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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
<p>Sex-Education, Culturally Sensitive, School Curriculum, Cultural Taboos</p>	<p>This study aimed to analyze the need for initiating sex education programs in schools of Lahore, Pakistan. Qualitative research methodology was used for data collection through focus group discussions and individual interviews with school teachers and students. The study revealed that the majority of the participants perceived a lack of knowledge about reproductive health and sex education among students and felt that such programs should be included in school curriculum. They highlighted several challenges that could hinder implementation of such programs, like cultural and religious taboos, parental resistance and inadequate teacher training. Participants advised various strategies for improving the effectiveness of sex education programs, including involving parents and religious leaders, providing comprehensive and age-appropriate information and cultural sensitivities. Study focuses status of incorporating sex education in school curricula and provides insights into challenges & strategies for realizing programs in conservative society like Pakistan. It is suggested that government and school authorities initiate and implement inclusive sex education programs that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive.</p> <p> 2022 Journal of Social Sciences Development</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Educating the masses, especially students in grade schools, is not only a global issue but also a dire need of time, given the increased use of technology resulting in spread of pervert sexual practices. With pornography on the rise and the horrific rise in cases of rapes in third world and subsequent dark trade of the selling rape videos in neighboring India demands greater attention be paid to instructing youth on sexual behaviors. Girls are doubly vulnerable and susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation. Sexual offenses, such as sexual harassment, stalking, voyeurism, and assaults on girls/women to outrage their modesty, are growing alarmingly (Bhattacharyya & Prasad, 2020).

Moreover, social networking websites and mobile apps that allow young people to engage in risky sexual practices have been cited as one of the critical reasons for the surge in HIV infections in the Asia-Pacific region (Ridder, 2017). A study by United Nations in late 2015 revealed that mobile dating apps increasingly facilitate spontaneous casual sex and that the age of such users availing this technology for this purpose is dropping (Berkowitz, Tinkler, Peck & Coto, 2021). It is around 12 or 13 years, as found in many parts of the region. With such people so young, the authorities struggle to reach them.

The state of affairs in Pakistan is no different. The social stigma, misconceived notions of religious teachings, and poor sex education contribute to a lack of information about safe sex and the spread of the sexual diseases. Young people do not have enough information to make safe choices. These teenagers have been neglected, and services have not been targeted toward educating them. In the highly digitalized world today, with youngsters having access to smartphones, the internet, and apps like WhatsApp and Facebook, it appears all they know is how to find another partner (Lim & Loh, 2019). The internet provides unlimited sexual risks and opportunities. This is the new frontier. The need for sexual education at schools could not be more urgent than it has become now. Yet the relevance of sex education/sexuality training in schools is issue that is begging nod of attention and approval in social orders/setups where Muslims form a more significant part of the community. Although the Qur'an has laid such great emphasis on procuring learning, and in times of the early Islam, Muslim men and women were never excessively reticent, not overly reluctant in making the inquiries, including those identified with private undertakings, sexual life. But for Muslim parents/guardians of today, guiding children on sexual issues has courteously become a forbidden subject (Musa, 2020).

Raised in a social domain that sees kids' information on the sexuality as hurtful, numerous Muslim guardians today are in a fix on whether sex training ought to be imparted to their young ones at home or even at school. Be that as it may, in the current age of noticeable social change on a global scale, youngsters need not bother with guardians and school to instruct them about sexuality. They are being assaulted consistently with the generous data on sex by the broad communications and companion bunch (Jozkowski, Manning & Hunt, 2018). This pattern, in any case, is testing because, for significant part, sex instruction advanced by above-cited channels is without ethical quality - as in, from numerous points of view, it negates the worth/honor framework honed in Muslim social orders. In this manner, issue of presenting sexuality instruction in the school educational programs should be evaluated in Muslim-dominant nations. Despite urgent need about Muslim-influenced cultures and regimes, sex instruction is banned to be educated at schools (Sham, Zaidi, Zahari, Danis & Razali, 2020). Young people are especially powerless against being deluded on off chance that they are not legitimately educated about scope of life matters. Exact and convenient sex instruction in young people can broaden their insight in sexuality, conceptive well-being and change practices (Allen, 2007).

Trepidation that formal sexual training can increment sexual conduct appears untrue (Goldman & Coleman 2013). Audits of sexuality instruction programs demonstrate that they primarily don't support early sexual activity. Unexpectedly, if arranged right, the projects can thus postpone first

intercourse, leading to more reliable prophylactic use and safe sexual practices (Treacy, Taylor & Abernathy, 2018). Sex training incorporates an expansive range of topics, for example, adolescence and pubescence-related subjects, conceptive framework life systems and physiology, pregnancy and birth, contraception and barrenness, savagery between sexes, sexually transmitted Infections by ailments (STDs), and human immunodeficiency infection (HIV). Among all the formative turning points, adolescence might be the most significant. It alludes to procedure of physical changes by which tyke's body turns into that of a grown-up fit for propagation. A late study led in the Sultanate of Oman has demonstrated that pubertal changes were neither recognized nor captured among adolescents as they achieved pubescence (Ayoubi, Abdulrahim & Sieverding, 2021; Jaffer, Afifi, Ajmi & Alouhaishi 2006).

A study found that 66% of their study members could accurately recognize names of regenerative organs. In the new time of globalization, teenagers are presented with unlimited data from various assets. TV, motion pictures, music, magazines, and the web are vital in giving data on each theme, especially the sexuality and regenerative well-being. In any case, in numerous examples, the data given is not exact or socially competent. While guardians and schools ought to assume a huge part in giving sex instruction, concentrating on demonstrating that the guardians talk practically and thoroughly to their youngsters once in a while, and schools are constrained in what they can educate (Aydoğdu, Gürsoy & Aral, 2021). To balance any potential antagonistic physiological effect that data from broad communications can have on the young people, a French study directed by the Population Council proposed that youths require more precise data on sexuality and conceptive well-being, including physiological changes amid pubescence (Babazadeh, Mousavi & Shariati, 2018). Research on youth sexuality in MENA nations is still in the early period of setting up a gauge of data on information, states of mind, and practices among assorted populaces (Zahlan, Khauli & Khoury, 2020).

In the present study, researcher needed to discover the discernment of Pakistani individuals. What is the average Pakistani individual's impression of fusing sexuality instruction in Pakistani state-funded educational system? Furthermore, what do they consider the requirements, difficulties, and suggestions? Along these lines, our examination was centered on the view of Pakistani individuals joining a sexuality instruction program in the Pakistani state-funded educational system (Nadeem, Cheema & Zameer, 2021). This pattern, in any case, is testing as, for significant part, sex instruction advanced by above-cited channels is without ethical quality -as in, from numerous points of view, it negates the worth/honor framework honed in Muslim social orders (Jozkowski, Manning & Hunt, 2018; Sham, Zaidi, Zahari, Danis & Razali, 2020). The apparent effect of populace development on financial improvement, the relationship between sexuality instruction and populace development, and the nonappearance of examination of view of Pakistani individuals of the need and advantages of sexuality training in government-funded schools are what persuaded me that exploration of this subject was essential.

Problem Statement

The problem statement of this research is to analyze the need for initiating sex education programs in schools of Lahore, Pakistan, and to identify the challenges associated with implementing such

programs, as well as perceived outcomes and suggestions for upgrading from various stakeholders such as teachers, students, and parents. Lack of comprehensive sex education programs in schools in Pakistan has resulted in negative outcomes such as high rates of the teenage pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and misinformation about sexual health. This study aims to provide insights into current situation and to suggest ways to improve sexual health education in schools. This study aims to gain information on under-examined point of view of Pakistani individuals regarding the need for sexual training in government-funded educational system. Specialists needed to research what understudies, educators, and other vital sources trust necessities, difficulties, and results are for joining sexuality instruction in Pakistani essential and auxiliary government-funded education system's educational modules. Besides, this study looked to discover distinctive partners' proposals for future changes.

Objectives & Questions

1. To investigate perceptions of teachers and students about challenges to implementation of sex education in academic curriculum of the public-school system.
2. To study perceptions of teachers and students about potential outcomes of implementation of sex education in "academic curriculum of public-school system."
3. To know perceptions of teachers and key informants regarding recommendations "for the implementation of sex education in academic curriculum of public-school system."
4. "Which are the perceived leading challenges that are associated with implementing a sex education program in the curriculum?"
5. "Which are the perceived leading outcomes of including a sex education program in the curriculum?"
6. "What do the various stakeholders suggest main tasks relates to sex education for future improvements?"

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' Perspective on Sex Education

Worldwide, teachers' perspectives on sex education are shaped by a variety of factors, including cultural, religious, and personal beliefs, and local laws and policies. A study of teachers' attitudes towards sex education in the United Kingdom found that teachers generally viewed sex education as important, but were also concerned about addressing sensitive topics in a culturally appropriate manner (Hickson et al., 2006). In the United States, teachers reported feeling unprepared to teach sex education, due to a lack of training and support, and conflicting cultural attitudes towards sex (Rode et al., 2011). In some countries, sex education is a mandatory part of curriculum and is taught in comprehensive and age-appropriate manner. The teachers in these countries may have received proper training and may feel comfortable and confident teaching the subject. They may see sex education as a way to empower students with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about sexual health and to protect themselves from potential harm. In few countries, sex education may be less emphasized or not included in curriculum at all. In these cases, teachers may not have received proper training or may feel uncomfortable to teach subject (Okunlola, Odukoya & Gesinde, 2020).

They may also be influenced by cultural or religious beliefs that view sex education as taboo or inappropriate. In some countries, topic of sex education is highly controversial, and teachers may be hesitant to teach it due to concerns about backlash from parents, students, or community (Kee-Jiar & Shih-Hui, 2020). They may be concerned about their own safety or job security if they choose to teach sex education. However, many teachers also recognized the importance of providing students with accurate information about sexual health and relationship to protect their well-being. Despite these differences in attitudes, the consensus among teachers globally is that the comprehensive sex education should be taught in schools. A systematic review of sex education programs found that comprehensive sex education, which includes topics such as anatomy and physiology, reproductive health, sexually transmitted infections, contraception, and relationships and communication, was effective in reducing the unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and risky sexual behavior (Kirby, 2002). In this connection, in Pakistan, situation is different. A comprehensive sex education is not widely taught in schools, and when it is taught, it is often limited to basic anatomy and physiology.

This is due to cultural and religious beliefs that consider sex to be a taboo subject, as well as a lack of teacher training and support (Nadeem, Cheema & Zameer, 2021). There is growing recognition of the need for comprehensive sex education in Pakistan, as rates of teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and gender-based violence continue to rise. A study of teachers' attitudes towards sex education in Pakistan found that majority of teachers were not comfortable teaching the subject due to cultural and religious beliefs, and lack of training and support (Iqbal et al., 2015). They believe that it is not appropriate to discuss sexual topics in the classroom. They may also feel that sex education is not their responsibility and that it should be left to parents to educate their children on these topics. They might see sex education as controversial or sensitive subject and have concerns about how it might be received by students, parents, and the community. Another study led in Pakistan found that although teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching sex education, they recognized its rank for preventing unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections among young people (Hassan et al., 2018). Study found that teachers would be likely to teach sex education if they received more training and support, as well as if curriculum was culturally and socially appropriate.

Students' Perspective on Sex Education

Perception of school students regarding initiating sex education in schools varies across the world (Achigibah, 2018). In some countries, students may welcome opportunity to receive comprehensive sex education in a safe and supportive environment. In contrast, students may be opposed to the idea in other countries due to cultural or religious beliefs. Moreover, some students may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing sexual topics in a classroom setting. Overall, perceptions on this topic can be diverse (Laverty, Noble, Pucci & MacLean, 2021). In countries where sex education is a part of the curriculum and is taught comprehensively and age-appropriate, students may have a more positive perception of the initiative. They may view sex education as an essential tool for learning about their bodies, understanding healthy relationships, and making informed decisions about their sexual health. They may appreciate having open and honest discussions about sexual topics with their peers and teachers in safe and supportive environment (Aydoğdu, Gürsoy & Aral, 2021;

Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022). On other hand, in countries where sex education is not a part of the curriculum or is taught in limited or stigmatized manner, students may have a negative perception of the initiative.

They may view sex education as unnecessary or inappropriate and may be opposed to discussing sexual topics in a classroom setting. The cultural or religious beliefs may also influence the students' perceptions, as some view sex education as conflicting with their values (Musa, 2020). Additionally, some students may feel embarrassed or uncomfortable discussing sexual topics in the classroom, and regardless of the country or cultural context. They may feel it is private and should not be discussed in a public setting like a school (Laverty, Noble, Pucci & MacLean, 2021). Studies have shown that students in Pakistan generally believe that sex education should be taught in schools, but they also express concerns about the quality and content of the education they receive. For example, a study of students in Lahore, Pakistan found that while the majority believed that the sex education was important, they felt that the education they received was inadequate and did not cover important topics such as reproductive health and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) (Naz et al., 2015). In addition, the cultural and religious norms in Pakistan often discourage open discussions about sex and sexuality, which can create various apprehensions including a barrier to the effective delivery of sex education.

For example, a study of students in Pakistan found that cultural and religious norms often dictate that discussions of sexuality and sexual health are taboo and should not be discussed in public (Nazir et al., 2018). This can make it difficult for teachers to address these topics in the classroom and for students to access accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health. Despite these challenges, students in Pakistan continue to express a desire for the improved sex education that is comprehensive, accurate, and culturally sensitive. For example, a study of the students in Lahore, Pakistan found that they wanted sex education to cover topics such as reproductive health, STIs, and safe sexual practices, as well as the emotional and social aspects of sexuality (Naz et al., 2015). Students in Pakistan generally believe that sex education is important and should be taught in schools, but they also express concerns about the quality and content of the education they receive. Cultural and religious norms in Pakistan often discourage open discussions about sex and sexuality, making it difficult for teachers to address these topics in the classroom and for students to access accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health. Despite these challenges, students in Pakistan continue to express desire for improved sex education that is comprehensive, accurate, & culturally sensitive.

Parental Support for Sex Education

Parental support for sex education is critical factor in ensuring that young people receive accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health and relationships. Research has shown that parental support can improve the quality and effectiveness of sex education programs and increase students' access to accurate information. However, there are also challenges to securing parental support for sex education, including cultural, religious, and personal beliefs, as well as concerns about the content and delivery of sex education. Studies have shown that parental support for sex education is influenced by a variety of factors, including cultural, religious, and personal beliefs.

For example, a study of parents in the United States found that cultural and religious beliefs, as well as personal values, were significant predictors of support for sex education (Lammers et al., 2011). Similarly, research in the United Kingdom found that parents' religious beliefs and values played a role in their support for sex education (McManus et al., 2000). In addition, research has shown that parents' perceptions of the quality and content of sex education programs can impact their level of support. In this regard, for example, a study of parents in the United States found that parents who perceived sex education as comprehensive and medically accurate were more likely to support it (Mark et al., 2005).

Conversely, parents who perceived sex education as overly focused on sexual behavior and not enough on relationship skills were less likely to support it (Mark et al., 2005). Thus, despite these challenges, research has also shown that parental support for sex education can have the positive impact on the young people's sexual health and well-being. For example, studies have shown that parental support for sex education is associated with increased use of contraception and lower rates of unintended the pregnancy and STIs among young people (Santelli et al., 2006). Despite these challenges, students in Pakistan continue to express a desire for the improved sex education that is comprehensive, accurate, and culturally sensitive. Some students may feel embarrassed or scratchy discussing sexual topics in a classroom setting. Parental support for sex education is a critical factor in ensuring that young people receive accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health and relationships. Parental support is influenced by cultural, religious, and personal beliefs, as well as perceptions of quality and content of sex education programs. Despite these challenges, parental support for sex education can have positive impact on young people sexual health as well as well-being.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paradigm for this study was interpretivism, as it acknowledges the subjective nature of reality and seeks to understand the meaning behind the experiences of participants (Creswell, 2014). By adopting an interpretive approach, this study recognizes that sex education is a sensitive and complex issue, and seeks to explore the perspectives and experiences of stakeholders involved in education system in Lahore, Pakistan. Research design for this study was focus group discussions and individual interviews with school teachers and students. This design allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of views and experiences of stakeholders to sex education programs in schools in Lahore, Pakistan (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach is particularly useful when exploring complex issues and seeking to understand context in which they occur (Yin, 2017). The method for this study was semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed scholar to explore the perspectives and experiences of participants while maintaining level of structure to ensure that all relevant topics are covered (Fontana & Frey, 2018). Interviews were conducted in Urdu, that is official language of Lahore, Pakistan, to ensure that participants feel comfortable expressing views in native language.

The population for this study were stakeholders involved in education system in Lahore, Pakistan. This were including school teachers and students. Inclusion of stakeholders offers comprehensive understanding of factors that influence need for sex education programs in schools. The sampling

strategy for this study was purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on their relevance to research question and their ability to provide valuable insights into the need for sex education programs in schools. Purposive sampling is particularly useful when studying complex issues where the researcher needs to ensure that participants have relevant knowledge and experience (Patton, 2015). The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were called participants, Teachers were denoted by (T) and Students were denoted by (S). The interviews were conducted face-to-face, and participants' responses was recorded using audio recording devices. The interviews were conducted in a private and confidential setting to ensure that participants feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. In this connection, the interview questions were developed based on the research question and were reviewed by expert panel to ensure their desired validity and reliability.

The data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This approach involves a systematic and iterative process of identifying patterns, themes, and categories within the data that are relevant to the research question or objectives. Qualitative content analysis does not aim to generalize findings to a larger population but rather to develop a deeper understanding of data through interpretation of the meanings, contexts, and perspectives embedded in content. Qualitative content analysis is a flexible method that can be adapted to various research settings and data types. It can be used in combination with other qualitative methods or as a standalone method for data analysis. The results of qualitative content analysis are typically presented in the form of description that capture the key findings of research. These findings can provide rich insights into the experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of the participants and can inform policy, practice, or further research in the field. This study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and was provided informed consent before participating. All data was kept confidential, and participant anonymity was maintained throughout the study. The researcher was ensured that the participants' privacy and dignity are protected throughout the research study.

FINDINGS OF STUDY

Challenges

Our first research question, about how the participants perceived their challenges, is covered in the following section.

RQ1: "Which are the perceived challenges associated with implementing a sex education program in curriculum?"

Perceptions of Teachers

The implementation of a sex education program in schools has been a controversial topic in many countries, including Pakistan. While there is growing recognition of importance of sex education in promoting healthy sexual behavior and preventing negative outcomes, there are also concerns about the potential risks and challenges associated with its implementation. In this context, it is important to understand perceptions of teachers about challenges associated with implementing a sex education program in curriculum of schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Several perceived challenges

were identified by teachers during the study. First, teachers reported that the topic of sex education is considered taboo in the cultural and religious context of Pakistan, and it may be perceived as a threat to the social and moral values of the society. This may create resistance and opposition to the implementation of sex education programs, particularly from conservative parents and religious leaders. In this connection, second, teachers identified that there is a lack of support and resources for the implementation of sex education programs in schools. This includes the lack of the trained teachers, appropriate teaching materials, and guidelines on how to deliver sex education programs effectively.

This lack of support may limit the quality and effectiveness of sex education programs, and may also discourage teachers from taking on responsibility of delivering such programs. Third, teachers noted that there are legal and ethical considerations associated with the implementation of sex education programs. In Pakistan, there are no clear guidelines or policies about implementation of sex education in schools, and teachers may face legal and ethical challenges if they are not well-informed and trained on the topic. Teachers may also be hesitant to discuss sensitive topics such as sex and sexuality with students, particularly if they feel that it may violate cultural and religious norms. Fourth, teachers noted that there are challenges associated with addressing the diverse needs and backgrounds of students. Sex education programs may need to be tailored to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population, as well as the specific needs and challenges faced by different groups, like students with disabilities or those from marginalized communities. Teachers may need to be trained and equipped with the skills and knowledge to address these diverse needs effectively. Fifth, teachers identified that there is lack of parental involvement and support for sex education programs.

Parents may be reluctant to discuss the topic of sex with their children or may feel that it is not appropriate for schools to take on this responsibility. This lack of parental support may limit the effectiveness of sex education programs and create challenges for teachers in implementing them. It is essential to address these challenges in implementation of sex education programs to promote healthy sexual behavior and prevent negative outcomes among students as determined through diverse viewpoints.

"One of biggest challenges we face in implementing a sex education program in schools is cultural and religious resistance. In our society, talking about sex is considered taboo and it may be alleged as a threat to the moral and social values. This may create opposition from conservative parents and religious leaders, and make it difficult to implement such programs effectively (T3)."

"There are several challenges. One of them is lack of support and resources for implementing sex education programs in the schools. We need trained teachers, appropriate teaching materials, and guidelines on how to deliver the sex education programs effectively. Without proper support and resources, it may be difficult to deliver high-quality programs (T5)."

"Legal and ethical considerations are one of the major challenges we face in implementing the sex education programs in schools. In Pakistan, there are no clear guidelines or policies regarding the implementation of sex education in schools, and teachers may face legal and ethical challenges if

they are not well-informed and trained on topic. Teachers may also be hesitant to discuss sensitive topics such as sex and sexuality with students, particularly if they feel that it may violate cultural and religious norms (T8)."

"One of challenges we face in implementing sex education programs in schools is lack of parental involvement and support. Parents may be reluctant to discuss the topic of sex with their children or may feel that it is not appropriate for schools to take on this responsibility. This lack of the parental support may limit the effectiveness of sex education programs and create challenges for teachers in implementing them (T9)."

"There are several challenges, such as addressing the stigma associated with sex education, lack of awareness and understanding of the importance of sex education, and limited access to information and resources on topic. These challenges need to be addressed to promote healthy sexual behavior and prevent negative outcomes among students (T10)."

Perceptions of Students

The students expressed various challenges such as discomfort and shyness to discuss sensitive topics, lack of the access to information and resources, cultural and religious resistance to sex education, addressing diverse needs and backgrounds of students, and legal and ethical considerations linked with sex education. Students suggested that sex education programs should be tailored to diverse needs of students and provide support and resources for teachers to create a safe and supportive environment for learning about sex education.

"I think one of biggest challenges is the discomfort that students may feel when discussing sensitive topics such sex and sexuality. Students may feel shy or embarrassed to ask questions or participate in discussions, which may limit the effectiveness of sex education programs (S1)."

"The lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of sex education is the key challenge. Some students may not see relevance of sex education to their lives, and may not take it seriously. We need to raise awareness about the benefits of sex education and its relevance to healthy sexual behavior and relationships (S4)."

"One of the challenges is the lack of access to information and resources on topic of sex education. Students may not have access to reliable sources of information, and may rely on rumors and myths to form their perceptions about sex and sexuality. We need to provide students with accurate and reliable information and resources on the topic (S7)."

"I think one of the challenges is addressing the diverse needs and backgrounds of students. Students come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and may have different levels of knowledge and understanding about sex and sexuality. We need to tailor sex education programs to diverse needs of students, and provide support and resources for teachers to address these needs effectively (S8)."

"Students may be concerned about the legal and ethical implications of discussing sensitive topics such as sex and sexuality, and may be hesitant to participate in discussions. Teachers need to be

trained and equipped with the skills and knowledge to address these concerns and create a safe and supportive environment for students to learn about sex education (S10)."

Outcomes

Our second research question, which is about how the participants interpreted their results, is covered in the following section. Most of the outcomes were favorable, reassuring, and optimistic for this study.

RQ 2: "Which are the perceived outcomes of including a sex education program in curriculum?"

Perceptions of Teachers

The teachers expressed various positive outcomes that could be associated with including a sex education program in the curriculum. Some of the main perceptions expressed by the teachers are discussed below: Many teachers believed that including a sex education program in the curriculum could help promote positive attitudes towards the sexuality among students. The program could provide students with accurate information and resources about sexual health, relationships, and communication. This could help students develop a better understanding of their own bodies and promote healthy sexual behaviors. Some teachers believed that including a sex education program in the curriculum could help reduce the incidence of STIs and unwanted pregnancies among the students. By teaching students about contraception, safe sex practices, and the risks associated with unprotected sex, the program could help students make informed choices about their sexual health. This could also help reduce absenteeism and dropout rates associated with STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

Some teachers believed that including a sex education program in curriculum could have positive mental health outcomes for students. By promoting positive body image, self-esteem, and reducing stigma and shame associated with sexual health, the program could help students develop healthy attitudes towards themselves and others. Many teachers believed that including a sex education program in the curriculum could help promote gender equality and empowerment. By teaching students about consent, respect, and healthy relationships, program could help reduce incidence of gender-based violence and promote positive attitudes towards gender equality. Some teachers acknowledged that there may be cultural and religious resistance to including a sex education program in curriculum. They held that by designing programs that are age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based, they could help address concerns and promote wider acceptance of the program.

"I think including a sex education program in the curriculum can have several positive outcomes. Firstly, it can help students develop a better understanding of their own bodies, and promote positive attitudes towards sexuality. Secondly, it can help reduce incidence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unwanted pregnancies by promoting safe sex practices. Lastly, it can help students develop healthy and positive relationships by teaching them about consent and respect (T3)."

"I believe that including a sex education program in the curriculum can also have positive mental health outcomes for the students. By providing accurate information and resources about sex and

sexuality, we can help reduce stigma and shame associated with these topics, and promote positive body image and self-esteem (T6)."

"Another potential outcome of including a sex education program in curriculum is the promotion of gender equality and empowerment. By teaching students about consent and respect, we can help reduce the incidence of the gender-based violence and promote positive attitudes towards gender equality (T9)."

Perceptions of Students

The students expressed various positive outcomes that could be associated with including a sex education program in the curriculum. Some of the main perceptions expressed by the students are discussed below: Some students believed that including a sex education program in the curriculum could help promote awareness and understanding of sexual health and related issues. The program could provide students with accurate information about contraception, STIs, sexual orientation, and gender identity. This could help them make informed decisions about their sexual health and relationships. Few students believed that including a sex education program in curriculum could help reduce stigma and discrimination associated with sexual health. By promoting acceptance and respect for different sexual orientations and gender identities, the program could help reduce bullying, harassment, and discrimination among students.

Some students believed that including a sex education program in curriculum could help promote healthy relationships in students. By teaching them about consent, communication, and respect, the program could help students develop positive and healthy relationships with their peers. Many students believed that including a sex education program in curriculum could help empower them to make informed decisions about their sexual health and relationships. By providing them with accurate information and resources, program could help students take control of their own bodies and sexuality. Some students acknowledged that there may be cultural and religious resistance to including a sex education program in curriculum. They believed that by designing programs that are age-appropriate, culturally subtle and evidence-based, they could help address these fears and promote wider acceptance of the program.

"I think including a sex education program in the curriculum would be really beneficial. It would help us understand more about our bodies and our health. We could learn about things like contraception and STIs, which are really important. Plus, I think it would help reduce the stigma and shame associated with discussing sexual health. It's important to be able to talk about these things openly and without judgment (S3)."

"I think including a sex education program in the curriculum would have positive mental health outcomes. We could learn about things like positive body image and self-esteem. This would help us develop a healthier relationship with ourselves and with others. It would also help us understand the importance of healthy relationships and how to maintain them (S5)."

"I understand that some people may have cultural or religious reservations about including a sex education program in curriculum. But I think we need to remember that sexual health is important part of overall health. If we can design a program that is age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and

evidence-based, then we can help address these concerns and promote wider acceptance of the program (S8)."

"I think one of biggest outcomes of including a sex education program would be promoting gender equality. We could learn about things like consent and respect, which are really important. We could also learn about healthy relationships and how to build them. I think this would help reduce gender-based violence and promote positive attitudes towards gender equality(S10)."

Suggestions

The following section covers our third study question, which relates to how participants regarded their suggestions.

RQ 3: "What do various stakeholders suggest relates to sex education for future improvements?"

Perceptions of Teachers

The school teachers shared their perceptions on what various stakeholders suggest for improving sex education programs in schools. They trust that involving parents, community leaders, religious figures, and health experts is crucial to creating effective sex education programs. They suggest that providing resources and support to parents can help them feel more comfortable talking about sex with their children, while involving the community leaders and religious figures can help promote wider acceptance of sex education. Teachers advocate that evidence-based and age-appropriate curriculum is essential to providing the accurate and comprehensive information on sex education while being sensitive to cultural and religious beliefs. Working with health experts and educators can help develop a program that meets the needs of students and the community. In terms of teacher training, teachers propose that providing teachers with training and resources can help them feel more confident in teaching sex education, and therefore, improve the quality of the program. The teachers also suggest involving students in the process of developing and implementing the sex education programs.

This could be done through surveys or focus groups, where students can provide feedback on what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. This feedback can help create a more engaging and relevant program that meets the needs of students. Lastly, teachers advocate promoting wider acceptance of sex education in the community. Many people still view sex education as taboo or inappropriate, which can impact the success of the program. Thus, teachers suggest working with local media outlets to promote positive messaging around the sex education and to address any misconceptions or concerns that people may have. In summary, school teachers in Lahore, Pakistan, believe that involving various stakeholders, developing an evidence-based and age-appropriate curriculum, providing training and resources for teachers, involving students in the process, and promoting wider acceptance of sex education are crucial to improving sex education programs in schools. By addressing these challenges and suggestions, sex education programs can provide the students with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions about their sexual health and relationships.

"I think one of the key suggestions for future improvements in sex education is to involve parents more. Many parents may feel uncomfortable talking about sexual health with their children, but if

we can provide them with resources and support, we can help them understand the importance of these conversations. We could involve community leaders and religious figures to help promote wider acceptance of the program (T2)."

"I think another suggestion for future improvements is to ensure that curriculum is evidence-based and age-appropriate. We need to be sensitive to cultural and religious beliefs, but we also need to offer accurate and comprehensive information. We could work with health experts and educators to develop a program that meets the needs of our students and community (T4)."

"I think we also need to address the lack of training and resources for teachers. Many teachers may feel uncomfortable or unprepared to teach sex education, and this can impact the quality of the program. We could provide training and resources to help teachers feel more confident in teaching this topic. We could also work with the government to allocate more funding and resources for sex education in schools (T8)."

Perceptions of Students

The perceptions of students regarding what various stakeholders suggest for the improvement of sex education programs in schools are diverse. Many students believe that the current sex education curriculum needs to be updated and improved. Students suggested that the curriculum should be comprehensive and include exact information about sex, contraception and sexually transmitted diseases. Involving students in the development of sex education programs can also help improve them. Students feel that they have a better understanding of what information they need and how to deliver it to other students. It can also make them feel more comfortable and open to discussing these topics. Moreover, students also believe that parents and community members can play crucial role in promoting positive attitudes towards sex education. Parents and community members can provide support and encourage positive attitudes towards sex education. They can also help break down taboos and misconceptions about sex, which will make it easier for students to discuss these topics openly and honestly.

"I think the curriculum needs to be updated with more comprehensive and accurate information about sex, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases. Teachers need to be trained to handle sensitive topics and create a safe environment for students to ask questions (S7)."

"Parents and community members can provide support and encourage positive attitudes towards sex education. They can help break down taboos and misconceptions about sex, which will make it easier for students to discuss these topics openly and honestly (S9)."

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to analyze need to initiate sex education programs in schools of Lahore, Pakistan. It used a qualitative research approach to gain insight into the perceptions of school students and teachers regarding the challenges associated with implementing sex education in the curriculum and the perceived outcomes of including it. The study found that there were significant challenges associated with implementing a sex education program, such as cultural and religious taboos, lack of parental support and inadequate teacher training. Both students and teachers perceived positive outcomes of including sex education in curriculum, like increased awareness, prevention of sexual

abuse, and the development of healthy relationships. One of significant findings of study was that cultural and religious taboos hinder execution of sex education programs in schools. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted in Pakistan (Jabeen & Ahmed, 2016; Khurram, Zaidi, & Farooq, 2013).

In a conservative society like Pakistan, discussing sex-related topics is considered taboo, and many parents and teachers hesitate to discuss such topics with children. As a result, students often rely on their peers or other sources of information, which may not provide accurate information about sexual health and relationships. Another finding of the study was the lack of parental support for sex education programs. Parents are an essential stakeholder in the education of their children and play a crucial role in shaping their attitudes and values. Therefore, it is important to involve parents in the development of sex education programs and educate them about the importance of such programs. A study conducted in the United States found that involving parents in sex education programs led to increased student knowledge and helpful attitudes toward sexual health (Huebner & Howell, 2003). However, many recognize the importance of providing students with accurate and comprehensive information about sexual health and relationships to protect their well-being. To address these challenges, there is a need for more comprehensive teacher training and support, as well as policy changes to ensure that the comprehensive sex education is included in the school designed curriculum.

The study also found that inadequate teacher training was a significant challenge in implementing sex education programs in schools. In Pakistan, teachers often lack necessary skills and knowledge to teach sex education effectively. Thus, it is essential to provide teachers with adequate training and support to deliver sex education programs that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive. Despite the challenges, both students and teachers perceived positive outcomes of including sex education in the curriculum. They believed that sex education could increase awareness of sexual health issues, help prevent sexual abuse, and promote the healthy relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted in other countries (Eggers et al., 2019; Subramanian & Bhatti, 2011). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research on the need for sex education programs in schools in Pakistan (Gulnaz & Akhtar, 2021; Imran & Aslam, 2020). One of the significant findings of study was that cultural and religious taboos hinder the implementation of sex education programs in schools. Lack of awareness and knowledge about sexual health and reproductive rights among students is a common issue in developing countries, including Pakistan (Salam et al., 2015).

Inadequate sex education programs and cultural and religious sensitivities have been identified as major barriers to sexual health education in these countries (Pandey et al., 2016). The findings of the present study also align with previous research on the challenges associated with implementing sex education programs in schools (Bhutta et al., 2017; Svanemyr et al., 2015). Lack of support from parents and community members, and inadequate training and resources for teachers, are common barriers to implementing sex education programs in schools. The study highlights need to initiate sex education programs in schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Findings suggest that cultural and religious taboos, lack of parental support, and inadequate teacher training are significant challenges that

need to be addressed. However, the study also found that including sex education in the curriculum could have positive outcomes, such as increased awareness, prevention of sexual abuse, and the development of healthy relationships. Therefore, it is essential to involve all stakeholders, including parents and teachers, in the development of sex education programs to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the need for initiating sex education programs in schools in Lahore, Pakistan. The perceptions of school teachers and students were explored regarding the challenges associated with implementing a sex education program in the curriculum, the perceived outcomes of including a sex education program, and the suggestions of various stakeholders for improving sex education in future. Findings suggest that there is a lack of awareness and knowledge among both students and teachers about sexual health and reproductive issues. There are several challenges associated with implementing a sex education program in schools, including cultural and religious barriers, lack of resources, and societal taboos. However, majority of participants agreed that sex education is necessary to address the increasing prevalence of the sexual health issues and teenage pregnancies. They also suggested several strategies to improve sex education programs, including providing teacher training, involving parents and religious leaders, and utilizing technology and social media platforms. This study adds to growing body of literature on sex education in Pakistan and highlights urgent need for comprehensive and culturally appropriate sex education programs in schools. The findings of this study can guide policymakers and educators in developing effective sex education programs that can improve the sexual health and well-being of the young people in Pakistan.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. The study suggests that there is a need for implementing sex education programs in schools in Lahore, Pakistan. It is recommended that the government and school authorities should initiate and implement comprehensive sex education programs that are age-appropriate and culturally sensitive.
2. Training for teachers: The study suggests that teachers need to be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills to teach sex education effectively. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers should receive training and support in delivering sex education in a sensitive and professional manner.
3. Involvement of parents: The study suggests that parents should be involved in the process of sex education. It is recommended that schools should involve parents in the development and implementation of sex education programs, and encourage open communication amid parents and teachers regarding the subject.
4. Further research: The study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and challenges associated with sex education programs in schools in Lahore, Pakistan. Further research is recommended to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of implementing sex education programs in schools in other parts of Pakistan.

5. Ethical considerations: The study highlights the importance of ethical considerations in the development and implementation of sex education programs. Therefore, it is recommended that schools and government agencies should consider ethical guidelines and principles when designing and implementing sex education programs.

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