

Defending Teenagers

Riko Niino (NIT (KOSEN), Wakayama College)

What do you do when you catch a cold? Go to hospital, take medicine, take a rest, or get some advice from your family and friends? I think most people have common knowledge about cold treatments. Now, what would you do if you had an unexpected pregnancy? Is there someone you could talk to about it? Would you know how to deal with it yourself?

I'm an open-minded person so sometimes my friends consult me about their sexual concerns. For example, "I want to take birth control pills, but I'm too ashamed to go to hospital" or "My period hasn't come yet, I am anxious. What should I do?" They don't know what to do. They can't even ask for advice from their friends or family because they are too ashamed. I feel frustrated when I see them so worried. Why do we need to feel ashamed of talking about and protecting our bodies? Our sexual health is at risk because of shame.

In Japan, the number of teenage abortions is close to 13,000 cases a year. In addition, more than 3,000 teenagers become victims of sexual abuse every year. These data suggest that teenagers may not have the necessary knowledge to protect themselves. In fact, WHO and UNESCO promote sexual education based on an effective, learner-centric approach in their guidelines called Comprehensive Sexuality Education, or CSE in short. CSE isn't just about sexual intercourse or childbirth. It is sex education based on science, gender equality, and human rights. It is called comprehensive because it teaches the emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. Although CSE has eight areas, Japanese sex education only focuses on the physical concepts: the human body, and sexual and reproductive health. However, we don't cover important matters such as relationships or sexual behavior. A lack of knowledge in these areas leads to low self-esteem, prejudice, sexual discrimination, and even sexual abuse.

I think we need to prevent people from being hurt by ignorance. So, I decided to take action myself. I tried to conduct a survey in school in order to investigate fellow students' perceptions and needs regarding sex education. The purpose of the survey was to understand the actual situation of students and to encourage our school to set up counseling facilities and hold lectures for students. However, I was very shocked when some teachers refused to conduct the survey, saying the contents were too sensitive and provocative. There was also a backlash from schoolmates. There are teachers who support my project but it has gone nowhere fast. The negative attitude of my school precisely reflects the lack of openness and sense of shame regarding sexuality in our society.

Sex education should never be a shameful thing, and nor is it something we should keep quiet about. In particular, teenagers, our generation, are naturally curious about sex, but still very vulnerable. You may have sexual problems or feel uncomfortable with your body. A society where you can't talk to anyone about these concerns should be outdated by now. We need comprehensive sexuality education in all educational

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(NIT (KOSEN), Wakayama College)

institutions, including KOSEN. I believe knowledge is the most powerful tool we have to protect our bodies and minds.