

Are Malaysians ready for comprehensive sexuality education?

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ABSTRACT

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Majority of adolescents and young people do not receive adequate knowledge and uninformed about sexuality, making them vulnerable to abuses, sexually transmitted diseases and unintended pregnancy. We described current updates and views on the implementation of sexuality education in Malaysia through our review on seventy-nine articles published in local online newspapers supplemented with scholarly journals and documents from official government websites. Framework analysis was carried to describe the purpose, available current programs, challenges and suggested solutions for implementation of comprehensive sexuality education. Sexuality education has been implemented in Malaysia for almost a decade through disintegrated and compartmentalised approach. The subject aims at providing knowledge on sexuality and reproductive health, promoting abstinence and curbing what was perceived as moral transgressions such as premarital sex and its consequences. The success of sexuality education is hampered by misconception on the impact of sexuality education, disagreement on the curriculum, lack of availability of trained teachers or trainers, lack of family and parents' involvement as well as poor multidisciplinary collaboration. Further enhancement requires all experts from various disciplines to sit together to harmonise the subject so that it is acceptable to religion and culture of multiracial society of Malaysians and aligned with human rights standards.

Keywords:

Sexuality education, adolescents and young people, human rights, Malaysia

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1. Introduction

Sexuality is part of life; a component of health, physical growth, mental development and socialising element for every human being. Each and every boy and girl, one day will make life-changing decisions on their sexuality. Hence, being informed sufficiently regarding sexuality is the rights of all children. Nevertheless, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 2015 indicated that the majority of them do not receive adequate and

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proper knowledge on sexuality, leaving them uninformed while making decisions and making them susceptible to abuses, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancy [1].

At the beginning, the curriculum of sexuality education focused more on providing knowledge on prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDs and promoting sexual abstinence until marriage. Evaluations of the effectiveness of the curriculum are inconsistent. In a general review of several abstinence-based sexuality education, it was suggested that this approach is "effective in curtailing teenage sexuality activity" [2]. It may also be beneficial in providing knowledge on sexuality to young people [3]. However, a meta-analysis study of 13 trials which included almost 16,000 students indicated disappointing results; the programs were found to be ineffective in reducing the number of adolescents who engaged in unprotected vaginal intercourse or condom use and provide no effect on the rate of STDs or unintended pregnancies [4]. Further, another meta-analysis of 12 research studies of school-based programs, the effect size for abstinent behaviour itself was very small, close to zero [5]. Evaluation by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) on the "best" federally funded abstinence-only-until-marriage programs in the US involving 2,057 participants; 1,209 of those young people were enrolled in the abstinence-only-until-marriage programs and 848 were part of a control group showed that abstinence-based sexual education was actually ineffective programs [6].

A more inclusive sexuality education is called abstinence-plus education or Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). UNESCO defines CSE as "an age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, nonjudgmental information" [1]. Goals of the implementation of CSE is to ensure that young people receive comprehensive, life skills-based sexuality education and for them to acquire knowledge and skills to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships and sexuality. The fundamental elements of CSE programs include "the firm grounding in human rights – including the rights of the child, and the empowerment of children and young people – and a reflection of the broad concept of sexuality as a natural part of human development. Effective sexuality education starts early in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood, building knowledge and skills that are appropriate for each stage through a carefully phased process over time, like any other subject in the curriculum" [1]. Not only emphasising the importance of abstinence, it also acknowledges that many adolescents will become sexually active. It also teaches about safe sex through the use of contraception and condom use; discusses on abortion and sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDs; and promotes gender equality and empowerment [7, 8]. Unlike abstinence-based education, substantial evidence have supported the effectiveness of CSE to delay the initiation of sex, reduced the frequency of sex, reduce the number of partners, reduce incidence of unprotected sex, increase safe sex through the use of condom or contraception, reduce occurrence of teenage pregnancy and STD or HIV/AIDs [9].

Providing sexuality education is not the sole responsibility of the teachers. A few other non-school-based sexuality programs have also been implemented [9, 10]. Faith-based sexuality education such as True Love Waits program encourages adolescents to abstain from sexual activity until they are married by making "virginity pledge". The goal of the faith-based sexuality education is mostly to emphasise on purity and abstinence. Further, it teaches sexuality in the context of spirituality and morality [10]. Home-based sexuality education has also been introduced to encourage the involvement of parents and family in teaching sexuality education to children and young people [11, 12]. Parents are provided with tools such as videos, pamphlets to explain regarding sexuality to their children [12]. Further, web-based sexuality education is another approach that may provide opportunities for youth to learn more regarding sexuality. With guidance and proper

regulation, the internet is an emerging unique but critical site to provide sexuality education. To date, there is a lack of evidence to show the effectiveness of the non-school based sexuality programs.

In Malaysia, sexuality education has probably been one of the most controversial topics to discuss. Nevertheless, as a reaction to various socially disturbing phenomena, in these recent decades, the needs for sexuality education have invited academic discussions, public opinions, and political debates of a broader variety. This article aims to provide an overview of recent updates and challenges on delivering sexuality education to children and young people in this country.

2. Methods

We described current updates and views on the implementation of sexuality education in Malaysia through our review on articles from local online newspapers supplemented with scholarly journals and documents from official government websites. For online newspaper articles, data were gathered from the online archives of the Star Online, Utusan Online, New Straits Times, the Sun Daily, Harian Metro, Kosmo, Sinar Harian and the Malay Mail. Online newspaper archives were chosen because they were readily available and accessible for reviews compared to printed newspapers. Seventy-nine articles discussing sexuality education published from January, 2010 to December, 2016 were included. Academic journals that discussed sexuality education in Malaysia were hand-searched using database Ovid Medline, Google Scholar and Malaysian Citation Index (MyCite). We also hand-searched official government websites for documents that discuss the topics of sexuality education. These include websites of The National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) or Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN), Health Education Unit of Ministry of Health (MOH) or Bahagian Pendidikan Kesihatan and Ministry of Education (MOE).

In order to retrieve data from the online archives, terms used was "sex education" OR "sexuality education" for English articles and "pendidikan seks" for Bahasa Malaysia articles. All articles or documents were retrieved and compiled. The articles and documents were initially analysed using thematic analysis. Then data from all sources were further summarised using Framework Analysis [13]; they were read and re-read iteratively to answer a few matrices of questions: What is the purpose of sexuality education? What are the current programs available to teach children and young people on sexuality? What are the challenges to implement sexuality education in this country? What are the suggested solutions? Discussions were done between team members over any disagreement of the content.

3. Results

What is the purpose of sexuality education?

According to Malaysia National Adolescents Health Plan of Action (2006-2020), sexuality and reproductive health educations should be implemented to increase knowledge on sexual reproductive health, increase knowledge on HIV/AIDS, reduce the number of teenage pregnancy every year and reduce adolescents specific fertility rate (ASFR among 15-19 years) (less than 14/1000) [14]. Further, it is important to prevent sexual behaviour which is perceived by the majority as transgression or morally ill such as sexual promiscuity, sex outside of marriage and premarital sex and to curb the negative implications such as unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, infant abandonment and sexual abuses. One of the examples is stated in the newspaper article:

The decision to introduce sex education is a move to help reduce unwanted pregnancies, baby dumping, and promiscuity among teenagers. [The Deputy Prime Minister] who is also education

minister said creating an accurate understanding of reproductive health among the young was vital in reducing baby dumping.

The Sun Daily, 12 November 2010

Further, sexuality education is also important to prevent physical and health complications such as adolescent pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS as highlighted by one of the articles:

The lack of holistic sex education is contributing to the sharp rise of sexually transmitted HIV infections even as overall infection rates in Malaysia are falling...Lack of holistic sex education is one of contributing factor of STIs...Sexual transmission of HIV must be overcome by education and knowledge.

The Sun Daily, 5 December 2016

What are the currently available programs?

Sexuality education has been integrated into the mainstream educational system by Ministry of Education (MOE) since 1989 for secondary schools students and for primary schools students. The subjects have been taught since 1994 [9]. According to the Ministry of Education, the subject related to biological, sociocultural, psychological and spiritual aspects of sexuality have been introduced to students as part of the syllabus in language, science, biology, Islamic education and moral education subjects. Initially, modules related to sexuality education were called as Family Health Education or *Pendidikan Kesihatan Keluarga* (1989-2002) and then changed to *Sexuality Education or Pendidikan Seksualiti* (2003-2005). The term "sexuality" carries a negative connotation to conservative society in Malaysia. Hence, the term *Reproductive Health and Social Education or Pendidikan Kesihatan Reproduktif dan Sosial (PEERS)* has been used since 20 December, 2006. Initially, PEERS was part of Physical Fitness and Health Education (*Pendidikan Jasmani dan Kesihatan*), but since 2011, Health Education (*Pendidikan Kesihatan*) has been taught as an individual subject [15].

PEERS

PEERS comprised about three quarter (75%) of Health Education subject which focuses on social skills and sexuality education. PEERS aims to inculcate positive perspectives on reproductive and social health, provide necessary information about sexual health and help students to have skills to make a responsible decision related to their sexuality and social life. Apart from biopsychosocial education on sexuality and reproductive health, the contents of PEERS include alcohol and substance misuse; interpersonal relationship skills; stress, conflict and mental health management; family roles and relationships; safety issues and management; and illness prevention.

Focusing on the sexuality and reproductive modules, PEERS teaches students according to their age and cognitive development. It teaches students not only on the anatomy of sex and reproductive systems but also other important aspects of sexuality such as 'safe touch'. One of the examples of scenario discussed by teachers to teach primary school children on 'safe touch' is; "*Mengapa anda berkata 'Tidak' apabila rakan anda menyentuh anggota seksual anda dengan sengaja? (Why do you say 'No' when your friend accidentally touches your sexual part?)*" (Year 4, Primary Education; Health Education book) [16]. Emphasis is given on how to respect and ensure safety and hygienic aspects of their own sexual organs. For adolescents in lower secondary, PEERS exposes the students to life skills of how to manage a risky situation, stress management, sexually transmitted diseases, secondary

sexual characteristics, sexual identity, sexual orientation, interpersonal relationships and prevention of smoking and alcohol and substance misuse. Family planning and contraception have also been introduced to secondary school students [17]. In addition to earlier topics for upper secondary students, other topics such as adolescent pregnancy and human trafficking are also taught.

Religious and Moral Education

At public schools in Malaysia, most Muslims and non-Muslim students are taught separately on Islamic or moral education subject. As part of curricula, Islamic education at primary and lower secondary schools teaches Muslim students on Islamic ways of social relationships between boys and girls; emphasising on chastity and *aurah* (part of bodies that should be covered) [18]. Higher secondary Muslim students are also taught about religious teaching on *munakahat* (marriage) and they are reminded to avoid religiously forbidden sexual behaviours such as *zina* (fornication) and homosexuality; *liwat* (sodomy) and *musahaqah* (lesbian) [19]. Moral education teaches non-Muslim students on several main principles of producing holistic individuals physically, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. Part of the syllabus is teaching students on values related to human's right such as respecting women's rights [20, 21]. There is neither specific topic on human rights nor did women's rights are taught in-depth or directly to Muslims students.

PEKERTI

National Population and Family Development Board Malaysia (NPFDB) or *Lembaga Pembangunan Penduduk dan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN)* has been entrusted by the Government to plan and provide out of school sexuality education to the public. Initially, this community-based sexuality education was called Reproductive, Social and Health Education or *Pendidikan Kesihatan Reproduktif dan Sosial (PKRS)*. However, later in 2012 Policy and Action Plan for National Reproductive Health Education and Social Education was known as PEKERTI Policy. The objectives of PEKERTI Policy are to raise awareness, develop skills, increase research and development and improve the effectiveness of reproductive health and social education among the community [22]. The target groups for PEKERTI Policy are students (Primary, Secondary and special educational school), young people at Institute of Higher Education and college as well as those attending National Service Training as well as parents and the public. Several programs including kafe@TEEN adolescent centre, PEKERTI @ National Service and PEKERTI @ School have been implemented to introduce PEKERTI modules to the target groups [23]. PEKERTI modules are community-based sexuality education which were developed and comprised of three units; i) "Information on reproductive health" which describes values and responsibilities on sexuality, behaviours that lead to risk of pregnancy, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, abortion, abandoned babies and rape; ii) "Technique to avoid premarital sex" which emphasises on how to have skills for sex refusal and be abstinent and to avoid high-risk situation; and iii) "Safe sex" which covers matters related to self-protection, prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections [24].

PROSTAR and Rahsia Remaja

Program Sihat Tanpa AIDS untuk Remaja (PROSTAR) is a health and community-based nationwide program run by Ministry of Health (MOH) based on the concept of "By Youth, Through Youth, and For Youth [*Oleh Remaja, Melalui Remaja, Untuk Remaja*]". The program involves young people aged 13 to 25 years who are trained to be Peer Counselors [*Pembimbing Rakan Sebaya*] [25]. Various

programs such as campaigns, seminars, workshops, group activities, sports and many others have been carried out to inculcate knowledge on healthy lifestyle, sexuality education and prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDS. Modules called PROSTAR Youth Training Module Manual (*Latihan Remaja Harapan PROSTAR*) on prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDS were developed by Ministry of Health called PROSTAR [26]. Apart from teaching young people on STDs and HIV/AIDS, this module encompasses topics including healthy lifestyle, assertiveness skills, interpersonal relationship, appreciating own body and positive behavioural change.

Ministry of Health through its Health Education Department has also introduced four modules related to sexuality education; i) *Rahsia Remaja* (Adolescent Secret), ii) *Rahsia Remaja: Cabaran Menjadi Teruna* (Adolescent Secret; Challenges to be a Young Man), and iii) *Rahsia Remaja: Manisnya Menjadi Gadis* (Adolescent Secret; Sweetness as a Young Woman] and iv) *Rahsia Remaja: Mencari Cinta*. (Adolescent Secret; Searching for Love) [27]. The first three modules focus on the anatomy of sex and reproductive organ, changes during puberty and how to respect the body. The last module specifically teaches a young person about the healthy relationship between young male and female and appropriate dating behaviour. In order to create interest of teenagers to read the module, information on sexuality is presented in a form of a story of how a young couple first having a relationship.

RHAM Modules and Life's Journey

A leading non-governmental organisation on sexuality and reproductive health; the Federation of Reproductive Health Associations, Malaysia (FRHAM) has also developed its own module called Reproductive Health of Adolescents Module (RHAM). It serves as a guide for educators, including youth peer educators who are involved in the promotion of adolescent reproductive health. The module comprises of seven concepts, nineteen topics and seventy-five activities. The module has been designed to promote healthy practices and life-enhancing values, self-esteem, gender equality, family relationships and develop skills and attitudes that will empower adolescents to make responsible choices in reproductive health. The topics are presented within the concepts entitled as; "Understanding my body, taking care of my health, we are equal; reproductive rights and reproductive health; me and my values; my friends and I; and my family and I". The recently updated module with similar concepts has also been published by this organisation and it is called Life's Journey [28].

Others

Education materials, programs and services focusing on sexuality and reproductive education have gradually increased. Other available programs or booklets include '3R, 'Demi Cinta, I'm in Control Modules and a few others. At the time of study, a few online and multimedia projects to enhance the effectiveness and delivery of sexuality education are on-going. These include Malaysian Sexuality Education (MSE) and PEACE for Women: *Modul Kesejahteraan Minda dan Kesihatan Wanita* proposed by experts from Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) respectively [29, 30]. A few researchers are developing an instrument to analyse the needs of public for sexuality education [31], however, to date no local study is available to evaluate the effectiveness of sexuality education in Malaysia.

What are the challenges and suggested solutions for implementation of sexuality education?

Table 1 below provides the summary of challenges and suggested solutions for the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education in this country.

Table 1

Challenges and suggested solutions for implementation of comprehensive sexuality education

Challenges	Suggested Solutions
Sexuality is a sensitive subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using culturally acceptable terms • Involvement of parents and family to discuss sensitive topics with children and young people
Misconception on the impact of sexuality education	Discussion between various groups of experts to clarify misconceptions
Disagreement in the curriculum - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The existing curriculum is disintegrated and compartmentalised • Lacking few fundamental elements of sexuality 	Review of the curriculum. Enhancement required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive understanding on physical aspect, reproduction and pubertal changes • Appropriate explanation of sexual intercourse, safe sex and the use of contraception aligned with local norms, values and culture • Incorporating element of empowerment and gender equality • Adding up personal safety measures • Respecting diversity in sexuality
Lack of trained teachers or educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equip teachers and parents with accessible sexuality education module • Improve connectedness between parents and school by engaging parents with school-based sexuality program
Lack of collaborative effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage parents and family involvement • Multidisciplinary effort – government, policy maker, educationists, health professionals, experts in religion, social activists, NGOs

Sexuality is a sensitive subject

Most professionals and the public in Malaysia believe that discussing matters related to sexuality is very challenging [9]. Any matters related to sex and sexuality is taboo and should be discussed only in a private sphere. In-depth interviews with 15 key professionals working in the field of sexuality and reproductive health in Malaysia by local researchers indicated that sexuality is perceived as negative matters [32]. The authors argued that such connotation was present because “*media and public discourses mostly broadcast the criminal and illegal aspects of sexuality*”. Our review on online newspaper articles also suggested that substantial articles have illustrated the relationship between sexuality with negative discourses such as sexual abuses, infant abandonment, unwanted pregnancy, and adolescent pregnancy. As a result, a few professionals suggested that:

a suitable term [should] be coined for sex education because the word “sex” had a negative and sensitive connotation.

The Star Online, 31 January 2016

Misconception on the impact of sexuality education

When it comes to sex education, society often immaturely or traditionally equates it to encouraging sexual experimentation, which is the greatest mistruth and fallacy of all times.

The Star Online, 8 March 2010

The strong opposition towards the implementation of sexuality education most often comes from conservative Islamic groups in this country. They disagree with the move to teach sexuality education in schools and believe that the subject may do more harm than good to the younger generation. They believe that Islamic teaching itself is enough to provide sexuality education. In the words of one of their leaders:

There is already sex education in Islam like parents should have a separate sleeping place for their children when they reach the age of seven and that women should be properly covered... introducing sex education in schools would be like teaching thieves how to steal properly.

The Sun Daily, 2 July 2010

Disagreement on the curriculum

The main challenge in the implementation of sexuality education in Malaysia is the disagreement regarding the syllabus of sexuality education. Many are aware that the current sexuality education aims for sex abstinence and has covered topics on the anatomy of reproductive organs, physical aspects related to puberty and prevention of STDs/AIDs. However, a few believe that the syllabus is still not quite complete, thus require further review. One of the important subject lacking is the comprehensive explanation on sexual intercourse; where, when and with whom to have sexual intercourse, preventive measures of early sexual debut, preventive measures for pregnancy and implication of sexual intercourse. Hence, one professional criticised that:

The syllabus in schools only scraped the surface, as it is focused on the scientific terms of reproduction, and students are not given proper education on intercourse and its impact

The Star Online, 24 September 2016.

Specifically, the important element lacking in current sexuality education is knowledge regarding contraception. According to one representative of the Ministry said:

The module is about preventing sex. We do talk about safe sex, but the demonstration of how to wear a condom, for example, is not allowed in schools

The Malay Mail Online, 13 February, 2014

The idea about excluding knowledge on contraception was challenged by one of the experts and argued that the concept of 'harm reduction' should be applied to prevent the consequence of sexual activities such as teenage pregnancy and infant abandonment. Further, the expert encouraged that:

The Government should also move towards providing free access to contraception to women who reached the age of consent, similar to that used in the harm reduction approach in tackling drug addiction

The Star Online, 21 January 2016

Another element missing in current sexuality education suggested by one of the educationists from a local university is educating children and young people on empowerment and gender equality (The Star Online, 1 December 2015). In one local study of illegal infant abandonment and infanticide in Malaysia, the authors indicated the relationship between gender equality and infant abandonment and infanticide and advocated sexuality education to emphasise on this matter [33]. According to the authors, evidence showed that the higher the gender inequality index, the higher the rates of infanticide. In order to improve further, an expert suggested:

We need to progress from the elementary teaching of physical development and changes from a child to adolescence and sexual reproduction biology lessons to comprehensive age-appropriate sexuality education in schools that also addresses body rights, sexually transmitted infections, identifies stay away zones, contraception information, the meaning of consent, respect, responsibility and relationship education. Gone are the days where sexuality education is solely about preventing pregnancies

The Sun Daily, 25 February 2015

Further, following the shocking case of a British paedophile; Richard Huckle who committed 71 counts of child sex offences on Malaysian children, a few articles suggested improvement in sexuality education. One of the examples highlighted:

As the country grapples with the news that its young had been savagely abused sexually at the hands of a foreign paedophile, Putrajaya yesterday revealed that it is pursuing steps to build another layer of protection from such predators. It wants to introduce a suitable sex education syllabus for preschoolers in Malaysia, which will help children better understand the harm that could come their way from such individuals”.

New Straits Time, 11 June 2016

As a consequence, a few experts have suggested that Personal Safety Program (*Program Keselamatan Diri*) should also be incorporated in sexuality education to prevent children from becoming the victims of sexual abuses (Harian Metro, 23 Jun 2016). The suggestion was also supported by other health professionals:

In a joint statement, the Malaysian Paediatric Association and the Academy of Medicine of Malaysia’s College of Paediatrics said while the subject may be deemed a taboo, approaching it in the curriculum, in the best way possible, would provide children and parents with safeguards against paedophilia

New Straits Time, 11 June 2016

Those who are practising gender role or sexual orientation which is out of norms of the majority are often marginalised and excluded from the social, economic, legal and cultural life of people in Malaysia. Matters regarding gender equality are taught in Moral Education which caters only for non-Muslim. On the other hand, Muslim students are seldom taught about gender rights. Further, as part

of the syllabus in Islamic Education, homosexuality is a transgressive and forbidden sexual behaviour. The current aim of the minister is to have an effective discussion regarding this matter and eventually find ways to curb and prevent the widespread of sexual minority groups in the school environment. One of the articles said;

The Education Ministry views seriously the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender phenomenon and is committed to ensuring that it does not spread to schools and harm the morals...The time has come for the LGBT issue be discussed openly and not treat it as a taboo subject, just like when we introduced sex education in schools where we undertook various measures including naming the subject health and reproductive education.

The Star Online, 20 September 2012

In answering to the criticisms and suggestions to current sexuality education, the President of National Collaboration of Parents and Teachers [*Majlis Permuafakatan PIBG Nasional*] (PIBGN) suggested that the curriculum has to be further reviewed and improved (Harian Metro, 27 January 2016).

Training for teachers or trainers

The availability of trained teachers or trainers is another significant hurdle in implementing effective sexuality education to children and young people in this country. Teachers themselves have doubts, do not feel comfortable discussing the subject, unclear of what can and cannot be discussed; have difficulty in explaining and answering pupils' questions regarding sexuality (The Star Online, 23 January 2015). As a result, the teachers experience anxiety and tension. A few complained that the teachers explained the topic in a superficial and vague manner (The Star Online, 21 February 2016) and many reluctant to discuss certain topics even though it has been provided in the syllabus of sexuality education (The Star Online, 17 July 2016). Ultimately, the lesson may not be effectively delivered. As one of the comments published in the article:

Educators experience a lot of anxiety and tension when faced with teaching young people about these issues. And, this tension can result in avoiding, or not effectively addressing, sex education. At the same time, many teachers don't feel adequately equipped or comfortable teaching it. Most adults didn't grow up with a lot of information on sex, so it makes sense that they don't feel prepared to discuss it with young people

New Straits Time, 22 June 2016

The problem experienced by the teachers was also expressed by the Secretary of National Union of Teaching Profession (NUTP) which said that:

Kesatuan itu menyokong penuh usaha kerajaan untuk menyediakan pendidikan seks di sekolah-sekolah tetapi sesuatu yang menyedihkan ialah guru-guru kurang latihan formal dari segi kerumitan dan sensitiviti subjek itu dan tidak yakin untuk mengajarnya [The union fully supports the government's efforts to provide sex education in schools but something sad is the teachers lack formal training in terms of the complexity and sensitivity of the subject and are not confident to teach it].

Kosmo, 3 March 2010.

KOSMO, 3 March, 201

Schools and teachers are reminded by one of the articles:

These facilitators need to be equipped to draw boundaries, manage challenging questions and ensure safety and respect. The people carrying out sex education classes should be personalities who are positive, approachable and possess the ability to be objective and neutral when discussing issues such as sex versus sexuality and don't get squeamish and shy during contraceptive demonstrations. These classes should also assist in developing communication skills so that the young are able to communicate their own thoughts on the subject matter and classes should include psychosocial implications of sex that will equip them to make informed decisions

The Sun Daily; 25 February 2015

Family and parental involvement

Many agree that providing knowledge on sexuality must start at home as early as possible before children are exposed to external influences through advances in online media, internet usage, telephone, radios and etc. The challenges occur when parents themselves have no knowledge and reluctant to teach matters related to sexuality to their children. Hence, parents are reminded to play their roles as stated in one of the articles;

The discussion can be initiated with the birth of a sibling in the family...Parents should be encouraged to discuss family attitudes, values and beliefs with their children at the early stage of their lives...At this stage, parents are encouraged to answer children's questions as accurately as possible...Parents should not only talk about body issues, sexuality and reproduction but must also emphasise the importance of good values and morals. It is evident that young people, whose parents discuss aspects of sexuality with them, tend to delay becoming sexually active, compared to those who do not discuss the topic...Parents are the best sex educators at home. A father must answer his son's sensitive questions. So, should a mother to her daughter's queries on the subject...This practice actually adds to better bonding among family members

The Star Online; 17 July 2016

Collaboration between Government and Private Sectors

Providing sexuality education to children and young people in Malaysia should be a collaborative effort from various stakeholders within Government agencies as well as private sectors. However, a few disappointments from private sectors that are willing to share the responsibilities are highlighted in the media. One of the articles mentioned that:

Currently, NGOs do not have access to conduct comprehensive sex education in schools or tertiary institutions and that sex education is not taught in its entirety in classes across the nation

The Star Online, 21 February 2016

4. Discussion

Sexuality education in Malaysia has improved dramatically in the last decades, but there are still rooms for enhancement. Current sexuality education is compartmentalised and disintegrated into health-based, academic-based or religious-based which make it probably difficult for the public to appreciate its existence, more so for the children and young people. The greatest challenge is to bring experts from various disciplines (such as educationists, health professionals, experts in religion and social activists) to sit together to create a subject of comprehensive sexuality education which is culturally, religiously and socially acceptable. While, there are many experts to prepare the content of sexuality education within their individual disciplines, but lacking the most is the champion to streamline and harmonise the syllabus so that it is conformed to culture and religion of multiracial society of Malaysians and aligned with the international (Western) understanding of human rights.

Almost two third of Malaysians are Muslims; hence the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education has to satisfy and agree with the norms of the majority without marginalising the needs of the minority. Many Muslim scholars in Malaysia would support the notion by a Muslim feminist; Riffat Hassan that *"The Quran is Magna Carta of human rights"* [34]. However, referring to current available religious-based syllabus on sexuality, the situation in Malaysia is likely to be as she argued further:

Muslim societies, in general, appear to be far more concerned with trying to control women's bodies and sexuality than with their human rights. Many Muslims when they speak of human rights, either do not speak of women's rights at all or are mainly concerned with how a women's chastity may be protected (They are apparently not worried about protecting men's chastity).

Riffat Hassan, n.d.

It is vital for the experts in religions to incorporate in the Islamic Education that the fundamental teaching of Islam is in keeping with current concept of human's right (including women's rights); Islam emphasises an individual rights to life, to freedom, to respect, to justice, to privacy and to have good life [9]. Sexuality education in Malaysia should be structured and delivered to the young people without an element of gender bias. It is important to emphasise the importance of respecting any gender; woman, man or others. The Islamic concept of sexuality is not merely for girls or young women to wear *hijab* or protect their *aurat*, but equally important for boys and young men to learn to control their libidinal impulse. Contrary to the teaching of religious fundamentalist and experts in the Malays-Eastern culture that girls should lower their voice, in order to prevent sexual transgression and sexual abuse, Malay-Muslims girls should be taught to express their disappointment on any cases of sexual harassment or abuse and their voice must always be heard. When teaching about sexual transgression and its consequences, it is vital to understand that sexual relation is the interaction between man and woman, hence sin for *zina* is for both; not only for woman but for man too. Another example is the discussion on premarital sex. Contrary to the statement taken from Form 1; Physical Fitness and Health Education Book (*Buku Pendidikan Jasmani dan Pendidikan Kesihatan*), 2016, page 34 which stated as below, both the pregnant girl and the boy who impregnated the girl should be responsible for the behaviour:

"Seorang perempuan yang hamil tanpa berkahwin telah melakukan perkara yang menyimpang daripada norma hidup dan agama (A girl who is pregnant out-of-wedlock have committed a behaviour which is out of norm and forbidden by religion"

Ministry of Education, 2016

When illegitimate pregnancy occurs both man and woman should be responsible - hence the sentence should be corrected as, "*the pregnant girl and the boy who impregnated her [perempuan yang hamil dan lelaki yang menyebabkan beliau hamil].....*" Hence, it is vital that harmonising the current sexuality education and human rights agenda be the future steps in implementing comprehensive sexuality education in Malaysia.

Not only focusing on experts in religion, collaborative approach from various stakeholders is the key to effective comprehensive sexuality education. Hence, further improvement should consider opinions from all experts within government sectors or NGOs. More importantly, opinions of children and young people, as well as parents and public, should be considered in the development of comprehensive sexuality education in this country. Importantly, parents and family are the main educators for comprehensive sexual education. In this country, their involvement is seriously lacking. The way forward is to enhance engagement of parents and family in providing knowledge of sexuality. Currently, in the syllabus of school-based sexuality education, there are no activities that require parents to take part in learning and discussion. Enhancement could be done through homework (such as questions or triggers) which requires the students to get opinion or feedback from their parents regarding sexuality. Indirectly, this method could encourage healthy parents-children relationship and communication, and increase school-parent connectedness. Studies have shown that adolescents who reported feeling connected to parents and their family were more likely to delay initiating sexual intercourse than other teenagers [36]. Recent meta-analysis of 52 studies involving 25 314 adolescents which examined the link between parent-adolescent communication about sex and safer sex practices among youth indicated a significant positive effect in particular among girls [37]. Through parent-children communication, personal and sensitive topics related to sexuality could easily be discussed and elaborated.

The fear of educators to deliver sexuality education should also be addressed. Comprehensive sexuality education is unlikely to be effectively delivered if educators have no clear intention and devoid of skills and methods to deliver the subject. Experts from other countries have also described various challenges in delivering sexuality education including disagreement with the content, duration and time-tabling of the subject, difficulty to teach subspecialty areas (such as psychologically-informed skills), inadequate training and development of teachers, unavailable or insufficiently used material, staff shortage and resources to implement and support the new curriculum [9]. As a result of those challenges, non-implementation is expected. Perhaps, the best way to move forward in the implementation of sexuality education is first to train the educators with enough knowledge on sexuality, effective communication skills and specific answers to questions related to sexuality and later to teach the students on this subject.

5. Conclusion

Sexuality education has been implemented in Malaysia for almost a decade through disintegrated and compartmentalised approach. The subject aims at providing knowledge on sexuality and reproductive health, abstinence and curbing what perceived as moral transgressions such as premarital sex and its consequences. The success of sexuality education in Malaysia requires experts to deal with misconception on the impact of sexuality education, disagreement on the curriculum, lack of availability of trained teachers or trainers, lack of family and parental involvement as well as poor multidisciplinary collaboration. In order to enhance further sexuality education in this country so that it is recognised as Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), all experts have to sit together to harmonise the subject so that it is acceptable to all Malaysians.

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