

## Parents need to grow up to give kids sex education: Experts

Parents need to understand their children and when they begin growing up should discuss with them sex education, participants stressed on the opening day of the three-day conference on reproductive and sexual health and rights here Monday.

At the 4th Asia Pacific Conference on Reproductive and Sexual Health and Rights (APCRSH), the discussion on sex education among the youth started with a panel member asking how many people had used a condom during their last sexual encounter.

Quite expectedly, the question drew a blank response, with participants, including NGO members, journalists, parliamentarians and researchers, looking the other way.

The obvious next question was that if educated, and so-called liberal adults, do not feel comfortable discussing such an issue in public, how is anyone supposed to have open discussions with children on sex education.

'This is the biggest challenge that we are facing,' said Radhika Chandiramani, executive director of the south and southeast Asia Resource Centre on Sexuality.

Narrating an incident while conducting a study in a rural area in Orissa, Chandiramani said that on asking the children about sex education, they replied that they would prefer to learn all about it from their parents because they trust them.

'When we asked the same question to the parents, after explaining the importance of sex education in preventing diseases like AIDS, they said that they would like to discuss this with their children but don't know how.

'This just shows that the intent is there, it's just the path that's missing. And we have to work in order to bridge that communication gap,' Chandiramani told IANS.

For this, Chandiramani said that the lesson should start right at the beginning.

'Why does a parent teach a child that this is his nose, and this his eyes, but when it comes to their genital organs, it is some absurd term like 'susu'? A child should be made aware of his body and the parent shouldn't hesitate in helping him do so.

'We have to set the path right, right from the start,' she said.

Renuka Chowdhury, union Minister for Women and Child Development, added to this by saying that parents need to grow up first in order to teach their children.

'We really need to break the 'Johnson Baby' image of our children. Although it's natural that parents will always find their kids small and cute, they need to understand that their children are maturing, mentally and sexually.

'Once parents start treating their children like growing individuals, discussing any subject should not be complicated,' Chowdhury said.

Deputy executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Purnima Mane said that sex education could probably be given a different spin in order to make it a more comfortable issue of discussion between parents and children.

'In order to ensure that kids are aware, things like the transmission of AIDS or even child abuse should be discussed with them openly. A different spin like sex education helps save lives, can give the entire 'uncomfortable' situation a different feel,' Mane said.

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