

The Analysis of Influence Factors and Solutions to the Lack of Sex Education for Minors in China from the Perspective of the Ecological Systems Theory

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Abstract. Nowadays the implementation of sex education is still insufficient in China, although it has been improved gradually. This paper looks at the dilemma in sex education in modern society in China, which is mainly concerned with the tension between the lack of systematic education on sex at all ages and the need for teenagers to better protect themselves from danger. Actually, sex education is of great significance to help children cultivate a sense of identity and gender equality, consciously respect members of the opposite sex, establish a sense of self-protection, and confront the concept of sex correctly. However, as a result of cultural conservatism, few educational systems in China have a clear sense of sex in all aspects. The study reveals the influence factors on the lack of sex education for minors in China from the perspective of the ecological systems theory, pointing out the negative impact of its absence and potential solutions to relieve the tension. Influence factors include the historical legacy Impact of Cultural Conservatism and the lack of policy support for the sexual education of minors, which belong to the ecosystems, while the impact of social media belongs to the macro system.

Keywords: Sex education; Ecological systems theory; Chinese education; Gender equality.

1. Introduction

A recent analysis of the popularization of sex education in China indicated that, although relevant information is available for young people to search for, the majority of students have no standardized access to learn about sex [1]. According to the survey, students usually know about sex from modern media including TV and the Internet, or the communication between peers, which account for 74.44% and 57.78% among all the accesses respectively. Following is the way of reading books and magazines, which makes up almost 50%. However, only 22.22% of students show that they have been taught knowledge of sex formally at school, which clearly demonstrates that the lack of formal education on sex is a great issue.

Without the correct guidance of sexual knowledge, minors have no way but to search for relevant information driven by curiosity independently, mainly through the way of suffering Internet since it's almost the most convenient method nowadays to acquire ideas. However, though the government has made great efforts to purify the online environment, there are still numerous websites and applications that are spectacularly obscene contrary to moral and social ethics. To make matters worse, teenagers are not mature enough to fully establish their values, distinguish right from wrong, and resist temptation firmly. As a result, it seems incredibly easy for young students to be misled by all kinds of obscene information, thus causing harm to both their physical and mental health. What's more, it is not beneficial for them to improve their awareness and ability of self-protection, because they will fail to realize the potential danger without guidance and suggestions from parents and teachers.

Therefore, building a formal system of sex education should be put high on the agenda for governments. Whereas, cultural conservatism in China has led to a gap in sex education so far, and its conservative cultural awareness is reflected in all aspects of society. As a consequence, all activities related to sex education are at most verbal, incomplete, and unsystematic. This paper will trace the source and analyze the real reasons affecting sex education in China from the perspective of

the exosystem and macrosystem so that relevant departments can take measures to propose solutions and address the problem.

2. The Historical Legacy Impact of Cultural Conservatism on Sex Education for Minors

In general, there are several influencing factors of lacking sex education in China, which include the neglect of home and schools, the management of media platforms, the lack of relevant policies and financial support, etc. However, these problems appear as a result of cultural conservatism, which works as the root cause of the absence of sex education.

2.1. The Impact of Long-term Rule of Feudalism and Centralized Feudal Monarchy on Sex Education for Minors

When it comes to cultural conservatism, under no circumstances should people neglect the long history of thousands of years of China, which still has a profound impact on the social culture and values today.

It is obvious that China had been governed by the feudal dynasty for a long time. Compared with other countries, it entered feudal society much earlier and ended much later, which started in 221 BCE from the Qin Dynasty and ended in 1911 of the Qing Dynasty. With the long-term rule of feudalism, it formed the highly centralized feudal monarchy which became the basic feature of China's social politics. At the same time, this feature is also reflected in culture. People's thoughts tended to be controlled and unified as an important meaning of strengthening the power of the emperor and consolidating the rule. The opinions of sex were no exception, following the ideas of the royalty, obeyed by the rank and files, and essentially affected by the traditional etiquette system and the implicit cultural practices.

For thousands of years, centralization of authority existed and reached its peak in the Qing Dynasty. In other words, it cultivated and got the top in the last feudal dynasty, so that all the rules and cultures were deeply rooted in minds through the latter social upheaval which lasted for only one hundred years. Even in modern society, people's ideas about sex still cannot be fully transformed [2].

2.2. The impact of Confucian culture and Neo-Confucianism culture on sex education for minors

Moreover, China's etiquette system, including Confucian culture, though well-known all over the world for its unique charm, also potentially restricts people's words and deeds in all aspects in public. People are taught Confucian culture to obey the systems from childhood including walking, greeting, seating, dining, worshipping, and so on. Since the Song Dynasty, about one thousand years ago, Neo-Confucianism of "preserving the code of ethics and getting rid of peoples' desires" by Cheng Ying, Cheng Yi, and Zhu Xi had emerged and became a rule that everyone should obey to prevent talking about the topics including "sex" casually in public, letting alone sex education. Zhu Xi, one of the presenters of the idea, reckoned that human desire is more than the need to maintain the basic life and violates the norms of etiquette, which is contrary to the principle of a harmonious society. In short, the asceticism of Zhu and Cheng stifled the progress of thought but protected the feudal rule [3].

2.3. The Influence of Traditional Gender Concepts on the Sexual Education of Minors

As the ruling thought of the Chinese feudal society, the patriarchy is a part of Confucian values. Confucianism holds that the primary responsibility of a wife is to serve the family, including doing all the housework and carrying on the family line. In addition, the filial piety emphasized by Confucian culture also believes that if there is no son, the incense of the family will be broken, and the only way to inherit and continue the family is to give birth to sons, which directly leads to the spread of son preference over daughters. Because of the preference for boys over girls, there were more men than women in ancient China—— although many people were willing to have children,

they would abandon or betray baby girls, which is not conducive to social stability. Therefore, in a gesture to maintain social order, the country had to issue relevant sexual regulations to prevent further deterioration of the situation. For instance, since it was common sense that literacy was the right of men, girls were not allowed to be educated in order to relieve the gender imbalance by controlling them more easily. In fact, males dominated in almost all walks of life involving sexual concepts, while females were in a disadvantaged state in sexual relationships, and sex education for women had always been stigmatized. This also explains the conservatism of Chinese culture vividly.

3. The Lack of Policy Support for Sexual Education of Minors

Cultural conservatism affects the political systems of education in China, which can be found in 3 prominent issues as follows.

3.1. Insufficient Sexual Education Policies for Minors

Firstly, there are few relevant policies. In addition to some entries in the Juvenile Protection Law, the Health Guidance Outline for Primary and Secondary Schools promulgated in 2008 is the main guidance outline for youth sex education in China [4]. It is worth emphasizing that sex is not only related to health. Sex is gender, sex is the source of life, sex is the original element of love, and sex is privacy. Sex connects to the development of individual self-cognition, physical health, emotions, happiness, responsibility, self-protection, etc, and these factors are important parts of individual personality construction. Therefore, it is one-sided and biased to link sex with health only in policy. What's more, compared to other developed countries, like the UK, Denmark, and so on, which have carried out several rounds of reform to continuously expand the coverage of sex education including FGM and RSE, the most complete policy on sex education of China is still the Health Guidance Outline for Primary and Secondary Schools in 2008 [5]. There are no else separate policies of sex education policy. Even until 2020, the Law of the People's Republic of China on Juvenile Protection (2020 Revision) proposed "schools, kindergartens should be suitable for their age sex education" for the first time. The Ministry of Education promulgated "Regulations of School Protection for Minors", pointing out that the school should target carry out adolescent education and sex education, making the students understand physiological health knowledge, improving the prevention of sexual assault, self-protection consciousness, and ability [6]. "Chinese children development outline" explicitly mentioned "sex education", adding the main goal of "school-age children generally accept sex education and the accessibility of children's sexual health service should be improved significantly" in the part of "children and health", and put forward "add the sex education into the basic education system and quality monitoring system, enhancing the education effect" strategy measures [7].

3.2. Difficulties Exist in the Implementation of Sex Education Policies for Minors

Failing to confront the concept of "sex" is one of the problems which can not be neglected. The current situation of sex education in China is that we dare not talk about sex education in education policy, but are collectively substituted as "adolescent education" and "health education". Failing to confront "sex" is the primary problem of sex education in China, which means a sensitive and reserved attitude towards sex education at the decision-making level.

Secondly, it starts too late. The current sex education in China is generally equivalent to puberty education. There is no denying that the experience of men's spermatorrhea and women's menstruation during adolescence are of great importance of sex education, but the time of sexual maturity is not the beginning of sex education. Compared to China, sex education in developed countries starts earlier, which starts in kindergartens in the United States, while starts from birth in European countries such as the United Kingdom [8-9]. From the author's perspective, the starting point of sex education in China should be advanced to childhood. Teachers should educate students from the perspective of cultivating their knowledge, attitude, and skills from the aspects of sex and personal

development, sex and social problems, and sex and human cognition, which is beneficial to develop a healthy lifestyle and prepare for the future in advance.

3.3. The Influence of Gender Concepts on the Sexual Education of Minors

Last but not least, there are no comprehensive political systems because of the several problems above. However, the issue of gender equality may be the potential cause of the lack of sex education in China. For instance, it seems that boys are allowed to watch videos or pictures in private, while girls had better not know about relevant knowledge. Otherwise, they will be considered unfaithful and indiscreet in the view of their parents. In addition, when some little boys do not respect girls, some parents will turn a blind eye or choose to be tolerant and not give them the correct guidance, so it is easy to promote a bad atmosphere where the boys become more and more unscrupulous, while girls are accustomed to forbearance. In fact, those sexual assault cases are hard to succeed all over the world, which makes the matter worse. Consequently, maybe official education is not necessary if the vast majority of people agree with the opinion that it's indiscreet for girls to learn about sex [10].

In a word, gender equality should be regarded as the primary principle of gender differences in sex education, so that teenagers can not only improve their skills to protect themselves from potential danger but also respect the group of opposite gender from heart, which eventually realize the original and final purpose of sex education. However, as is known to us, there is still a long way to go to achieve gender equality according to the global situation. We hope that gender bias can be released gradually from generation to generation, and our sex education will be more and more mature and improved in China.

4. The Impact of Social Media on the Sexual Education of Minors

The dilemma of sexual education also appears on the social media of China. For example, on the one hand, there are strict supervision and blocking mechanisms on official media and applications. On the other hand, there are still many negative websites lurking in every corner of the web page and cannot be eradicated, which lead to the fragmentation of the network environment. The reasons are as follows.

4.1. Social Media Lacks the Right to Speak about the Sexual Education of Minors

In the online platforms which are legal and official, there is a strict review mechanism for reports and netizens' comments. For example, when people send messages on Sina Weibo, once the relevant keywords are triggered, these words will be replaced by special symbols, or they will be directly prohibited from uploading or publishing. This situation leads to some reasonable and normal sex education or related knowledge popularization directly disappearing from the public because they cannot pass the audit. For instance, students learn through online meetings during the pandemic. Teachers in biology class are easily identified as disseminating pornographic information when teaching knowledge of reproduction. As a result online meetings are frequently banned immediately. In addition, China's social media has been specially set up a youth version of the network for minors according to their ID card number, creating a healthy and green network environment. However, it also directly blocks the relevant knowledge of sex education because of excessive purification. In the absence of separate policies and systematic education in schools, online media could have been used as a platform for the dissemination of sex education with fast speed and widespread, but it lost this function for minors due to various restrictions.

4.2. Ineffective Supervision of the Dissemination of Obscene Information

However, although the relevant departments have enacted laws to purify the network, there are still many bad websites hidden in the dark, even if they are destroyed immediately when they are discovered, these websites cannot be eradicated thoroughly. Messages and videos on these websites may lead to a misrepresentation of sex, where the information has gone from one extreme to another,

is full of pornographic and violent pictures and videos, and is not mosaiced. There is also a lot of information about sexual assault, ethics, and other issues. The so-called "sexual deviation" and "non-mainstream" information, pictures, and videos on the Internet often give teenagers the illusion that "sex is taboo" and thus arouses their curiosity [11]. This kind of curiosity may lead to cognitive errors and further misunderstanding. At the same time, the Internet is an anonymous social media platform, which means that anyone can use it for sexual harassment. Stars or some abnormal behaviours on the Internet often lead to problems such as sexual harassment or abuse. Many functions of the Internet can be used to commit sexual harassment and abuse.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, according to the ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenne, there are several influence factors of the lack of sex education in China, which can be attributed to the exosystem and macrosystem respectively, including the Cultural Conservatism, the lack of official policies, the impact of media platform. However, these problems appear as a result of cultural conservatism, which works as the root cause of the situation.

The conclusion of the main points of this paper is as follows. China had been governed by the feudal dynasty for a long time when thoughts tended to be controlled and unified. It even has a perceptible impact on modern society till now. Since the Song Dynasty, which is about one thousand years ago, the Neo-Confucianism culture of "preserving the code of ethics and getting rid of peoples' desires" has emerged and become a rule that everyone should obey to prevent talking about relevant topics about sex casually in public. Moreover, traditional gender concepts also affect the sexual education of minors.

The factors above lead to cultural conservatism till the modern day, and further affect the current situation of sex education in China. To begin with, there are insufficient sexual education policies for minors. Then, there are difficulties in the implementation. For instance, all walks of life fail to confront the concept of sex and substitute "education of adolescence" or "health education" for "sex education" in policies. What's more, the education starts too late. Compared to developed countries like the USA and the UK, where sex education starts from childhood to cultivate a healthy lifestyle and prepare for the future, China starts in adolescence. And the issue of gender equality and the impacts of social media are the possible causes in modern society—— it seems that boys are allowed to watch videos or pictures in private while girls had better not know about the knowledge of sex in the view of parents. If true, it can explain why there is no need to carry out formal education about sex.

Though there are some aspects not mentioned in this paper, including the family education of microsystem and other cases of mesosystem, this paper traces the source and analyzes the real reasons affecting sex education in China from the perspective of exosystem and macrosystem, so that relevant departments can take measures to propose solutions and address the problem. In the future, the author will insist on studying the negative impact of the lack of sex education and providing suggestions for the effective implementation of sex education for minors in China.

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