Effectiveness of Abstinence-Only and Comprehensive Sexual Education in Reducing Teenage Pregnancy in the U.S.

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Introduction
Considering the United States remains the most developed country in the world, the incidence of teenage pregnancy continues to prevail as a significant health concern. Although formal sexuality education has been incorporated into the United States school system, the method in which these programs are being presented continues to be a topic of debate. Sexual education based on the promotion of abstinence-only curriculum has left our adolescent population with incomplete information.

Abstinence-only sex education and comprehensive sex education are the two predominant methods of delivering sexual health education to US teens. However, it is not known which of these methods are associated with reduced teenage pregnancy. Using the PICO (Problem, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) framework, we examined which of the above delivery methods of sex health education are associated with reduced teenage pregnancy. The comprehensive sex education method was found most effective in reducing teenage pregnancies. Such teaching method was found to provide more complete and accurate information to teenagers on sexual health. (Fig 1)

Methods
A search of the literature using the CINAHL, MEDLINE and PUBMED databases was conducted. Specific keywords such as “teenage pregnancy”, “adolescent pregnancy”, “teenage girls”, “abstinence education”, “abstinence counseling”, “sexual education”, “comprehensive sex education”, “sexual health”, “birth control”, “U.S. schools”, and “school role” were used in the search of the literature.

Studies that were conducted among US teenagers between ages 13 and 19, and were published between the years 2004 and 2014 were included in the review. The initial search yielded 252 research articles. Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded.

Results
Although the issues related to methods of teaching and presenting sexual health education continue to exist in the United States, the majority of data collected supports the idea of teaching sexual health through comprehensive education programs designed to provide complete and accurate information to adolescents. The comprehensive sex education method was found most effective in reducing teenage pregnancies. Such teaching method was found to provide more complete and accurate information to teenagers on sexual health. (Fig 1)

Conclusions
Teenage pregnancy can carry severe consequences for adolescents. The comprehensive sexual education method was found most effective in reducing teenage pregnancies in the US when compared to abstinence-only sex education method.

While promoting abstinence to teenagers is important, it is evident that comprehensive sex education programs which include abstinence, forms of contraception and STI education within the curriculum allow for a more appropriate learning experience. Comprehensive sex education programs provide complete information and have the potential to significantly impact the adolescent population by reducing teen pregnancy rates.

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