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Perception on providing comprehensive sexuality education to school children among teachers of international schools in Colombo District

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Background: Many controversies exist regarding the content, delivery strategies and age of introduction of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) to the school children in Sri Lanka. Studying teachers' perspectives on provision of comprehensive sexuality education to school children is important. Due to COVID-19 pandemic situation we could only successfully recruit teachers of international schools to this study.

Objective: To describe the perception and associated factors on providing CSE to school children among teachers of international schools in the Colombo District.

Method: A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted using a self-administered online questionnaire, with convenient sampling among 170 teachers of international schools in Colombo District. Perception was assessed using a 21-item questionnaire on 5-point Likert scale and converted to a 0-100 scale. Those in the first quartile were categorized as having an unfavourable perception towards provision of CSE to school children. Data analysis was done using SPSS software version 15.0. A value of $p < 0.05$ was considered significant.

Results: The majority 64.2%, (n=162) were below 30 years of age. Eighty eight point seven percent (n=168) were females. A favourable perception towards provision of CSE was shown by 70.9% (n=117). Seventy five percent (n=119) were of the view that topics like human body and development should be initiated at primary grades. However, more sexually oriented topics were considered as suitable to be initiated during grades 6-11 (contraception: 88.2%, n=135; sexuality, sexual behaviour and sexually transmitted diseases: 86.3%, n=132; puberty and secondary sexual characteristics 64.9%, n=100). Unfavourable perception towards provision of CSE was found to be significantly associated with higher age ($r = -0.17$), teaching in a boys' school ($\chi^2 = 15.03$, $df = 2$), and lack of support received by teachers in teaching CSE ($\chi^2 = 15.34$, $df = 1$).

Conclusion: The majority of the teachers had a favourable perception regarding provision of CSE. Furthermore, they considered it to be a collective effort and a gradual process.