Abstinence-Only versus Comprehensive Sexual Education: Preventing Unintended Pregnancy

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Abstinence-Only versus Comprehensive Sexual Education: Preventing Unintended Pregnancy

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INTRODUCTION
In the United States, there is no universal curriculum for sex education. The two most prevalent education methods are abstinence-only education (AOE) and comprehensive sexual education (CSE). As posed in the PICO question, these authors question which method is more effective in the prevention of unintended pregnancies (UP).

PICO QUESTION
(P) = In female adolescents aged 10-19 years old
(I) = how effective is comprehensive sexual education
(C) = compared to abstinence-only education
(O) = in the prevention of unintended pregnancies?

METHODS
• Databases: CINAHL, OneSearch, Nursing Reference Center Plus, and Google Scholar
• Search terms: pregnan*, sex*, educat*, adul*, abstinen*, comprehensive
• Inclusion criteria
  a. Must address pregnan*, sex*, educat*, and adul*
  b. Must address abstinen* and/or comprehensive
  c. Published between 2017 and 2023
• Exclusion criteria
  a. Did not discuss the effectiveness of abstinence and/or comprehensive sex education in preventing unintended pregnancy in adolescents
• Total number of articles: 10

RESULTS
Advantages of CSE
- Improvement in academic performance
- Increased use of protection
- Fewer experiences of unprotected sex
- Delay in sexual initiation
- Minimization of negative consequences in sexual activity for adolescents (sexually transmitted diseases, infection transmission, unintended pregnancy)

Barriers & Challenges to CSE
- Inconsistency in curriculum
- Compliance from adolescent population
- Acquisition of unanimous political support

CSE versus AOE
- Strong support for inclusion of sexual education topics in schools rather than explicitly practicing abstinence.
- AOE is not considered to be more financially affordable as compared to CSE.

CONCLUSION
• Literature review indicated some CSE curriculums may be more effective in preventing UP and promoting sexual health for women aged 10-19 years old.
• The major barrier to CSE curriculum must be addressed and reassessed is lack of standardized approach; each state/municipality included used a different curriculum.
• There is an added benefit of CSE, including better overall sexual health, as compared to AOE.

While AOE was more effective in some studies, the major drawbacks of reduced overall sexual health and compliance issues show the need for more CSE to provide independence, and knowledge for decision-making.

Suggestions For Future Research
• Evaluate the effectiveness of CSE and AOE using biological measurements as well as behavioral measurements.
• Directly compare the effectiveness of different CSE curriculums in improving sexual health and wellness.

References