

The Influence of Parental Sexual Education on the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Children: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child sexual abuse is a serious form of violence and a major global public health concern. A 2018 survey by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection reported that 1 in 17 boys and 3 in 5 girls in Indonesia had experienced sexual violence at least once in their lives. This study aims to analyze the influence of parental sexual education on the prevention of sexual violence in children.

Subjects and Method: This systematic review was conducted using the PRISMA-ScR checklist. Database searches were performed in PubMed, Scopus, Wiley Online Library, and ScienceDirect for articles published between 2019 and 2022, with all sources accessible free of charge. The search terms used included: sex education to parents about sexual against children, "sex education" AND "parents" OR "sexual abuse" AND "children" OR "sex education" OR "parents" OR "sexual abuse" OR "children." Selected articles were then critically appraised using the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) checklist.

Results: From the initial search across the four databases (PubMed, Scopus, Wiley Online Library, and ScienceDirect), a total of 976 articles were identified. After removing three duplicate articles and screening the full texts, 10 articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in this systematic review.

Conclusion: This study identified two main themes showing that parental sexual education plays an important role in helping children understand how to protect themselves and recognize different forms and consequences of sexual violence. The results emphasize that clear guidance and regular education from parents are essential to support children in preventing sexual violence.

Keywords: sexual education, parents, child sexual violence, scoping review

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BACKGROUND

Child abuse is defined as any form of mistreatment or harmful acts toward children, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, and commercial exploitation, all of which may endanger a child's health, survival, dignity, or develop-

ment (WHO, 2020). A 2018 survey by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) reported that 1 in 17 boys and 3 in 5 girls in Indonesia had experienced sexual violence at least once in their lives. This number increased in 2020, particularly during the COVID-19 pan-

demic, as indicated by reports showing 1,848 cases of child sexual abuse (CSA) from January to June 2020 (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, 2020).

Many factors contribute to the occurrence of CSA, including parental factors such as parenting style (Anggreni et al., 2017), the presence of a stepfather (Ayan and Bilican Gökkaya, 2018), parental absence during childhood (Butler and Pérez-Fuentes, 2013), and father absence (Kidman and Palermo, 2016).

The increasing prevalence of sexual crimes against children has raised significant concerns among parents and educators due to the severe long-term consequences for victims (Soesilo, 2021). Sexual education in Indonesia remains highly controversial, with many people expressing disagreement regarding its provision at home or in school (Haryono and Anggareni, 2018).

Child sexual abuse is a global public health issue, and China is no exception. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that 15–20% of women and approximately 8% of men worldwide have experienced some form of sexual abuse during childhood or adolescence (Barth et al., 2013). In China, a meta-analysis of 27 studies reported that 15.3% of women and 13.8% of men had experienced CSA before the age of 18 (Ji et al., 2013), while another meta-analysis found prevalence rates of 9.1% among boys and 8.9% among girls (Ma, 2018).

Parent–child communication and parenting style are strong protective factors against CSA (Rudolph et al., 2018). Most studies examining parental roles in CSA prevention focus on assessing parental knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions (Guggisberg et al., 2021), as well as strategies to improve awareness and preventive prac-

tices (Livingston et al., 2020). In China, although parents recognize the importance of educating their children about sexual abuse, many lack the necessary knowledge and skills to do so effectively, a challenge particularly evident among rural parents with lower education levels (Chen et al., 2017). CSA prevention programs centered on parental involvement can enhance parenting practices and help reduce CSA risk (Rudolph et al., 2018).

CSA prevention is influenced by several factors, including parental knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviors. According to Pertiwi et al. (2017), parental knowledge significantly affects parents' attitudes toward CSA prevention. These attitudes and knowledge, in turn, shape parental behavior. Parents must possess adequate knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors related to CSA prevention because they serve as primary caregivers, educators, protectors, and sources of safety for their children (Zahirah et al., 2019). Parental sexual education is therefore crucial, as parents are closest to the child and play a key role in prevention through active and engaged parenting.

Research on systematic reviews specifically addressing CSA prevention methods for parents in Indonesia remains limited. Thus, there is a need for a review that explores effective CSA prevention methods suitable for Indonesian parents, enabling them to implement preventive strategies with their children. The aim of this study is to identify the role of parental sexual education in preventing sexual violence in children.

SUBJECTS AND METHOD

1. Study Design

This study used a systematic review approach guided by the PRISMA-ScR checklist. The process followed key stages recommen-

ded for scoping reviews, including defining the review focus using the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework, identifying and selecting relevant studies through the PRISMA flowchart, charting the extracted data, and summarizing and reporting the findings (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Joanna Briggs Institute, 2015; Munn et al., 2018).

2. Inklusion Criteria

The criteria for selecting articles included identifying studies relevant to the review based on the following inclusion criteria: original research articles; published in English; published within the last five years (2019–2023) and available as free full-text; and studies that examined parental education related to the prevention of child sexual abuse.

3. Exclusion Criteria

The exclusion criteria for article selection included the following: review or commentary articles; studies that focused solely on general parental education; studies that discussed only parental education related to child sexual abuse without examining preventive aspects; and research protocol papers.

4. Operational Definition of Variables

Sex Education refers to a comprehensive set of knowledge and skills related to sexuality and reproductive health that should be introduced to children and adolescents at an early age. Its primary purpose is to equip young individuals with an understanding of their bodies, prevent sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies, and promote healthy, informed, and responsible sexual behavior.

Sexual Violence refers to any coercive, exploitative, or abusive sexual act perpetrated by one individual against another, including various forms of sexual harassment. Sexual violence encompasses behaviors that inflict physical, psychological, or

emotional harm and may include acts such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment.

5. Data analysis

In this systematic review, the researchers identified studies relevant to the topic of parental sex education as a preventive strategy against child sexual abuse. The search process involved entering keywords aligned with the review focus, namely: “sex education” AND “parents” OR “sexual abuse” AND “children” OR “sex education” OR “parents” OR “sexual abuse” OR “children”. All retrieved articles were then imported into Mendeley to facilitate the screening process, which included evaluating titles, abstracts, and full-text articles.

RESULTS

Data charting was conducted for the ten selected articles to extract key information, including the target population, core concepts addressed, and the contextual settings in which each study was conducted. All included studies focused on parents or parent–child dyads, with several involving specific groups such as mothers of young children or parents of children with developmental conditions. The conceptual focus across the articles primarily centered on parental communication about sexuality, child sexual abuse prevention, parenting practices, and factors influencing parents' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding CSA prevention.

Most studies were situated in community or family settings, with some addressing broader social contexts. Although the research designs varied across the included articles, all emphasized the role of parents as a primary protective factor in preventing child sexual abuse. After synthesizing the key elements from these ten studies, the relevant findings for this systematic review are as follows:

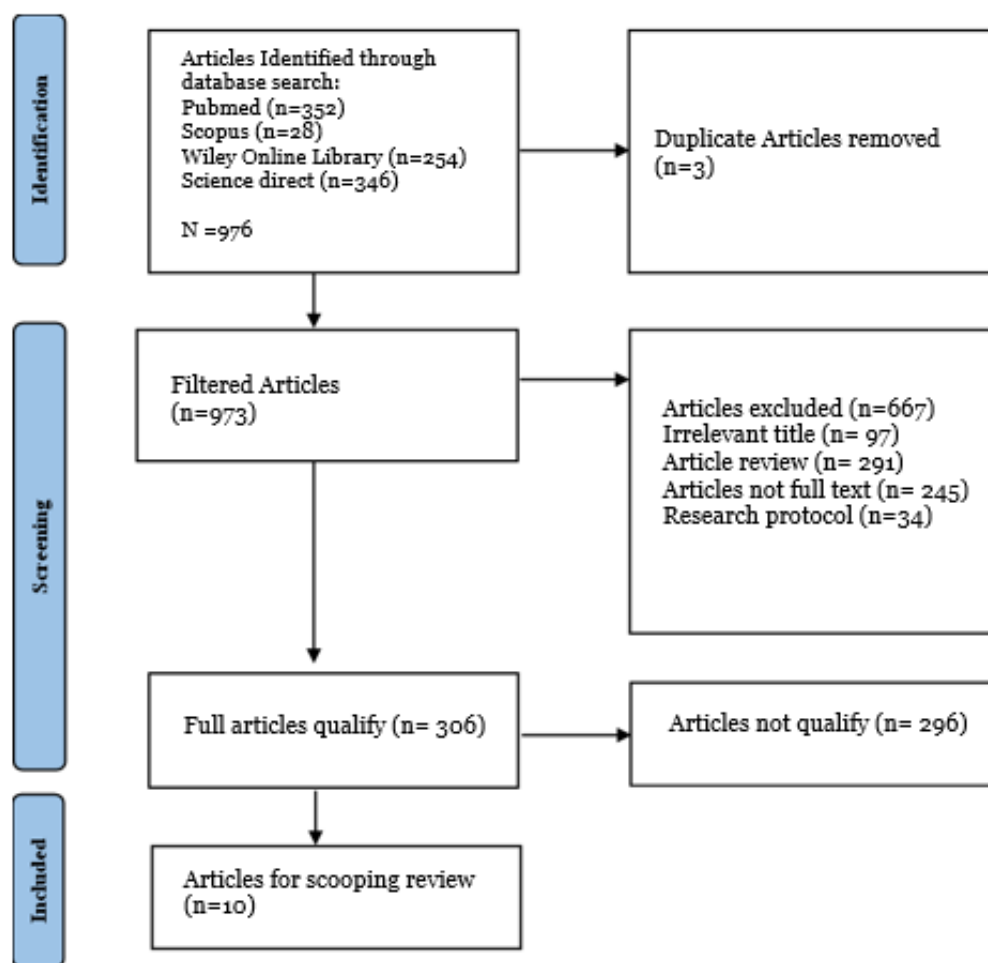


Figure 1. Scoping review selection using PRISMA flow chart

Based on the PCC framework applied in this review, a total of 10 studies were identified as meeting the inclusion criteria. These studies were mapped according to their Population, Concept, and Context to clearly outline the scope and thematic focus of the available evidence. The first group of studies involved parents and young children—particularly those aged 3–6 years—and examined themes related to preventing child sexual abuse and delivering sexuality education within the family setting. Several studies also explored parental communication about sexuality and sexual abuse, including among children with specific developmental conditions such as

Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The second group of studies similarly focused on parents, especially mothers, and assessed their knowledge, attitudes, and preventive practices related to child sexual abuse. These studies further investigated parental communication strategies, emotional regulation, and positive parenting practices aimed at reducing children's vulnerability to sexual violence. Most of the included studies were conducted in community and family contexts across diverse cultural settings, including Malaysia, China, and other regions, demonstrating the broad relevance of parental engagement in CSA prevention.

Table 1. PCC Model for Examining the Influence of Parental Sex Education on the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse: A Systematic Review

Author (Year)	Population(P)	Concept(C)	Context (C)
Cirik et al. (2019)	Children aged 3 to 6 years and their parents	Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse	Community/family setting
Teo & Morawska, (2021)	Parents	Child Sexual Education	Community/family setting
D Kenny et al, (2020)	Parents	Communicate About Sexuality and Child Sexual Abuse Against; Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Community/family setting
Alrahmmah et al, (2019)	Parents	Parental communication and prevention practices related to child sexual abuse	Family and Social Context
Rudolph et al, (2019)	Mothers	Parents views on child sexual abuse prevention	Family and Social Context
Soleimani et al, (2021)	Mothers	Parental communication and prevention practices related to child sexual abuse	Community/family setting
Na Barlow et al, (2019)	Mothers	Child sexual abuse and secondary outcomes including parental emotional regulation	Community/family setting
Fideyah et al, (2019)	Parents	Parents' knowledge, attitudes, and practices in Malaysia regarding providing sexuality education to their children	Community/family setting
Shaw et al, (2021)	Parents	Promoting positive parenting practices and effective parent-child communication to reduce sexual risk and prevent HIV	Community/family setting
Zhang et al, (2019)	Parents	Parenting behaviors in China; parents' attitudes, knowledge, and practices regarding preschool-aged children's sexual abuse prevention education, including exploration of factors influencing parents' educational practices related to Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) prevention	Community/family setting

Based on the critical appraisal of the eleven included studies, four articles were rated as Grade A with quality scores ranging from 9.1 to 10, while six articles were rated as Grade B with scores between 9.0 and 9.1. Of the ten articles selected for synthesis, five were conducted in high-income countries: one study from the United States (2020, Grade B), two from Australia (2021 and

2019, Grade A and Grade B), one from the United Kingdom (2019, Grade B), and one from Saudi Arabia (2019, Grade A). The remaining five studies originated from middle- and low-income countries, including Iran (2021, Grade A), China (2019, Grade B), Zimbabwe (2021, Grade B), Malaysia (2019, Grade B), and Turkey (2019, Grade A).

The eleven studies were further categorized based on methodological design. Four employed randomized controlled trials (RCTs) focusing on strengthening parental roles in preventing child sexual abuse. Four studies utilized cross-sectional designs to assess parental communication and preventive practices across diverse populations. The remaining two studies adopted qualitative designs, providing deeper insight into parents' knowledge, attitudes, and experiences regarding child sexual abuse prevention.

DISCUSSION

Tao and Morawska (2021) evaluated the effectiveness of a brief parenting intervention designed to support parent communication with pre-adolescent children about sexuality. The findings demonstrated significant intervention effects that were sustained over a three-month period on primary outcomes, including parental behavior, self-efficacy, beliefs, and attitudes, although no significant effects were observed on secondary outcomes (i.e., parental knowledge, parental comfort, and child behavior). The study also reported general improvements in parental behavior and self-efficacy over time. More specifically, parents who received the intervention showed a significantly greater use of sexuality-education strategies compared to those in the control group, with moderate effect sizes that remained stable over three months. These results align with the authors' hypotheses and are consistent with previous research by Davis et al. (1986), which found significant improvements in sexuality-teaching skills among Caucasian mothers of preschool-aged children who participated in a similar brief parenting program. The current study also confirmed significant intervention effects on parents' self-efficacy in applying sexuality-education

strategies, with moderate effect sizes sustained over time, echoing findings reported by Cirik et al. (2019).

Similarly, Shaw et al. (2021) found that brief parenting interventions effectively enhanced communication practices between parents and pre-adolescent children regarding sexuality. Their results showed significant improvements in parental behavior and self-efficacy across three months, with intervention participants demonstrating greater use of sexuality-teaching strategies than parents in the comparison group. These findings were consistent with earlier evidence, including Davis et al. (1986) and Kenny et al. (2020), supporting the effectiveness of short, structured parenting interventions in strengthening parents' confidence and skills in sexuality education.

A qualitative study further revealed that 83% of parents expressed concerns about potential negative consequences of discussing child sexual abuse (CSA) with their children. Common concerns included fear, anxiety, reduced self-confidence, and potential harm to the parent-child relationship (Ridolp et al., 2019). However, in practice, parents who provided CSA education to their children reported feeling more at ease after delivering the information, with only seven parents continuing to experience anxiety. The study also reported no adverse emotional or behavioral effects on preschool-aged children following CSA training. Most parents taught their children to label genital areas using correct anatomical terminology, though a small number still felt embarrassed using terms such as "penis" or "vagina." Overall, the evidence demonstrated that parent-led CSA training does not harm children's sexual development; instead, it increases children's knowledge and offers protective benefits against CSA.

Based on this systematic review of ten articles that met the inclusion and exclusion criteria, parental sexuality education as a preventive measure against CSA can be summarized into two major themes. First, sexuality education delivered by parents plays a crucial role in equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed to protect themselves from sexual abuse, supported by active parental engagement and guidance. Second, parent-led sexual abuse prevention education has been shown to be safe, non-harmful, and beneficial for children's development, enhancing their knowledge and strengthening protective factors. These findings highlight the importance of consistently promoting parental involvement in CSA prevention to help reduce the incidence of sexual abuse among children.

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This study is self-funded.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There was no conflict of interest in this study.

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