



## Examining Teachers' Roles in Early Childhood Sex Education: Insights from Indonesian Playgroups

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### ABSTRACT:

This study investigates the roles of teachers in implementing sex education in Indonesian playgroups, focusing on their opinions, experiences, and methods. The research addresses the psychological effects of child sexual abuse and emphasizes the need for preventative measures through early education. Utilizing a qualitative approach, interviews were conducted with 13 teachers from various playgroups in Ciputat, Indonesia, and analyzed using Colaizzi's method. The findings highlight two main themes: teachers' recognition of the importance of sex education and their practical experiences in implementing it. Most teachers agreed on the necessity of early sex education to promote awareness and protection against sexual violence. However, their understanding of the subject varied, with many expressing discomfort discussing sensitive topics. Teaching methods ranged from storytelling to demonstrations, but materials addressing reproductive organs were rarely included. The study underscores the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents to align educational goals. The findings contribute to the broader discourse on integrating comprehensive sex education into early childhood curricula, offering practical insights for policymakers and educators. Future research should explore the scalability of these approaches and their long-term impact on children's safety and well-being.

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## 1. Introduction

The psychological consequences of sexual abuse of children have a profound impact on their well-being, with anxiety and trauma often persisting into adulthood. These impacts are not exclusive to girls, but also affect boys, demonstrating that sexual violence does not solely affect girls but also affects boys (Wohab & Akhter, 2010). The World Health Organization defines sexual violence as any act or conduct of a sexual nature that occurs without the explicit consent or understanding of a child. This definition includes situations where a child is developmentally unprepared and unfamiliar with the relevant social norms of society (Srivastava et al., 2017). It is further noted that sexual violence is closely related to threats and coercion and is only desired by one party (Manuputty, 2018). In essence, child sexual abuse is an act of coercion accompanied by threats, which compel the child to comply with the perpetrator's will to engage in sexual activity.

According to data extracted from the official website of the Ministry of Women's and Children's Empowerment and Protection (KEMENPPPA) on violence, sexual violence is the most prevalent type of violence. It is documented that there were 9,588 cases of sexual violence against children in 2022 (<https://kemenpppa.go.id/2022>) (<https://dataindonesia.id-2022>). The Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) also refers to the same situation where sexual violence against children is the highest reported case. During the 2022 period, the KPAI recorded approximately 834 cases of sexual violence against children. (<https://www.kpai.go.id-2022>). The data indicates that Indonesia is in an acute phase of child sexual abuse.

The high prevalence of sexual violence against children represents a collective obligation to address this issue through a multifaceted approach. While legal action and accountability are essential elements, it is crucial to implement preventative measures to combat this problem. A number of studies have indicated that sexual education can serve to mitigate the risk of sexual violence (Ashilah, 2023; Fadhilah, 2021). Unfortunately, there are still many people who believe that discussing sexuality with children is inappropriate. Adults are reluctant to engage in discussions about sexual matters, particularly those related to sexual activity, due to the perceived taboo surrounding such topics. Ultimately, the discourse on sexual matters commences during adolescence, and even then, it employs metaphorical language to avoid the use of explicit terminology. (Ashilah, 2023; Tirtawinata, 2016; Widiarsini et al., 2021). The provision of sexual education to pre-pubertal children is considered to be irrelevant and risky due to cultural perspectives that consider it so (Robinson et al., 2017). In contrast, sexual education is a broad-based subject matter that encompasses not only the discussion of sexual activity but also the examination of related behaviours in everyday life. Nevertheless, the reality is that the provision of sexual education for children remains a topic of contention in numerous countries (Oktavianingsih & Ayriza, 2018).

Sexual education is an endeavor to provide knowledge about the genetic composition and its functions, as well as the differences between men and women. Furthermore, sexual education is a process of instilling values in socialization to prevent the violation of religious teachings or community norms that have been mutually agreed upon. It also strives to create an understanding and awareness of the moral significance of sexual education (Widayati et al., 2022; Zain et al., 2020). Moreover, sexual education is intimately linked to healthy living education and an understanding of body ownership rights. It can be argued that sexual education should also be linked to life skills, such as decision-making, communication, negotiation and identification of sources of help (Banerjee & Rao, 2022). Consequently, it is recommended that sexual education be provided to all individuals at the earliest opportunity. The more an individual is able to understand themselves, the more they are able to navigate the complexities of civilised society. Following Freud's theories, children between the ages of three and four years old are believed to be undergoing a sexual phase, commonly referred to as the anal period. This period is characterized by the onset of bladder and bowel control in children. Children derive pleasure from urination and defecation. At this stage, parents should begin toilet training their children so that they can become independent. Freud postulated that positive experiences gained during the anal period would facilitate the development of competence, productivity, and creativity in children (Gumiandari & Nafi'a, 2019). However, it should be noted that children enter the phallic period at this age. During this period, children begin to pay attention to their genitals and those of their friends. At this age, children begin to differentiate between their genitals and those of their peers and even adults (Neto et al., 2018). The discrepancy in the ages of the two preceding statements does not negate the sexual stages of children. Other opinions posit the age of 3-4 years marks the conclusion of the anal period, thereby suggesting that the age of 3-4 years also marks the beginning of a transitional period between the anal period and the phallic period. In light of Freud's sexual stages, it is evident that playgroup-age children require sexual education to navigate the stages effectively. As stated

by Supriyati, children's sexual development cannot occur independently; they require assistance and guidance to ensure that their sexual development is not misguided and develops in a normative manner (Supriyati, 2018).

The scope of sexuality education for children aged 3-4 years is the delivery of information about the functions of body members, with a focus on the genitals or reproductive organs. This information should include how to keep them healthy, how to maintain privacy over their genitals, and how to interact healthily with the people around them (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

In addition to parents, schools are also responsible for providing sexual education to children (Oktavianingsih & Ayriza, 2018). The most basic level of educational institutions that children enter in Indonesia is the playgroup. Playgroups represent a form of early childhood education (PAUD) unit within the non-formal education sector. They organize educational programmes for children aged two to six years, with a priority age of three and four years (Kemendikbud RI, 2015). Although the playgroup is a non-formal education pathway, its function is analogous to that of kindergarten (TK), as both are part of early childhood education. The purpose of this form of education is to provide stimulation to help children's physical and spiritual growth and development.

A considerable number of studies have been conducted on the role of teachers in sexual education for early childhood in schools. However, the majority of these studies have focused on kindergarten teachers. Similarly, research investigating the implementation of sexual education is predominantly conducted in kindergartens. Consequently, the objective of this study is to analyse the role of playgroup teachers in the implementation of sexual education in their respective educational institutions.

## 2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach. In educational research, qualitative research is of great importance, as it enables researchers to answer questions that emphasize the 'how' and 'why' aspects of a phenomenon. Furthermore, researchers are permitted to pose realistic questions related to other people's experiences, which facilitates the acquisition of a more complex and nuanced understanding (Cleland, 2017; Oranga & Matere, 2023). The data were collected through open-ended interviews, during which the researcher employed interview guidelines to ensure that the information obtained remained consistent with the researcher's intended focus. The study involved 13 playgroup teachers from seven clusters in the Ciputat sub-district, South Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia. The Head of the Integrated Service Centre for Women and Children Empowerment of South Tangerang City has indicated that the highest number of cases of sexual violence have been recorded in the Ciputat subdistrict (Jakarta Suara, 2022). The respondents were randomly selected, as not all teachers were willing to be interviewed. The data collection process was conducted over four months, from July to November 2023. Following the statement by Fauziyyah et al. (2023) that this research draws upon the experiences of teachers in the field, the findings are presented as they are, accompanied by the views and attitudes of teachers towards these phenomena. The limitation of this study is that the number of samples obtained was not in line with the researcher's preference and was only from one cluster in one sub-district. This is due to the difficulty in getting teachers to agree to be interviewed. However, this research still refers to ethical research, which means that the researcher ensures that the teachers are willing if the results of the interview are used as research data without the need to include identity.

The data were analyzed according to Colaizzi's method. Colaizzi's method (Wirihana et al., 2018) has seven steps: reading and re-reading the transcript, extracting statements, formulating meanings. Formulating meanings into clusters and themes, a description of the phenomenon's essence is produced. Participant feedback validates the findings. The seven stages were modified into three. The interview results were reread and grouped into themes. Finally, the data was developed into a description of the findings.

## 3. Result and Discussion

The respondents included in this study were all female teachers with a minimum of five years experience in the profession and an undergraduate degree in early childhood education. The analysis yielded two themes: their opinions and experiences regarding sexual education in schools.

Table 1. The Analysys of Interview

| Category  | Theme               | Statement   |
|---|---------------------|---|
| <b>Opinions on improving sexual education knowledge</b> | Internal motivation | Teachers are aware of the necessity for information related to sexual education. They must expand their knowledge base in areas pertinent to their professional responsibilities. |
|   | External motivation | Teachers believe that by learning about sexual education, they can educate their students to avoid sexual crimes.   |

| Category   | Theme  | Statement  |
|--|--|--|
|  | Sexual education                             | Teachers expressed discomfort in discussing the topic of sexual intercourse with their pupils, with some teachers referring to sexual education as relating to intimate relationships. Nevertheless, teachers concurred on the protective measures that can be employed to safeguard children from sexual crimes. These include the instruction that children should scream or run when forced to touch their bodies, the recommendation that children watch positive shows, the teaching of children to know their genitals and reproductive organs, and the guidance that children should be taught to identify those with whom they can hug. Teachers also contend that, if the objective of sexual education is to facilitate the recognition of body parts and the adoption of effective protection methods, it is clear that the earliest stages of childhood require the provision of sexual education. Nevertheless, if the programme is to be delivered at school, teachers anticipate that parents will be willing to cooperate. |
| <b>Experience of implementing sexual education</b> | Sexual education materials provided          | A significant number of teachers appear to have limited understanding of the scope of sexual health education in early childhood. Furthermore, they rarely receive seminars or training on sexual education. Based on their experience, teachers have taught children about the various body parts, including those that should be covered and those that should not be touched. However, they are unaware that this material constitutes part of sexual education. The introduction of body parts is limited to general parts, except genitals, which some teachers have never discussed.   |
|  | Media used                                   | Some teachers utilize storybooks, while others employ props.   |
|  | Metode yang digunakan                        | The teaching methods employed by teachers include demonstration, storytelling, lecture, and the delivery of advice. Habituation is also an important factor in the educational process.  |
|  | Frequency of application of sexual education | In the context of teaching material on body member recognition, teachers commonly present such content during the theme of "myself". However, materials about the prohibition of touching other people's bodies and the rejection of goods from strangers are often introduced in an incidental manner.  |

The role of teachers in implementing sexual education in schools cannot be separated from the motivation of teachers to develop their insights into the current knowledge of early childhood education. In Indonesia, the topic of sex is often avoided in conversation. This is also a phenomenon observed among playgroup teachers in the Ciputat subdistrict, Indonesia. Nevertheless, teachers are also driven by a desire to gain the knowledge and skills required to implement sexual education in schools. In light of the aforementioned findings, it can be posited that the teachers in question are motivated to learn more about sexual education. This motivation is driven by their awareness of the necessity to develop themselves professionally. It is evident that as educators, they are cognizant of the necessity to possess knowledge that can enhance their professional competence. In addition to self-development, teachers are aware that they must also act professionally to protect their students from dangerous situations. Therefore, they must provide lessons that teach children how to protect themselves. This motivation serves as a source of strength, demonstrating that they are deserving of the role of teacher (Nirmalawaty et al., 2021). Teachers who are committed to their profession tend to perform better (Dunggio, 2023).

The teacher's opinion that parents should be involved in the sexual education process at school is supported by numerous studies that demonstrate that parental involvement in school is highly beneficial for children's academic success, both at school and at home (Bajaj et al., 2023). In terms of sexual education, parents and teachers must agree on the substance of sexual education that must be delivered both at home and at school. This agreement affects the successful implementation of sexual education in children (Rachmasari, Kurotul Aeni, 2023). The presented experience indicates that teachers have implemented sexual education. However, the lack of clarity regarding the definition and scope of sexual education constrains teachers in their capacity to engage in further learning. Teachers acknowledge that the implementation of sexual education is predominantly conducted orally and is not included in the curriculum. Indeed, the implementation of sexual education materials can be facilitated through the incorporation of various learning strategies within the curriculum program (Setyowahyudi & Leda, 2023). The knowledge of teachers regarding sexual education materials has been demonstrated to significantly influence their attitudes toward the delivery of sexual learning (Nadeem et al., 2021).

## 4. Conclusion

From the evidence presented thus far, it can be concluded that the knowledge of teachers about the topic of sexual education will have an impact on their role in organizing this subject in the context of their classroom teaching. Furthermore, it is also necessary for teachers to collaborate with parents to implement sexual education effectively. Parents and teachers must reach a consensus regarding the implementation of sexual education in schools. This will ensure that teachers can fulfill their role in this area to the fullest extent possible.

The results of this study can be used as a reference for developing programs to protect children in schools. Furthermore, the study results can be followed up to see if other regions have the same or different problems regarding sex education in PAUD facilities, especially playgroups.

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