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Children's Questions and Answers of Parents: Sexual Education Dilemma

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to determine questions of 36 to 72-month-old children have about sexuality and to examine the answers given by parents. In the first stage of the study, 84 parents were contacted in order to determine children's most frequently asked questions on sexual development. In the second stage, top two questions from this list were selected and directed to 80 parents, all of whom were sampled from a separate pool. As a result of this study, it was discovered that children mostly question the physical features of girls and boys, and the pregnancy period. When parents' responses were examined, it was determined that a small portion of the responses were based on scientific grounds and that parents often provided answers based on avoidance-based and religious beliefs. Also, parents' gender, age, number of children, gender of their children, learning status and income do not make any difference.

Keywords: preschool period; sexual development; sexual education; parent; child

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Introduction

From the moment they are born, babies begin to understand and explore their environment. The foremost factor that triggers this process is their curiosity about the world they were born in. During the course of this recognition and exploration period, a baby makes observations, touches things and tries to understand what she/he encounters. By this means, baby tries to familiarize and harmonize herself/himself with both herself/himself and the external world. Following her/his observations and experiences, a baby will be aware that there are two gender types, that people of each gender type resemble one another, and that she/he belongs to either of them at the age of 2 or 3. When a three-year-old child is asked the question 'Are you a girl or a boy?', he or she generally labels his/her gender accurately. After labeling his/her gender and identifying himself/herself correctly, the child continues to observe those who resemble him/her and others who don't and starts to question and express physical differences between them. In his study carried out to determine the sexual information level of 147 children between the ages of 2 and 6, Volbert (2000) stated that children from all ages have knowledge about their gender identity, gender differences and parts of sexual organs. This fact can be interpreted as an inseparable part of growth and development.

The purpose of sexual education, which includes emotional, social and physical aspects of growth, interpersonal relations, sexuality and sexual health, is to inform children and young individuals on various notions, skills and values and to ensure them happy, secure and satisfying relationships (European Parliament, 2013; cited from Kadıoğlu Polat and Üstün Budak, 2015). Sexual education of a child begins with his/her birth. Particularly at about the age of 2,5-3, a child encounters people from the same-sex and opposite sex in numerous stages such as the development of expressive language, process of socializing and becoming independent, and the beginning of nursery education, and this generates a lot of questions. Frankham (2006) and Volbert (2000) have also claimed that children most frequently ask questions about pregnancy, birth and the differences between genital organs. All these questions come from the child's curiosity and desire to know. As the first teachers of a child are his/her parents, he/she directs such questions to them. According to Güneş (2013) and Uçar (2015), during this period, the biggest responsibility of the family is to acknowledge the child's sexual development and to be aware of the child's developmental features, instead of waiting for the child to ask these questions first. Therefore, parents should take responsibility for providing information on sexuality, setting an example for the child, as well as requesting the child's school to give sexual education, supporting this education and inspecting it (Çalışandemir, Bencik and Artan, 2008). Frankham (2006) has expressed that parents generally prefer to give an explanation when children ask questions or when someone in the family is pregnant or gives birth. However, not answering a child's questions on time or in an age appropriate way may cause his curiosity to deepen and lead him/her to different and inaccurate sources of information (Türküm, 2013). When children are inhibited in terms of their sexual interest, they come to know various things about the specific aspects of sexuality (Schuhrke, 2000). For this reason, parents have to take the first and most important step. Given on time and in accordance with the child's age, his/her parents' answers will both satisfy the child's curiosity – even if for a short while – and strengthen the relationship between parent and child. Frankham (2006) has also asserted that parents in the US have a hard time providing information on sexuality to their adolescent children.

Within this context, this study's aim is to find out what kind of questions 36 to 72-month-old children ask to their parents and what sort of answers are given by parents. It also aims to determine whether variables such as gender, age, number of children, educational status, gender of children, and level of income affect parental answers.

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Method

Model and Study Group

This is a qualitative research study. Maximum Variation Sampling Method was used for the selection study group. The aim of Maximum Variation Sampling is to discover what kind of similarities and common aspects are available among situations that bear diversity by providing sampling variety (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2004). Two separate sample groups were used in the study. The first stage of study consists of 84 parents. Most of the them are women and university graduates and 46,4% of them have 2 children. When it comes to gender of their children, 36,9% of them have one daughter, 34,5% of them have both daughters or sons. Additionally, it can be concluded that average age of parents is 34,14 and average income is 4.177,38 Turkish Liras.

After the first stage of the study, namely the determination of most frequently asked sexual development questions among children, was completed, the second stage was initiated with the examination of answers provided for the previously specified questions. To analyze parents' answers to these questions, 80 parents who have 36 to 72-month-old children were selected. Only those who did not take part in the first study group were included in the second stage. Demographic information of parents selected for the second stage is as follows:

Similarly to the first stage of the study, nearly all parents who participated in the second stage of the study are women and nearly half of the participants are high-school graduates. When it comes to the number of children they have, it was determined that 53,8% of parents have two children. In terms of the gender of their children, 38,7% of parents have both daughters and sons, 33,8% of them have only one son. Additionally, it is concluded that average age of the parents who participated in the second stage is 34,11 and their average income is 3.869,37 Turkish Liras.

Data Collection Tools

Parents' Demographic Information Form

Six questions were included in this form. Parents' Demographic Information Form includes questions related to parents' gender, age, number of children they have, their children's gender and finally, the school he or she graduated from as well as income status.

Specification Form for Questions About Sexual Development

Main purpose of this form is to determine the questions children most frequently ask to their parents about sexual development. There is only one instruction on the form. 'Write down the questions your children ask you about sexual development.' Parents were asked to follow this instruction and to write down 5 questions most frequently asked by their children about sexuality.

Parents' Answer Form for Questions About Sexual Development

This form includes two questions most frequently asked by the children from the first stage of the study. Taken from 'Specification Form for Questions About Sexual Development', these questions are as follows:

1) (If your child is a girl) why don't I have a weenie? / (If your child is a boy) why don't girls have a weenie? (The wording used for these questions are not 'Why don't I have a vagina? Why don't boys have a vagina? In neither of the questionnaires from the first stage of the study were the questions worded this way. In consideration of research ethics, data obtained from the first study group weren't edited. For this reason, questions were prepared and presented in their original form.)

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2) ‘How did I go in my mother’s belly?’

In Parents’ Answer Form, the questions children asked about sexual development were addressed to parents. In the second stage, parents were queried ‘If your child asked you the following questions, how would you answer?’

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed through Content Analysis Method. During content analysis, the aim was to reach connections and concepts that can help explain the data collected. Data is scrutinized in detail via content analysis; inputs that have resemblance are put together within the frame of certain concepts and themes, then they are interpreted and arranged in a way that readers can understand (Karataş, 2015).

Direct citations are included so as to support the themes discovered in findings of the study. Also, since credentials of the parents participating in the study will be kept confidential, a code system was formed. Considering the order of forms, parents were given codes such as E1, E2, E3, etc.

Reliability

One of the methods used for reliability of qualitative research is the strategy of ‘researcher attitude.’ In this strategy, the researcher must by no means not let his/her personal assumptions, worldview, biases, and academic position interferes with the study. Otherwise, there is the potential of these elements negatively influencing the study. In this study, researcher’s attitude strategy was employed. To determine the questions children most frequently ask about their sexual development, parents were asked; and the most frequent questions were specified. Afterwards, the previously determined questions were directed to a separate study group composed of different parents and their answers were written down. Researchers did not alter any of the questions or answers parents have provided; they conducted the study while preserving the original form of data obtained from study group.

Findings

Findings of the study were accumulated in three topics and each finding was presented in a distinct sub-heading.

Findings concerning questions 36 to72-month-old children most frequently ask about sexual development

84 parents, who were brought together with the purpose of determining questions 36 to72-month-old children most frequently ask about sexual development, were asked to fill out ‘Specification Form for Questions About Sexual Development’ and as a result of analysis of answers provided by these parents, 4 themes have emerged. These themes have the following titles: ‘differences in physical features’, ‘pregnancy period’, ‘gender stereotypes’ and ‘adult relationships’.

The theme of ‘differences in physical features’ includes questions on physiological and anatomical differences due to a child’s biological gender. For instance, these are questions about the absence or presence of a penis or vagina and having big or small breasts. ‘Pregnancy period’ theme involves questions covering stages from the conception to the pregnancy period and birth itself. For instance, they are questions about how the baby got inside his/her mother’s belly and about how he/she would come out. ‘Gender stereotypes’ theme includes questions regarding men and women’s gender roles and identities. For example, questions on color choice, make-up, dress and length of hair

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are categorized under this theme. Finally, the theme of 'adult relationships' consists of questions related to the emotional and sexual experiences of men and women.

As a result of content analysis, findings concerning questions children ask about sexual development are presented on Table 1.

Table 1. Content analysis results of questions 36 to72-month-old children most frequently ask about sexual development

Questions about sexuality	n	%
Differences in Physical Features	137	52,49
Pregnancy Period	79	30,27
Gender Stereotypes	27	10,34
Adult Relationships	18	6,90
Total	261	100

Parents participating in this study stated that they were asked a total of 261 questions about sexual development. Following the content analysis, it was observed that 52,49% of questions were related to differences in physical features; 30,27% of them were about pregnancy period; 10,34% were about social sexuality stereotypes and lastly, 6,90% were related to adult relationships. Raw samples for each theme are presented on Table 2.

Table 2. Raw data samples of children's questions

Differences in Physical Properties	Pregnancy Period
E4. "Why doesn't my sister have a weenie" E5. "Will I grow a weenie like the one my older brother has?" E13. "When will my breasts get bigger?" E19. "Why is the thing what I pee and a boy pees with different?" E21. "Why don't girls do their toilet standing." E31. "Why didn't my dad breastfeed me?" E69. "Why doesn't my sister have a weenie, is she sick?"	E11. "How did my brother/sister go in your belly?" E16. "How do people get pregnant?" E40. "How did I come into the world?" E45. "How does the baby come out of his/her mother's belly?" E66. "I want to have kids. What should I do?" E77. "Do you buy babies from the hospital?" E80. "What do you do to have a brother/sister?"
Gender Stereotypes	**Adult Relationships**
E3. "Why are women's nails long but men's are short? E18. "Will I have a husband too?" E20. "Are boys or girls stronger?" E31. "Why don't men wear pink?" E63. "Bartu has long hair, is he a girl?" E74. "Mom, am I circumcised?"	E12. "Why do boys and girls kiss?" E21. "What does it mean to make love?" E26. "Why do you sleep in the same bed if you are not going to make a brother/sister?" E47. "Can I kiss like on the television?" E61. "When I grow up too, will I sleep with Tuğçe like you do?"

As seen on Table 4, when the questions children ask about physical differences are examined, girls and boys dwelled generally on the absence or presence of their penis. None of 84 parents stated that boys asked the question 'Why don't I have a vagina (even with a different name referring to that anatomical organ)? Accordingly, if it is a girl, the question is 'why don't have a weenie?' and if it is a boy, the question is 'why don't girls have a weenie?' Moreover, it was determined that children directed questions about physical differences between adult men and women and differences between children and adults as well as questions about differences between a boy and a girl.

In regard to the pregnancy period, most questions were about how a baby in conceived. Concerning adult relationships, questions about adult women and men's sexual and emotional relations were asked. Finally, with respect to gender stereotypes, questions about differences in men and women's appearances in terms of gender stereotypes were asked.

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Findings concerning parents' answers for questions 36 to72-month-old children most frequently ask about sexual development

In the first stage of the study, questions children most frequently ask about sexual development were determined and questions with high recurrence frequency in 'Differences in Physical Properties' and 'Pregnancy Period' themes were selected. These questions are

- (If your child is a girl) Why don't I have a weenie? / (If your child is a boy) why don't girls have a weenie?
- How did I get in my mother's belly?

In the second stage of the study, parents' answers for the previously determined questions about sexual development were examined. First of all, content analysis of the following questions was completed: (If your child is a girl) why don't I have a weenie? / (If your child is a boy) why don't girls have a weenie? As a result of the content analysis, 4 themes were specified. These sub-themes were named evasive answers, answers based on religious beliefs, answers with a scientific basis and answers based on social stereotypes.

The theme of evasive answers includes answers that have no religious or scientific base and that do not provide a full explanation. While the theme of answers based on religious beliefs try to satisfy the child's curiosity through religious notions and teachings, the theme of answers based on gender stereotypes includes answers that do not depend on religious or scientific basis but contain unrealistic and extraordinary elements frequently conveyed to children in the society. Finally, the theme of answers with a scientific basis is made up of answers that are appropriate for the child's developmental level and that bear scientific truth.

Results of the content analysis carried out in line with the parents' answers are given on Table 3.

Table 3. Content analysis results for the questions 'why don't I have a weenie?' / 'why don't girls have a weenie?'

Parents answers for questions about sexuality	n	%
Evasive Answers	44	55
Answers Based on Religious Beliefs	21	26,25
Answers with a Scientific Basis	12	15
Answers Based on Gender Stereotypes	3	3,75
Total	80	100

Within the context of the study, it was determined that out of 80 parents, who answered the questions 'Why don't I have a weenie? / Why don't girls have a weenie?', 55% of them gave evasive answers, 26,25% of them offered answers based on religious beliefs, 15% of them gave scientific answers and 3,75% provided answers based on social stereotypes. Raw data samples belonging to four themes are presented on Table 4.

Table 4. Raw data samples of themes that were formed in accordance with parents' answers.

Evasive Answers	**Answers Based on Religious Beliefs**
E5. "Girls and boys have different bodies" E9. "Girls have organs peculiar to them." E10. "It is because men and women are different." E28. "That's the order of the world, honey." E43. "I would give superficial answers saying you are a man like your father/you are a girl like your mother."	E23. "God created men and women, each type of gender has different characteristics, and for this reason girls don't have a weenie. E59. "God creates boys with weenies and girls with choochies, so that they can be different." E65. "God created boys and girls with different organs. For example, your breasts don't grow bigger

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E49. "There is no need for a weenie to be a girl." E51. "My daughter is three and half years old and has got brothers. She asked this question and as I wasn't prepared for this, I couldn't figure out what to say and I ignored it." E62. "Because you are a girl, girls don't have a weenie."	either." E71. "Because God created them as they are." E76. "They are created in this way, what girls have are called private parts."
Answers with a Scientific Basis	**Answers Based on Gender Stereotypes**
E13. "Girls' and boys' organs are different. Girls have a vagina and boys have a penis." E14. "Only boys have a weenie. For example, you, your grandfather and your father have it. Girls have a choochie. For example, your grandmother and I have it. As girls are different from boys, the places we pee with are different,. Girls don't have weenie." E18. "Since there are two types of gender, boys have weenie and girls have vagina."	E55. "Girls don't have a weenie, it is circumcised. So girls don't have one." E66. "Because girls are princesses. We are different from boys. They watch Spider man. And you watch Ayas, Pepe etc. They play with cars and you play with dolls. They can be naughty sometimes but you are very polite. There are some differences between us and this is one of them." E74. "So that girls can be more elegant and they can sit politely"

When Table 4 is examined, it can be seen that parents' evasive answers don't actually give children a full explanation. Alternatively, answers based on religious beliefs give explanations related to the creation and answers based on gender stereotypes separate genders not only in terms of physical properties but also in terms of behavior. It can even be stated when E55, one of the parents, says that girls are circumcised and so they don't have a weenie, he/she considers girls deficient compared to boys and imposes this view on the child. It is thought that this view can make girls feel deficient. By leading him to think that if he is circumcised, he might turn into a girl, it might cause boys to be terrified of circumcision. In general, this view can have a negative effect on both boys and girls.

The second question children most frequently ask is 'How did I get in my mother's belly?' This question was directed to the parents in the study group and their answers were analyzed through content analysis method. The results of content analysis are presented on Table 5.

Table 5. Results of content analysis for answers to 'How did I get in my mother's belly?'

Parents' answers for Children's questions about sexuality	**n**	**%**
Evasive Answers	48	60
Answers Based on Religious Beliefs	24	30
Answers with a Scientific Basis	7	8,75
Answers Based on Gender Stereotypes	1	1,25
Total	80	100

Regarding the question 'How did I get in my mother's belly?', it was concluded that, out of 80 parents, 60% of them gave evasive answers, 30% of them gave answers based on religious beliefs, 8,75% of them gave answers with a scientific basis and 1,25% gave answers based on social stereotypes. Raw data samples of each theme are presented on Table 6.

Table 6. Raw data samples of the themes were formed in accordance with parents' answers.

Evasive Answers	**Answers Based on Religious Beliefs**
E47. "We wished for you and here you are." E55. "I will explain how you entered in your mother's belly later." E60. "They gave an injection in the hospital and you were born, then we took you" E62. "I slept with your father and there you were when we woke up." E65. "Your mom and dad loved each other very much. They were lovers. Lovers kiss each other and have some special times that you can't understand now and	E3. "When people love each other, God gives them a child." E4. "God put you in my belly." E16. "Your dad and I wished for you and prayed God so that he would give us you. Then He gave you" E25. "God gives. I asked from Him and He put a baby in my belly. He will be a doctor when he grows up." E34. "I am telling him/her that he/she is a gift from God." E56. "God wished for it and so you were born."

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they have babies." E67. "When moms and dads love each other a lot, they have a little gift. Then you show up in my belly."	E58. "We prayed and waited, and then you were born."
Answers with a Scientific Basis	**Answers Based on Social Stereotypes**
E7. "Each mother has an egg in her belly and each father has sperm. Dads give sperms to moms and moms unite sperms with their eggs in their belly and baby starts to grow there, when it is time, they get out of there. That's how you were born." E14. "There is this thing called sperm in your dad's body. This sperm goes inside your mom, When it is united with the egg inside your mom, they go in the egg and start to grow together and the eggs turn into babies." E51. "Sperms needed for you to get born begin a journey towards your mother's ovary. At the end of the journey, you were born"	E24. "We saw you on the clouds and loved you a lot. We said may these babies belong to us and you came to us. You went inside my belly and you got bigger and bigger. When you couldn't fit into my belly, you went out and came to us"

When Table 6 is examined, it can be discerned from the evasive answers that parents mostly attribute the pregnancy process to something beyond themselves. For instance, these include wishing for a baby and taking one from the hospital. In the answers based on religious beliefs, it was observed that they again attribute the pregnancy to a being beyond themselves, i.e. God, and they explain it through religious beliefs. On the other hand, only one parent gave an answer based on social stereotypes. Said parent explained the pregnancy by adjusting the old-fashioned notion that claims 'Storks have brought you' into to something else beyond himself (clouds). It can be deduced that common aspect of all the answers except for the ones with a scientific basis is that a mother and father's role in the pregnancy is completely ignored. This attitude may be related to parents' preference to keep their roles in the pregnancy in the background so as to prevent the child from asking the same question again. On the other hand, while some parents have chosen to give their answers in accordance with their religious beliefs, others may have felt themselves insufficient to provide a scientific answer appropriate for their children's age.

Findings concerning the comparison of answers in terms of parents' gender, age, number of their children, their children's gender, educational background and income level

Depending on parents' gender, age, number of their children, their children's gender, educational background and income level, parents' answers were compared for the following questions: 'Why don't I have a weenie? / Why don't girls have a weenie?' The result of comparison is presented on Table 7.

Table 7. Depending on the parents' gender, age, number of their children, their children's gender, educational background and income level, comparison of parents' answers to the questions 'Why don't I have a weenie? / Why don't girls have a weenie?

		Religious		**Evasive**		**Scientific**		**Social**		**Total**	
		n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Gender	Female	19	25	42	55,3	12	15,8	3	3,9	76	100
	Male	2	50	2	50	-	-	-	-	4	100
Age	20-25 years old	3	60	2	40	-	-	-	-	5	100
	26-30 years old	6	40	6	40	1	6,7	2	13,3	15	100
	31-35 years old	4	16	16	64	4	16	1	4	25	100
	35-40 years old	5	19,2	15	57,7	6	23,1	-	-	25	100
	41 years old and older	3	33,3	5	55,6	1	11,1	-	-	9	100
Number of Children	Only child	6	21,4	16	57,1	5	17,9	1	3,6	28	100
	Two children	11	25,5	24	55,8	6	14	2	4,7	43	100
	Three or more children	4	44,4	4	44,4	1	11,2	-	-	9	100
Children'	Girl	5	22,8	12	54,5	3	13,6	2	9,1	22	100

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s Gender	Boy	8	29,7	13	48,1	5	18,5	1	3,7	27	100
	Both boy and girl	8	25,8	19	61,3	4	12,9	-	-	31	100
Educational background	Primary School	3	33,3	6	66,7	-	-	-	-	9	100
	Secondary School	-	-	3	100	-	-	-	-	3	100
	High School	8	36,4	10	45,5	4	18,1	-	-	22	100
	Associate Degree	-	-	5	83,3	-	-	1	16,7	6	100
	Graduate	9	24,3	18	48,7	8	21,6	2	5,4	37	100
	Postgraduate	1	33,3	2	66,7	-	-	-	-	3	100
Income level	At Hunger Threshold	0	0	3	100	0	0	0	0	3	100
	At Poverty Threshold	13	27,7	26	55,3	5	10,6	3	6,4	47	100
	Middle and Upper Class	8	26,7	15	50	7	23,3	0	0	30	100

When Table 7 is examined, it can be seen that, depending on the gender variable, parents who participated in this study mostly gave evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs. Another important finding is that all of the 12 participants who gave answers based on science were women. When parents' answers are compared on the basis of age variable, it can be observed that while more than half of the parents between the ages of 20 and 25 gave answers based on religious beliefs, parents in other age groups generally offered evasive answers. In terms of the number of children parents have, it was determined that parents with one and two children generally gave evasive answers while parents with three or more children gave both evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs. Moreover, it can be concluded that parents' educational background and income level as well as the gender of their children doesn't affect the answers parents offered for children's questions about sexual development and that parents mostly preferred to give evasive answers.

In conclusion, it is determined that regardless of parents' gender, age, educational background, income level and the number and gender of their children, to a large extent, parents offered evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs to children's 'Why don't I have a weenie? / Why don't girls have a weenie?' questions.

One of the questions children most frequently ask about sexual development is 'How did I get in my mother's belly?' Depending on the parents' gender, age, educational background, income level and the number and gender of their children, parents' answers for this question were compared. Results of comparisons are presented on Table 8.

Table 8. Depending on parents' gender, age, educational background, income level and the number and gender of their children, comparison of the parents' answers to 'How did I get in my mother's belly?'

		Religious		**Evasive**		**Scientific**		**Social**		**Total**	
		n	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**	**n**	**%**
Gender	Female	23	30,3	46	60,5	6	7,9	1	1,3	76	100
	Male	1	25	2	50	1	25	-	-	4	100
Age	20-25 years old	2	40	3	60	-	-	-	-	5	100
	26-30 years old	6	40	8	53,3	1	6,7	-	-	15	100
	31-35 years old	9	36	13	52	3	12	-	-	25	100
	35-40 years old	7	26,9	16	61,6	2	7,7	1	3,8	26	100
	41 years old and older	-	-	8	88,9	1	11,1	-	-	9	100
Number of Children	Only child	6	21,4	17	60,7	5	17,9	-	-	28	100
	Two children	14	32,6	27	62,8	1	2,3	1	2,3	43	100
	Three or more children	4	44,4	4	44,4	1	11,2	-	-	9	100
Gender of Children	Girl	6	27,3	13	59,1	3	13,6	-	-	22	100
	Boy	8	29,6	17	63	2	7,4	-	-	27	100
	Both boy and girl	10	32,3	18	58,1	2	6,5	1	3,1	31	100
Educational	Primary School	4	44,4	4	44,4	1	11,2	-	-	9	100
	Secondary School	1	33,3	2	66,7	-	-	-	-	3	100
	High School	7	31,8	15	68,2	-	-	-	-	22	100

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Background	Associate Degree	4	66,7	2	33,3	-	-	-	-	6	100
	Graduate	8	21,6	22	59,5	6	16,2	1	2,7	37	100
	Postgraduate	-	-	3	100	-	-	-	-	3	100
Income Level	At Hunger Threshold	1	33,3	1	33,3	1	33,3	-	-	3	100
	At Poverty Threshold	17	36,2	28	58,6	2	4,2	-	-	47	100
	Middle and Upper Class	6	20	19	63,3	4	13,3	1	3,4	30	100

When Table 8 is examined, it can be seen that parents who participated in this study mostly gave evasive answers depending on parents' gender, age and the gender of their children. When answers of parents with an associate degree are examined, it can be determined that they generally offer answers based on religious beliefs. It was also discovered that among the answers provided by primary school graduate parents at hunger threshold with three or more children, the percentage of answers based on religious beliefs and evasive answers are equal and that those two constitute the highest proportion.

In conclusion, it was discovered that, regardless of parents' gender, age, educational background, income level and the number and gender of their children, to a large extent, parents gave evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs to the children's question 'How did I get in my mother's belly?'

Discussions and Conclusions

When findings obtained from this study were examined, it was observed that questions children most frequent ask about sexual development are ones related to differences in physical features and ones concerning pregnancy. Tuzcuoğlu and Tuzcuoğlu (1996) have also discovered in their studies that children mostly ask their parents questions about pregnancy and physical differences between a boy and a girl. Moreover, Frankham (2006) and Volbert (2000) have stated that children most frequently ask questions regarding the pregnancy period, birth and differences in genital organs.

In terms of differences in physical features, it was concluded that girls mostly ask the question 'Why don't I have a weenie?' and boys ask the question 'Why don't girls have a weenie?' It is remarkable that children focus on presence or absence of a penis when it comes to the differences of boys' and girls' genitalia. The fact that children don't ask the question 'Why don't I have a vagina?' or 'Why don't boys have a vagina?' and the fact that they express their curiosity through questions on boys' genitalia can be explained through gender concept. Socially, boys' genital organs are discussed more comfortably than girls'. In fact, at times it is considered normal to have boys' genital organs on display.

This phenomenon can be related to the society's attribution of a higher value for men and thus for their genitalia. Additionally, it should be noted that the only parent in this study used the term 'penis' for boys' genitalia. Actually, it is crucial that children are taught scientific names of their genital organs. Martin et al (2011) discovered in their study that mothers with a daughter or a son avoided teaching the anatomical names of genital organs to their children. Instead, they preferred to use euphemisms. Also in Larsson and Svedin's study (2002), carried out with teachers and parents about sexual attitudes of 3 to 6-year-old children, it was concluded that adults, who participated in the study group, avoided naming children's genitalia, especially refraining from uttering girl's genital organ while talking about sexual attitudes with children. Kenny and Wurtule (2008) discovered that although the majority of children knew the names of bodily organs, only a limited number of children knew the correct terminology for their sexual organs. On the other hand, in a study carried out by El-Shaıeb and Wurtule, it was discovered that parents avoided discussing differences of boys' and girls' genitalia with their sons and daughters. As these works suggest, literature supporting the findings obtained through this study already exists.

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Upon examining parents' answers to children's questions, it was discerned that the majority of parents offered evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs to questions 'Why don't I have a weenie? or 'Why don't girls have a weenie?' and 'How did I get in my mother's belly?' Parents' ignorance of sexual education can also be considered a reason for their evasive answers. Ceylan and Çetin (2015) and Eliküçük and Sönmez (2011) state that parents see themselves insufficient to talk about sexuality with their children. In a study carried out by Konur (2006), parents, who had children between the ages of 4 to 6, expressed that they disapproved of family members providing sexual education to children because they were afraid of misleading them, they didn't know what kind of an approach they should take or they thought that sexual education was not necessary. Göçgeldi et al (2007), Eroğlu and Gölbaşı (2004), Tuğrul and Artan (2001), Tuzcuoğlu and Tuzcuoğlu (1996) concluded in their studies that, while answering their children's questions on sexuality, a considerable number of the parents felt themselves insufficient in terms of knowledge and didn't know what kind of an attitude they should adopt. Similarly, Croft and Asmussen (1992) have also noted that the fact that parents don't know what kind of information their children need any given age may cause them to avoid giving their children sexual education altogether. It should be remarked that the notion that parents feel inadequate to talk to their children about sexuality and to give them sexual education hasn't changed much in the last ten years.

The fact that parents don't believe in the necessity of sexual education or the fact that they didn't receive such an education from their own parents could play a significant role in most parents' offering evasive answers when it comes to their children's questions on sexuality. In a study by Orak and Bektaş (2010), it was observed that mothers, who were taught by their own mothers on sexuality either by asking or spontaneously and who found this information 'partly useful' or 'very useful', constitute a higher percentage when it comes to offering their own daughters sexual education. Similarly, Ceylan and Çetin (2015) discovered in their studies that a majority of parents didn't receive any sexual education. Therefore, parents who participated in this study group may have not received any sexual education either. In their own study, Geasler, Dannison and Edlund (1995) have asserted that although most parents want to do a better job, when it comes to sexual education they tend to play the same role as their own parents. In terms of the reasons that push parents to act like their own parents, factors such as shame and ignorance come into play.

Another factor that may cause parents to give evasive answers to children's questions can be the feeling of shame they feel when faced with these questions. Ceylan and Çetin (2015) determined in their study that parents feel inadequate and nervous about sexual education. Similarly, Martin and Torres (2014) observed that while parents were talking about the pregnancy period with their children, they tried to digress or gloss over the subject and they had problems in controlling their feelings. In Turnbull, Wersch and Schaik's study (2008), parents stated that they felt restless and ashamed when faced with children's questions on sexuality. Allen and Baber (1992) have also claimed that the feeling of shame might hinder both teachers and parents from talking to children about sexuality. Furthermore, Tuğrul and Artan (2001) and Tuzcuoğlu and Tuzcuoğlu (1996) have concluded in their studies that parents felt nervous, worried and embarrassed about their children's questions and that they even pretended not to hear of these questions. On the other hand, in a study carried out by Kurtuncu, Akhan, Tanır and Yıldız (2015), it was discovered that such feelings of embarrassment and hesitation were not only peculiar to parents but also to doctors and nurses, who are expected to guide parents, as well.

The idea that preschool children don't need sexual education or that it is too early to give them information about sexuality may be another reason for evasive answers. Mothers, who participated in the studies of Tuğrul and Artan (2001), have stated that sexual education should begin in high school. Stone, Ingham and Gibbins (2013) discovered in their studies that parents experienced a series of difficulties when answering their children's questions on sexuality. Major difficulties include the wish to protect the innocence of the child, ignorance about the age appropriateness of these explanations and the feeling personal discomfort. It was also detected in Davies and Robinson's studies (2010) that sexual education is avoided by emphasizing the innocence of childhood. Moreover, Klein and Gordon

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(1992) have asserted that another factor that keeps parents from talking about sexuality might result from the assumption that these kinds of subjects would give the children 'ideas.'

Finally, it was discovered that, regardless of the parents' gender, age, educational background, income level and the number and gender of their children, parents offered evasive answers and answers based on religious beliefs to a large extent. This finding corresponds with the studies carried out by Göçgeldi et al (2007) and Yelken (1996). While Göçgeldi et al determined no statistically significant difference in sexual education given to children by both mothers and fathers on the basis of children's gender, parents' educational background, occupation, age and their monthly income, Yelken (1996) claimed that there were differences in mothers and fathers' level of knowledge on sexual education in terms of their educational and occupational status. In a study carried out with 130 children from the ages of 2 to 7, Gordon, Schroeder and Abrams (1990) have attempted to measure the level of children's knowledge on sexuality. It was discovered that regarding parts of the genital organs, pregnancy and prevention of sexual abuse, children from middle and upper socioeconomic classes have more knowledge and parents from lower socioeconomic classes have a more limiting attitude towards sexuality.

Consequently, when it comes to sexual education, although there may be some differences on the basis of parents' ages, educational status and socioeconomic levels, it can be concluded that the answers parents give to their children's questions don't show any significant change. Sexual education is regarded as a taboo in most societies and generally, evasive answers are given to the children's questions. Yet parents shouldn't forget that these questions are a natural part of their development and it is essential to provide children with age-appropriate answers of a scientific basis.

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