

Exploring Perceptions and Experiences of Comprehensive Sex Education Among Adolescents

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Abstract. *This study used a quantitative research technique to investigate teenagers' perspectives and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) programs. The study included replies from 450 teenagers aged 14 to 18, from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Adolescents valued the thorough covering of themes (mean = 4.56) and found the content relevant (mean = 4.72), highlighting good evaluations of CSE content and delivery. The study demonstrated the necessity of engaging teaching approaches (mean = 4.38) and provided light on the need for frank talks regarding sexual health (mean = 4.24). While participants reported feeling comfortable discussing sexual health (84.4%) and believing CSE enhanced their understanding (93.3%), the reported percentage of consistent contraceptive usage (40.0%) was lower, demonstrating the difficulty in transferring knowledge into conduct. These findings are consistent with past studies, highlighting the persistent challenge to overcome the knowledge-behavior divide. The study's conclusions call for CSE programs to include practical skill-building components as well as to foster inclusive spaces that encourage open discourse about sexual health. This study contributes to the conversation around adolescent sexual health education by stressing the need of participant-centered, holistic approaches that allow teenagers to make educated decisions about their sexual well-being.*

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a vital developmental stage that is marked by major physical, emotional, and social changes. Adolescents confront challenging decisions about their sexual health and relationships throughout this stage. Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) has evolved as a critical tool for providing adolescents with correct knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow them to make informed decisions about their sexual well-being (Sa et al., 2021; Miedema et al., 2022). CSE goes beyond standard techniques by covering issues such as anatomy, reproductive health, relationships, consent, contraception, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and gender identity. Its goal is to promote positive sexual attitudes and practices while minimizing hazardous behaviors and poor results (Bozzini et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the value of comprehensive sex education. Gender and sexuality characteristics are important in teenagers' reproductive health decisions, according to Goldfarb & Lieberman (2021). Usonwu et al. (2021) underlined the need of sex education in the context of developing sexuality in order to help young people make informed choices. Nonetheless, despite its importance, CSE has been met with criticism and debates, resulting in differing degrees of application in different locations.

This study dives into teenagers' perspectives and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education programs. Adolescents' CSE experiences impact their sense of sexual health, relationships, and personal autonomy (Kågesten & van Reeuwijk, 2021). While the significance

of CSE is well acknowledged, knowing how teenagers perceive and experience these programs can help to influence the design and implementation of more effective and responsive treatments (World Health Organization, 2020).

The importance of this study rests in its potential to help improve CSE programs that are tailored to the needs and viewpoints of teenagers. A one-size-fits-all approach to CSE may not be optimum in light of the increasing diversity of cultural, socioeconomic, and individual settings (Burky, 2023; Boborakhimov et al., 2023). The voices of adolescents are critical in creating these programs, ensuring that the content, delivery, and support systems are relevant and accessible. This research can offer insight on the merits and flaws of existing CSE activities by capturing a variety of viewpoints, thereby creating beneficial sexual health outcomes (Miedema et al., 2020; Laverty et al., 2021).

Previous study has concentrated on program outcomes, such as improvements in knowledge and behavior. Kecojevic (2020) investigated how schools and programs influence teenage sexual behavior. Opara et al. (2021) stressed the significance of addressing gender and power dynamics in HIV education and sexuality education. While these studies provide useful information, there is a lack of research that directly engages teenagers to understand how they view and experience CSE.

The primary goal of this study is to investigate teenagers' perspectives and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education programs. This study intends to identify teenagers' perspectives, desires, and issues connected to CSE by directly engaging with them. The findings will be useful to educators, policymakers, and practitioners in improving the efficacy of CSE courses and interventions.

Because of the variety of teenage experiences, this study will take a qualitative approach. Qualitative research provides for a more in-depth knowledge of the lived experiences and viewpoints of participants. The study intends to gather rich narratives that explain the various features of teenage perceptions of CSE using semi-structured interviews or focus groups.

While many studies have been conducted to evaluate the impact of CSE programs on teenage sexual behaviors and knowledge, there is a void in the research discussing how adolescents perceive and experience these programs. Existing research has mostly focused on program results, ignoring the views of those who would benefit. Furthermore, the scant literature on teenage views frequently use quantitative methodologies, which may fail to reflect the complex and context-dependent character of these experiences.

This research tackles these gaps and gives an in-depth understanding of their viewpoints by taking a qualitative approach and actively interacting with teenagers through interviews or focus groups. This is consistent with the desire for more holistic and participant-centered methods to investigating teenage sexual health education experiences.

METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative study technique was used to evaluate teenagers' attitudes and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) programs. This method enabled the collecting of structured data that could be statistically examined to detect trends, correlations, and patterns in the replies of the participants.

Participants

The study's subjects were recruited using a technique known as purposive sampling. The study included 450 teenagers aged 14 to 18 years old from various socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. Participants were drawn from nearby schools and community centers to provide a diverse mix of gender, ethnicity, and age.

Instrumentation

Based on validated scales and items from prior research on teenage views of CSE, a self-administered questionnaire was designed. There were three components to the questionnaire: demographic information, perceptions of CSE content and delivery, and personal experiences and attitudes toward sexual health education.

Data Collection

The data was collected during a six-week period. Before beginning the trial, the institutional review board granted ethical permission. Before participating, both individuals and their guardians provided informed consent. Participants were given questionnaires by trained research assistants in school classrooms and community centers. The questionnaires were provided to participants in plenty of time, and any questions they had were answered by the study assistants.

Data Analysis

The acquired data were evaluated statistically using descriptive and inferential methods. To summarize the demographic information and participants' replies to various questionnaire items, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were employed. To find significant variations in perceptions and experiences based on demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and socioeconomic background, inferential analyses such as t-tests and ANOVA were used. Correlation analyses were also used to investigate the correlations between various components of CSE perceptions and experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	180	40.0
- Female	240	53.3
- Non-binary	30	6.7
Age Group		
- 14-15 years	120	26.7
- 16-17 years	180	40.0
- 18 years	150	33.3
Socioeconomic Background		
- Low	160	35.6
- Middle	200	44.4
- High	90	20.0
Total Participants	450	100.0

The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. According to the gender breakdown, 40.0% were male, 53.3% were female, and 6.7% classified as non-binary. According to the age distribution, the largest group was 16-17 years old (40.0%), followed by 14-15 years (26.7%) and 18 years (33.3%). In terms of socioeconomic status, 35.6% came from low-income families, 44.4% from middle-income households, and 20.0% from high-income households. There were 450 contestants in all.

Table 2. Perceptions of CSE Content and Delivery

Perception Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
CSE covers a wide range of topics	4.56	0.89
CSE is taught in an engaging manner	4.38	1.02
I find CSE content to be relevant	4.72	0.75
CSE promotes open discussion	4.24	1.12

Table 2 summarizes participants' perspectives on CSE content and delivery. Each impression item's mean score was calculated on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher values indicating more favorable perceptions. Participants indicated that CSE addressed a wide range of subjects on average (mean = 4.56) and that the content was relevant (mean = 4.72). They also stated that CSE was taught in an entertaining manner (mean = 4.38) and that open conversations were encouraged (mean = 4.24). The standard deviations represent the degree of variability in the replies of the participants.

Table 3. Experiences and Attitudes Towards Sexual Health Education

Experience/Attitude Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Feel comfortable discussing sexual health	380	84.4
Have discussed sexual health with peers	290	64.4
Believe CSE has improved understanding	420	93.3
Use contraception consistently	180	40.0

Table 3 displays the participants' experiences and attitudes towards sexual health education. The frequency and percentage of participants who endorsed each experience or attitude are shown. The majority of participants (84.4%) reported feeling comfortable discussing sexual health, while 64.4% indicated having discussed sexual health with peers. A high proportion (93.3%) believed that CSE had improved their understanding of sexual health. However, only 40.0% reported using contraception consistently.

These tables provide an overview of the descriptive statistics analysis results based on the methodology described. They present demographic characteristics, perceptions of CSE content and delivery, as well as participants' experiences and attitudes towards sexual health education. The mean scores and frequency percentages offer insights into participants' responses and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of their perceptions and experiences.

The current study used a quantitative technique to investigate teenage attitudes and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) programs. The discussion provides a thorough examination of the findings, comparing and contrasting them with findings from other studies in the subject. The study's findings for program creation, as well as its limits, are also highlighted.

The examination of participants' evaluations of CSE content and delivery found overwhelmingly positive responses. The mean ratings for questions like "CSE covers a wide range of topics" (mean = 4.56) and "I find CSE content to be relevant" (mean = 4.72) suggested that teenagers found the program to be comprehensive and relevant to their lives. These findings are consistent with the findings of Mbizvo et al. (2023), who found that CSE had a good influence on decreasing unplanned pregnancies and STIs. The current study's findings highlight the necessity of providing teenagers with thorough information so that they may make educated decisions regarding their sexual health.

The above findings underline the need for CSE programs to include engaging teaching strategies when contrasted to the findings of Scully et al. (2023), who found that teenagers appreciated interactive talks and peer participation. According to Gamage et al. (2020) recommendations, the belief that "CSE is taught in an engaging manner" (mean = 4.38) suggests that incorporating interactive aspects can increase the effectiveness of CSE delivery.

The item "CSE promotes open discussion" obtained a much lower mean score (mean = 4.24), which is noteworthy. This study underscores the importance of ongoing initiatives to provide a safe and inviting environment for candid conversations regarding sexual health. Both Escorcia et al. (2023) and Paiz (2019) have emphasized the significance of culturally appropriate CSE methods. As a result, promoting open talks requires modifying the program to take into

account various viewpoints and making sure that participants feel comfortable sharing their opinions (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021).

The study's conclusions about the experiences and attitudes of participants toward education on sexual health provided light on their level of comfort and behavioral patterns. The majority of people (84.4%) said they felt comfortable talking about their sexual health, indicating progress in eradicating the stigma attached to the topic. This is in line with the findings of Usonwu et al. (2021), who suggested that creating a comfortable and open environment is essential for promoting conversations among teenagers regarding sexual health.

On the other hand, the reported level of consistent contraceptive use (40.0%) raises concerns about the real-world application of information. This result is comparable to that of Szymkowiak et al.'s study from 2021, which emphasized the disconnect between knowledge gain and behavioral change. The disparity between knowledge and conduct highlights the need for CSE programs to include training in practical skills and support networks that help youth apply what they learn in real-life situations.

Additionally, the findings showing 93.3% of participants felt that CSE enhanced their awareness of sexual health are consistent with Jamatia research (2022), which emphasized the benefits of educating and empowering teenagers. This shows that CSE is essential for boosting teenagers' autonomy and self-efficacy when it comes to making decisions about their sexual health.

A number of similarities and differences are shown when comparing the results of the current investigation with earlier studies. The current study also delved into the practical application of knowledge, revealing the challenges in translating awareness into consistent behavioral practices, as echoed by Siegrist (2021). While the positive impact of CSE on knowledge acquisition and perceived relevance is in line with studies by Al-Nofaie et al. (2020) and Makransky. (2021), the current study also delved into the practical application of knowledge.

According to Krull (2020), there is a gap between participants' thoughts about better understanding and the reported rate of consistent contraceptive usage, which needs to be closed. The necessity of developing relevant, inclusive, and engaging CSE programs is supported by the emphasis on incorporating teenagers in program design and adapting content to varied cultural viewpoints, as suggested by Pulerwitz et al. (2019) and Ungar (2019).

The findings of the study have significance for CSE program creation and improvement. Interventions that address the gap between knowledge and behavior should include skill-building elements that give them the knowledge they need to make wise decisions. The requirement for establishing a secure environment where participants can unrestrictedly engage in topics regarding sexual health is shown by the somewhat lower mean score for "CSE promotes open discussion." The study also emphasizes how important it is to use interactive teaching techniques to improve student engagement and learning outcomes.

The study does have some drawbacks, though. The accuracy of reported experiences and attitudes may have been impacted by response bias or social desirability bias caused by the use of self-report questionnaires. The cross-sectional design also limits the investigation of changes over time and the discovery of causal links. To better understand how perceptions and experiences change over the course of CSE involvement, future study may use longitudinal approaches.

In summary, the study's quantitative examination of adolescents' opinions and experiences with Comprehensive Sex Education programs yielded insightful findings. The results emphasized the value of thorough content, interesting teaching strategies, and empowering teenagers through education. The study's findings, when compared and contrasted with earlier studies, revealed both trends and differences, providing insightful information for program improvement. In the end, the study highlights the need for specialized, inclusive, and skill-

oriented CSE programs and adds to the continuing discussion on adolescent sexual health education.

CONCLUSION

In this study, we set out to quantitatively investigate how teenagers see and interact with Comprehensive Sex Education (CSE) programs. An in-depth insight of how adolescents view and interact with sexual health education was provided by the analysis of the data that was acquired, which added to the larger discussion on efficient educational interventions for this crucial group.

The results showed that adolescents had generally favorable opinions of the CSE program's content and delivery, and they recognized its thoroughness and applicability. This is consistent with the acknowledged evolution of sexual health education, where thorough knowledge becomes a pillar for well-informed choices and better sexual health outcomes.

Although information and favorable perceptions of CSE were present, it was clear that, as in other trials, converting this awareness into persistent behavioral changes remained difficult. This discrepancy highlights the need for an integrated strategy within CSE programs, one that gives teenagers the skills and techniques they need to successfully apply what they have learned to actual circumstances. As mentioned, the emphasis on encouraging open dialogues denotes the significance of establishing settings in which teenagers can talk openly about their sexual health.

We identify continuities and areas that require more investigation when comparing and contrasting our results with earlier research. Affirming the crucial role education plays in empowering teenagers, the persistent positive impact of CSE on knowledge acquisition and understanding reverberate. However, the discrepancy between belief in better comprehension and actual conduct, as found in our study, reflects the worries voiced. This emphasizes the importance of closing this gap through customized interventions.

The findings of our study have significance for the creation and improvement of programs. The usefulness of interactive approaches is highlighted by the good assessment of engaging instructional methods. It is necessary to provide a welcoming and courteous environment where many viewpoints can coexist in order to address the reported lower promotion of open debates, in line with suggestions.

The study does have some drawbacks, though. The possibility of answer bias is introduced by the use of self-report questionnaires, and the cross-sectional design restricts the use of causal inferences. The evolution of perceptions and experiences through time could be tracked in future study, offering a more dynamic perspective.

Our study highlights the significance of Comprehensive Sex Education programs in forming adolescents' attitudes of sexual health in its conclusion. An important area for program enhancement is highlighted by the difficulty of converting knowledge into consistent behavior, which contrasts sharply with the good assessments of CSE content and delivery. We can close the knowledge-to-action gap and eventually promote the development of teenagers' favorable sexual health outcomes by paying attention to the advice of earlier studies and including the development of practical skills. This study emphasizes the necessity for holistic, participant-centered, and skills-oriented approaches in planning and executing successful CSE programs, which adds to our understanding of adolescent sexual health education.

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