

# Research on the Multidimensional Value and Communication Practice of Adolescent Sex Education in China

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## Abstract

Objective: To explore the multi-dimensional value and communication practice of adolescent sex education in China. Methods: Study the overall teaching and cultural differences of sex education and discover the educational value of teenage sex education in gender equality, physical and psychological development, laws and regulations. Results: Multiple practical approaches based on community education, family education, school education community education and media communication are proposed. Among them, community education can provide sex education services for teenagers through community activities, community organizations and community resource integration; family education can promote youth sex education through parent participation and parent-child communication; school education can improve the quality of youth sex education through curriculum, teacher training and school resources utilization; media communication can convey accurate and scientific sex knowledge through radio, television, Internet and other media channels about sex education. Conclusion: This paper provides multi-dimensional arguments and practical ways to implement adolescent sex education in China and provides a reference for the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.



Full Text Article



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**Keywords:** Youth, Sex Education, Multi-dimensional Values, Communication Practice

## Introduction

Adolescent sexuality education, as one of the important educational fields [1], involves the value of multiple dimensions such as society, health and education, and is of great significance to the growth of individual adolescents as well as to the public affairs of society. Li Hongyan, an expert in 2020, was interviewed by China News Agency.

Li Hongyan pointed out in an interview with China News Agency in 2020 that comprehensive sexuality education has positive significance in promoting sexual and reproductive health

(prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS), ensuring safety (prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and bullying), promoting gender equality, and developing socio-emotional competence, etc. [2]. The issue of sex education itself is a topic of great cultural and social significance, involving comprehensive issues in multiple fields such as gender equality, physiological and psychological development and law.

By synthesising relevant studies at home and abroad, we find that adolescent sex education has important social, health and educational values in multiple dimensions [3]. In terms of gender equality, sex education can promote gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination, and lay the foundation for the social development of gender equality [1]. In terms of physiological and psychological development, sex education can help guide adolescents to correctly understand their bodies and psychology, and to form healthy and positive personalities and attitudes [4]. In terms of laws and regulations, sex education helps adolescents treat sexual and emotional issues by the law and improve their legal awareness and legal literacy [5].

In order to effectively implement adolescent sex education, this paper proposes a multifaceted practical approach based on social education, family education, school education and media communication. It helps to provide theoretical support and practical guidance for the implementation of sex education for adolescents in China and provides a reference for the formulation and implementation of relevant policies.

## **The current situation and challenges of adolescent sex education in China**

Chen Jing's 2015 article, 'Analysis of China's Sex Education Policies from 1978-2014,' summarised that according to different time stages and the specific content of policies and regulations, China's adolescent sex education can be broadly divided into three major phases: sexual hygiene education oriented towards physiological knowledge (1978-1994), sexual health education oriented towards social issues (1995-2006), and sexual relations oriented Sexual safety education (2007-2014) [6]. Evolution to the present-day China entered sexual and reproductive health education (2011-2020), the current implementation of adolescent sexuality education in China is an important issue. In this paper, we will analyse and discuss the current implementation of adolescent sexuality education and the existing problems from various aspects [7-20].

### **1. Current Implementation of Sex Education for Adolescents**

At the social level, the 'Healthy China 2030' Programme clearly states that sexual health education and intervention for key groups such as adolescents should be strengthened and that the mental health of adolescents should be improved. However, there are differences in actual implementation. On the one hand, economically developed and coastal regions and schools attach greater importance to and accept sex education for adolescents, and have actively taken various measures to promote it, including the development of specialised curricula and the training of professional teachers. On the other hand, remote and inland areas and schools are still lagging and neglecting sex education for young people. At the same time, there is still a bias in the knowledge and understanding of sex education for adolescents, which is often interpreted simply as the

imparting of sexual knowledge, to the neglect of the holistic and comprehensive nature of sex education.

At the educational level, the lack of full-time sex education trainers has led to a lack of professional knowledge and skills among those involved in the promotion of sex education for young people. Teachers lack a systematic knowledge base and professional guidance on sex education for adolescents, which brings certain difficulties to the implementation of sex education for adolescents. The imbalance of educational resources also restricts the implementation of sex education for adolescents. Some districts and schools lack relevant educational resources, such as teaching materials, facilities and teachers, which also makes the implementation of sex education for adolescents difficult.

From the family level. On the one hand, some parents have conceptual barriers to adolescent sex education, believing that adolescents should not receive sex education or that sex education will lead to undesirable behaviours. On the other hand, some parents lack proper guidance and support for adolescent sex education. This has limited the role of family education in adolescent sex education to a certain extent.

## ***2. Major Problems and Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Sex Education for Adolescents at Present***

The closed attitude of social and cultural concepts towards the topic of sex and the cognitive bias towards sex constitute a certain resistance to the implementation of sex education. Some people are sceptical about the need for sex education for adolescents and even stress that sex education will lead to more problems. The constraints of such traditional concepts mean that during implementation, it is necessary to face the pressure and controversy of public opinion.

Sex education for adolescents lacks a systematic and comprehensive nature. Existing sex education for adolescents often focuses only on the impartation of knowledge in certain areas, while neglecting the comprehensive nature of sex education. Sex education for adolescents involves several dimensions, such as gender equality, gender and sexual orientation, knowledge of sexual health, psychosexual development, etc., but the existing content and methods of education often fail to cover all aspects of knowledge and skills.

Sex education lacks a systematic and standardised curriculum and teacher training. At present, sex education in China tends to be fragmented and sporadic, lacking systematic curriculum development and teacher training. The fragmentation of curriculum content and the lack of teacher education have led to a lack of unified guiding ideology and standardised educational methods in sex education, thus failing to effectively improve the quality of sex education for young people.

Lack of family education is also one of the important problems facing adolescent sex education at present. In 2017 a set of teaching materials titled *Sexual Health Education Reader for Primary School Students: Cherish Life* was uploaded on the Internet by certain parents who took screenshots out of context, accusing the teaching materials of abetting, and was ultimately withdrawn as a result. Family is the first classroom of sex education for adolescents. However, due to parents' lack of knowledge and communication skills in sex education, adolescents are unable to acquire correct knowledge of sex, thus increasing their confusion and misinformation about sex.

Media communication is also one of the challenges facing sex education for teenagers. Nowadays, the popularity of new media, such as the Internet and mobile phones, has brought adolescents into contact with a wider and more diversified range of sex information, but the accuracy and scientificity of such information cannot be guaranteed. Some sexual information may be harmful to adolescents, and it is difficult to regulate and control. Information overload and information asymmetry brought about by the dissemination of media pose challenges for adolescents.

To address these problems and challenges, a combination of methods and strategies is needed to promote sex education for adolescents. (1) Social education should be strengthened to provide sex education services for adolescents through social activities, social organisations and integration of social resources; (2) Family education should be strengthened to enhance parents' knowledge and communication skills in sex education to ensure that adolescents can acquire correct knowledge and values about sex in the family environment; (3) School education should strengthen the training of teachers and the standardisation of curricula to improve the quality of sex education; (4) Media communication needs to be effectively regulated to provide accurate and scientific sex knowledge and to avoid the dissemination of harmful information.

Sex education for adolescents faces many problems and challenges in the process of implementation in China, and it is necessary to strengthen the synergistic promotion of social education, family education, school education and media communication to effectively promote the development of sex education for adolescents in China.

## **Multi-dimensional analysis of the value of the implementation of sex education for adolescents in China**

### ***1. Value to the individual growth of adolescents***

The World Health Organisation points out that adolescence is an important stage in a person's physiological, psychological and social development, as well as a key period for shaping individual growth.

Sex education can help adolescents establish correct gender concepts and awareness of gender equality. Adolescents are in a period of gender role identity, while gender stereotypes and gender discrimination often exist in society. Through the delivery of sex education, adolescents can understand that the nature of gender is a biologically based difference, and that sexual orientation and gender identity are part of an individual's diversified development, thus contributing to the formation of concepts and attitudes of gender equality.

Sex education for adolescents is also important for the promotion of their physical and psychological development. As adolescents are at a critical stage of physiological development, sex education can provide them with scientific knowledge about physiological changes during puberty and methods of psychological adaptation, helping them to better understand and cope with their own physical and psychological changes. At the same time, sex education can also help adolescents establish positive sexual attitudes and behavioural habits through the transmission of scientific knowledge about sex and mental health counselling, to promote their healthy growth.

Sex education for adolescents also has an important impact on the cultivation of adolescents' legal literacy and legal awareness. During adolescents' development, they are gradually equipped

with legal responsibilities and rights, and the relationship between sex and sexual partners involves legal norms and legal responsibilities. Through the delivery of sex education, adolescents can learn about the relevant laws and regulations, enhance their legal awareness, and avoid behaviours that violate the law, while at the same time protecting their legitimate rights and interests.

## *2. Value to the public affairs of the community*

The introduction of sex education for young people is of great significance to the promotion of gender equality in society. Gender equality is a basic human rights principle, and sex education for adolescents is precisely one of the important ways to help adolescents realise gender equality. The implementation of sex education can help adolescents get rid of the traditional fixed concepts of gender roles and establish the values of respect and equality, thus creating a more equal and inclusive environment for society [21].

The implementation of sex education for adolescents is also of great significance in maintaining social stability and tranquillity. Adolescents are the future of society, and their sexual concepts and behaviours will directly affect the values and moral standards of society. The implementation of sex education can help adolescents establish correct moral concepts, form healthy sexual behaviour patterns, and reduce the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and the rate of unwanted pregnancies among adolescents, thus helping to maintain social harmony and stability.

## **Discussion on the communication practice pathway of sex education for adolescents**

### *1. The role of school education*

School education is an important part of adolescent sex education in China, and it plays a crucial role in the implementation of adolescent sex education [22]. As a formal education institution, school education has unique advantages and responsibilities with professional teachers and high-quality educational resources.

The role of school education in adolescent sex education is mainly reflected in the curriculum, teacher training and the use of school resources. By designing reasonable curriculum content and teaching methods, schools can provide adolescents with systematic and comprehensive sex education teaching. In terms of curriculum, schools can integrate sex education into various disciplines, so that students can receive knowledge and skills training in sex education in different disciplines and improve their awareness of sex education and sexual morality. In addition, schools can also offer special sex education courses or activities to explain and discuss in detail the key points and difficulties of sex education, to enhance students' knowledge and awareness of sex education.

Schools should also strengthen the training and development of full-time teachers of sex education for young people. Teachers are the main implementers and disseminators of sex education, and their ability and quality directly affect the effectiveness and quality of sex education. Only then can they better provide students with systematic and comprehensive sex education and be able to effectively carry out sex education teaching work. In addition, schools should strengthen the



supervision and evaluation of teachers to ensure the quality and effectiveness of their teaching in sex education.

Schools should also make rational use of school resources to provide comprehensive sex education support for young people. Schools can provide more learning opportunities and communication platforms for adolescents by organising various kinds of sex education activities and providing resources and facilities related to sex education. For example, schools can organise activities such as campus lectures and seminars, and invite experts, scholars and sex educators to campus to give special lectures and training, to provide students with comprehensive and accurate knowledge and information on sex education. In addition, schools can set up a sex education resource bank to collect and organise sex education-related books, materials, videos and other resources for students' independent learning and use.

## ***2. The role of family education***

Family education is an indispensable and important factor in adolescent sex education, which promotes adolescent sex education through parental involvement and parent-child communication [20].

Family is the earliest and most important social environment for children's sexual knowledge acquisition and value formation. Family education can provide a safe and open sex education environment for adolescents and guide them to form correct and healthy sexual concepts. Parents can adopt appropriate methods and content for sex education according to the age characteristics of their children. For example, when the age is appropriate, they can tell their children the basic knowledge about physiological development and sex knowledge, helping them to understand their physiological changes and enhance their self-protection ability. In addition, parents can also enhance their intimate relationship through an open family atmosphere and parent-child exchanges, to increase their children's acceptance of sex education. This form of family education can help young people build up their self-confidence, and respect for others and resist negative influences.

## ***3. The role of social media***

Complementary to family education is the role of social media. In the present era of advanced information technology, social media such as radio, television, internet and other media channels can not only provide young people with information and knowledge on sex education but also cultivate their correct attitude towards sex. Social media have a wide coverage and strong dissemination power, they can deliver accurate and scientific sex knowledge to all the people who are concerned about sex education for teenagers. Radio and television, as traditional media methods, can deliver relevant information to the public through special programmes on sex education and advertisements on sex education for teenagers. The popularity of the Internet and mobile terminals has made it possible for teenagers to access the content of sex education anytime and anywhere, and this convenience and real-time nature have greatly promoted the popularisation of sex education for teenagers.

Social media can also play the role of a medium, through different forms and contents to guide young people to establish a positive and healthy concept of sex. For example, by broadcasting sex

education episodes in some youth idol dramas and children's cartoons, it can subconsciously help adolescents examine their behaviours and values and learn from them the correct attitude towards sex. Meanwhile, adolescents can also communicate with their peers through social media platforms to share their experiences and confusions, get timely feedback and support, and improve their confidence and self-protection awareness [9].

Social media also brings some challenges and risks. Teenagers are generally more capable of using the Internet, but they cannot discern information and are easily misled by false information and undesirable content. Therefore, the media should also strengthen the regulation of the content of sex education for adolescents, provide accurate and scientific information, and block and deal with undesirable media content to protect the healthy growth of adolescents.

## Conclusion

Sex education for adolescents in China has important social, health and educational values in multiple dimensions, such as gender equality, physiological and psychological development, and laws and regulations. To effectively implement adolescent sex education, this paper proposes a multifaceted practical approach based on social education, family education, school education and media communication. It provides arguments and practical ways of multi-dimensional value for the implementation of sex education for adolescents in China.

In order to better promote the development of sex education for adolescents in China, we suggest strengthening the formulation and implementation of policies on sex education for adolescents, improving the interaction and coordination between school education and family education, and advocating the participation and support of all sectors of society. We also call on all sectors of the community to pay more attention to sex education for young people and jointly promote the healthy development of sex education for young people.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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