

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

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ABSTRACT

Talking or hearing about the term “Sex” is more than enough to question the dignity of a person but engaging in the act would not be such an issue, the population of India, itself justifies this statement. Sex education is not included in the curriculum, despite the fact that students today receive education in all areas, be it academic or co-curricular activities. Everybody is a fan of technology and social media these days, youth’s attitude is being evolved and it’s developing more positively towards sex Education but there are many things to be taught by a professional for proper clarity and as the children don’t have easy access to the same, they find some alternatives in the world of technology which is impacting many areas in their life. In view of such an issue, the present study attempted to examine the relationship between the Attitude toward sex education affecting self-esteem and sexual assaults among youth. 200 youth participants from Delhi (Mean age=20.735 and SD=2.346) voluntarily participated in the study using the snowball sampling technique. Rosenberg’s Self-esteem scale, Attitude scale towards sex education, and sexual assault severity scale (SASS) were used to measure the variables. Correlation, found using SPSS, between Attitude toward sex education and self-esteem was weak ($r=0.139$) and Attitude towards sex education and sexual assaults was inversely correlated ($r=-0.0086$). If the sample size would’ve been more the results could be strongly correlated positively and negatively respectively. However, the findings open new avenues of research for sex education and sexual assaults in other states of India as well.

Keywords: Sex Education, Self-esteem, Sexual assaults, Youth

In India, it is reported that only 28% of victims of sexual assault report the crime to authorities, despite the widespread nature of the issue in the country. This is due in part to the societal mentality, which often emphasizes concerns about public perception and the potential for judgement. This cultural mindset has resulted in the establishment of a wide range of taboos and beliefs that can inhibit individuals from making the appropriate choices. Sexual assault is characterized by any form of unwanted sexual contact that takes place without proper legal consent. Though it may be accompanied by physical force, it is not a mandatory aspect of the definition. The perpetrator may use tactics such as coercion,

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Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

intimidation, and incapacitation to carry out the act. A specific type of sexual assault is rape, which involves the intrusion of the vaginal, anal, or oral area. People who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, minors, or those with mental disabilities are generally considered unable to give consent for sexual activity. In such cases, the perpetrator can be charged under Section 7 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Rules, 2012 (POCSO) for committing sexual assault.

Sex education refers to the process of educating individuals about various aspects of human sexuality, including topics such as sexual development, reproductive health, sexual anatomy and physiology, contraception, safe sex practices, and healthy relationships. The goal of sex education is to furnish correct and appropriate to age information that supports comprehension and management of the physical and emotional aspects of human sexuality. It is usually delivered through various channels such as educational programs in schools, community-based programs, and digital platforms. It is important to note that adults also benefit from accurate and comprehensive sex education. While sex education is often focused on adolescents and teenagers, it is not limited to that age group. In contrast, in India, the subject of sex education is commonly considered a forbidden topic and inappropriate to discuss due to long-standing cultural and societal perceptions. This creates a challenge for the introduction of extensive sex education programs in schools and other educational institutions.

Many advocates of the Association of India believe that sex education is a fundamental human right that falls under the category of reproductive rights. This viewpoint is supported by various provisions of the Indian Constitution, including:

The Indian Constitution, under Article 21A, stipulates that every child between the ages of 6 and 14 is entitled to free and mandatory education. Failing to provide sex education may be considered a violation of this constitutional provision. Additionally, as per Article 45 of the Indian Constitution, the state has an obligation to integrate sex education as a component of free and compulsory education for children between the ages of 6 to 14. Furthermore, as per Article 51-A of the Indian Constitution, it is the responsibility of parents to ensure the education of their children aged 6 to 14, including providing sex education.

It is well-established that sex education can aid both adolescents and adults in safeguarding themselves from sexually transmitted diseases and accessing safe sexual environments. As per Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, the state has an obligation to establish a sex education program, and failure to do so would be a violation of this constitutional provision. India, at the United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, affirmed the sexual and reproductive rights of adolescents and young people, which includes the ability to make informed decisions about sexuality, which is facilitated by comprehensive sex education. Furthermore, in 1992, India ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which obligates the state to protect children from all forms of abuse and violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation. Given the prevalence of sexual abuse and exploitation in India, the government has an obligation to establish a comprehensive sex education program to protect children from such abuse, as per the treaty.

There are laws but the implementation of these laws would help in making an impact.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's perception of themselves, and it is shaped by their beliefs and attitudes. Family, tradition, and culture play a significant role in shaping self-esteem in the Indian context. According to the American Psychological Association (APA),

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

self-esteem is the extent to which an individual's self-attributes, characteristics and concepts are perceived positively. It encompasses one's physical self-image, perception of their accomplishments and talents, values, and perceived success in fulfilling them, and how others perceive and respond to the individual. A high level of self-esteem is correlated with positive views and attributes, while low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness are common symptoms of depression. A moderate level of self-esteem is considered crucial for mental well-being.

The focus of the present study is on youth as they are at a stage in life where they are able to understand their bodies, make informed decisions about sexual activity, reduce the risk of unwanted pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and develop positive attitudes towards their bodies and sexuality through comprehensive sex education. They learn about consent, healthy relationships, and what constitutes abuse through sex education, which can contribute to the promotion of healthy relationships, reduction of gender-based violence and fostering a culture of respect and equality.

In recent years, there have been various studies conducted by researchers to gain insight into the concept of sex education in India. One such study, conducted by Laneri in 1996, aimed to evaluate the impact of a values-based sex education program on students' moral judgment, sexual knowledge, self-esteem, and attitudes towards high-risk sexual behavior. The study found that, in contrast to the anticipated outcomes, there was no notable difference in the attitudes towards sex of adolescents who participated in the values-based sex education program as measured by the attitudinal measures used. Additionally, the study found that sexual knowledge was a more accurate predictor of attitudes towards sex than high levels of self-esteem or moral judgment.

Another study by, Das (2014) examined the curriculum of the Adolescent Education Programme as it had been revised in 2009-2010 by the National Council of Educational Research and Training and the United Nations Population Fund, in India. The study aimed to critically analyze the discourse surrounding sexuality education in India, and to consider potential future developments. The study found that developing a sexuality education curriculum that is inclusive of and caters to diverse young people, and that makes accurate and reliable information on sexual and reproductive health available to all young people, is an important step in the realization of sexual rights as a human right.

In 2014, Carson, Foster, and Chowdhury conducted a research study titled "Sexual Abuse of Children and Youth in India" which was published in *The Oriental Anthropologist*. The objective of the study was to provide an anthropological understanding of the nature and prevalence of child abuse and neglect in India, specifically focusing on sexual abuse of children and youth. The study concludes that programs geared towards preventing violence and child abuse should be developed to assist the community in addressing these issues. Additionally, the study recommends that both government and non-government organizations place a significant emphasis on implementing wide-reaching public education programs on various forms of child sexual abuse and exploitation.

Rationale

- The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between sex education, sexual assault and self-esteem, and to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying causes. This research will contribute to the larger body of knowledge on the importance of comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education.

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

- By identifying the relationship between the lack of sex education and the increase in the number of sexual assault cases, it will help in developing and implementing more effective sex education programs that could help in decreasing sexual assault cases in future.
- It will also aid in understanding how such programs can help in promoting self-esteem among individuals and building healthy and respectful relationships. Furthermore, the study could also provide insight on how sex education can empower young people, particularly women, to take control of their bodies and make informed decisions about their sexual health. It could also shed light on how sex education can break the societal taboos and stigmas around sex and sexuality, fostering a more open and inclusive society.
- The research will also explore how sex education can impact self-esteem in young people. It has been established that self-esteem is an important factor for overall well-being. A lack of knowledge about one's body and sexual health can contribute to feelings of shame and low self-esteem. By providing comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education, it can help young people understand their bodies and develop a healthy sense of self-worth. They will have more accurate and complete information, which in turn would help them to understand and navigate the physical and emotional aspects of sexuality, leading to a better self-esteem.
- The study may also provide insights into how sex education can help young people to learn more about the concepts of respect, consent, and boundaries and building healthy relationships, which are crucial for mental well-being and self-esteem.

METHOD

Participants

A sample size of 200 participants was selected for the study. The sample population was balanced in terms of gender representation, with 50% of the participants being male (n=100) and the other 50% being female (n=100). The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 25 years, with a mean age of 20.73 and a standard deviation of 2.346. The majority of the respondents were college students. The data collected revealed that 42.9% of the participants obtained knowledge about the term "sex" from their friends, only 11.1% were educated about it by their teachers, and 51% of the participants were not exposed to the term by either their school or their parents. Additionally, social media also had an influence on the understanding of sex education among youth, with 16.2% of the participants agreeing that it played a role. Similarly, video streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime also had an impact on the understanding of sex education among youth, with 12.1% of the participants agreeing that these platforms had an influence.

Measures

- **Biographic Information Schedule:** A Biographic Information Schedule was created using the Google Forms platform for the purpose of collecting demographic information from participants, including their name, email address, age, gender, and educational attainment. Furthermore, two questions were also included in the schedule to elicit the participants' perspectives and understanding of the research topic under investigation.
- **Attitude towards sex education:** To assess the attitudes of youth towards sex education, a standardized Attitude Scale towards Sex Education, developed by Dr. Usha Mishra was employed. The scale consisted of 32 items, with 16 items reflecting positive attitudes and 16 items reflecting negative attitudes. The norms for

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

interpreting the raw scores were established using the stanine grade system, with stanine 1 indicating very low attitudes towards sex education, stanines 2 and 3 indicating low attitudes, stanines 4, 5, and 6 indicating moderate attitudes, stanines 7 and 8 indicating high attitudes, and stanine 9 indicating very high attitudes.

- **Sexual assault severity scale (SASS):** A comprehensive measure of assault severity, developed by Karyn Crystal Swinson, was utilized for the research. The measure consisted of 9 items and inquired about any unwanted sexual behavior experienced by participants since the age of 18. The questions were answered using a Likert scale with a range of 0 to 3 points, where 0 represented "never," 1 represented "once," 2 represented "twice," and 3 represented "three times or more."
- **Rosenberg self-esteem scale:** The present research utilizes the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) as a standardized assessment tool for the evaluation of self-esteem among the study participants. The study employs a ten-item scale, scored on a four-point Likert scale, with "Strongly Disagree" scored as 1 and "Strongly Agree" scored as 4. The scores are added to get the total score, which indicates the level of self-esteem among the participants. It is also important to acknowledge that in the scoring process, the scores of Items 2,5,6,8 and 9 are inverted.

Procedure

The present research employed a combination of convenient sampling and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants. The potential participants were contacted via phone and informed about the study, which aimed to understand their attitudes towards sex education and its potential impact on sexual assault and self-esteem. The participants gave their informed consent to participate in the study and provided their email addresses. The researcher then sent a Google Form questionnaire to each participant via email. Participants were provided with the researcher's email address and were instructed to reach out in case they had any queries. After completion of the questionnaire, the total scores for all scales were calculated, and data analysis was subsequently performed using IBM SPSS and Microsoft Excel.

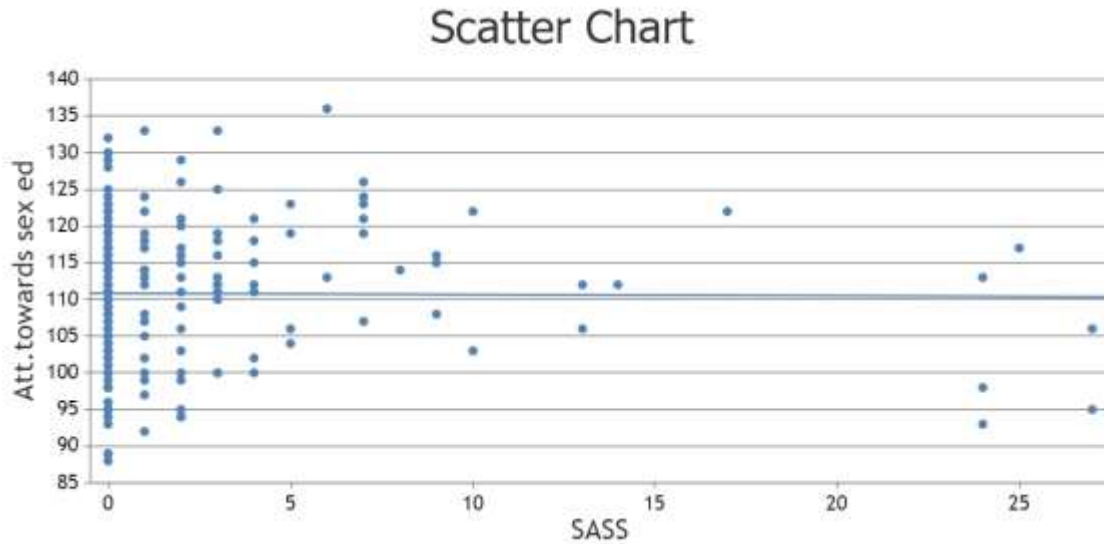
RESULTS

The present research utilized bivariate correlation analysis to investigate potential associations between two sets of variables. Specifically, the first set of bivariate correlation calculations were performed between scores on the Attitude towards Sex Education scale and scores on the Sexual Assault Severity Scale (SASS) to examine the existence of any correlation between these two variables. Subsequently, the second set of bivariate correlation calculations were conducted between scores on the Attitude towards Sex Education scale and scores on the Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) to investigate the existence of any correlation between these two variables. These calculations provide a starting point for understanding the relationship between the variables and potentially inform further research in the area.

Table 1 Correlation between Attitude towards sex education and Sexual Assault Severity Scale (SASS) among youth

Correlation	Attitude towards sex education	Sexual assault severity
Attitude towards sex education	1	-0.0086
sexual assault severity	-0.0086	1

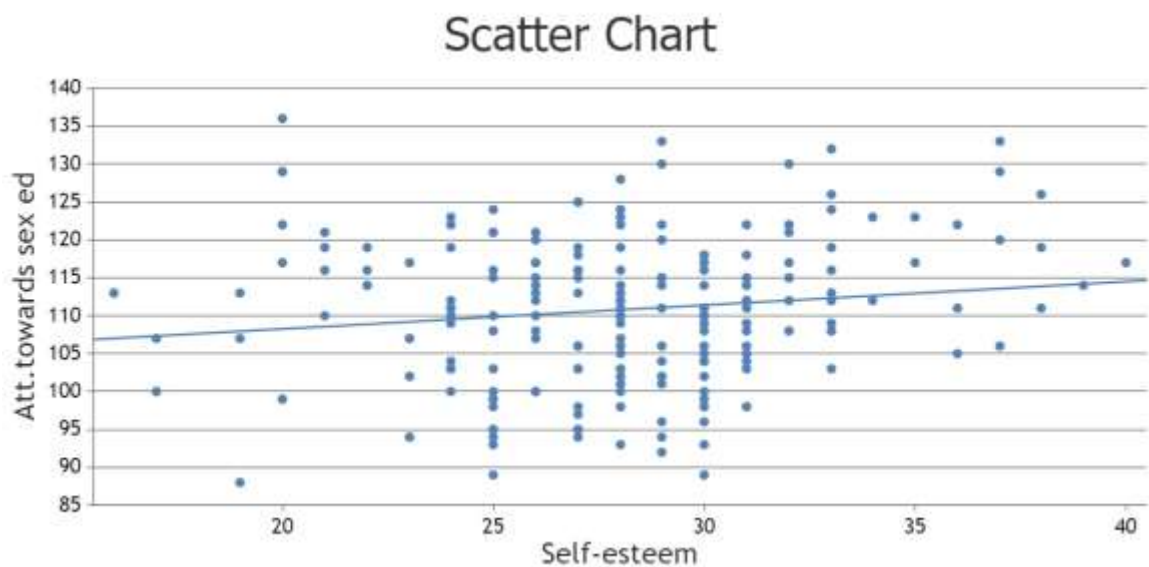
Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth



The data analysis presented in Table 1 reveals a minimal correlation between individuals' attitudes towards sex education and the severity of their sexual assault experiences (n=200). The correlation coefficient (r) is calculated as -0.0086, which suggests a weak negative correlation. The scatter plot, where attitudes towards sex education is on the y-axis and the Sexual Assault Severity Scale (SASS) is on the x-axis, fails to demonstrate any obvious relationship between these variables. The data points are scattered and no clear linear relationship can be observed, it indicate that there is a little or no correlation exists between the two variables. These findings imply that an individual's attitude towards sex education does not have a significant effect on the severity of their sexual assault experiences or vice versa.

Table 2 Correlation between Attitude towards sex education and Self-esteem among youth

Correlation	Self-esteem	Attitude towards sex education
Self-esteem	1	0.139
Attitude towards sex education	0.139	1



The results presented in Table 2 indicate a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between attitudes towards sex education and self-esteem (n=200). The

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

correlation coefficient (r) is 0.139, and the p -value is less than 0.05, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant. The scatter plot, with attitudes towards sex education on the y -axis and self-esteem on the x -axis, illustrates this correlation by showing a slight clustering of data points around a linear pattern, although the relationship is weak. These findings suggest that individuals with higher self-esteem may hold more positive attitudes towards sex education, or vice versa.

DISCUSSION

The issue of sexual assault in India is a complex and multi-faceted problem that has been the subject of ongoing research and debate. The aim of this study is to understand the relationship between sex education, sexual assault, and self-esteem among youth in India. It seeks to identify the underlying causes of sexual assault, and how sex education can impact self-esteem. The research will contribute to the broader understanding of the importance of comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education in addressing sexual violence in the country.

In India, sexual assault is a widespread problem, yet there is a significant under-reporting of cases due to societal attitudes and taboos surrounding the issue. Many victims are deterred from reporting the crime due to concerns about public perception, judgement and stigmatization.

Comprehensive and culturally sensitive sex education can also help young people to understand the importance of consent and boundaries, fostering healthy relationships and self-esteem. A comprehensive and open-minded attitude towards sex education can help people to break societal taboos and stigmas around sex and sexuality, fostering a more open and inclusive society. It could also empower young people, particularly women, to take control of their bodies and make informed decisions about their sexual health, which can help to build a healthy sense of self-worth and self-esteem.

The attitude towards sex education in India has a long history rooted in traditional cultural and societal beliefs. Historically, the topic of sex was considered taboo and not appropriate for discussion, leading to a lack of comprehensive sex education in schools and other educational institutions. This has resulted in a lack of accurate information and understanding about sexuality among the Indian population, particularly among youth.

Traditionally, sex education was not considered an important aspect of education in India, and discussions about sex were mostly limited to traditional teachings of procreation and reproduction. The focus was on the biological aspect of sex rather than the emotional and social aspects, which is essential for a comprehensive education on sex. Many people believed that talking about sex would encourage premarital sex and other deviant behaviors, which further reinforced the idea that sex education was not suitable for Indian society.

As a result of these beliefs, sex education was not widely implemented in schools and often not discussed in the home. This lack of education has led to many misconceptions about sex and sexuality, and a lack of knowledge about the importance of consent, respect, and healthy relationships.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness about the importance of sex education in India. The government, non-governmental organizations, and various other institutions have recognized that the lack of education about sex can have significant negative

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

consequences for individuals, families, and society as a whole. This has led to the development of more comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education programs in schools and other educational institutions. However, the implementation of these programs has been slow, and there is still a long way to go to ensure that all young people in India have access to accurate and appropriate information about sex and sexuality.

Despite these developments, there is still a lot of cultural resistance to sex education in India. Many people continue to view it as something taboo, and this perception is reinforced by the lack of discussion on this topic in the media and popular culture. This perception needs to change, and sex education should be considered a fundamental right and necessary aspect of education that can empower young people and make them more aware of the risks and consequences of their actions. It can also aid in preventing sexual harassment and abuse, promoting self-esteem and building healthy relationships.

Open discussions with youth regarding sex education would be beneficial in several ways in changing the attitude towards sex education and leading to less sexual assault and higher self-esteem among the youth population in India.

It would provide a safe and open space for young people to discuss and ask questions about sexuality and sexual health, which would help to dispel any misconceptions or misunderstandings that may be prevalent. This would help to promote accurate and age-appropriate knowledge about sexuality, which is crucial for healthy sexual development and decision-making and create a culture of openness and inclusivity, which would help to break down the taboos and stigmas that currently surround sex and sexuality in Indian society. This would empower young people to make informed decisions about their sexual health and to navigate the physical and emotional aspects of sexuality with confidence and self-assurance. This would also help to promote self-esteem, as it would provide young people with accurate information about their bodies, sexual health and sexual rights. This would help them to understand and accept their bodies and sexuality, leading to a more positive and healthy sense of self-worth and by promoting healthy relationship and the concept of consent, respect and boundaries, which are crucial for the mental well-being and self-esteem of young people.

open and inclusive discussions with youth regarding sex education would help to break down societal taboos and stigmas, promote self-esteem, and empower young people to make informed decisions about their sexual health, ultimately leading to less sexual assault and higher self-esteem among the youth population in India.

The study used a sample of 200 participants, comprising an equal number of males and females, aged between 15 to 25 years. The majority of the participants were college students. The data collected revealed that many participants obtained knowledge about sex from their friends and social media, but not from their teachers or parents. The study used a standardized Attitude Scale towards Sex Education, developed by Dr. Usha Mishra to assess the attitudes of youth towards sex education; Rosenberg's self-esteem scale and sexual assault severity scale developed by Karyn Crystal Swinson, to inquire about any unwanted sexual behavior experienced by participants since the age of 18.

The data analysis in Table 1 of the study reveals a minimal correlation between individuals' attitudes towards sex education and the severity of their sexual assault experiences. The correlation coefficient (r) is -0.0086 , which suggests a weak negative correlation, but scatter

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

plot does not demonstrate any obvious relationship between these variables. This means, the study failed to find any significant relationship between individual's attitude towards sex education and the severity of their sexual assault experiences, this may imply that there is little or no correlation between the two variables.

These findings are consistent with some prior research which suggests that attitudes towards sex education may not necessarily be a major predictor of sexual assault experiences. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that early sexual initiation, peer pressure, and alcohol use were more strongly related to sexual assault experiences than attitudes towards sex education. This research suggests that various other factors and not just one variable like attitude towards sex education is responsible for causing sexual assault.

On the other hand, the results presented in Table 2 indicate a weak but statistically significant positive correlation between attitudes towards sex education and self-esteem. The correlation coefficient (r) is 0.139, which suggest a weak relationship, the p -value is less than 0.05, indicating that this correlation is statistically significant. The scatter plot illustrates this correlation by showing a slight clustering of data points around a linear pattern, although the relationship is weak. These findings suggest that individuals with higher self-esteem may hold more positive attitudes towards sex education, or vice versa.

This result is consistent with previous research which has suggested that attitudes towards sex education may be related to self-esteem. For example, a study published in the *Journal of School Health* found that young people with higher self-esteem had more positive attitudes towards sex education and were more likely to use contraception. Additionally, a systematic review published in the journal *Sexual Health* found that comprehensive sex education programs can improve self-esteem among young people.

Overall, the study suggests that attitudes towards sex education may be related to self-esteem, but not to sexual assault experiences. This may imply that comprehensive sex education may have positive effects on self-esteem, but it is not a major factor in preventing sexual assault. The study's limitations highlights the need for further research to explore and understand the complex relationships between sex education, self-esteem and sexual assault, possibly by including other important variables that could be contributing factors to sexual assault experiences and self-esteem.

This study could potentially benefit the Indian society by providing insights into how sex education can impact attitudes and experiences related to sexual assault and self-esteem among young people. In India, sex education is not a widespread practice and many youth receive inadequate or misinformation about sex, sexuality and sexual health. The study could help in highlighting the need for comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education programs in India.

By identifying the relationship between lack of sex education and the increase in the number of sexual assault cases, it could help in developing and implementing more effective sex education programs that could help in decreasing sexual assault cases in future. This is especially important in India as the country has a high rate of sexual violence, with an estimated 106 rape cases per day in 2019 according to the National Crime Records Bureau.

Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

The study could also aid in understanding how such programs can help in promoting self-esteem among individuals and building healthy and respectful relationships. By providing comprehensive and culturally-sensitive sex education, it can help young people understand their bodies and develop a healthy sense of self-worth. Furthermore, it could also provide insight on how sex education can empower young people, particularly women, to take control of their bodies and make informed decisions about their sexual health.

In conclusion, the findings of this research reveal that there is a weak, yet positive relationship between attitude towards sex education and self-esteem among Indian youth. However, it also highlights that there is no significant relationship between attitude towards sex education and sexual assaults among this population. It is important to note that the study's limitations include the small sample size and potential bias due to the personal nature of the questions asked. Additionally, the diversity of attitudes and beliefs among Indian youth may have also impacted the results. Despite these limitations, the research provides valuable insight into the relationship between sex education and self-esteem among Indian youth.

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Attitude Towards Sex Education Affects Sexual Assaults and Self-esteem among Youth

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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