

Human Sexuality

Unit 4 Contents

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Population and Family Life

Unit 4 : Human Sexuality

Unit Introduction

Sexuality is an area that needs exploration of its many aspects to aid the youth in developing their sense of self and personality. The self in its entirety includes a sexual part, the acknowledgement of which is important for a healthy development of the individual. This unit is therefore included to ensure that the student comprehends about sexuality with special reference to values and ethics of sexual behaviour. Practice of responsible sexual behaviour ultimately means making the earth a more healthy place to live in. Irresponsible sexual behaviour results in infections and diseases, a higher rate of population, adolescent pregnancies and a degeneration of traditional cultural mores and values. This unit intends to guide youth about sexuality by clearing confusions, to help them to come to terms with their own sexual awareness and identity and to help them in making the right choices when they are faced with demanding situations.

Learning objectives of the unit

After studying this unit, you should be able to :

- comprehend the concept of sexuality and its development.
- equip yourself with the knowledge of sexuality that would prepare you for a responsible adulthood.
- discuss about certain sociological aspects of sexuality.

Concept of sex and sexuality

The term sex is normally used to refer to the gender of an individual. More commonly it is used interchangeably with sexual intercourse meaning the physical intimacy between two individuals. Sex may hold different meanings for different people. Sex can be love, a challenge, an insult, a sport, a weapon, an obsession, a pastime, a tranquilliser. The most beautiful aspect of sex is the physical and emotional intimacy between two persons which expresses each one's need, desire and love for the other.

Sex is necessary and essential part of marital life. Apart from the purpose of procreation, sex serves as a language of love, a re-energiser of loving relationships. The need to love and be loved, to be recognised and appreciated, characteristic of any human relationship, are contributory factors to the success of a marriage and family.

There is a lot of controversy about what is normal or natural in sex. There is no rule of thumb. Sexual norms vary with community. A well known psychologist put it succinctly "sexual relationship between two persons, with love, understanding, caring and sharing without coercion, knowing the consequence of the behaviour, is natural and normal".

What is sexuality ?

Sexuality is a term that is used to describe a fine combination of physical, emotional intellectual and social aspects of a person's personality which expresses maleness or femaleness. Sexuality therefore refers to the total personality of the individual. It includes :

- How does one feel about oneself ?
- How does one feels about being a man or a woman ?
- How does one gets along with embers of either gender ?
- How does one tackle educational and social goals ?

Sexuality also includes genital and reproductive health such as intercourse and child bearing (refer to unit 3 of this block).

What is sex drive ?

Sex drive is a biological instinct among human beings which is an impulse related to sex. The sex drive is present right from childhood (for instance, you must have noticed a baby touching its genitals and getting pleasure out it). It however, becomes more defined during adolescence. This is a period when sexual feelings increase and become more focused. The focus may be on another individual of the opposite sex. (what about homosexuality?). The sex drive is characterised by :

- attraction towards the opposite sex
- wet dreams

- fantasy
- having "crushes"
- masturbation
- urge to have sex.

Sexual thoughts and behaviour are a natural part of humans existence. The frequency with which these thoughts come may vary and what stimulates sexual thoughts and behaviour could be different for different individuals. It is important to remember that all this is normal and health. However, sex needs to be handled with maturity due to its possible consequences. The following section deals with this aspect i.e., responsible sexual behaviour.

Responsible sexual behaviour

The appropriateness of sexual behaviour varies with different countries, according to the differing customs and traditions. What is appropriate in one culture may not be appropriate in another culture. Sexuality is expressed in many ways. In adolescence, common among them are masturbation, dating someone from the opposite sex, dancing, kissing, holding hands, premarital sex. What is important to remember is that sexual feelings must be expressed in a way that do not harm oneself or any other.

Sex and mental maturity

Sex, if not handled with maturity can result in harmful consequences - physical, emotional and health related. For this reason it is better to wait till one is mature enough. Adolescents like to discuss about sex only with their peer group. This sometimes can result in the youth taking a lot of wrong decisions. For instance, challenges from one's peers about one's ability to perform sexually can be a strong motivator to indulge in sex early. Not to be sexually active is then considered a sign of immaturity. However, our ability to be sexually active is not a sign of adulthood, but being able to wait is a definite sign of maturity.

A relationship cannot be based on physical attraction alone. A healthy and lifelong relationship survives on :

- Knowledge : of the likes and dislikes of the other person which brings compassion and understanding.
- Responsibility : consciousness of one's behaviour and its effect on the other person and being able to respond to the needs of others.
- Understanding : being able to place oneself in the shoes of the other and being sensitive to his/her needs and feelings.
- Selflessness : willingness to work for and give oneself fully to each other.

- Trust: entrusting oneself to the other, having confidence in the strength and understanding of his/her love.
- Respect: acknowledging the other's rights and personality.

Common sexual experiences in adolescence

The growing up stage with its novel life experiences may leave the adolescent on an emotional roller coaster. Described below are a few common experiences which are included to clear some confusions in the adolescent's mind.

● **Love and Infatuation**

Due to a heightened sexual drive, there is a natural attraction between boys and girls in adolescence. They start forming mixed groups and learn about each other's interests and needs. Strong friendships develop which may be life long. At other times, infatuation occurs when the adolescent believes that he or she is in love with another person. As they grow up and become emotionally mature, the youth develop the ability to differentiate between love and infatuation, between a life long friendship and a friendship that ends in a marriage partnership. There are probably as many definitions of love as there are lovers in the world. It would suffice to say that love is the mutual giving and receiving of care, respect and support that binds two persons close enough to want to share their lives together.

● **Masturbation**

Masturbation means the stimulation of the sexual organs to secure pleasure. Both boys and girls may indulge in it. It is part of the normal process of growing up. This is perfectly a normal behaviour. A lot of boys tend to worry about their health after masturbating. But no physical harm results from masturbation. However, one should not equate masturbation with real love making. While masturbation is self-centred, making love to another person is a shared experience, a means of expressing mutual love, and a giving as well as taking of physical and emotional satisfaction.

● **Homosexuality**

Some times youth of the same sex develop intimacy and indulge in mutual masturbation or similar erotic behaviour. This is more common in conservative cultures where a strong sex segregation is practised. In rare cases it is practised by some people who are not capable of having heterosexual relationship.

● **Pre-marital Sex**

The sex drive experienced by boys and girls some times leads to pre-marital sex which is not approved by the society. The main reason being that both partners are not mature emotionally and physically to face the consequences of such relationship which can result in pregnancy and accompanying negative impacts.

Responsible parenthood

The youth of today will be the parents of tomorrow. Responsible parenthood is a term given to the process of giving birth and bringing up children in a way that promotes the well being of the family without compromising on health, education and other amenities that increase the quality of life. In order to fulfil this role it is necessary for the youth to understand about reproduction and develop healthy attitudes toward living and parenting. The youth should understand that parenthood must be by choice and not by chance. How many children to have, when to have them and why to have them are issues that need thinking over and discussing with one's partner. All this requires planning in advance. Once a marriage is settled, a dialogue should be established between the couple about conception and contraception. Besides knowledge on the spacing and number of children, they should also be aware of their economic status, and knowledge and ability of upbringing including education.

Today even after marriage young people in many communities are hesitant and feel embarrassed to talk about sex and issues related to it. However, it is important to bear in mind that talking about sex and sexuality is not "immoral" or "bad". Rather it has positive implications in helping the youth to practice sexual behaviour in a responsible manner and to take rational and responsible decisions about parenting.

Some measures that help the youth in responsible sexual behaviour are :

- Contraception - a means of preventing conception. It can be achieved By controlling the release of the egg by taking certain hormonal substances
- preventing the male sperm from meeting the egg by the use of a barrier
- preventing the fertilised egg from settling in the lining of the uterus by the use of devises that make the uterus unreceptive to a fertilised egg.

Family planning could be practised by married people to help them to have children when they are emotionally, physically and economically ready to bear and rear the children. Various types of contraceptive methods are used by couples who practice family planning. Family planning offers them a choice of how many children to have and when to have them. It also helps couples who are infertile to conceive. It is a method that promotes the welfare of the family by safeguarding the health of women and children. Family planning, therefore, aids couples in bearing the responsibility of parenthood.



Self-help questions

Explain the terms sexuality. How does it differ from the term sex ?

The main reason adolescents feel apprehensive and guilty about their sexual urge is lack of information'. Comment.

Define responsible sexual behaviour.

Unit Summary

This unit discussed meaning of sex and sexuality. The purpose of physical intimacy is described as beyond procreation. More importantly it contributes in a larger measure to the success of marriage and family life. Sexuality and sex drive have different connotations; while the former is a reflection of a comprehensive personality of the individual concerned, the latter is the biological instinct related to sex. Responsible sexual behaviour of a person is closely related to the mental maturity of the person. Various factors that contribute to the healthy and life-long relationship between a man and a woman are described. Whereas talking about sex and sexuality need not be considered as taboo, knowledge about such matters have positive impact on individuals, and in fact help the youth towards following healthy sexual practices and a responsible parenthood.