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Perception of Adolescents towards Sex Education

Abstract

A study was conducted in the district Sangrur of Punjab, India to find out Perception of the adolescents regarding sex education. Out of 21 senior secondary schools in Sangrur Tehsil 10 senior secondary schools were selected on the basis of random sampling. In the present study unit of analysis were adolescents studying in the classes IX to XI. From each selected school, six adolescents were contacted and equal representation is given to male and female adolescents. Results revealed that all adolescents favoured the inception of complete sex education in the schools. Adolescents irrespective of gender and age reported that sex education would result in closer teacher- pupil relationship. A majority of adolescents wanted same gender teacher for imparting sex education. Adolescents supported the inception of complete and comprehensive type of sex education in schools and also suggested the collaborative role to parents and doctor (medical staff) in the overall curriculum of sex education.

Keywords: Adolescents, Parents, Teachers, Sex education.

Introduction

Adolescence is a complex stage which results in wide array of changes i.e. occurring in physiological, psychological and social spheres. The life of adolescents is full of opportunities to enter into new experiences, to explore new relationships, to feel new resources of inner strength and ability. Usually the period of adolescence is described as the most vital season between the spring time and the summer of life. Adolescence is the most vulnerable period of human life. Four factors make youth's vulnerable to risky behavior—lack of information and awareness, lack of health services, lack of decision-making power, and lack of resources (McCauley and Salter, 1995,). STIs including HIV are most common among young people aged 15-24 years and it has been estimated that half of all HIV infections worldwide has occurred among people aged less than 25 years (WHO, 1995). Sweat and Denison (1995) have reported that the risk of STI/ HIV infection among adolescents in developing countries is coupled by socio-cultural, political and economic forces such as social taboos, poverty, unemployment etc. Awasthi and Pande (1998) have reported that adolescents lack knowledge about pubertal transitions and STDs.

Ainsworth and Over (1994) and Friedman (1993) have reported that demographically adolescents compose approximately one-third of the world's population. It is necessary to recognize the problems and needs of vulnerable adolescents and devise a mechanism to help population living in this age group. Traditional education system has failed to equip youth with the requisite information and skills necessary to handle complex developmental tasks at a younger age, leaving youth ill-prepared and vulnerable to the negative consequences of sexual behavior (Asmussen and Croft, 1992). Forrest et.al (2002) suggests that it is now widely accepted that young people have a right to sex education, partly because it is a means by which they are helped to protect themselves against abuse, exploitation, unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS.

Current information show that adolescents are inadequately informed regarding their own sexuality, physical well being and their health and the major source of information for them is media and peers. Whatever knowledge they have is incomplete and confused. A survey done with 959 adolescent girls on the issues of sexuality shows that regardless of age and education all the subjects have expressed the need for the introduction of sexuality education into academic curriculum (Maitra,1994). In his study Bailie (1991) has found that most students want to discuss issues which they regard as important, rather than have topics imposed on them, and that they should have the opportunity to ask questions. They want teaching to be done in the form of small discussion groups, of boys

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and girls. They also express a need to ask questions in a private and confidential setting. They request the use of more visual aids, and express their dislike of lectures. Almost all the groups feel that sexuality education should take place during normal school hours and that the time allocated to this subject is insufficient.

Adolescents often look to their families as one of several preferred sources of sexual health information (King et al., 1988; McKay et al., 1998). A 2008 survey of parents and teenage children aged 13 to 18 years reports that around two-thirds of young people seek advice from their parents if they need contraception or think they have an STI, and around three-quarters seek advice if they had an unplanned pregnancy. In this study, more parents have thought that their teenage children would ask them for help or advice than actually would. However, the survey shows that young people prefer to talk about sex with their parents (72%), followed by friends (68%) and the internet (61%) (Marie Stopes International, 2008). In addition, most young people agree that sexual health education should be a shared responsibility between parents and schools (Byers et al., 2003)

In India, young people and especially young girls are reported as having consistently poor knowledge about sex and reproduction, including modes of transmission for HIV and the use of condoms as a preventive measure. Parents and family members are reluctant to discuss sexual matters with young people. Women interviewed in a variety of contexts have reported that they have been told very little about sex and reproduction prior to marriage (Bang et al., 1989). In rural and urban areas young people, especially girls, remained uninformed since sex and reproduction are considered distasteful and embarrassing subjects (Jejeebhoy, 1998). In a study that has been conducted in Mumbai, one mother reports that adults do not want to frighten young girls by talking about sex (George & Jaswal, 1995). By way of contrast, and like many of their counterparts in countries elsewhere in the world, young men in this same context are encouraged to be sexually experienced, but reliable sources of information are few and far between. The peer group therefore constitutes an important source of information, as does the developing mass media (Jejeebhoy, 1998).

Due to peer love and peer pressure, which is a part of their growing up, children tend to discuss sexuality with friends and classmates. This often leads to anxiety, negative attitude, phobia and misconceptions as they cannot decide about the correctness of the information they get (Joshi & Chauhan, 2011). Most teenagers turn to their peers as sources of sex education rather than teachers and school counsellors (Hlalele, 2008). According to Larson and Richards (1994), adolescents spend substantially more time interacting socially with peers than parents and peers act as great supplier of information. According to Maitra (1994), 84 per cent secondary school attendees favour the inception of sex education in schools. The students report that

school based sex education represents a feasible mechanism to their needs of sexuality education. Adolescents feel that the sex education they receive in school is inadequate, and they want open discussions on the topic of sex with their parents (Fay & Yanoff, 2000). The vast majority of parents and children look to schools to provide the education because schools have the resources, the training, and the commitment to a common curriculum, whereas the home environment may have limited or incorrect information and an unwillingness of parents to talk about sex with children (Archard, 2000).

Discussion of sex openly, is a taboo in the Indian society and the parents in India constitute a very small percentage as source of sexual information to their children. The school has not yet taken up the responsibility to teach reproductive health education, to primary school or secondary school students. On the other hand, the socio-psychological problems faced by adolescents and the reproductive behaviour they exhibit have changed in the recent past. The teachers who teach the adolescents, the students who are adolescents themselves, the parents and the guidance counselors in schools acknowledge the rise in premarital sexual activities of the adolescents. With the widespread availability of information, the influence of the media and the breakdown of traditional family structures, sexual behaviour among adolescents may be described as being in a state of flux. While information on sexual activity and behaviour is limited, disturbing trend is the lack of use of contraceptives and knowledge of STDs. The solutions to the problem of adolescents lie in imparting sex education.

It is evident from the above review that there are number of pubertal concerns of adolescents which are not adequately addressed. The present paper addresses the viewpoint of adolescents on sex education. The perception of adolescents about significance and content of sex education has been discussed in this paper.

Objectives

1. To explore the preferred significance and content of sex education according to adolescents.
2. To highlight the functional and dysfunctional aspects of sex education as perceived by adolescents.
3. To find out the main agency for imparting sex education according to adolescents.

Methodology

For the present study the selected locale is Sangrur district of Punjab. Sangrur is in the Southern part of Punjab and it is one of the old districts of Punjab. For the present study the term adolescent has been defined as the children of age group between childhood to adulthood i.e. age group (11-19 years). The age group of 11-19 years was further subdivided into three divisions i.e. upto 15 years (early adolescence), 15-17 years (mid adolescence), >17 years (late adolescence). The unit of analysis were adolescents age group of 15-17 years and studying in the classes IX to XI. There are 21 Government senior secondary schools in Sangrur

tehsil (15 rural and 6 urban in two Blocks). 10 senior secondary schools were selected on the basis of random sampling. From each selected school, six adolescents were contacted for the present research. An attempt was made to give equal representation to both male and female adolescents, in the 50:50 ratio of male and female adolescents. Two adolescents (one male and one female) were selected from each class on random basis. As number of classes were three (IX –XI) thus, six adolescents from one school were included. In all 60 adolescents were included in the sample under study. A semi structured interview schedule was used to collect the information.

Results

Profile There were 30 male adolescent students and 30 female adolescent students included in the study. There were 10 male and 15 female adolescents in the age group of up to 15 years, 18 male and 12 female adolescents were in the age group of 15-17 years and 2 male and 3 female adolescents were in age group of more than 17 years. The failure rate in a particular class was less for female adolescents resulted in lower age of female adolescents. Thus there were more male adolescents of higher age than female adolescents. The adolescents from class 9th, 10th and 11th were included. There was equal distribution i.e. 33.3% of both male and female adolescents in all the three classes. There were 86.7% of male adolescents and 76.7% of female adolescents who hailed from rural background. A few adolescents from urban areas were also attending these schools due to their proximity to the cities. There were 43.3% of male adolescents who had both brother(s) and sister(s). A majority of the female adolescents i.e. 76.3% belonged to nuclear families whereas 50% of the male adolescents belonged to nuclear families.

In case of the male adolescents a large number of mothers were illiterate. There were 60 % of the fathers of the male adolescents who had educational qualification up to high school. There were 50% of the mothers of the female adolescents who had education up to high school. There were 26.7% of mothers who were illiterate, while 10% fathers were illiterate in the sample under study. A majority of the mothers of the male adolescents i.e. 90 % were house wives/ not working. There were 13.3% fathers of the male adolescents who were labourers, 26.7% of them were farmers, 23.3% of them were engaged in private jobs and 26.7% fathers were running their own small business. A majority of the mothers of the female adolescents i.e. 66.7 % were housewives or not working. In case of fathers of the female adolescents, 30% of them were engaged in Government jobs while 26.7 % of them had their own small business, 13.3% of them were engaged in farming.

It was found that 46.7% of parents of the male adolescents owned land while 56.7% parents of the female adolescents owned land. Among those who possessed land majority owned small chunk of land i.e. less than five acres. A majority of the male adolescents i.e. 73.3% reported Rs. 20,000 as their

total monthly family income while 23.3% reported their total family income between Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 40,000. There were 43.3% of the the female adolescents who had total family income up to Rs. 20,000 while 40% of them had total family income from Rs 20,000 to Rs 40,000. Families of female adolescents had comparatively higher monthly income than families of male adolescents.

Significance and content of sex education

There are two major viewpoints through which various scholars and educationist view the issue of sex education. These are abstinence-only sex education and comprehensive sex education. Abstinence-only sex education includes discussion of values, character building, and in some cases refusal skills. Broadly it promotes abstinence from sex, does not acknowledge any sexual activity among adolescents, does not teach about contraception or condom use and cites sexually transmitted diseases and HIV as reasons to remain abstinent. However comprehensive sex education promotes abstinence from sexual activity but acknowledges sexual activity among adolescent, include topics about contraception, condom, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV.

In Indian setting there is a hot debate on the issue of sex education in schools and there are also opposing views about sex education. Sex education in schools is a sensitive issue. The viewpoint about the significance of sex education largely determines the content of sex education he/she approves to be in schools. The content of sex education is the most debated issue with no definite consensus building on it. In the present study an attempt has been made to explore the opinion of respondents about significance and content of sex education.

The views of adolescents about the significance of sex education were recorded on the basis of ten statements framed on significance of sex education. The responses were categorized into two types i.e. positive and negative. Positive significance showed that sex education is beneficial for the society and negative significance showed that sex education has negative outcomes. An attempt has been made to find out the relationship between age of adolescent according to gender and their tendency towards significance of sex education.

Table 1

Distribution showing association between age of adolescents and the significance of sex education

Significance Of Sex Education	Age of Adolescents					
	Upto15		15-17		>17	
	M (N-10)	F (N-15)	M (N-18)	F (N-12)	M (N-2)	F (N-3)
No. (%)						
Positive	2 (20)	7 (46.7)	8 (44.4)	7 (58.3)	2 (100)	2 (66.7)
Negative	8 (80)	8 (53.3)	10 (55.6)	5 (41.7)	0 (0)	1 (33.3)

(Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

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Results indicated that there were 20% of the male and 46.7% of the female adolescents in age group of up to 15 years who favoured comprehensive sex education. In the age group of 15-17 years there were 44.4% of the male and 58.3% of female adolescents who viewed sex education through the significance of comprehensive sex education. However in the age group more than 17 years all the males and 66.7% of female adolescents showed inclination towards comprehensive sex education. It is pertinent to mention here that a majority of adolescents favoured comprehensive type of sex education.

Content of Sex Education

An attempt has been made to find out the relationship between age of adolescent according to gender and content of sex education.

Table 2 Distribution showing age of adolescents and their opinion on content of sex education

Content Of Sex Education	Age of Adolescents					
	upto15		15-17		>17	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
	No. (%)					
Comprehensive	0	6 (40)	8 (44.4)	5 (41.6)	1 (50)	3 (100)
abstinence-only	10 (100)	9 (60)	10 (55.6)	7 (58.4)	1 (50)	0

(Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

It was found that 44.4% of male adolescents in the age group of 15-17years and 50%male adolescents in more than 17years of age group showed tendency towards comprehensive sex education. It was found that the male adolescents of middle and upper adolescence period suggested more topics for sex education similar to comprehensive sex education. In case of female adolescents there were 40% in age group of up to 15years, 41.6% in the age group of 15-17years and all in age group of more than 17years showed preference for comprehensive sex education. The female adolescents were more decisive than male adolescents. They wanted the inclusion of topics of comprehensive sex education. The plausible reason for such results might be that onset of puberty in females is earlier than males which results in enhanced curiosity about pubertal transitions in comparison to male adolescents of early adolescence period.

Results depict that both male and female adolescents showed propensity towards comprehensive sex education but were also doubtful and hesitant about the inclusion of topic on contraception. The plausible reason for this might be their socialization in which open discussion about sexuality and contraception is discouraged.

Level at which Sex Education should be Introduced

It is propagated that sex education at an appropriate time can bring about a healthy change in behaviour of adolescents. An attempt has been made

to probe the opinion of adolescents about level at which sex education should be introduced in schools.

Table 3 Distribution showing the opinion of adolescents about the level at which sex education should be introduced

Level	UPTO 15		15-17		>17		p-value	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
	No. (%)							
6-8 th	4 (40)	12 (80)	2 (11.2)	10 (83.3)	0	3 (100)	0.143	0.697
9-10 th	6 (60)	3 (20)	16 (88.9)	2 (16.6)	2 (100)	0 (0)		

Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

Results show that there were 40% of the male and 80% of the female adolescents in the age group of up to 15 years, who reported that sex education should be introduced at 6th-8th class. However there were 60% of the male adolescents and 20% of the female adolescents who favoured the inception of sex education at class 9th-10th. In the age group of 15-17 years, a majority of the male adolescents i.e. 88.9% favoured inception of sex education in the classes of 9th-10th and a majority of the females i.e. 83.3% favoured the inception of sex education in class 6th-8th. In the age group of more than 17 years all the male adolescents favoured inception of sex education at 9th-10th class level and all the female adolescents favoured the inception of sex education at the 6th-8th class level. Statistical analysis indicated no association between the age groups of male and female adolescents and the academic level at which sex education should be introduced in schools.

Female adolescents favoured inception of sex education at 6th-8th class but male adolescents favoured inception of sex education at 9th-10th class. The plausible reason of this difference in perception about inception of sex education between male and female adolescents could be early pubertal maturation among the girls than the boys. Thus female adolescents seek information on pubertal changes at an early age in comparison to male adolescents.

Agencies Essential For Imparting Sex Education

Sex education is seen as a solution to the multifaceted problems of adolescents. But any success of sex education is ill conceived without having the opinion of adolescent about involvement of persons who are entrusted with sorting out the problem of their sexuality. An attempt has been made to probe about the opinion of adolescent on the various agencies involved in imparting sex education.

Table 4 Distribution showing the opinion of adolescents about involvement of persons imparting sex education

Agencies	UPTO 15		15-17		>17		P-Value	
	M (N-10)	F (N-15)	M (N-18)	F (N-12)	M (N-2)	F (N-3)	M	F
	No. (%)							
Parents	6 (60)	15 (100)	12 (66.7)	12 (100)	1 (50)	3 (100)	0.866	-
Teachers	10 (100)	15 (100)	18 (100)	12 (100)	2 (100)	3 (100)	-	-
Counsellor	10 (100)	12 (80)	18 (100)	10 (83.3)	2 (100)	3 (100)	-	0.697
Doctor	8 (80)	13 (86.7)	18 (100)	11 (91.7)	2 (100)	3 (100)	0.117	0.757

(Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

*Multiple choices were provided.

Nearly all the male adolescents in the age group of up to 15 years favoured the involvement of teachers, counselor and medical practitioners in sex education programme. There were 60% of the male adolescents in the age group of up to 15 years who reported involvement of parents in sex education programme. In case of female adolescents, all in the age group up to 15 years favoured the involvement of parents, and teachers and a majority favoured involvement of counselors and medical practitioners in the process of imparting sex education. All the male adolescents in the age group of 15-17 years favoured inclusion of teachers, counselors and medical practitioners in sex education. There were only 66.7% of the male adolescents of this age group who favoured the involvement of parents in the sex education programme. Similarly all the female adolescents in the age group of 15-17 years favoured inclusion of parents and teachers. However, a majority favoured involvement of counselors and medical practitioners in the process of imparting sex education. In the age group of more than 17 years, there were 50% of the male adolescents and all the females favoured parental involvement in sex education. However, all the male and female adolescents favoured involvement of the teachers, the counselors and the medical practitioners.

Techniques Used For Imparting Sex Education

Sex education is aimed to equip the individuals with sex-related information, motivation, and behavioral skills that will enable them to sort out their sex-related problems and to achieve sexual well-being. An attempt has been made to explore the opinion of adolescents about various techniques for imparting sex education to adolescents.

Table 5 Distribution showing the opinion of adolescents about techniques for imparting sex education

Techniques	UPTO 15		15-17		>17		P-Value	
	M (N-10)	F (N-15)	M (N-18)	F (N-12)	M (N-2)	F (N-3)	M	F
	No. (%)							
Lecture Method	7 (70)	8 (53.3)	9 (50)	4 (33.3)	1 (50)	0 (0)	0.581	0.188
Discussion	10 (100)	15 (100)	17 (94.5)	12 (100)	2 (100)	3 (100)	0.708	-
Books/Literature	10 (100)	10 (66.7)	17 (94.5)	7 (58.3)	2 (100)	3 (100)	0.708	0.391
Usage Of Charts	10 (100)	15 (100)	18 (100)	12 (100)	2 (100)	3 (100)	-	-
Multimedia	10 (100)	8 (63.3)	17 (94.5)	6 (50)	2 (100)	3 (100)	0.708	0.275

(Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

*Multiple choices were provided.

In the age group of up to 15 years case, all the male adolescents favoured inclusion of lecture method, discussion, provision of books, literature/charts and multimedia as techniques for imparting sex education. There were a majority of the female adolescents in the age group of up to 15 years who reported discussion, books, and charts as techniques to be used for imparting sex education. There were 53.3% of the female adolescents who reported inclusion of lecture method and multimedia as a technique for imparting sex education. In the age group of 15-17 years a majority of the male and the female adolescents reported that discussion, books, charts/literature and multimedia should be used for imparting sex education. In the age group of more than 17 years there was one case who stated inclusion of lecture method as technique for imparting sex education. However, all the male and the female adolescents stated that discussion, books, charts and multimedia techniques should be included for imparting sex education. Results depicted that both male and female adolescents favoured the use of multiple teaching techniques for imparting sex education. It was also observed that the adolescents favoured the inclusion of multimedia while teaching sex education..

Gender Of Teacher For Imparting Sex Education

As sex education is centered on the issue of sexuality and gender, so the gender of the teacher dealing with sex education is also important. In Indian society discussing issues of sexuality with the person of opposite sex is not considered good. An attempt has been made to know the gender of the teacher imparting sex education from adolescents.

Table 6 Distribution showing the opinion of adolescents about gender of teacher for imparting sex education

Gender	Upto 15		15-17		>17		P-Value	
	M (N-10)	F (N-15)	M (N-18)	F (N-12)	M (N-2)	F (N-3)	M	F
	No. (%)							
Same Gender Teacher	9 (90)	10 (66.7)	11 (61.1)	9 (75)	2 (100)	3 (100)	0.171	0.484
Teacher Of Any Sex	1 (10)	5 (33.3)	7 (38.9)	3 (25)	0	0		

(Percentages have been calculated from total males and females in their respective age group)

In the age group of up to 15 years a majority of the male adolescents i.e. 90% and 66.7% female adolescents reported that sex education should be provided by the same gender teacher i.e. male teacher to boys and female teachers to girls in separate tutorials. In the age group of 15-17 years there were 61.1% of the male adolescents and 75% of the female adolescents who reported that sex education must be provided by same gender teacher in separate tutorials. All male and female adolescents of age group of more than 17 years stated that same gender teacher should be employed to impart sex education. Results indicate that a majority of both male and female adolescents argued that it is easy to point a query to same gender teacher than to opposite gender teacher. Adolescents also showed the conviction that same gender teacher would address the problem of their sexuality with more competence than with opposite gender teacher.

Discussion

The present paper attempts to highlight the perception of adolescents on imparting sex education. It is a fact that changes in society and educational structure go hand in hand. All societies are changing and these changes must be synchronized with the changes in family and educational system. In modern times there is greater onus on schools to socialize children. The shrinking role of family adds more concern about education in schools. As our Indian society, is in transitional stage we need to update our functioning of educational system. Sex education is some-what more contentious issue in our society than in western world. Modern society is continuously threatened from growing problems directly related to flawed sexual behavior in our adolescents. It reflects that there is some flaw in our education system. Other problems like AIDS and wrong sex behavior of adolescents is also haunting our society. Social concerns such as adolescent pregnancy, vulnerability and spread of STD among adolescents have forced both parents and teachers to think seriously on sex education. It is believed that the sex education can help us in this area. The views of adolescents on sex

education would help us to understand their problems of sexuality and their stand with regard to sex education.

Results show that adolescents are in the great need of correct and reliable information on the multifarious changes happening to them. Indian culture and value system also act as impediment in the way of free flow of correct and reliable information from adults to adolescents. Adolescents supported the inception of complete and comprehensive type of sex education in schools and also suggested the collaborative role to parents and doctor (medical staff) in the overall curriculum of sex education.

Adolescents in the present study favoured the inception of complete and comprehensive type of sex education in schools. They reported that sex education in schools would not have negative influence on teacher–student relationship. Most of them opined that as teachers never supply any wrong information and it would help them to sort out their pubertal concerns adequately in a positive manner .Female adolescents favoured inception of sex education at 6th-8th class whereas male adolescents favoured inception of sex education at 9th-10th class. The plausible reason of this difference in perception about inception of sex education between male and female adolescents could be early sexual maturation among the girls than the boys. Thus female adolescents seek information on pubertal changes at an early age in comparison to male adolescents.

Adolescents suggested that curriculum of sex education should be designed by parents, teachers, counselors and medical practitioners. It was found that both male and female adolescents favoured the use of multiple teaching techniques for imparting sex education. Adolescents reported that discussion, books, charts/literature and multimedia should be used as techniques for imparting sex education.

Adolescents reported that they need correct information regarding their sexuality and pubertal transitions from a genuine source. As girls mature at an early age in comparison to boys they need the information about various facets of pubertal change at an earlier stage. It is irony of the situation that adults usually remain silent and ignore the need of information concerning sexual /pubertal transition of adolescents. Adolescents usually depend upon peers and media to get the information about sexuality. Adolescents favoured the inception of comprehensive sex education in schools and they also wanted collaborative efforts of teachers, parents and medical professionals.

The present study indicates that adolescents are in need of correct information on pubertal transition and sexuality from the genuine source. Adolescent showed there affinity towards the inception of comprehensive sex education.

Sexuality is not only about disease or pregnancy prevention, but rather it is about much broader and deeper issues essential to living whole and fulfilling lives. We can't underestimate the importance of teaching our children about sexuality to

ensure their health and wellbeing. They will use the knowledge and skills throughout their lives. Therefore it's crucial to invest in their teachers' training. If attention is given to the needs of teachers and an adequate training program is developed, implementation of a sexuality education program is not only possible and rewarding, but also invaluable to our children.

Adolescents need to be given platform to express their views regarding their reproductive needs as well as evaluation of sex education sources and messages provided. Adolescents should not be seen as passive recipients but as active agents in the communication process. This will help in the implementation of adolescent friendly services. Adolescents should not be denied complete and accurate information in the name of 'cultural silence'.

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