



Research Paper

Main Dimensions of Challenges in Adolescent Sex Education: A Mixed-methods Research

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Abstract

Aim: The purpose of this study was to identify the main dimensions of the challenges of implementing adolescent sex education. This applied study used a mixed-methods exploratory approach. Data were analyzed through Strauss and Corbin's open and axial coding in the qualitative phase and through structural equation analysis in the quantitative phase in SPSS and LISREL software. Findings from the qualitative phase led to the identification of six main categories of policy barriers, family barriers, invalid information barriers, religious-belief barriers, sociocultural barriers and educational-organizational barriers as the challenges of adolescent sex education. These findings were presented to the statistical population in the quantitative phase in an 18-item questionnaire. Data analysis in the quantitative phase showed that these categories had appropriate goodness of fit.

Keywords: Sex Education, Sex Education Challenges, Teachers, Adolescents, Parents.

Introduction

The need for sex education is one of the most important educational needs and human rights of children and adolescents, and one of the biggest concerns of parents and the society. However, children and adolescents are still deprived of such education in most countries of the world (Majdpour et al., 2017). In Iran, as one of the traditional-religious societies, the approach

to sexual affairs does not explain a clear path for sexual socialization of individuals and sexual affairs are always in an aura of ambiguity. Meanwhile, Islamic ideology has rich knowledge and appropriate solutions in this field (Zandvanian & Shamshadi, 2010). Despite the popular belief that sex education encourages teens to have sex, the results of studies have shown that the lack of sex education has not only prevented adolescent sexual relations, but also has led to the establishment and formation of misconceptions and misinformation among Iranian youth. In the absence of sex education, young people turn to pornography through media such as magazines, Internet sites, and provocative television programs to obtain sexual information (Rafaei Shirpak et al., 2006).

A review of research conducted in this field shows that institutionalizing sex education among adolescents as a necessity for adolescent education has always been neglected by parents, teachers and researchers, as well as policymakers in the education system in Iran. Therefore, in order for adolescents to excel and be educated, we analyzed, evaluated and assessed the basic dimensions of the challenges of and barriers to the implementation of sex education from the perspective of those closest to adolescents, namely parents, teachers and educators. We actually addressed the following questions:

- 1- What are the main dimensions of the challenges of implementing adolescent sex education?
- 2- Are the elements designed for the model of challenges in the implementation of adolescent sex education appropriate?

Methodology

Given the objective of the present study, the mixed-methods exploratory approach was used. Grounded theory was used in the qualitative phase, and structural equation model in the quantitative phase. To answer the first question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants who met two of the three inclusion criteria: scientific expertise, practical experience, or having children aged 12 to 16. We used Strauss and Corbin's (1998) qualitative data analysis of continuous comparison with inductive content analysis technique for open, axial and selective coding. Then, the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative data were confirmed with expert review method. To answer the second research question, the structural equation model was used. The statistical population in the quantitative phase of the research included high school teachers in Khoy and Chaypareh cities who were selected by stratified random sampling method from each gender and grade totaling 345 teachers selected by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table. The data collection tool in the quantitative phase was a researcher-made 18-item questionnaire that covered the six main elements identified in the

qualitative phase: Policy barriers, family barriers, invalid information barriers, religious-belief barriers, sociocultural barriers, and educational-organizational barriers that present the sub-findings of qualitative analysis. Content and face validity of the instrument were confirmed before implementation by experts and professors. Construct validity was also examined through confirmatory factor analysis. In order to evaluate the reliability, the questionnaire was provided to a pilot sample of 46 teachers by convenience sampling method. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the pilot sample indicated the appropriate reliability of the scale and its components.

Results

Continuous analysis of the interviews yielded categories that provided valuable information about the basic dimensions of the challenges of implementing adolescent sex education based on the views of teachers and parents. These dimensions are policy barriers, family barriers, invalid information barriers, religious-belief barriers, sociocultural barriers and educational-organizational barriers. After identifying the main challenges of implementing adolescent sex education in the qualitative phase, 18 items were developed to measure these components in the quantitative phase. After confirming the content and face validity and reliability of the developed questionnaire, it was presented to the statistical community in the quantitative phase. The reliability of the instrument was measured as Cronbach's alpha of 0.821 and the mean item test correlation and Spearman Brown method (split half) of 0.869. The mean item-subscale correlation showed a relatively strong correlation among the items of each subscale, meaning that the subscales had appropriate reliability. In order to determine which challenges of adolescent sex education extracted from the qualitative phase are approved by teachers, a questionnaire was developed and distributed among the study population; 345 people answered the questionnaire items. The data extracted from the questionnaires was analyzed using LISREL software and structural equation method. In order to determine the adequacy of model fit, CFI, TLI, IFI, GFI, NFI, AGFI, RMSEA and df/χ^2 indices were used. The results showed that all values were within the appropriate range.

Table 1. Goodness of fit indices of the measurement model

Indices	χ^2	df	CMIN/df	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Values	634.51	324	1.95	.95	.94	.93	.91	.05

Discussion and conclusion

Our findings introduced a set of elements to the challenges in sex education that can help the growth of future research in this field. The constructs identified in this study complete and summarize previous research. This may justify the validity of the extracted elements. Therefore, with the elements designed for the challenges of providing sex education, it is possible to measure the effectiveness of each challenge as a criterion. At regular intervals, the status quo of the barriers to sex education can be assessed based on these elements, and be compared with the ideal status. If a gap is observed, the suggested programs, methods and strategies for sex education should be applied to improve the situation. The results of this study can be an opportunity for experts and educators to identify the barriers to and challenges of providing sex education, by designing and implementing programs based on Iranian Islamic culture, to try to eliminate taboos on adolescent sex education. Furthermore, recognizing the challenges of providing sex education, the officials of the education system should train teachers and experts, and to develop appropriate educational content.

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