

The Comparison between China and Sweden in Sex Education and Countermeasures for China

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Abstract. In today's society, many teenagers are being sexually assaulted. In China, influenced by traditional ideas and the existence of exam-oriented education, sex education is still in its infancy and difficult to carry out. Even if some schools carry out sex education courses, there are still many problems, such as the lack of laws, no professional teaching staff, parents' resistance and so on, all of these hinder its development. By contrast, as a country with a long history of sex education, Sweden has a lot to experience and differences with China, such as policy, culture and education system. This paper mainly adopts literature analysis, comparing the differences between Sweden and China in policy, culture and education system to solve the problems in China's sex education. This paper has four parts. The first one illustrates the content of policy, culture and education system. The second elaborates the problems existing in the current sex education in China. The third compares China with Sweden in these three parts. The fourth provides feasible suggestions: special law should be established; social organizations ought to cooperate; media should take the responsibility to propagandize positively; the supervision and management of the curriculum are supposed to be strengthened; families also need to guide their children and participate in sex education.

Keywords: China, Sweden, Sex education.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, a lot of children endure sexual abuse; suffer from AIDS; pregnant as teenagers which may cause serious damage to their body and mind. From 2013 to 2016, courts nationwide closed 10,782 child molestation cases, according to data released by the Supreme People's Court [1]. In addition to sexual assault cases, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases has also raised awareness of the need for sex education. According to the National Health Commission, PRC, 958,000 people were reported to be living with the virus by the end of October 2019[2]. Although China has introduced some laws to promote sex education, but most schools still do not offer such courses. Numerous children and teenagers are eager to learn some basic knowledge about sex. There are a lot of benefits for students to learn sex education. It helps children to know themselves better, avoid mental illness and family tragedy, prevent the spread of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, and promote family harmony and social stability.

Most of the existing research papers just pointed out the current problems of sex education in China and some solutions. Diao pointed out the shortcomings in the implementation of sex education in primary schools such as the lack of educational resources, the lack of teachers' level, the imperfect teaching supervision system and so on in China and provide feasible suggestions according to these difficulties [3]. Zhang also described the current situation of Chinese sex education and tried to explore solutions from social level, for example, the establishment of a sound legal system for sex education, the establishment of comprehensive sex education guidelines, the use of new media publicity, and strengthen the construction of sex education content [4]. Zhang explored the relevant measures from the perspective of multi-governance including government, school and family [5]. Comparing some successful countries with China is a significant way to broaden horizons and learn experience. However, only a few papers use comparative methods to study. Wu compared Sweden with America in the development of the situation, development process educational objectives, educational content and educational methods and summarized the experience to put forward

reasonable suggestions to China [6]. Nie compared international and Chinese policy on sexuality education [7]. But there are few studies compare sex education between China and Sweden alone.

Meanwhile, Sweden has a long history of sex education and achieves a great success in sex education. In Sweden, there are almost no pregnancies among girls under 20 and one of the most successful contraceptive policies in the world has resulted in a low abortion rate in Sweden. Between 1985 and 1999, only 5,132 HIV positive cases were detected in Sweden [8]. Meng indicated that the success of Swedish sex education cannot be separated from the national laws, the corporation between schools and family, the high academic level of teachers and the participation of social organizations [9]. Sweden is undoubtedly experienced and highly successful in sex education. By comparative method, many of the problems with sex education in China are easily discernable. Yet, there are few comparative studies between Sweden and China.

Therefore, this study aims to compare Sweden with China from the perspectives of policy, cultural background and education system. It applies the literature research method, reviewing the extant academic research and reports from reputational organizations. Policy indicates the promotion and implementation of sex education, as well as curriculum standard. Cultural background is about the degree of tolerance for sex education. Educational system includes the curriculum, quality of teachers, educational resources and so on. It is expected that this study can provide feasible suggestions to China promoting the comprehensive development of the legal system, helping children acquire adequate knowledge and reducing the sexual abuse.

2. Sex education

The promotion of sex education concerns with culture, policy and educational system. *Culture* is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people [10]. Therefore, people in different social groups have different attitudes and tolerances to the topic of sex discussed in this paper, which also affects the formulation of sex education policies. *Policy* is a guide and a document of some sort, containing a page or flips of pages to deal with a recognized problem of concern; it is also a dynamic process instead of static and rigid [11]. The policy of sex education provides standards and norms for the implementation of it at the national level. Whether the policy or law related to sex education are adequate or not will affect the quality of sex education. *Education system* is commonly the product of a distinctive set of historical, political, social, cultural, and economic effects [12]. There are broad and narrow education systems. In the broad sense, apart from the educational structure system, curriculum and teaching material system, education management system, teacher training system, are also included. Program content, course format, resources, infrastructure, funding, administration are belong to education system. This paper mainly compares the two countries in these three aspects. The difference of these systems will affect the difference of the final educational effects.

3. Current situation in China

The development of Chinese contemporary sex education experiences a long history. It can trace back to the founding of PR of China in 1949 when many intellectuals proposed sex education, such as Lu Xun. He believed that sex education should not only be taught in class, but also should be popularized and promoted [13]. And even the world's oldest sex handbooks are Chinese [14]. Although China has been aware of the importance of sex education since the beginning of the last century, it is still in the bud today. The current situation of Chinese sex education is not optimistic, and there are still a lot of problems.

First, the state should provide uniform standards and feasible regulations for sex education at the macro level. However, in Chinese education-related legal, sex education is fragmented, not systematic and incomplete. As a result, the implementation of sex education in China lacks uniform standards and execution.

Second, when it comes to the problems of education, school is undoubtedly the main object to provide eligible education to students. But under the influence of Chinese exam-oriented education, there are insufficient hours of lessons on sex education. Some teachers believe that school work should focus on prescribed courses, and it is not appropriate to spend too much time on sex education. They think that simply completing the task is enough. So they ignore the actual development needs of students. Besides, the content of sex education is outdated and the way of teaching is simple. Most schools use monotonous and boring teaching methods to impart knowledge and teach students "body and development", "violence and security", the concept of "sex and reproductive health", but the knowledge about sex fantasy, sex dream and education, contraception pregnancy is almost blank[3].

Third, family education is always ignored. Many parents firmly believe that the responsibility of educating children vest in schools and teachers, they just need to take care of them in basic necessities of life. Even some children have to care for the elderly in the family from a young age. As a result, these children are unable to get a proper education from their families to achieve personal growth and development. The ambiguity of education subject leads to the difficulties in implementing sex education.

Last, as is well-known to all, China is a country with a long history, so the cultural environment of China is conservative and the public has a low tolerance of sex. Parents and teachers are ashamed to talk about "sex" with their children or students. They stigmatize hugging or kissing in their home education, which results in students' rejection and afraid of such very common sexual activities. Therefore, some scientific courses about sex or textbooks are always resisted by a lot of parents. All these hinder the further development of sex education in China.

4. Comparison between China and Sweden

4.1. Cultural background

Sweden is a relatively open country, different from China, in Sweden, sex is not a taboo topic, and it is a matter that can be discussed. Naked culture is accepted in Sweden, where naked sculptures can be seen on the streets and sex is depicted in cartoons, without being resisted by parents or teachers. At the same time, Sweden is strict about bad sex culture. Although Sweden is a relatively liberal country, the government prohibits prostitution and sexual violence is not allowed on television. Therefore, Sweden is a country with a healthy sexual culture environment, which is conducive to the development of sex education. But as a matter of fact, there are many obstacles in the early implementation of sex education in Sweden, and some people still maintain a conservative attitude towards sex. In 1910, a labor leader gave a speech calling for the working class to learn more about family planning. It was angrily attacked by conservative lawmakers and sued for what it called indecency [15]. Thanks to the efforts of many pioneers, sex education gradually flourished.

But China has always been under the influence of Confucian culture for thousands of years, which still influences the way of behavior and thinking of Chinese people until today. Conservative sexual morality in the Chinese context refers to the traditional ascetic sexual morality represented by Confucianism [16]. The expression of sexual ethics is that the only purpose of sex is reproduction. After 1949, the Cultural Revolution, with its slogan of class struggle, decried sex as the enemy of the revolution and created an anti-sex social order. This kind of social ethics limits people's basic rights [16]. In modern society, individuals have more and more autonomy and freedom, and the state government's intervention in personal life style is gradually weakened. However, the idea of advocating asceticism which has been around for hundreds of years permeates all aspects of people's life and still exerts a great influence on the society. When children encounter this kind of confusion, parents and teachers usually refuse to talk about "sex" with their children or students. As a result, students are not willing to consult teachers and parents about related problems, but go to websites and magazines to learn about them, which make it difficult to acquire scientific and systematic knowledge.

4.2. Policy

At present, China has not formulated independent national standards for sex education, but only integrated relevant content into health education policy standards. *The Guidelines for Health Education in Primary and Secondary Schools* includes five areas of health education in primary and secondary schools: healthy behavior and lifestyle, disease prevention, mental health, growth and adolescent health, and safety emergency and risk aversion [17]. According to the different stages of the growth and development of children and adolescents, the contents of the five fields are reasonably allocated to the fifth level according to the fifth level of the lower grade of primary school, the middle grade of primary school, the senior grade of primary school, the junior grade and the senior grade. In senior high school, special emphasis should be placed on helping students to understand the harm of premarital sexual behavior to physical and mental health, and to establish healthy and civilized sexual concepts and morality [17]. Sex education and sexual health services for children are also mentioned in the *Circular on the Outline of China's Children's Development (2021-2030)* issued by the State Council. It emphasizes to guide children to set up the correct gender concept and moral concept, correctly understand the relationship between the sexes. Sex education will be incorporated into the basic education system and quality monitoring system to enhance the effectiveness of education. Parents or other guardians should be guided to carry out sex education according to children's age and development characteristics, strengthen education on prevention of sexual assault and other measures. The aim is to severely punish sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, abandonment and other illegal and criminal acts that infringe upon children's personal rights [18].

However, Sweden in 1956 formulated the national nine-year system of students sex education syllabus; in 1976 midwives were given the right to prescribe contraceptives; Homosexuality was officially removed from the list of diseases in 1979; in 1998, the national policy and regulations on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS were formulated [19]. And in 2022, a policy about gender quality was promoted to emphasize the importance of gender equal health and sexual and reproductive health and rights [20]. It can be seen that Sweden has been making unremitting efforts in the aspect of sex education legislation. Meanwhile, the Swedish government pay close attention to the problem of the mass especially to the influence of the teenagers, this system and the Swedish government regulations can be seen in the protection for teenagers, in Sweden for child pornography attitude is very tough, if someone is holding a child porn publications or someone from the Internet to download minors pornographic images, all of this is guilty; Sweden also sets the legal age of consent, whether same-sex or heterosexual is 15 years old, if the age of sexual consent under attachment raised to 18 years old, these reflect that Sweden has made a lot of efforts for the protection of for teenagers [15].

4.3. Educational system

In China, adolescent sex education involves a wide range of content, mainly involving sex morality, sex psychology and sex physiology. The main contents include the composition and physiological knowledge of male and female reproductive organs, performance and health during puberty, development of sexual characteristics, sexual life and health of sexual organs, education of sexual morality, explanation of menstruation, differences between male and female in social roles and psychological characteristics and so on [21]. But exam-oriented education deeply hinders the development of sex education. Some teachers believe that school work should focus on prescribed courses, and it is not appropriate to spend too much time on sex education. They think that simply completing the task is enough, so they will reduce the hours of sex education even replace it with major courses. In the current curriculum system of sex education, teachers mainly carry out educational activities around the content of textbooks, but there are few textbooks especially for school teenagers. In addition, bound by traditional sex education concepts, some sex education textbooks are obscure in content, which makes students unable to obtain accurate knowledge. Some experts have developed a series of teaching materials based on excellent experience at home and abroad. For example, *Boys and Girls*, the first sex education textbook in Shanghai in 2011 and *Life*

Safety Education compiled by Wuhan Press in 2014 have made great breakthroughs in the concept and value orientation of sex education. However, it has also triggered public controversy over sex education textbooks for primary schools, which are often at risk of being resisted [22]. What is more, there is a lack of relevant evaluation and supervision system. Most schools do not include the teaching effect and quality of sex education into the school evaluation system, which make it difficult to get a comprehensive and scientific evaluation of sex education. And in terms of the training system, normal students have not been trained in the teaching skills of sex education, and the teachers themselves are insufficient in the reserve of sex knowledge. So teachers' professional skills are insufficient to complete teaching this kind of knowledge to students.

In Sweden, the content of sex education includes physiology and psychology education, values education, marriage and family life education, health education, the way and method of obtaining sex education and so on. And with the continuous development of society, the content of sex education is more and more close to the reality of the school and the needs of students, there are many characteristics, mainly reflected in people-oriented, oriented to all students, the whole process of sex and stage combination, and morality [15]. Sweden also use national and international Internet sex education of dialogue and consultation, for the Swedish school sex education through the Internet offers unlimited resources, let the students, teachers and parents are easy to get the information, to find the answer to the question, is popular among the students, it is advantageous to the middle school sex education smoothly. The content of sex education textbooks has changed from the original emphasis on uniform teaching to the fact that each school can write its own textbooks and use its own methods instead of emphasizing uniformity. This is conducive to the development of sex education by making personalized content according to different teaching methods. Swedish schools learn about the sexual knowledge needs of school students in the school and even in the region through questionnaires, surveys, interviews and other forms, and then set corresponding teaching objectives and teaching methods according to the common problems in the survey results. Sweden attaches great importance to the training of teachers' relevant skills and professional knowledge. As early as 1945, Sweden has opened the first training class for sex education teachers in schools [8]. All of these ensured that primary school sex education achieved fruitful results.

5. Suggestions for China's sex education

Through the comparison of different aspects in the two countries mentioned above, it can be seen that the development of sex education cannot be achieved without the following four aspects: national level, social and culture, school education and family education.

From the perspective of national law, a perfect legal system is the guarantee for the development of sex education. The state enacts relevant laws to set uniform teaching standards and goals and enforce them in schools to ensure the implementation of sex education curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a special legal system to determine the standards for courses of sex education, including course content, class hours and textbook compilation and so on.

Besides, the low tolerance of sex in Chinese society and culture prevents many measures from being carried out and promoted. It is well known that changing a country's cultural environment is very difficult. However, the mass media can be a good tool to inform the public about the importance of sex education in order to improve the inclusiveness of sex education and ensure and promote the development of sex education courses. Meanwhile, the social organizations play a vital role. In Sweden, social organizations like RFSU (Swedish Association for Sex Education) which was founded in 1933, has made continuous improvements in the practice of sex education over the years. It has published numerous sex education textbooks, came up with new ideas of sex education, and provided a platform for the exchange of sex education experts, scholars and teachers. These organizations undoubtedly play a supporting role. Therefore, the government can cooperate with social organizations. The state can formulate laws and policies, and at the same time, social organizations

can carry out relevant work, provide psychological and intellectual services for teenagers, and the media can do good publicity, so as to form multiple channels to carry out sex education.

As the main body of education, schools can implement relevant policies established by the state, and also play a vital role in enlightening and teaching students about sex education and other aspects. Schools should promote the all-round development of students, ensure the length of class hours of sex education courses, pay attention to the training of teachers' relevant skills, carry out diversified teaching methods so as to improve students' interest in learning and update the teaching content in time with the development of times.

Family education deeply influences the growth and development of children. Good family education plays a significant role in children's mental health. Instead of avoiding answers and stigmatizing sex, parents should actively and correctly guide their children when they ask questions about sex and use visual language to answer them. At the same time, parents should tell their children how to learn to protect them from sexual assault and not hurt others. Parents should also communicate more with the school and link with schools to know the students' psychological situation in time.

The development of children and the promotion of sex education cannot be separated from the cooperation of the state, society, schools and families. It is the efforts of many parties that will lead China's sex education to a new stage.

6. Conclusion

At present, there are many problems in sex education in China, and news of some teenagers being sexually assaulted frequently occurs, which shows the necessity of sex education. Therefore, in this case, Sweden's experience is compared to obtain relevant measures to solve the problem. By comparing China with Sweden in three aspects, some experience can be learned: Special law should be established. Social organizations ought to cooperate. Media should take the responsibility to propagandize positively. The supervision and management of the curriculum are supposed to be strengthened. Families also need to guide their children and participate in sex education. However, it is not enough to just point out the problems. China should take active actions to implement and carry out sex education courses and apply these suggestions into practice to realize the significance of this paper. Only by doing these can the children will be protected to some extent, realize their physical and mental health development and have a happy childhood.

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