Chapter 8: CONCLUSION

8.1. The Significant Findings of the Study

The significant findings of the study with their implications of understanding of larger interconnected realities are given below. It is followed by the policy implications of the study, limitations that cannot be overcome and the further scope for research.

I. Only 30 per cent of the schools practiced high level of intervention so far as the adolescents’ issues are concerned. The textual resource materials circulated within schools affiliated to CBSE and WBBSE boards demanded high level of commitment from the teachers which they failed to fulfill due to organizational constraints of the time-bound schooling system. The proactive character of the schools in imparting sexuality education is determined by the Board of Secondary Education to which the school is affiliated. It is found that schools affiliated to CBSE board and WBBSE board are more positively inclined towards imparting sexuality education than those affiliated to ICSE board. Textual resources developed by WBBSE focused more on delicate, contentious issues related to adolescents whereas most comprehensive biological information is provided by textbooks approved and followed by ICSE board.

II. The sample of parents and teachers represents educated Hindu Bengali community belonging to families falling under middle-income group categories. The sample of teachers-educators and counsellors interviewed are competent educators having an average experience of 20 years. The average age of the sample of adolescent respondents are found to be 16 years approximately. Age wise the sample is homogenous, stable and matured given that most respondents belonged to mid- and late adolescence. Almost all adolescents went to regular, co-education schools and represented educated, middle-income group families belonging to the Bengali-Hindu community.
On analysing the general definition and conceptualization of sexuality education is concerned, it is found that the majority of the stakeholders are unaware of the holistic approach of comprehensiveness of sexuality education. Only a moderate section of parents and teacher reiterated that sexuality education has an integrated and holistic approach towards the development of the adolescents through teaching of essential life skills and by providing necessary information on ARSH. Majority of the stakeholders; a substantial number of parents and teachers exhibited a restricted and limited understanding of sexuality education. They conceptualized sexuality education to have a narrow focus whereby it deals only with teaching about sex, sexual behaviour, STIs and STDs and about pregnancy and contraception. More or less similar ideas are also found to be nurtured by the adolescent-respondents; most of them defined sexuality education as instructions on how to have sexual intercourse and how to deal with sex-related problems. Adolescents’ showed low level of awareness regarding sexuality education. They agreed that sexuality education is necessary for them but only to prepare them as an adult and to create awareness about their sexuality. They could not visualized sexuality education as contributing to their knowledge about life skills including academic performances or in improving their relationship with family and peer-group. Thus, 47 per cent adolescents considered that sexuality education will instil proper attitude towards love, sex and sexuality but almost 36 per cent are undecided whether or not sexuality education can instigate sexual activities. The same fear that talking about sex will promote and/or increase sexual activities among young people is found among majority of parents and teachers; they believe sexuality education provide information about how to have ‘safe sex’ when it discusses contraception. This disparity between the actual nature of sexuality education and the way it is perceived has larger cultural implications. The stakeholders reflect the conservative view on sexuality education rooted in the patriarchal normative structure; the conservative view also influences their everyday experiences, their ‘lifeworld’ and their taken-for-granted ‘stock of knowledge’. The enduring and consistent character of the narrow, problem-specific conceptualization results
from structured ‘mental habits’. Thus socially rooted assumptions explain the stakeholders’ inhibition and taboo against sexuality education.

IV. On analysing the role of parents in providing informal sexuality education, it is found that higher percentages of parent-respondents avoided intimate topics involving human sexuality and sensitive issues such as practicing unsafe sex risk-taking behaviour. They stressed too much on value-education and socially approved behaviours. This reflected the cultural lag whereby even within modern families, traditional familistic emphasis on values and relationships continued to persist. So far as the teachers are concerned, they are also found to be more comfortable in providing value education in Life Style/Life Skills classes. Among the ARSH components, changes during puberty, HIV-AIDS and reproductive process are discussed more by the teachers than issues related to pornography, teenage sexual relationships, unprotected sex and its consequences.

V. Most parent-respondents, especially mothers are found to engage in moderate to high degree of communication with adolescents. Mothers are found to be communicating more than fathers. Adolescents are also found to be more comfortable with the idea of involving their mothers instead of their fathers. The preference for mother to father is because they are not the main socializing agent or the head authority figure in the family. In the patriarchal set up fathers are the head authority figure and so adolescents’ relationship with them is more formal than their relationship with their mother. It can be deduced that adolescents are more emotionally close to their mother. Also it need to be noted that socially learned gendered notions permeate through the process of imparting sexuality education and determines the expected role of the educators. Female teachers are also found to discuss life skills components more in class than male teachers who delivered more instructions on sensitive ARSH components. Due to their gender roles and definitions of femininity, female teachers are more inhibited to talk about sex, sexual behaviour and sexuality more than male teachers.
VI. The main problem associated with parents-led sexuality education appears to be parents’ indifferent attitude towards sexuality education; they regarded it as not important and therefore unnecessary for the adolescents. Inhibition, avoidance and lack of motivation to initiate the process of communication also appeared to be major problems affecting parents’ role as sexuality educator. In case the formal sexuality education, the fact that the teachers are overburdened and are lacking in motivation and enterprise to successfully implement formal sexuality education emerged as an important impediment in the process of imparting sexuality education. In case of both parents and teachers, their subjective inhibitions towards sexuality education appeared to a significant hindrance to their role as socialiser and educator.

VII. In spite of inhibitions nearly 80 per cent of both parents and teacher respondents supported sexuality education and concurred on the need of relevant communication through family-led informal and school-based formal sexuality education. It is to be noted that majority of the parents and teacher respondents did not receive sexuality education during their adolescence; they are not socialized to provide sexuality education as a part of their duty as caregivers yet they supported sexuality education. This contradiction and inherent ambiguity in the behaviour of the adult caregivers can be seen as reflexive action of the modern individual. Reflexivity is a dynamic characteristic of modernity whereby social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices. Thus the actor or agents are becoming increasingly free of structural constraint and better able to reflexively create not only themselves but also the societies in which they live. The self become something to be reflected upon, altered and even moulded. The adult caregivers have internalized the social norms to a great extent but are able to resist and control their inhibition, reflect critically upon their role as socialiser and the need to provide sexuality education. They are being reflexive of their role are able to modify it and support sexuality education to some extent. That is why it is found that in spite organizational problem, absence of social support and personal inhibitions,
most parents and teachers do not oppose or resist sexuality education extremely, they tries to follow a middle-path appeasing the social norms at one hand and trying address necessary adolescent issues. They do intervene at some level.

VIII. **Gender also shaped learners’ behaviour and their interpersonal relationship and communication.**

Thus it is found that romantically involved female adolescents are found to suffer from mental stress, anxiety, guilt and depression than their sexually active male counterparts; male adolescents cherished their sexuality whereas the female adolescents felt inhibited in expressing sexual desire or passion. As a result, girls directed their guilt though self-inflicted pain whereas boys sexually gratified them though watching pornography or practicing self-pleasure. Further 67 per cent female adolescents are less likely to explore media and Internet for information. Whereas 55 per cent of the adolescents accessing media and Internet for information are male.

Male adolescents also emerge as significant viewers of pornography and sexually explicit content given that the media market is mostly driven by the need to titillate male sexuality through various imagery of the female body and sexuality.

IX. Higher percentage male adolescents (84 per cent) are informed of the stage of adolescence compared to female adolescents. Adolescent girls are found to be more aware (79 per cent) of negative impacts of early marriage and pregnancy than boys. **Awareness and curiosity about menstruation is high among all the respondents in contrast to the silence regarding nocturnal emission.** All adolescent girls are aware of menstruation but 30 per cent boys have no knowledge of nocturnal emission and reason for its occurrence. Majority of adolescent boys (96per cent) affirmed their knowledge of relationships showing more confidence than girls because they experience less social constrains and prohibition to explore relationships. Irrespective of gender, adolescents’ perception about sexual relationships is restricted to sexual intercourse, marriage, and pregnancy; their expressions of sexuality are delimited to romantic affairs, flirtations and bodily practices such as masturbation. Very few adolescents are found to
be aware of homosexuality or sexual diversity in general; those who known regarded it as an abnormal tendency unacceptable by society. Most adolescents showed low level of awareness against sexual abuse but when compared adolescent girls are found to be more aware of sexual abuse given that caregivers provide required advice to potential female victims. Majority of the respondents are found to be incapable of indentifying a ‘bad’ touch and they have no idea of protecting themselves from potential threats. Male adolescents are found to be more aware of risky sexual behaviour than female adolescent respondents given that they are more sexually inclined than their female counterparts whose sexual behaviour are closely guarded. The gendered character of the knowledge constructed around adolescent sexuality is well evident in the findings. The adolescent girls as well as the boys are more informed about the female body and not the vice versa. Similarly, the issue of teenage parenting is made important to female adolescents. The problem of this unequal approach is that both male and female adolescents suffer. Whereas adolescent girls suffers from the oppressive domination hidden in knowledge produced, adolescent boys suffer from constructed ignorance about their body and sexuality which increases their chances to fall victim to sexual abuse an incorrect life-choices. Again girls are found to identify parents and teachers as primary sources whereas boys identified peer groups and media as primary sources of information. Girls have also used school texts for information more than boys. All the findings reveal the strong presence of gender inequality whereby the girls are trapped by the patriarchal notions of body, sexuality and have learned the risk or danger discourse propagated more than the boys.

X. As many as 74 per cent of the sample of adolescents communicated and shared with peer group regarding adult sexual behaviour, habits and practices. The main reason cited by adolescents regarding their propensity to communicate with their peers is that since they belong to similar social status, experiencing similar problems and issues they are better able to understand each others’ perspectives than their adult caregivers. Being at par with their peers, adolescents are
able to communicate without being judged or without the fear. Given a choice between peer group and media, adolescents relied more on their peer relationships and peer networks. They positively evaluated information sharing with peer group as against the market-driven mass media with main aim to entertain. The personal attachments with peers are valued more than the impersonal media and Internet. Adolescents are found to be critical of the distorted and unrealistic erotica circulated through Internet as they seek to entertain and excite and not to inform.

XI. Adolescents find sharing with parents problematic because they feel parents do not completely trust them and are prone to misunderstand them. They also find parental surveillance offensive. Parental emphasis on morality, values and sexual abstinence broadens generation gap and parents’ inability to give time and attention to adolescent also create distance between them. So far formal sexuality education is concerned only few adolescents found Life Style classes and Life Skills classes informative and relevant. Many failed to understand the approach of life skills education and confused it with moral education. Adolescents found school authorities highly orthodox. Only 28 per cent adolescent respondents reported to have communicated with their teachers in comparison to 53 per cent who have not found it easy to share with them.

XII. Other problems located by adolescents like female adolescent respondents opinionated that boys often do not show proper respect and attitude towards teachers and so circumstances may not be suitable to start sexuality education in schools. According to some other respondents, students are already overburdened with a huge syllabus and large number of extra-curricular activities in which case a separate programme of sexuality education will only add to their burden.

XIII. It is also evident from the responses given by adolescents that they occupy a subservient position within family, especially in lower income-group families and this acts as a significant obstruction to the empowerment of the adolescents affecting their decision-making skills, negotiating skills, assertiveness and refusal skills. Their subservient position is embedded in the
familistic traditionalism. In India, the family comes first; emphasis is laid on the hierarchy of relationships and inherent notions of authority, fulfilment of duties and obligations. Modernization has taken place but it has not been adopted fully; society is still in transition where the residual properties of tradition persist as a cultural lag.

XIV. However, parent-adolescent communication and sharing is found to be a complicated zone characterized by contradictory elements. The problem between adolescents and their parents and teacher-educators is therefore not really that of reliability. Though the question of misunderstanding, low confidence and excessive surveillance exist, yet adolescents are aware that they are safe and protected under the care and supervision of their guardians and mentors. Their caregivers take their responsibility in spite of being authoritative and judgmental. This emotional security is absent in their relationship with their peer group. It is possible that the issues involving adolescents and their primary caregivers are preliminarily based on disturbed patterns of communication. The causes of these disturbances are present in the various exchanges that take place between them in their everyday life. Data shows that more than 55 per cent of female adolescents felt shy and afraid in talking to their parents; a comparatively less number of male adolescents (around 40 per cent) felt the same. Female adolescents, as a result of gender socialization appear to be more shy than their male counterparts.

XV. When asked whether they want their parents and teachers trained and involved as sexuality educators, a section of adolescents disapproved the idea and many commented that their parents and teachers already know everything. Given their improper attitude, shyness, inhibitions and fear towards their parents and teachers it is possible that adolescents misinterpret the essential aim of involving them in sexuality education programmes. It is clear from their reactions that they do not understand that being trained in providing proper sexuality education is not restricted to the discussion of sex, sexual intercourse and sexual relations. It basic aim is to train parents and teachers on how to instill proper attitude towards sex, sexuality and how to
successfully communicate with adolescents about various sensitive, intimate but essential everyday issues. In a way adolescents’ inhibition rooted in the same social and cultural milieu is a reflection of the hesitation they observe in their parents. This mutual avoidance practiced by parents, teachers and the adolescents form the main barrier to initiate communication and therefore might be the central cause of their unsuccessful involvement in sexuality education programmes. Thus a certain amount of contradictions exist even within adolescent respondents.

XVI. On the whole the adolescents suggested few steps for a more effective sexuality education programme. (i) They suggested involvement of parents and teachers as sexuality educators as majority (65 percent) found them most reliable, trustworthy and dependable sources of information compared to peer-group and mass media. (ii) Learners also seem to prefer involvement of experts and counsellors in sexuality education programme because of their professional expertise. About 32 % of adolescents thought that sexuality education provided by skilled personnel can lead them to a more secured life.(iii) Around 56 per cent of adolescent respondents are positive about peer-based learning in sexuality education classes where trained school students would act as sources of sexuality information for other students.

The findings locates various gaps and problems in the process of imparting sexuality education but it is also evident that there are ways in which these problems could be addresses and there are opportunities for change as the respondents showed high level of internal contradictions which is result of their reflexivity.

8.2. Policy Implications of the Study

As stated earlier, this study addresses the problem and debate surrounding the possible positive contributions of sexuality education thwarted by general resistance of the society. These are difficulties embedded in the socio-cultural structures and processes that hinders formal implementation of sexuality education through educational institutions and also affects the role of primary socialisers,
parents in imparting informal sexuality education. In fact the main aim in understanding adolescents’
attitude, opinions and reflection regarding informal and formal sexuality education, its sources, its
components and its inbuilt difficulties is to form a fundamental knowledge base. On the basis of what is
learned from the adolescent respondents it might be possible to think ahead and work out possible ways
to create effective sexuality education programmes at the formal level. Even at informal level the issues
of communication, misunderstanding and domination with parents and peers can be addressed so as to
rejuvenate the interpersonal relational space. Informal sexuality education can then only be more
compliable with the present social context and parents will emerge as a competent co-operator with
teacher-educators and experts at formal level. Thus, from applied sociological perspective, I have tried
to address these issues and based on the finding suggest the following insights that can inform relevant
policy formulation in these sphere.

1. Sexuality education programmes need to create awareness among stakeholders especially
caregivers, parents and teachers. If they realize that sexuality education is restricted to talking
about sex their inhibitions will lessen. Thus the underlying holistic assumption related to
sexuality education has an instrumental dimension; the holistic approach can be used as an
heuristic attempt to lessen resistance and counter controversies.

2. Male adolescents are found to utilize sexuality education as an opportunity to held titillating
sex-talk. These misinterpretations can be problematic, thwarting the learning goals of sexuality
education programmes, making it more difficult for educators to impart knowledge. Adolescents need to be made aware of the difference between ‘sex-talk’ and sexuality
education.

3. School management and boards of secondary education have to be pro-active in implementing
sexuality education in schools. They need to change organizational settings such as class hour
and implement effective plans and policies regarding proper training of the teachers. Training
and resource materials have to be practical and easily applicable worksheets need to be prepared in order to motivate teachers.

4. On the whole, teachers need to feel involved and motivated to attain the goals of the sexuality education programme. Teachers’ awareness regarding various methods of teaching, various relevant issues and benefits of sexuality education need to be increased through proper training. They also need to have organizational support from school education board and committee. This can be done by involving more teachers instead of a single functionary. This will not only lessen their burden as individual educators but will also provide them with social support; teachers need to value their position as sexuality educator and should not be ridiculed. To make the training session more effective, a proper assessment of teachers’ capacity is needed; in other words policy-makers should concentrate on teachers’ capacity building at training sessions and workshops.

5. The pedagogy involved cannot be normative or canonical; it needs to engage open and free communication and nurture realistic and rational attitude. Teaching methods cannot be defensive, it cannot induce in fear. The pedagogy need to uphold the rights-based approach embedded in comprehensive sexuality education. Pedagogy also needs to involve peer-learning methods.

6. Adolescents took the help of their parents while filling up the questionnaires. It can be stated that filling up the questionnaire lead to some amount of interaction in regarding sex and relationships took place between them. It is also found that during interview sessions that parents’ involvement and their interaction with their children on sexuality educators developed their understanding and increased their rapport with their children. They got the opportunity initiate conversation on sensitive issues. Thus the study gave them a required opening. So far the teachers are concerned, they also got sensitised about sexuality education and adolescent issues while participating in the study. It can therefore be suggested that this research or to say
any research or workshop on sexuality education can potentially initiate communication between caregivers and adolescents. They function as a latent intervening factor. Sexuality education is therefore needs to be treated as a platform for dialogue between the stakeholders. It is absolutely necessary that the stakeholders; parents, adolescents, educators, policy-makers and administrators come together and discuss the issues to reach appropriate solutions.

7. In the context of India, the reality of sexual diversity (as manifested in homosexual and bisexual tendencies and in the presence of transgender people) needs to be addressed properly through formal and informal sexuality education so that the adolescents can perceive beyond the existing patriarchal norms the delimits possibilities and present a narrow conception of the actual reality.

8. Based on the suggestions provided by the adolescents policy-makers need to re-conceptualise sexuality education making it more effective for the adolescents; the role of peer educators need to be explore more by administrators and they should also find ways to involve parents in the formal implementation of sexuality education

8.3. Limitations of the Study

A research study always has its limitations. It cannot be an error free engagement since social science deals with living entities and actual realities and situations which cannot always be manipulated as per the need of the study. The limitations of the present study mostly arise from the peculiar nature of it subject matter and the resultant contradictions and ambiguities within the respondents. Thus one of the main limitations of the study is that it failed gain access to relevant sources because of the peculiar sensitivity attached with sexuality education and due to its reputation of leading to controversies and misunderstandings. Schools especially acted as closed door organization highly grounded in rigid rules and orthodox decorum of a strict management body; their necessity to maintain public and social approval and popularity make them act vulnerable in face of controversies. Many school principals
refused access to their teachers, students and organizational information because they are afraid of how parents will react negatively. Some school teachers refused to be a respondent as their school did not allow them to speak of school’s private policies. Even when I promised to maintain anonymity, the teachers refused as any revelation can create problem harming their career as teacher. More than ten schools did not reply to the official letter asking for the permission to conduct research. Teacher-respondents are also found to have busy schedule, they are so overburdened they could only spare few minutes or could only provided some information regarding the present scenario of the school so far as imparting sexuality education is concerned. Overall there is lack of transparency on what is actually going on inside the school premises. Not only the teachers but also the parents and adolescents refused to participate in the study due to their inhibitions. Many adolescents are afraid of their parents’ reaction on being involved with a study on sex education. They are also quite overburdened with lessons and examination to spare time and thought on sex and sexuality.

As such the sample selected is biased; it fails to represent respondents from diverse familial, educational, economical, religious and social background. I could not get Muslim and Christian respondents; neither could I access the non-Bengali communities simply because for them talking about sex appeared more difficult. Convent and missionary schools and madrasahs have strong religious bindings especially the intimate and private domains of sexuality. Since the sample is not representative, the findings of the study cannot be generalised; they remain relevant only to the particular socio-cultural context and within a limited time-frame. However, further research in this domain and in similar context can add to the generalisability and applicability of the present study.

8.4. **Scope for Further Research**

There are lots of scopes for further research in this domain. This study itself can be extended to include the respondents from the other districts of West Bengal and if possible to conduct exploration in the pan-Indian level. Further researches on sexuality education can inform about adolescence, adolescent
sexuality and critically analyse the position of women and young people within a patriarchal social set up. Such studies can actually look into the possibilities of change through sexuality education.

It is human nature to hope for change, change towards an emancipated and empowered social existence. I would like to conclude this research with my hope as a human being as well as a social researcher that change will come, may be slowly but the critical and liberating force inherent in sexuality education cannot be prevented to chart new ways for the young people and the adolescents. The picture I selected and attached below signals that hope, a bunch of female adolescents from humble background in spite of all the resistance have gained access to education and equal opportunity. They will in time redefine their intimate decision-making and other life choices.