

Knowledge and importance of sex education in young university students of the Academic Unit of the North of the State of Nayarit of the Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit

Conocimiento e importancia de la educación sexual en los jóvenes universitarios de la Unidad Académica del Norte del Estado de Nayarit de la Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit

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Abstract

Sex education is a topic formally included in the plans and programs of studies at the different educational levels, however, and despite the efforts that continue to be made to form and generate a culture related to it, in many places it continues to be a taboo or content that generates controversy within the family or community. In that sense, knowing the importance that this has for university education is something of great relevance, for which the present text reports the results obtained in relation to the object of study of Sexual Education in the students of the Academic Unit of the North of the Nayarit State of the Autonomous University of Nayarit, as a significant aspect in their personal and professional training. For the development of this study, a validated and adapted survey on sexual education by Dzib and Hernández (2016) was used, applied through a google form that was sent to all students. The total number of responses was 247; The results showed that most of the respondents are informed, but they express their desire to be provided with advice and relevant information about sexual education in the Academic Unit. Once the information was collected, the results were graphed and based on them a series of strategies and recommendations are proposed for the benefit of the Academic Unit, students and society in general.

Sex education, University training and dissemination strategies

Resumen

La educación sexual es un tema incorporado de manera formal en los planes y programas de estudios en los distintos niveles educativos, sin embargo y, a pesar de los esfuerzos que se siguen realizando por formar y generar una cultura relacionado a ello, en muchos lugares sigue siendo un tabo o un contenido que genera controversia entre la familia o comunidad. En ese sentido, conocer la importancia que éste tiene para la formación universitaria es algo de gran relevancia, por lo que el presente texto reporta los resultados obtenidos en relación al objeto de estudio de la Educación Sexual en los estudiantes de la Unidad Académica del Norte del Estado de Nayarit de la Universidad Autónoma de Nayarit, como aspecto significativo en su formación personal y profesional. Para el desarrollo de este estudio se utilizó una encuesta validada y adaptada sobre educación sexual de Dzib y Hernández (2016), aplicada mediante formulario google que se envió a todos los estudiantes. El total de respuestas fue de 247; los resultados reflejaron que la mayoría de los encuestados están informados, pero manifiestan su deseo a que se les brinde asesoría e información pertinente acerca de educación sexual en la Unidad Académica. Una vez recabada la información se graficaron los resultados y en base a ellos se proponen una serie de estrategias y recomendaciones en beneficio de la Unidad Académica, alumnos y sociedad en general.

Educación sexual, Formación universitaria y estrategias de difusión

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Introduction

According to Ríos et al. (2018), sexuality education is a basic element to promote the sexual health of all people. And which should be a collaborative work between the health sector and educational institutions, because the latter have a great potential in the development and transformation of future generations, as well as in the reconstruction of the social fabric.

Some experts who promote sexual health try to define the role of education as something essential in the construction of a culture on these issues, starting with certain population groups, such as children and young people, and where the objective is to understand that the human sexual act is an inherent aspect of every individual, which allows them to understand and accept that this is something healthy, which causes happiness and satisfaction with themselves and with others, contributes to solving problems related to sexuality, due to the prejudices and double entendre comments that are usually made.

However, talking about sexuality education from an integral perspective should be understood as a "process based on human rights and a gender perspective, with information to make responsible decisions, without prejudice or guilt; with biological, emotional, social and cultural content, in addition to ethical principles" (Tapia, 2017, p. 2). In other words, sexuality education is not only analysed from a single perspective and in an informative manner, but also strengthens the idea of forming citizens, capable of influencing, transforming and improving their context, allowing them to develop personally and professionally in a full and conscious manner; and where sexuality forms part of this framework.

Talking about sexuality with children, adolescents and young people must also be understood from the family and cultural context of upbringing, understanding that this is part of our life, inherent to us, that we are sexual beings by nature, that there are diverse ways of expressing, communicating and feeling, also implies assuming that both men and women are different both physically and emotionally and that in this sense there will be a great diversity of ways of thinking and exercising this sexuality from its three dimensions: reproductive, pleasurable and relational.

In Mexico and in the world it is still a pending task to consolidate sex education from a comprehensive perspective, even though there are policies, strategies and various actions for its implementation, there is still much to be done, according to UNESCO (2014, p. 1) there are "very few people receive adequate preparation for their sexual life, making them potentially vulnerable to coercion, abuse and sexual exploitation, unplanned pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV", without doubt these are serious problems that remain in force especially in contexts of marginalisation and poverty.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the profound inequalities in various aspects of population groups, such as education, health and access to technology, and above all in the economic sphere. In the area of sexuality, according to Breña (2021), this situation has increased teenage pregnancies; in this context, Mexico occupies one of the first places with high rates of teenage pregnancies. It is estimated that out of every 1000 pregnancies around 7.3 % correspond to young mothers between 15 and 19 years old. And in many cases even younger.

Since 2015, the federal government has been tackling this problem and it is estimated that from the beginning of the pandemic until today, the total number of teenage pregnancies will amount to 191,948, an increase of approximately 12 % of what was expected.

According to the National Population Council (CONAPO), it has made calculations taking into consideration the problems that arise in access to contraceptive and hospital services during the pandemic, for example, consultations have been notably reduced due to fear of contagion, which leads to an increase in unwanted pregnancies, If we add to this the real problems that exist, such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), easy access to abortion and the lack of access to health services for prevention, together with the social and economic problems that society in general is going through, this makes the situation even more complex.

In Mexico, the average age at which sexual relations begin is relatively low in many areas of the Republic, and the lack of sex education, especially in rural regions and sectors of the population that consider it unsuitable for dissemination among children and adolescents, has an impact on the number of pregnant adolescents. This is without considering those situations in which sexual violence, which accounts for 10% of such pregnancies, cannot be prevented through education.

In view of this situation, comprehensive and scientific sex education is required, with sufficient information for the whole community to understand its importance in the development of everyone, as well as the problems that it unleashes. From the reproductive dimension, contraceptive methods, risks and diseases must be known, and respect and responsibility must be promoted, always within the framework of human rights.

Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, raised controversy by addressing the issue of sexual manifestations and desires in very young children, and it is certainly a reality that is experienced in all areas, both in the family and in society, as he stated that sexual desire is always present. It has always been necessary to show affection through touching, being intimate, hugging and this will continue to happen until the day our life ends because humans need affection, not necessarily sexual affection, depending on who it is with.

In this context, it is very important that educational institutions at all levels provide training on sexuality that allows all individuals to have a healthy sexual life free of prejudices and to make their own decisions, aware of the implications for themselves and for others.

In the specific context of the north coast region of the state of Nayarit and the Academic Unit of the North of the State of Nayarit (UANEN) belonging to the Autonomous University of Nayarit (UAN), there is an absence of indicators that allow for the identification of the degree of integration of sexual education as part of the integral formation of students and even of statistics that allow for the precise identification of the number of pregnant students.

In this sense, carrying out this study is very important because it sets a precedent for the development of proposals and the definition of strategies for the promotion of sexuality education at the university level. According to the National Population Council (CONAPO), it has made calculations taking into consideration the problems that arise in access to contraceptive and hospital services during the pandemic, for example, consultations have been notably reduced due to fear of contagion, which leads to an increase in unwanted pregnancies. If we add to this the real problems that exist, such as Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), easy access to abortion and the lack of access to health services for prevention, together with the social and economic problems that society in general is going through, this makes the situation even more complex.

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Problematic situation

According to Siderac (2015), recognising the importance of the subject of sex education allows us to understand it and modify the reality in which we find ourselves and show progress in relation to it, because the ideal behaviour of all people should be in a healthy and natural way, as part of the complement of happiness with the individual and with others.

Men and women express and feel their sexuality in different ways. In the case of boys and girls, it is often questioned why they should know about it, leaving aside the fact that through this aspect they develop their own personality and their social relations with affection and security; it contributes to the management of their emotions, pressure from their friends and peers, as well as protecting themselves against sexual abuse.

In the case of university spaces, it is a subject with little or no dissemination within the university community, and only occurs unless it is a specific aspect within professional training, as in the case of health careers, which have formally incorporated it into the study plans and programmes.

In the case of the Autonomous University of Nayarit (UAN), the approach to sexuality education at the institutional level is carried out through an institutional programme called Healthy University, which, as part of its work axes, takes up this important aspect of training, in addition to offering workshops and holding conferences inside and outside university spaces, but there is undoubtedly much to be done from an integral perspective.

It is interesting to question why there is resistance to including sex education or why there are few activities related to it. In this context, María (2009 cited by Siderac, 2015) considers that there are three main beliefs or assumptions that come from very conservative people who are related to the patriarchy:

- The first of these is that there are only two sexes: male and female, and without being able to question these beliefs, and obviously based on heterosexuality. Anything outside of this is considered perverse, sick or deviant.
- The second belief is that sexual relations are performed for the sole purpose of procreation, forgetting about pleasure altogether, and are not even discussed. Whoever addresses the subject will be as perverse and sick as anyone who dares to question this creation.
- The third assumption or belief is related to the family, it is said that the family is the basic cell of society, i.e., how it is formed. This family, according to the author, is the one that rests and is supported by the two previous beliefs, i.e., the male and female gender as parents, and sexual relations with the sole purpose of procreation.

In contrast to these beliefs, it is known beforehand that nowadays sexuality is lived in a very freeway, and that two ways of seeing it coexist, on the one hand, what really happens, as well as its diverse expressions, and on the other hand, conservative beliefs. However, it is considered important to address sexuality so that children, adolescents and young people can live it naturally and in a healthy way, understanding and opening their minds to everything that really exists and implies living from a holistic perspective.

On the other hand, Butler (2013 cited by Siderac, 2015) refers that in this challenge it will be very important to discuss the different beliefs with which we are formed and educated. And perhaps one of the challenges is to address sexual dimorphism, understanding it as the variations in the external physiognomy of men and women, which has given rise to various interpretations and movements from the perspective of sexuality.

This will be a very difficult challenge that will have to be done with the participation of all those involved as a whole; it requires analysing and thinking about what has previously been excessively forbidden and denaturalised sex itself. This is where educational institutions have a great task to do at all levels of education.

Background

Preinfalk (2016) carried out an exploratory study related to approaches to sex education in public universities in Costa Rica, finding that universities recognise the importance of sex education and implement actions in line with the subject.

On the other hand, Escalera and Amador (2021) carried out a study of knowledge of actions for the prevention and reporting of sexual harassment among social work students, in which they describe the mechanisms and actions that have been implemented by various institutions to prevent and intervene in gender-based violence and for which they considered good sex education to be important.

Undoubtedly, there is a close relationship between having training in sexual education and the phenomena of desertion, lag and abandonment that occur in educational institutions, which is why it is important to create scenarios and conditions to avoid this type of situation and improve the quality of life of students.

Description of the study

Based on the above, the objective of this study is to identify and analyse the knowledge and importance of sex education for students at the Academic Unit of the North of the State of Nayarit, in order to propose strategies to help reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, which have an impact on school dropout and school failure.

This research work was carried out with all the students of the Academic Unit of the North of the State of Nayarit in the Bachelor's Degrees of Law, Accounting, Education Sciences and Administration currently offered. It is a quantitative and exploratory study, a google form was elaborated and applied and the link was sent to the students. The time given to respond was one week.

The survey was taken and adapted from a study conducted by Doris L.B, Dzib M. R.C.H, H.R.C and Dzib, M.S.P in 2016 related to sex education. Once the responses were collected, the information was concentrated, analysed, graphed and interpreted, which allowed for some recommendations to be made for implementation in the academic unit in question.

In order to collect the information, the total enrolment of 804 students was considered, distributed among the Bachelor's Degrees in Accounting, Administration, Education Sciences and Law; however, only 247 responses were received, representing 31% of the total target population.

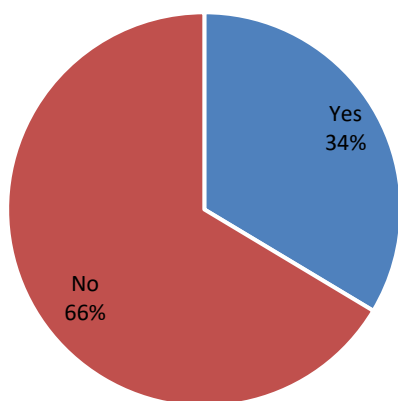
The data collection technique used was a survey adapted through a google form that was sent to all groups of students at UANEN. It is important to mention that the survey is anonymous so as not to compromise or intimidate the students and to ensure that the responses are objective.

Results and discussions

Once the information has been concentrated on the basis of the responses obtained, data of utmost importance are shown and interpreted in order to design targeted strategies for the student population of the academic unit.

The first question is related to family characteristics, they were asked if their parents live together, 66% of respondents said yes, while 33% did not, this data is an important factor as it allows us to analyse whether this situation mediates the knowledge of sexuality education in university students (see Graphic 1).

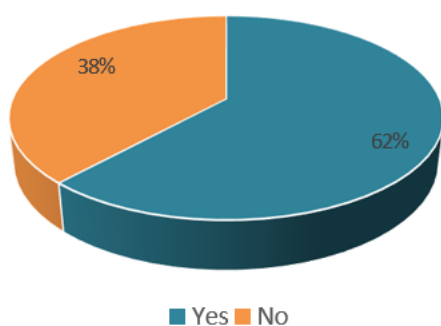
Do your parents live together?



Graphic 1 Coexistence of parents
Source: Own elaboration

Something important for the development of young students is family upbringing, where communication is one of the most important pillars, so when respondents were asked if their parents talk to them about changes in their sexuality, 62% said they did, but 38% said they did not, which could be a factor that increases the problems related to this issue (see graphic 2).

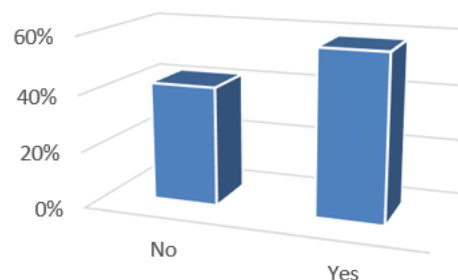
Do your parents talk to you about the changes you are going through or have gone through?



Graphic 2 Communication with parents
Source: Own elaboration

The importance of communication on sexuality issues can be seen as a strategy for prevention, so students were asked if they consider that their parents have relevant information to answer their questions, 58% answered yes, and 42% said no, which could be a cause for concern in the area due to the increase of unwanted pregnancies among students in the academic unit (see graphic 3).

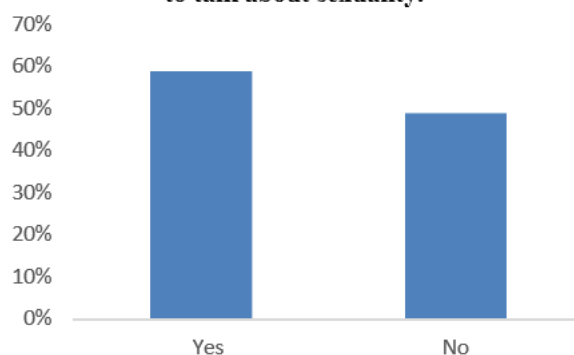
Do you think your parents have the right information to answer your questions about sexuality?



Graphic 3 Communication with parents
Source: Own elaboration

In the same vein, they were asked whether the communication they have with their parents provides an opportunity to discuss these issues, 59% said yes and 41% said no (see graphic 4).

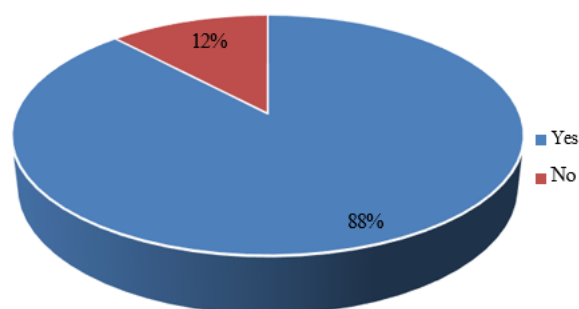
The communication you maintain with your parents gives you the opportunity to talk about sexuality.



Graphic 4 Confidence in the family
Source: Own elaboration

Misinformation on this topic is one of the main reasons why many young people suffer the consequences. In question five related to the importance of parents at home in providing guidance on sexuality education, 88% responded that it is of great importance because the family is the primary source on these issues, while 12% said it is not (see graphic 5).

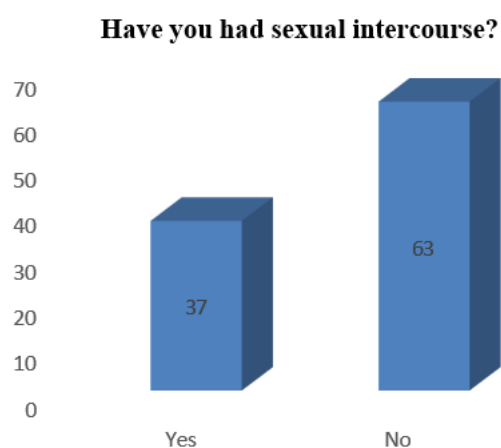
Do you think it is important for your parents to give you guidance on sex education at home?



Graphic 5 Sexual orientation
Source: Own elaboration

This information is correlated with the two previous questions, because although the students consider it important for parents to provide this type of guidance, 42% consider that they do not have the relevant information to be able to provide it, but also a similar percentage of students perceive that they are not given the opportunity to address this type of topic.

Question six regarding whether they have had sexual relations, 62.7 % gave a positive answer, while 37.3 % said they had not. It is important to mention that even with these results, the majority of students are inclined to want to have information about sexuality and in this sense, it is considered important that they are informed so that they have the opportunity to make decisions about how to live and enjoy it freely.



Graphic 6 Sexual relations
Source: Own elaboration

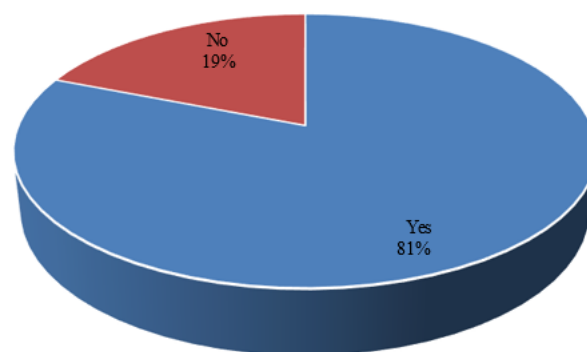
In question seven, students were asked about their knowledge of STDs, 99% were aware of the risk of being sexually active and only 1% responded that they were not.

In relation to question eight, which was an open-ended question, the students stated that they were aware of several sexually transmitted diseases, the main ones mentioned being:

- AIDS
- herpes
- gonorrhoea
- syphilis
- chlamydia
- Papiloma humano virus

Prevention is an important factor in health care and in the case of STDs it is essential that, in addition to the information that is available, the respective care is put into practice; related to the above, they were asked about the knowledge they have on this subject to avoid contagion, 95% mentioned having information about it and only 5% did not (see graphic 7).

Does your Academic Unit provide you with information about Sexually Transmitted Diseases?

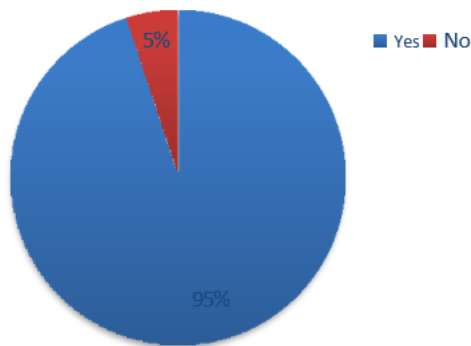


Graphic 7 Preventive care
Source: Own elaboration

Question ten related to the importance of disseminating information about the risks to which they are exposed when having sexual relations, 100% are aware of this problem.

Since the school is a place where, in addition to professional training, it becomes a space for socialisation, coexistence and formalisation of relationships between students in the community, they were asked if their academic unit provides them with information related to STDs. 81% said no and only 19% said yes (see graphic 8).

Do you know the precautions people who have sex should take to avoid getting STDs?



Graphic 8 Information in the Academic Unit
Source: Own elaboration

As this is a topic that is not addressed in the academic unit, 92.5% of the students said that they would like their school to provide them with information on sexuality as an important aspect of their integral formation, while only 7.5% responded that it did not.

Undoubtedly, university spaces as training centres are ideal for the socialisation and dissemination of this topic that is so important for the lives of the subjects, which is why the need to address this as part of their training process is evident.

Conclusions

The subject of sexuality is difficult and complex in different cultures, given the social prejudices that have prevailed in our society over time; however, little by little they have been opening up to the subject and seeing it as a natural aspect of life, something with which one is born and feels the need for attachment and affection through sexual contact.

Based on the results obtained, it can be concluded that the majority of individual university students do have knowledge of sexuality, even though it is not a subject that is expressed openly with their parents, not only because it is considered that they do not have the necessary information to be able to provide guidance, but also because the source of information is diverse.

Likewise, sex education is a topic that is not addressed within the Academic Unit of the North of the State of Nayarit, the respondents consider it necessary and important to be informed about it, so that related problems can be reduced and above all as a strategy for the prevention of STDs, unwanted pregnancies and sexual violence in any of its manifestations.

- Fernández (2011) also states that good sexual information can prevent unwanted pregnancies and diseases that put young students at risk in all universities and in this case in the Unidad Académica del Norte del Estado de Nayarit; Although there is no certainty that the lack of information is the trigger for this fact, it is important to take into account and promote healthy sexual education. It should not be forgotten that Mexico is the country with the highest number of unwanted pregnancies according to statistics from the National Population Council (CONAPO), which is why it is essential and highly relevant to take decisions and actions.
- In this sense and given the importance of sex education in today's world, we propose a series of actions and strategies to be implemented in the academic unit that will benefit students and society in general.

The following actions are recommended:

- Implementation of monthly workshops where information on sexuality is provided and students can express doubts and concerns about contraceptive methods, sex itself, sexually transmitted diseases, i.e., everything that is required for them to understand and live their sexuality responsibly and fully.
- Carry out campaigns to raise awareness of the risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, in collaboration with personnel from the Municipal Health Department.
- Seek links with health institutions in the region to jointly promote sexual health within and outside the university community.

- Establish participation agreements with the Acaponetense Women's Institute to carry out informative activities on sexual education, talks, among others.
- Establish collaboration agreements between UANEN and different health institutions, such as the Mexican Institute of Social Security, the Ministry of Health, the Institute of Security and Social Services for State Workers, the Acaponetense Women's Institute, among others, in order to be able to carry out:
 - Monthly workshops where information on sexuality is provided and students can express their doubts and concerns about contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted diseases and related issues.
 - Awareness campaigns on the consequences of not being responsible in the exercise of sexuality.
 - Respect for sexual diversity

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