

The role of parents in nurturing and sexuality education for children from Islamic and scientific perspective

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Abstract

Context: Parents have an important role in sexuality education for children.

Aims: The present study aimed to review the role of parents in nurturing and sexuality education for children from the perspective of Islam and scientific resources.

Setting and Design: This narrative review was done in 2018.

Materials and Methods: To this narrative study, the Persian and English articles in the databases of PubMed, Magiran, Barakat Knowledge network system, SID, UpToDate, Cochrane Library, Scopus, Google Scholar, CINAHL, and Web of Science were searched. The following keywords were used for search: sexuality training, sexuality education, sexual health, guidelines, packages, Islam, parents, father, mother, and children. Inclusion criteria were studied design (articles, grey documents, packages, and guidelines) introduced in the field of sexuality education for children aged 0–12. From 80 studies retrieved, 18 articles were reviewed.

Statistical Analysis Used: We employed content analysis method to extract our findings.

Results: The results of this study organized into three categories; (1) Parents are introduced by Islamic and scientific resources as the first educators of sexuality for children, (2) All resources highlighted that values and cultural features of each family are explained to children by their parents, and (3) Islamic and scientific resources put an emphasis on the effectiveness parent role on the promotion of sexual health in children and establishment of a healthy society.

Conclusion: These issues indicate the necessity of attention to nurturing and sexuality education and considering the fact that the Islamic community requires to be shaped through its own teaching principles. Accordingly, Iranian society is in need of guidelines for parents' readiness in line with their own culture and religion.

Keywords: Children, Islam, Nurturing, Parents, Sexuality education

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual interactions instigate from birth and even at human fertilization time; and hence, sexual assumptions and beliefs originated from the early years of individuals' life can be

taken into account as a foundation for mental-sexual health in adolescence and adulthood with direct and significant effects on life-long sexual behaviors.^[1] Sexual behavior is an important element of sexuality. The given behavior is

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also influenced by children's age and what they observe in sexual behaviors demonstrated by their family and friends; affected by cultural and religious beliefs about sexual issues.^[2,3] Studies have revealed that nurturing and sexuality education can put such behaviors in the right track.^[4] In this line, that nurturing and sexuality education consist of measures and strategies adopted from the early human life consistent with sexual growth and development in children by their caregivers with the fundamental purposes of sexual awareness, contribution to the development of sexual behaviors at a healthy pace, fulfillment of sexual duties, continuity and survival of generations, as well as peace and friendship in life.^[5] However, there is difference of opinion in terms of that nurturing and sexuality education in Iran and even parents' information regarding sexual growth and development in children is insufficient.^[6,7] Moreover, theoretical ambiguities and executive barriers to the implementation of that nurturing and sexuality education are evident in Iranian society, while sexuality education is carried out by parents at home in many countries across the world. Due to the lack of formal and informal education and even guidelines for parents, they are not trained in this domain and even do not have the capacity to respond to children's inquiries about sexuality and how to manage their sexual behaviors. They also fail to effectively interact with their children in terms of sexuality.^[8] In developed country, many resources pay attention to parent's role as sexual educators, emphasize education of parents by professionals as the first sexual health promotion strategy for children, and focus on provision of educational materials for enhancing knowledge, and hence, that adults can easily talk to their children and destroy barriers of negative attitude toward SE for children.^[4,6,7]

A culture of silence and conservatism is prevailing although positive and correct communications and interactions between parents and children can be significantly correlated with healthy sexual behaviors in children,^[9] because such relationships can be a protective agent for a wide variety of sexual behaviors in children and lead to the prevention of child sexual abuse.^[10]

Studies have shown that as adults obtain the knowledge of the differences between normal and abnormal sexual behaviors and become familiar with the principles of that nurturing and sexuality education for children, they are able to respond properly and promptly to their children's sexual behaviors rather than interpreting their performance from their own perspective, and consequently, shape healthy sexual development and growth in children. Therefore, having enough knowledge and skills with regard to sexual growth and development in children can be promote sexual

health.^[11] Accordingly, the following study was conducted to investigate the role of parents in that nurturing and sexuality education for children from the perspective of Islamic and scientific resources.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a narrative review with systematic search which was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, identifying the research question was performed. The second stage, searching strategies for identifying related studies, and the procedure to select the studies was performed. In the third stage, summarizing, extracting, and reporting the data was done.

Identifying the research question

“What is the role of parents in that nurturing and sexuality education for children from the perspective of Islamic and scientific resources?”

Searching strategies for identifying related studies and the procedure to select studies

Based on the research question, researchers independently began the initial search in databases of Barakat Knowledge network system, SID, UpToDate, Cochrane Library, Scopus, Google Scholar, CINAHL, and Web of Science, as well as the resources by the Ministry of Health from various countries such as Canada, Australia, the United States, and Iran; along with those published by associations practicing in the field of sexual health, using the Medical Subject Heading with keywords

such as “sexuality education,” “sexuality training,” “sex education,” “sexual health,” “parents,” “father,” “mother,” “guideline,” “package,” “children,” and “Islam” from September 2017 to May 2018.

Moreover, related articles published between 1970 and 2018 were extracted.

The reason for the selection of the year 1970 was that it was the date sexuality education and training started in Western societies and most of the kindergartens in the United States and Sweden commenced that nurturing and sexuality education for children since the 1960s.^[12]

Two researchers fulfilled the search process using a checklist of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Hence, the articles and the documents were examined based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. For this purpose; studies, documents, and guidelines targeting the role of parents in sexuality education for children were investigated. Studies in English and Persian were then included in the study. If the reported results in the articles were incomplete, the authors were contacted

and the information was completed. The approaches and strategies-specific to sexuality education for adolescents and adults were excluded from the study. It should be noted that no limits were used in terms of the inclusion of the articles based on their research designs. At the end of the search, 80 articles were retrieved and following the screening of their titles, abstracts, and full-texts; a total number of 18 articles were included in the study, and 62 articles were removed. In this respect, 3 articles were excluded because of being duplicates or due to their titles. Moreover, 24 articles were removed after screening their abstracts, and 14 articles were crossed out following screening their full-texts. Finally, the relevant articles were selected [Figure 1].

Summarizing, extracting, and reporting the data

Having selected the studies from the previous stage, the researchers then carefully studied all the relevant papers, and they extracted and organized the information they needed for the current study. The results of reviewing the studies led to the extraction of the paper and organization of the content on the challenges of child abuse reports into three main categories and 15 subcategories based on the role of parents in sexuality education for children that had been mentioned in the assessed articles.

Ethical considerations

This study was approved by the ethics committee of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences with the code of ethics IR.MAZUMS.REC.1397.098.

RESULTS

In this review, valuable resources were found in relation to that nurturing and sexuality education for

children [Table 1]. The results of the current study led to the organization of role of parents in sexuality education for children from Islamic and scientific perspective into three major categories. These categories include: (1) Parents are introduced the first educators of sexuality for children, (2) Values and cultural features of each family are explained to children by their parents and (3) Effectiveness of parent role on promotion of sexual health in children and establishment of a healthy society is shown in Table 2.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to review the role of parents in nurturing and sexuality education for children from the perspective of Islam and scientific resources. The results of this review showed that parents' role can be categorized into^[1] parents are introduced by Islamic and scientific resources as the first educators of sexuality for children,^[2] all resources highlighted that values and cultural features of each family are explained to children by their parents,^[30] Islamic and scientific resources put an emphasis on the effectiveness parent role on promotion of sexual health in children and establishment of a healthy society.

The review of included studies regarding the role of parents showed that there is widespread agreement that parents are children's first and important educators and that they play a vital role in the development, growth, and management of children's sexual behaviors.^[4,7,8,20,22] This agreement can be found in several studies^[31-33] and guidelines such as sexual development and behavior in children information for parents and caregivers,^[17] the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States.^[20]

Studies also showed that parents supporting the implementation of a comprehensive that nurturing and sexuality education program and participating in such programs could provide high-quality sexuality education for their children.^[4,27] It had been further suggested in the relevant packages that parents needed to obtain the required information and knowledge in this regard via professionals^[28] because parents do not have access to suitable resources.^[29] Moreover, the studies put emphasis on teaching parents by professionals as the first strategy for improving sexual health in children^[1,4,6,15] and focused on educational contents to improve knowledge to make adults able to talk to children with much comfort and overcome obstacles of negative attitudes toward that nurturing and sexuality education for children.^[27]

The results of this review showed that all resources emphasized that values and cultural features of each

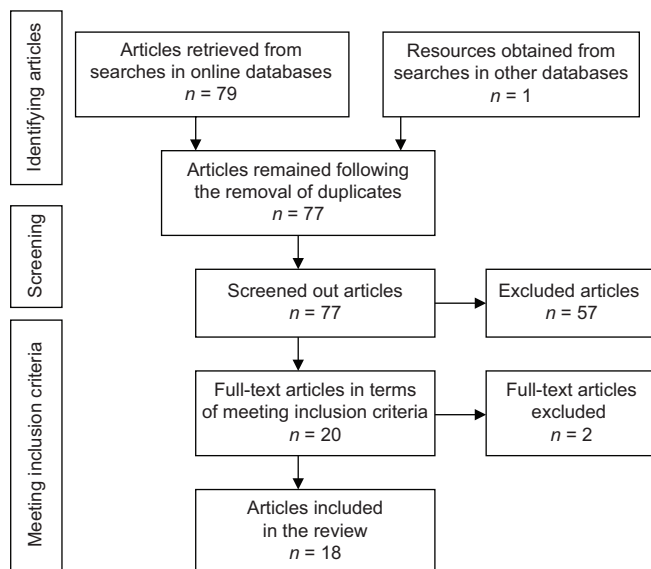


Figure 1: The flowchart for the selection steps of the articles

Table 1: Characteristics of documents, packages, and guidelines illustrating role of parents in sexuality education for children

Author/Organization (Years)/Country	Type of documents, packages, and guidelines	Content
Ganji (2017) ^[7] /Iran	PhD thesis	Learning about different levels of sexual development in children Biological growth and development Psychosexual growth and development Sociosexual growth and development Types of sexual behaviors in children Characteristics of normal and abnormal sexual behaviors in children Learning how to respond to sexual behaviors in children Principles of dealing with sexual behaviors in children Methods of coping with sexual behaviors in children (childhood sexual games and plays - nudity) Learning how to provide sexuality education and training for children: How parents answer children's inquiries Learning about the basics of dealing with sexual questions by children sexual education training fitting children's age How to teach family values and patterns to children How to deal with long delays in bathroom or toilet Learning to prevent child sexual abuse
Albert Health Services (2009) ^[13] /Canada	Package	Teaching family beliefs and values to children Learning about stages of normal sexual development in children Learning easy ways of talks with children about sexual issues
Government of Western Australia, Department of Health (2011) ^[14] /Australia	Guideline	What parents need to know as the first sexuality educators Learning about right times to start sexuality education and training for children
Department of Family and Children Services (2007) ^[15] /the United States	Guideline	Child sexual behaviors: Before school age (0-5 years old) First years of school (5-9 years old) Before adolescence (9-12 years old)
Albert Health Services (2013) ^[16] /Canada	Package	What parents need to know Effective role of parents in sexuality education and training for children Differences between gender and sex Scientific facts related to sexual health education and training for children
National Child Support Network (2009) ^[17] /the United States	Guideline	Learning about sexual behaviors and sexual development in children Learning how to deal with children's sexual behaviors Learning how to teach sexual issues to children
National Sexual Violence Resource Center (2013) ^[18] /Canada	Guideline	Learning about natural sexual development in childhood Learn how to prevent child sexual abuse Teaching children on the basis of family values
Prince Edward Island Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (2013) ^[19] /Canada	Guideline	Learning about natural and expected sexual behaviors in children Learning how to deal with sexual behaviors in children
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (2004) ^[20] /the United States	Guideline	Learning about sexual development in children Teaching communication skills to children Teaching personal skills to children
Planned Parenthood (2015) ^[21] /the United States	Guideline	Learning how to deal with sexual behaviors in children Parents' familiarity with necessity and importance of sexuality education and training for children Responsiveness to children's inquiries about sexuality Talks with children about privacy Learning how to prevent child sexual abuse Learning what parents need to disclose to their children
Michigan Children's Trauma Assessment Center, Greg Rapid ^[22] /the United States	Guideline	Sexual behaviors in children Expected sexual behaviors at different ages How to respond to children's sexual behaviors Body protection Normal sexual games at different ages
University of Dublin, Queen's University Belfast (2009) ^[23] /Northern Ireland	Guideline	Learning how to teach children Teaching communication skills to children
Department of Health (2005) ^[24] /Tennessee, the United States	guideline	Building self-confidence Teaching problem-solving skills to children Teaching personal care to children
Family Health Center (2003) ^[25] /the United States	Package	Family talks about sexual health Parents as the first sexual educators Learning about the basics of responding sexual questions raised by children How to answer children's inquiries about birth process-

Contd...

Table 1: Contd...

Author/Organization (Years)/Country	Type of documents, packages, and guidelines	Content
Rahnama (2007) ^[26] /Iran	Paper	Separating parents' beds from those of children Correct sexual health education Avoiding common bathing of children underlying methods for achieving sexual health
Alberta Health and Welfare Services (1999) ^[27] /Canada	Package	Teaching sexuality to children How to deal with children's sexual behaviors: Self-stimulation, privacy, children's nudity, self-confidence
Alberta Health Center (2009) ^[28] /Canada	Package	Talks to children about gender, sexuality, health, and sexual well-being Teaching children how to make decisions about sexual issues
Federation of Planned Parenthood (2009) ^[29] /the United States	Guideline	Talks to children about sexuality True and false beliefs about sexual issues

Table 2: Role of parents in sexuality education for children from Islamic and scientific perspective

Categories	Subcategories (studies)
Parents are the first educators of sexuality for children	Learning about different levels of sexual development in children ^[7,15,17,18,20,22] Learning about characteristics of sexual behaviors in children in different ages ^[7,15,17,19,22] Learning how to respond to sexual behaviors in children ^[7,17,19,27,28] Learning easy ways of talks with children about sexual issues ^[7,13,14,17,20,21,23]
Values and cultural features of each family are explained to children by their parents	Education for children based on family values ^[7,13,14,16,25,26,28,29] Teaching children based on culture and values in society ^[13,26,28,29] Provide an optimal sexual environment ^[7,15,16,20-22,24-26] Talks to children about sexuality true and false beliefs about sexual issues ^[7,29]
Effectiveness of parent role on promotion of sexual health in children and establishment of a healthy society	Protect, support, and prevent child sexual abuse ^[7,18,21,22,24,26] Building self-confidence ^[7,27] Teaching communication skills about family and friends ^[7,15,20,23,24] Teaching problem-solving skills to children ^[24,28] Teaching personal care to children ^[7,22,24] Teaching children how to make decisions about sexual issues ^[7,28] Helping to develop the psychosocial and physical sexual health of children ^[7,13-16,18,19,23]

family are explained to children by their parents.^[13,26,28,29] Family, as the first social group those children belong to from the early years of their lives; is considered the first and the most important factor effective in children's sexual socialization.^[7,8] Within these educational packages and guidelines, attention to values and culture in each society had been underscored as the strengths of such programs. Research studies similarly demonstrated that parents' attitudes could be touched in whole life.^[34] It should be noted that sexuality is extremely affected by norms in family and society.^[4,18] Since children's socializations occur first at home and then in society, the role of culture and values in family and society is highlighted and it overshadows sexuality in children.^[8,18,28,29]

Although that nurturing and sexuality education in some societies have been recognized,^[35] it has remained as an unacceptable issue in some countries like Iran. There is also no agreement about that nurturing and sexuality education for children in Muslim communities; nevertheless, children can receive formal and informal education by their parents, school, and professionals in developed countries. Considering developments in Iran in the domain of sexual health and reproduction as well as movement toward healthy societies on the basis of the definition provided by

the World Health Organization (2004), there is no official comprehensive system for that nurturing and sexuality education for children.^[36] According to the findings of the present review, it was revealed that there were limited guidelines related to Iran's culture.^[7] The review of included studies also showed that Islam was not against the nurturing and sexuality education. Given the Islamic perspective of the nurturing and sexuality education, some scholars have argued that if Muslims cannot easily discuss sexual issues with their children, problems will arise regarding cultural education and training but not religious teachings. Islam also views sexual functioning as a divine blessing and calls attention to the role of parents in that nurturing and sexuality education for children. The results of this review further suggested the fact that parents needed to be encouraged to fulfill this important task.^[36,37] Human sexual life, like all other material aspects of life, has also a spiritual and divine dimension from the point of view of the religions, especially Islam and the Qur'anic doctrines. There is even a kind of harmony between the parts of human existence and the fulfillment of the transcendent identity of man depends on the balanced growth and development of these parts. It should be noted that studies have shown that Islam has not created taboos or sanctions regarding sexual issues and has not ever concealed them. In

Islamic jurisprudence textbooks and even in the theological treatises written by religious authorities, the nurturing and sexuality education have been addressed, and it has been noted everywhere that a Muslim needs to become aware of the issues related to sexual life and learn about it legitimately.^[35] Therefore, religion is not opposed to the nurturing and sexuality education for children, and this wrong belief and attitude in society and family should be corrected.

In line with the results of numerous studies,^[4,26] the findings of this review also showed that religious beliefs as one of the most important social phenomena could play a major role in shaping the individuals' beliefs. No culture and religion has merged sexual tendencies with religious rules as accurate as Islam. Besides, religious thoughts have had great effects on opinions and viewpoints among Muslims regarding sexuality. In Islam, sexual tendencies have been further considered as a manifestation of spirituality.^[38] Hence, sexuality education is provided according to the sociocultural characteristics (based on religion). After explaining the current situation based on the results of this study and reflecting on the characteristics of Iranian society, i. e., having strong and rich Islamic ideology, it seems that practical application of sexuality principles in Islam can be a proper solution in this regard.^[39]

In line with the results of numerous studies,^[4,15] the findings of this review also showed that effectiveness of parent's role on promotion of sexual health in children and establishment of a healthy society. Informing the family about the psychosocial development of children and empowering them to establish a good and desirable relationship will lead to a family-centered approach to the development and development of sexual behaviors, issues and sexual problems of the child. Psychosocial education will help the child to have a positive attitude to sexual health and to identify gender roles in society and to adapt to them, and to protect the child from exploitation and sexual abuse,^[40] and to identify behaviors appropriate to gender, identity and gender and desirable patterns;^[41] therefore, the education of the child will have irrefutable effects on his adult sexual behavior. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that the more parents will use the child's sexual intercourse with more comprehensive, logical and comprehensive programs; they will have a healthier child.

This study has some limitations, we used the differences type of studies with different methodological design in this narrative review and most of the packages and guidelines found in this review were stated theoretically. In other words, they were not based on experimental studies.

CONCLUSION

Nurturing and sexuality education need to be conceptualized by each society. Moreover, it was argued that children's healthy development and growth will occur as parents gain skills as the first educators of sexuality for children. In addition to proper and healthy growth, nurturing and sexuality education can prevent sexual deviations, disorders, and diseases. All these issues indicate the necessity of attention to sexuality education and considering the fact that Islamic community requires to be shaped through its own teaching principles; the discovery of education and training methods consistent with these foundations, goals, and principles extracted from major religious texts as well as techniques elicited from verses and accounts can be a turning point in this domain in this society. Accordingly, Iranian society is in need of guidelines for parents' readiness in line with their own culture and religion.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to the writing of the scientific proposal, data collection, and manuscript drafting. The final manuscript was reviewed and approved by all the authors.

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