

Preventing sexual violence in the Fajar Harapan Congregation: the responsibility of parents in providing sex education for children aged 6-9



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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the crucial role of families, particularly parents, in imparting sex education to children, emphasizing the significance of parents as the primary educational influencers. Focused on children aged 6-9 years, a critical developmental period often overlooked in sex education, the objective is to explore how Christian parents can integrate and deliver sex education aligned with Christian teachings (PAK) within the family context. The research is grounded in real-world concerns identified within the Fajar Pengharapan congregation, where a 6-year-old encountered sexual harassment due to parental negligence in sex education. Employing a qualitative research method, data were gathered through direct interviews with parents of 6-9-year-olds in the GPM Fajar Pengharapan Congregation, supplemented by relevant literature. Findings reveal parents' limited understanding of sex education, indicating suboptimal efforts in educating their children. Effective strategies for delivering sex education to children, especially within the 6-9 age range, remain unclear. Parents often perceive in-depth sex education at this age as inappropriate. Their efforts primarily encompass explaining basic anatomy, emphasizing protection against harassment, and instilling moral teachings related to gender equality, recognizing all individuals as God's creations. As part of a Christian family, it is imperative to acknowledge and educate children on sexual values, considering sex as a divine gift approached with care and timing. This research contributes insights into the challenges Christian parents face in delivering comprehensive sex education, emphasizing the need for tailored approaches and increased awareness within this community.



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1. Introduction

The pivotal role of parents in providing sex education for young children within Christian families is particularly crucial in the current era of digitalization. Sex education is essential due to the prevalence of sexual abuse cases involving minors, perpetrated by adults or individuals with close ties to their families. For instance, a case in Amsterdam highlighted the sexual abuse in very young children of a 7-year-old child [1]. Another incident was the physical and emotional abuse of elementary school children by teachers that occurred in the Republic of Cyprus [2]. Likewise, there are cases of teachers sexually abusing students between the ages of 14 and 17 at the teacher's home [3]. Steely et al, conducted research on teachers who were convicted of sexually abusing underage students. Steely et al., conducted interviews with 35 female sex offenders who used their positions as teachers to sexually abuse underage students from 1995 to 2016 in southern states. Based on victim and perpetrator narratives, it was found that several categories of female teacher perpetrators included predators, sexual friendships, and emotional dependency [4]. In Maluku, instances of sexual abuse against children saw a significant increase

in 2022, with 50 reported cases distributed across all districts and cities, according to Mimi Hudjajani, Head of the Women and Children Protection Division of Maluku Province [5]. Further, in Central Maluku Regency, children aged 6 years fell victim to sexual harassment by individuals close to them [6]. Responding to the alarming rate of sexual abuse cases in Maluku involving minors, Rasyid La Koko, Head of Social Worker and Child Protection for Central Maluku Regency, declared an emergency regarding sexual violence against children.

Based on the documented cases of sexual abuse against minors, it is crucial for parents to assume the role of companions in their children's family life, necessitating the inclusion of sex education for young children. Contrary to being considered taboo, sex education must be imparted to children from an early age in Christian families. This serves as a foundational aspect of educating children in moral, religious, and social-ethical values. Initiating sex education during childhood is imperative to cultivate a correct understanding of body organs, Christian religious values as a moral compass, and guiding children on rejecting and preventing sexual harassment behavior. Early childhood sex education is a proactive measure aimed at providing comprehensive information about sex, reproductive health, and the physical changes associated with development. By instilling sex education in children, it contributes to the prevention of deviant behavior, fostering socially responsible individuals within society [7]. The Head of the Maluku Province Child and Women's Protection Service attributes the rise in sexual abuse cases against children to inadequate parental supervision and a lack of sex education at home. Additionally, the influence of social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, along with promiscuity, exacerbates the problem [8]. Data from the Ambon District Court reveals 11 cases of sexual violence against children within Christian families, specifically the GPM Fajar Harapan Ambon congregation. These incidents involved children as young as 6 years old and occurred in 2020. The perpetrators, known to the victims, took advantage of opportunities like cellphone interactions for sexual harassment. Parental negligence allowed these incidents to transpire, emphasizing the urgency for proper supervision and sex education. It is noteworthy that children aged 6-9 years undergo sexual reproductive maturity, marked by physical changes in both boys and girls. To thwart social abuse of young children, parents in Christian families must actively provide sex education, as the family holds a pivotal role in instilling fundamental values during a child's development.

Previous research has explored reproductive health education for children using multimedia [9], counseling, and parenting from an Islamic perspective [10], as well as the impact of information media and sex education for children [11]. Additionally, there has been research on the role of parents in sex education to address children who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) [12]. Despite the existing literature on the role of parents in providing sex education for children aged 6-9 years to prevent sexual abuse from a Christian perspective, no specific studies have delved into this topic at the congregational level. Sex education is imparted to young children to counteract sexual harassment from individuals in close proximity, such as teachers at school, social friends, or family members. Specifically, at the GPM Fajar Pengharapan congregation, sex education is provided for children aged 6-9 years to ensure they acquire accurate knowledge about the development of their physical organs based on gender. This education serves as the foundation for instilling Christian religious values, thereby forming the basis for cultivating social ethics in friendships, relationships, and interactions within both society and schools.

2. Method

The research employed an exploratory qualitative approach [13] to investigate the role of parents in delivering sex education to children aged 6-9 years as a preventive measure against sexual harassment. Data were collected through observation and interview methods. Subsequently, the field data were descriptively analyzed in an exploratory manner [14]. Various pertinent literature sources were consulted to reinforce and substantiate the research findings. Finally, conclusions were drawn concerning the role of parents in providing sex education for young children to mitigate the risk of sexual abuse.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Family as the basis of Christian values education

In this section, the author aims to express the viewpoint that Christian religious education within the family holds significance due to its role as the primary foundation for an individual's faith development. In a household, it is crucial to foster the learning and cultivation of one's faith, devotion to beliefs, worship practices, and daily conduct. Individuals bear a significant responsibility in being the light and salt of the world, especially among those unfamiliar with Christ. It is imperative to live in accordance with God's Word and apply the teachings found therein. Within the family structure, education assumes a pivotal role. Apart from steering the family toward the righteous path to God, Christian education within the family serves as an extension of Christian education received at school and in church. These three components are inherently interconnected and cannot be separated, as they mutually reinforce and complement each other. In Ruwi Hastuti's writings, he elucidates that "a Christian family is primarily a place of education for children." It is within the family context that children can imbibe Christian values, shaping their character through myriad teachings and responsibilities, encompassing aspects of life, morality, and ethical conduct. Moreover, Hastuti asserts that a Christian family under the guidance of the Lord Jesus is bound to be obedient and spiritually robust [15].

This obedience and strength, if realized, contribute to the development of commendable Christian personalities. The Christian family, conceptualized as a social group and fellowship where both children and parents revere and worship God, serves as the foundational environment for a child's development and learning. Families undertake the task of guiding and instructing their children, molding their mentality from ignorance to knowledge. The family also bears the responsibility of strengthening the mental fortitude of children, ensuring resilience through effective training. Recognizing the family's pivotal role as the primary source for instilling values, it is imperative to provide comprehensive education to children from an early age. Failure to do so may result in misunderstandings about the perception of sexuality in the future. According to research findings, parents within these families comprehend the values and significance of being part of a Christian family. Acknowledging Jesus as the head of the family, they anticipate a journey filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Education and the inculcation of positive values, initiated within the family, pave the way for children to navigate life with minimal challenges. Even when faced with difficulties, well-equipped with mental fortitude and strong faith, these children can adeptly overcome adversities.

As the primary foundation for imparting values to children, it is the responsibility of parents to provide sex education to their children from an early age. The history of sex education traces its roots back to the West. Notably, expert Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) opposed providing sex education to children before adolescence [16]. The development of sex education took an organized and systematic turn in Sweden around 1962 [17]. It was divided into two components: sex instruction, introducing human anatomy and biology, with a focus on the reproductive system [18]. This included guidance on family development and methods of contraception to prevent pregnancy [19]. Russell et al. elucidate that sex education is an endeavor to impart knowledge related to biological, psychological, and psychosocial changes resulting from human growth and development [20]. It is rooted in providing knowledge about the function of reproductive organs, coupled with the infusion of moral values and ethics. This commitment aims to prevent violations, deviations, and misuse of reproductive organs [21]. From a theological standpoint, sexual education is a coaching effort to comprehend oneself as a creation in the image of God (*Imago Dei*) [22]. Consequently, Christian theology perceives sex education through two lenses. First, God created humans as male and female [23], and individuals must grow in accordance with their natural characteristics. Second, being created in the image of God entails purity, demanding responsibility in maintaining one's own purity and holiness in sexual matters [24].

Based on the field research findings, the informants—primarily parents with children aged 6-9 years—tend to view sexual education as inappropriate or unsuitable for discussion and education among children. They often perceive sexual education solely in terms of knowledge about sexual relations, deeming it too taboo for children of that age. Consequently, there is a

lack of emphasis on providing a comprehensive understanding of sexual education to their children. This lack of understanding among parents regarding the definition of sex itself may lead to children forming misconceptions. Hence, it is crucial for parents to acquire a proper understanding of what sex education entails. Sex education is deemed equally important as any other form of education for children. The significant role that parents play in providing sex education to children cannot be overstated, given their close proximity to the child. Parents are anticipated to be the primary source of information for their children. Commencing sex education at an early age is preferable as it serves to preempt potential sexual dangers. Consequently, the informants express a collective hope in this research—that they can discover an effective approach to imparting appropriate sexual education and understanding to their children.

3.2. The role of parents in providing sex education for young children

In this section, the author presents various perspectives on sex education for children within the family, derived from the outcomes of interviews and field research. Consequently, this section elucidates the pivotal role played by parents as the primary figures in the educational process for children. The family, with parents at its core, assumes a crucial role in delivering education to children, emphasizing the significance of their involvement. Several effective methods exist, providing suitable avenues for implementing this educational process. Drawing from the interview results, the author identifies several methods applicable to educating children on appropriate sexual matters, namely Modeling, Mentoring, Organizing, and Teaching.

- Modeling; in this section, the method of Modeling emphasizes that parents play a crucial role as the primary examples or role models for their children. Parents serve as the foremost models in establishing the child's "way of life" pattern [25]. Parents are required to be the paramount exemplars, demonstrating aspects such as appropriate dressing and demonstrating correct bathroom practices. According to field research findings, parents have been observed implementing this method with their children. Additionally, it is imperative for parents to set an example for children in fostering a positive relationship with their bodies, including proper care such as cleaning sensitive areas and dressing according to the child's gender. However, not all parents consistently employ this method, often perceiving that children can naturally handle such matters on their own initiative. Moreover, parents should exemplify self-protection measures to prevent sexual violence. This includes demonstrating actions such as screaming loudly if someone touches a vital part of the child's body, teaching the child to assertively say "I don't want to" if invited to a secluded place, and exemplifying seeking help or assistance if the child feels threatened. Unfortunately, the research reveals that not all parents consistently engage in these practices. This lack of consistency contributes to confusion among children when faced with such situations, as observed in the case of the GPM Fajar Pengharapan congregation.
- Mentoring; in this section, it is imperative for parents to comprehend the mentor-mentee (mentoring participant) relationship [26], a unique dynamic intended to enhance skills and knowledge [27]. The author explores the roles of individuals acting as mentors and children as mentees. This encompasses parents guiding the child's life skills development. Specifically, parents are tasked with overseeing and ensuring the appropriateness of their children's viewing habits, encompassing both TV programs and YouTube content. Moreover, parents are encouraged to supervise children as they change clothes, emphasizing the importance of appropriate locations such as changing rooms or bathrooms. Regrettably, the implementation of these methods by parents is found to be lacking. In the mentoring process, establishing relationships and interactions is a crucial component, especially in providing sex education to children from an early age. Children need guidance to understand appropriate behavior with the opposite sex. Parents can direct their children not to undress immediately in front of the opposite sex and advise them on bathroom etiquette. Unfortunately, research indicates suboptimal implementation of these measures by parents, potentially linked to the prevalent habit of providing cell phones due to parental busyness. Another approach involves parents offering mentoring by providing facilities for children. This method aims to ensure gender-appropriate separation, such as separate bedrooms, changing cupboards, and

enclosed bathrooms. However, not all parents adopt this approach, citing inadequacies in their living spaces, particularly when accommodating more than two children.

- **Organizing;** in this method, the process involves systematically organizing all activities [28]. The objective is to accommodate and categorize various tasks, establish relationships between individuals or groups, and define boundaries of authority [29]. In this section, it is imperative for parents to implement the Organizing Process concerning the management of children. Within this process, parents play a pivotal role in regulating the child's time for urination and guiding them on appropriate toilet use. Additionally, parents should discourage others from touching the child's vital organs. The purpose of these measures is to encourage children to consistently use the toilet when urinating. Unfortunately, this method has not been consistently implemented by parents. Furthermore, the organizing process extends to grouping, where children are directed to seek permission before entering their parents' room. Parents may also consider sleeping arrangements based on gender, and it is beneficial for children to have separate bedrooms. Surprisingly, none of the parents in this study have applied this method, as they perceive their children to be too young and do not fully understand the implications.
- **Teaching;** in this method, the purpose is to provide instruction related to knowledge and culture [30]. Teaching is designed to guide individuals in improving their quality of life, enhancing skills, and fostering ideals, knowledge, and hope [31]. Parents play a crucial role in imparting knowledge about sex education, a vital component of a child's sexual education within the family. Within this educational process, children are taught to recognize the reproductive aspects within themselves. Parents should introduce proper terminology such as "Penis" and "Vagina" while also emphasizing that these body parts should not be touched by just anyone—an aspect often modified by parents in reality to use less explicit terms. Moreover, parents should teach children about sex education using accessible language. Early education on pregnancy is crucial, presented in simple language that children can comprehend. Additionally, children should be introduced to the functions of reproductive organs. Surprisingly, none of the parents in the study implemented this method. In the process of sex education, instilling moral values is essential. This involves fostering mutual respect between genders, including discouraging actions such as lifting skirts or peeking at parents' clothes. Such ethical and moral values should be integral to children's education. Unfortunately, the research indicates that parents have not optimally implemented this aspect, often attributing it to the belief that children are too young to comprehend the rationale behind such teachings.

Parents, being the primary and initial educators, are anticipated to impart suitable knowledge about sex to their children. Ideally, parents should seize the opportune moments or the right time to engage in open and critical dialogues with their children at home. These discussions should address information that children may encounter from external sources such as mass media and peers. It is recommended to utilize these moments after praying with the children or during family gatherings (BINAKEL). The aim of instilling sex education during these moments is to help children comprehend the significance of sex and its relevance to their lives. Parents are encouraged to convey the understanding that sex is a precious gift, but it should be approached with careful consideration of the right time and moment.

4. Conclusion

Sex education stands as one of the essential lessons that parents should convey to their children. This form of education is beneficial for individual children, equipping them with the knowledge to steer clear of undesirable possibilities. As a conduit for instilling moral values within the family, parents must recognize the importance of incorporating sex education. The utilization of methods such as Modeling, Mentoring, Organizing, and Teaching is crucial. Through these methods, the author aspires to facilitate a well-executed process of sex education for children within the GPM Fajar Pengharapan congregation.

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