Recent economic development in China has not only increased standards of living but has also increased mobility, urbanization and access to mass media and Western culture. As a result, young people in China, especially those who are in high school and college, possess a more liberal attitude toward sex compared to previous generations [1]. As some studies show, a growing number of young people in China, including students in high schools and universities, are sexually experienced [2-5]. However, many of them do not have basic knowledge of safe sex [6] and the adverse health consequences of unsafe sex. For instance, although it has been proven that use of a condom is an effective strategy for disease prevention, it was found in a study that as many as 40% of sexually active Chinese college students reported never or rarely using condoms [7]. Consequently, the annual number of HIV-infected young Chinese students in China has grown rapidly in recent years, rising from 799 in 2008 to more than 3,400 in 2015 [8]. Additionally, based on the most recent reproductive health survey in China, approximately 22% of young females who engaged in premarital sexual activities had unexpected pregnancies in 2014 and about 92% of these pregnancies eventually resulted in abortion [9].

While sex education is compulsory for K-12 students in China, it does not seem to be effective. Although many sex education programs have been implemented, they do not receive enough attention because most schools focus on pushing their students to score high in their exams, as this will allow them to enroll at good high schools or universities [9]. As one study showed, instructors of sex education in Shanghai, one of the largest cities in China, tend to mainly focus on puberty and express a reluctance to teach knowledge of STDS, HIV, and AIDS [10]. Parents’ attitudes toward the sex education of their children are not always positive, because discussing sex with the next generation has never been encouraged in Chinese culture.

Recent economic developments in China have also made studying abroad a feasible option for young students, especially for those who are from affluent families. According to a recent statistic, more than 300,000 Chinese students were living in the United States for the purpose of higher education during the school year of 2015-16[11]. Some studies showed that, compared with their counterparts in China, Chinese students in the United States are reported to be more receptive to premarital sex and are also sexually active. The exact reasons are not very clear, but one study has indicated that the increase in sexual activities could be a result of a change of values in relation to sexual behaviors that takes place after moving to the United States [12]. It was also found that inconsistent use of condoms is very common among Chinese college students in the United States [12]. The adverse and predictable health consequences associated with this phenomenon, including the possibilities of having an STD and unexpected pregnancy, can negatively impact the process and outcome of Chinese students’ learning in the United States.

In order to pursue advanced education successfully, international students need to overcome a number of barriers, and the degree of adaption to American culture plays an important role in determining the likelihood of overcoming these barriers. Unfortunately, one study showed that Chinese students in general have limited interaction with Americans because of limited oral English proficiency [13], which indicates the potential difficulties of assimilation into American culture. Because of the difficulty of cultural adaption, young Chinese student may become more sexually active, which is due to their misconception of American culture. They may also practice unsafe sex more often, which is due to their lack of access to formal sex education prior to their arrival in the United States. This combination of causes of the prevalence of unsafe sex among young Chinese students in the United States seems to have been ignored by many scholars and practitioners of health education for a long time, which is not to mention the negative consequences associated with this issue.

Because the number of high school graduates is decreasing and recruitment has become a challenge for many U.S. higher-education institutions, many colleges and universities in the U.S. have been aggressive in recruiting international students, especially students from China [14]. The effort seems to be very successful so far, because the number of international students in the U.S. has risen steadily in the past decade [15].
According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, international students contributed more than $30.5 billion to the U.S. economy [16], and Chinese students contribute a huge portion of this amount of revenue, given the fact that they account for 31% of international students and have become the largest group of international students [11]. Therefore, the retention and success of Chinese students has strong financial implications for many U.S. colleges and universities. Unfortunately, little effort has been put into promoting the right knowledge of sex in this student population and preventing them from experiencing the negative consequences of unsafe sex, which limits their chance of advancing successfully in their education. It is vital for administrators, health educators, and researchers to learn more about Chinese students’ knowledge, attitude and practice of sex in order to help them design any necessary and barrier-breaking strategies of health education and to deliver the right sex education to them.

REFERENCES


