

# The Dilemma and the Way Out of Girls' Sexual Education in the Yi region of Liangshan

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**Abstract:** The Yi ethnic group in Liangshan has a special culture and marriage customs, and is sensitive to words and topics such as "sex". In this context, girls of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group lack access to scientific sexual knowledge, resulting in a lack of sexual education. Through fieldwork and interviews, this paper understands the current situation and problems of sex education for girls in the family, school and society in the Liangshan Yi region, including: women in the Liangshan Yi region equate "sex education" with talking about "sex", such as birth, pregnancy, menstruation, and other taboos that cannot be mentioned in the region; sex education in schools is only about sex physiology, emphasizing how to maintain boundaries with boys and avoid sexually transmitted diseases; influenced by traditional family culture, Yi women do not have a correct attitude toward sexual assault and choose to tolerate it. Based on this, this paper synthesizes the understanding of sex education curriculum in China and other countries, and combines the unique sex culture of the Liangshan Yi region, by designing a sex education activity curriculum as a way out of the current situation of sex education for girls in the Liangshan Yi region.

**Keywords:** Family branch culture, Liangshan, Sex education, Yi girls.

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## 1. Introduction

The Yi ethnic minority (also known as Nuosu or Nosu) inhabits Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Southwest Sichuan Province of China. Liangshan, consisting of seventeen counties within its territory, is home to the largest population of Yi people in mainland China, with approximately 2.94 million Yi people in the region by the end of 2021.[1]Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture covers 71.7% of mountainous areas, with most peaks over 4,000 meters above sea level. According to the fourth national population census in 2021, the Yi population is 2,936,500, 54.56% of the people in Liangshan.

Due to the remote geographical location and special topography of the Liangshan Yi region, the lack of communication with the outside world has led to the formation of a unique ethnic culture of sex and marriage. At the same time, the lack of scientific knowledge and guidance on sex education has resulted in a high incidence of AIDS and other related diseases. As a vulnerable group in the local society, women do not know how to deal with sexual deviance positively when they encounter it.

Currently, research on sex education is mainly reflected in the study of sex education goals, sex knowledge, and sex curriculum for all students. In terms of sex education goals, scholars such as Yan Hanwen proposed that the goals of sex education for adolescents aged 3-15 are to form correct values about sex; understand the process of sexual development and maturation; learn to avoid sexual abuse through understanding; know gender interaction and interpersonal skills; understand gender roles and gender identity; and learn love, respect, and responsibility.[2]At the level of sexual knowledge, Zhao R. Wu JQ. Li Yuyan and other scholars found that the poorly grasped knowledge of primary school students mainly focused on pubertal growth and development and AIDS-related knowledge, and the poorly grasped knowledge of junior high school students focused on reproductive physiology knowledge especially the lack of

understanding of reproductive processes.[3]In terms of sex courses, Liu Jinyun, Liu Wenli learned that through learning sex education courses, in terms of physiology, adolescents learn about sex science such as sexual reproduction and sexual behavior, physical and psychological changes during puberty and knowledge of sex transmission such as AIDS; in terms of sexual legal system, adolescents can understand the knowledge of sexual legal system, master interpersonal skills, build good interpersonal relationships, know techniques and skills on how to deal with danger in the face of danger, and know how to protect themselves from aggression.[4]

"The emotional and social factors involved in sex education are of equal if not great importance than the child's acquisition of information on the physiology of sex and reproduction," explained the authors of "The Schools Responsibility in Social Hygiene Education" in 1940. "So conceived" they argued, "sex education is an inseparable part of the education of the total personality of the child." [5] The current research on sex education is generalized and few studies have been conducted specifically on girls' sex education, and the existing studies on girls' sex education are only on sexual abuse and protection of girls left behind in rural areas. Therefore, this paper uses fieldwork, questionnaires, and interviews to understand the problems and dilemmas of sex education for girls in the Yi region of Liangshan, based on the elementary school in Zeyao Township, Xide County, Liangshan Prefecture, and to design an activity curriculum that incorporates the unique sex culture of the Yi region.

## 2. Research Methodology

From August 2017 to May 2019, I have entered Coronation County and Xide County in the Yi ethnic region of Liangshan several times to understand the culture of the Yi ethnic region of Liangshan through field observations, in-depth interviews with girls in the Yi ethnic region of Liangshan, school teachers, and social women in non-schools of the Yi ethnic

group, to understand the family, school and social environment in which the Yi ethnic girls live, the problems and dilemmas of girls' sex education, and to conduct sex education activity courses with Zeyao Township Primary School as a pilot.

A total of 30 people were interviewed. There were 10 teachers(T-n), 10 students(S-n), and 10 local village names(M-n), 5 males and 25 females.

**Table 1.** Interviewee Profile

Code	Age	Gender	Details
T-1	56	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-2	48	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-3	47	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-4	21	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-5	38	Male	Teacher of Yi
T-6	36	Male	Teacher of Yi
T-7	52	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-8	43	Female	Teacher of Yi
T-9	45	Female	Teacher of Han
T-10	33	Female	Teacher of Yi
S-1	13	Female	Student of grade 5
S-2	12	Female	Student of grade 5
S-3	13	Male	Student of grade 6
S-4	11	Female	Student of grade 4
S-5	13	Female	Student of grade 6
S-6	13	Male	Student of grade 6
S-7	12	Female	Student of grade 5
S-8	15	Female	Student of grade 6
S-10	12	Female	Student of grade 4
M-1	76	Female	Villager of Yi
M-2	64	Female	Villager of Yi
M-3	72	Female	Villager of Yi
M-4	55	Female	Villager of Yi
M-5	53	Female	Villager of Yi
M-6	47	Male	President of Yi
M-7	53	Female	Villager of Yi
M-8	48	Female	Villager of Yi
M-9	43	Female	Villager of Yi
M-10	74	Female	Villager of Yi

### 3. The Current Situation of Sexual Education for Girls in the Yi Region of Liangshan

Sexual education in rural primary and secondary schools is to some extent a blind spot, although the school has a physiological health class, most teachers once to talk about sensitive knowledge such as reproductive organs, usually let students learn on their own.[6]Rural girls left behind in the family sex education is already very lacking, through the school environment to enable them to learn and understand all the relevant knowledge of sex safety education, but due to these unfavorable factors in the school, the result of left-behind girls sex safety education almost tends to zero.[7]

### 3.1. Sex Education in The Family

#### 3.1.1. Was Picked Up

education is important for all students. It also helps with a successful transition to life after school. [8]But it didn't happen in Liangshan.

*T-3: I'm sure I haven't asked it. I am from the countryside, and my parents are both authentic Yi. I have to say 90% of Yi people don't ask this question.*

*M-1: "Picked up, from the pig pen or from the cattle pen. The Yi people usually say they are picked up and are embarrassed to say that I gave birth to them. When they grow up, they will clear by themselves.*

When asked in the interview whether they had asked their parents where I came from and whether they had been asked this question by their children, all women(30 interviews) before the 1970s did not ask their parents where I came from because of the distant parent-child relationship and the backwardness of the family, and when they were asked this question by their children, they would use answers such as "I picked you up from the toilet", "You are popped out of the stone", "I picked you up from the cattle pen", "I picked you up from the garbage can "Yi women who were born after 1970 were curious about where they came from and asked their parents, and received a similar answer: "I picked you up", and the place they picked them up was modified according to their own wishes. When their children ask them such questions, they say that the children nowadays are more intelligent and precocious, and they know, but they don't know exactly what they know, how much they know, and whether they know the correct scientific information, and they don't give their children the right answers and education.

#### 3.1.2. Humiliated Menstruation

Puberty is related to sexual maturation. Changes which take place in the bodies of boys and girls modify their different attitudes towards their surroundings, themselves and sexuality. The formation of gender identity to one's own sexuality depends on primary socialization within the family, the influence of peers and friends, as well as the educational system Quality sex. [9]

*M-4:My parents didn't tell me about it, and I was too embarrassed to ask them. I hid. My stomach was very painful when I was in my period. Sometimes I hid,and sometimes I did a little Mixin. We Yi people actually have a habit that we do a simple Mixin by ourselves when we have little cold or stomached. Do not need to Bimo. They call it sending ghost and it will be fine.*

"Mixin" is a form of Yi Bimo culture and refers to a ritual. "Bimo are knowledgeable in Yi language, Yi scriptures and religious rituals, and are the intellectual class of the people.[10]In the Yi region, Bimo is the equivalent of a "doctor". In the past, when medical equipment in Yi area was relatively backward, the presence of Bimo greatly relieved the pressure of local medical treatment and ensured the physical and mental health of people.[11]

*T-1: We Yi people are originally a relatively conservative people. You know that how normal it is to have a period. You don't even dare to say that you are pregnant. After you give birth to a child, it is not allowed to breastfeed in front of your own husband, not to mention in front of the elder family members. only can secretly breastfeeding.*

Yi women generally believe that menstruation is very shameful and embarrassed and must not let men (even their fathers and brothers) know about it, and some Yi women will not even tell their mothers. They use words such as "strange" and "hidden", thinking that they are strange and that they are a weird person, and even though they may experience physical discomfort and psychological panic, they will hide it from others. Some Yi women will discuss this with their sisters, and residential students will discuss this with their classmates, all without receiving proper knowledge about menstruation, including how to use Sanitary pads, and what to look for during menstruation. Not only menstruation, but also pregnancy, breastfeeding and other things related to female reproduction cannot be said. You can't even breastfeed in front of your husband.

### 3.2. Sex Education in Schools

Mitigating teenage pregnancy using Sex education can effectively delay sex among people even as it increases condom and overall contraceptive use among sexually active. Scholarly research during the last two decades has shown that sexuality education does not increase rates of sexual activity among those who are sexually active. When young people are equipped with accurate and making decision, negotiations, communication and critical thinking and have access to counseling and HIV services that are judgmental and affordable they are better able to avoid unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion, improve their sexual reproductive health and protect themselves against STIs and HIV, understand and question social norms and practices concerning sexuality, gender and relationships and contribute positively and to be better equipped to face other challenges in life, especially during the transition period from childhood to Adulthood[12]

*T-1: I just went to work when there was no electricity, candles, kerosene lamps, horse lamps at night. When it was dark, I rested. Generally, by the end of May and June, the old folks would be out of food and had nothing to eat. I am considered to have received education in a good area. The education in Mianling of Liangshan is relatively good. It seems that there is such a course offered in junior high school that simply tell you the characters of a boy when he is in his adolescence.*

*T-4: We used to have sex education class in our school. Twice a week, talking about sex education, such as the organs of men and women, sexually transmitted infectious diseases. The teacher played the videos like female students are playing outside and be raped. Through these videos to tell girls to learn to protect themselves and so on. There are special textbooks.*

Women of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group have received sex education in elementary or middle school. These sex education help girls understand physiology structure of females and how to protect themselves when they have sexual experiences, which has some positive significance for the sex education of Liangshan Yi girls. However, when educating students to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, teachers show crime videos and indicate that girls will be raped if they go out and play, which undoubtedly puts pressure on girls' sexuality and does not give them the correct education on sexual psychology, sexual morality and sexual legal system.

### 3.3. Sex Education in Society

#### 3.3.1. Having A Boy Gives You Roots

The Yi ancestors have always attached great importance to

the reproduction and growth of their population, and have placed their expectations for the multiplication and reproduction of their family descendants on the ancestral spirits, thus gradually developing a unique concept of reproduction and ancestor worship rituals. The cult of fertility was formed and developed on the basis of the primitive nature worship, hoping to obtain a strong reproductive power to satisfy the strong desire for their own reproduction and racial prosperity.[13] Whether in ancient times, when fertility rates were low due to poor natural and social environments, or in modern times, when fertility rates are high due to advanced medical conditions and good natural and social environments, the Yi attach great importance to population growth and reproduction, and no matter what the context of the times, a strong and prosperous family lineage is a solid foundation for the survival and development of Yi society.[14]

*M-8: It's too hard, the women in Liangshan are too hard. The men don't have the awareness of contraception and don't want to wear condoms. In contrast, the women keep feeding children and giving birth to children, and they don't know what they can do to control birth.*

*M-6: In our Yi tribe, most people feel they have to have a son, and this thought is very strong. I have a relative who had six daughters in a row and another son. As Yi people you die of old age, sons play a very important role. When an old person died, many things only can be done by his own son, and his daughter is not can be a substitute. There is also a custom that if a Yi woman has not given birth to a son, when you die, the ceremony is different. There are many people think that the birth of a son is a woman's business.*

Due to the geographical location and topographical features as well as historical reasons, the Liangshan Yi region has developed a unique awareness of reproduction and male worship, and think a family is strong if the male children are prosperous. If a woman does not have a son, she will be discriminated against by their parents-in-law and husbands, and she will feel that they have no one to rely on. Because of lacking scientific sex education, a woman has to keep on having children until she has a son, which leads to many families in Liangshan Yi having as many as 5 or 6 children.

#### 3.3.2 Holding Hands Is Immoral

Liangshan used to be a hierarchical slave society, with ranks divided into Tusi, Black Yi, White Yi, and Wazi. There was bullying and oppression among the various classes, and the help and resistance from fellow family members prevented such unwarranted oppression. In addition, the family branch is an indispensable part of the Yi people's ability to meet their basic needs, maintain internal order and stability, and inherit Yi culture. The family branch is a "family association" linked by blood ties, characterized by a father-son lineage, which is close to the Han Chinese concept of "clan" [15].

*T-8: The wife and husband cannot hold hands on the street in case people make idle talk. If you're not married, walking down the street with a man, you will be condemned by all the people in the town.*

*M-6: Among traditional Yi people, the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law are not allowed to talk to each other. This is also the same for brothers and sisters-in-law.*

In the Liangshan Yi region, there are strict boundaries between men and women in public, and even two people in love or even a couple cannot have intimate actions in public, even if they are just holding hands, they will be condemned. There are many stories in history about the strict boundary

between men and women, and women who chose to commit suicide to protect their "chastity", and such stories are respected and practiced as virtues.

## **4. The Dilemma and The Way Out of Girls' Sexual Education in The Yi Region of Liangshan**

### **4.1. The Dilemma of Sexual Physiology Education**

#### **4.1.1. Reproductive and Fertility Education Is Not Correct Enough**

In the Liangshan Yi region, "sex" is a very embarrassing thing that cannot be mentioned, and sex-related topics such as birth, pregnancy and Menstruation are taboo and cannot be talked about, especially by elders and men, and even by their husbands, who are considered "vastik". The "sex education" is a topic that is taboo. Yi women are very vague about the concept of "sex education", they do not know what scientific sex education stands for, and equate sex education with talking about sex-related topics and how to keep boundaries with boys.

As a result of misinformation, girls in the Liangshan Yi region do not understand how they came into the world at an early age, and when they face marriage and childbirth in adulthood, they do not know, or even misunderstand, about contraception, pregnancy, abortion, and other sexual reproduction and reproductive knowledge, which causes serious physical and psychological harm to them.

#### **4.1.2. Adolescent Growth and Development Education Is Not Comprehensive Enough**

The sex education received by girls in schools in the Liangshan Yi region is lacking, and some Yi women have never received sex education in school. Sexual education in school is only about few physiological sex educations, but not about sex psychology, sex morality, sex law and other comprehensive sex education. Although Yi women are aware of the importance of sex education, they do not know much about scientific and comprehensive sex education, and they think that sex education only teaches women how to use condoms, how to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and other superficial knowledge About Sex Physiology.

#### **4.1.3. Inaccurate Knowledge of Sexually Transmitted Diseases**

In order to prevent the harm of AIDS, parents warn their children about inaccurate sex education information such as "holding hands will make you pregnant" due to the fear of AIDS, which makes children also have a confusion and fear of AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. This has led to a layer of confusion and fear among children about sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS. As for other sexually transmitted diseases other than AIDS, they do not know and pay little attention to them, and do not teach their children how to use the correct scientific contraception.

### **4.2. The Dilemma of Psychosexual Education**

sex education's psychological bent helped weaken moral and biological absolutes. [16]Through observation interview records and data compilation, the dilemma of sex education in the Liangshan Yi region can be summarized into two aspects: strict boundaries with the opposite sex; and misunderstanding of love and dating.

#### **4.2.1. Strict Boundaries with The Opposite Sex**

Due to the family branch concept of strict hierarchical boundaries in the Liangshan Yi region and the long-standing idea of male superiority over female, there are strict boundaries between women and men in the Liangshan Yi region; fathers and daughters cannot reasonably express their love for each other, and fathers have to maintain their strict image; couples cannot show intimate actions or even hold hands in public; students of the opposite sex want to be close to each other but do not know the correct way to express themselves.

#### **4.2.2. Misunderstanding of Love and Dating**

Due to the special marriage and marriage customs in the Liangshan Yi region that are different from those of the Han nationality, many girls in the Liangshan Yi region have a marriage contract or even a marriage at a very young age. Influenced by social customs and traditional practices as well as the guidance of correct sex education, boys in the Liangshan Yi region lack respect and love for girls, do not know how to express their love for girls, and behave in a frivolous way toward girls, which causes harm to girls' physiology and psychology.

### **4.3. The Dilemma of Sexual Morality and Sexual Legal Education**

Due to traditional customs and social mores in the Liangshan Yi region, there is a lack of accurate and comprehensive information about proper expression of affection and moral constraints in marriage. At the same time, people in the Liangshan Yi region lack knowledge of the legal system of sexual laws and regulations, and the definition of sexual harassment and other behaviors is not clear enough. Girls in the Liangshan Yi region do not know enough about the ways and means to use the weapons of the law to protect themselves from sexual abuse, and they are influenced by the confinement of traditional thinking and the concept of family branches, and usually choose to be silent when they are subjected to unjust behavior.

### **4.4. The Way Out of The Current Situation of Girls' Sex Education in The Liangshan Yi Region**

#### **4.4.1. Design of Curriculum Objectives for Girls' Sex Education Activities**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child calls for and defends the need for children and young people to have access to objective holistic sex education. [17]The resolution emphasizes the differences in the sexuality needs of adolescents and adults. [18]The rights of young people, their opinions and attitudes, and competence are essential for the development and implementation of sex education health programs with subsequent validation. Their active participation, in cooperation with parents, teachers and other professionals and volunteers, is important.[19]

Combined with the International Sexuality Education Technology Guideline, the Comprehensive School Sex Education Guideline Kindergarten-12th Grade[20]As well as the Health Guideline for Primary and Secondary Schools, I propose the design of sex education goals for girls in the Liangshan Yi region.

(1) To provide girls in the Liangshan Yi region with scientific and accurate knowledge about sexuality.

(2) To help girls in the Liangshan Yi region develop correct sex-related values, observation and discrimination skills, attitudes and behavior patterns that are consistent with

individual, family and social requirements.

(3) To guide girls in the Liangshan Yi region to develop interpersonal skills and help them understand and establish good interpersonal relationships (including sexual relationships).

(4) To be able to help adolescents in the Liangshan Yi region develop the concept of being responsible for sexual relationships.

#### **4.4.2. Design of Curriculum Content for Girls' Sexuality Education Activities**

The content of the curriculum on sexuality education activities for girls was designed in two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. In the horizontal dimension, the knowledge and concepts related to sexuality that students should understand and master are proposed; in the vertical dimension, the content and teaching methods adapted to the grade level are proposed according to the grade level.

Horizontally, the knowledge and concepts related to sexuality are divided into six major themes: human development; interpersonal relationships; social skills; sexual behavior; sexual health; and sexual social culture. Sexual physiology, sexual psychology, sexual ethics, and sexual legality are addressed.

Longitudinally, it is divided into early childhood: preschoolers; childhood: lower elementary school (first to third grade); preadolescence: upper elementary school (fourth to sixth grade); and adolescence: middle school.

#### **4.4.3. Design of Curriculum Organization for Girls' Sex Education Activities**

In terms of curriculum organization, the concepts are deepened through illustrated stories, animations, games, case studies, and performances, so that students can understand the concepts and integrate them to unify knowledge and behavior.

## **5. Conclusion**

In order to improve the current situation of girls' sexual education in the Liangshan Yi region, this paper obtained, through field and in-depth interviews, that the dilemmas of girls' sexual education in the Liangshan Yi region include: receiving wrong knowledge about reproduction and fertility in the family; equating "sexual education" with how to maintain boundaries with boys; being influenced by traditional family culture and the idea of male superiority over female, and choosing to tolerate sexual deviance. There is a strong tension between sex, education, ethnicity, and girls, and sorting out the logical relationship between these elements can not only enrich sexology, sociology, and ethnology but also contribute to the enrichment of elementary school sex education. Based on the current situation of sex education for Yi girls, this paper aims to provide scientific and feasible sex education for Yi girls in the context of Yi sexual culture. Girls know how to protect themselves from sexual diseases such as AIDS by understanding sex, sexual morality and legal system, and sexual mental health.

Understanding is only the first step of practice, and this paper's understanding of the dilemma of sex education for girls of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group and the superficial taste of sex education curriculum are only the beginning. Further practice and reflection are needed to provide scientific sex education for girls of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group and to apply the knowledge of sex education in practice to protect themselves.

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