Presenting a Model for Parental Sexual Upbringing of Children: A Grounded Theory Study

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: *Original Research* **How to cite this article:** Parsayan, M., Jabalameli, S., Aghahoseini, T., & Khoshakhlagh, H. (2024). Presenting a Model for Parental Sexual Upbringing of Children: A Grounded Theory Study. *Psychology of Woman Journal, 5*(3), 42-47. https://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.pwj.5.3.6 © 2024 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.	**Objective:** The purpose of this research is to present a model for the sexual upbringing of children by parents, utilizing a practical qualitative approach with the grounded theory method. **Methods and Materials:** The research population included informed parents (20 mixed-gender individuals) with children aged 8-12 years, holding at least a high school diploma, and professors (15 individuals) from universities in Isfahan. Participants were selected based on theoretical and purposive sampling. Data collection continued with in-depth interviews guided by questions until theoretical saturation was achieved. The data analysis process was performed through multiple stages of coding. **Findings:** The findings indicate that causal conditions (misconceptions about sexual education and upbringing based on individual values), contextual conditions (social norms, acceptance of the issue of sexual education), intervening conditions (attention to the psychological needs of the child, sense of responsibility towards the child, and consideration of children's psychological states), strategies (adherence to the law, parental blame, and a scientific approach to sexual education), and outcomes (institutionalization of a specific sexual pattern) were identified as different stages of the paradigmatic model of sexual education. **Conclusion:** The sexual education in each country and its curriculum are based on the cultural teachings and beliefs of that country. Therefore, the proposed model of this research aids in addressing the necessity and need for education on the cultural-social structures prevailing in the Iranian society. *Keywords: Sexual upbringing, children, parents, grounded theory.*

1. Introduction

Among the important and key issues in the third millennium, health is a prominent topic, and effective sexual health education has been identified as one of the central subjects by the World Health Organization (Barimani Aboksari et al., 2021). The lack of proper sexual education

for children can lead to irreversible consequences such as sexual abuse, sexual assault, sexual deviance, and sexual disorders (Claussen, 2019). Sexual education consists of measures that begin in the early stages of human life with the goal of developing a balanced and proportionate sexual instinct. Education is defined as the gradual and harmonious development of all human potentials, among which sexual education plays an influential role (Latham-Cork et al., 2018). Therefore, sexual education comprises a series of teachings from birth to adulthood provided by the family and society to equip individuals with the necessary awareness and skills about sexual matters in accordance with the norms, values, and culture of the society (Naderi et al., 2023).

The taboo nature of sexual matters is a collective attitude rooted in the ancient patterns common to societies. Jung believed that ignoring the instinctual nature of humans could lead to problems in the body and psyche. He argued that the collective unconscious consists of two interconnected parts: instincts and archetypes, both of which influence human behavior and personality. An archetype, which forms one of the fundamental parts of Jung's theories, is understood in relation to the unconscious and represents a behavioral pattern common to all humans from the creation to the present, manifesting in various forms in human consciousness under different circumstances (Shahriari Nasab & Dehghani, 2015). In the case of Iran, due to its religious and Eastern history, addressing sexual education has always been considered taboo. Furthermore, the pattern of sexual education in a society governed by Islamic culture is very vague and unknown, necessitating exploration. According to the Islamic worldview, sexual education continues from before an individual's birth until their death, encompassing the authentic dimensions of human existence and focusing on the principles of voluntary behavior formation according to religious texts. This includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects at three levels: preparatory, positive, and negative, for the implementation of educational instructions (Ganji et al., 2018).

As mentioned, one of the gaps in studies related to sexual education patterns in the country is the lack of attention to psychological factors during childhood within the family, where a significant portion of sexual education takes place. Education refers to subjects such as reproductive knowledge and sexual topics based on designed programs for teaching sexual behavior and attitudes (Goldman, 2011; Whitfield et al., 2013). In an annual study in England, children and adolescents identified parents as a very important source of information in sexual education (Whitfield et al., 2013).

Despite numerous studies highlighting the importance of the family's role in sexual education, the results of reviews of domestic studies in this area show that the topic does not enjoy suitable popularity among Iranian families (especially fathers) (Amini et al., 2016). According to research by Goldman (2011), the reason for fathers' lack of attention to sexual education may be their limited presence at home, as fathers in most families are primarily responsible for providing for the family (Goldman, 2011).

Fathers and mothers cannot and should not be indifferent to their children's sexual issues and questions (Alavi, 2013). Sexual education is one of the most difficult and sensitive types of education, where a slight mistake or oversight could lead children to corruption (Rahmani et al., 2018). Therefore, sexual education is one of the most challenging parts of education; on one hand, parents are afraid of informing their children about these matters, fearing that such awareness will lead them astray, and on the other hand, parents' modesty and shyness in providing sexual information pose a challenge in this issue (Bradford et al., 2019). Parents are naturally the primary sexual educators of children and play the most crucial role in preparing children to face the stresses and ambiguities of life (sexual life of the child) (Robinson et al., 2017).

The existing problem in the path of children's sexual education is the lack of awareness and false modesty. These two factors prevent communication between parents and children for expressing truths in a proper and correct manner (Gevorgyan et al., 2011). Moreover, parents' needs in this regard are unclear, and parents still do not have a correct definition of sexual education, which adds to their mental challenge (Zain Al-Dien, 2010). This issue is especially prominent in Iranian society, where the religious and traditional culture has made sexual education a taboo topic, causing children to be distanced from sexual education, which could have harmful consequences for children and adolescents and even affect their marital lives.

Regarding the current research, some studies have been conducted. Ahmadi & Hasani (2021) concluded in a study that multimedia sexual education for children, according to experts, has the necessary credibility and also that the education provided has had a significant impact on the awareness of parents and educators about sexual education (Ahmadi & Mohammadhasani, 2021). In a study, Yazdani & Sohrabi (2018) concluded that sexual education has a significant impact on the sexual identity and self-esteem of children aged 7 to 11 (Yazdani & Sohrabi Shegefty, 2018).

Based on the aforementioned information, sexual education is an important educational topic in the curriculum of all countries, necessitating further studies. Therefore, the present research focuses on analyzing the patterns of nurturing sexual characteristics by parents in the city of Isfahan in accordance with Iranian-Islamic culture, marking the first study of its kind at the national level to explore parents' beliefs about sexual education.

2.   Methods and Materials

2.1.   Study Design and Participants

The current research is applied in aim and qualitative in method, utilizing an exploratory sequential approach with grounded theory. Participants in this study in the year 2020 included all fathers and mothers with children aged 8-12 and psychology experts in the city of Isfahan, selected through purposive sampling based on the level of theoretical saturation (including 10 fathers, 10 mothers, and 15 experts); purposive sampling was used because we want to utilize individuals who have extensive knowledge in the field of sexual education to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of parents and experts in sexual education.

2.2.   Measures

2.2.1.   Semi-Structured Interview

In this study, semi-structured interviews are used as the research instrument. In semi-structured interviews, the interview questions are mostly predetermined, and similar questions are asked of all respondents; however, they are free to respond in any manner they choose. The interview guide does not specify the details of the interview, the manner of expression, or their sequence. Accordingly, the current study, based on previous research questions and some supplementary questions, allows interviewees to respond based on their own experiences with sexual education.

2.3.   Data analysis

Data were analyzed using triple coding based on the paradigm model of Strauss and Corbin.

3.   Findings and Results

Based on interviews reflecting the lived experiences of fathers, mothers, and experts, initially, concepts were identified and reported in open coding. In the open coding phase and by coding based on significant and relevant sentences, 210 initial codes regarding the patterns and coping methods of parents were extracted. The effort in this phase was to extract key points emphasized by the interviewees, which led to 114 final codes after merging overlapping or similar concepts, or deleting ambiguous concepts and codes. Following the extraction of initial codes, a second phase of coding was performed to provide greater coherence and to generate initial concepts. In this phase, codes referring to a single concept and sharing semantic and conceptual commonalities were categorized into a general concept, resulting in 23 concepts re-coded from open coding, categorized into 12 categories. In the axial coding phase, the sexual education pattern was introduced as the main category, shown in Table 1. Finally, in the selective coding phase based on theoretical foundations and the derived model and the researcher's inference, 6 patterns were extracted and named: belief-centered, norm-centered, child-centered, law-centered, knowledge-centered, and superficial-centered.

Table 1

Initial Codes, Concepts, Categories, and Selected Final Codes

| Selected Categories	Axial Categories	Concepts
Belief-Centered Model	Education based on religious values; Education based on individual values	Religious values in sexual education; Personal beliefs in sexual education; Traditional beliefs; Stereotypical beliefs; Preaching viewpoint
Norm-Centered Model	Social norms in sexual education; Social acceptance of sexual education issues	Conventional view on sexual education; Social conditions in sexual education; Collective pressure in sexual education; Cultural patterns in sexual education
Child-Centered Model	Attention to the psychological needs of the child; Feeling of responsibility towards the child	Empowering the child in sexual education; Fear of psychological harm to the child; Fear of social dangers to the child; Fear of the child being deviated
Law-Centered Model	Adherence to the law; Obedience to legal authorities	Attention to legal authorities; Attention to formal institutions; Adherence to national principles and rules; Awareness of legal responsibility of the family in education
Knowledge-Centered Model	Scientific approach; Rational approach	Attention to scientific findings; Attention to medical and health findings; Attention to logical and rational arguments

Superficial-Centered Model	Superficial view of sexual education; Superstitious view of sexual education	Conspiracy illusions about sexual education; Blaming view towards sexual issues; Yellow information about sexual education

The conceptual model derived in the axial coding phase is also reported in Figure 1. In fact, after open coding and categorizing the codes from the interviews, the researcher identifies the axial category, which is usually the phenomenon under study in the research, and establishes a logical and causal relationship between this category and other categories. In this coding phase, the researcher defines conditional, interactive/process, and consequential categories. In this study, "sexual education patterns" was considered the axial category, and other categories are interpreted as follows: Causal Conditions: In this research, contextual factors causing the emergence of sexual education patterns that are the main drivers of orientation towards each pattern are considered as causal conditions. Contextual Conditions: Contextual conditions or prevailing contexts are a series of specific conditions under which processes and interactions occur to manage, control, and respond to phenomena. In this research, cultural and social factors are considered as contextual conditions. Intervening Conditions: Intervening conditions act as a context that mitigates or intensifies phenomena. In this research, individual categories, religious beliefs, and ideological beliefs act as intervening conditions that influence the orientation towards a type of sexual education. Strategy (Processes/Interactions): Represents behaviors, realities, and purposeful interactions that result from the influence of intervening and contextual conditions. Strategies created for controlling, managing, and dealing with each phenomenon are under specific observed conditions. For example, accepting responsibility towards the child or obeying the law. Outcomes: Outcomes are the results and consequences of processes and interactions. In this theory, the emergence of various patterns of sexual education is considered as the outcome and result of this model. The codes obtained from the axial coding phase are displayed in Figure 1 to provide a comprehensive understanding of the completed stages.

Figure 1

Final Paradigm Model
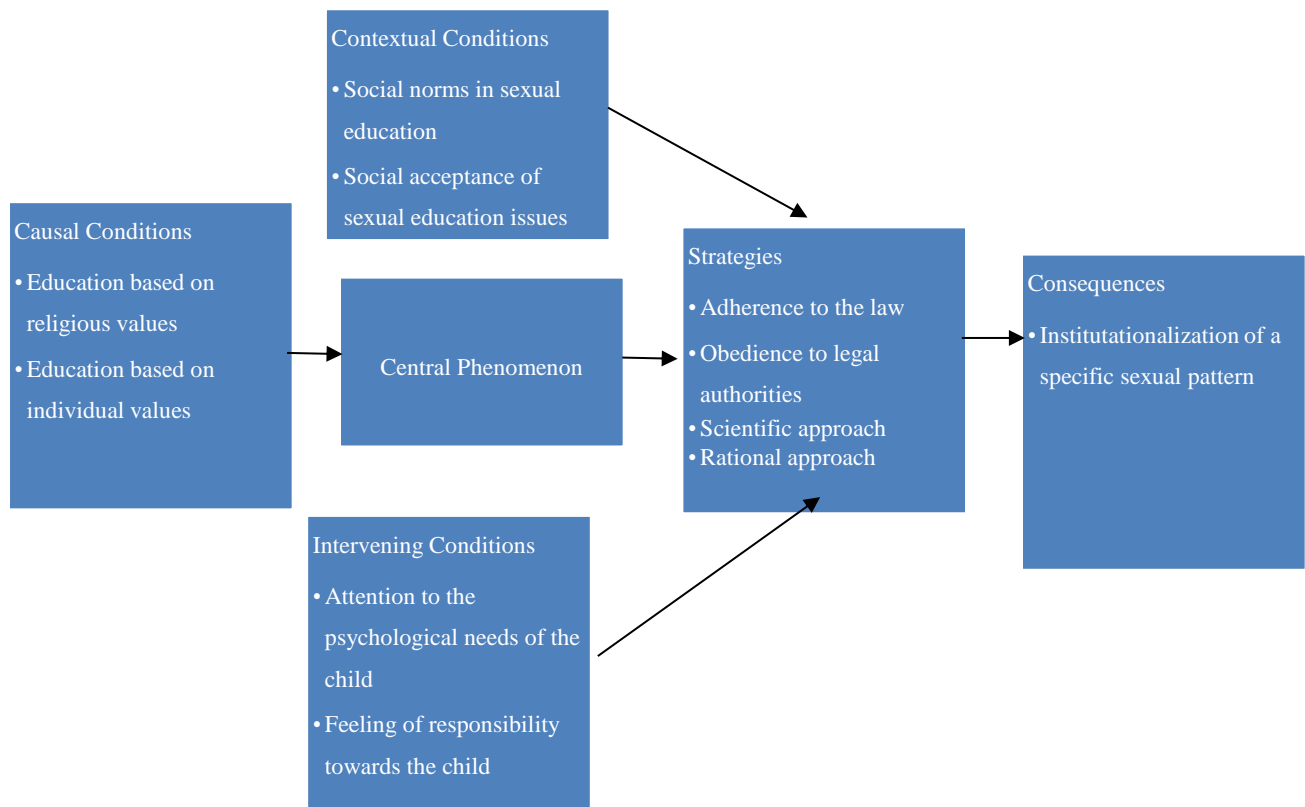
4. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of the current study was to analyze the patterns of nurturing sexual characteristics by parents in the city of Isfahan to their children. This research has examined and analyzed the conceptual scope, dimensions, and effective components influencing the pattern of nurturing sexual characteristics. The final results, based on the analysis of extracted codes and the presented model regarding sexual characteristics and educational patterns of parents in Isfahan, represent the first precise and scientific study in this field, whereas previous research has generally addressed sexual education.

The study process revealed that sexual education patterns from the perspective of parents and psychologists, considering the social and cultural conditions of Iran, can be classified into belief-centered, norm-centered, child-centered, law-centered, knowledge-centered, and superficial-centered sexual education models. According to the conceptual model, the effective dimensions on sexual education patterns have been incorrect beliefs, education based on religious values, and education based on individual values, and sexual issues become problematic due to being taboo and the lack of proper interaction and entry into the family and societal values, guaranteeing negative outcomes in adulthood as children do not know how to deal with these emotions and feelings and effectively have problems in adult relationships and expressing sexual needs. What families call modesty causes many parents to refrain from teaching sexual education, consequently leaving children without awareness. Therefore, it is necessary to induce a sense of optimism and create trust in parents to seek Iranian-Islamic educational models and patterns, where parents can interact positively and constructively with their children, backed by scientific knowledge, critical thinking, and Islamic creativity, and make the most of the extensive capacities and strategies for sexual education.

The conceptual model strategy for sexual education, considering the goal of sexual education to raise healthy children with an attitude based on scientific issues in accordance with Iranian-Islamic values and with health transitioning through the sexual world that God has placed for them to enjoy and adapt socially and psychologically without the unnecessary worry and concern of parents as the value system acts as a guardian and guide.

According to the outcomes of the conceptual model and the extracted concepts and categories, sexual education for children begins from birth, and the primary goal of sexual education is that the sexual development of children progresses naturally and healthily so that in adolescence they can prevent damages without enduring stress, manage their emerging sexual desires that are natural and normal at this developmental stage, and reach a level of development in youth that allows them to be suitable spouses and competent parents for their children.

Studies (Rahmani et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2017) regarding the importance of educating children and the harms caused by misunderstandings align with the knowledge-centered and superficial-centered sexual education model. In the context of "Knowledge-Centered Model," it can be said that this code is currently expanding and has a universal aspect; the expansion of virtual media, the internet, and diverse educational networks on one side, and the increase in education and awareness among families on the other, have led families to specialize in the sexual education of their children, either through study or consultation with specialists.

Another extracted code in the present study is the "Child-Centered Model," where attention to the concepts of these codes, for example, "fear of psychological harm to the child," "fear of social dangers to the child," or fear of the child deviating" shows that there is a deep concern among families and experts about social harms. The existence of such an educational model is not unexpected as, given the religious values of the Iranian society, families are concerned about the sexual harm to their children and thus tend to address sexual education with this approach.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

Given the above, it can be concluded that the sexual education patterns extracted in the current study are supported by theoretical and research findings and can be used as a credible model by practitioners. However, the absence of research in the field of presenting a sexual education model using grounded theory and the limited study population to parents and psychologists are weaknesses of the current study, necessitating future studies to conduct similar interviews with children. Future studies could also test the relationships between the conceptual model of the present study or similar models regarding

sexual education through structural equation modeling approaches. Researchers could also replicate the present study in subcultures of Iran, such as Turkmen, Qashqai, or Kurd populations, and compare the results. In addition to the comparative study of sexual education models within Iran, future researchers could also examine and compare the sexual education models of Iran with neighboring Muslim countries through cross-cultural studies.

Authors' Contributions

Authors contributed equally to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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