

Sexual health and self-care among young people and adolescents

Salud sexual y autocuidado entre jóvenes y adolescentes

Saúde sexual e o autocuidado entre jovens e adolescentes

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Abstract

The aim was to analyze in the literature the factors inherent to the process of information about sexual orientation for young people and adolescents. Integrative literature review, carried out using the Virtual Health Library and PubMed scientific databases, from 2012 to 2022, using the Boolean operator "AND". Complete, free and original articles were included. After the findings, the final selection of six articles was made. After the analysis, three categories were divided, the first identifying the relationship between gender and the search for knowledge, the second comprising the search for knowledge and easy access to unsafe information, and the third identifying the unpreparedness of parents to their children about sex education. It found the difficulty that parents have in exposing the theme of sexuality with their children, denoting shyness and inflexibility. On the other hand, the children feel the need to pass on information, and often end up seeking it with inconsistent sources. Having seen, guidance on sex education within the family and in other aspects is necessary in order to overcome the challenges encountered in this study.

Descriptors: Sex Education; Adolescent; Orientation; Sexual Health; Parent-Child Relations.

Resumén

El objetivo fue analizar en la literatura los factores inherentes al proceso de información sobre orientación sexual de jóvenes y adolescentes. Revisión integrativa de la literatura, realizada utilizando la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud y las bases de datos científicas PubMed, de 2012 a 2022, utilizando el operador booleano "AND". Se incluyeron artículos completos, gratuitos y originales. Luego de los hallazgos, se realizó la selección final de seis artículos. Luego del análisis, se dividieron tres categorías, la primera identificando la relación entre el género y la búsqueda de conocimiento, la segunda comprendiendo la búsqueda de conocimiento y fácil acceso a información insegura, y la tercera identificando la falta de preparación de los padres hacia sus hijos sobre educación sexual. Se constató la dificultad que tienen los padres para exponer el tema de la sexualidad con sus hijos, denotando timidez e inflexibilidad. Por otro lado, los niños sienten la necesidad de transmitir información, y muchas veces terminan buscándola en fuentes inconsistentes. Visto lo visto, la orientación sobre la educación sexual en la familia y en otros aspectos es necesaria para superar los desafíos encontrados en este estudio.

Descriptores: Educación Sexual; Adolescente; Orientación; Salud Sexual; Relaciones entre Padres e Hijos.

Resumo

Objetivou-se analisar na literatura os fatores inerentes ao processo de informação sobre orientação sexual para jovens e adolescentes. Revisão integrativa da literatura, realizada através das bases de dados científicos Biblioteca Virtual da Saúde e PubMed, no período de 2012 a 2022, utilizando-se do operador booleano "AND". Foram inclusos artigos completos, gratuitos e originais. Após os achados, deu-se à seleção final de seis artigos. Posterior à análise ocorreu a divisão de três categorias, sendo a primeira, identificando a relação entre gênero e a busca por conhecimento, a segunda, compreendendo a procura por conhecimento e o acesso facilitado com informação não segura e a terceira, identificando o despreparo dos pais para com os filhos acerca da educação sexual. Constatou a dificuldade que os pais apresentam em expor a temática sexualidade com seus filhos, denotando timidez e inflexibilidade. Em contrapartida, os filhos sentem a necessidade do repasse de informações, e por muitas vezes, acabam buscando com fontes inconsistentes. Tendo visto, a orientação sobre a educação sexual no âmbito familiar e em outros aspectos se faz necessária, a fim de superar os desafios encontrados nesse estudo.

Descritores: Educação Sexual; Adolescente; Orientação; Saúde Sexual; Relações Pais-Filho.



Introduction

Adolescence is characterized as a peculiar stage of the human life cycle, marked by the transition from childhood to adulthood, where the individual experiences physical, cognitive and emotional changes with the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics. The Ministry of Health follows the convention drawn up by the World Health Organization (WHO) that delimits the period between 10 and 19 years, 11 months and 29 days of age as adolescence, and between 15 and 24 years as youth^{1,2}.

In this phase, the experience with sexuality is more acute and usually materializes through unprepared sexual practices, which can predispose them to risks for a diverse range of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), as well as unplanned pregnancies. Therefore, it is recognized that sexual behavior is a process that occurs in stages and encompasses several elements, such as sex education. In addition, it is related to the level of knowledge that the adolescent has^{3,4}.

Sex education can be understood as any socialization experience lived by the individual throughout his life cycle, which allows him to position himself in the social sphere of sexuality. It is also complemented that, in addition to economic factors, there is the early onset of sexual activity and the decrease in the age for menarche, allied to the lack of information about conception means and the deficiency of support programs for adolescents. In view of these aspects, the role of the nurse, as of the entire health team, has a central focus on the triad of promotion, prevention and care^{5,6}.

With this, it should be noted that the profile of an educator relevant to the profession makes the nurse a fundamental member of the health team able to develop and put into practice educational activities that contribute to sexual activity being practiced in a healthy way by adolescents⁷.

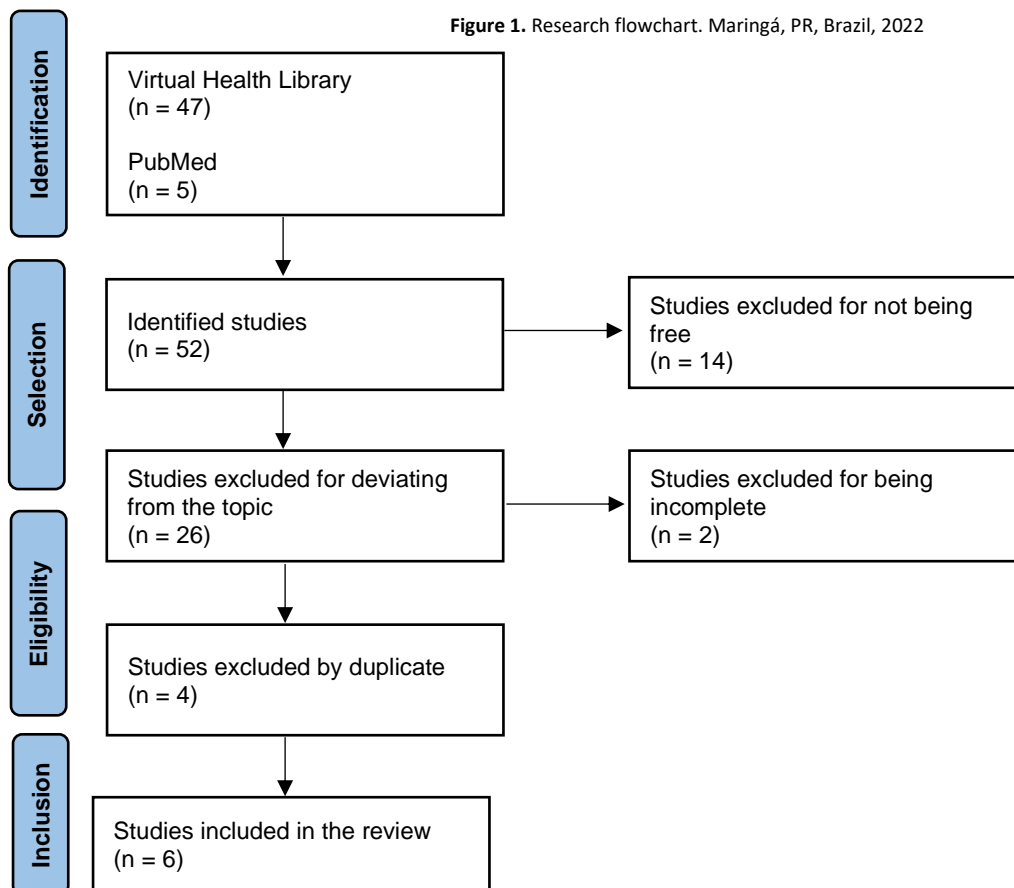
However, it is a topic of great importance to be addressed in different contexts, since the lack of information can cause several consequences: early pregnancy, contamination by STIs, as well as, it can increase the probability of prejudiced experiences in relation to practices and forms of to be related⁸.

Therefore, it is questioned, how does the literature expose the determining causes to the process of information on sex education for young people and adolescents? Given the above, the objective of the present work is to analyze in the literature the factors inherent in the process of information about sex education among young people and adolescents.

Methodology

This is a bibliographic research of integrative literature review, considering the materials available in the Virtual Health Library (VHL) and PubMed databases. The Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) used were: sexual education, adolescent, sexual orientation and sexual health, also in English: "sex education", "adolescent", "sexual health" and "orientation". Together with the Boolean operator "AND" in both databases to compose the search strategy.

Figure 1. Research flowchart. Maringá, PR, Brazil, 2022



Results and Discussion

As a result of using the descriptors, 1112 articles were found with titles in Portuguese and English, with 985 articles in the Virtual Health Library (VHL), and 127 studies in PubMed. From the separate material, the titles were read in order to verify which ones did not address the proposed theme, in which 52 articles were selected, 47 from VHL and 5 from PubMed.

After reading the abstracts of the articles selected in the previous step, 14 articles remained, 11 from VHL and 3 from PubMed. From the careful analysis, 39 were excluded, 26 for deviating from the proposed theme, of this too, 14 were not free, 4 were duplicated in the databases and 2 were incomplete articles. The pre-selected studies were then read in full. Subsequently, the selection of 6 studies that made up the integrative review was obtained.

Most of the defined works were quantitative research. The only selected article that was of Brazilian origin was excluded after reading the results, as it was not within the inclusion parameters, the other selected studies were carried out in India, Ethiopia, United States, Iran and Italy, as shown in Chart 1.

The inclusion criterion was defined by: original studies published in 10 years (2012-2022), electronically available in full, in Portuguese and English, with no restriction on location and method used. Subsequently, the titles were read in order to verify what did not address and did address the proposed theme, then the articles were selected by reading the abstract and after the integrative reading was performed, obtaining then the final selection of articles of those that were in agreement with the proposed theme.

As for the exclusion parameters, articles that distanced themselves from the proposed reflections of this study were discarded, namely: literature reviews, books/magazines, course completion works, abstracts of annals, incomplete articles, in duplicate and that had no translation.

After a consensual discussion between the reviewers, the final selection of six articles was obtained, which included the integrative review (Figure 1).

In the case of an integrative review, there is no need for submission to the Research Ethics Committee, however, the information from the publications used in the course of this study is explained in a secure way.

Chart 1. Characterization of selected articles, published between 2012 and 2022. Maringá, PR, Brazil, 2022

ID	Objective	Study	Main results
9	Inadequate guidelines to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people and adolescents.	Cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach.	Less than half of single young women have received some form of FLE (Family Life Education to Improve Young People's Sexual and Reproductive Life Experiences) in India.
10	Parental communication on sexual and reproductive health issues with the adolescent.	Community-based cross-sectional study.	Just over a fifth of parents had communicated with their teens about sexual and reproductive health issues.
11	It aims to examine communication between parents and young people on topics related to sexual and reproductive health and factors associated with it.	Cross-sectional study with a quantitative approach.	Communication with parents occurs not only infrequently, but also in the form of warnings and threats.
12	Implementation of educational interventions to promote the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent students.	Descriptive study, experience report type.	It was noted the lack of knowledge of adolescent students about the theme of sexual and reproductive health.
13	Evaluate the impact of the Adolescent Prevention Education Program.	Quasi-experimental comparison group design.	The results highlight the role that school-based peer leadership programs can play in promoting the development of healthy sexual futures for adolescents.
14	Exploring puberty experiences in adolescent girls living in the city of Sari, Iran.	Qualitative study of content analysis.	The importance of better emphasizing information about puberty and its essential needs was perceived among adolescents.

Data analysis and elucidation was performed using the MaxQDA Plus software version 2020, in which the word cloud was developed, as shown in Figure 2, which constituted significant information for raising the subtitles

for the study's investigation. The terms "adolescents", "sexual" and "reproductive" obtained greater coverage in the collection, followed by "parents", "young people", "health" and "life".



Figure 2. Word cloud with highlights extracted from the analysis of this study. Maringá, PR, Brazil, 2022



To conclude the analysis, three categories were identified, the first being named, identifying the relationship between gender and the search for knowledge, the second, comprising the search for knowledge and facilitated access with insecure information and, finally, the third, identifying the unpreparedness of parents towards their children about sex education, described below.

Identifying the relationship between gender and the pursuit of knowledge

The relationship between gender points to the prevalence of female participants, in which the male public is commonly more inhibited in talking about sex education, being less likely to engage in sexual communication with their parents or at school, as, generally, the trust and lack of openness become barriers^{8,15}.

There were also differences in the use of the family as a source of information, with women being more likely to talk to one of their parents than men. Among the younger categories (10-14 years), only one-fifth of men and one-third of women reported parental communication, i.e., men were less likely to argue at an early age than women in the same age group^{9,11}.

Still in this context, we can say that the mother is the mediating path in the process of dialogue about sexuality between the father and the daughter, which confirms this position is the ideology of the female figure showing more sensitivity and emotion when dealing with these issues¹⁷.

Understanding demand for knowledge and easy access to insecure information

Some studies have pointed out that the main source of information, and most frequently used, is the Internet, however, facilitated access can allow adolescents to access content with distorted information, this, combined with the fragility of family dialogue and sex education, can favor exposure to sexual and emotional risks^{8,16}.

Participants in one study even referred to the use of unreliable and vague sources of information, including

friends, radio and television. It is understood that the interaction with friends represents a large space in the daily life of adolescents, allowing socialization and experimentation with affective relationships, however, these end up serving as a model and influencing behaviors and attitudes. However, the adolescent's involvement with a group of friends can increase the risks of unsafe information and reckless behavior^{13,16}.

The search for such sources was justified by the adolescents, as they did not feel comfortable raising these issues at home or even thought that their parents did not know much more than they did. On the other hand, some parents point out that the Internet is a factor that hinders communication about sexuality, since their children can obtain their own information, making it difficult to exchange values, since the bases of knowledge offered are not always accompanied by sensitivity and attention to the needs inherent in the youth's life cycle^{13,17}.

Identifying the unpreparedness of parents towards their children about sex education

Five articles associated the fact that parents are exempt when it comes to sex education. Communication with parents was reported as problematic by the majority of participants in a study, with the most common reason being the adolescent's fear of initiating sexual practice, as well as other reasons: being culturally unacceptable, difficult to explain, shame/taboo, lack of conscientiousness and lack of time/too busy¹².

However, in this scenario, the "outdated" model of the parents is notorious, due to the way in which they were prepared, that is, they were taught full of restrictions. Thus, given the unpreparedness, there may be a closure or an "escape from the topic", another important factor is the issue of the father figure, in the vast majority, exempting himself from the role of sex educator for his children, delegating this function only to the mother⁸.

In this context, it was considered that parents generally provide non-specific messages to want to protect



their children, but without information about it, having punctual and even warning conversations, where these are triggered only by a specific event, that is, when starting a romantic relationship or in situations where discussions arise when something happens to a young person in the locality, whether due to an unexpected pregnancy or problems related to Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)^{8,10}.

With this, it is perceived that these conversations do not occur in a friendly way, but in a threatening and warning tone. Therefore, it is considerable that parents do not recognize the concerns of adolescents, and on the other hand, adolescents end up not heeding their parents' advice, begin to want independence, lack confidence in the family, disagree with their parents' opinions, feel confused about their role and prefer to be with friends and/or their peers, as they are easier and more ready to discuss than with their parents^{9,13}.

Conclusion

The present study demonstrated, through an integrative literature review on the factors inherent in the information process on sex education for young people and adolescents in the last ten years, that sex education needs to be much more than interventions focused on the prevention of STIs and of early pregnancy.

As much as sex education has been much studied in its many dimensions, there is still a need for greater interest on the part of guidance, that is, according to the analyzes of

the studies it was evident that one of the dimensions to be improved is the perspective of parents regarding their children's sexual education.

Having seen that if parents do not have an affinity around the subject with their children, they end up looking for information facilitated in other means, such as the Internet and/or friends. However, the probability of this adolescent taking on risky behaviors around misrepresented knowledge is increasing, and this, combined with the fragility of dialogue within the family, can favor exposure to both sexual and emotional risks.

Nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance that Nursing assumes the commitment to mediate in this scenario of sexual education with family members, establishing health promotion and prevention assistance, accompanied by educational actions, together with intersectoriality in schools, in order to build a broader and more complete perspective on the sexual health of young people and adolescents, since the nurse is a suitable professional to contribute throughout the life cycle of this adolescent.

However, parents must play an active role in the various contexts of adolescent learning, as they have been one of the main agents of education for their children. That said, future studies are needed in order to delve into the biggest deficits on the subject in order to overcome the challenges found in this study.

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