

Sexuality Education For Early Childhood: Themes, Methods, and Perceptions of Raudhatul Athfal (RA) Educators

Pendidikan Seksualitas Bagi Anak Usia Dini: Tema, Metode, dan Persepsi Pendidik Raudhatul Athfal (RA)

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Abstract: *Sexuality education equips children with knowledge about the functions of genital organs, help them maintain hygiene, and protect themselves from sexual violence. This study aims to investigate the themes, methods, and perceptions of educators regarding sexuality education. The research utilized a quantitative survey involving 247 educators. An online questionnaire with both closed and open-ended questions was employed as the research instrument, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods for closed questions and qualitative methods for open-ended questions. The content validity of the instrument was established through validation by psychologists, indicating that the questionnaire could be effectively used. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. The results indicated that the majority of respondents emphasized the importance of introducing sexuality education at an early stage. However, the lack of knowledge regarding suitable themes, limited teaching materials, and negative societal stigma were identified as significant challenges. Despite these obstacles, respondents acknowledged the importance of teaching various themes, such as protecting sensitive areas, maintaining the health and hygiene of genital organs, addressing religious norms related to interactions with the opposite sex, and respecting the privacy of others. Respondents suggested that the most effective methods for introducing these themes included the use of songs, fairy tales, and role-playing activities. The pedagogical implication of this study underscores the need to enhance educators' knowledge about sexuality education and provide them with adequate teaching materials.*

Keywords: *sexuality education theme, educator's Perception, methods of sexuality education, early childhood education*

Abstrak: *Pendidikan seksualitas membekali anak dalam pengenalan fungsi alat genital, menjaga higienitasnya, serta perlindungan diri dari kekerasan seksual. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap tema, metode, dan persepsi guru dalam pendidikan seksualitas. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah survei kuantitatif dan melibatkan 247 pendidik. Instrumen penelitian berupa kuesioner online dengan pertanyaan tertutup*

dan terbuka yang dianalisis menggunakan metode statistik deskriptif untuk pertanyaan tertutup, serta metode kualitatif untuk pertanyaan terbuka. Validasi instrumen dilakukan melalui validitas konten dengan melibatkan psikolog, dan disimpulkan bahwa angket tersebut dapat digunakan. Reliabilitas diukur menggunakan Alfa Cronbach. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas responden menyatakan pendidikan seksualitas sangat penting untuk dikenalkan sejak dini. Namun, minimnya pengetahuan tentang tema yang dapat diajarkan, terbatasnya bahan ajar, dan stigma negatif dari masyarakat menjadi faktor yang memperberat. Padahal, terdapat banyak tema penting yang harus diajarkan seperti perlindungan area sensitif, kesehatan dan kebersihan organ genital, norma agama terkait interaksi dengan lawan jenis, dan menghormati privasi orang lain. Responden menyatakan bahwa metode yang paling efektif untuk memperkenalkan tema-tema tersebut yaitu melalui lagu, dongeng, dan permainan peran. Implikasi pedagogis dari penelitian ini adalah perlunya meningkatkan pengetahuan para guru tentang pendidikan seksualitas dan menyediakan bahan ajar atau kurikulum yang mendukung.

Kata kunci: *tema pendidikan seksualitas, persepsi pendidik, metode pendidikan seksualitas, pendidikan anak usia dini*

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality education remains a sensitive topic within different levels of education, particularly when it comes to early childhood education. However, in Appendix I of the 2014 Minister of Education and Culture Number 146, which focuses on basic competencies to promote a healthy lifestyle for children aged 4-6 years, there are specific indicators that highlight the importance of children learning to protect themselves. These indicators include helping children recognize the body parts that need to be safeguarded and teaching them how to defend against various forms of violence, including sexual violence and bullying.

Sexuality education encompasses various meanings, and these meanings differ based on cultural and linguistic contexts. In the Indonesian dictionary, the term "sex" refers to gender, while the Oxford dictionary defines it as pertaining to men and women. Sexuality education involves providing information about the physical attributes of being male or female and the psychological implications associated with these aspects (Yafie, 2017). In the context of early childhood education, sex education

involves imparting knowledge about the functions of the body and reproductive organs, as well as teaching children how to care for and protect them. It also includes guidance on socializing in line with religious values, societal norms, and promoting healthy interactions (Nurhapipa & Hanifah, 2020). Therefore, the author suggests that early childhood sexuality education focuses on introducing children to their bodily organs, particularly the genitals and reproductive organs, and teaching them how to safeguard these parts, maintain personal privacy, and develop healthy relationships with others in their daily lives.

Based on previous research, both educators and parents have emphasized the importance of providing sexuality education during early childhood (Rachmasari et al., 2023). It is evident that sexuality education is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed, but it should be done in a manner that is appropriate for children. Article 15 of Law Number 35 of 2014 states that every child has the right to be protected from various forms of harm, including political activities, armed conflicts, social unrest, violent events, war, and sexual crimes. Without proper

sexuality education, the risk of sexual violence against children is likely to increase since they may not be able to recognize inappropriate behavior targeted at their own bodies. Disturbingly, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, through the SIMFONI (The Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children), recorded at least 1,500 cases of sexual violence against children in 2019 alone.

In society, there are differing perspectives regarding children and their understanding of their own bodies. Some researchers argue that children naturally possess curiosity and a desire to explore their bodies (Kenny et al., 2015; Martin, 2014). Conversely, there is a viewpoint that considers children as innocent and asexual beings, devoid of any sexual desires, thoughts, or interests (Blaise, 2009; Hornor, 2004). These researchers assert that childhood is a stage filled with questions and curiosities, and sexual development is a phenomenon that occurs during early childhood (Kenny et al., 2015; Larsson & Svedin, 2002). However, there is an ongoing debate concerning the sexualization of children at an early age. The primary concern stems from the belief that childhood is distinct from adulthood, and therefore children must be shielded from adult behaviors (Alat, 2015).

However, the situation becomes disheartening when considering the contradictory role of the media in the debate surrounding child sexuality. It is concerning that children are frequently exposed to sexual images through the media (Lemish, 2015). This issue is further compounded by the reluctance of parents and educators to openly address and acknowledge sexuality, as they often perceive early childhood as a time of innocence, believing that children should remain unaware of such matters (Flores & Barroso, 2017; Malacane & Beckmeyer, 2016). These attitudes are deeply ingrained in our culture, often intertwined with religious influences. Consequently, due to cultural

discourses surrounding children and sexuality, researchers have limited knowledge about the development of child sexuality compared to the adolescent phase (Lucke, 2020; Martin & Bobier, 2017).

This study aims to explore the perceptions of RA educators regarding early childhood sexuality education. It focuses on their interactions with various themes in early childhood sexuality education and the methods they employ in teaching this subject. The research subjects chosen for this study are educators working at the early childhood education level under the Indonesian Ministry of Religion, specifically those affiliated with Raudhatul Athfal (RA). The selection of RA educators was based on preliminary research findings that revealed unfavorable perceptions regarding sexuality education, particularly for young children. This aspect adds novelty to the study since previous research has not specifically examined RA educators, despite the significant role played by RA institutions, which are religious in nature, in providing sexuality education to their students. This importance stems from the close relationship between sexuality education and the teachings of Islam, as mentioned in Surah Al Isra verse 32:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزِّنَى ۚ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا

The verse conveys a clear message, stating, "and do not approach adultery. In fact, adultery is an abominable act and a bad way." This verse highlights the importance of taking preventive measures against sexual misconduct by avoiding behaviors or exposure to content that may lead to adultery. This includes avoiding activities such as dating, consuming sexual content, and even being cautious about the soap operas parents watch or the advertisements shown on YouTube. When it comes to understanding sexuality, it is crucial to con-

sider a combination of perspectives, including biological, psychological, and social aspects (Mayer & McHugh, 2016). The sexual development of a child is a complex process that poses challenges for parents and educators alike. Among these educators, it is the responsibility of teachers to effectively introduce the concept of sexuality in early childhood education (Sajaniemi *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, this research holds significant value as it aims to present an understanding of how educators perceive sexuality education and how they communicate its themes to students who undergo joint study. The findings of this study can have implications for future early childhood education practices regarding sexuality education.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative survey method to gather data. The research focused on RA educators in the City of Banjarmasin. According to the 2020 BPS data, there are a total of 61 RAs in the city, with 2696 educators who are affiliated with private schools under a governing foundation and have a religious orientation. To ensure a representative sample, the researchers used Isaac Michael's table with a significance level of 10%. As a result, 247 participants were randomly selected for the study and provided with an online questionnaire.

To collect data for this study, online questionnaires were utilized. These questionnaires consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, which aimed to explore educators' perceptions of early childhood sexuality education, as well as other indicators, themes, and methods in this field. The questionnaire was specifically developed to meet the objectives of the study. The closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, while the open-ended questions were analyzed qualitatively. To ensure the questionnaire's validity, psychologists were involved in assessing its content validity, and the results indicated

that the questionnaire could be used reliably. Additionally, the questionnaire's reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha test, which showed a value greater than 0.60, indicating that the questionnaire is considered reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions of RA Educators on Early Childhood Sexuality Education

Every person goes through the process of developing their sexuality, which encompasses biological, psychological, and social aspects. In the journey of understanding their own sexuality, children simultaneously explore and grasp concepts related to their bodies, genitalia, and gender identity. It is crucial to provide appropriate guidance during this early phase of development in order to foster a correct understanding of sexuality. Early childhood educators play a significant role as facilitators of sexuality education and socialization for children. The way educators perceive and approach sexuality education greatly influences the strategies and goals they set for imparting this knowledge.

The urgency of sexuality education for early childhood

Educators widely emphasize the importance of sexuality education, highlighting three key reasons. Firstly, it serves as a means to empower children from a young age, enabling them to protect themselves. By understanding their bodies, children can recognize which areas are private and should not be touched by others. If faced with an inappropriate situation, they can confidently refuse, avoid, or seek help. Secondly, sexuality education fosters an understanding of gender differences and roles, allowing children to comprehend societal expectations associated with their gender. Moreover, it educates them about the functions of their genitals and emphasizes the significance of cleanliness. This knowledge equips children

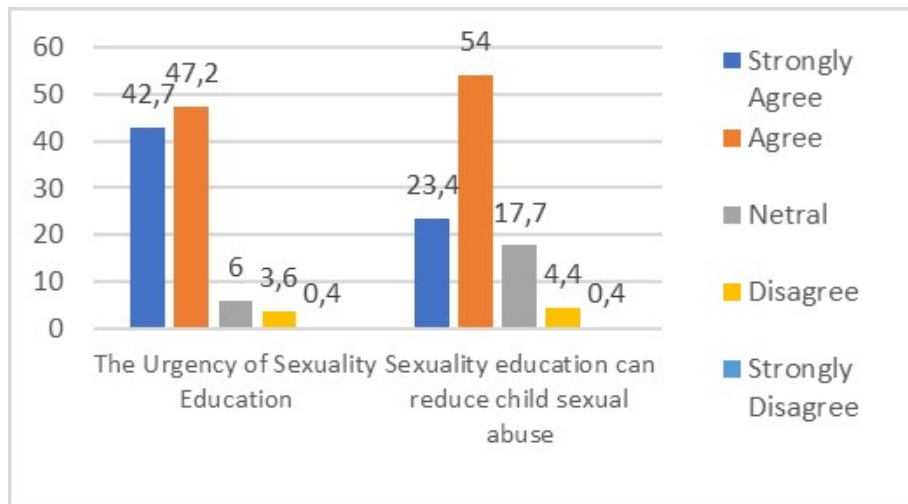


Figure 1 Educator's Perceptions About the Urgency of Sexuality Education for Early Childhood

with essential information on maintaining hygiene and navigating appropriate behavior within their gender communities.

The topic of sexuality is still considered taboo by the majority of people, leading to a general reluctance to discuss it, particularly with young children. Consequently, many children lack crucial knowledge about their own genitals. During a certain phase, children naturally explore and experiment with their bodies, including their genitals, driven by curiosity and pleasure. However, if they lack adequate understanding of their genitals, this phase can potentially lead them into troublesome situations. Compounding the issue is the widespread availability of digital content containing explicit material, which children inadvertently encounter. Unable to discern inappropriate content, there is a risk that children may imitate what they see, further complicating matters.

One educator expressed the following viewpoint regarding sexuality education for young children: "Introducing sexuality education at an early age is crucial as it enables children to become familiar with their own valuable body parts. They are taught the significance of maintaining cleanliness and good health in relation to these body parts, including their genitals and other organs. Importantly, early

education also equips children with knowledge to protect themselves from potential sexual abuse perpetrated by individuals who prey on underage children. Additionally, by providing sex education at a young age, we can help prevent the development of negative thoughts in children, particularly those influenced by media sources such as television, the internet, and books."

Some educators who oppose the implementation of sexuality education for children should not be misunderstood as lacking an understanding of its significance. These educators actually acknowledge the importance of sexuality education but differ in their opinion on the appropriate timing for its introduction. They believe that introducing sexuality-related topics at a young age might be too burdensome for children. They recognize that certain aspects of sexuality are challenging to explain in a way that children can fully comprehend, increasing the likelihood of misconceptions arising.

Educators have expressed contrasting views regarding the urgency of sexuality education, with the majority stating that the available information within their Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions is insufficient. Managers of these institutions are hesitant to incorporate sexuality education into their curriculum due to the prevailing community

perception, particularly among parents, which does not endorse such efforts. To prevent tension, conflicts, and negative stereotypes associated with the institution, topics related to sexuality are often integrated into broader themes such as self-awareness and personal development.

Availability of sexuality health information is required in ECEC

In Figure 2, the study reveals that a significant number of educators strongly believe that early childhood education should include sexuality health information. Specifically, 60.1% of educators emphasized its importance, while 29.4% considered it to be very important. The average response value from the participants was 4.15 out of a maximum score of 5, indicating a strong consensus regarding the urgency of providing comprehensive sexuality education for young children. This is especially crucial as the topic is often considered taboo within society.

According to the survey, educators commonly cited several reasons to support the importance of sexuality education for children. One prominent reason is the recognition that children need to develop media literacy skills in order to navigate the sexual narratives they encounter through different media platforms. Additionally, educators emphasized that sexuality education plays a crucial role in

fostering children's understanding of respecting their own bodies, as well as gender identity. It also aims to promote their safety by equipping them with knowledge to make informed decisions and reduce risky sexual behavior as they mature. Furthermore, sexuality education is seen as a means to address and rectify any misinformation children may acquire from peers or the internet.

Early childhood can learn about sexuality in appropriate themes and methods

Based on Figure 3, it is evident that the majority of educators hold a positive view regarding teaching the subject of sexuality to young children. A significant 47.2% strongly agree with this notion, while an additional 48% agree. This stands in contrast to the prevailing belief that sexuality is a taboo topic. Such a belief often limits the understanding of sexuality to mere sexual behavior or the biological aspects of relationships between men and women. However, educators recognize that there are numerous crucial aspects of sexuality that children should be acquainted with. These include topics such as maintaining personal hygiene of their genitals, understanding appropriate behavior based on gender, respecting others by refraining from intruding on their sensitive areas, and safeguarding oneself from unwanted touch in those sensitive areas.

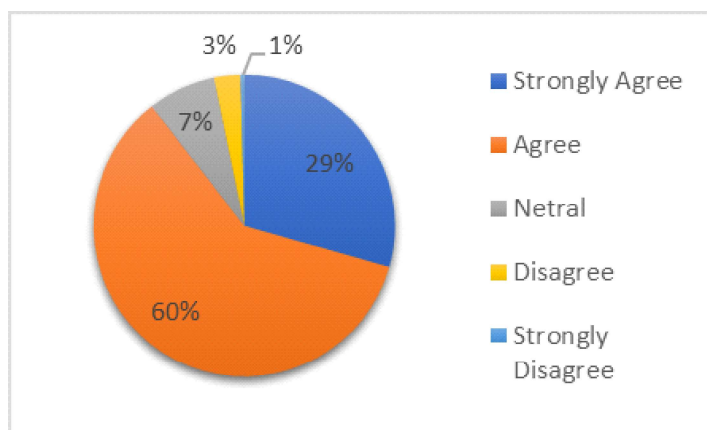


Figure 2 Educator's Perception About The Availability of Sexuality Health Information in ECEC

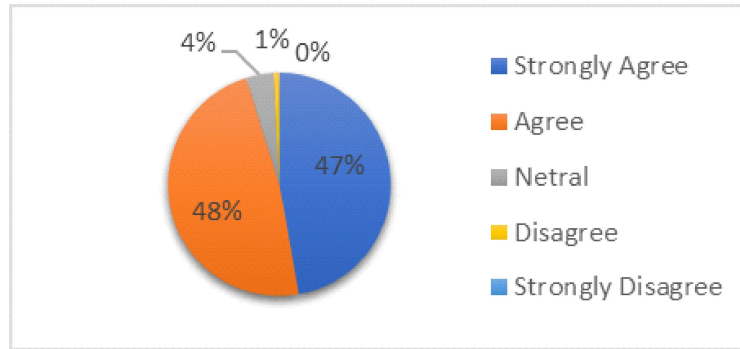


Figure 3 Educator's Perception about Children's Ability to Understand The Theme of Sexuality

Educators highlight the significance of ensuring accurate comprehension when discussing sexuality education with children. It is essential for educators to explain the information in a manner that corresponds to the children's developmental stage and language comprehension. They do not need to delve into explicit details regarding sexuality since young children typically display curiosity primarily about babies and pregnancy. Therefore, discussions about sexual behavior are unnecessary at this stage. Emphasizing the use of appropriate terms when referring to genitals is also crucial. Often, individuals resort to using nicknames or pseudonyms for genitals, which can lead to misunderstandings among children.

Children receive more information about the theme of sexuality from the media they consume, their environment, and their friends.

Figure 4 reveals that a significant portion of educators, approximately 41.9%, agree that

young children nowadays are exposed to a substantial amount of sexuality-related information from sources whose credibility and accuracy cannot be verified. These sources include internet content and peers. However, a considerable number of other respondents, around 32.7%, indicated that this could potentially occur, but they cannot be entirely certain since they are unable to consistently monitor the child's behavior. It is challenging for educators to keep track of what children watch, which games may contain sexual content, and the topics discussed among their friends.

Given the vast range of sexuality themes encompassing physical, psychological, and social aspects, it is highly likely that children receive a substantial amount of information from sources that may not be reliable. The primary reason for this is that educators face limitations when it comes to explaining sexuality-related

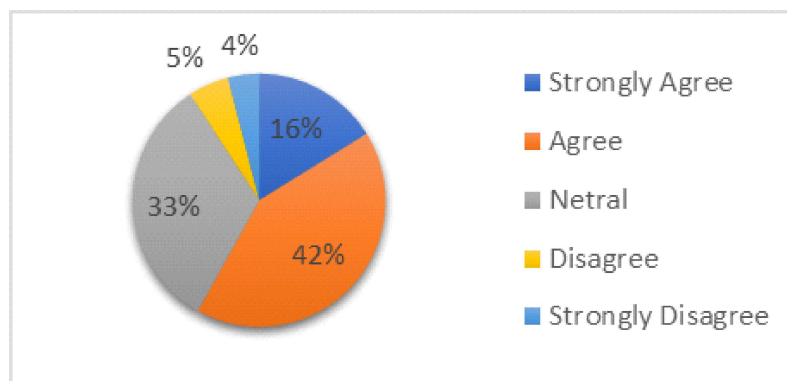


Figure 4 Educators' Perception of the Credibility of Information Sources Children Receive on the Theme of Sexuality

topics, whereas internet content, the community, and peers lack the moral responsibility to provide accurate information. Early childhood education should empower children with the ability to discern incorrect notions about sexuality, particularly in light of harmful advertisements that promote an ideal body size, portray violence against women on television, and perpetuate social and cultural gender stereotypes. The key is to provide children with the correct concepts, enabling them to have a basis for comparison and make informed decisions.

Early childhood is highly susceptible to experiencing sexual disorders due to their limited understanding of the concept of sexuality, which leaves them unable to protect themselves effectively. Instead of waiting, it is crucial to teach them about relationships, respect, body ownership, and appropriate touch from an early age. This education is essential for children to develop a sense of body autonomy, understanding that they are not passive objects to be touched or abused. To facilitate this, it is necessary for children in their early years to have a vocabulary and emotional literacy that enables them to express concerns or ask questions about such matters. Simultaneously, educators and parents have an important role in removing taboos and eliminating feelings of shame surrounding these issues.

The topic of sexuality is a private matter, therefore, it is not deemed appropriate to be taught broadly in the classroom

Although the importance of sexuality education is recognized, there are still educators who believe that certain topics within this subject should not be taught in classrooms as a whole. Specifically, issues related to reproduction and the origin of babies are often deemed more suitable for individual discussions with children. According to these educators, teaching such themes in a classroom setting could potentially lead to confusion and misconceptions among the students.

According to Figure 5, a significant portion of educators (23.4%) believed that certain topics should only be addressed privately when children specifically inquire about them. However, the majority of respondents (51.2%) disagreed with this notion, asserting that these themes can be effectively comprehended by children if communicated using appropriate language and methods tailored to their stage of development.

Fear of receiving negative responses from parents or society if I teach topics related to sexuality to children

There are some groups of people who see sex education solely as a moral matter, disregarding its crucial role in addressing the lack of knowledge about sexuality. This lack of understanding contributes to the spread of

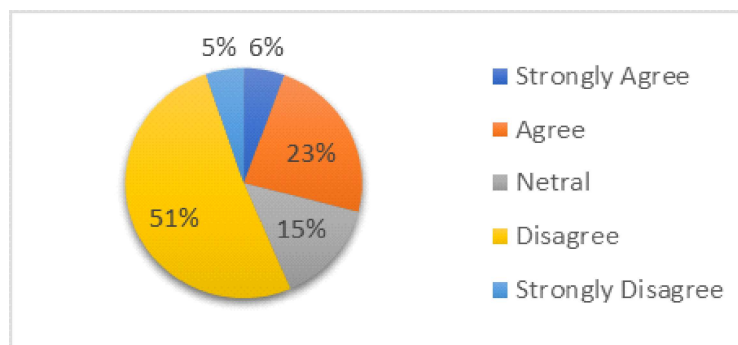


Figure 5 Educators' Perceptions About The Topic of Sexuality Are Not Considered Appropriate to be Taught in A General Class Setting

violence and sexual misconduct. It is essential to emphasize that comprehensive sexuality education plays a vital role in preventing and combating violence and sexual exploitation, particularly among children and adolescents. International human rights bodies have recognized the rights of young individuals to receive comprehensive, accurate, scientifically sound, and culturally sensitive sexuality education, in accordance with established global standards. The right to such education is equivalent to the rights to live free from violence and discrimination, enjoy the highest attainable standard of mental and physical health, access and share information, and receive a quality and inclusive education. Unfortunately, when public perception opposes these rights, the effective implementation of sexuality education becomes challenging.

According to Figure 6, the largest percentage of educators (43.5%) expressed that the public's perception of sexuality education has become more open and inclusive. These educators have no reservations about teaching sexuality education to young children, especially when approaching the topic from a broad perspective that focuses on empowering children against sexual harassment. However, a significant number of educators still believe that societal conditions are not conducive to supporting sexuality education. Around 28.6% of educators admit to being apprehensive about

teaching sexuality-related themes to young children due to potential negative perceptions.

Factors affecting educator's perceptions of sexuality education

According to Figure 7, educators' perceptions of sexuality education are influenced by multiple factors. This study highlights three main factors that shape these perceptions. Among them, the factor with the highest influence is understanding religious norms, earning a total of 167 points. When the content of sexuality education aligns with religious principles, educators are more likely to support it and carry out the teaching process with confidence and dedication.

The educational background and level of knowledge regarding sexuality education are significant factors that shape educators' perceptions. This factor holds the second-highest influence, scoring 131 points. Educators who possess a deeper understanding of sexuality education are more likely to have inclusive attitudes and perspectives. As their knowledge becomes more comprehensive, their willingness to teach sexuality-related themes to young children also increases.

The third factor influencing educators' perception of sexuality education is the customary norms and culture in which they live and socialize. This factor obtained a total of 98 points. Educators are keenly aware of the

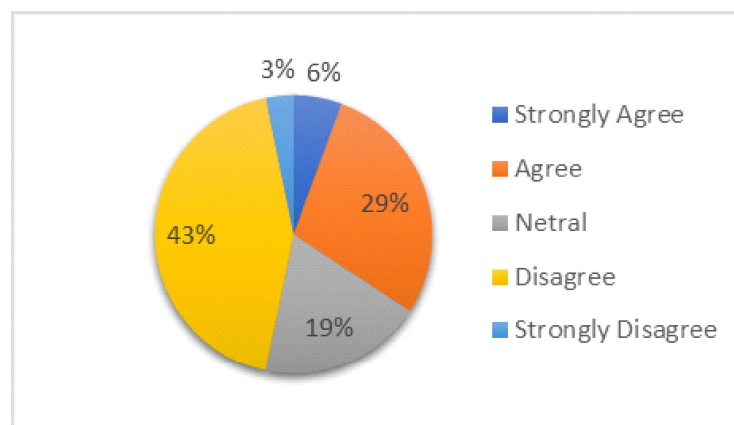


Figure 6 Educators Perception About Fear of Getting Negative Response from Parents

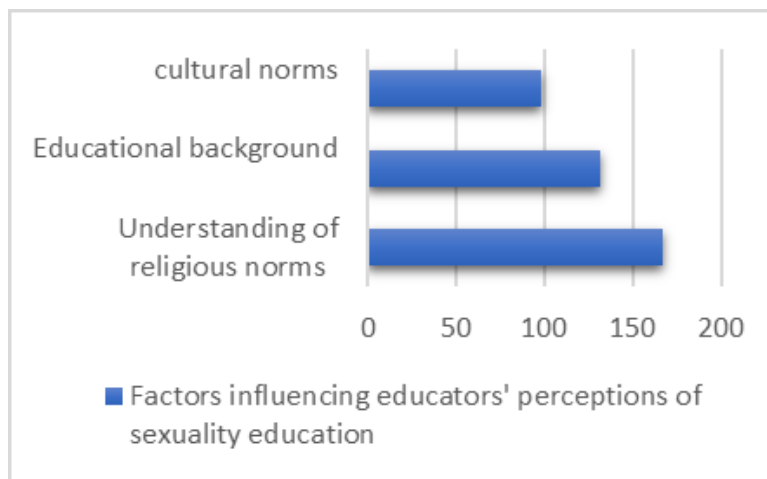


Figure 7 Factors Affecting Educators' Perceptions of Sexuality Education

tension that exists between customary norms and cultural expectations when it comes to sexuality education. This tension arises due to the lack of open information and the strong stigmatization surrounding topics related to sexuality. In societies shaped by customs and culture, discussions about sexuality are considered taboo and not meant for public discourse. However, the educators participating in this study expressed that if the public had a comprehensive understanding of the content and goals of sexuality education, they would likely be supportive of these efforts in order to protect the well-being and future of their children.

Themes in Sexuality Education for Early Childhood

Urgent Themes Taught In Sexuality Education According to Educators

The themes considered urgent for sexuality education in early childhood, as identified by educators or respondents, are quite diverse. Figure 8 outlines six main themes that are considered crucial to be taught. The theme that received the highest number of mentions from respondents is the concept of body and protecting sensitive areas. This theme received a total of 144 points.

The theme that received the second-highest number of mentions from respondents

is related to religious norms regarding interactions with the opposite sex, earning 88 points. Following closely is the theme of digital device health, which received 86 points. Another significant theme is about respecting others' boundaries and maintaining privacy, totaling 71 points.

In fifth place, there is a tie with the theme of understanding gender differences and their roles, also earning 71 points. Lastly, the theme that received the lowest number of points, 32, is teaching about gender differences and their impact on the surrounding environment.

Themes Taught Must Be One-way

Due to the lack of experience and the absence of a standardized concept or curriculum in sexuality education, educators often perceive that the themes taught should be one-sided, with educators deciding what children can and cannot learn. However, this authoritarian approach can lead to contradictory reactions, as young children naturally possess a strong sense of curiosity.

According to Figure 9, the majority of educators who participated in this study expressed that they hold the primary authority in determining what children can and cannot do regarding the theme of sexuality. Around 43.1% strongly agreed with this statement, while 54% agreed. It is evident that educators

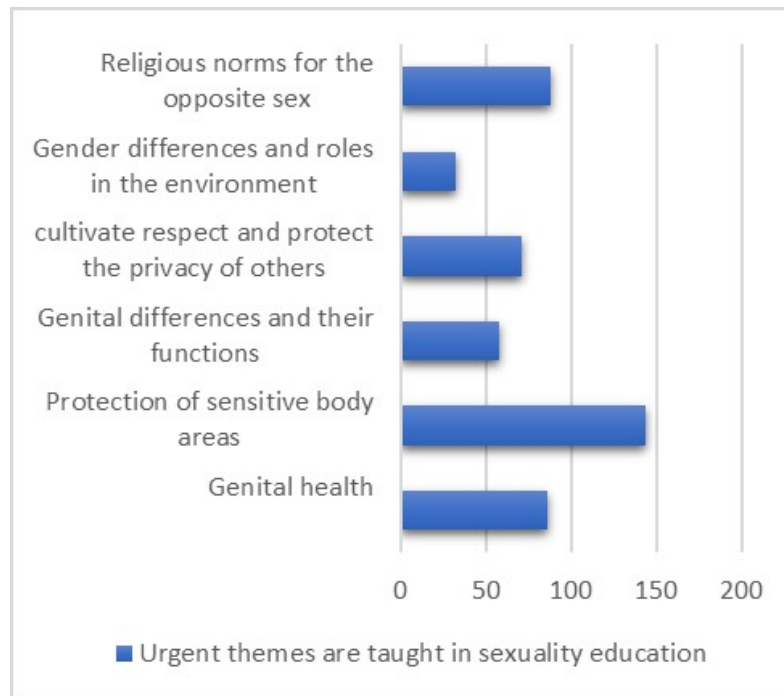


Figure 8 Urgent Themes Taught

possess more competence and insight into the concept of sexuality education compared to early childhood. However, it is essential to establish positive communication with young children on these topics, allowing them to internalize and reconstruct the concept based on their own critical thinking. When children generate their own understanding, they are more likely to strongly believe in the concept compared to when it is imposed upon them.

The Theme of Sexuality Should be Included in The Curriculum

To ensure the effectiveness and accuracy of

planning, implementing, and evaluating sexuality education for early childhood, it is crucial to include themes related to sexuality education in the curriculum. These topics should not be limited to everyday interactions between students and educators, such as answering children's questions about sexuality. The inclusion of these themes in the school curriculum has far-reaching implications. It determines how educators are trained to address sexuality at the school level and the extent to which it is integrated into the educator training courses. It is important to note that sexuality education goes beyond

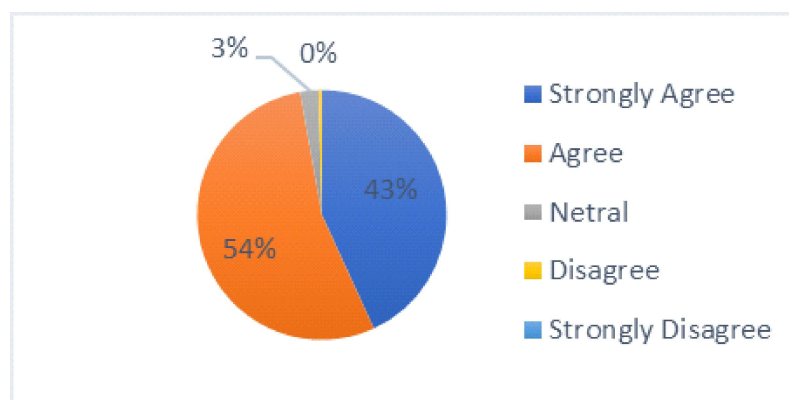


Figure 9 Themes Taught Must Be One-way

imparting cognitive knowledge; it is a life skills-based approach that aims to empower young children. By fostering autonomy, decision-making skills, and self-esteem regarding their own sexuality, it seeks to positively influence their behavior.

According to Figure 10, the majority of educators who participated in the study agreed that sexuality education is included in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) curriculum, accounting for 59.7%. A portion of the respondents stated they were unsure (19.4%), while a smaller percentage strongly agreed (14.9%). Educators have proposed several options for the sexuality education curriculum, including a standalone curriculum dedicated to sexuality education or integration of related themes such as "me and my body," "body hygiene," "playing with friends," and others.

The Method for Teaching Sexuality Education for Early Childhood

The most appropriate method for teaching sexuality education for children

The learning method refers to the approach used to effectively convey knowledge and ensure its acceptance. When it comes to teaching sexuality education to early childhood, it is crucial to employ the appropriate methods that align with the child's age and characteristics. This study has identified six methods that are considered most suitable for teaching sexuality education to young children.

As depicted in Figure 11, the most preferred delivery method chosen by the respondents is through songs, earning 152 points. Following closely is the storytelling method with 116 points. In third place, we have the question and answer/discussion method, which received 104 points. The lecture method ranks fourth, with 86 points, as respondents found it suitable for teaching sexuality education to early childhood. Additionally, the use of videos showcasing relevant themes of sexuality education was also chosen by respondents, scoring 85 points. Lastly, the role-playing method, with a total of 81 points, was another method selected by respondents for teaching sexuality education.

Teachers and parents should collaborate in teaching sexuality themes to children

According to Figure 12, the majority of respondents strongly agree (41.5%) or agree (54.4%) that collaboration between educators and parents is crucial in implementing sexuality education for early childhood. This collaboration ensures that the concepts taught at school align with the messages conveyed at home, preventing children from becoming confused about these sensitive topics. Educators also emphasize the importance of receiving positive parental support before teaching sexuality education, as it contributes to the overall effectiveness of the educational process.

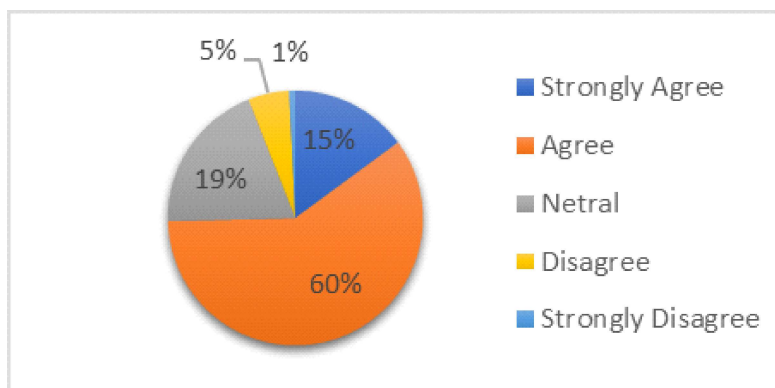


Figure 10 The Availability of Sexuality Education Curriculum for ECE

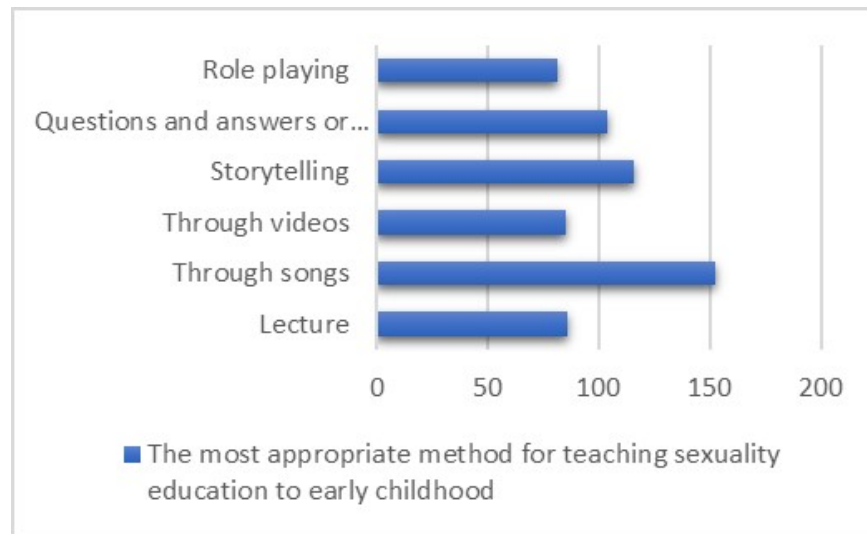


Figure 11 The Appropriate Method For Introducing The Theme of Sexuality

One of the primary sources of resistance faced by educators when implementing sexuality education for early childhood is believed to be parents. The majority of parents still hold the view that sexuality education should not be taught at any educational level, let alone be included in the curriculum. This perception stems from a limited understanding that sexuality education solely revolves around intimate relationships. Hence, educators believe that it is crucial to broaden parents' perceptions regarding sexuality education. When educators and parents share the same understanding and perspective on sexuality education, it is anticipated that the pressure on educators will decrease. This, in turn, will create a more comfortable and supportive environment for educators involved in the program.

Avoid answering children's questions related to sexuality

Educators often find it challenging and uncomfortable to discuss sexuality with young children, which can lead to problems and discomfort. While it is crucial for educators to be open and honest when addressing children's questions and comments, their responses are often influenced by their own level of comfort. It is important to acknowledge that children are naturally curious about sexuality and have their own understanding of the subject. How educators choose to respond to children's questions or comments about sexuality themes can either normalize, limit, confuse, or reshape their understanding of these topics.

According to Figure 13, it is evident that a significant portion of respondents (61.7%) are

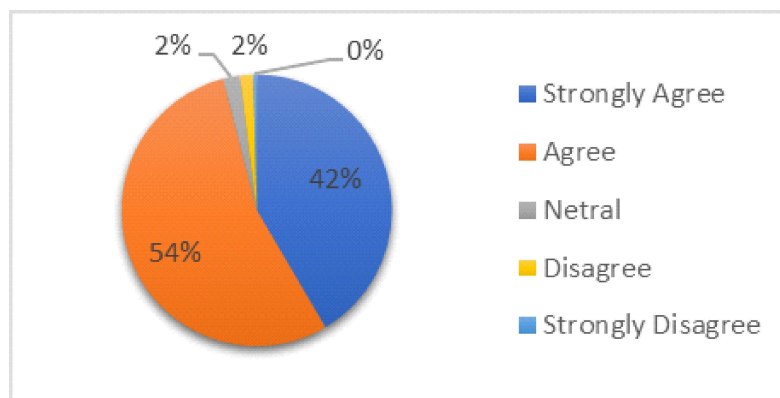


Figure 12. The Urgency of Educator-parent Collaboration in Early Childhood Sexuality Education

open to discussing sexuality when children inquire about it, without avoiding or diverting the topic of conversation. This finding indicates that educators already possess the necessary confidence to address matters of sexuality with children and are at ease when responding to this delicate subject. However, a smaller percentage of respondents (16.1%) admitted that they might still try to avoid such situations, while 17.3% expressed discomfort when discussing sexuality in the presence of children.

It is difficult to explain themes of sexuality to young children in a way that they can understand

Traditionally, the educator has held the primary role in the learning process, with students taking on a passive role. However, in recent decades, new approaches have emerged, showing that learning is always built upon the existing knowledge that students possess. Students construct their own knowledge through interactions with their surroundings and the information they receive. From this perspective, learning extends beyond simply receiving and processing information provided by the educator. Students thrive when given the opportunity to develop their own understanding by critically engaging with personal experiences and information. Adopting a learner-centered approach enables students to actively participate in the learning process and fosters a unique learning style.

In a two-way educational setting like this, the role of the educator is no longer dominant. Instead, educators must strive to ignite students' curiosity and encourage them to actively share their existing knowledge. By engaging in learning activities of this nature, educators can effectively address challenging questions and comments from children regarding sexuality education. Figure 14 illustrates that a significant portion of educators (46.8%) encounter these difficulties. However, an encouraging 24.2% reported being accustomed to such situations, enabling them to respond confidently and without hesitation to sensitive questions or comments from young children regarding the topic of sexuality.

Educators should receive training to effectively teach topics related to sexuality and child development

Sexuality education training is crucial for Early Childhood Education and Care educators in today's world. It encompasses various aspects such as the essential concepts to be taught, the appropriate teaching methods, and the necessary evaluation techniques. Effective teaching plays a vital role in ensuring successful sexuality education, making it imperative for all educators to receive the right training and support. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, sexuality education requires specialized teaching skills. Furthermore, the training program aims to equip educators with

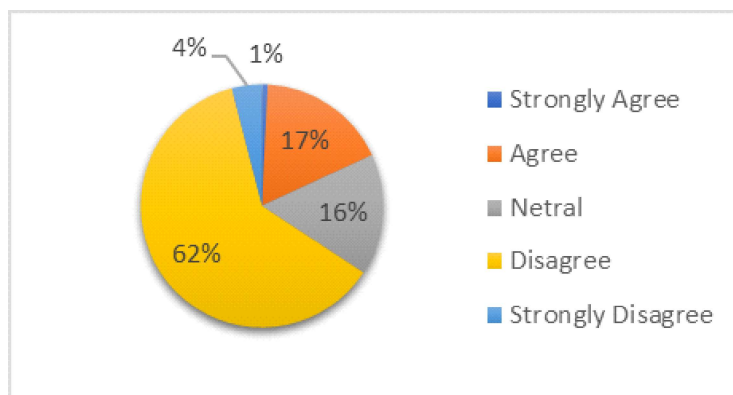


Figure 13 Educators Avoid Answering Children's Questions Related To Sexuality

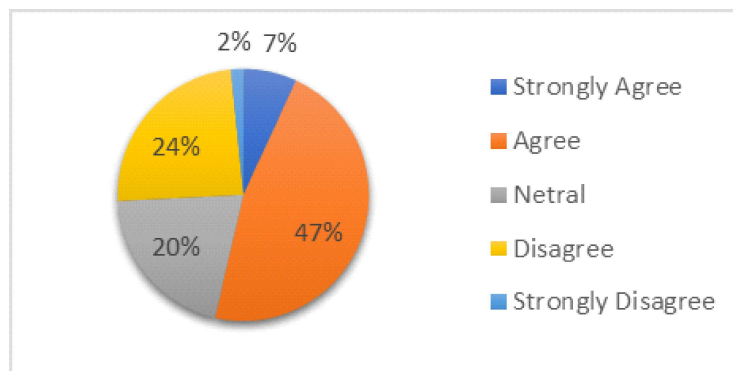


Figure 14 The Difficulty of Educators In Explaining The Theme of Sexuality Education

interactive and participatory teaching approaches specifically tailored for sexuality education.

According to Figure 15, a significant majority of respondents in this study (47.2% strongly agree and 48% agree) believe that ECEC educators should receive training in sexuality education. This data suggests that educators feel they lack a clear understanding of the concept of sexuality education and a well-established method for teaching it to young children. It is not uncommon for educators to encounter personal, religious, or moral barriers when addressing sensitive topics. Consequently, they may choose to avoid incorporating such topics into the curriculum. Therefore, it is essential for these objections and uncertainties to be openly discussed during educator training. When educators align their attitudes, feelings, and beliefs with the topic of sexuality, they become more effective in communicating relevant information.

Inhibiting Factors for Educators in Teaching Sexuality Education

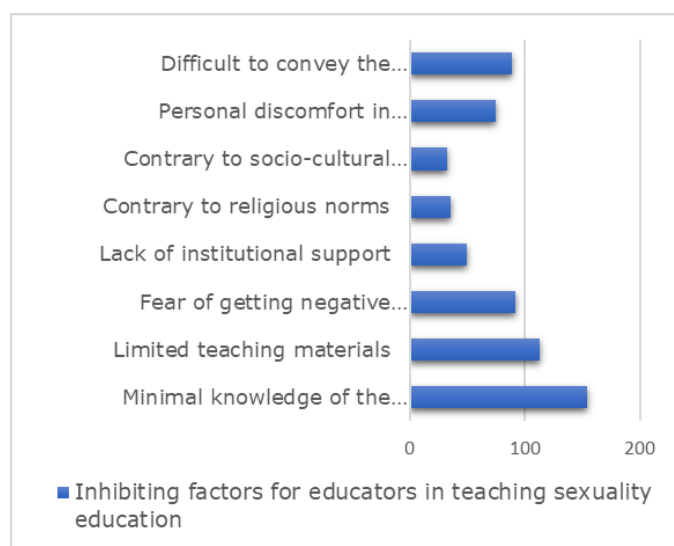


Figure 16 Inhibiting factors for teaching topics related to sexuality

When it comes to teaching sexuality education to early childhood, there are bound to be several obstacles. This study has

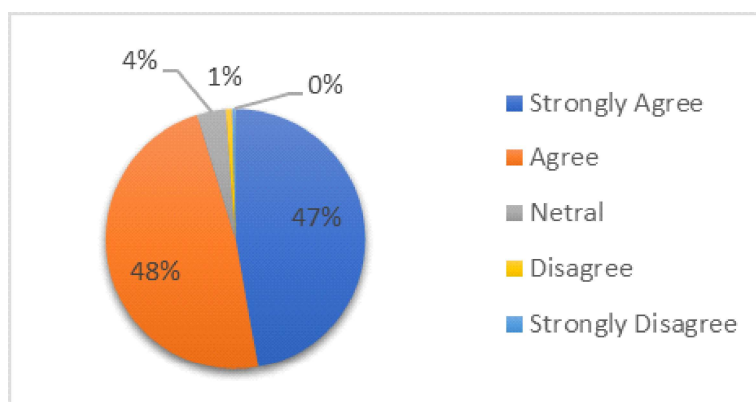


Figure 15 Training Related To Sexuality Education

identified at least eight factors that hinder educators from effectively teaching sexuality education. Among these factors, the respondents expressed that the most inhibiting one was their lack of knowledge about the theme they were teaching.

According to Figure 16, lack of knowledge about the theme being taught is the highest inhibiting factor with a total of 154 points. The next significant factor, totaling 113 points, is the limited availability of teaching materials on sexuality education, making it challenging for educators to effectively teach the subject. Another obstacle identified is the fear of facing negative stigma from others, which scored 92 points. Additionally, conveying the themes in a way that children can comprehend was highlighted as a difficulty, receiving 89 points. Personal discomfort in discussing the topic of sexuality education follows closely with 74 points. Finally, lack of institutional support in teaching sexuality education ranks next with 49 points.

Educators' perceptions of sexuality education can significantly impact their responses to children's behavior related to sexuality. Ajzen's theory of planned behavior explains that the likelihood of someone engaging in a specific behavior depends on their behavioral intentions, which refers to their inclination to perform that behavior. These intentions are influenced by three types of perceptual variables: (1) attitudes toward the behavior, which refers to how much the behavior is viewed as favorable or beneficial; (2) subjective norms, which relate to the social pressure one feels to engage in the behavior; and (3) perceived behavioral control, which reflects the individual's belief in their ability to easily carry out the behavior (Ajzen, 1991). This study aims to investigate the perceptions and experiences of educators regarding their interactions with the topic of child sexuality, as well as their expectations of sexuality

education. Additionally, the study will explore the factors that contribute to educators avoiding discussions about sexuality when interacting with children and assess their confidence in teaching this subject.

Previous studies have revealed that many early childhood educators in the field of ECEC lack confidence and feel uneasy when it comes to implementing sexuality education. For instance, Balter, van Rhijn, and Davies (2016) discovered that Canadian ECEC educators expressed uncertainty regarding the appropriate age-appropriate information about sexuality for young children, indicating a need for further training in this area. Similarly, Counterman and Kirkwood's (2013) study found that some American early childhood educators perceived their knowledge of early sexual development as quite limited. They mentioned that their training predominantly focused on preventing sexual harassment, leaving them unsure about what and how to teach in the field of sexuality education. Furthermore, these educators expressed discomfort when communicating about sexuality with children and their families. Unsurprisingly, the study conducted by Brouskeli and Sapountzis (2017) involving Greek ECEC educators also revealed feelings of academic unpreparedness and embarrassment when it came to teaching children about sexuality.

The development of human sexuality is a complex process that begins at conception and continues throughout one's life. (Kakavoulis, 1998). Sex plays a significant role in shaping an individual's personality, as it is influenced by a range of experiences rooted in historical, social, and cultural contexts (Ganji et al., 2017). Furthermore, sexuality is considered to be a developmental domain influenced by various factors playing different roles, including biological, psychological, and social factors (Balter et al., 2016).

According to the literature, sexual socialization is a lifelong process that begins

at birth, through which children gradually develop fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions regarding sexuality (Blaise, 2009). Research indicates that within this process, various concepts are encompassed, including gender identity and formation, the development of gender roles, the acquisition of sexual knowledge, and the formation of sexual attitudes (Ganji et al., 2017). During infancy, the sexual socialization of children is primarily influenced by their family culture. However, as the child grows and develops, the impact of the family diminishes, and the child's sexual experiences become shaped by a broader range of environmental interactions (Kakavoulis, 1998).

Early childhood has traditionally been regarded as a natural phase, viewed solely as part of the broader continuum of human biological development. However, there has been recent criticism of this definition, as it overlooks the diverse nature of this stage and its variations across different historical, geographical, political, and economic contexts (Gittins, 1998). Early childhood is shaped by a multitude of factors, such as cultural background, social class, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, family dynamics, age, and ability. The socio-cultural construction of early childhood is primarily influenced and defined by adults. Adults play a crucial role in determining how children should behave, what knowledge they should possess, and when and how they should acquire it, including matters related to sexuality. Adults commonly hold the belief that young children should not be exposed to discussions about sexuality, resulting in a tendency to avoid this topic in their interactions with children (Stein et al., 2018).

Early childhood innocence is characterized by qualities such as purity, naivety, selflessness, irrationality, and a state of unawareness. Robinson (2017) argues that early childhood innocence serves a vital social function by delineating and managing the distinctions

between adults and children. The concept of innocence in early childhood becomes the foundation for controlling children's exposure to specific types of knowledge, particularly knowledge related to sexuality (Bhana, 2008). The establishment of what is commonly referred to as 'adult-only' knowledge rules predominantly stems from the perceptions and concerns held by many adults regarding the potential erosion of children's innocence and its potential effects on their emotional development. Numerous adults consider a child's awareness of sexuality as an inappropriate progression (Rudolph & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2018). This is a commonly heard viewpoint among many parents in the field of early childhood education. However, by avoiding discussions about sexuality education, parents, educators, and the community inadvertently expose children to haphazard knowledge acquisition through sources like YouTube videos, television, and unhealthy relationships they encounter in their daily lives.

Parents, educators, and the community need to acknowledge that early childhood is exposed to sexual education through informal channels, although adults may not always recognize it as such (Martin & Bobier, 2017). As a result, parents often overlook their children's behavior and avoid addressing their questions about sexual topics (Robinson et al., 2017). They may quickly switch off the television or remove their children from viewing sexual content (Sharifi et al., 2016). It is important to note that the term "sexual material" here refers to discussions or representations involving the interaction between genders and understanding and safeguarding one's own body. When it comes to sexuality education, it should be approached with care and delivered in a positive and informative way within preschool settings.

Sexuality education in early childhood, whether provided by ECEC institutions, is often not structured or formally planned. Instead, it

tends to be conveyed through everyday interactions and socialization. Parents, caregivers, and educators address questions and guide children's behavior in relation to sexuality without following a specific curriculum. The lack of a standardized approach leads to diverse interpretations and discussions surrounding the education of children on sexuality, with the intention of protecting them from the potential challenges associated with this topic (Jones, 2011).

A significant portion of the research conducted on child sexuality education primarily examines behavior rather than knowledge and attitudes. These studies tend to classify any behavior remotely related to sexuality as sexual behavior, primarily from an adult perspective. However, there is substantial evidence indicating that certain actions labeled as sexual behavior by adults may not be driven by sexual satisfaction or stimulation for children. In other words, behaviors that adults perceive as sexual may simply be interpreted as play or an expression of curiosity during early childhood. It is crucial to consider that children may assign different meanings and purposes to such behaviors than adults do.

To date, there hasn't been a specific sexuality education curriculum for early childhood implemented in Indonesia. However, in the United States, the Sexuality and Information Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) has developed a resource called "Early Guidance on Sexuality Issues: From Birth to Five Years." These guidelines by SIECUS focus on six key concepts that shape sexual development in early childhood. These concepts include human development, human relationships, personal skills, behavior, health, and society and culture. These guidelines provide a framework for understanding and addressing sexuality-related topics during the early years of a child's life (Bass & Coleman, 2022). This concept encompasses various

important topics relevant to early childhood, including friendship, emotions, communication, body positivity, curiosity about sexuality, understanding consent, gender roles, diversity, and fairness. The SIECUS guidelines provide detailed information on how caregivers can effectively communicate these key messages to children. They cover topics such as how the body functions, where babies come from, the role of the five senses, promoting body appreciation, expressing love and affection, understanding masturbation and self-pleasure, addressing curiosity about sexual intercourse, emphasizing genital hygiene, preventing sexual harassment, and exploring gender roles. The aim of these guidelines is to ensure that sexuality is not stigmatized and is understood as an integral part of a child's early developmental experiences.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The majority of educators recognize the significance of introducing sexuality education to children, as it can help reduce instances of sexual harassment by providing them with knowledge about genital function, hygiene, and how to protect sensitive areas. Sexuality education delivered through early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions also serves as a countermeasure against unreliable and inaccurate information about sexuality. An overwhelming 96% of respondents believe that a successful implementation of sexuality education requires collaboration between parents and educators.

However, educators face several challenges when teaching sexuality education. These challenges include a lack of knowledge about appropriate topics to be taught, limited availability of teaching materials, and negative societal stigma surrounding the subject. Educators have identified several crucial themes that should be addressed, including the

importance of safeguarding sensitive areas, maintaining genital health and hygiene, understanding religious norms related to interactions with the opposite sex, and respecting others' privacy.

To effectively introduce these themes, educators have found that using methods such as incorporating songs, fairy tales, and role-playing activities can be highly effective.

Suggestion

It is important to create a curriculum for sexuality education in early childhood education, particularly in RA institutions. Moreover, RA educators require training in sexuality education for young children. When it comes to implementing sexuality education, educators should work together with parents, engaging them through parenting activities or other means. Additionally, there is a need to enhance public awareness and understanding of sexuality education, emphasizing its importance and the need for immediate action.

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