

The History of Sex Education in the United States

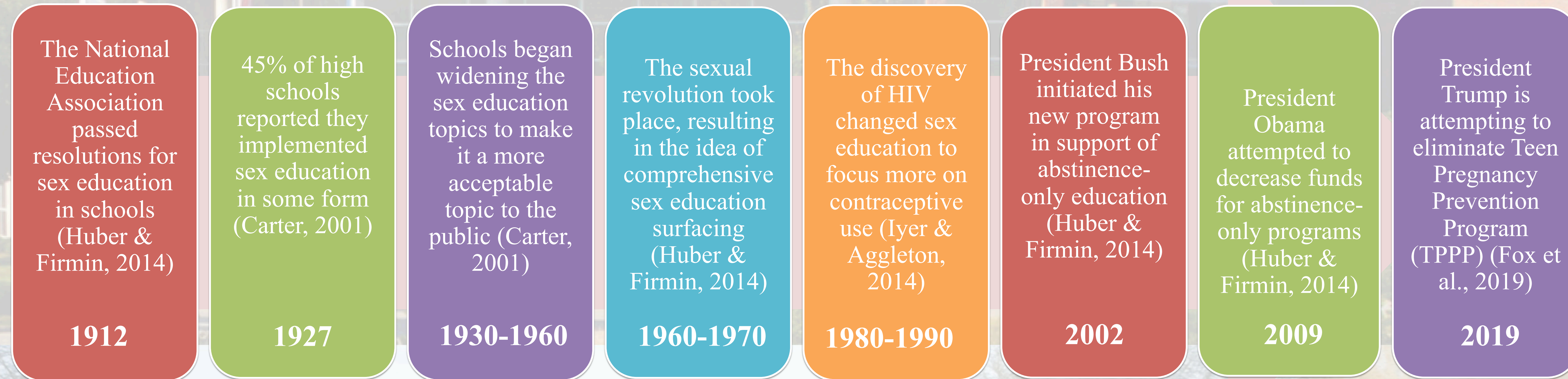
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Overview

- Sex education has served as an integral factor in the development from childhood to adulthood for centuries, however, only within the past one hundred years has this subject been discussed in schools (Carter, 2001).
- Abstinence-only programs are still awarded approximately \$85 million a year from the U.S congress (Hall et al., 2016).
- There were overall reductions in formal sex education in schools from 2006-2013. Additionally, there was an increase of abstinence-only information and a decrease in birth control information (Hall et al., 2016).
- Despite evidence against the effectiveness of abstinence-only programs, public and political support has been maintained for both types of sex education (Eisenberg, Bernat, Bearinger, & Resnick, 2008).
- The following review will cover the timeline of sex education in the United States, trends in information content, and future areas psychology can impact healthy sexual development in America's youth.

Figure 1: A Timeline of Comprehensive Sex Education in the United States



The Debate Between Abstinence vs. Comprehensive



What is Abstinence-Only Sex Education?

- Education that primarily emphasizes sexual relations belong in marriage, and that abstinence is the only successful practice in avoiding all sexual consequences (Kantor et al., 2008).

What is Comprehensive Sex Education?

- Education that often includes information about birth control, Sexually Transmitted Illnesses (STIs), masturbation, puberty, healthy relationships, and abstinence (Huber & Firmin, 2014).



Current State of Federal Sex Education Funding

- President Trump's 2018 proposed budget included \$277 million in new funding for abstinence-only education, and he planned to cut \$200 million to evidence-based adolescent pregnancy-prevention programs (Fox, Himmelstein, Khalid, & Howell, 2019).
- In 2018, the federal government allocated over \$100 million for abstinence-only programs. Reports show that as long as these programs comply with the federal eight-point statutory definition of abstinence education, the funding continues to extend through the years (SIECUS, 2018).
- In 2019, federal funding for certain comprehensive programs were not included in the annual report. Despite several attempts to receive this information, the recipients of \$75 million remains completely unknown (Eisenstein, 2019).
- Title V is currently awarding \$75 million annually alone to one abstinence-only program renamed "Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SIECUS, 2018).

Sex Education Today and Why it Matters

- Even with research finding ineffectiveness of abstinence-only sex education, this program continues to be commonly taught around the United States (Hall et al., 2016).
- The quality of sex education significantly impacts clinical work with clients when handling issues with relationships, sexual dysfunctions, and overall sexual health.
- Understanding the changes of sex education, in addition to how societal norms and expectations have impacted the content, is crucial for psychologists to better comprehend the knowledge, expectations, and beliefs of our clients.
- Knowing a client's sex education knowledge directly affects treatment. For example, if a client only received abstinence-only sex education, the clinician may need to target emotions dealing with sexual activity.



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