**Forum:** United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women - UNW

**Issue #1** Addressing the accessibility of sex education for women in academic institutions around the world.

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# Introduction

Sex education is a way to teach people how to make safe, respectful decisions regarding health and relationships. It is not only taught to children, but also adolescents and adults all over the world. There have been many changes over time, regarding the content of sex education, beginning with the prevention of unintended pregnancy all the way to homophobia and online bullying; but of course, this took many decades to happen because not everyone agrees with sex education being taught in academic institutions. Starting back in 1955, Sweden was the first country to allow sex education to be taught in schools and many western European countries followed after that (WHO). Allowing progress to continue could have a positive and life-long effect on the health and well-being of all young people, not just women. Many countries do not allow sex education to be taught because of certain cultures or religious ideologies and they believe it could have a corrupt influence on the young people, therefore these countries tend to have higher numbers of unwanted pregnancies and abortion (UIA). Abortion is illegal in many countries therefore any woman who was inconveniently impregnated because someone did not get the proper sex education is forced to give birth to that child even if it will have a negative outcome on the woman.

Many female adolescents around the world lack the knowledge of reproductive health safety, putting them at higher risk to unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and much more. It is crucial for young women to have access to sexual education in order to teach them how to protect themselves and advocate for their well-being, dignity, and health. Proper sexual education will provide the necessary knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to make the right decisions for one’s body. The sexual education programmes are a basic human right for young people all over the globe and it must be pursued in schools to ensure our next generation of women’s safety.

Currently, the first few countries in Europe who allowed for sex education to be taught in schools still have the best reported approach to sex education because of their progressive approach; all those countries reported between 5 and 6 teen births per thousand people. This is proof for the rest of the world that progress can be made. Providing sex education to not just women, but men as well, in all academic institutions across the world, will allow for the safety of women’s health.

We can’t empower our leaders of tomorrow if they are not safe and healthy. The teenage pregnancy rates are getting higher as the days go by because of many different reasons, but having quality sex education in schools all over the world could lower this number. Having sex education in schools gives all students the opportunities to learn how to be safe and take care of their reproductive health. This way students can finish their full education to become the leaders we need for the future.

# Definition of Key Terms

**Sex education**

Learning about the cognitive, emotional, social, interactive and physical aspects of sexuality.

**Human development**

The enlargement of people's freedoms and opportunities as well as improving their well-being; helping them figure out who to be, what to do, and how to live.

**Sexual health**

A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality (CDC).

**Gender inequality**

Discrimination on the basis of sex or gender causes one to be frequently privileged or prioritized over another.

**Human Rights Obligations**

Universal rights everyone around the world has simply because they are human regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, and language.

**Women’s rights**

Women’s right to live free from violence, slavery, and discrimination; to be educated; to own property; to vote; and to earn a fair and equal wage (GFW).

**Mental and Physical Health**

Physical fitness helps our bodies to stay strong whereas mental fitness allows us to achieve and sustain a state of good mental health.

**Academic institutions**

Can be schools, universities, colleges, or educational programmes that have their own set of rules and business processes to educate people.

**Abortions**

Occurs when a pregnancy is terminated by the removal of an embryo or fetus.

# General Overview

**Historical Background on Sex Education**

Sex education did not become something people necessarily cared too much about until the time of World War II. The occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases was increasing at a rapid speed as a result of large numbers of soldiers traveling across Europe. The people were highly affected by this and wanted to change the negative consequences they were facing. Schools at the time still did not allow sex education to be taught, however some countries, for example the UK, produced publications that were aimed to help parents educate their children about sex education (Reiss). Finally in 1955, Sweden was the first country to implant sex education into the curriculum of their schools. This caused less teen pregnancies to occur as well as lower numbers of HIV/AIDS infections. According to UNESCO, two out of three girls in some countries have no idea of what is happening to them when they begin menstruating. This is one out of many reasons why sex education was implemented into schools, and still must be re-established in schools today in order to keep all women healthy and give them the knowledge they need to avoid negative outcomes.

**The Spread of HIV/AIDS with Women**

One of the major consequences of women not having access to sex education, is the spreading of many sexually transmitted diseases (STI’s). Specifically, HIV infection rates, and women and girls inability to deal with the epidemic of these diseases. Most times, women are not provided with the proper information about HIV and how to avoid it. Also, they tend to have less resources to take precautionary measures and to be able to treat any diseases that they obtain. A lot of women who live with HIV oftentimes have to deal with stigma and exclusion caused by their lack of rights. It is also commonly seen that women have to take the burden of caring for others who are sick or dying from AIDS, as well as the orphans that are left behind (UNW). Therefore causing the reduction of opportunities for education and employment for women in these situations.

# Major Parties Involved and Their Views

**Sweden**

Sweden was the first country in the world to make sex education in schools mandatory in 1955. This teaching programme was intended to prevent social problems as well as to promote gender equality and the equal dignity of all students. Since 2011, Sweden has been implementing sex education not only in secondary schools, but as well as adult education (Skolverket). Their programmes teach the physical factors in biology, but as well as the moral factors in Christianity classes and social science classes teach the socio-economic factors. They try to make their programme diverse enough so their students can have a full understanding of sex education. All schools in Sweden must actively promote the equal rights and equal opportunities of women and men to ensure they are treated equally and both receive good quality education. Reaching gender equality is a significant factor in academic institutions in Sweden, especially highlighted during sex education programmes in schools around the whole country. However, there are still debates about who should be teaching the students sex education; should it be doctors or teachers? Many people believe doctors should because they have more knowledge about the human body, but teachers know how to better communicate with their students and teach them in ways they will understand. One of the main concerns with sex education in Sweden is the lack of knowledge that the teachers have with those topics. The aim of all the hard work that is being put into educational systems in Sweden is to combat discrimination and promote good health for all the women living in Sweden (EIGE).

**Japan**

In 2019, the Health Administration Report concluded that there were approximately 156,430 cases of abortion in Japan; about 12,678 of these cases were for women under the age of 20. The Japanese Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists found that the main reasons for these high numbers were because the population was not aware of how pregnancy works, they had a lack of knowledge of contraception and an overall lack of knowledge of their bodies (TSH). This is a result of not having the proper sexual education in schools. In Japan, teachers must follow guidelines that were set up to be taught in science and biology classes in primary and secondary schools across the country. The curriculum does not include everything that is necessary to give students the full spectrum of sex education therefore creates more consequences for women all over the country; it increases the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy. The Japanese Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has voiced their concerns about the lack of proper sex education in Japan and how it is negatively affecting women all over the country, however the government has not been quick to act on this issue.

**United States**

In the United States, only seven out of fifty states teach the full spectrum of sex education in schools; this includes HIV/STI education, and comprehensive healthy relationship content (communication skills, decision-making skills, violence prevention, child sexual abuse, consent, sex trafficking, etc…). Medical associations are not the only ones advocating for sex education to be taught to women of all ages across the country, but 93% of parents support having sex ed. be taught starting from the middle school age (Wilimitis). The purpose of having these programmes in academic institutions across the USA is to teach not just women, but men as well. This allows people to have healthy relationships, make informed decisions about sex, think critically about the world, be a good ally to those who are in bad situations, and love themselves for who they are (2023 Planned Parenthood Federation of America Inc). Research suggests that because a large percentage of public schools in the United States are not currently teaching any sex education, many teenagers, boys and girls, receive no formal sex education at all; this is mainly because the US Constitution does not require public schools to teach sex education. If the government does not promote sex education being taught to keep the women across the country safe, then no organization will have sex education be their priority to be taught in schools (Merriam).

**Pakistan**

Any topics related to sex education are generally not talked about in Pakistan at all; almost as if it is forbidden to talk about. However, Pakistan has a high prevalence of abortions (it is quite commonly seen) and sexually transmitted diseases (STI’s). Pakistan is very much influenced by religious and traditional practices therefore anything about sexuality education that is spoken about or brought up causes criticism and outrage by the public (Shaikh and Ochani). It is because of this that there are many negative consequences that are inflicted upon overall public health, but specifically of young women across the country. In 2012, there were a total of 2.2 million abortions in Pakistan and presently, the yearly national abortion rate stands at 50 per 1000 women (Shaikh and Ochani). Abortion is illegal in Pakistan, proving the alarming need for public awareness campaigns about sex education safety at the least. Women are not taught about the need to be safe with their bodies in order to protect themselves from negative outcomes. In spite of strong religious and traditional views in Pakistan, it is crucial to the health of the population of women to implement public sex education courses for all women and girls across the country to increase the overall public knowledge of sex education.

**Nepal**

The current public debate going on in Nepal is whether or not sex education is appropriate to be taught to people in academic institutions. The curriculum is considered ‘insufficient and inadequate due to socio-cultural factors.’ Young people in Nepal engage in unsafe sexual practices due to the lack of knowledge about sexual health and the low accessability to proper health services. In 2000, The Government of Nepal (GoN) constructed a national health and development strategy to improve the overall health of the young population, but the lack of sex education was not targeted with this strategy therefore adolescents are at considerable risk of negative health outcomes (Pokharel and Adhikari). About 17% of women become mothers between the ages of 15 - 19 years, according to the Ministry of Health and Population, because of inadequate sexual health knowledge. Many curriculum developers and lawmakers in Nepal say that sexual education corrupts the youth and defies “Nepalese values.” It is because of mindsets like this that Nepal is not able to move forward towards a safer future for women all over the country and provide a curriculum to teach the necessary information about sexual health to prevent any more negative outcomes on women.

# Timeline of Events

**Date Description of Event**

| Late 19th Century | A few different sex education publications were produced in England to aid parents in teaching their children. |
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| 1919 | The U.S. Department of Labor’s Children’s Bureau released a report suggesting sex education during school could have better protected soldiers from STIs during WWI. |
| 1920s | Senior girls had brief instruction on ‘self-reverence, self control and true modesty.’ |
| 1955 | Sweden establishes sex education in schools for all people. |
| June 1981 | Beginning of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the United States. |
| 12 December 2011 | Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, gives a speech about the significance of Women, Health, and Development. |
| 2016 | An estimated 17.8 million women were living with HIV (15 and older), which consisted of 52 per cent of all adults living with HIV. |
| 2018 | UNW publishes the ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.’ |
| 2019 | An estimated 21 million pregnancies each year, of which approximately 50% were unintended and which resulted in an estimated 12 million births. |

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# UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The UNW committee recognizes that there are various actions the UN has taken to address the need for sex education across the whole world to ensure the safety of women and girls. There are many committees in the UN that have taken actions to make this happen, but UNW specifically focuses on the effect sex education has on the development of women and girls and how UNW can support these people.

* In 2018, the UNW helped published a book titled, *International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.* This book was intended to assist the development of sex education, not only in schools, but out-of-school sex education programmes as well. This document is not only useful for government education ministers, but also for non-governmental organizations, youth workers and young people to advocate for themselves (UNW).
* Another publication created by UNESCO that the UNW contributed to titled, *The journey towards comprehensive sexuality education: Global status report*. The report is designed to help inform about continued advocacy and provide the necessary efforts with the goal of having all learners receive good quality sexuality education throughout their schooling years. It gives recommendations and solutions for all countries as well as actions to implement policies and programmes that support the availability of sex education, the increase of contributions in quality teacher training, and the strengthening of observing the implementation of comprehensive sexuality education (UNW).
* A significant event for women was The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in September 1995 strived for Action for Equality, Development and Peace. There were many topics discussed relating to all topics about women, but one main issue was women and health. They came to many conclusions; for example, “Undertake gender-sensitive initiatives that address sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, and sexual and reproductive health issues. Actions to be taken.” All countries that participated are encouraged to take on all conclusions that were made at this conference.

# Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Over the years, there have been different attempts across the world to resolve the issue of sex education. However, not all of these attempts have been effective in a way that benefits women. The UNW is not the only group working to improve this situation.

* UNESCO carried out a study in 2010 concerning the impact on health and the effectiveness of school-based sex education in Estonia. They targeted a younger audience in schools over the country to teach about youth-friendly sexual health. The research showed there were many improvements with regards to the sexual health of adolescents and overall health of young girls. For example, about 4,300 unintended pregnancies were avoided after the study was completed. This was one successful attempt at providing sex education and should be recommended for other countries around the world (Boonstra).
* “Many women and girls are dying because of poor sex education,” says Alvaro Serrano, UNFPA. India is one of these regions where this is true because sex education is a controversial topic. Even the health minister in 2014 said it should be banned, however not everyone agreed with this. Some public groups were able to set up the YP Foundation (young people foundation); it is a feminist, intersectional, rights based group focused on providing comprehensive sexuality education. This program has reached more than 13000 young people across India and has made their teachings available for anyone who wants access to it (YP).
* On July 23, 2010, the United Nations held a general assembly about the human right to education; but more specifically the human right of having access to sex education. It was discussed that sexuality, health and education are three interdependent rights meaning that all are connected. They stressed the importance of providing sex education to everyone across the world and came up with many recommendations in order to ensure that sex education is established everywhere (UN). [Here is the full outcome and list of recommendations they came up with to get started with the next step.](https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/UNSR_Sexual_Education_2010.pdf)

# Possible Solutions

In most countries, this issue remains unnoticed and unsolved. Many women and girls do not have access to sex education therefore cases of HIV/AIDS occur more and unintended pregnancies are more frequent. There must be actions to prevent these consequences from happening and address the global issue. Long term solutions are recommended for resolutions, however if current progress is to be shown, short term solutions must be implemented immediately as a part of the resolutions.

All solutions must cover the entirety of the issue which includes access to sex education and the prevention of negative consequences like STIs and unwanted pregnancies. For example, establishing a series of books specifically targeting the young girls across the world who do not have access to sex education at school. This will help them learn independently and without the discrimination from their surroundings. The books will include the entirety of the sexual education curriculum and a section of contacts in the UN if help is needed. The books could also be published and accessed in an online tool kit. Not everyone across the world has access to technology resources for this, and that is where the books will be provided.

However, it is more important to take this back to the root issue that sex education is not always provided for girls in school. If programmes are implemented into schools first, then other solutions like books and online tool kits won’t be as necessary since they would have the education given to them by a professional at school. Nations must take into consideration all women and girls in their country including those in poverty and unfortunate conditions. No matter who they are or where they live, their safety and health is a priority. Moreover, all solutions must take all these factors into account.

# Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)

The accessibility of sex education for women in academic institutions around the world connects to multiple sustainable development goals. However, the most significant goal is number three which is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (UN). This SDG has multiple target points related to overall global health. Target 3.7 is: “By 2030, ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programmes.” The UN is striving to complete many goals before 2030, and these goals represent their call to action. There are many aspects to this issue making it difficult to overcome. SDG three encourages nations across the world to solve this issue before 2030 so the overall global health of women can improve and sexual education can be provided for all women and girls. Although the UN is taking action to reach these goals as soon as possible, it has been difficult because not all nations are taking this issue as a priority. Goal number three provides women with significant knowledge and understanding with their sexual health and how to prevent unwanted pregnancies. As well as keeping them safe from STI’s and other horrible diseases. This will only be solved if all nations work together to provide this for women throughout the entire world and keep them healthy.

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# Appendix

1. A report from the United Nations Human Rights office of the High Commissioner about girls, women and sexuality education and the link to achieving the MDGs. Gives many examples of past actions that the UN has taken in regards to this issue.
   1. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/GenderAndEquality/Infonote_Women_and_the_right_to_sexual_education.pdf>
2. UNW article specifically about HIV and AIDS. Gives an overview of how HIV and AIDS are impacting women and their suggested solutions to solve the issue and spreading of the infections.
   1. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/hiv-and-aids>
3. A UNESCO article giving an overview of what sex education is, how it affects people's lives, and what UNESCO is doing to prevent this issue from getting worse overtime.
   1. [www.unesco.org/en/articles/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important#:~:text=Sexuality%20education%20has%20positive%20effects,or%20STI%2FHIV%20infection%20rates](http://www.unesco.org/en/articles/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-important#:~:text=Sexuality%20education%20has%20positive%20effects,or%20STI%2FHIV%20infection%20rates)
4. A course book that was written by UNW and other main committees of the UN speaking about “International technical guidance on sexuality education: An evidence-informed approach.”
   1. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/1/international-technical-guidance-on-sexuality-education>
5. The center for disease control and prevention made a detailed timeline starting all the way in 1980 giving information about the progress of HIV and AIDS. Including the events and statistics as well as solutions to the problem.
   1. <https://npin.cdc.gov/pages/hiv-and-aids-timeline>