

Limited Recourses for sexual physiology and Health Education for rural Primary Students in China

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Abstract. This paper analyzes the current situation and deficiencies of sexual physiology and health education resources in rural primary schools in China. Due to traditional cultural concepts, uneven distribution of educational resources, and shortage of teaching staff, rural primary school students face many challenges in sexual physiology and health education. The article points out that the taboo concept of the Confucian culture towards sexual topics makes it difficult to carry out sex education in families and schools, and the shortage of teachers and insufficient teacher training further aggravate this problem. To improve the current situation, the article suggests strengthening teacher training, improving educational policies, and promoting the balanced development of educational resources between urban and rural areas, in order to enhance the health literacy and quality of life of rural students.

Keywords: Sex physiology and health education, rural primary schools, Confucian culture, shortage of teachers, educational policies.

1. Introduction

In China, sexual physiology and health education has always been a curriculum that is frequently ignored. Owing to the geographical terrain and restricted access to educational facilities, a significant number of pupils attending primary schools in rural areas lack knowledge regarding sexual physiology and health [14]. When confronted with the alterations in their physical forms, numerous students experience confusion, fear, and a sense of being overwhelmed. Simultaneously, it is crucial to promote comprehensive sexual and physical health education in primary schools located in rural areas, considering the inadequate health conditions among students prevalent in those regions [1]. This essay aims to provide an overview of the historical context and present state of sexual physiology and health education in rural primary schools. It will next examine the factors contributing to the scarcity of resources in this area and offer critical analysis and recommendations about existing policies.

2. Background

2.1. Definition of sexual physiology and health education

Sexual physiology and health education: Sexual physiology and health education is a multidisciplinary field of study, which refers to the systematic education and guidance to help individuals understand and master the knowledge and skills related to sexual physiology and health to promote physical and mental health, prevent related diseases, and establish healthy sexual attitudes and behaviour patterns [13]. The main goal of this initiative is to increase health literacy among individuals, enabling them to make informed choices and support beneficial health practices. This education includes physiological knowledge, personal and environmental cleanliness, prevention of infectious diseases, healthy habits, and many other aspects.

2.2. The influence of Confucian culture on sex education

Confucianism: Confucianism has five core ideas and principles [3].

Ren: called 'Ren ai 'or humanity, emphasizing care, compassion and respect between people. Benevolence is the highest standard of morality.

Li: refers to etiquette, norms and traditional habits, and it is an important means to maintain social order and harmony, it includes family ethics, social norms and political systems.

Yi: It represents justice, fairness and morality, emphasizing the moral correctness of behaviour, righteousness and interests are opposed, and doing things should be moral first, rather than personal interests.

Zhi: refers to wisdom and knowledge, emphasizing the importance of learning and thinking.

Xin: refers to honesty and trust, emphasizing people should be honest and trustworthy.

3. The reason for the lag in Sexual physiology and health education in China

In traditional Chinese culture, the topic of sex is often considered private, even taboo. It is generally deemed inappropriate to discuss these topics openly [7]. Confucianism, which places a high value on etiquette and morality, views sex as an area that must be tightly controlled and regulated [5]. In the Analects, Confucius advocates for the principle of "Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety; make no movement which is contrary to propriety." suggesting that behaviour not aligned with propriety should be avoided [2]. This concept transfers into strict restrictions on the public discussion and expression of sex.

Additionally, Confucian thought imposes significant expectations on women's chastity and obedience within the family and society [5]. The topic of sex, particularly concerning women, is therefore seen as something to be avoided. Mencius further reinforces this in his writings, where he states that "men and women are different," indicating distinct roles and obligations for men and women in both familial and social contexts [7]. This differentiation strengthens the gender role distinctions and perpetuates the taboo surrounding sexual topics.

On the other hand, family education is deficient in understanding sexual and physiological health. Out of the total of 6,093 students included in the research, only 11.3 per cent of boys and 30.4 per cent of girls received responses to their sexual health questions from their mothers. Similarly, 17.5 per cent of boys and 7.9 per cent of girls obtained answers from their fathers. Chinese parents prioritise their children's academic pursuits and delay discussions about sex until after junior high school [10]. Furthermore, numerous parents experience a sense of being overwhelmed and uneasy while engaging in conversations with their children regarding sexually related topics, and they may not possess the necessary knowledge to adequately address their children's inquiries on the subject [10]. They hold the belief that engaging in conversations about the topic with their children at an early age can have an impact on their "purity"[11].

4. The situation of sexual physiology and health education for rural primary students in China

Based on Wang's analysis of data collected from a rural primary school, among the 140 questionnaires, 21.4 per cent of the students reported never having received sexual and physiological health education, while 78.6 per cent of the students reported having gotten such information. Regarding particular information, a total of 79 individuals lacked understanding of the distinctions between male and female biological traits, while just 61 individuals possessed knowledge about that [14]. When queried about their awareness of women's periods, just 59 participants were knowledgeable while 81 participants were unaware [14]. From the provided statistics, it is obvious that the sexual physiology and health education for primary school students in this school is significantly lacking.

4.1. Insufficient educational resources

Among rural primary school students, the majority of female students show a greater understanding of fundamental physiological and health knowledge compared to their male classmates.

Statistics indicate that girls exhibit a higher level of concern for their hygiene compared to boys, with a proportion of approximately 90 per cent [1]. In the higher and lower grades of education, Higher-grade students possess a greater awareness of physiological hygiene and a more profound comprehension of fundamental practices such as handwashing before meals and after using the restroom, maintaining sufficient sleep duration, and so on [1]. This further demonstrates that students' awareness of sexual physiology and health education grows as they get older.

4.2. Differences in students' cognitive level

From my own experience, living in the city, I felt immense fear and believed I was going to perish when I got my first period in sixth grade. This was because neither my teachers nor my parents had previously provided me with basic information about this physiological process. It is conceivable that students residing in rural areas might not get timely sexual physiology and health education. As I grew up, I discovered that it had a significant influence on me. Under the current policy in China, there is an important disparity in the education penetration rate between urban and rural areas. This raises the question in my mind of whether all students in rural areas have received comprehensive sexual and physiological health education. Following that, I shall analyze the factors resulting in the lack of sexual physiology and health education resources in rural areas.

5. Factors that cause the scarcity of sexual physiology and health education resources

5.1. China's rural primary schools suffer from a shortage of teachers.

The social structure and resource distribution in urban and rural areas of China vary. People who live in rural areas argue that children should exert effort, leave rural areas, and relocate to urban areas in order to acquire a more extensive range of information, establish connections, and access additional resources [8]. Consequently, this leads to a large percentage of teachers being hesitant to work in rural regions. In contrast to urban areas, teachers in rural regions receive lower incomes, experience poorer treatment, and work in subpar instructional environments [8]. Due to the disparity in economic development between urban and rural areas, the unequal allocation of education resources has resulted in an increasing number of highly qualified teachers opting to work in urban areas [8].

As a result of Lu's investigation of 12 primary schools in a rural region of China, the total number of students is 59, 127, but the number of teachers is only 3450 [8]. The number of teachers in rural schools is very inadequate, and the organization of the subject structure is inappropriate. At the same time, due to the remote location of many schools in mountainous regions, transportation is exceedingly inconvenient, significantly affecting both students and teachers. Moreover, because of financial constraints, the district's yearly teacher recruitment fails to meet the need adequately. During the period from 2010 to 2014, a total of 579 teachers in rural primary schools were no longer at work, with around 200 of these teachers being transferred to urban primary schools [8]. Undoubtedly, there exists a notable discrepancy in the number of students residing in rural and urban areas, which suggests a greater need for educators in urban regions as opposed to rural regions.

5.2. Existing policies to address the shortage of rural teachers.

Firstly, advocate for the standardization of teacher rotation and the interchange of teachers between urban and rural areas for primary and secondary school. This would facilitate the equitable distribution of instructors in urban and rural regions. Commencing in 2019, pilot programs will be implemented in various provinces and areas. Simultaneously, it has released a stress reduction list of primary and secondary school educators intending to alleviate their workload. The government is dedicated to enhancing the teaching environment and fostering a more conducive teaching atmosphere (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Secondly, enhance the integrated recruitment platform for primary and secondary school teachers in both urban and rural regions, and allocate additional capital to facilitate the hiring of more educators in rural areas. The China education department shall persist in enhancing the organization of rural educators and the construction of schools (MOE.gov, 2021).

5.3. Evaluation & recommendation

For students, job rotation among teachers can significantly impact their ability to adapt to different teaching methods. As students become accustomed to one teacher's pedagogy, transitioning to a new teacher can disrupt their learning process. This frequent change may affect their academic performance.

For teachers, adapting to different working environments and teams can affect the quality of their instruction [9]. The disparities between urban and rural settings require teachers to adjust to new environments and colleagues, posing substantial challenges. This can increase work-related stress and potentially impact their teaching effectiveness.

Firstly, more aid can be offered to instructors who rotate, including provisions for housing and opportunities for career development.

besides that, it is crucial to implement monitoring and evaluation programs to measure the efficacy of the rotation system and promptly make any adjustments based on feedback received from instructors and schools.

Finally, it is imperative to enhance the school infrastructure to improve the educational atmosphere and facilitate a more favourable learning environment in rural schools.

5.4. Lack of sufficient teacher training on sexual physiology and health education

Within the rural teacher's category, there is an immense number of replacement teachers who have not acquired comprehensive professional education, they mostly rely on their own experiences to educate [8]. This demonstrates that the rural curriculum concept is falling behind the content of the urban curriculum and is unable to keep up with the rapid changes of the modern day. Teachers are not adequately trained and equipped with resources for sexual physiology and health education [6]. Being rural teachers, they lack the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate and articulate delicate this subject [14]. Meanwhile, there is a lack of accompanying educational resources, such as textbooks and sanitary pads for females, even in remote regions, sanitary pads are in short supply [14]. In addition, many teachers personally experience discomfort and unease while addressing these themes [6]. Another thing is rural teachers face an excessive workload, with most of their time and energy dedicated to daily teaching responsibilities. In certain cases, teachers are even required to engage in agricultural work at home [6]. The demanding workload and busy lifestyle leave teachers with insufficient time for training and personal development, ultimately impacting the quality of their teaching. Being rural teachers, they lack the knowledge and skills to effectively communicate and articulate delicate subjects.

5.5. Existing policies to address inadequate training of rural teachers.

Firstly, the Ministry of Education has proactively investigated the establishment of experimental zones for comprehensive reform of teacher education at the province level. This initiative aims to foster collaborative education between local governments, colleges and institutions, and primary and secondary schools. Implement a robust teacher training program and establish an extensive framework for teacher research. Simultaneously, subsidies have been introduced to support the education of teachers in rural areas, and a fund has been established to provide rewards for these teachers. This program has benefitted almost 6,000 teachers (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Secondly, the Ministry of Education has introduced government-funded training for college students specializing in education studies, as well as targeted training for teachers in rural areas.

Furthermore, they have initiated a program to recognize and reward exceptional young teachers in rural areas (MOE.gov, 2021).

5.6. Evaluation& recommendation

The government allocates an excessive amount of funding to rural education, resulting in reduced investment in other areas like urban planning, infrastructure development, and healthcare facilities. The government also faces the difficulty of efficiently distributing capital.

The government could improve surveillance and assessment initiatives and enact periodic evaluations to guarantee the efficacy of teacher training programs and the allocation of funds.

Moreover, partnerships with universities can be strengthened to ensure that teacher training programmes meet the needs of rural schools.

6. Conclusion

China faces a major challenge in efficiently distributing resources due to its high population density. There should be a timely promotion of sexual physiology and health education, with a particular emphasis on addressing the educational needs of children in rural areas, as opposed addition to those in urban areas. Also, there is a research gap that requires further investigation. Given the disparities in acceptance and comprehension among male and female students residing in rural and urban regions, it is imperative to do additional research to determine whether teachers should employ distinct instructional approaches when teaching sexual physiology and health education to rural students. In the future, both urban and rural youngsters will have the opportunity to pursue their desired education, leading to enhanced personal growth and contributing to the progress of the nation.

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