Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Why in news?

Earlier this month, a man and his minor son were arrested for sexually abusing a 5-year-old girl, who was related to them, for 6 months.

DATA POINT | SEXUAL ASSAULT IN INDIA
• **Global**-The prevalence of child sexual abuse has been estimated at 19.7% for females and 7.9% for males. • **India** - It is home to a large number of sexually abused children. • In 2020, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) registered 43,000 offences under the stringent POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act, 2012. • *Online child abuse* has increased during pandemic induced intense lockdown. In average there was 1 case for every 12 minutes. • As per (NCRB), 51,863 cases were reported under POCSO in 2021, out of these 64% were of sexual assault. • Data show that both male and female children are victims of sexual abuse. • **High demand** - A report by India Child Protection Fund suggests an alarmingly high demand for Child Sexual Abuse Material in as many as 100 Indian cities including Delhi and Mumbai. • NCRB data shows that it is necessary for schools to impart comprehensive sexuality education not only to children, but also to parents and caregivers.

What is Child Sexual Abuse?

> According to the World Health Organization, *Child Sexual abuse includes a child who is unable to give consent, under compulsion, fear or any other circumstances, not prepared physically, mentally or emotionally for sexual activities, any illegal activity, other activity which not relates with the moral values of the society, child trafficking, child prostitution, child pornography, and many other similar acts, which are done against the will of the child in it".*

- It is also called as child molestation in which an adult or older adolescent uses a child for sexual stimulation.

What are the causes of child sexual abuse?

- **Exploitation -** The exploitation of the children in Commercial or household work refers to child labor. This exploitation sometimes leads to sexual harassment.
- **Poverty -** Poor and needy children become victim to adult abusers, who pretend to

help them but take advantage of them.

- **Lack of Education -** Education is the key to a child's future.
- Uneducated children are more prone to abuse and become more vulnerable as they are beyond the protective reach of school and support services.
- **Poor health problems** - Children living with a poor mental condition, learning disability or physical disability are more likely to report childhood sexual abuse as compare to others.
- **Homelessness-** Domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other sorts of relational brutality are high between the homeless children.
- **Unemployment -** If there is an increase in one unit of unemployment then ultimately increase in all forms of abuse.
- **Acquaintances -** Children believe in the person with whom they are familiar and cannot resist his or her behavior easily, even though they find it uncomfortable.
- **Age of Parents** - If the parents are too young to take care of their children with proper protection then their children are at high risk.
- **Mental Health Problem** - A person suffering from depression or psychiatric illness is at a much higher risk of abusing and neglecting others.



What is comprehensive sexuality education?

According to the United Nations (UN), a comprehensive sexuality education is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality.

- **Aim** - To equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to
  - Realize their health, well-being, and dignity
  - Develop respectful social and sexual relationships
  - Consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and
  - Understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.
- **Coverage -** It is delivered in formal and non-formal settings, in schools or out of schools.
- **Scientific -** It is scientifically accurate, based on research, facts, and evidence.
- **Spiral-curriculum approach -** It is incremental, starting at an early age with foundational content and skills, with new information building upon previous learning, using a spiral-curriculum approach that returns to the same topics at a more advanced level each year.
- It is age and developmentally appropriate with content and skills growing in abstractness and explicitness with the age and developmental level of the learners.
- **Accommodate -** It also must accommodate developmental diversity, adapting for learners with cognitive and emotional development differences.
- **Curriculum based** - It should follow a written curriculum that includes key teaching and learning objectives, and the delivery of clear content and skills in a structured way.

Why there is a need of comprehensive sexuality education?

- **UNFPA -** UN Population Fund (UNFPA) says that, "the right of access to comprehensive sexuality education is grounded in fundamental human rights and is a means to empower young people to protect their health, well-being and dignity".
- **UN Global Guidance** - It recommends starting comprehensive sexuality education from the age of 5 along with formal education.
- This means that young children will be taught about their bodies, emotions, the basic principles of consent, and how to deal with violence, bullying or abuse.
- **Better informed of rights -** As per the review quoted by WHO, with comprehensive sexuality education, young people will be better informed of their rights and sexuality.
- They will be more likely to engage in sexual activity later. Programmes built only on the concept of abstinence have not been effective.
- **Holistic coverage -** The key intervention area that the UNFPA Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education mentions are:
    - Ensure that the CSE programmes include sound monitoring and evaluation components.
    - Give due consideration to inequality, gender norms, power in intimate relationships, and intimate partner violence.

- **Kerala model-** The State Council of Educational Research and Training informed the Kerala High Court that awareness about POCSO would be included in the curriculum from 2024-25.
- With the relationship between sexual health and human rights being complex, non-linear and interrelated, it is hoped that the curriculum is holistic and not simply related to legalities.

- **UNESCO 2021 Global Status Report** -
    - **Capacity building -** It says that capacity-building of teachers is critical as the curriculum requires non-intuitive participatory pedagogies.
    - The report cautions against the effects of inaccurate information, and values that silence discussions on sexuality and rights.
    - **A Government -NGO case study from Jharkhand**- A school-based programme, Udaan, which began as an Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health programme led by the State AIDS Control was Society, got mainstreamed into the Education Department, as a model of commitment to scale up comprehensive sexuality education.

What are the challenges in adopting comprehensive sexuality education?

- **Poor support -** Several State governments and certain sections of society in India have adopted an ostrich-like approach to comprehensive sexuality education.

- **Adherence to traditional values** - The states had withdrawn the program citing that it violates Indian values. Traditional values are often shaped by patriarchal and hierarchical social structures.
- **Mass media -** They often propagate the traditional patriarchal values, this negatively affects the young adults of all gender.
- **Unaware of sexual consent** - A recent study shows that more than 64% of youth from

Mumbai were hesitant to give consent, ask for it, and to withdraw it when dating someone.
- Discussions around consensual sexual pleasure is traditionally absent.

What lies ahead?

- An explicit creation of vocabulary in regional languages to discuss the concept of sexual consent and its nuances is urgently required.
- In India, the responsibility of sexuality education is vested with the State governments.
- Each State has the freedom to develop creative curriculums within the framework suggested by the UNFPA.

References

1. The Hindu | India needs comprehensive sexuality education
2. UNESCO | What is comprehensive sexuality education?

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