Parents’ Perspectives Regarding Comprehensive Sex Education

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Research Problem
The United States has higher rates of risky teen sexual activity, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and teen pregnancies, than other industrialized countries (Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty, 2008).

Research Question
What are the perspectives of parents with young children in a Midwestern college campus early childhood care center on the value of a comprehensive sex education program in public middle schools?

Hypothesis
Based on Alton, Valois, Oldendick, & Drane’s (2009) research, we predicted that parents who support a comprehensive sex education program in public middle schools will support (4+ on the Likert Scale) ten or more sex education topics to be taught to their children.

Theoretical Framework
The Social Exchange and Rational Choice Framework assumes a solution can be created through the calculation of the costs, benefits, social opinions, and personal values to create a decision that can be generalized to the common public (White & Klein, 2008).

Literature Review
Alton, Valois, Oldendick, & Drane (2009): found no need for a moral debate on sex education because 92% of the respondents supported a comprehensive sex education program in schools.
Eisenberg, Bernat, Bearinger, & Resnick (2009): found that parents supported condom access in schools when they have the knowledge that condom availability does not increase teen sexual activity.
Eisenberg, Bernat, Bearinger, & Resnick (2008): found that parents supported the majority of sex education topics being taught in middle school, abortion in high school, and puberty development in elementary school.
Kohler, Manhart, & Lafferty (2008): found that comprehensive sex education has a relationship with a 50% lower threat of teen pregnancy.
Kirby (2007): found that an effective sex education program is designed with comprehensible sex information and resources, a clear and focused message, and an active learning environment for the teens. He also found that a comprehensive program and an abstinence-only program can work together.

Methods
Participants
- 21 parents with young children in a Midwestern university’s child care center
Research Design
- Non-random pilot study, cross-sectional, purposive sampling
Data Collection Instrument
- IRB approved, informed by literature, implied consent
- 12 demographic questions, 12 close-ended statements based on a 1-5 Likert Scale, and 4 open-ended questions
Procedure
- Distributed the surveys to each child’s “cubby” where the parents picked it up and returned it to the designated boxes within a week. A cover letter was provided with the survey emphasizing the implied consent and confidentiality to reduce any potential pressure to complete the survey.
Data Analysis Plan
- Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)
- Frequencies, mean comparisons, correlations, and a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability analysis.

Results Summary
We found support for our hypothesis through our frequencies. Eleven out of 12 topics were highly supported by the majority of our participants to be taught in middle school.

Variables
Demographic Variables
  - GNR (Gender)
  - ICL (Income level)
  - RUC (Relationship to the university’s child care center)
  - SEP (Who do you believe sex education should be provided by?)
  - AOC (What is the age range of your oldest child?)
  - APS (Will your children attend a public school?)
  - SSM1 (Do you support the majority of our participants to be taught in middle school?)
  - SSM2 (Do you support a comprehensive sex education program in public middle schools?)
  - SDM (Sexual decision making)
Dependent Variables
  - RPA (Reproductive anatomy)
  - RSF (Responsible relationships)
  - SDM (Sexual decision making)
  - PCB (Pregnancy and child birth)
  - ABO (Abstinence as the best option)
  - CPA (Contraception as a preventative measure)
  - STA (STD/HIV/AIDS)
  - GMLT (LGBTQ topics)

Implications
Politicians
Utilize our results to support the implementation of comprehensive sex education policies that will benefit our youth population.

Educators
Wisconsin’s new sex education policy allows schools to choose between comprehensive and abstinence only sex education or comprehensive with an emphasis on abstinence. Educators can utilize our results to help them make a choice that represents what parents support.

Future Research
Include a random, large, national sample in order to generalize the findings nationwide.
Expand the sample to include middle school parents and high school parents.

Conclusion
This study demonstrated a younger generation of parent support for comprehensive sex education in public middle schools. Our research was important to the field of family studies in that the field advocates for the health of families and children, which includes supporting a rational choice about comprehensive sex education. We hope that we have contributed to a movement that will put a comprehensive sex education program into practice in our public middle schools. Why wouldn’t we want our youth to learn about their physical development, healthy relationships, and the continuum of sex decisions before they experiment with sex?