

Rural Parental Experiences and Needs in their Roles as Sex Educators: A Qualitative Study

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BACKGROUND

Rural areas have a higher national teen pregnancy rate. There is strong evidence that parents can play an important role in positively impacting adolescent sexual health outcomes. It remains unclear how parents are currently employing this role and how to effectively engage them.

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ Examine parental perceptions related to the sex education of their children.
- ❖ Examine parents' perceived roles as sex educators.
- ❖ Investigate parents' needs for providing effective sex education.

METHODS

Very little qualitative data exists regarding parent-child sex education within rural communities.

19 parents of first-born adolescents in a rural community were individually interviewed using a semi-structured approach.

Thematic analysis was used to code and interpret data.

RESULTS

Major Themes

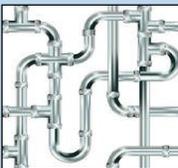
- ❖ Parents are talking with their adolescents about sex and desire to have open communication.
- ❖ Parents experience deficient and harmful sex education histories and want something better for their children.
- ❖ Parents look to school as a major prompt.
- ❖ Biggest barrier in having sex education conversations is knowing what to say and when to say it.
- ❖ Parents are comfortable with the 'plumbing' of sex education, but struggle to discuss sensitive topics related to intercourse and pleasure.
- ❖ Parents perceive rural towns as protected/safer, that they have a pulse on what their children are doing, and their adolescents are less likely to engage in sexual behaviors compared to 'city kids'.
- ❖ Conservative values confine opportunity for change.
- ❖ Parents want to receive information/resources from trusted sources; most highly cited was the school.
- ❖ Parents suggested a guide to explain *what* to say to their children and *when* to say it.



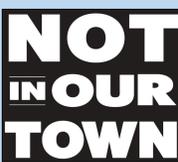
"If there's anything you ever need or want to know, it could even be in the middle of the day, it could be in the middle of the night, it don't matter, just come and ask." – P12



"It's kind of like an iceberg. The school is more the tip of the iceberg, but it's up to the parents to go through the whole iceberg." – P16



"Which part do you talk to them about first? What part is more important? What are the different parts that should be talked about? It's overwhelming to me." – P14



"I don't feel that the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders are as sexually active in our small town as they would be in a larger area." – P4



"If there was an 'answer all', like the proper way, like the exact way on how to explain things." – P8

"I would rather the school, the government, stay out of our lives in that way. I wouldn't ask them for any help in this matter." – P18