

A survey on young people's attitudes towards sexual education in the family

Xiaochuan Jiang*

College of Social Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ, UK

ABSTRACT. Although schools in China are gradually paying more attention to sexuality education, families need to pay more attention to sexuality education for young people since each person's physical development is not identical. In the process of family sexual education, it is essential for parents to take a leading role and to understand the wishes of their children. The aim of this study is to understand the needs of young people for family sex education and to understand how young people acquire and want to acquire knowledge about sex. The data are collected by questionnaire, with a total sample of 90.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sexuality education is considered to be the teaching and guidance about physical growth, sexuality and the various topics related to sexuality, including information about adolescence, reproduction, contraception, sexual orientation, gender identity and interpersonal relationships. It aims to support and protect children and adolescents by providing them with the skills and information which guides them to generate a healthy lifestyle. This helps them to develop an understanding of basic sexuality, sexual health and to take responsibility for their own health and safety and that of others. Sexuality education has long been an issue of concern, but few people focus on sexuality education in the family, especially in China. In China, the topic of sex has long been a sensitive issue, sexuality education in family was rarely discussed in public. However, such topics are very crucial to the physical and mental health of young people. According to previous studies, most parents are not yet able to meet their children's demands for knowledge about sex, although Chinese parents have recently adopted a more open and expressive approach to communicating with their children as in the West.[1] Even among university students in higher education, the spread and level of sexual knowledge are relatively low, and most knowledge about sex comes from the internet rather than from schools or parents.[2] It implies that these teenagers do not receive the expected guidance from their teachers or parents and are likely to receive misinformation leading to accidental pregnancies or illnesses. It can be seen that sexuality education in Chinese family fails to meet the expectation of adolescents. The lack of sexuality education in Chinese family brought personal harm and social problems. Liu et al's discovered that as China has developed, people's attitudes towards sex and sexual behaviour have become more liberal, which has led to an increase in accidental

pregnancies and abortions among teenagers. Nearly 40% of the more than 2000 young people in their survey had repeated abortions, and those who had abortions were highly unlikely not to use contraception and probably would have repeated abortions.[3] According to the statistics, the number of rape crimes will remain essentially stable from 2010 to 2020.[4] These studies suggest the significance of sex education for young people. In Chinese tradition, parents are considered to be the best teachers of their children, which indicates of the importance of family education. Children spend most of their time in the company of their parents, and their parents' behaviour and education are crucial to their children's life. This article attempts to explore whether and how sex and its related topics are discussed and communicated in family education in China. Adopting questionnaire method, this study surveyed 90 Chinese adolescents. Based on the results of survey, they are hesitant to accept sexual education from their families.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing literature on sex education in the family primarily explores three themes of parent's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. A number of authors have recognized parents believe that educating their children about sexuality is a very important task. For example, data from Liu et al. found that more than half of parents had positive attitudes towards sexuality education.[1] Hrishika and Sharma stated that parents are willing to share their children's adolescent worries.[5] However, Jerves et al. also showed that some parents felt that discussing sexuality with their children would have a negative impact on them.[6] Andari et al. pointed out that some parents consider sex education to be taboo until kids are mature enough.[7] They do not want their children to receive sex education too early, believing that it will make them have sex earlier. Moreover, It is found

* Corresponding author: jxc_zj@qq.com

that some parents do not actively discuss sex related topics with their children and would like the school to take the responsibility, although these parents believe that sex education is very important. In addition, Fentahun et al. researched parents' and students' perceptions of sexual intercourse education in schools, found that over three quarters of parents and students agree that sex education in school is essential.[8] On the other hand, Liu et al. suggested that parents felt they had a greater responsibility than schools to educate young people about sexuality, although they thought that school education was very important.[9] In short, those literature pertaining to the parent's attitude strongly suggest that they hope children can receive sex education, in order to better protect themselves.

According to previous studies, parent's knowledge also has an import impact on their children's sexual education. Liu et al. indicated that parents with more education and higher incomes were more supportive of sex education, and most of their sex knowledge came from professional journals and newspapers, with only 3.1% coming from their parents.[9] So most of them have not discussed sex with their families and are embarrassed to talk to their children about it. Andari et al. emphasized that parents having good knowledge do not mean that they can provide better sex education to their children, but parents having enough knowledge about sexuality can better protect and educate their children and prevent them from being harmed.[7] Furthermore, social influences can also cause parents' lack of sexual knowledge. For instance, Jerves et al. showed that the lack of sex education in previous generations of families, the influence of machismo and religious ideology, led some parents think that they were depressed and frustrated when they received sex education.[6] This also contributes to some of their mistaken perceptions about sex, such as that masturbation can cause brain damage, that homosexuality is a mental illness, and that girls are not allowed to have premarital sex while boys are permitted. Andari et al. stated that social restrictions on sexuality education lead to a lack of sexual knowledge among parents, which in turn causes parents to be confused about how to communicate with their children on sexuality education.[7] These all means that parents' lack of sexual knowledge can lead to them not being able to teach their children with enough ability and confidence.

In terms of behaviors, a series of previous researches indicated that whether to communicate, who to communicate with and how to communicate are the three main challenges that exist in the family. Specifically, the majority of parents in these studies did not initiate discussions about sexuality with their children, and some of them believed that the information such as contraception, could easily be obtained from the internet or school. Angera et al. , Liu et al. and Walker all found in their research that mothers have a greater responsibility in the family sex education process. Angera et al. found that in the family, mothers took responsibility for having discussions about sexuality with their children earlier and more often than fathers.[10]

Similarly, Liu et al. showed that while over 80% of parents in the survey did not educate their children about sex, mothers were almost twice as likely as fathers to educate their children about sex.[9] A large part of the reason for this is because parents find it difficult to communicate with their children about sexuality. Hrishika and Sharma claimed that only nearly half of parents discuss body changes with their children and about 70% of parents never talk to their children about contraception and sexual diseases.[5] Walker concludes that some parents may shirk their responsibility to teach their children about sexuality, avoiding embarrassing conversations with them or letting them to learn about the sex problem form the books by themselves.[11] However, he also argued that in some families, parents will take the initiative to communicate with their children about sexuality at an early age, and will gradually expand the content of the conversation according to the child's age and knowledge. Moreover, when parents think a child is "old enough" to talk about sex also makes a big difference between families. It is essential to know how to communicate with young people about sexuality. As demonstrated in Jerves et al. study, parents often communicate with their children with the goal of abstinence, using intimidation as a means of what they believe is a good way to prevent young people having premarital sex.[6]

These studies together provide important insights into parents' attitudes and role in sex and sexuality related topics. However, the main weakness in their study is that they make no attempt to focus on children. Therefore, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of sex education in family education, this study will pay attention to young people's views on family education and what kind of knowledge they want to get from their parents about sexuality.

3. FINDINGS

The aim of this essay is to investigate young people's views and attitudes towards some basic issues concerning education on sexuality in the family. The study was carried out from July to August 2022 and took a quantitative approach. The questionnaire was used to collect data from a random sample of young people aged 18 to 25 years old. It was collected by using the Questionnaire Star (a widely used questionnaire collection site in China, www.wjx.cn) and 90 valid data were collected. After creating the questionnaire online, a web link will be provided for easy forwarding to others and the it can be accessed from a mobile phone or computer. Data collectors briefly introduced themselves and the purpose of the study to the study participants to ensure the accuracy of the data. Ethical considerations are also involved in the process of collecting data, participants are voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality are guaranteed. The questionnaire was designed with 17 questions (13 single choice, 3 multiple choice and one voluntary fill in the blank question). The questionnaire asked for basic information about the participants, focusing on their attitudes and knowledge

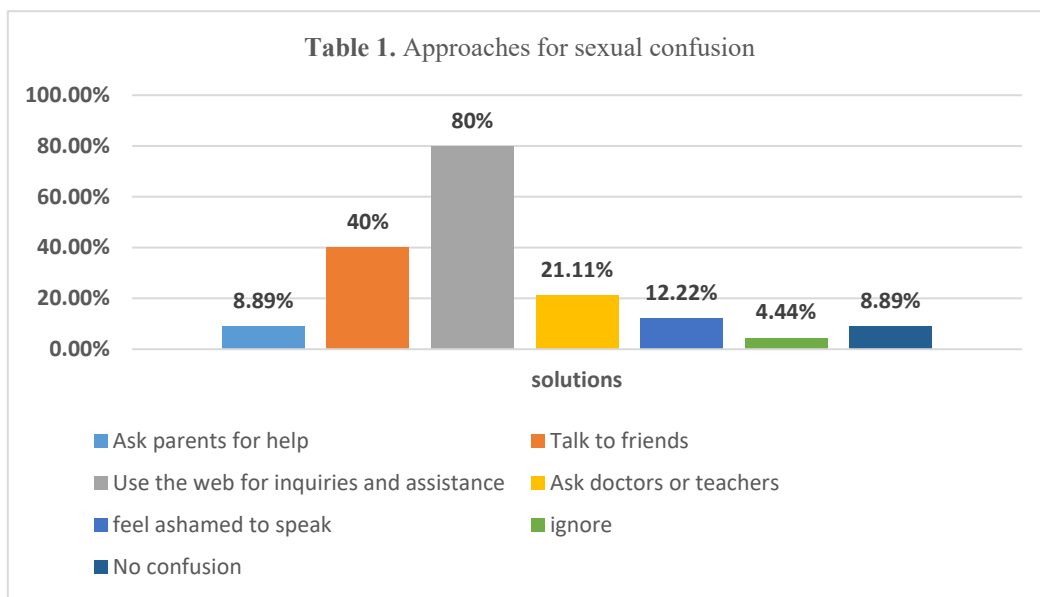
about sex education in the family, as well as their parents' knowledge of sex and the help they provided.

In this questionnaire, 72 females (80%) and 18 males (20%) participated. Nearly 95% of the students felt that they had some knowledge of sex, and more than half of them felt that they had a lot of knowledge of sex. In this aspect, they showed confidence and believed that they had a relatively high level of knowledge about sexuality.

3.1 Providers of sexual knowledge

It can be found that although the importance of education about sexuality in the family has been emphasized, there are still a minority of people who want more information from their parents about sexuality and expect them to help answer their questions. 6 people (6.67%) believed that sexual education in the family was generally important or indifferent, but over 93% believed it was essential. The relative concentration of their answers to this question indicates that they themselves clearly understand and to some extent believe in the need for sex education in the family. 32 participants (35.56%) said they would like to learn more about sex from their parents, but possibly due to the influence of Asian culture,

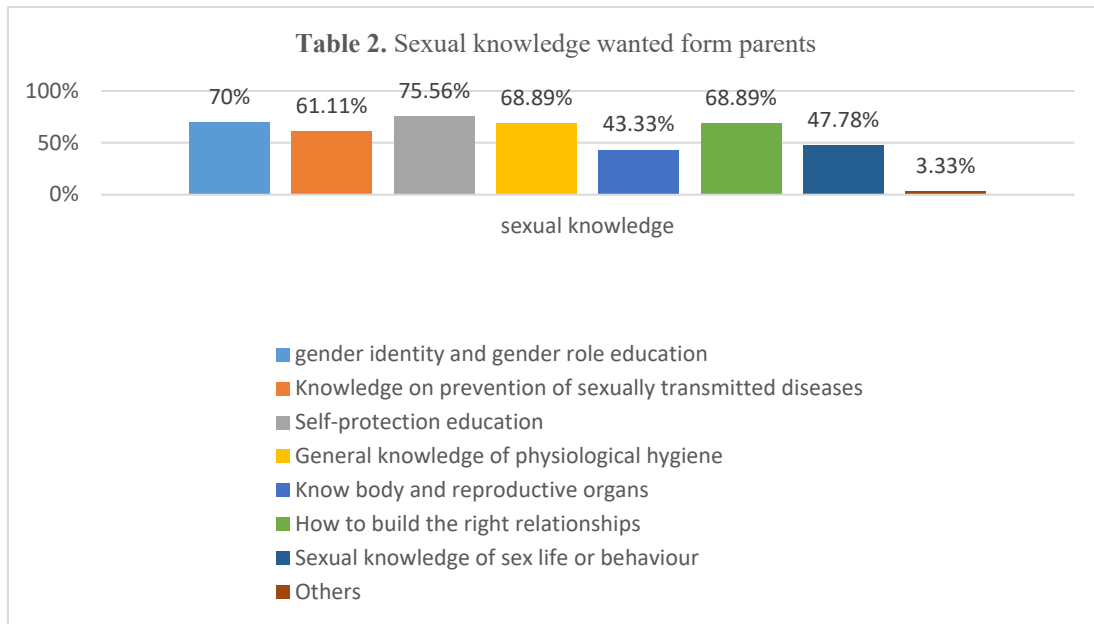
most people still have an implicit view of sexuality, so more than fifty percent of the participants in the survey thought it was optional, and twelve of them (13.33%) did not want to get more information about sex from their parents. This is not the same as the previous answer, it is clear that the importance of family sexual education and the desire to gain more knowledge about sex from parents is not overly relevant. They are aware of the importance of family sexual education and recognize the necessity of it, but when asked in depth, some of them are hesitant about it, expressing uncertainty and do not desire to gain more knowledge about sexuality from their parents. As shown in Table 1, the participants habitually sought help from the Internet to solve their questions about sex (80%), while 40% would talk to friends and 21.11% would ask doctors or teachers. The percentages of those who think it is shy and difficult to talk about solving the confusion about sex, those who ignore it and those who are not confused are 12.22, 4.44 and 8.89 respectively. Only 8 people (8.89%) answered that they would seek help from their parents if they were confused about sexuality, and the results showed that they would prefer the internet to be the provider of their sexual knowledge rather than their parents.



3.2 The expected sexual knowledge from parents

According to Table 2, 75.56% of the participants wanted to receive sexual knowledge from their parents about self-protection education, whereas only 43.33% and 47.78% wanted to receive knowledge about knowing their own body and sexuality sex life. 62 people (68.89%) wanted to learn from their parents about physical hygiene and how to build the right relationships, while 70% and 61.11% wanted to learn about gender identity and gender roles and how to prevent illnesses respectively. It can be observed that there is a relatively strong desire to learn

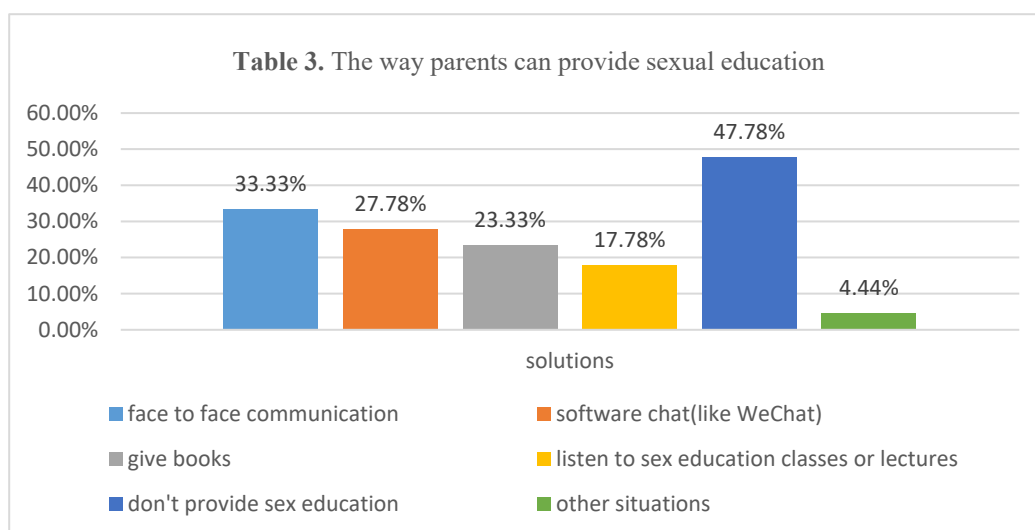
about some aspects of sexuality, like gender identity and self protection, with three quarters of young people wanting to be educated by their parents, but almost half of them do not need or want to be educated by their parents about sexuality and changes to their bodies. Young people have more open attitudes to sexuality than before and also understand that learning about sexuality can help protect them better. Nevertheless, more than half still do not discuss changes in their bodies or their views on premarital sex with their parents, despite most of them not being completely opposed to premarital sex and asking their parents for relationship advice.



3.3 General views on sexual education

The general perception of these young people is that their parents' knowledge and perceptions about sexuality have an impact on them. The majority agreed that parents' education (96.67%) and attitudes (94.44%) influence their children's sexual education. The statistics show that more than one third of their parents have received university education or even higher, and the number of those who have received senior middle school and junior high school education are 26 (28.89%) and 27 (30%) respectively. However, nearly 70 percent of them believe that their parents do not know enough about sex. Moreover, Table 3 illustrates the ways in which parents provide sexuality education to their children. Indeed, nearly half of the young people reported that their parents

did not provide them with sexual education. One third of those said their parents chose face-to-face communication as a method of teaching them about sexuality. There are also 25 families (27.78%) who choose to communicate through software chat. Other parents chose the indirect approach of learning by themselves from books (23.33%) and taking them to listen to sexual education courses or lectures (17.78%) instead of teaching them by themselves. Due to the social environment impact, a lot of parents are embarrassed to teach their children about sexuality, but almost half of them still choose the way that they think is appropriate to teach their children. They are too embarrassed to talk about sex education with their children, as same as their children too shy to ask them about sexual knowledge.



The final question asked for more opinions on sexual education in the family, and they were relatively unified in their views, still emphasizing the importance of sexual education in particular, and hoping that parents would

also pay more attention to educating their children about sex, giving them more patience and building their children's sense of self-protection.

4. DISCUSSION

According to the results collected from the Questionnaire Star, more females participated in the survey and more females than males were willing to focus on the issue of sex education in the family. Influenced by the social environment, there are always higher requirements for females than males when considering the sexual aspect, and the double standard of sexual morality still influences the sexuality of modern young people. Therefore, women are also more concerned about the importance of family sexual education, which can provide them with confidence in their future lives by establishing correct sexual attitudes at an early age and teaching them the correct ways to deal with relationships, as well as eliminating their fears and confusion in the process of facing their sexual physiology and psychological development. Since more females participated in the survey, they may feel embarrassed to ask their parents about sexuality, hence they strongly agree on the importance of sexual education in the family, but seldom ask for it actively.

The accessibility of the internet is one of the main reasons why teenagers do not exactly want to get their sexual information from their parents. Learning from the internet has become the norm for teenagers nowadays, especially for those with sensitive or embarrassing topics. Much of the sexual knowledge available on the internet is not systematic and comprehensive, and may be misinterpreted or incorrectly. Young people are easily influenced by outside factors and may only learn about the parts that they are interested in, so blindness and one-sidedness are obvious. These results in unplanned pregnancies and inappropriate sexual behavior happens sometimes. It is therefore important that young people's own needs for sexual knowledge and confusion about sexuality are addressed through the right channels for help and resolution. It is normal to grow up with curiosity about sexuality. Parents should take appropriate measures to guide their children positively, and the government should strengthen the propaganda of positive sexuality and work together to cultivate a sense of moral responsibility among young people. Furthermore, in recent years, there have been a number of issues regarding sexual crimes and the spread of HIV, these phenomena are also evidence of the lack of sex education in our country. Some young people may seek sex online, which increases the risk of contracting the HIV epidemic.[12] It is reported that there will be 223 cases of sexual assault on children under the age of 18 in 2021, as many as more than 500, and the proportion of boys who have experienced sexual assault has increased significantly. There were 223 publicly reported cases of sexual abuse of children under the age of 18 in 2021, amounting to more than 500 people, and the proportion of boys among those who experienced sexual abuse has increased significantly. For these reasons, there is a strong demand for self-protection education among.

It is not only parents who need to correct shy traditional attitudes, but also their children. Our country has long been in a sexual inhibited cultural environment

where sex is considered a sensitive topic. A lot of parents lack common sense and knowledge about sex education. Before educating their children, they need to establish a good concept of sex and carry out scientific learning. Parents need to change their perceptions and become more open in facing their children's questions, even if they cannot answer them. Checking with them or looking in books to ensure the accuracy of their knowledge also a better way to promoting relationships. As a child, it is important to learn to be open to receiving sex education from parents. Instead of passively accepting knowledge, try asking your parents about sexuality, beginning with the knowledge you want to know more about.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the power of the family is an essential part of sexual education and most young people are aware of its importance. Although their sexuality is open, they are not sure if they should receive sex education from their parents in family. Many of them have been influenced by the deliberately avoidant attitudes of their parents because they have not received sex education from their parents since they were young. Therefore, they believe that their parents themselves do not have enough knowledge about sex to teach them, so they are uncertain about whether they should ask their parents about it. Paradoxically, they also want to acquire relevant sexual knowledge from their parents, such as how to protect themselves and how to establish proper relationships. Teenagers are sensitive, and although they are relatively open about their sexuality, they may also be averse to formal conversation. Parents should take gentle measures to treat their children as equals and guide them to voice their demands. As a child should also listen to the education of parents, encounter confusion actively seek support and help from the family.

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