PERCEPTION TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION AMONG UNIMAS COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

With the increased rate of baby dumping cases and other related social problems in Malaysia which is very worrying, there were many debates on how to cope with the problems. One of the solutions proposed by the government was to implement sex education in school. However, this stirs a lot of controversial issues due to differences in opinions and perceptions about the implementation of sex education in schools. This study aimed to examine the perception of UNIMAS community towards sex education and its associate factors which indirectly would influence their perceptions. This study was conducted using quantitative approach whereby a cross sectional study using descriptive design was adopted. A total of 150 respondents were recruited using stratified random sampling whereby the number of samples was calculated based on its actual total population for each stratum which were divided into students, academic staffs and non academic staffs. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and chi square test. Results showed that 54.7% \( (n=81) \) of respondents had negative perceptions meanwhile 46% \( (n=69) \) had positive perceptions toward sex education. Their main source of sex information was peers \( (68.7\%) \). Types of occupation, mothers' highest educational level, parents as a source of sex information, cultural or religion factors were found to have significant relationships with perception towards sex education. It can be seen that policy makers need to be cognizant on people perception towards sex education if it is to be implemented successfully.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the study

The alarming rates of baby dumping since the past few years had opened the eyes of many people (Kamarudin, Mohd Zool Hilme, Nazni, Zaherawati & Zaliha, 2012). Not only baby dumping issues, other sex related problems such as teenage pregnancy, rape cases, increasing transgender population, lesbians and gay also contribute to unhealthy sexual norms in our society. Thus, both governmental and non-governmental organizations had showed their concern and commitment to stop these worrisome situations. Various kinds of plans were aimed to create awareness among society regarding the issues. One of those plans is sex education.

Sex education can be defined as an “education which increases the knowledge of the functional, structural and behavioural aspects of human reproduction” (Chan & Jaafar, 2009, para.1). Meanwhile, Alford (2001) describes comprehensive sex education teaches abstinence as the best way to avoid self from contacting sexual transmitted diseases (STDs) and unintended pregnancies. At the same time, it also teaches about condoms and other contraception to reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and infections with STDs including Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).
World Health Organization (WHO) (2005) stated that in Malaysian schools, sex education or adolescent reproductive health is called Family Health Education (FHE). This is an educational program planned to give students, an accurate and up to date knowledge about human sexuality. The elements of FHE were first implemented in secondary schools in 1989, followed by primary school in 1994 through physical and health education. However, despite of many years of implementation, FHE was seen to be not effective as evidenced by rising in rape cases with 1479 police reports lodged by rape victims in 2003 and 3098 cases in 2007 (Hariati, 2010) and other sexual misbehaviour problems mostly related to youngsters.

Hence in 2010, the Deputy Education Minister, Dr Puad Zarkarshi had announced that sex education with the new curriculum on Reproductive and Social Health Education (PEERS) to be introduced in January 2011 in both primary and secondary schools (Maria, 2010). The modules are categorised into several topics according to their level of education. In the lower primary level, the new module include male and female physical profiles and their differences, personal hygiene, how to say “no” to unsafe contact, the importance of self-respect and emotional management. While for students in secondary school, they were taught about STDs, sexual behaviour development, sexual identity orientation, teen pregnancy, family values, and precaution against premarital sex (Nurjehan, 2011).

1.1 Statement of Problem

With the arising number of cases related to social problems, the Ministry of Education had decided to implement sex education in schools hoping to reduce social problems such as baby dumping, teenage pregnancy and run away cases (Minderjeet, 2010). However, not all people can accept this transformation. This is especially so in a multicultural country such as Malaysia whereby sex education is still considered to be a very controversial subject. Law
(2004) pointed out that most institutions that collaborate with adolescent and youth program still face with fear and opposition that come from cultural and religion.

Many people and organizations had given their response, opinions and also debates about sex education since its first announcement in 2011. According to Bruess and Greenberg (2008), argument about sex education has centred on its content and methodology more than talking about whether there should be a program. Some people viewed sex education as something that can influence the young generation to have unhealthy sexual behaviour. One of the strongest rejections came from the Menteri Besar of Kelantan, Datuk Nik Aziz Nik Mat who indicated that sex education in schools would encourage teenage sexual promiscuity and he claimed that this situation is like teaching a thief on how to steal (Kuppusamy, 2010).

Those who rejected sex education to be taught in schools were not only parents but also the teachers. Some teachers refused to teach sex education in school because they were afraid that they might be sued by the parents if they were to make mistakes in conveying the knowledge of sex to the students (“Malaysian teachers”, March 2010). Besides being anxious about the syllabus that will be taught to the students, most of contentions focus on delivery of sex education. Parents as well as the experienced professionals argued over who should teach sex education, how to teach and when to teach (Campos, 2002).

On the other hand, some people believed that sex education have its positive effects on initiation of sex, frequency of sex, number of sexual partner, condom use and other sexual behavior that can prevent negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes (Kamaruzaman, 2012). In a study conducted in Canada, majority of parents support the implementation of sex education in school as long it still recognize and respect the diversity of moral beliefs that exist in the community (Holowaty, Mckay & Pietrusiak, 1998). It can be seen that different
people have different perceptions towards sex education implementation. With these two sides still questioning on the implementation, effective sex education for the youth might be affected or delayed.

Perceptions towards sex education implementation need to be examined closely from all angles especially opinions and perspectives from adolescents particularly on what they need to learn which are still not very often integrated at the planning stage of sex education (Sieg, 2003). Besides the adolescents, there is also a need to include the adults especially the parents in designing the sex education programs (Kayombo & Mbonile, 2008). Hence, it is of importance to conduct a study which will assess the perceptions and the factors that influenced the perceptions towards sex education among adolescent and adults. From the study, it is hoped that the feedback can guide the policy makers to improve the content of curriculum before its implementation. The general objective for this study is to examine the perceptions of UNIMAS community towards sex education.

1.2 Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of UNIMAS community towards sex education?
2. What are the factors influencing perception towards sex education among UNIMAS community?
1.3 Research Objectives

The specific objectives for this study are:

1. To assess the perceptions of UNIMAS community towards sex education.
2. To identify factors that influences the perception of UNIMAS community towards sex education.

1.4 Significance of the Study

In most countries including Malaysia, sex education had become a highly political and controversial issue. Thus, it is essential for policy makers to evaluate the process involved towards its development (Measor, Miller & Tiffin, 2000). This includes knowing the perception of the public toward sex education. In this study, UNIMAS was selected as the location to be conducted in order to examine the perception towards sex education. From the perceptions, policy maker maybe able to know the source of contention since sex education programs have a tailored agenda to consider (Campos, 2002). Subsequently, this would allow education policy makers to identify the problems and take measures such as create awareness among the public about what sex education is really about and how or to what extent the sex education syllabus could be improved in the future.

In addition, this study aimed to show how important the roles of parents, culture and religion and also mass media in determining the perception towards sex education thereby supporting or compromising on sex education. From the findings in this study, it has thrown up many questions and it is suggested that the association of the factors is investigated in future studies.
1.5 Definition of Terms

_Perception_

Perception is the ability of people in understanding the nature of something (Turnbull, 2010). In this study, perception refers to the way the UNIMAS community perceive sex education as a subject that will be taught in school.

_Sex education_

Sex education is defined as the systematic attempt to promote the healthy awareness in the individual on matters of his or her sexual development, functioning, behaviour and attitudes through direct teaching (Frimpong, 2010). Sexuality education covers the same topics as sex education but also includes issues such as relationships, attitudes towards sexuality, sexual roles, gender relations and the social pressures to be sexually active, and it provides information about social, reproduction & health services. It may also include training in communication and decision-making skills (MDG 5 Watch, 2010).

_University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) community_

UNIMAS community refers to both the students and staffs which includes the academic and non-academic staffs.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

According to Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) (2009), effective sex education can provide young generation with age appropriate, culturally relevant and scientifically accurate information. Some adolescents found discussions about how to avoid getting STDs, avoid pregnancy and information about condoms and other forms of birth control to be very helpful (Neinstein, 2002). Despite all the positive aspects about sex education, it still becomes a controversial issue which had attracts both opposition and support (UNAIDS, 2009). They had argued on many aspects of sex education and not merely about the effects of sex education but also on who should deliver, appropriate communication to be used and contents of sex education.

Sex education is not just another subject that can be added in school curricular as it contain issues that are of such central significance in the lives of young generation in future (Sieg, 2002). Hence, this review of literature will look into the perceptions towards sex education, opinions about who should deliver sex education and the factors that might influence their perceptions towards sex education. All studies reviewed were obtained through the online news and online databases such as Medline, Proquest, Springerlink and Science Direct.
2.1 Positive Perceptions

When sex education was first announced to be taught in school in January 2011, some parents welcome it with an optimistic mind. This could be due to the sudden rise in the rates of baby dumping recently as evidenced by 517 baby dumping incident recorded in 2005. This lead to people looking forward for sex education and hoping that it can provide adequate knowledge related to sex such as how to use condom, pregnancy, consequence of unwanted pregnancy and reproduction system which include menstruation and how baby was made (Jennifah et al., 2012; Murty, 2012).

The Malaysian Council for Child Welfare Honorary Secretary, Ismail Majid says that sex education should not be considered as a taboo but should be initiate to overcome problems like baby dumping (Fong & Kong, 2010). This is because in a country with well-known Asian values like Malaysia, discussing sex-related issues is still considered as taboo and very sensitive. This will then lead to lack of self-awareness towards both social and sex-related problem and ultimately contribute to increase social problems specifically sexual risk behavior among the young generation.

Another view from a council member of the Asia Pacific Council of Contraception and a sex education supporter, Jamiyah, viewed that young adolescents who are already empowered with the knowledge of sexual and reproductive health will have greater chance in making the right decision when they encounter with passion-fuelled situation (Raman, 2010). This is of significance as the adolescent would know when and how to control themselves from engaging in sexual activity, while the risk of having an unwanted pregnancy and other negative complications can be reduced. She also iterated that sex education should be initiated
by parents when their children are still at an early age. In addition, explaining or teaching young children, the topics covered need not necessarily have to be complex. The parents should at least tell the child that they are prohibited from touching another child’s private part (Raman, 2010).

Jennifah et al. (2012) in their quantitative study of knowledge on sex education towards a perspective of baby dumping issue revealed that there is a significant relationship between knowledge on sex education and baby dumping issue. The respondents were secondary school students who agreed that knowledge on sex education is important in order to prevent or reduce the number of baby dumping. This finding is congruent with a study conducted by Fatimah Abdullah (2010), who found that not only teenagers but also young women at their early twenties had severe lack of knowledge about sexuality. It was manifested by most young mothers who still did not know that they were pregnant after they stopped menstruating and there were some girls who cannot distinguish between urethral and vaginal openings (Baradan, 2010).

The above findings was further supported by a Malaysian police report (2006) noted that those teenagers who made up the dominant group with regards to abandoning their babies was due to a lack of information on sexuality besides cultural factors (Baradan, 2010; Jia, 2010; Kamarudin et al., 2012). If they were left uninformed about how and when they can get pregnant, they were at a higher risk of having unwanted pregnancy. As for our local society, instead of blaming both boy and girl, there is a higher tendency to put the blame on girls and of being rejected by family if the girl had premarital pregnancy (Jia, 2010). Being pressurized by various factors, the girl who had unintended pregnancy will try her best to hide the
pregnancy and dare to dump the baby anywhere just to make sure the family and society did not know about it. In this situation it is important for the girl to be able to act rationally and be responsible for what she had done.

On the other hand, refusing to explain issues related to sexual relationship to children will just develop negative perceptions and fear towards sexuality among them (Snegroff, 2000). Children who are in the growing process are known to have high curiosity about everything that happened around them. If their parents or teachers cannot answer questions related to sexuality such as ‘how my little brother can be inside my mother’s womb?’ or ‘why my older sister need to wear pad’, it will lead to misconception and thus encouraging the young people to sought this knowledge from somewhere else outside home, perhaps from their peers or more risky source such as internet (Liamputtong & Rawson, 2010).

Hence, most of the young people who did not receive adequate knowledge regarding sexuality at home due to barriers such as cultural taboo or parents’ embarrassment tend to support sex education to be taught in school. This is supported by the study done in India where about 86.7% of the students believe that sex education is an essential part in the school curriculum (Benzaken, Gill & Palep, 2011).

Furthermore, some parents rely on school teachers to be their mediator in conveying sexual knowledge to their children. This is especially for those parents who feel embarrassed and lack of confidence as to whether they are using the appropriate way of telling the children about sex and relationship (Sieg, 2003). Thus, the parents perceived that an institution outside home, especially like school would be able to give their children the required information.
needed by them (Liamputtong & Rawson, 2010). Liamputtong and Rawson also noted that, even though some parents teach sex education at home, most of the children are not satisfied with the contents delivered as it was always limited to the physiological process of menstruation rather than an inclusion of the psychological and sociological process involved in sexuality.

In Malaysian perspective, discussing about sex openly is viewed as inappropriate and against the norms (Chan & Jaafar, 2009). In their study of parents’ attitudes towards inclusion of sexuality education in Malaysian schools, Abu Sadat, Pute Rahimah, Saodah and Syed Sohail (2009) found that majority of the parents agreed that sex education should be taught in elementary school. However they viewed that sex education in Malaysia ought to be more religious in content and not contradicting to the teachings of Islam. Furthermore, one of the mothers who supported sex education expressed her view regarding sexuality as important due to the fact that even family members rape their own ‘girls’ and the ‘poor girl’ does not know how to deal with such situation. Hence, sex education can also be as an ‘eye opener’ to the ‘girls’ so that they can be more self-protective and avoid from being the victim of any sexual abuse.

2.2 Negative Perceptions

UNAIDS (2009) stated that if positive impact on children and young people were to be made before they are sexually active, a comprehensive sexuality education has to be part of the formal school curriculum, delivered by well-trained and supported teachers. Teachers played an important role in making sure accurate, age-appropriate information regarding sexual health are imparted to the students. However, to a sensitive and controversial subject would
not be an easy task as teaching other subjects. Malaysia being a multiracial, religious and
cultural nation, with different ethnic group having its own views on the subject will make
teaching more challenging ("Malaysian teachers", 2010).

This is further supported by Bajos, Collumbien, Hodges, Patel, Slaymaker, Singh and
Wellings (2006) who described that the greatest challenge to sexual health promotion in
almost all countries comes from conservative opposition forces to harm-reduction strategies.
Many societies still think discussions of sexual issues as taboo and should not be discussed
openly (Frimpong, 2010). One very good example would be Kelantan Menteri Besar, Datuk
Nik Abdul Aziz Nik Mat is one who believed that sex education in schools will just bring
more harm than good to the young generations. He iterated that sex education will encourage
young people to experiment sex leading to negative consequences such as baby dumping.
Instead, he viewed that instilling Islamic values in young people is the best solution to resolve
the problem ("Nik Aziz", 2010).

With the increasing number of cases of baby dumping, many were looking forward on sex
education as a way to help to curb this problem. However, some people think it is not as
important as it implies. Kelantan State Exco, Halimah Ali viewed that sex education is not the
ultimate answer, instead a dynamic solution is needed. (Jennifah et al., 2012). With advanced
technology and unlimited access to internet, the young generations are free to search and
exposed to various kinds of information regarding sexuality. As stated in The Star Online
("Porn a major reason", 2010), Federal CID director Commander Datuk Seri Bakri Zinin
claimed that the widespread access to pornography and weakened family ties have become the
major factors contributing to an increase in baby dumping in the past five years. He then
pointed out that pornography materials can be access online easily by the youths even through their mobile phones and this will give bad influence to them.

However his idea was not supported by the Women Aids Organisation executive director, Ivy Josiah who believed that lack of knowledge regarding sexuality is the main reason behind baby dumping issue. Through the interview session with women who had unwanted pregnancy, she found that difficulty in negotiating about contraceptive use with the boyfriend is the main reason and not because of pornography factor (Fong & Kong, 2010).

On other hand, there were those who oppose sex education and firmly support the abstinence-only-education. Those who strongly oppose to sex education, held community meetings, press conferences and even circulated petitions to affirm their stand on abstinence-only-education (Dwonch-Schoen, Howard-Barr, Panella & Weiss, 2010). Others who support this kind of education are the worldwide religious leaders who believe that young people should be ‘protected’ from education about sexuality and should just practice abstinence (International Planned Parenting Federation (IPPF), 2009). Some mothers especially those who seem to be ‘over protective’ towards their children also prefer their children to know about sexuality by themselves. They believed that if their children were taught about sexuality, they will not be paying attention to the lessons but rather interested to trying it (Abu Sadat et al., 2009).

Even worst, some girls are being left in confusion about their body changes especially when the first menstruation period occurs. For instance, a mother from urban slum of Mumbai decides to tell her daughter about menstruation only after her daughter has her menarche (Padma, Shobha & Vidula, 2003). Besides that, in order to avoid from revealing extra
information about sex that might increase young people’s curiosity, some parents seem to take the safest way where they just only teach their children some basic aspects of male and female relationship (Abu Sadat et al., 2009).

Although most of those parents who perceived negatively towards sex education, there are also objections from the young people themselves. In a study carried out in Netherland, the young Muslim perceived that sex education is not vital that it must be taught in school because the Qur’an already had all the guidelines that every Muslim should follow (Gerjo, Meijer, Poelman, Schaalma & Smerecnik, 2010). This is further supported by a father who is also a participant in a study in Malaysia whereby, he stated that sex education is not something new for Muslims (Abu Sadat et al., 2009). In Islam, the Qur’an and Sunnah had already written about sexuality where sex is viewed as something confidential between married spouses. Premarital sex is not acceptable and is sinful. Besides that, there are many other related topics that can guide the Muslims about sex education if they learn it thoroughly (Kotb, 2004).

Furthermore, perhaps because of its cultural taboo, many adolescent are not comfortable to discuss about sexuality with adults such as teachers or parents but rather discuss it with their peers (A.A, Akande & T.M, Akande, 2007). Some young people who oppose sex education also mentioned that some information received in sex education class is outdated and they are not satisfied with the learning tools used by the teachers during teaching (Liang, 2010).

Most of those who opposed sex education misunderstood about what sex education is really about. They think that the education will teach about sex rather than health related topics. Consequently, most believed that students will practice what they were taught (Kayombo & Mbonile, 2008). Due to the misperception, most of the countries had replaced the phrase ‘sex
education’ by other terminology such as ‘comprehensive health education’, ‘sexual health education’ or ‘Reproductive and Social Health Education’ (Dwonch-Schoen et al., 2010).

2.3 Who Should Deliver Sex Education?

This question remains a controversial issue as to who should deliver sex education.

2.3.1 Parents

Being the closest to their children since birth and preparing them to adult life, some view parents as the most appropriate to teach about sexuality to the young people (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1999). In reality, parents do play important role in educating young people about sexual and reproductive health although many of them always assume that their children were not matured enough and will not commit in sexual relations (Azriani, Amaluddin, Halim, Maizun, Mohd Ismail, Razlina, Shaiful Bahri, Siti Hawa & Wan Manan, 2011).

Although nowadays young people have many options to refer regarding sexuality such as magazine and internet, the young generation still prefers their parents to be the providers of sex education (Kayombo & Mbonile, 2008). Besides that, if compared to boys, high proportions of girls who are synonym with shy character chose to obtain the information from their parents or siblings when it comes to question about sexuality (Benzaken et al., 2011).

However, not all parents are qualified to be the sex educator. This is because some parents feel uncomfortable to discuss about sexuality as they themselves are not too sure whether the information they convey to their children is right or wrong (IPPF, 2009). Even if they are sure about the facts, some parents felt embarrassed and concerned about how their children will feel after discussing sex with them (Snegroff, 2000). Resulting from parents’ hesitation in