Mabini Review
Volume XVI, No. 2, 2026

Polytechnic University of the Philippines



Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Philippines: An Evidentialist Critique

Nolly Chris P. Lopez
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
ncplopez@pup.edu.ph

DOI: https://doi.org/10.70922/1nnhfc25

Copyeditor: GERLIE C. OGATIS

Submit to this journal
Other related articles
Announcements
Other PUP Journals

Article History:

Received: April 7, 2025
Accepted: July 28, 2025
Revised: February 16, 2026

Other citation formats:

APA MLA

How to Cite this paper:

Lopez, Nolly Chris P. "Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Philippines: An Evidentialist Critique." *Mabini Review* 16, no. 2 (2026): 337–356. https://doi.org/10.70922/1nnhfc25.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at mabinireview@pup.edu.ph.

Copyright © 2026

CC BY-NC 4.0

Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Philippines: An Evidentialist Critique

Nolly Chris P. Lopez
Polytechnic University of the Philippines
ncplopez@pup.edu.ph

Abstract

The increasing rate of teenage pregnancy is one of this country's national emergency. To solve this problem, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) must be compulsory nationwide through the sanction of Adolescent Pregnancy Bill, known as SB1979. While CSE's operational definition under this bill involves the promotion of children's rights and adolescents' access to effective contraceptive use, the revised bill then removes these two due to opposition, but it encompasses cultural relevant and context-appropriate which has been restated in UNESCO's CSE 2018 document. This paper aims at re-evaluating the evidence whether claims about CSE have been tried and tested to effectively reduce teenage pregnancies, provided that no concrete solution has been proposed. As the late English analytic philosopher and evidentialist Anthony Flew puts it, follow the evidence wherever it leads you. First, the researcher attempts to re-examine DepEd's sample references before answering the question as to whether CSE is pragmatically necessary based on its operational definition being cultural relevant and context appropriate. Finally, this paper assesses as to whether CSE's operational definition in childhood pedagogy is ethically justifiable. Two of which are childhood masturbation and gender identity in relation to children's rights to sexuality.

Keywords: *Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Adolescent Pregnancy Bill, Gender Identity, Childhood Masturbation*

INTRODUCTION

There is a recent overwhelming concern among government agencies, Filipino senators, and educators due to the increasing rate of teenage pregnancy. In 2020, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) declares the Philippines as one of the highest adolescent birth rates among the

MABINI REVIEW | Volume XVI, No. 2 (2026): pages 337-356
© 2026 Lopez, N. C. P. | ISSN: 2012-2144 (Print) | ISSN: 2546-0757(Online)

ASEAN Member States.[1] UNFPA raised this urgent concern, describing the alarming increase of adolescent pregnancy rate in this country as a national emergency. This emergency was stirred when the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) was closely surveilling the growing numbers of pregnancies among adolescents between 2021 and 2022.[2]Adolescents in this context are construed as young women belonging to 10 to 19 years of age. CPD's prime concern, however, is the growing numbers of young girls under 15 years of age at 35.13% in 2022 from 9.80% in 2021. Whether the data collected is mostly recent in the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), PSA positively expressed on the contrary that adolescent pregnancies in general were declining from 8.6% in 2017 to 5.4% in 2022.[3] From this, young girls under 15 years of age had the least number of adolescent pregnancies at 1.4%. Even CPD Executive Director Lisa Grace Bersales admitted the fact that "[a]lthough live births from adolescent girls, 14 years old and below, is just 0.22% of total live births recorded, CPD is still deeply concerned about the increase in adolescent pregnancy, especially among our very young girls."[4]

In order to reduce the adolescent pregnancy rate in this country, UNFPA intervened by proposing a better access to services through the integration of comprehensive sexuality education. In February 2024, Bersales expressed the same to push through the international organization's intent for the legislative branch to prioritize the passage, known as "Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill."[5] Although this bill was already filed back in 2023 which was co-authored by four senators, senator Risa Hontiveros is the outspoken architect and the leading sponsor of this bill. This bill was only stirred when senator Sonny Angara had introduced the urgent need of this bill due to rise of adolescent pregnancies in 2023. However, Angara also admitted that even though there is a decline in adolescent pregnancies as a welcome news, there

1 United Nations Population Fund, *Eliminating Teenage Pregnancy in the Philippines* (January 2020), 1–2.

2 Commission on Population and Development, "CPD Calls for Heightened National Vigilance vs. Adolescent Pregnancies as Live Births Among Very Young Girls Increased in 2022," February 2024, https://region10.cpd.gov.ph/cpd-calls-for-heightened-national-vigilance-vs-adolescent-pregnancies-as-live-births-among-very-young-girls-increased-in-2022/.

3 Philippine Statistics Authority, "Teenage Pregnancy Declined from 8.6 Percent in 2017 to 5.4 Percent in 2022," January 23, 2023, https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/national-demographic-health-survey/node/168693.

4 Commission on Population and Development, "CPD Calls for Heightened National Vigilance."

5 Commission on Population and Development, "CPD Calls for Heightened National Vigilance."

remains "more girls who are a lot younger are becoming mothers already is very alarming and cannot be left unchecked."[6]

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill and the CSE

The Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Bill is presently known as Senate Bill no. 1979. Inside the SB 1979 is the content that stresses the necessary implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in learning modules to DepEd and CHED. Accordingly, CSE is referred to as "the process of acquiring complete, medically-accurate, relevant, age and development-appropriate, and culturally-sensitive information and skills on all matters relating to the reproductive system, its functions and process, human sexuality and forming attitudes and beliefs about sex, sexual identity, interpersonal relationships, affection, intimacy, and gender roles. . ."[7] From this definition, it is important to note two key reasons that stand out the purpose why this bill exists. Not only does it aim at reducing the rise of adolescent pregnancy, but it is also the procedure of acquiring comprehensive information and skills related to sex education, encompassing "children rights, effective contraceptive use, and abortion."[8]

The Opposition and Revision

However, the SB 1979 has received pushback from conservative legal dissenters and withdrawal from senators in January 2025, claiming it has hidden *woke a*genda.[79] One of which is the *Project Dalisay*, an initiative by the National Coalition for the Family and the Constitution (NCFC) which started to exist in January 2025. Project Dalisay is a family-rights movement behind the online petition aiming at the protection of the sanctity of Filipino family and the innocence of children under the present Constitution. Former Chief Justice Lourdes Sereno is a chairperson of this project and an enacted convenor of NCFC. Now, the contention of *Project Dalisay* initially sparked the controversy in video that CSE, according to Sereno, is an international program primarily endorsed by UNESCO and the UNFPA to hypersexualize children

6 Hannah Torregoza, "Gov't Should Probe Teenage Pregnancies Especially Those That Involve Older Men—Angara," *Manila Bulletin*, February 7, 2023, https://mb.com.ph/2023/02/07/govt-should-probe-teenage-pregnancies-especially-those-that-involve-older-men-angara/

7 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*, 19th Cong., 1st sess., Rep. 21.

8 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*.

9 The term "woke" has its roots in 1930s African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and refers to critical awareness of social or systemic injustices, particularly racial discrimination. The term has since been adopted in progressive liberal and left-leaning discourse to describe awareness of systemic oppression involving race, age, gender, sex, socioeconomic status, and political identity.

at a very early age.[10] Sereno argued that although SB 1979 is soundly good and humane to begin with, yet inside the content is the alleged exclusion of parental consent which undermines the role of parents to their sexually-active adolescent children having their own sexual rights. To quote the passage under section 4, it is stated then that "accessibility - Health facilities, goods, and services should be known and easily accessible (economically, physically, and socially) to all adolescents, without discrimination and without the need for parental consent. Confidentiality should be guaranteed and maintained at all times."[11]

In January 22, Hontiveros finally conceded to revise the SB 1979 but then she implicitly labeled the dissenting movement of so much disinformation. *Project Dalisay* critically replied to Hontiveros's assertion in their Full Statement, clarifying that nowhere did *Project Dalisay* ever mention childhood masturbation stated in the bill which is not the original contention of legal dissenters apart from discrete statement of PBBM. Their repeated contention only concerns about the compulsory implementation of CSE in all schools nationwide which has its source from "two existing documents embodying the International standards of CSE – the UNESCO and WHO Guidance, both of which discuss masturbation as normal, not harmful. . ."[12] The response led Hontiveros to propose an amended substitution or revised version of SB 1979. This includes the removal of "children's right [to sexual and reproductive health], effective contraceptive use, and children's sexual activity without parental consent."[13] The new definition of CSE now encompasses "age-appropriate, culturally relevant program to teaching about sexuality and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information."[14] However, this new definition has already been restated last 2018 under the DepEd order no. 31, adhering to its general conformity to UNESCO 2009. Under the revised SB 1979, Hontiveros confidently told during the plenary session on the following day that "the proper implementation of CSE is *tried and tested* as an effective way to reducing teenage pregnancy."[15]

In this paper, the researcher will proceed to answer the main challenge to the claims of UNFPA and Hontiveros: *Is there evidence that CSE in the Philippines has been tried and tested to effectively reduce adolescent*

10 Project Dalisay, "Explainer Video: Unmasking the Perils of CSE," YouTube video, January 10, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGtfX8PrScs.

11 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*, 7.

12 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*, 7.

13 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*, 12.

14 Senate of the Philippines, *Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023*.

15 Senate of the Philippines, "Transcript of Kapihan sa Senado with Senator Risa Hontiveros," January 23, 2025, https://web.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2025/0123_hontiveros1.asp.

pregnancies? The gap of this paper, however, provides no concrete solution to reduce adolescent pregnancies, except that which the researcher's prime intent ensures only to critique DepEd's implementation of CSE. This involves the researcher's main argument whether CSE is pragmatically necessary and ethically justifiable. To say pragmatically necessary, what the researcher wishes to mean is the need to demonstrate overall evidence behind the unsettling effectiveness of CSE from provided scientific literatures and the need to address the new operational definition such as "age-appropriate and culturally relevant."[16] After dealing with the empirical outcome, the researcher also challenges whether they are ethically justifiable.

DEPED AND THE EVIDENCE FOR CSE

Former Court Justice Lourdes Sereno disclosed in dismay that CSE has already been rolled out by DepEd since 2018. Even though the legislative status of SB 1979 remains pending for the second reading, there already exist school curriculums that have been rolled out in the prior knowledge of parents and legal dissenters. Sereno said that "the DepEd's duty is to attach every reference of UNESCO in academic curriculum."[17] In the "Policy Guidelines on the Implementation of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education under the DepEd order no. 31, Sereno stated in particular that one of its references is derived from the 2009/2018 published document entitled, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence Informed Approached co-authored by UNESCO, United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), and World Health Organization (WHO). She added, it should have been examined categorically as compliant with Constitution. The Constitution requires us to look at the family's life as sacred and as the foundation of the nation."[18] She then clarified her position that she is not against sex education but rather it must be advocated in line with our religious and constitutional foundation. In December 2020, Michael Cabrera, a Senior Education Program Specialist has made controversial points of slide presentation in his DepEd-CSE learning curriculum.[19] One of which is the apparent subliminal narrative in the slide page 22 encouraging early adolescent students under the 4th through 6th grade levels to access to information, condom for boys. In slide page 56, it is also stated under 8th grade level that CSES's proposal includes the explanation of the "health benefits, risks, and effectiveness rates of various methods of

16 Senate of the Philippines, "Transcript of Kapihan sa Senado."

17 Project Dalisay, "Unmasking the Perils of CSE."

18 Project Dalisay, "Unmasking the Perils of CSE."

19 Michael Cabrera, "Entry Points of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Standards and Learning Materials in the K to 12 Curriculum/MELMCs," PowerPoint presentation, Department of Education, December 22, 2020.

contraception, including…condoms."[20] Besides, it is also included in the content point concerning premarital sex and abortion. These discussions are enough to be quite alarming about one's curiosity in an attempt to practice abortion which is inherently illegal in our present constitution.

However, DepEd released a response to recent criticisms. In the "Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), they replied that [t]his education is not about encouraging sexual activity, but rather about ensuring that learners understand how to protect themselves from serious health risks, such as STIs."[21] By teaching them about contraception, we are not only addressing the physical health aspects but also fostering responsible behavior, respect for others, and the ability to make decisions based on knowledge rather than misinformation. But this appears self-contradictory under DepEd-CSES's proposal which includes the explanation in slide page 62 that "there are many ways of expressing love, and that sexual activity is a mature way of showing care and affection. To say that it only raises awareness for self-accountability, except that which late adolescent's active engagement for sexual activity with anyone so long as it is considered a positive expression in many ways even at their inappropriate age of 16 and 17 is self-stultifying. It only, thus, defeats the purpose of integrating CSE to practice abstinence while it also teaches otherwise. However, DepEd still pushes that CSE is way more effective based on the provided references from scientific journals in "Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education."[22]

In the next section, this paper will now examine the alleged effectivity by reading closely the original research data from the given references of DepEd without heavily reliance on CSE defender's summaries or conclusions. The researcher's contention is that the empirical science has to be objective in the sense that even if one's interpretation seems odd to the data based on her political biases so as to make bedfellow with science, data do not change. Only her interpretation to the data does. As the late English analytic philosopher and evidentialist Anthony Flew puts it, "Follow the evidence wherever it leads you."[23] Afterwards, we will proceed to answer one of the key questions whether CSE is pragmatically necessary or not.

20 Cabrera, "Entry Points of Comprehensive Sexuality Education."

21 Cabrera, "Entry Points of Comprehensive Sexuality Education."

22 Cabrera, "Entry Points of Comprehensive Sexuality Education."

23 Department of Education, *Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (January 15, 2025), 10.

The Effectivity of CSE: An Evidentialist Critique

In the "Briefer on Comprehensive Sexuality Education, DepEd recently addressed Project Dalisay's criticisms by providing five (5) samples of scientific journals and report in response to ineffective allegation"[24] as follows:

1. A Cochrane review of 41 randomized controlled trials in Europe, the United States, Nigeria and Mexico also confirmed that CSE prevents unintended adolescent pregnancies;[25]
2. A comparison study in Kenya, involving more than 6,000 students who had received sexuality education led to delayed sexual initiation compared to more than 6,000 students who did not receive sexuality education;[26]
3. A review of 22 curriculum-based sexuality education [programs] found that 80% of [programs] that addressed gender or power relations were associated with a significant decrease in pregnancy, childbearing or STIs. These [programs] were five times as effective as those [programs] that did not address gender or power;[27]
4. CSE in Indonesia (Setara): The positive changes cited include:
   - increased comfort when talking about puberty and body-related topics;
   - feeling more positive about the changes happening because of puberty; considering gender equality more important;
   - feeling safer from bullying;
   - increased self-confidence; and increased comfort with experiences of romantic/sexual attraction.
5. A 2023 meta-analysis shows that well-designed CSE programs can significantly improve knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, promote safer sexual behaviors (e.g., increased contraceptive use, delayed sexual initiation), enhance attitudes towards gender equality and consent, reduce risky sexual behaviors, and improve health outcomes such as lower rates of STIs and unintended

24 Department of Education, *Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 9–13.

25 Chioma Oringanje et al., "Interventions for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies among Adolescents," *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2016, no. 2: 1–19.

26 Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale and Collins Kyeremeh, "The Trouble with Condoms: Norms and Meanings of Sexuality and Condom Use among School-Going Youth in Kenya," *International Journal of Sexual Health* 22, no. 4 (2010): 234–46

27 Nicole Haberland, "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power in Sexuality and HIV Education: A Comprehensive Review of Evaluation Studies," *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41, no. 1 (2015): 31–42, https://doi.org/10.1363/4103115.

pregnancies, with effectiveness depending on program quality and cultural adaptation.[28]

Let's first regard to critically examine each item related to scientific journals and reports before answering the question whether CSE is pragmatically necessary.

1. The first study above is found in UNFPA's "Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Global Review. It is a published scientific document entitled Interventions for preventing unintended pregnancies among adolescents,"29 which co-authored by Oringanje, Meremikwu, Iko, and Ehiri. The first publication was in 2009 and the latest publication in 2016. Although UNESCO and DepEd mentioned that CSE is integrated in this study to prevent unintended pregnancies, there is no clear evidence that this study is explicit to support the educational intervention of CSE. In fact, it is stated that there are multi-faceted ways to educational intervention that whilst some interventions promote abstinence-based sex education, others include a comprehensive, health-education approach, in which the latter has no evidence to refer it as CSE to some extent.[30] Second, this article also specified that the evidence on the possible effects of educational interventions in general on "outcomes such as initiation of sexual intercourse, use of birth control methods, abortion was *not conclusive*. They added that educational interventions "were unlikely to significantly delay the initiation of sexual intercourse among adolescents compared to controls (RR 0.95, 95% CI 0.71 to 1.27; 2 studies, 672 participants, low quality evidence). However, it is not clear if the educational interventions had any effect on unintended pregnancy as this was not reported by any of the included studies. . . For adolescents who received contraceptive-promoting interventions, there was little or no difference in the risk of unintended first pregnancy compared to controls (RR 1.01,

28 Eun Joo Kim et al., "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs on Children and Adolescents." *Healthcare* 11, no. 18 (2023): 1-17. doi: 10.3390/healthcare11182511.

29 Kim et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs."

30 See Oringanje et al., "Interventions for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies among Adolescents"; Fong, "Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions for African American Adolescents: A Randomized Controlled Trial" (1998).

95% CI 0.81 to 1.26; 2 studies, 3,440 participants, moderate quality evidence)."[31]

2. The second study is also found in UNFPA (2015). The two comparative articles mentioned are co-authored by Maticka-Tyndale in the same year 2010. The first study is entitled "A multi-level model of condom use among male and female upper primary school students in Nyanza, Kenya and the second one, The Trouble with Condoms: Norms and Meanings of Sexuality and Condom Use Among School-Going Youth in Kenya."[32] Both are far from being clear whether these studies are associated with CSE in particular. Whilst the first study explained that religious groups who are allegedly responsible for the spread of HIV in relation to condom use for males, they "were negatively related to the outcome variable."[33] But we find no evidence that 6,000 students who had received sexuality education led to delayed sexual initiation and [increased condom use]. In fact, the first one is inconclusive and thereby, recommending the HIV prevention to just take account the sexual behaviors of youth by schools and communities in general. The second one challenges the claim that condoms effectively prevent HIV transmission amongst young students. On the contrary, there are "overarching themes emerged from a thematic analysis of the data. Condoms did not fit with the purposes, meanings, and understandings of sexuality; in fact, condom use violated most of these. Condoms were also thought to be dangerous for girls and women, to contribute to the spread of HIV, and to be unnecessary for protection against HIV."[34] Added authors, the complexities of sexuality evidenced in the discussions of these youth and adults challenge the viability of the ABC (abstain, be faithful, use a condom) message as a preventive measure against HIV transmission.[35] That being said, if CSE encourages adolescents to use condoms for preventive measures, the latter study concluded that there is no clear evidence of its effectivity.

31 Oringanje et al., "Interventions for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies among Adolescents"; Fong, "Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions."

32 Oringanje et al., "Interventions for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies among Adolescents"; Fong, "Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions."

33 Eleanor Maticka-Tyndale and Eric Tenkorang, "A Multi-Level Model of Condom Use among Male and Female Upper Primary School Students in Nyanza, Kenya," Social Science & Medicine 71, no. 3 (2010): 616–25.

34 Maticka-Tyndale and Kyeremeh, "The Trouble with Condoms."

35 Maticka-Tyndale and Kyeremeh, "The Trouble with Condoms."

3. The third study is also restated in UNFPA (2015). When UNESCO and DepEd stated the empirical result of 22 programs as found to be *effective*, they confidently referenced a certain article entitled, "The case for addressing gender and power in sexuality and HIV education: a comprehensive review of evaluation studies."[36] However, there is a superficial, tricky part here where they intend to generalize programs as entirely sex education programs. But that is not what the author is implicit to explore in her systematic review. There are many ways of program intervention. One of which is the sex education program. Out of 22 program interventions, the author indicated only 10 that addressed gender or power relations, which is 80% were associated with lower rate of unintended pregnancy or STIs. However, it does not specify whether the sex education program is part of its 80%, since there are sorts of sex education, such as CSE, abstinence-based sex education, and HIV education. CSE promotes safer sex with condom and contraceptive use. Abstinence-based education encourages abstinence without the condom and contraceptive use. In fact, when the author indicated that curriculum-based sexuality education in general was integrated 11 schools, only 3 schools have had positive effects on health outcome among adolescents. Three of them are not evidently related to CSE.

   Even if it is noted that "some comprehensive sexuality education programs were *effective* and others were not,"[37] nowhere did it find to be effective on the data when she explicitly listed a table assessing effects of curriculum-based sexuality education intervention. Surprisingly, no clear evidence has been suggested that CSE provides a positive effect on health outcome which is contrary to her previous explanation.[38] She then clarified that "we could identify no rigorous studies that examined the efficacy of sexuality education programs…The current review was undertaken to determine what existing evaluations of interventions for young people might suggest."[39]

4. The fourth study is an evaluation report found in Marlies Morsink's QuIP [Qualitative Impact Protocol] Report on Rutgers' SETARA Programme in Indonesia. Although the researcher takes no serious

36 Haberland, "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power," 36.

37 Haberland, "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power," 36.

38 Haberland, "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power," 32.

39 Haberland, "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power," 36.

in assessing its substantive argument to DepEd's references, he finds it useful then to understand that most of the time, the information gathered by young students have more practically acquired from schools than to their family about the topic of sexuality. In an open-ended question, the study conducted SETARA (Teens' Aspiration), known as CSE has the highest influential positive changes among students in Indonesia.[40] The second to the highest is the influence of family attitude/bond with parent(s). The fact that he takes no serious in this report is that the specific intent of his research covers only what can be strictly relevant to the effectivity of CSE. In fact, it does not specify the positive effect of reducing adolescent pregnancy. Second, the methodology used in this study is apparently a qualitative-based, which heavily relies on self-reported impact data that are quite subjective to selected respondents in terms of their biased narratives on social-related themes. But let's give the benefit of the doubt that the respondent's biases are absent, the self-reported data is still limited and restricted "to what respondents actually know and what they regard as most important."[41] Unlike a rigorous quantitative-based method such as meta-analysis and systematic review, the application of Qualitative Impact Protocol depends only on selected experiences and subjective opinions that are mostly relevant and insightful to them.

5. Nevertheless, DepEd can also provide a methodological rigor that supports their claims. One of which is the aforementioned 2023 meta-analysis entitled "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs on Children and Adolescents"[42] by eight South Korean scholars. Of all the references given by DepEd, only the fifth article has the strongest tool for combining numerous statistical studies that are in conflict. It may sound convincing at first when DepEd provided a brief review of this article which is undeniably grounded on extensive evidence for the effectivity of CSE. For example, it is true that there is a significant higher positive benefit of CSE for promoting "healthy sexual behaviors or attitude with 10.1% (n = 24)."[43] However, DepEd is inaccurate when

40 Marlies Morsink et al., soh (Utrecht: Bath Social & Development Research Ltd., 2020), 8–9.

41 *Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol* (Bath Social & Development Research Ltd., 2020), 2.

42 *Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol*, 2.

43 Kim et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs," 7.

> referring to the category of delayed sexual initiation. The result for delayed sexual onset is just 0.9% (n = 2) which is among the lowest percentage and is very less effective compared to promoting healthy sexual behavior. Additionally, it is also true that the overall result for CSE had the highest effect on *knowledge* with 14.1% (n = 33).[44] Now, the category for healthy sexual behavior is only third to the highest compared to the *unprotected sexual activity* as second to the highest with 13.7% (n = 24). I don't have the problem with CSE being the highest effect on knowledge, since school curriculum plays a pivotal role for instilling a learning information to students. My initial intent of this research, however, is to look for a pragmatic effect, not epistemic one. Now, if we remove knowledge in this category, what is left then is the category of *unprotected sexual activity*. What DepEd did not tell us in many details are the most disturbing outcome variables indicated under this category which involves sexual violence perpetration or victimization and transactional sex and having multiple sexual partners among middle/high-school students. Provided that *unprotected sexual activity* supersedes the *protected sexual activity* to a greater extent, it is questionable then if CSE would be the highest positive effect on the former category leading them to commit multiple sexual partners and be subject to any sexual violence perpetration, involving sexual assault and harassment, and rape. Authors in this meta-analysis may sound convincing to give credence to the overall effectivity of CSE, it is no less than what they are transparent about its detailed effects that makes more sense. Attached below is the second table characterizing the outcome variables in CSE:

Aside from given references above, DepEd also provided a national demographic result of teenage pregnancy cases and dropouts in basic education. However, this is quite absurd given that the rise of teenage pregnancy case is a prime concern that has been released by CPD as an alleged "national emergency."[45] If teenage pregnancies have been decreasing, why need to amend SB 1979 to begin with? However, they acknowledge that the preliminary data collected from the field is subject to further validation. But let's give a benefit of the doubt that teenage pregnancy cases are, indeed, gradually decreasing in schools through CSE implementation, we still have an

44 Kim et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs," 7.

45 Kim et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs," 7.

inherent problem in this regard. First, there is no available sources or perhaps, lack of evidence to support whether the decreasing teenage pregnancy in schools correlates with CSE implementation in particular. Second, if there is, then correlation is not causation.

Table 3. Characteristics of outcome variables in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (n = 34).

Categories	Outcome Variables	k	Percentage
Abstinence	Abstinence from sex/Abstaining from penile–vaginal sex	2	0.9
Attitude	Attitudes towards using condoms, healthy sexual behavior, homosexuality, gender roles, and CSE	24	10.1
Beliefs	Beliefs about causes of pregnancy, HIV, STIs/Acceptance of gender roles, dating violence, and rape myths	10	4.8
Body image	Body image	1	0.4
Capacity	CSE capacity	1	0.4
Cognition	Risk perception towards HIV, STIs, pregnancy/Perceived susceptibility, severity, barriers, benefits	7	3.1
Communication	Communication with parents, partner, boyfriend, or girlfriend regarding sexual health	17	8.4
Condom use	Inconsistent or consistent condom use	6	3.1
Contraceptive use	Contraceptive use/Currently using birth control	13	5.3
Delaying sexual onset	Delaying vaginal sex (boys and girls)	2	0.9
Family plan	Family planning referrals (male and female)/Married/Cohabiting	3	1.3
HIV positive	HIV-positive/HIV-negative	2	0.9
HIV test	HIV tested/Not HIV tested/Willingness to HCT	5	2.2
Intention	Intention to use a condom, contraception, protection, prevent pregnancy/Intent for bystander intervention	22	9.7
Knowledge	Knowledge of contraceptive methods, sexual, STD testing, causes of STIs, non-causes of HIV, pregnancy, STI prevention	33	14.1
Perceived norms	Perceived community norms regarding contraceptives, condom use, gender equitability, teen sex description, dating violence, gender roles, contraception, protection norms	10	4.4
Performance	Performance behavior to escape and avoid situations where unwanted sex could happen	2	0.9
Pregnancy	Pregnancy since program enrollment/Was or is pregnant/Never been pregnant	2	0.9
Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy towards condom use/Self-efficacy in dealing with coercive sex/Contraception and protection efficacy	6	3.1
Self esteem	Self esteem	1	0.4
Sexual behavior (sexual activity)	Ever had sex/Had vaginal sex/Rights with steady partner/Number of condomless sex acts/Limiting sexual partner only to one	16	8.4
Skill	CSE skill	3	1.3
STD test	Receiving more than one joint testing	1	0.4
STDs	Reported STD symptoms	2	0.9
Unprotected sexual activity	Unprotected sexual activity/More than one sexual partner/Engage in transactional sex/Sexual violence perpetration or victimization/Teen sexual intentions/Unmet contraceptive needs	24	13.7

Note: CSE, Comprehensive Sexuality Education; HCT, human immunodeficiency virus counseling and testing; HIV, human immunodeficiency virus; STD, sexually transmitted disease; STI, sexually transmitted infection.

Figure 2: Characteristics of Outcome Variables in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (n=34). Accessed March 13, 2025, https://www.mdpi.com/2227-9032/11/18/2511.

Is CSE Pragmatically Necessary?

Granted that DepEd provided no evidence to support the effectivity of CSE, we will move on to answer the first sub-question, *Is CSE pragmatically necessary?* First, let us regard to assess if CSE's operational definition under the revised SB 1979 fully satisfies the condition of being "culturally relevant

and context-appropriate."[46] Now, if the revised bill underwent to scrutiny in order to conform with Filipino values and culture, the essence of CSE has already lost in its pragmatic intent to encourage and promote children's rights, effective contraceptive use among adolescents which is more consistent with the definition of CSE under the previous SB 1979. Although DepEd clarifies that their integration of CSE still includes contraceptive use among adolescents as a preventive measure against Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), it is no less than logically incoherent to the operational definition of CSE under the revised bill.[47] Now critics would insist that even if the information about contraceptive use is not plainly stated under the revised bill, it is a non-sequitur to claim that this information should not be encouraged. Let's give the benefit of the doubt that it remains integrated, contraceptives were still less effective in preventing STIs based on existing meta-analyses and systematic reviews.[48] Second, DepEd's integration of Singapore's family primacy and abstinence-based narrative being made more explicit to DepEd order no. 31 (2018) no longer functions as CSE in its essence, except for encouraging contraceptive use. DepEd also promoted abstinence before marriage which is clearly the operational definition of abstinence-based sex education more than CSE. In fact, Dr. Rebecca Oas, a molecular biologist and a director of Research for C-Fam, noted that much of the evidence to promote some form of sex education described as CSE is weak or misleading. Oas implies that CSE's integration of abstinence-based or abstinence-plus programs is no longer CSE in its operational definition even among existing scientific journals that supported the positive effectivity of CSE. She added:

> The organization Advocates for Youth, which promotes CSE, published a guide to comparing sex education programs in which it characterized terms like "abstinence-based" or "abstinence-plus" programs as "term[s] normally used to mean comprehensive sexuality education." An updated fact sheet from the same organization described "abstinence-plus" as meaning "[p]rograms which include information about contraception and condoms in the context of strong abstinence messages." As one article points out, "[a]cross the literature, CSE is often linked with abstinence-plus education, with some authors presenting the two terms as being synonymous with one another.[49]

46 Kim et al., "Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs," 7.

47 Department of Education, *Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 4, 15.

48 Department of Education, *Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education*, 4, 15.

49 Rebecca Oas, "Why Comprehensive Sexuality Education Is Not the Answer," Center for Family & Human Rights, January 30, 2023, https://c-fam.org/definitions/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-is-not-the-answer/.

In the local sense, if the information emphasizes the strong abstinence message which no longer includes child's rights to sexuality and condom use given that contraceptive is also ineffective to prevent from STIs, then the information characterizing CSE is, in fact, the abstinence-based education and thereby, *CSE is pragmatically unnecessary.*

Is CSE Ethically Justifiable?

In response to the question whether CSE is ethically justifiable, let's consider first the operational definition that constitutes CSE in childhood pedagogy. One of which is to teach about childhood masturbation being unharmful and normal. Even if the SB 1979 and DepEd's curriculum did not include childhood masturbation, Dr. Rica Cruz, a Filipino sex therapist, a board-certified clinical sexologist supported UNESCO's 2018 CSE document that "masturbation does not cause physical or emotional harm but should be done in private."[50] In a *Smart Parenting* web article, Judy Aladin wrote Rica Cruz clarifying that self-stimulation among children ages 5-6 "may even begin in utero, [as] a way for children to feel comfort or explore their bodies, and not for sexual reasons."[51] Aladin cited a 2010 study entitled "Infantile and early childhood masturbation: Sex hormones and clinical profile which aligns with Dr. Cruz's insights that masturbation starts in children before 2 years of age. However, this cited study did not support Dr. Cruz's claim concerning infantile and childhood masturbation as a norm for self-comfort. On the contrary, the study stated that "this was a prospective study of all infants and young children referred to the participating pediatric neurology clinics between September 2004 and 2006, diagnosed with *gratification disorder*."[52] Researchers in this cited article clarified that childhood masturbation is associated with gratification disorder supporting with a 2005 peer-reviewed article that a pediatric movement disorders clinic with a suspected movement disorder were determined to have postures and movements associated with masturbation and a 2004 peer reviewed article in which every child patient (21/31) were diagnosed with gratification disorder. Furthermore, childhood masturbation can be associated with exposure to pornography and comorbid

50 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2018), 71.

51 Judy Santiago Aladin, "Expert's POV on Children and Masturbation: 'It's Not about Sex,'" *Smart Parenting*, January 21, 2025.

52 Michele Yang et al., "Masturbation in Infancy and Early Childhood Presenting as a Movement Disorder: 12 Cases and a Review of the Literature," *Pediatrics* 116, no. 6 (2005): 1427–1532.

psychiatric disorder, especially children with ADHD.[53] To argue for the normality of childhood masturbation which is lacking any data to demonstrate these unverified claims, appears also to be ethically unjustifiable. Furthermore, under the learning objective, CSE document explains to students under ages of 9-12 on "how someone's *gender identity* may not match their *biological sex*."[54] It is also stated in the previous SB 1979 that adolescent sexuality refers to gender identity. Dr. Debra Soh, a well-known American neuroscientist and bio-sexologist, responds that gender identity is based on biology which will be elaborated in my next article entitled, Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Its Secular Postmodern Foundation: A Critical Appraisal:

> [B]iology will influence hormonal exposure in the womb, as well as the child's resulting [traditional] *gender identity*. At about seven weeks, if the embryo is male, the testes will begin to secrete testosterone, masculinizing the brain. If the embryo is female, this process does not occur.[55]

This can be accounted when I and few of my fellow colleagues in our respective college went to Barangay 286, San Nicolas Manila for children's outreach activity on September 26, 2024. Through the PUP extension program *Lingap Komunidad,* we had given an opportunity to serve and distribute to each children a free coloring pad. One with blue coloring pad for boys and one with pink coloring pad for girls. Unfortunately, some blue coloring pads for boys went out of stock. What is left available were pink coloring pads. Then there was a boy roughly at 5-6 years of age who began to cry when given with a pink coloring pad. He got tantrum to get a blue one just like his peers. Later, his request was granted to swap from a matured pre-adolescent. Even at an early age, children can still recognize between what is for boys and for girls, despite that they may be unable to distinguish between male and female and hence, inherent biological hormones influence unborn child's brain in the womb resulting in respective sex identity.

A 2016 study supporting (6) six peer-reviewed articles concluded that the exposure to testosterone has a powerful effect on male's brain by altering the neural stem cells programming responsible for the brain growth, leading

53 Diana Russell, "Exposure to Pornography as a Cause of Child Sexual Victimization," October 2020, https://www.dianarussell.com/exposure_to_porn_cause_child_sexual_victimization.html.

54 UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*, 50.

55 Debra Soh, *The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2020), 18.

to sex differences between male and female in the womb.[56] Now, to teach children that gender is socially constructed and that they have "rights" from Moneyian "gender identity" perspective implies that they have also rights to undergo sex reassignment surgery based on their preferred sex. Not only is it scientifically lacking with no supported evidence but more so, it is ethically unjustifiable.

CONCLUSION

Of all the given evidential critiques, this study does not yet meet a *sufficient condition* to resolve the problem concerning the increasing rate of adolescent pregnancies in the Philippines. Although the purpose of this research aimed at critically re-evaluating the alleged effectivity of CSE, the researcher, in all his fairness, provides no concrete solution to the problem. However, the researcher can only depend on Project Dalisay's proposed solution by adopting a distinct sex education in Singapore, best known for rapidly declining teenage pregnancy rate in most Asian countries through MOE sexuality education program. Even DepEd wants to revisit Singapore's MOE sexuality education for potential integration of best practices. Part of their best practices is the integration of parental authority and family as basic unit of society and the abstinence before marriage as a key mechanism against teen pregnancies and STIs.

Former Court Justice Lourdes Sereno conclusively proposed that with everything we have to root out Comprehensive Sexuality Education from our entire school system and from the legislative agenda. It must be replaced by a pro, single constitutional curriculum that recognizes the enduring family values of Filipino. One of which is to recognize, under the article XV, Section I, the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Part of this is to find a family in accordance with their religious conviction. Numerous studies consistently demonstrate a positive correlation between parental religiosity and delaying adolescent sexual activities. This includes greater significant contribution to delayed onset of contraceptive use, less sexually permissive peers, less sexual initiation, less multiple sexual partners, and lower odds of sexual regrets. And lastly under the same article is the children's right, not to sexual gratification or any sexual-related services but rights to protection from all forms of cruelty and exploitation.

56 Matthew Bramble et al., "Sex-Specific Effects of Testosterone on the Sexually Dimorphic Transcriptome and Epigenome of Embryonic Neural Stem/Progenitor Cells," *Scientific Reports* 6 (2016): 1–13.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aladin, Judy Santiago. "Expert's POV on Children and Masturbation: 'It's Not about Sex.'" *Smart Parenting*, January 21, 2025.

Bramble, Matthew, et al. "Sex-Specific Effects of Testosterone on the Sexually Dimorphic Transcriptome and Epigenome of Embryonic Neural Stem/Progenitor Cells." *Scientific Reports* 6 (2016): 1–13.

Cabrera, Michael. "Entry Points of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) Standards and Learning Materials in the K to 12 Curriculum/MELMCs." PowerPoint presentation, Department of Education, December 22, 2020.

Commission on Population and Development. "CPD Calls for Heightened National Vigilance vs. Adolescent Pregnancies as Live Births Among Very Young Girls Increased in 2022." February 2024. https://region10.cpd.gov.ph/cpd-calls-for-heightened-national-vigilance-vs-adolescent-pregnancies-as-live-births-among-very-young-girls-increased-in-2022/.

Department of Education. *Briefer on the Comprehensive Sexuality Education*. January 15, 2025.

Fong. "Abstinence and Safer Sex HIV Risk-Reduction Interventions for African American Adolescents: A Randomized Controlled Trial." 1998.

Haberland, Nicole. "The Case for Addressing Gender and Power in Sexuality and HIV Education: A Comprehensive Review of Evaluation Studies." *International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 41, no. 1 (2015): 31–42. https://doi.org/10.1363/4103115.

Kim, Eun Joo, et al. "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Comprehensive Sexuality Education Programs on Children and Adolescents." *Healthcare* 11, no. 18 (2023): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11182511.

Maticka-Tyndale, Eleanor, and Collins Kyeremeh. "The Trouble with Condoms: Norms and Meanings of Sexuality and Condom Use among School-Going Youth in Kenya." *International Journal of Sexual Health* 22, no. 4 (2010): 234–46.

Maticka-Tyndale, Eleanor, and Eric Tenkorang. "A Multi-Level Model of Condom Use among Male and Female Upper Primary School Students in Nyanza, Kenya." *Social Science & Medicine* 71, no. 3 (2010): 616–25.

Morsink, Marlies, et al. soh. Utrecht: Bath Social & Development Research Ltd., 2020.

Oas, Rebecca. "Why Comprehensive Sexuality Education Is Not the Answer." Center for Family & Human Rights, January 30, 2023. https://c-fam.org/definitions/why-comprehensive-sexuality-education-is-not-the-answer/.

Oringanje, Chioma, et al. "Interventions for Preventing Unintended Pregnancies among Adolescents." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, no. 2 (2016): 1–19.

Philippine Statistics Authority. "Teenage Pregnancy Declined from 8.6 Percent in 2017 to 5.4 Percent in 2022." January 23, 2023. https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/national-demographic-health-survey/node/168693.

Project Dalisay. "Explainer Video: Unmasking the Perils of CSE." YouTube video, January 10, 2025. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGtfX8PrScs.

Qualitative Impact Assessment Protocol. Bath Social & Development Research Ltd., 2020.

Russell, Diana. "Exposure to Pornography as a Cause of Child Sexual Victimization." October 2020. https://www.dianarussell.com/exposure_to_porn_cause_child_sexual_victimization.html.

Senate of the Philippines. Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act of 2023. 19th Congress, 1st sess., Rep. 21.

Senate of the Philippines. "Transcript of Kapihan sa Senado with Senator Risa Hontiveros." January 23, 2025. https://web.senate.gov.ph/press_release/2025/0123_hontiveros1.asp.

Soh, Debra. The End of Gender: Debunking the Myths about Sex and Identity in Our Society. New York: Threshold Editions, 2020.

Torregoza, Hannah. "Gov't Should Probe Teenage Pregnancies Especially Those That Involve Older Men—Angara." *Manila Bulletin*, February 7, 2023. https://mb.com.ph/2023/02/07/govt-should-probe-teenage-pregnancies-especially-those-that-involve-older-men-angara/.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-Informed Approach. Paris: UNESCO, 2018.

United Nations Population Fund. Eliminating Teenage Pregnancy in the Philippines. January 2020.

Yang, Michele, et al. "Masturbation in Infancy and Early Childhood Presenting as a Movement Disorder: 12 Cases and a Review of the Literature." *Pediatrics* 116, no. 6 (2005): 1427–1532.

BIONOTE

Nolly Chris P. Lopez is a regular college instructor under the Department of Humanities and Philosophy, and the College of Arts and Letters at the Polytechnic University of the Philippines. He received double degrees in which the latter focuses on Education program at the same institution. He then also finished his MA major in Philosophy at Christ the King, Mission Seminary, Quezon City. He has been a faculty member since 2016, handling GEED courses in ethics and major courses in *Philosophy of Religion* and *Epistemology*. His research interests include the *Analytic Philosophy of Religion, Metaethics, Bioethics, Natural Law,* and *Jacques Maritain.*