate training on recognizing abuse—one of the basic aspect of sexual security training.⁴⁸

Seeking help afterwards

Experiencing sexual harassment, as unwarranted as it is, does not mean that the victim should suffer in isolation throughout their lives. Seeking help after such an incident is crucial for mental recovery, dealing with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and regaining a positive outlook towards the world.

Figure 4.3: Proportion of respondents who felt comfortable seeking help



82% men and 78% women respondents did not feel comfortable seeking help.

There are established NGOs, counselling centres and support groups across the country available for victims of sexual crimes. However, victims of harassment cases resist seeking help after an incident. Our survey revealed almost eight out of ten victims of sexual harassment did not feel comfortable seeking help immediately afterwards. This speaks volumes about the existence of hidden victim-shame or uncertainty regarding what they went through, as they feel uncomfortable to approach their family members, friends or teachers.⁴⁹

Voices from our survey

“ I personally dealt with sexual assault at an early age. Therefore, I think it is important to teach kids about good and bad touch, their private parts etc. through structured programmes.”

Role of Teachers

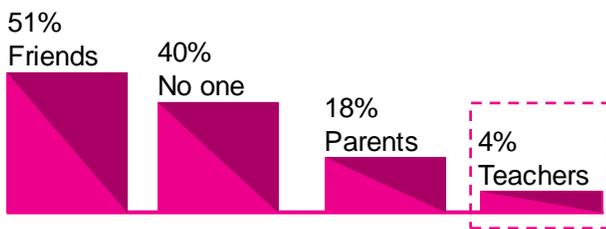
The role of teachers is one of the most important in a student’s life—be it academically, disciplinary or related to a child’s social and cognitive development. Though officially a teacher’s job is limited to the subjects they teach, they play a monumental role in forming social understanding and behavioral attitudes in their students too.⁵⁰ Children often rely on their teachers, parents and other adults while they form their value and belief systems.

Keeping this in mind, we recognized the importance of the impact teachers had on our respondents during their schooling years. In this section, we intended to gauge whether students identified teachers as trusted adults in their lives, and to also understand any social challenge they may have faced due to teachers.

Teachers as trusted adults

Teachers, parents and peers form the three pillars that a child relies on while navigating their journey of social understanding. With this opinion poll, we intended to understand which of the three important figures in a child’s life is the most influential when it comes to trusting them with social experiences, in particular the negative ones.

Figure 5.1: Percentage share of most trusted stakeholder



Note: Respondents could choose multiple options

We see that out of all the respondents, 40% did not trust anyone to share their negative experiences with.

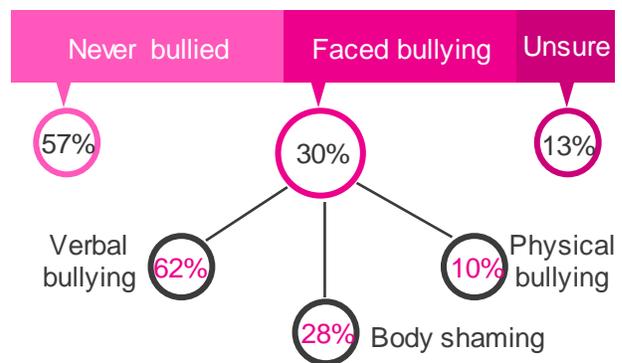
What is more surprising, is that the highest number of respondents felt most comfortable sharing it with their peers, and least number of

respondents felt comfortable sharing it with their teacher(s). Ideally, students should feel a secure sense of trust in their teachers. If equipped with proper training, teachers are capable of giving rational guidance and trusted mentorship without any judgements. However, we observed that children lean on their peers the most. Peers of the same age can be a healthy source of emotional support, but they are the least equipped to guide a child through complex situations, which may lead to uninformed or negative influencing.

Teacher bullying

Teacher bullying is not an uncommon phenomenon across schools in India and the world. Though many students don’t face it in an obvious manner, this form of bullying is often disguised as disciplining a child.⁵¹ It may not always be harassment or abuse as predetermined. Teacher bullying can take forms of verbal offense, body shaming, or even at times physical beating. Without proper training related to social challenges within a classroom setting, teachers may come in with their predefined biases from their lives, and may project it on impressionable young children.

Figure 5.2: Respondents who faced teacher bullying and type



Through our survey, we identified close to three in five children who faced at least one of the three aforementioned forms of abuse perpetrated by teachers- with the most common form of teacher bullying being verbal bullying.

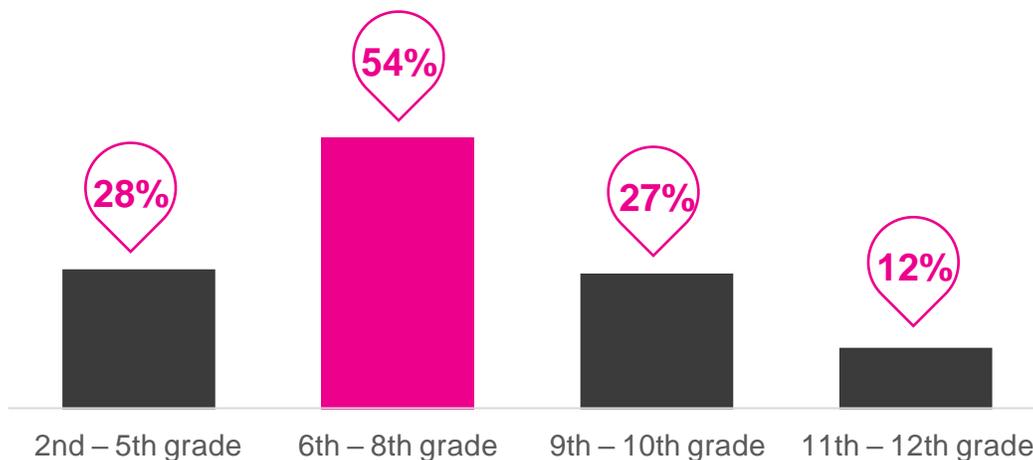
Teacher’s influence on social understanding

A teacher influences its children’s social understanding all throughout their schooling years, albeit more intrinsically than vocally. To test this hypothesis, we took an opinion poll from our respondents to see what they feel regarding teacher influence on student outlook and social behaviour. More than half of our respondents agreed that teachers who deal with early adolescents have the most impact on shaping social definitions for them. Almost equal number of respondents agreed that teachers who deal with pre- and post-adolescent children also influence their social understanding in many ways. Our main inference here is that adolescent years are pivotal in a student’s life, shaping much of their beliefs and definitions. As a teacher can be an important trusted adult figure in their lives, they learn a lot from them as well. However, we also acknowledge that their impact is not limited to adolescents: both before and after adolescent years, students are socially curious and remain malleable to all believes and views. Their understanding can be molded all throughout schooling years- especially by their teachers.

Voices from our survey

“ Teachers play a huge role in what kind of humans children turn out to be. The school I went to believed that girls are responsible for enticing men and distracting them with our anatomy. This is why they came up with a Gender neutral uniform- a track suit which hindered sports activities. While on the other hand there were no such rules for boys. They believed that the school was only for academic studies. This impacted mine and a lot of other student's mental health because as teenage girls we felt trapped and restricted.”

Figure 5.3: Opinion poll: teachers assigned to which class play the most significant role in conforming gender roles, giving basic awareness of harassment, assault, etc.

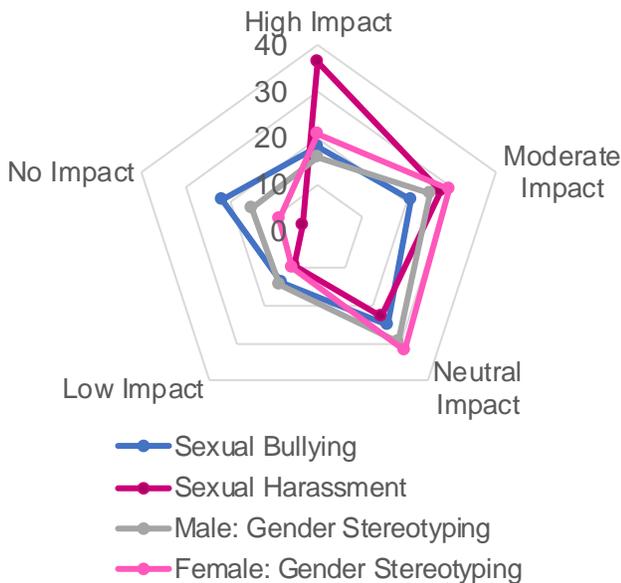


Note: Respondents could choose more than one option

Correlating Sexuality Education, Mental Health and Learning Experience

One of the crucial features of the survey was its attempt to shed light upon the issue of mental wellbeing, which is uniquely at the intersection of sexuality education as well as a child's overall learning outcomes. The survey, while diving into various personal experiences, also took a poll on a scale of one to five (one signifying lowest impact & five signifying highest) to aggregate how each respondent—who agreed to have experienced some social challenge—suffered mentally because of the same. Here are the key highlights from what our respondents reported, particularly based on their personal experience with gender stereotyping, sexual bullying, & harassment.

Figure 6.1: Impact on mental health



Note: Scale is % of respondents

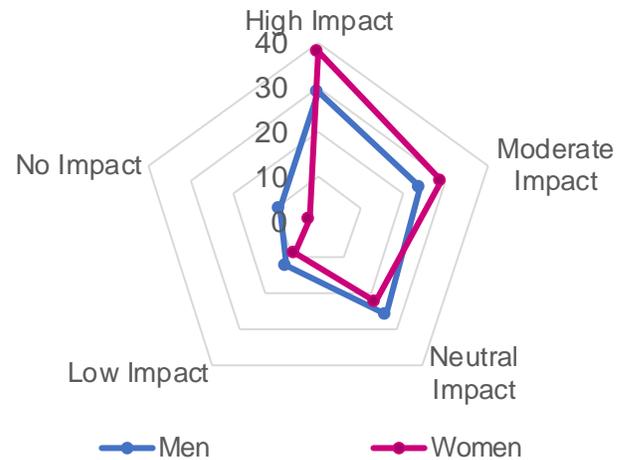
Here, we observe several critical points. First is that about one in three men who experienced bullying due to gender stereotypes faced moderate to high mental health impact. On the steeper side, one in three women who experienced the same, also reported experiencing moderate to high mental health impact due to similar events. For sexual bullying, we see out of all respondents who

reportedly experienced it, close to 40% agreed that their mental health was impacted. Lastly, we observe that two in every three respondents who experienced sexual harassment in school, faced impact on their mental health. As sexual harassment is an intimate issue, its impact is often something children hesitate in admitting even to the most trusted adults in their life due to reasons such as fear, shame, self-blame among many others.⁵² Here, we delved deeper within intersectional cuts to observe how different mental health impacts were for gender and sexual identity. Two most startling revelations are highlighted below:

Sexual harassment: men v/s women

We observed that for sexual harassment victims, a greater number of women respondents agreed that their mental health was impacted due to this experience, in comparison to men. Hence, young girls are more psychologically vulnerable to these instances, often dealing with a lingering fear of facing such an incident again, finding themselves unable to cope with the event itself.

Figure 6.2: Impact of sexual harassment on mental health



Note: Scale is % of respondents

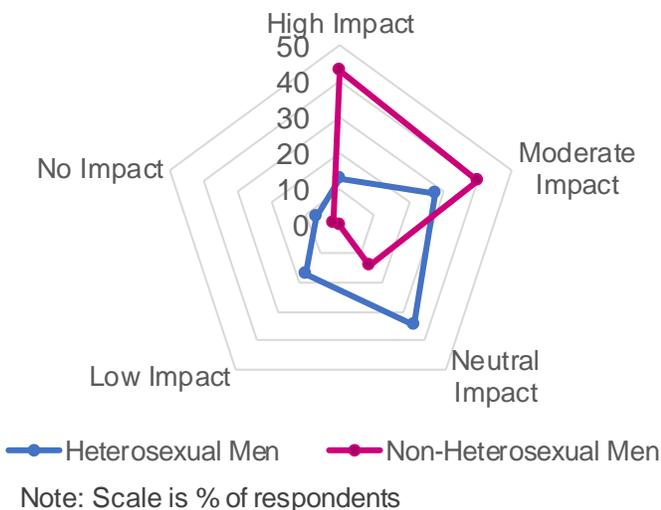
On the flip side, we can also infer that men, due to lack of common knowledge around men's

experiences with sexual harassment, often can't recognize it until it's severe enough. Moreover, they may simply disregard it due to social pressure to not address their vulnerabilities with trusted peers or adults.⁵³ Despite several other possibilities behind these result, our key takeaway is that mental health consequences of such events should be discussed with all children alike, so that they address it and seek support to recover from it.

Men's experience with gender stereotyping

Another interesting insight was this: among men who reported having faced bullying due to gender stereotyping in school, only 41% heterosexual men agreed their mental health was negatively impacted due to the event. Whereas 83% non-heterosexual men—about double the previous number—agreed that their mental health was negatively impacted due to gender-based bullying. The same statistical gap was not as pronounced for women (57% heterosexual women to 62% non-heterosexual women faced the same). This data emphasizes that the impact on mental health due to gender stereotyping differs by a great margin between heterosexual & non-heterosexual men. Until we acknowledge this difference and actively work to mitigate this, the problem remains unsolved.

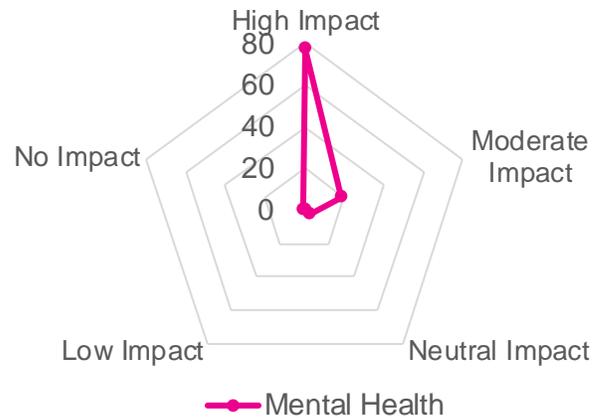
Figure 6.3: Impact of gender stereotyping on mental health



Impact of mental health on learning experiences

As various existing research shows, negative personal experiences during school life can impact a student's mental health, and ultimately their overall academic performance as well.⁵⁴

Figure 6.4: Impact of mental health on learning experiences



What's interesting is that children not only find it challenging to keep up with studies, but also tend to lag behind in extra-curricular activities if their mental health is compromised, which has actually proven to facilitate their social development.⁵⁵ We asked our respondents in the survey whether they believed that mental health of children also impacts their learning experience in school. Here, we saw over 90% respondents who strongly agree that it does.

The results of this survey lead us to conclude that children faced learning challenges post their experience with any form of bullying or harassment. Sexuality education and its benefits are not limited to the child's social and emotional wellbeing. Its advantages also spill over to their schooling performance as well. Sexuality education, academic education and extracurricular activities all stand together as equally important markers of a child's overall learning experience in school, enabling them to be better educated, more informed and empathetic adults.





The Way Forward

The Way Forward

The utopia of sexuality education in India

International benchmarking and India's diagnostic study highlights the gap and need for sexuality education in countries across the world, especially in India. The Health and Wellness Curriculum or Ambassador Initiative is a recognizable step forward by the Indian government towards encouraging sexuality education as a separate subject taught in schools. However, its grassroots implementation still remains imminent. Acknowledging the cultural and societal challenges that have obstructed such efforts in the past, it is even more important for government and civil society organizations to raise awareness on the need for sexuality education, bust the myths surrounding it, and propagate the plethora of benefits it can reap for students.

As per the results highlighted and inferences drawn from The Zero Period Survey, here are some key takeaways on what an ideal sexuality education should include, keeping in mind the social and cultural realities of India:

Sexuality education should be taught as a separate course throughout schooling years



The need for Sexuality Education does not remain limited to a particular age group. In many instances, we observed that students of all age-group faced certain social or sexual situations, which they were inept to navigate due to lack of general awareness or training. Quality Sexuality Education includes a wide range of concepts, which are appropriately designed and disseminated for each age group. Children of all ages face unique challenges, and a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum will always recognize their individual needs.

Sexuality education should be gender and queer inclusive



It is easy to assume that sexuality education looks different for boys and girls. However, our survey results challenged this assumption with evidence. Subjects related to gender identities, sexual harassment, and even menstruation should be covered for all gender groups. The sex-based class segregation may be necessary to avoid embarrassment in culturally more conservative environments, however, no subject should be left unaddressed for any gender group, Reinstating gender and queer inclusive content is necessary for successful implementation of SE in schools.

Active advocacy is the need of the hour: Challenging stigmas around sexuality education



The real challenges to delivering sexuality education lies outside the classroom. Age-old schools of thought around gender and sex, hesitation to corrupt children's mind and distract them from academics are some of the many myths that occlude the delivery of sexuality education. This is not only the case with India. Throughout the world, as this study initially highlighted, these myths have served as the biggest roadblocks. Governments and civil-society organizations need to actively propagate its advantages, address myths and help school authorities and parents understand the pressing need for it today.

Recognizing sexuality education's influence on learning outcomes



As the survey results highlighted in its last chapter, emotional and mental wellbeing play a crucial role in how a student performs academically, which is further directly correlated to how they handle social circumstances growing up. Natural processes like puberty, menstruation, gender and sexual identification, as well as unfortunate events like bullying and harassment play a part in how they perform in school. As sexuality education aims to address these, schools need to invest towards it as it can consequently influence student's overall performance.

Allyship in delivering sexuality education: Teacher-training and parent workshops



Teachers and parents play an exceedingly critical role as adult caregivers in children's lives. A teacher's role is unique as they are the non-familial adult in a child's life, equipped to give sound knowledge and open room for discussion which children may hesitate to have with parents. On the flip side, parents impact a child's social and emotional wellbeing to the greatest extent. Hence, teacher sensitization & parent workshops are equally important. Schools should recognize the value-addition teacher-training courses can bring to their students. Involving them in educating and advocating for sexuality education is of utmost importance for scalability of Sexuality Education in the long run.

About The Zero Period

Our Vision

To ensure every child in India receives accurate & age-appropriate sexuality education throughout school.

Our Mission

Aims to achieve this vision by a three-way model of active advocacy, de-stigmatization initiatives in schools and upskilling existing school teachers for grassroots implementation.

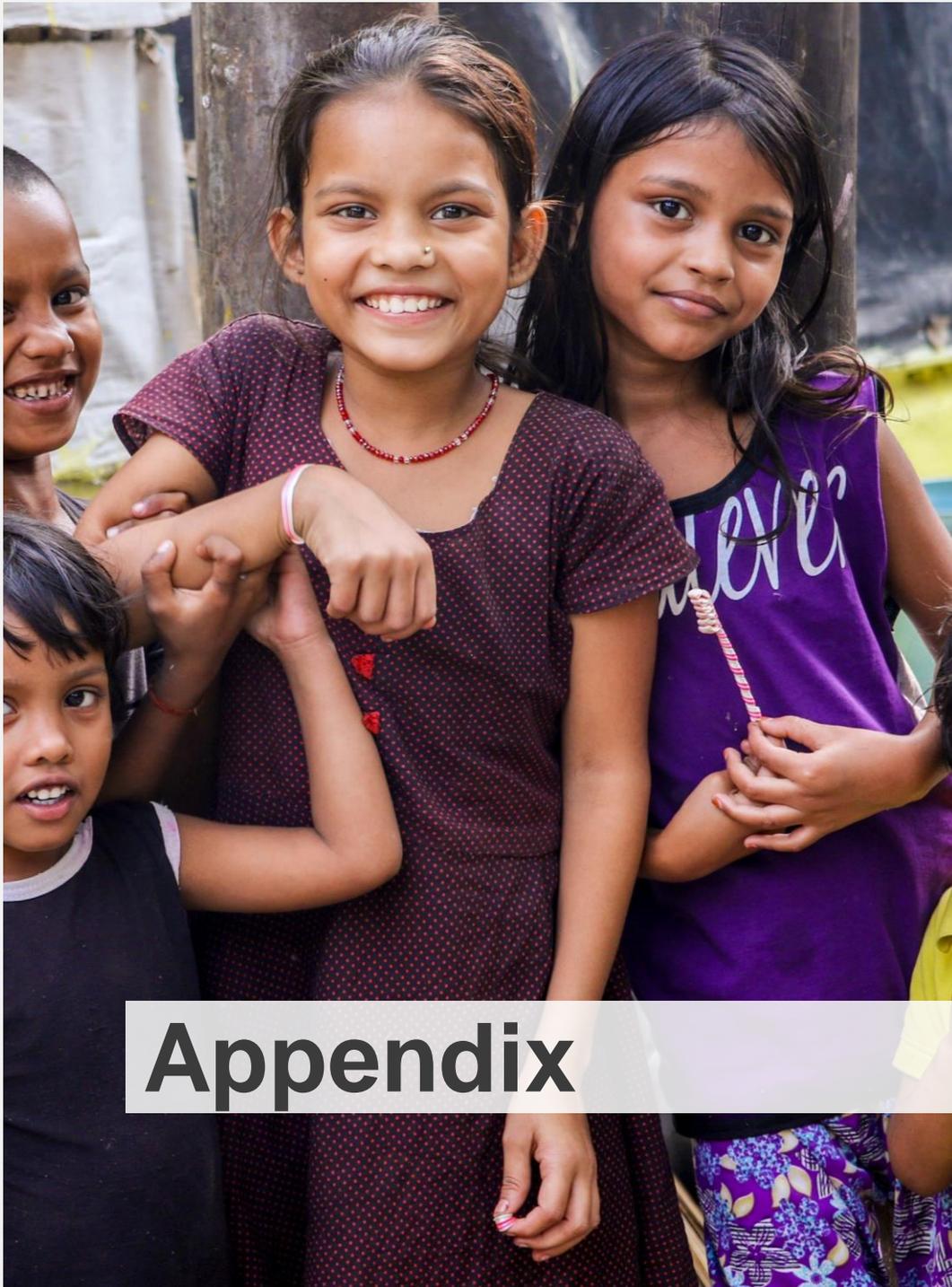


L-R: Barkha Tripathi (Co-founder), Bhumika Joshi (Co-founder)

Our Founding Story

In 2020, amidst an unprecedented crisis in the education ecosystem, The Zero Period was established with a single idea—children should not have to come back to the same education system they left behind in classrooms. The "new normal" of the Indian education system should enable children to become more than simply literate; it should equip them to be more informed and empathetic human beings.

By recognizing how a comprehensive sexuality education course in school can fully meet this need, The Zero Period aims to advocate for and enable the same in Indian schools.



Appendix

I: Study Limitations (1/2)

The findings of this research need to be viewed considering certain limitations. As is the case with majority of studies such as this, it stands at risk of certain biases, methodological challenges, and analytical limitations- some of which have been highlighted below for the reader's reference:

A. Research sampling:

Please refer to the section on Methodology and Demographics of The Zero Period Survey for detailed bifurcation regarding respondent information. The survey was open for age groups 18-25 only, keeping in mind the higher recall value and social relevance for more recent school graduates. However, 3% respondents reported being above age 25. Their data has nevertheless been considered for statistical aggregation in 24-25 age bracket. Moreover, despite its intent otherwise, the survey was only able to capture 1% non-binary individual's responses. Therefore, the Results and Inferences section of this report refrains from stating any non-binary gender segregation inference.

B. Insufficient sample size and digital outreach:

Due to monetary challenges and global health scenario (COVID-19 pandemic), this survey was created on Google Forms and was conducted only via online sources. The outreach for the questionnaire was done through various digital means such as text messages, social media channels, university collaborations for outreach, etc. This survey was open for responses for a period of 4 weeks and received 2,051 responses. The data collected remains vulnerable to an insufficient sample size to make widespread inferences for the overall Indian scenario on Sexuality Education. Moreover, the outreach model of the survey leaves room for those who are digitally privileged i.e., have easy access to internet. This leaves many low-income background recent graduates from getting access to this survey, particularly from Tier 3 cities in India.

C. Lack of previous research studies on sexuality education in India:

The survey designed by The Zero Period was unique in its structure. The survey was created only based on international standards of sexuality education, and how it reportedly benefited the students of other nations. Due to the lack of a national curriculum in India, how the same model would have benefited Indian students given their cultural realities is not clearly understood. This gives room to several inferences drawn which can't be verified because of lack of evidence.

D. Inaccurate recollection of respondent's early age memory:

The authors of this survey recognize that the survey's respondents may not be able to fully recollect many intimate memories from their childhood and teenage years. This again leaves room for incorrect information shared by them.

I: Study Limitations (2/2)

E. Positivity bias or halo effect during respondent's self-reflection:

The authors of this survey recognize that the survey's respondents may be susceptible to a "goodness bias" or a self-appreciating "halo-effect", wherein they may be biased to project themselves as overall good rather than bad and refraining from recollecting certain experiences where they were perpetrators of negative events. This can cause some statistical flaws while aggregating the results in certain sections of the report, particularly the ones which contain questions with an "accusatory" significance.

F. Cyber-related experiences and lack of digital access for our respondents:

The survey questionnaire included a set of questions on cyber-crime and the impacts of digital world on their social and sexual understanding. However, the authors of this survey recognize that due to technological development over the recent five to seven years, its respondent's experience cannot be a reflection of a current school student's digital access and cyber-related experiences. Hence, the study does not report that segment into its final analysis.

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III: Glossary

- **Sexuality Education:** Sexuality Education is a rights-based approach which seeks to equip young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values they need to determine and enjoy their sexuality—physically and emotionally, individually and in relationships.
- **Heterosexuality:** (of a person) sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex only.
- **Non-Heterosexual:** (of a person) sexually attracted to people other than only opposite sex. This includes same-sex attraction, bisexuality asexuality, and other such forms of sexual attraction.
- **Non-binary:** Denoting or relating to a gender identity that is not defined in terms of traditional binary oppositions such as male and female.
- **Transgender identity:** Denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender does not correspond with their birth sex.
- **Sexual Bullying:** A type of bullying that occurs in connection with a person's sex, body, sexual orientation or with sexual activity. It can be physical, verbal, and/or emotional.
- **Sexual Attraction:** Defined as an attraction on the basis of sexual desire or the quality of arousing such interest.
- **Social Pressure:** Direct or indirect form of negative mental influence on an individual due to social and cultural realities of their society or community.
- **Sexual Slurs or Slangs:** A term of disparagement used to refer to members of a given gender, sex, or sexual orientation in a derogatory or pejorative manner. The motivation for using a sexual slur is often sexism and/or bias against a sexual orientation or practice.
- **Menstruation:** Menstruation, or period, is the natural shedding the uterine wall every month which results in vaginal bleeding for all people who have the female reproductive organ.
- **Cyberbullying:** The use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.
- **Cyber-harassment:** Cyber-harassment usually pertains to unconsented conduct, such as threatening or harassing email/instant messages, or to blog entries or websites dedicated solely to tormenting an individual. Harassment does not include constitutionally protected activity or conduct that serves a legitimate purpose, i.e., free speech.
- **Gender-related bullying:** A type of bullying that occurs in connection with a person's gender identity, non-conformity and/or prevailing gender stereotypes. It can be physical, verbal, and/or emotional.
- **Child sexual abuse:** Child sexual abuse, also called child molestation, is a form of child abuse in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation.
- **Sexual Harassment:** Any form of unwelcome sexual behaviour that's offensive, humiliating or intimidating.
- **Sexual Assault:** An act of physical, psychological and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act, inflicted on someone without their consent.
- **Learning Experience:** Any interaction, course, program, or other experience in which learning takes place, whether it occurs in traditional academic settings (schools, classrooms) or non-traditional settings (outside-of-school locations, outdoor environments), or whether it includes traditional educational interactions (students learning from teachers and professors) or non-traditional interactions (students learning through games and interactive software applications).
- **Learning Outcomes:** Learning outcomes are measurable achievements that the learner will be able to understand after the learning is complete, which helps learners understand the importance of the information and what they will gain from their engagement with the learning activity.
- **Mental health:** Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.
- **Sexual Orientation:** Sexual orientation is a term used to describe your pattern of emotional, romantic or sexual attraction
- **Gendered stereotyping:** A gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by women and men.

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The Zero Period is a non-profit organization with a vision to ensure every child in India receives accurate & age-appropriate sexuality education. It aims to achieve this goal by a three-way model of active advocacy, de-stigmatization initiatives in schools and training existing school teachers for grassroot implementation.

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