Iranian parents' experiences about children sexual training: Control, restriction and education

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ABSTRACT

Sexual training is one of the most important and sensitive aspects of upbringing of children, to which little attention is paid for some reasons, such as shame, pudency, and being a taboo subject in some societies. Parents also do not have sufficient knowledge and insight into this context, and by gaining knowledge from invalid sources, maybe they cannot play this important educational role. This study has dealt with exploring parents' experiences about children sexual training, through a qualitative approach. This study was designed as a qualitative content analysis method. Thirty seven qualified parents were selected using a purposeful sampling method. Data collection was performed by holding 6 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 5 individual interviews. FGDs and individual interviews were written and data analysis was performed using a conventional content analysis. Analyzing participants` experiences in the sexual training of children, led to the emergence of three main categories; control and punishment of the child, restricting the child and trying to educate the child, as parenting strategies. The parents adopted several strategies for the sexual training of their children, most of them associated with control and restriction and some of which could have led to subsequent injuries. They had not received any education in this area and experienced frequent worry, doubt, and wandering during their children sexual training. Hence it seems necessary to provide valid educational resources according to the cultural and religious teachings, create opportunities to educate parents, and respond to their problems.

Keywords: sexual training, sex education, parenting strategies, Iran, qualitative study
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INTRODUCTION

Upbringing of children has different aspects, one of the most important and sensitive of which is sexual training (1, 2). Sexual training is use of methods to create healthy sexual traits and behaviors, and not only encompasses sexual feeling, but also has the feature of growing social, ethical, and cultural personality (3).

Although some people believe sex education is specific to puberty, research suggests paying attention to sexual matters and its relevant issues begins from childhood. Parents have the main role for sexual training in childhood and creating proper habits during sexual development (4-6). Also, providing sex education at early childhood is

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often considered to be controversial. Nonetheless, there are strong signs that indicate involving parents in the sex education of children is important, and early and open communication can positively affect safety, prognosis, and sexual health of children (7-9). Parents' behavior in the upbringing of children is under the influence of various factors, such as: level of education, beliefs, family and religious values, socio-cultural environment, and the socioeconomic level of the family (5, 10, 11), and can lead to multiple differences in the sexual training model.

In addition, the privacy of sexual matters and their being mixed with shame and modesty, and being a taboo, especially in Eastern societies (12-14), can lead to parents' discomfort and anxiety at the time of transferring these matters to their children (4, 15). And that is why, in many societies including Iran, little attention is always paid to sexual matters in comparison with other domains, and this also includes educational and research issues (10), such that studies in this area are much less than in other aspects of health. It is noteworthy that Islam has not created any taboo and prohibition in the field of sexual matters, and has not hidden talking about its relevant issues. In Islamic jurisprudential books, and even in practical treatises of religious authorities, sex education is discussed, and it has always been taken into account that an individual Muslim becomes aware of issues related to sexual life and learns its ways and rules legitimately (16).

Hence, educating parents as primary factors in upbringing, who have the highest responsibility in appropriate sexual training of their children, is necessary (10, 17, 18), which requires identifying parents' experiences and beliefs in the sexual training of children, and religious and cultural values prevailing in the society.

Objectives: This study aims to exploring the Iranian parents` experiences about sexual training of children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was a qualitative study with naturalistic paradigm. The conventional content analysis approach was used. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences. From among the parents who volunteered to participate in the study and who have at least one child, 37 participants were selected purposefully.

The research environment included kindergartens, healthcare centers, and any environment the parents preferred. Data gathering was conducted using the Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) method. While introducing the objectives of the study to them, the researcher invited the parents to participate in the study. The time and place of the FGDs was determined by considering the participants' opinions. Six sessions of FGDs was hold, and 5 to 7 individuals participated in each session. In each session, after introducing the participants to each other, the aims and methods of the group discussion was explained again. They were assured about protecting the confidentiality of information, and were reminded that if they are not willing to talk about some experiences, they can say it in third person, or discuss it at the end of the group discussion in a personal interview. Written informed consents were obtained for participating in the study and recording the sessions. The FGDs began by asking the question "Please talk about your experiences about the sexual training of your children.", and based on the parents' explanations, the next questions were raised. The sessions lasted 60 to 100 minutes. The researcher played the role of facilitator and used a secretary to record the data. After conducting the FGDs, due to its necessity, five individual semi-structured interviews were carried out too.

 FGDs and interviews were immediately written word by word, and then after being reread several times, the semantic units were determined. The expressions and codes were extracted. The similar codes were classified, and named based on the content. Classifying the data continued until the emergence of subcategories and main categories.

In order to ensure the credibility of data (19), different methods of data collection were used, FGDs were hold in different times and places, participants with maximum diversity were selected, and the codes were reviewed by the participants. The reliability of data was approved using the outside observer method. To ensure the transferability, the research results were reviewed by a number of parents who had characteristics similar to those of the participants and who did not participate in the research. In verifiability, the accuracy of data encryption process was investigated by peer review.

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RESULTS

Six FGDs with 32 participants, and 5 depth individual interviews were held with 28 mothers and 9 fathers, 10 of them participated as couples. The participants' age range was from 24 to 48 years old, their level of education was from elementary up to doctorate, the number of their children was from 1 to 3, and their children was ranging in age from 3 months to 21 years old.

Three main categories were obtained from analyzing the data of the study; that is, control and punishment of the child with two subcategories, restricting the child with three subcategories, and trying to educate the child with three subcategories, which represented the parents' strategies in the sexual training of children (Table 1).

Table 1. The main categories and subcategories resulting from analyzing the parents' experiences about the sexual training of children

Subcategory	Main category
Oversee children during the games Employing punitive and deterrent methods	Control and punishment of the child
Restricting girls in playing and socializing with the opposite sex Preventing children from watching illicit TV channels Hiding emotional-marital relationships in the presence of the child	Restricting the child
Preparing the child for stages of growth Response to child's sexual curiosities Teaching child how to protect sexual health and privacy	Trying to educate the child

1- The first main category: Control and punishment of the child
One of the parents' most common upbringing methods, especially in sexual training, is controlling the child tangibly or intangibly which is done in different contexts and in various ways. This category consists of two subcategories; Oversee children during the games, and employing punitive and deterrent methods.

1.1. Oversee children during the games
Most parents referred to their sensitivity and attention to the children's not being alone with each other, and about their presence in a closed room, and being out of reach when playing. They tried to keep the children under surveillance at parties, whether they were with the opposite sex or the same sex. The mother of a 6-year-old girl said in this regard: "*I'm very sensitive about looking after my daughter not to be alone with my brother's son who is seven years old. My husband is even more sensitive than me; he controls them so much that everyone notices. Our acquaintances say: Why are you so worried? Why do you control your daughter so much?*" The mother of a 6-year-old boy was also saying: "*My son, too, goes with his uncle's daughter to a room, and they say we want to play. I tell them to let the door open and then play. They say: No! We want to close the door, we want to talk privately. We want to play a doctor game. But I say: No! Let the door open. We won't listen to you.*"

Some parents even prevent their sons and daughters from being alone with each other, or control them somehow. A mother, who has a daughter and a son, explained that: "*I have two children. My daughter is older. She is 11. They mostly tend to go in their room together, and watch a movie or a CD. I say to them that the door must be open.*"
Also, when children are playing, the mothers supervise them and control the type of games they are playing and their behavior, under various pretexts, such as: giving a snack, or doing a task. Among sensitive games are playing the role of a couple and doctor games. The mother of a 6-year-old boy said: "*Many children play doctor games these days. For instance, when they want to examine each other, they examine from top to bottom. I went and controlled them on the pretext of giving fruit juice to them.*"

Most of the parents mentioned different methods to supervise children's communications and games, but they said that when a child is outside the home environment, such as: streets, a kindergarten or a school, they are out of parents' direct control. The mother of a 4.5-year-old girl said: "*We can control them at home, but they finally go to kindergarten or school, and their friends talk about things on which we don't have any control.*"

Although the parents were satisfied with their control and monitoring, they were worried about the outcomes and correctness of these measures. A mother was explaining about dealing with her 4-year-old daughter: "*I went to my daughter's room once, and saw her with her aunt's daughter being naked and looking at each other. I lost my temper, and rebuked them. I said: you did a very bad thing. But I worry that this behavior of mine will make her do in secret. After that, I tried not to react immediately and strongly in such situations*".

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1.2. Employing punitive and deterrent methods
The results showed that, given that sexual issues and behaviors are of particular importance to parents, in many cases, they use deterrent and sometimes punitive methods to control the child and prevent or terminate behaviors which are indecent or inappropriate to them. Many parents use the method of instilling fear in the child, to prevent them from making mistakes or being misled. A father said: "*I somewhat agree to punish the child or scare them. You can't see indecent sexual behavior from your child and do nothing. You must instill such fear in them so they don't do such behavior.*"

In dealing with the child's sexual behaviors, some other parents reacted seriously, threatened the child, and even imprisoned them in a room. The following is the opinion of a father, about dealing with indecent sexual behaviors: "*Almost at the age of five, our son lay on his abdomen and rubbed himself against the floor. In my opinion, in such situations, you have to threaten the child, or throw them in a room and close the door, for half an hour or one hour, to be punished, and if necessary, beat them.*" On the contrary, some other parents believed that threatening and frightening the children make them do in secret, thus, they avoid doing such things. Mothers emphasized that, by being kind to children and loving them, parents should establish a good relationship with their children to attract their trust. The mother of a 6-year-old girl said: "*When my child does a bad thing, I talk to her kindly in an appropriate occasion, and explain the problem which is in her behavior, to declare that this behavior of her was not right, and I declare my opposition. This way the child exactly notices the problem. I disagree that we threat and beat them without explanation*".

2. The second main category: Restricting the child
Another strategy used by parents in sexual training of children, was the main category; restricting children in various fields according to family values and cultural context of society, consisting of three subcategories; restricting girls in playing and socializing with the opposite sex, preventing children from watching illicit TV channels, and hiding emotional-marital relationships in the presence of the child.

2.1. Restricting girls in playing and socializing with the opposite sex
Data analysis showed that most parents prefer that their children play with the same sex, and they have fundamental concerns about girls' playing and socializing with the opposite sex. For this reason, they try to prevent their daughters from close relationships and especially being alone with the opposite sex, in various ways. The mother of a 6-year-old girl deals in this way with the situation of her daughter's being alone with her aunt's 18-year-old son: "*I myself pay careful attention to my daughter not to be alone with older boys. For instance, my daughter has always liked to go to her aunt's house, which has an 18-year-old son, but I never let her go when her cousin was alone at home. I only allowed her to go, when her aunt was at home.*" Also, the father of a 4-year-old girl said: "*A girl's playing and socializing with a girl does not cause a problem. I don't like my daughter to play with boys, but when it happens, we must pay more attention to them, and control them more*".

The majority of parents said that for cultural reasons and social values, they impose more restrictions on their daughters, and in total, they restrict their socializing with the opposite sex. The father of a girl said: "*If my daughter is with me, and I want to visit my friends, because the environment is manly, I don't take her with myself.*" The mother of a 6-year-old girl believes: "*We having daughters are much more sensitive than those who have sons. If my children were boys, I wouldn't care even if they saw each other's genitals.*"

The other restriction some of the parents imposed was preventing their children from communicating with their peers who had bad behaviors in the context of sexual issues, or whose families did not observe the values prevailing in the society in the context of sexual training. This restriction, in many cases, had led to decreased or broken relationships between relatives and friends. The mother of a 5-year-old girl said: "*One of our relatives has a 7-year-old son, who does behaviors my husband and I don't like. For instance, he hugs girls and kisses them, or plays husband and wife games, or repeats the genitals' name. My husband has become so sensitive we have stopped visit them.*"

2.2. Preventing children from watching illicit TV channels
In Iran, in addition to domestic TV channels, a large number of satellite channels are available to some families, which are directed from outside the country, and most of which do not fit the religious, political, and cultural context of the society. Data analysis showed that the families have completely different opinions and behaviors about watching illicit TV channels which directed from outside the country. Some parents believed that we should create a

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completely open environment for the child from childhood, so that he can see everything, and thus, everything is normalized for them. A participant said: "*Even if we don't have satellites, they will go to others' houses, and watch foreign channels, or their friends and others talk about those channels. So, in my opinion, it's better that we ourselves sit beside them, and watch.*"

But most parents said that they worried about the adverse effects of illicit channels on their children, especially some channels which display programs with sexual subjects. This concern had caused some of them to protect their children by preventing the family's access to these channels from the beginning. Also some others, after seeing the consequences of watching these channels in children, attempted to disconnect them entirely, or filter some inappropriate channels. A mother of a 6-year-old son said in this regard: "*We had a satellite until two years ago, but we disconnected it because of my son. He had reached an age where I see he is being hurt. I couldn't bear to have my child grow with their culture. Now, I installed an allowable digital receiver. My son is going to live in this society; he must grow with the culture of this society.*"

Also, a small number of parents were confused and didn't know how to protect their children, while taking advantages of foreign channels. The father of a 6-year-old girl said: *I don't know whether we should let our children watch such things and we explain for them, or we should restrict them completely. I fear that if I bring up my child not to know well enough about sexual matters, some day some people in society, who have satellites, will cause harm to my child.*"

2.3. Hiding emotional-marital relationships in the presence of the child
The data analysis showed that with a child being born. Most of parents were seeking to limit their emotional-marital behavior in the presence of the child, and define boundaries for these relationships. Almost all parents exercised caution not to perform marital relations in the presence of the child and even not in the place where the child had slept. Many of them do not even do simple behaviors, such as sitting next to each other, in the presence of children. The mother of a girl said: "*Children notice many things in their parents' relations, but I don't know what they understand. For instance, if I sit beside her father and hold her father's hand, does she realize that because we're wife and husband, we do this, or does she think because I'm her father's friend, I hold his hand? I don't know what impact it will have on her.*"

Some parents believe that children should see the parents' emotional behaviors in the home environment, to understand intimacy and learn about peace of mind, so if they see such behaviors outside the home environment, they will not be surprised. The mother of a boy and a girl said: "*I think, sometimes children should see their parents kissing each other, to learn about affection. Of course, these behaviors should be done gently and according to the norms in front of children.*"

3. The third main category: Trying to educate the child
Descriptive analysis of the participants was indicative of the parents' efforts towards the appropriate sex education of children, which consisted of three subcategories; preparing the child for stages of growth, response to child's sexual curiosities, and teaching child how to protect sexual health and privacy.

1.3. Preparing the child for stages of growth
The majority of parents referred to physical developmental changes in children, and their willingness to recognize their body and its difference from that of the opposite sex, and by educating them, they tried to prepare them to pass this period. Of course, in many cases, parents gave incomplete and sometimes wrong answers, which indicated that the parents were not ready to deal with developmental changes in children. A mother explained about the differences between boys and girls to her 5-year-old son: "*When my son asked about his genitals, I answered that the urine is stored here to exit later. Then he said: Then, why don't you have one? I said: The ladies have one, but it's in their bellies. He said: Why the men and the ladies are different? I said: God has created them like this.*"

Most parents said, around the age of four, their children were very curious to know about their genital tract and its difference from that of the opposite sex, and the parent were looking for a solution to solve this problem, and sometimes, they got help from other parents. In a completely normal condition, the mother of a 4.5-year-old girl tried to explain her daughter's curiosity about the difference between boys and girls. She said: "*When my sister wanted to change her son's diaper, my daughter was watching, and I didn't stop her. She said in surprise: Why is my*

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cousin like this? I said: Boys are like this, and girls are like you. She didn't ask a question anymore and didn't pry either."

Also some parents used teaching devices to facilitate teaching children about body organs. A mother said: "*There's a series of cards like a puzzle, which has all male and female's organs. Of course, the genital organ is covered up, and explained in a separate sheet. With these cards, I explained all organs to my son, without any sensitivity.*"

Some participants noted that teaching should begin from the first years of life, and they also expected kindergarten teachers to have sufficient skills in this regard. A mother said: "*I say, sexual training should begin from the early years of birth, for example, from kindergarten. A kindergarten teacher should be able to teach small but informative points with regard to sexual training, to kindergarten children.*"

The majority of participants stated that they do not have the skill and ability needed to educate children, and do not know what to teach at each age, and what rules they should comply with. They were looking for practical methods which can be implemented in the cultural and religious context prevailing in the society. A father said: "*They should provide a definition for sex education and tell us how to teach. We don't know how to teach. Everyone does whatever comes to their mind. They should come and extract the methods which work in our society, and teach them to people. I think, it's necessary to offer some instruction from the ages of kindergarten. Children should receive right and timely information, and know well enough lest they experience a crisis in the age of puberty all of a sudden.*"

3.2. Response to child's sexual curiosities
The parents said that during the process of growth, their children asked them many questions in relation to sexuality and reproduction. To answer their children's questions, parents adopted different strategies according to their information and ability. In some cases, they gave wrong or incomplete answers to the child, evaded the reply or gave an answer based on the child's information and age. The father of a 6-year-old boy said: "*In my opinion, the best time for education is when the child asks a question. When my son asked about the differences between boys and girls, I explained to him very vaguely; only to the extent that he could understand and needed.*"

Also, some of the parents returned the questions to children themselves, and used their answers to answer them. A mother said: "*At the age of five, my son asked me what the difference between men and women is. I said to him: You tell me boy! You become a man, and say what men do, and I become a woman and you tell me what to do. And he concentrated on the duties of men and women. I'm happy he doesn't know anything about marital relations.*"

Also, some parents tried to make the genital organ seem disgusting and dirty to children, in order to prevent them from paying attention to this area. A mother was explaining thus: "*My son asks: Ma, why don't women have a penis? Why do men have one? What it can be used for? I really sometimes don't know what to answer. Then I said: It's to empty the urine, and if you touch it, not only it is dirty, but it's also a sin.*"

One of the problems many parents had, was doubt and lack of knowledge to answer the children's continuous questions about marital relations, how a fetus forms in the womb, and birth. The mother of an 8-year-old girl said: "*My daughter asked where babies come from. I said from mothers' belly. I didn't really know what to say. I said: God puts babies in our belly. She said: Then, I want God to put a baby in my belly too. I said: No! You're small now, you have to become older.*" Another mother said: "*My son had been asking me persistently for a long time: How did I get out of your belly? I had to lie, and said: You came out through my belly button.*" The mother of a 12-year-old boy said: "*My son asked: What is a cesarean section? I said: There's a lock on the abdomen, the doctors open it, and the baby comes out of it.*"

Some parents feared to answer some of their children's questions, and said that if someday their children ask about marital relations, they won't be able to answer. A father said: "*I'm worried lest my child accidentally see a scene of marital relations, and then he wants to ask me about it. I don't know what to answer.*"
To some parents, the most important sexual curiosity of children is to try to recognize their genital organs through touching it or looking at it, as well as trying to understand the opposite sex. And they stated that, by feigning negligence and ignoring some of these behaviors, while helping children acquire some information, they avoid causing sensitivity in them. The mother of a 4-year-old boy said: "*At the age of 3 to 5, children may touch their*

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genital tract, or look at it. We shouldn't show sensitivity to their behaviors, we shouldn't rebuke them, we must even behave in a way as if we haven't noticed, and we must distract their attention."

3.3. Teaching child how to protect sexual health and privacy
The results showed that most parents were aware of the need to educate children about the privacy of genital areas and how to protect themselves, and tried to teach their children in different ways. Some parents taught the privacy of genital organs to their children. A participant said: "*I taught my children when they were little, that this area is very private and nobody should see it. Of course, I myself tried not to change the children's diapers in front of others, and tried to keep their privacy.*"

Also, some mothers taught their children to tell them all daily issues and events that happen, so that they can control the process of the formation of sex education in their children and can also protect them. The mother of a boy and a girl said: "*I've brought up my children in a way that they're not afraid to tell me anything. Actually, they know that I won't blame them, if they tell me anything ... They tell me the most private things about sexual issues and relations between boys and girls. Therefore I can give them necessary information just in time.*"

Also, most parents did not agree that to what age, a parent of the opposite sex is allowed to bathe the child. One of the mother said in this regard: "*I know it's better that the same-sex parent bathe the baby. But I don't know to what age, a parent of the opposite sex can bathe boys and girls.*" Some also doubted whether bathing the child by someone other than their parents, is allowed or not. The mother of a 4-year-old boy said: "*My child sometimes showers with his grandfather. I don't know whether it's wrong or right.*"

Some other parents were familiar with the instances of child abuse, and tried to teach their children how to protect themselves. The mother of an 8-year-old girl said: "*I taught my child not to approach strangers, and not to answer them, if they asked something. I even said: If you don't like the way men look at you or behave, come and tell us soon.*"

In environments such as kindergartens where the child is out of their direct access, some parents use other methods to protect the child's privacy. For instance, from the beginning of the child's entry into kindergarten, they talked to the kindergarten manager, and determined some rules, most important of which, was doing the tasks related to the toilet and washing the child by a trusted person. The mother of a 3-year-old girl said: "*I enjoined the kindergarten manager to consider that only a specific and trusted person must take my child to the toilet, and I emphasized that that person must be familiar with the issues of sexual training of children.*"

<center>**DISCUSSION**</center>

This study, for the first time, has dealt with exploring Iranian parents' experiences about sexual training of children. The categories extracted, represent diverse strategies that parents use correctly or incorrectly during the period of bringing up their children and selection of these methods is influenced by various factors, especially by the socio-cultural environment. Investigating the findings showed that parents used strategies such as: control and punishment of the child, restricting the child, and trying to educate the child.

In this study, control and punishment of children was one of the parents' strategies, which were done in the form of monitoring their games and punishing them. Many parents believed that although many of the child's behaviors with regard to sexual matters are due to their curiosity and as an attempt to understand these issues, but they need to be controlled in order not to lead to unusual and damaging behaviors. Controlling the child in the home environment was easy and feasible, but there was a concern that, with the child's entry into an environment outside the home, such as kindergarten and school, or playing with their peers on the street, they may lose their control on them. When facing situations meant sexually inappropriate behavior to them, some parents used frightening and threatening language, and sometimes physical punishment.

The child's restriction and prevention were among the parents' most common strategies in sexual training. By restricting girls from playing and socializing with boys, preventing children from watching illicit TV channels, and hiding their emotional-marital relationships in the presence of children, they tried to achieve appropriate sexual training of their children. It seems that employing this strategy was due to the weakness of parents' necessary knowledge and skills for sexual training. Parents' inability to distinguish between normal behaviors related to

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growth and abnormal behaviors confused them for using limitation strategies or giving freedom to children. Most of the parents stated that, during their childhood, they didn't grow up with correct sexual training. And in fact they have not learned anything that they can transfer to their children, and this has also been confirmed in other studies (20). Studies suggest that children need attention and sex education, and adults have not been educated in this field to be able to respond appropriately to the child's behaviors, but they are eager to get more information (17).

This restriction is more severe for girls. Therefore, one of the parents' concerns was to determine a limit for their daughters' communication with boys. In many cases, to protect their daughters, parents attempted to reduce their communication with relatives who had sons. The results also showed that despite obvious socio-cultural changes in recent years (15), parents are still very sensitive to maintaining values and true upbringing of children, and this sensitivity, and the subsequent control and restriction are more severe for their daughters. In some studies, it is believed that girls are more sexually vulnerable than boys, one of whose reasons is the lower age of puberty in girls than in boys (2).

Although most of the parents were worried about the adverse impact of some illicit TV channels on the process of sexual training of their children, but they failed to come to a clear decision with regard to how to manage and deal with that. And due to their religious and familial beliefs and convictions, they adopted different strategies. Also, the results of other studies show that the context and circumstances of using the media may affect premature sexual behaviors. Special parental restrictions on the media, results in further protection against premature sexual relations, compared with other restrictions, or when parents are watching simultaneously (21).

Another important issue from the parents' point of view in this study, was hiding their emotional-marital relationships in the presence of children. The results showed that parents were confused about the child's understanding of emotional-marital relations, and the allowable limit for their emotional-behavioral manifestations and their positive and negative effects on the child. But, in these cases, most of them behave according to their religious and cultural values, and after the birth of the child, they impose some restrictions in this regard.

The parents' other basic strategy in sexual training, was trying to educate children. Although by teaching children about the genital tract at different developmental ages, paying attention to sexual health protection of children, and answering their sexual questions, they tried to sexually educate their children, but they acknowledged that they do not have sufficient knowledge and skills to provide this teaching. Also the studies show that the family, as the first instructor of children's sex education, participates in their socialization and sexual literacy (22).

One of the parents' problems in children's education was facing children's sexual questions, and how to answer them. During the process of growth and development, children ask different questions of their parents about sexual issues, to satisfy their curiosity, and the parents are often unable to provide a correct and age-appropriate answer. Most of these questions are about the differences between the two sexes, understanding themselves, how people make children, and about childbirth. Studies have emphasized that parents should provide their children with necessary information in proportion to their age growth, to the extent that their children need, realistically, without secrecy, by taking into account the sociocultural feature prevailing in the society, and as individually and indirectly as possible (3). In a study in Iran, one of the concerns in this regard, has been considered to be the social concern about the negative effects of sex education (13). And in another study, the most important communicative barriers in the sexual training of children, was said to be the need to protect children from unawareness during childhood, appropriate timing, age appropriateness of teaching, parents' inconvenience in teaching, and fear of criticism and judgement (7). The issue that to what extent parents feel informed and comfortable in teaching their children about sexual matters, and their use of effective parenting strategies are significantly associated with the parents' self-confidence (4). Also, according to the results of this study, teaching children how to protect their sexual health and privacy in daily routine care, such as: clothing, taking a bath, and going to the toilet, was among the issues of concern to parents, in which they acted differently too.

CONCLUSION

Parents adopted multiple strategies for the sexual training of children, most of which had controlling, punitive, and restrictive aspects, and some of which could have led to subsequent losses. The results showed that the parents had tried to understand their children's educational needs at different developmental ages, and emphasized the importance of protecting their sexual health and privacy, but they acknowledged that they have not received any

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education in this regard, and do not have sufficient skills to deal with these issues. Due to their lack of access to integrated educational sources proportional to the values and culture of the society, they had experienced frequent worry and confusion when dealing with issues of sexual training of children. Hence it seems necessary to provide valid educational resources proportionate to the cultural and religious teachings, create opportunities to educate parents, and respond to their problems.

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