

# Sexuality Education from an Islamic Perspective



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By

Muhammad Aftab Khan,  
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The Messenger of Allah (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him) said, "He who follows a path in quest of knowledge, Allah will make the path of Jannah [Paradise] easy to him. The angels lower their wings over the seeker of knowledge, being pleased with what he does. The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth and even the fish in the depth of the oceans seek forgiveness for him. The superiority of the learned man over the devout worshipper is like that of the full moon to the rest of the stars (i.e., in brightness). The learned are the heirs of the Prophets who bequeath neither dinar nor dirham but only that of knowledge; and he who acquires it, has in fact acquired an abundant portion."

**[Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi]**



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## PREFACE

All Praise is due to Allah, We praise Him and we seek help from Him. We ask forgiveness from Him. We repent to Him; and we seek refuge in Him from our own evils and our own bad deeds. Anyone who is guided by Allah, he is indeed guided; and anyone who has been left astray, will find no one to guide him. We bear witness that there is no God but Allah, the Only One without any partner; and we bear witness that Muhammad (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him) is His servant, and His Messenger.

The main focus of the book is to address a variety of challenges faced by contemporary youths in the global Muslim communities. In the contemporary Muslim world, there is limited literature on an Islamic approach to sexuality education. Despite the limited literature, we have attempted to focus on the issues which are of primary importance for the layperson, Muslim students and teachers in particular. While accomplishing this project, we do not claim to be authorities or specialists on the subject. Over the years, we have written various articles and books on this issue, which encouraged us to accept this task as a challenge.

This book is divided into fourteen chapters. The first chapter gives a historical overview of sexuality education in the modern world. This also includes a brief account of single-sex education in America. The second chapter deals with the Islamic philosophy of sexuality education. It gives some indications about sexuality education during the contemporary as well as the early periods of Islamic history. This chapter also discusses an exhaustive view of the different aspects of sexuality education as revealed in the Qur'an. This information is presented in tabular form, which provides insight concerning the diversity of the topics discussed in the Qur'an. In the context of the quality and quantity of this information and guidance, it can safely be argued that no other divine book has given such extensive information on this important aspect of human behaviour. Chapters three and four focus on the guidance contained in *Hadith* literature about different aspects of sexuality and sexuality education. In chapter five, we examine the *fiqh* literature from the different schools of *fiqh* that have provided a wealth of knowledge on a variety of aspects of sexuality. Since only one aspect of sexuality, purification (*taharah*), is concerned with the saying of prayers and the performance of other religious rituals, it has been dealt with extensively by the jurists (*fuqaha*) and other scholars. It is worth noting that

no other religion has provided such guidance to their followers. Chapter six examines the myths and misconceptions about sexuality and refutes many superstitions and misconceptions about this important aspect of human behaviour.

Chapter seven mainly focuses on the problems Muslim parents have in imparting sexuality education to their children. While briefly tracing the historical background as to why and how Muslim parents at the present time have difficulty imparting sexuality education to their children, some important problems are highlighted. In chapter eight, the contemporary issues and challenges are discussed with reference to sexuality education. The meaning, scope and need for sexuality education and the roles of parents, clergy and schools are also been examined. Chapter nine examines the development of a curriculum for sex and sexual health education. While discussing the broad outline of the topic, it also deals with sexual growth and development during the adolescent period. Chapter ten comprises age- and development-specific sexuality education curricula for children and adolescents and provides some important practical suggestions regarding this issue. This includes various views about the curriculum in relation to the aims and objectives of sexuality education in Islam and gives some details of education and training at different stages. In addition, some aspects of Islamic teachings after marriage, for example, the rearing of children and their moral training, are been discussed. Chapter eleven presents the perceptions of Muslim scholars (professors, physicians, psychiatrists, media-men, and lawyers) towards sexuality education. Chapter twelve examines Islamic sexuality education for young adults. Chapter 13 focuses on the major social challenges faced by the *Ummah* including the impact of September 11, Islamophobia, stigma, identity and intergenerational crises, acculturation, refugees, and macroaggressions. The final chapter, chapter fourteen, examines the challenges faced by Muslims and the possible strategies and solutions for dealing with the sensitive topic of Islamic sexuality education.

The essence of this book is based on the following notions:

- The fundamental of Islam as a religion is based on the Oneness of God.
- The source of knowledge is based on the Qur'an and the *Hadith (Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah)*.
- It is a sign of respect that Muslims would utter or repeat the words 'peace and blessing be upon him' after hearing (or writing) the name of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him).

We seek refuge from Allah, the Almighty, from the knowledge which is not beneficial.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Bismillah Ar Rahman Ar Rahim*

All Praise is due to Allah, and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings Be Upon Him), his family and his companions.

First of all, we would like to highlight the point that the theme of this book originated at the Islamic Academy Cambridge, UK. We wish to thank all the individuals, too many to mention, who have helped and supported us in various ways and for their useful suggestions for improving the quality of this book. We are also grateful to all the scholars, academics and clinicians for giving us their valuable time to participate in the study. We would like to thank the staff at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for their valuable and constructive suggestions during the development of the proposal and during the process of writing and publishing.

Last, but not least, we wish also to thank our wives and family members as without their appreciation and encouragement, this work would have not been possible. May Allah bless them all with the best of rewards in this world and the Hereafter. Jazak Allah Khayr.

Professor Dr Muhammad Aftab Khan  
Professor Dr G. Hussein Rassool  
Professor Dr Shaikh Abdul Mabud  
Professor Dr Muhammad Ahsan



# CHAPTER ONE

## AN OVERVIEW OF SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE MODERN WORLD

### Introduction

Facets of humanity have long been dwindling between the two approaches concerning sex and sexuality. The first approach has been that of total abstinence while the second is having unlimited sexual freedom. The latter school of thought advocates sexual freedom, sex for fun, sex for its own sake, and free sex. It argues that no one should put any restrictions on this process, whether it is religious, moral, traditional, or cultural. This concept is not new as its roots are traceable in ancient history. However, celibacy was introduced in Christianity by St Paul, who said: “It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”<sup>1</sup> Most people do not agree with this view and argue that this natural human desire should not be suppressed. Thus, the Reformation Movement led by Martin Luther (1929–1968) can be considered as an abhorrence of this approach. In the perspective of modern history, the deaths of millions of male soldiers in the two world wars caused a considerable gender gap. Many people believe that as the institutional systems in the West did not allow polygamy, women in Europe were left to the mercy of their desires and needs, resulting in the promotion of free sex, which was in contrast to the original Christian values. Albert Ellis (1962)<sup>2</sup> and G.F. Gilder (1975)<sup>3</sup> considered this approach as “sexual suicide and sexual tragedy.”

Sex is not only an instinct but also a life force and cohesive impulse as individuals' very characters are affected by how sexuality is managed, expressed, denied, and propagated. If devalued, it adversely affects family values as well as the social fabric of the society. In the view of George

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<sup>1</sup> Corinthians I, 7:1.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Ellis, *The American Sexual Territory* (New York: Groveless Inc., 1962).

<sup>3</sup> George, F. Gilder, *Sexual Suicide* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975).

Gilder,<sup>4</sup> if sex becomes cheap, it costs society and the nation as a whole dearly. This is because, in such a context, the value of marriage disappears, with the consequence of the institution of the family becoming weak and fragile. It is natural that men and women require a sustainable partner for companionship. Nature has made this desire and given a perpetual appeal for both sexes for the purpose of establishing life based on the strong family bond that is deeply rooted in the institution of marriage.

Keeping in view the situation in the contemporary world, unlimited sexual behaviour has resulted in a major loss of human values and a decline in the moral character of society. Nowadays, as we observe the turning away of youths from the Judeo-Christian tradition in the West, we can also see that the condition of youths in Muslim countries is not much different. Unfortunately, the Muslim clergy has failed to speak out frankly about the place of sex and sexuality in the lives of young people. Lacking this guidance, their desire has driven them to seek the knowledge they wish from less authentic sources, like peers, television and social media, etc. Up-to-date and needs-based religious teachings will be particularly helpful for Muslim youths to overcome the challenges they face in the contemporary global environment.

One of the important factors in why the present-day Muslim clergy has been unable to provide the right type of information on the subject is the lack of research and the unavailability of quality literature providing comprehensive guidance with regard to sexuality education based on the Qur'an, *Hadith* and Islamic scholars. The other problem is that due to the distinctive socio-economic, political, educational, and cultural practices prevalent in most Muslim-majority countries, educationists and Muslim scholars do not have the courage to come forward and take the lead to provide the requisite education in this field. Therefore, the current state of Muslim countries highlights that there is an urgent need to conduct extensive and in-depth research in this area. Such research should be based on the core teachings of the Qur'an and the *Hadith* and should address the issue of sexuality education in the light of the contemporary challenges faced by Muslim youths. In the context of the current climate on sexuality education, this book is an attempt to explore various dimensions of this issue and suggest some challenges and measures for improvement.

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<sup>4</sup> Gilder, *Sexual Suicide*, 1975.



## What is Sexuality Education?

Sexuality education is a broad term and has different meanings for different people and organisations. Sexuality education comes under different labels, including:

- Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)
- Holistic Sexuality Education
- Life and Living Skills
- Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)
- Sex Education
- Sexuality Education
- Sexuality and Reproductive Health (SRH)

The concept of sex education was labelled as too narrow in its perspective as it focuses mainly on the physical aspects of sexual and reproductive knowledge (human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexual intercourse, and other aspects of human sexual behaviour). The concept of sexuality education is the new language that is in line with the educational, human rights and public health priorities of the new millennium.

Many international and educational institutions use the term comprehensive sexuality education (CSE). This is referred to as

A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.<sup>5</sup>

The United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations sexual and reproductive health agency, views CSE as

A rights-based and gender-focused approach to sexuality education, whether in school or out of school. It is taught over several years, providing age-appropriate information consistent with the evolving capacities of young people. Comprehensive sexuality education includes

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<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *International technical guidance on sexuality education, An evidence-informed approach*, Revised edition (Paris, France: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2018),16.

scientifically accurate information about human development, anatomy and reproductive health, as well as information about contraception, childbirth and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).<sup>6</sup>

From a global perspective, the World Health Organization categorises sexuality education programmes into three groups:

- “(1) Programmes which focus primarily or exclusively on abstaining from sexual intercourse before marriage;
- (2) Comprehensive programmes, which include abstinence as an option, but also cover contraception and safe-sex practices; and
- (3) Programmes which include the elements in category 2, but also put them into a wider perspective of personal and sexual growth and development, sexual rights and the right to education.”

These latter programmes are referred to as holistic sexuality education.<sup>7</sup> In the Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe, the concept of holistic sexuality education is defined as

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

Sexuality education starts early in childhood and progresses through adolescence and adulthood. It aims at supporting and protecting sexual development. It gradually equips and empowers children and young people with information, skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality, have safe and fulfilling relationships and take responsibility for their own and other people’s sexual health and well-being.<sup>8</sup>

The above definitions and characteristics of sexuality education are context-based in secular democratic societies. It is not the essence of sexuality education that is being subjected to criticism but its interpretation and implementation in the schools’ curriculum. Although sexuality education is comprehensive in its nature and process, it is nonetheless

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<sup>6</sup> UNFPA, “*What is comprehensive sexuality education*” 2016, accessed 30 Dec, 2018, <https://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education>.

<sup>7</sup> WHO (Europe), “*What is “Holistic” Sexuality Education?*”, accessed 30 Dec, 2018, [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/250824/Frequently-asked-questions\\_15\\_05\\_2014.pdf?ua=1](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/250824/Frequently-asked-questions_15_05_2014.pdf?ua=1).

<sup>8</sup> WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe: A Framework for Policy Makers, Education and Health Authorities and Specialists*, (Köln: BZgA, 2010).

incomplete from an Islamic perspective. The sexuality education prevalent in Western education initiatives are devoid of the “values and morality associated with sex, sexual dysfunctions and deviations and the institution of marriage.”<sup>9</sup> Islamic sexuality education (or Islamic relationship and sex education) is implemented within the larger context of Islamic values and principles. It has been suggested that

In non-Islamic schools, children are often ‘educated’ in skills such as applying contraceptive methods to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies or in learning how to give sexual consent or arrange an abortion. There is scarce mention regarding the sacredness of their bodies or the sexual act, nor of moral teachings such as the importance of chastity and waiting for marriage.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of this book, Islamic sexuality education means imparting age-specific knowledge of sexuality and sexual health according to Islamic values and principles. The aim is teaching Muslims the moral character of Islam and its rulings. This is the abstinence approach to sexuality education based on the Islamic paradigm.

## **Need for Islamic Sexuality Education for Muslim Youths**

It is obligatory for all Muslims to follow the Islamic teachings, which are not only confined to rituals and prayers, in their daily lives. Islam provides guidance in all spheres of daily activities, lifestyle and practices, including the establishment of specific rules relating to sexuality. Stressing the Islamic stance on sexuality education and its significance, Shaykh ‘Abdul-Majeed Subh, a prominent scholar, states

Those who think that sex education is not allowed in Islam are completely wrong. The books of Islamic jurisprudence expose several topics promoting sexual awareness, including discussion of menstruation, childbirth bleeding, pregnancy, delivery, rules of sexual intercourse, rules of marriage, taking a bath (*ghusl*) after sexual intercourse, rules related to ejaculation of sperm during intercourse and intercourse without

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<sup>9</sup> Shahid Athar, *Sex Education: An Islamic Perspective*, 2018, accessed 30 Dec, 2018, <https://www.islamicity.org/2191/sex-education-an-islamic-perspective/>.

<sup>10</sup> Islam Today Magazine UK, *Do Muslim Children Need ‘Islamic’ Sex Education?* accessed 31 Dec, 2018, <http://islam-today.co.uk/do-muslim-children-need-islamic-sex-education>.

ejaculation, and rules related to the punishment for committing adultery or fornication.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, if a Muslim wants to follow Islamic lifestyle and practices in an authentic and integrated way, then they must know the sexual mores of this faith – just as they learn how to perform the daily prayers. Since Muslim youths are also being exposed to an array of sexual norms through the Internet and social media, it is necessary for them to know the Islamic perspectives about sex and sexuality so that they may adhere to the ethics as prescribed.

Besides, there are many indigenous and immigrant Muslim families and their children living in Western and Northern Europe, North America and Australasia who are directly exposed to the Western value system and sexual mores. In some of the countries, sex and relationship education is the part of educational curricula. For example, in England, children from year 7 onwards study sexuality education but sex and relationships education (SRE) is compulsory from age 11 onwards.<sup>12</sup> Although parents have the right to withdraw their children from these classes, concerns have been expressed by Christian organisations that sex and relationship education weakens the influence of parents and makes them powerless to protect their children from presentations of sexuality and sexual activities. In addition, it is argued that it was not for the state to prescribe what was taught in this area. These sentiments are also echoed within the Islamic value system on sex and sexuality. Secular sexuality education, devoid of morality, is being promoted by educators in many ways and this is unacceptable within the paradigm of the Islamic value system. This poses another challenge for Muslim parents amidst the challenges of parenting in secular societies and for the Muslim community (*Ummah*) as a whole. This situation highlights the need for sexuality education from an Islamic perspective.

## **Historical Background of Sexuality Education**

As a result of the French Revolution (1789–1799), it was believed that no divine power had revealed a code of law for the regulation of

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<sup>11</sup> Shaykh ‘Abdul-Majeed Subh, cited in *Is Sex Education Allowed?* 2018, accessed 31 Dec, 2018, <http://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-the-scholar/morals-manners/sex-education-allowed/>.

<sup>12</sup> *The National Curriculum*, accessed Nov 14, 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/other-compulsory-subjects>.

humankind's sexual life. There was no religious institution possessing the authority to enforce sexual prohibition. This situation promoted liberal sex and the concepts of sexual freedom and free sex. However, due to the rising concern about the hazards of teenage sex, teenage pregnancy and sexual trauma, health workers and school leaders called for the introduction of sexuality education in schools. It was first organised in Sweden in the 1950s and quickly became the mainstream in the Judeo-Christian Western world. The introduction of school-based sexuality education continued into the 1990s and early 2000s, first in France and the UK and subsequently in Portugal, Spain, Estonia, Ukraine, and Armenia. In Ireland, sexuality education became mandatory in primary and secondary schools in 2003.<sup>13,14,15,16</sup> During the last half of the twentieth century, various approaches to sexuality education have been implemented with varying results. In the following sections, we shall discuss some of the most salient features of two such systems practiced in the United States of America (USA) and European countries. For a more comprehensive account of sexuality education in Europe and the USA, see Aftab Khan.<sup>17</sup>

## Comprehensiveness of Sexuality Education System

Sexuality education (or sex education) started in Sweden. Later, in early 1970, public schools started explaining “where babies come from” and “how one gets venereal diseases.” Over time, the emphasis of these lessons changed, and in addition to teaching the biology of reproduction, students were informed that sex was fine outside the constraint of marriage. The sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s was characterised by an increased number of sexual partners and the growing acceptance of sexual encounters between unmarried adults. Throughout this period, young men and women engaged in their first acts of sexual intercourse at increasingly younger ages.<sup>18</sup> The children of the Baby Boom generation

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<sup>13</sup> IPPF, *Sexuality Education in Europe—A Reference Guide to Policies and Practices*, The SAFE-Project (London: IPPF).

<sup>14</sup> WHO Regional Office for Europe and BZgA, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> UNESCO, *Prevention Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. A review of policies and practices*, (Moscow: UNESCO Regional Office, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> T. Yepoyan, “School-based Sexuality Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,” *Entre Nous, the European Magazine for Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 80 (2014): 14–16.

<sup>17</sup> Aftab Khan, *Sex and Sexuality in Islam* (Lahore: Nashriyat, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Escoffier, *The Sexual Revolution, 1960–1980*, accessed Nov 14, 2018,

were beginning to have sex at an earlier age than their parents did in the 1970s. As a result of earlier sexual initiation among girls, the historical gender gap in first sexual experience narrowed. Today's adolescents are more sexually active, have more partners and have sex more frequently.<sup>19,20</sup>

During the last three decades, classroom sexuality education was debated in the USA and elsewhere. These debates were particularly intense when teen pregnancy rates began to rise at an alarming rate and the HIV/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic was having a devastating impact on young people. The debates divided people and society and created two main divergent groups. The mainstream sex educators advocated comprehensive sexuality education while the religious groups opposed the value-free science of sex. Abstinence before marriage became the guiding principle of sexuality education. Many organisations opposed to comprehensive sexuality education made aggressive efforts to implement abstinence-only approach programmes in several countries, including the USA. Their disagreements with the promoters of comprehensive sexuality education include:

- A threat to their livelihood
- They are safe-sex gurus and condom promoters
- This system is “smut,” “immoral” and “a filthy communist plot”<sup>21,22</sup>
- It is undermining the moral values of American youth
- They reject the Judeo-Christian ethics
- Christian’s faith in God will be subtly destroyed
- It is “Sodom and Gomorrah all over again”<sup>23</sup>

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[http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/sexual\\_revolution\\_S.pdf](http://www.glbqtarchive.com/ssh/sexual_revolution_S.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, “The Failure of Sex Education”, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 32-5 (October 1994): 55–80.

<sup>20</sup> Escoffier, *The Sexual Revolution*.

<sup>21</sup> D.W. Haffner and D. deMauro, *Winning the Battle: Developing Support for Sexuality and HIV/AIDS Education*, (New York: Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), 1991).

<sup>22</sup> People for the American Way (PFAW), *Teaching Fear: The Religious Right's Campaign against Sexuality Education* (Washington, DC: PFAW, June 1994).

<sup>23</sup> *Sodom and Gomorrah – Again and Again*, accessed Nov 14, 2018, <https://bibleprophecy.wordpress.com/2016/01/15/sodom-and-gomorrah-again-and-again/>

Ultimately the comprehensive sexuality education programmes were successful throughout the early to mid-1980s due to the overwhelming approval of the public at large, particularly the parents.

In the mid-1980s, a new factor, the AIDS epidemic, changed the scenario of sexuality education. In October 1986, the Surgeon General's report on AIDS shifted sexuality education to the public health framework. According to C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General,

There is now no doubt that we need sexuality education in schools and that it [should] include information on heterosexual and homosexual relationships. The lives of our young people depend on our fulfilling our responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

By the late 1980s, many states in the USA required schools to provide information about AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Some of these states were also required to provide instruction in sexuality education.<sup>25</sup> There were mixed types of sexuality education. Some states appeared to encourage only limited instruction, including abstinence. Others provided courses on HIV and STD prevention with information on condom use and other prevention strategies in addition to information about abstinence.<sup>26</sup> Some of the sexuality education programmes excluded topics such as abortion, homosexuality and masturbation because they were considered too controversial.<sup>27</sup> The inadequacy of such policies and practices of many sexuality education programmes strengthened the cause for comprehensive sexuality education.

## **Abstinence-Only Programme**

The Abstinence Education Programme began in the USA in 1997 as part of the Welfare Reform Act 1996. The abstinence initiatives focus on teaching middle school and high school youngsters that sexual abstinence

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<sup>24</sup> C.E. Koop, *Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Patricia Donovan, *School-Based Sexuality Education: The Issues and Challenges*, *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 30, 4 (1998): 188–193.

<sup>26</sup> NARAL, *A State by State Review of Abortion and Reproductive Rights* (Washington, DC: NARAL, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> A.E. Gambrell and D. Haffner, *Unfinished Business: A SIECUS Assessment of State Sexuality Education Programs* (New York: SIECUS, 1993).

until marriage is the best choice.<sup>28</sup> The aims of abstinence education include:<sup>29,30</sup>

- Abstinence from sexual activity outside marriage is the expected standard for all school-age children.
- Abstinence from sexual activity is the only certain way to avoid out-of-wedlock pregnancy, STDs and other associated health problems.
- A mutually faithful monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the expected standard of human sexual activity.
- Sexual activity outside the context of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects.
- Bearing children out of wedlock is likely to have harmful consequences for the child, the child's parents and society.
- How to reject sexual advances.
- How alcohol and drug use increase vulnerability to sexual advances.
- The importance of attaining self-sufficiency before engaging in sexual activity.

Over half a century ago, the National Council of Churches' Commission on Marriage and the Family, the Synagogue Council of America's Committee on Family and the United States Catholic Conference's Family Life Bureau issued an interfaith statement on sexuality education, affirming that human sexuality is a gift from God, to be accepted with thanksgiving and used with reverence and joy.<sup>31</sup> The 1968 statement calls upon communities of faith to provide resources, leadership and opportunities for sexuality education and recognises the vital role that schools play, reaching large numbers of young people who need to understand their sexuality and their role in society. Churches and synagogues all across America offered faith-based sexuality education to

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<sup>28</sup> *Abstinence*, accessed Nov 14, 2018, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/contraception/abstinence\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/contraception/abstinence_1.shtml).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Social Security Act, §510 (b) (2), and [advocatesforyouth.org](http://advocatesforyouth.org).

<sup>31</sup> Heather D. Boonstra, *Matter of Faith: Support for Comprehensive Sexuality Education Among Faith-Based Organizations*, Guttmacher Institute, accessed Nov 14, 2018, <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2008/02/matter-faith-support-comprehensive-sex-education-among-faith-based-organizations>.



their members, with the principle that sexuality is a God-given gift and an integral part of human life.<sup>32</sup>

Religious leaders were increasingly interested in helping adolescents understand their sexuality in spiritual terms.<sup>33</sup> It is generally argued that when young people see their sexuality as being a gift of God rather than something forbidden or sinful, they are less likely to abuse it. Pope Francis said

Sexuality, sex, is a gift of God. Not taboo. Love between a man and a woman, when it is passionate, it leads you to give your life forever. Forever. And to give it with your body and soul.<sup>34</sup>

Abstinence-only proponents claimed that sexuality education programmes only provide limited or no information on abstinence but focus principally on teaching students about contraception and safe-sex techniques. In addition, they also maintained that sexuality education programmes condone homosexuality, teach students how to have sex, and undermine parental authority.<sup>35</sup> Abstinence-only proponents also maintained that the trends in the continuing high rates of adolescent pregnancy, STDs and out-of-wedlock births are proof of "the widespread failure of conventional sexuality education."<sup>36</sup>

Like comprehensive sexuality education programmes, there have also been opposing views for the abstinence-only programmes. Some of those include:

- These were very limited in scope and they typically limit discussion to sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, contraceptive

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<sup>32</sup> Freedman-Doan et al., "Faith-based sexuality education programs: What they look like and who uses them," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 1 (2013): 247–262.

<sup>33</sup> Louise Palmer, cited in Sabnum Dharamsi, *Relationships, Sex & Marriage for Muslims, Christians & all Faith Communities in Tower Hamlets*, 2002, accessed Nov 14, 2018, <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/sabnum-dharamsi-b0ba1316>.

<sup>34</sup> Cited in S.C. Caleb, *Human Sexuality a Gift from God*, accessed Nov 15, 2018, <https://www.scross.co.za/2018/10/human-sexuality-a-gift-from-god/>.

<sup>35</sup> Concerned Women for America (CWA), *Sexuality Education in American Schools: An Evaluation of the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States, a Public School Administrator's guide* (Washington, DC: CWA).

<sup>36</sup> Kristine Napier, "Chastity programs shatter sex-ed myths," *Policy Review*, May–June, 83 (1997):12.

failure rates, and the need to refrain from sexual activity outside of marriage.

- They often failed to mention basic sexual health information.
- These programmes, often referred to as “fear-based”, are designed to control young people’s sexual behaviour by instilling fear, shame and guilt. They informed children that they are going to go blind, get a disease, never be able to get pregnant, and ultimately die.
- Sexuality education programmes teaches students of grades 7-12 about abstinence and 78% of public and private school teachers in health education classes include instruction in the rationale for choosing abstinence.<sup>37,38</sup>
- There is evidence to suggest that no methodologically sound studies show abstinence-only programmes delay the initiation of sexual intercourse.<sup>39,40</sup>

Despite this evidence, abstinence-only programmes continue to proliferate. In this debate, many other factors have also come to light. For instance, the idea that ignorance is not the problem, but the lack of knowledge is. This viewpoint has also been substantiated by Diclemente et al.,<sup>41</sup> who observed that the didactic transfer of factual information alone is not enough to change behaviour. Another factor is parental discipline. One study, based on teenagers’ reports of levels of parental control, shows that teenagers with moderately strict parents had the lowest level of sexual activity, teens with very strict parents had higher levels, and those with

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<sup>37</sup> J.D. Forrest and J. Silverman, “What public school teachers teach about preventing pregnancy, AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases,” *Family Planning Perspectives*, 21, no. 2 (1989):65–72.

<sup>38</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), School-based HIV-prevention education—United States, 1994, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 45, no. 35 (1996):760–765.

<sup>39</sup> D. Kirby, *No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy* (Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> B.L. Wilcox et al., *Federally Funded Adolescent Abstinence Promotion Programs: An Evaluation of Evaluations*, paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research on Adolescents (Boston, Mar. 10, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> R.J. DiClemente et al., “Determinants of condom use among junior high school students in a minority inner-city school district,” *Pediatrics*, 89, no. 2 (1992):197–202.

very permissive parents had the highest level.<sup>42</sup> Good family values and attributes are essential formative forces for children's development. It is acknowledged that in families where parents feel free and happy to express affection and love for each other will have happy children, accepting themselves, their being and their sexuality with joy.

Family structure is another important factor. Research findings suggest that girls raised by single mothers are less likely to be supervised, more likely to engage in early sex, and more likely to end up pregnant compared with girls raised by their married parents.<sup>43</sup> Another important factor is religion. "Religiously observant teens are likelier than others to refrain from early sex while the highest level of premarital intercourse occurs among teens with no religious affiliation."<sup>44</sup> Religion has a powerful influence on premarital sex and getting its adherents to abide by its precepts.<sup>45</sup> Youths affiliated or identifying with a religious denomination report lower rates of non-marital sex than do the unchurched.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, if you are not religious but are living in a Muslim-majority country, you are likely to adjust your sexual behaviour in accordance with the Islamic faith<sup>47</sup> and act in ways that are more consistent with Islamic religious precepts.

Across the world, the Islamic faith is very powerful in shaping behaviour. Early premarital sexual activity has a negative influence on the ability to form long-term relationships later in life.<sup>48</sup> The findings of Kinsey et al.<sup>49,50</sup> with regard to religious groups are very interesting. Male adolescents and young adults who are orthodox Jews are less sexually

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<sup>42</sup> Whitehead, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 55–80.

<sup>43</sup> Bruce J. Ellis, et al. "Does father absence place daughters at special risk for early sexual activity and teenage pregnancy?" *Child Development*, 74, no. 3 (2003): 801–821.

<sup>44</sup> Whitehead, *The Atlantic Monthly*, 55–80.

<sup>45</sup> Amy Adamczyk, and Brittany E. Hayesa, "Understanding the influence of Islamic cultures and religious affiliation for explaining sex outside of marriage," *American Sociological Review*, 77, no. 5 (2012): 723–746.

<sup>46</sup> C. Smith and M L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Adamczyk et al., *American Sociological Review*, 723-746.

<sup>48</sup> J.S.McIlhaney, Jr and F M. Bush, *Hooked: New Science on How Casual Sex is Affecting Our Children* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> A. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (London: Saunders Company, 1953).

<sup>50</sup> A. Kinsey, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (London: Saunders Company, 1953).

active compared to devout Catholics and Protestants. Equally, the most sexually active individuals are non-Church-going Catholics, followed by non-Church-going Protestants and non-synagogue-going Jews. In the case of females, a small percentage of the religiously devout Protestants had experienced orgasm compared to non-Church-going Protestants.

## **Important Reflections on Sexuality Education Programmes**

Having gone through some of the features of both approaches, it may be concluded that sexuality education in schools was not introduced in response to public demand, nor was there a parental lobby clamouring for it. Rather, demand rose from a powerful lobby of liberals, researchers and enterprising business professionals. There is no right or wrong way to approach sexuality education in the West. There are two opposing camps: one believes that sexuality education is designed to lessen the natural modesty in children, awaken that passion and pressure them to accept all sexual sins and perversions.<sup>51</sup> Another view put forward is that learning about sexuality is a normal part of child development, communicating with teenagers that it is fine to have sex as long as they practice protected-sex. The argument is that it is important to be safe and use the right protection, such as condoms for both genders for casual sex and birth control (harm minimisation). It is important to note that in other areas of health behaviours, including smoking and substance use, we teach our children risk avoidance – we inform them not to drink or smoke. How can we say that we can successfully practice risk avoidance in those areas but not this one? To say that children do not have any self-control may be regarded as the rationalisation of a morally bankrupt society. This hypocrisy has led to the present-day sexual anarchy and has brought the West to the brink of “sexual suicide” or “sexual tragedy.” Another scholar stated that

Unfortunately for our youth, for their innocence and moral integrity, education in sexuality gets all the emphasis. Education in chastity is either

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<sup>51</sup> Randy Engel, *Sex Education – The Final Plague* (Charlotte, NC: Tan Books, 1993).

simply neglected or, worse, it's even ridiculed and sneeringly discussed as incompatible with modern youth.<sup>52</sup>

Similarly, Carole Ulanowsky<sup>53</sup> and Valerie Riches,<sup>54</sup> while criticising the current practices in school sexuality education, remarked that the changes in British society have left many young people morally adrift, to be blown anyway by their natural hedonism as by the unscrupulous forces of a sex exploitative society.

Despite the two approaches to sexuality education in the US, the teen pregnancy rate is substantially higher than in other western industrialised nations.<sup>55</sup> The UK has the highest teenage birth and abortion rates in Western Europe.<sup>56</sup> It is reported that rates of teenage births are five times those in the Netherlands, double those in France and more than twice those in Germany.<sup>57</sup> On a global scale, however, studies have shown that there has been a decline in the rates of teenage pregnancy. Although reasons for the decline are complex, there is evidence to suggest that it is due to more teens abstaining from sexual activity, the increased use of birth control for those who are sexually active, and more openness between teenagers and the parents offering guidance.<sup>58,59</sup> Similarly, in Japan, the rate of teen pregnancy is considerably lower because of the traditional moral values

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<sup>52</sup> William A. Marra, "The two directions of sex education," *Faith Newsletter Catholic United States*, 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Carole Ulanowsky, "Sex education: Beyond information to values." In *Sex Education and Religion*, ed. Michael J. Reiss and Shaikh Abdul Mabud. Cambridge: The Islamic Academy, 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Valerie Riches, "Shortcomings of present-day practice in school sex education." In *Sex Education and Religion*, ed. Michael J. Reiss and Shaikh Abdul Mabud. Cambridge: The Islamic Academy, 1998.

<sup>55</sup> G. Sedgh et al., "Adolescent pregnancy, birth, and abortion rates across countries: levels and recent trends," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 56, no. 2 (2015): 223–230.

<sup>56</sup> L. Avery and G. Lazdane, "What do we know about sexual and reproductive health of adolescents in Europe?" *European Journal of Contraception and Reproductive Health Care*, 113, no. 1 (2008):58–70.

<sup>57</sup> United Nations Statistics Division, 'Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men, Table 2b- Indicators on Childbearing', accessed Nov 16, 2018, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/ww2005/tab2b.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> J. Santelli et al., "Explaining recent declines in adolescent pregnancy in the United States: The contribution of abstinence and improved contraceptive use," *American Journal of Public Health*, 97, no. 1, (2007):150–156.

<sup>59</sup> L.D. Lindberg et al., "Understanding the decline in adolescent fertility in the United States," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 59, no. 5 (2016): 577–583.

and it is shameful to be a young unmarried mother. Some Western European countries are liberal about teenage sexuality and insist on the harm- minimisation approach of using contraceptives to prevent teenage pregnancies. The dichotomy in the USA, being moralistic and permissive simultaneously, means neither route has been pursued successfully.

Careful consideration of this whole situation reflects that human sexuality is primarily a matter of moral, spiritual and physical health. Therefore, priority should be given to restoring the moral and material support for marriage based on a two-parent family. The disintegration or weakening of the institution of the family contributes to several psychosocial problems. It is worth pointing out that the high-risk groups more vulnerable to becoming teenage parents include those young people in care, the homeless, underachievers at school, the children of teenage parents, certain ethnic groups, and those brought up in socially deprived environments.<sup>60,61</sup>

## Single-Sex Education in the United States

The importance of female education needs to be emphasised. Educated mothers will produce healthy and responsible citizens of the state. In the West, the first generation of educated women was the product of single-sex secondary and undergraduate schools. In the last decade of the 19th century, seven women's colleges in the northeast of the USA, the Seven Sisters, started educating the daughters of the elite class. Graduates from these schools paved the way for the women's movement during the 19th century. The schools not only inspired activism in women but also prepared them to work as wage-earning teachers, a respectable professional career for unmarried females. It may be pointed out that in the West during the 19th century, segregation of the sexes was considered natural and part of the cultural practice, resulting in single-sex schools being established. However, as a result of the feminist movement, by the end of the 19th century, co-education had become the norm.

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<sup>60</sup> C. Swann et al., *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood: A Review of Reviews. Evidence Briefing* (London: Health Development Agency, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> D. Trivedi et al. *Update on Review of Reviews on Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood*. Submitted as an addendum to the first evidence briefing 2003. (Centre for Research in Primary and Community Care University of Hertfordshire On behalf of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, December 2007).