

The Impact of Sex Education on the Status of Women in the United States

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Abstract. As social identities are more and more developed and people's awareness of self-identity is blooming, sexual-related topics are frequently becoming the most highlighted topic in nowadays social topics. Sexual minorities and women as two relatively disadvantaged groups in social structure, LGBTQ+ and women's rights, and status occupied greater weight in motions and social norms. Self-identification and self-protection are where sex education is involved. Sex education is an important part for an individual to form a sane identity, and it does not merely exist in school but (should) exist in society outside of schools' high walls. Sex education is an important step to equip the educated with the essential knowledge to protect themselves away from sexual problems, conduct safe, healthy, and responsible sexual behavior and enhance reproductive health. This article will use a case study to examine how sex education relates to women's status or social identities by comparing the sex education curriculum and social situation in two major American states, Texas and New York. Analyze how different pedagogical, curricular, and instructional approach greatly impacts the status of women in these states, exploring the laws and the regulation that govern these practices. This article will show how they impact women's physical and mental health, their income levels, and their professional advancement. It will argue how systematical sex education affects the status of women in New York and Texas and conclude the effective measure to improve the women's status, which would be helpful to present the importance of sex education, and provide feminism and also sexual minorities a new key effective point to sustain their rights.

Keywords: Sex education, New York, Texas, Status of Women, adolescents.

1. Introduction

How sex education relates to a woman's status? Let's first understand what sex education is. Sex education is the process of educating people and shaping their thoughts and beliefs about sex, sexual orientation, intimacy, and connections. Sex education is the education on sex and relationships.[1] Its contents may cover emotional relationships and responsibilities, human sexual anatomy, sexual behavior, sexual reproduction, the legal consent age, reproductive health and rights, safe sex, birth control, and sexual abstinence. The most effective point of how sex education is related to women's status is: that females may be the only ones who have to be responsible for reproduction in heterosexual sexual behavior. Which probably means negative health issues, financial situation, and school or workplace difficulties. Unplanned pregnancy may cause the female to drop out of school, face unbearable financial situations, be threatened by illness, at a disadvantage in the workplace.....

Good sex education can improve self-esteem, self-confidence, awareness of gender equality, and fundamental rights of the educated. Thus, a person with good sex education would be more aware of the consequence of sexual behavior, more likely to be able to be responsible for any behavior including sexual behavior, and respect the sex partner more. Teenage females who attend teen clinics might benefit from protection because of dialogue with parents. [2] Sex education is essential knowledge of great significance for individual growth that always is intentionally or unintentionally ignored because of the original particular private property.

Sex education at present is an unavoidable topic in most countries especially well-developed countries like the United States. It has been brought up repeatedly as the development of gender and identity. The suffering of confusing and doubting who I am and relating discovery process is usually most vigorous during the adolescence period. Just a few of the many benefits of sex education include lowering sexual shame, inhibitions, and double standards, supporting the traditional ideals of love

and fidelity, and encouraging a healthier, more laid-back, and more responsible attitude toward sex.[3] Conducting a comprehensive sexual health education (CSE) will be significantly helpful for them to figure out their self-content identity, live confidently with their differences with others, and live better with their fundamental rights and with the respect of each other. Thus, the best approach to form such an environment most appropriately with good timing, which makes the adolescents at school becomes the focus of sex education. By equipping teenagers with CSE, most of the population will finally own a basic common sense all the people are equally the same, and a truly friendly and harmonious environment will finally form. Sex education is not merely for bene benefit it women, whereas creating an equal and mutual respect environment.

The goal of sex education in the United States is to provide clear expectations for students regarding what they should understand and be able to do after passing a particular grade level.[4] This article will compare the differences and similarities in sex education in New York and Texas. To highlight the benefits of CSE and demonstrates its positive effects on women.

2. Sex Education in New York and Texas

Adolescent relationships that are violent can lead to future violent relationships, including intimate partner violence and sexual assault. CSE is the only upstream strategy to stop sexual assault and harassment before it happens. LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately at risk of being victimized in schools, which has been linked to lower academic achievement, an increase in suicidal ideation, higher absenteeism rates, and detrimental effects on emotional health. CSE programs cultivate crucial knowledge and abilities that support healthy relationships, empowering and protecting young people. When schools take steps to educate their students about such topics as consent, bodily autonomy, and dating violence as well as to enact school policies aimed at prevention, teens are less likely to be victims, and more likely to refrain from engaging in intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment is significantly decreased. Additionally, CSE encourages tolerance and inclusion by educating kids about gender identity and sexual orientation through lesson plans and engaging activities that are appropriate for and inclusive of LGBTQ adolescents. CSE programs promote preventive behaviors that minimize the chance of pregnancy and STIs, such as limiting the number of partners, communicating the risks to partners, and using condoms more frequently, when youths do begin the sexual activity. CSE helps kids delay the initiation of sexual engagement.

When schools take steps to educate their students about such topics as consent, bodily autonomy, and dating violence as well as to enact school policies aimed at prevention, teens are less likely to become victims, are more likely to abstain from committing intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment is significantly decreased. Additionally, CSE encourages tolerance and inclusivity by assisting students in understanding Through lesson ideas and activities that apply to and accepting of LGBTQ adolescents, sexual orientation and gender identity are discussed. When youth do begin engaging in sexual activity, CSE programs encourage improved protective behaviors to reduce pregnancy and STIs, such as having fewer partners, better communicating with partners about risk, and using condoms more frequently. CSE programs also assist youth in delaying the onset of sexual activity.

Studies show a connection between the social and emotional skills learned in CSE programs and better physical and mental health results, as well as happy and fulfilling relationships. Additionally, studies show that CSE-cultivated social and emotional skills enhance academic performance. A 2015 meta-analysis of programs to prevent school dropout, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, showed that social-emotional skills programs significantly decreased dropout rates, from an average of 21.1% in control groups to 10.2% in program groups.[5]

2.1 Sex Education in New York

Currently, the public school in New York doesn't require comprehensive sexual health education besides the instructions about HIV/AIDS. Thus, many schools do not provide sex education, if there

are, the curriculum qualities and contents are varying by the school district. The requirements of the quality of sex education curriculum in New York state are quite low. It is not necessary for sex education to focus on abstinence, nor is it necessary to teach about sexual orientation or gender identity, nor is it necessary to teach about consent, and even no need to be medically accurate in sex education instruction and most of the provided sex education is inaccurate, incomplete, and stigmatizing. [6] If the parents or guardians don't want their children to have sex education at school, an "opt-out" policy is provided -- providing "confidence that the learner would get such instruction at home," families are permitted to exempt their children from HIV/AIDS education. Whereas since 2011, Comprehensive health education classes in schools must cover sex education. Although it is only taught for one semester, it must be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and skills-based. [6] Merely 37.9% of students in grades 6, 7, and 8 and 80.1% of students in high school, according to research from 2017, were educated about all sixteen key sexual education subjects (as identified by the CDC).

There are different job opportunities and courses designed to help women to chase their dream can be easily found on the New York government's official website. For different specific cases, it provides different solutions for women in different situations.

2.2 Sex Education in Texas

Sex education is not mandatory in Texas as well. The latest Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) (revised in 2020) required the schools to teach seventh and eighth-grade pupils about birth control options, but no need to be mandatory and consistent comprehensive sex education. [5] Till August 26, 2022, Texas Sex Education Policies and Requirements still have not required schools in Texas to instruct in sex education. If a school decides to offer sex education, the curriculum must place a strong emphasis on abstinence; the instruction doesn't need to be medically correct. It must say that homosexuality is not an acceptable lifestyle to the general public and that it is a crime under the Texas Penal Code if it also employs a curriculum created by the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Consent education is not a mandated part of school curricula, and each school has its unique curriculum. According to reports, some textbooks even downplay the benefits of abstinence by listing condom use as a high-risk practice and excluding it as a method of preventing sexually transmitted infections. In Texas, there is an "opt-in" regulation; parents or guardians must give written approval before their children participate in sex education at school (if there is any). [7] According to reports, some textbooks even minimize the advantages of abstinence by classifying the use of condoms as a high-risk behavior and eliminating it as a means of preventing STIs. In 2017, 58.3 percent of school districts only taught abstinence, 16.6 percent taught abstinence-plus, and 25 percent did not teach any sex education at all, according to a Texas Freedom Network survey.

In Texas, there is no official information from Texas government websites for the female to find re-employment opportunities. The only remedial service for females that can be found on the Texas official website is the academic services for high school girls with unwanted pregnancies.

Many undocumented immigrants avoid getting medical care out of fear of being deported as a result of the Trump administration's continued onslaught on immigrant communities. The closure of 82 family planning clinics in Texas between 2011 and 2016 had a detrimental effect on the ability of low-income families and individuals to access healthcare services.

3. The Factors that Caused the Negative Impression on Women in Sex Education

Three main reasons caused the negative impression of females: inaccurate educational content, abstinence sex education, and non-mandatory sex education. The origin and the continuation of the negative impressions of women is the inaccurate educational content, the objective neither comprehensive sex education content creates the misunderstood of the reproduction process, and the

non-mandatory sex education and abstinence sex education starts the systematical misunderstood negative perception of women.

3.1 Inaccurate Educational Content

Sex education in New York and Texas is not required to be medically accurate. This means the wrong anatomy knowledge, and even the contraception method had been keeping diffusing. The incorrect information existing in sex education curricula provided at school could be significantly powerful in strengthening the original stereotype about women and sexual behavior. The systematically biased sex education curriculum taught by the school, which is a comparatively authoritative and reliable place, can not provide the students with a clear understanding of sexual-relating activities or a healthier lifestyle. Nevertheless, strengthened the existing stereotypes about women and sexual activities.

The inaccurate sex education can't give students a sense of self-awareness or responsibility. And keeping the incorrect information in adolescents' minds, they may more likely to engage in sexual intercourse without any awareness of the consequences of their behavior and end up with unbearable results. Merely 11% of the high school students in New York who were polled in 2017 reported utilizing a method to avoid pregnancy and STIs, even though 50% of the students had had sexual contact. [6]

3.2 Non-Mandatory Sex Education

Since sex education is not required in every school district, the subject is constantly changing. Early pregnancy or parenting is listed as a major cause of dropping out of high school by almost one-third of young women, according to research done in 2017. Additionally, youths between the ages of 15 and 19 account for more than 50% of all new STI cases in the state of New York. [6] When schools take steps to educate their students about such topics as consent, bodily autonomy, and dating violence as well as to enact school policies aimed at prevention, teens are less likely to be victims, and more likely to refrain from engaging in intimate partner violence, and sexual harassment is significantly decreased. A successful sex education program, like CSE, aims to protect and empower young people by developing the vital knowledge and abilities needed for healthy relationships.

Without sex education with comprehensive content, unplanned pregnancy and STIs are more likely to happen to adolescents. According to the most recent information gathered by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about teens' birth rate (*The number of births per 1,000 females in age group.), the teenage 15~17 birth rate in New York is 4.1, in Texas is 9.8; teens ages 18~19, the birth rate in New York is 18.3, in Texas the rate is surprisingly reaching to 42.2. The absence of mandatory sex education also caused high abortion in New York and Texas. In 2019, New York has the highest reported legal abortion rate in the US, which is 78587 cases with 20.3 percent per 100,000 population, and Texas is the third high state reported legal abortion rate with 57275 and 9.5 percent per 100,000 population.

The things that will happen to an unplanned pregnancy is probably the inability to provide for the coming child, especially to the parents who are still in school or is unemployed. Besides, most adolescents are not responsible enough for their behavior, the worst situation could be illegal abortion, or the young mothers bear the burden of pregnancy and raising a child alone. The current optional sex education with inconsistent content of sex education is not helping adolescents deal with unplanned pregnancies or potential STIs.

3.3 Abstinence Sex Education

Abstinence sex education was proved that does not have a significant likelihood of reducing reported STD diagnoses. Adolescents who only received abstinence-based counseling and no sex education will have an increased risk of pregnancy. [8] The content of abstinence sex education reinforces the stereotypes that adolescents already know, such as the highly gendered, heterosexist, and fear-based of sexual knowledge. [9] This means, the school as an authority place to gain reliable

knowledge, strengthen the negative aspect of sex, and keep students away from sexual behavior by taking advantage of their fear of the unknown rather than disseminating correct knowledge to students and helping them to develop an objective and comprehensive understanding of sex.

The strengthened stereotypes are more likely to lower adolescent girls' self-esteem. Adolescents to girls might be so tough as both their bodies and mind are undergoing drastic change. Since adolescents have already grown up in a social environment, they have ingrained the idea that appearance plays a significant role in both how they see themselves and how others perceive them. [10] What these teenage girls will expose to is abstinence sex education (if there is any) which portrays the curiosity of the unknown and the inevitable physical need as evil and something should be guilty of.

These biased contents undoubtedly stressed teenage girls and may cause their inability to cope with the great psychological and physical changes happening to them. Their body is more like an indispensable part of social taboos rather than just their own body. Abstinence sex education is more likely to let girls fit into a variety of "moral constraints", whether it is reasonable or not, and form a conservative characteristic with low self-esteem. This horrible feeling is not merely continuing in adolescence but probably will last as a lifelong binding.

4. Conclusion

The non-mandatory abstinence sex education in New York and Texas states is enhancing adolescents' knowledge of sex and birth control though it may not medically correct. To conduct a better sex education, the current changing process of sex education in schools in New York and Texas from biased sex education to a CSE still has many obstacles to overcome. Moreover, sex education from social organizations can also be very important.

The most obvious problem in current sex education in New York and Texas is accuracy. Abstinence sex education may be helpful to prevent adolescents away from sexual behavior, but the wrong message about how to implement contraception measures will not help them avoid STDs. To provide better sex education at school, the states may need to accordingly get closer to the U.S. sex education standards, and carefully select the educational content that is most beneficial to students, while considering local needs and federal standards. To maximize the results of sex education, a group of professional sex education teachers who possess an objective and rational understanding of sex education should be prepared.

As Texas has just updated its sex education standard in 2021 and New York starts to provide a series of new services in a related area such as remedies for dropping out of school or losing a job due to pregnancy. The latest outcome of these changes is not measurable yet. This study merely used the results from previous research, and some of them may not so up to date.

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