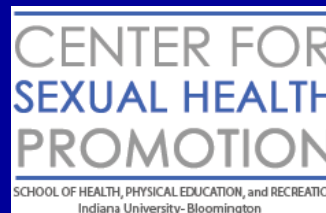


# Regional Differences in Sexuality Education in Florida: Implications for Programs and Policy

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# Study Team

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# Sexual Health in Florida

- School-based sexuality education remains a major issue concerning youth across the U.S.
- Levels of sexually transmitted infections (STI) and unintended pregnancies continue to rise in the adolescent population (Santelli *et al.* 2006a)
- Particularly true in the state of Florida:
  - A recent three-year evaluation revealed approximately 13,400 new cases of chlamydia and 3,400 new cases of gonorrhea were reported among females 15-19 years of age (Florida Department of Health 2007)
  - Florida also currently ranks sixth in the nation in terms of adolescent pregnancies, with over 480,000 births to adolescent mothers annually (Guttmacher Institute 2006)
  - Florida is continuously ranked second or third in the nation in terms of incident HIV infections and overall HIV/AIDS cases (CDC 2005)

# Sexual Health in Florida

- Along with socio-cultural differences, the distribution of public health concerns is also disparate across the state
- Ex: The southern counties of Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach are the top three counties of reported HIV/AIDS cases and other sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis in Florida (Florida Department of Health 2007)



# Funding for Sex Education in Florida

- Teachers in Florida schools which receive federal Title V, Section 510 funding are required to include “abstinence-only-until-marriage” in any discussion of sexuality in the classroom
- During the fiscal year of 2006, Florida received \$10,700,147 in federal funds for abstinence-only programs and an additional \$2,521,581 in federal and \$3,500,000 in state Title V, Section 510 funding (SIECUS 2007)
- The state of Florida currently maintains an official “stress abstinence” policy in regards to sexuality education and instruction on HIV/AIDS
- No recent legislation for sexuality education at a state level in Florida had been proposed (Florida Statutes 2006)

# Regional Differences in Sex Education: Why Are They Important?

- While state mandates exist in Florida, sexuality education curricula and course content are heavily influenced by regional school districts and/or local governments (Landry *et al.* 2003)
- This has major implications for regional differences in what is taught regarding sexuality
- In a study of school principals (Kaiser Family Foundation 2000), many reported a “great deal” of influence from the local government and regional school district on sexuality education curricula
- When asked why specific topics were not included in sexuality education curricula, principals often referred to a school or district policy that prevents inclusion of that topic (Kaiser Family Foundation 2000)

# Demographic Differences in Florida

- According to the United States Census Bureau (2007), population characteristics vary dramatically across three major regions in Florida – North, Central, and South
- The area encompassing North Florida (including the “Panhandle”) is predominantly rural and conservative in regards to attitudes toward sexuality
- The region is arguably closer to South Georgia in terms of social and cultural norms than it is to South Florida
- Central Florida, a vast expanse stretching across the interior of the state, is also heavily agrarian but has experienced an explosion of international tourism and development in the area surrounding Orlando

# Demographic Differences in Florida

- North and Central Florida have large amounts of retired persons
- South Florida has become heavily urbanized in recent years and also has a significant amount of Blacks and Latinos (particularly those of Cuban ancestry)
- The region is also marked by large aggregates of uninhabitable land, including the Everglades
- Geographic residence, age, and ethnic identity have been related with attitudes towards sexuality in previous research



# Primary Aim of Study

- To date, no study has examined regional variation in sexuality education and related factors in Florida
- However, understanding such variation may help to uncover factors promoting disproportionate rates of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, especially those in South Florida
- Research on regional differences in sexuality education across this large and diverse state is needed to determine whether state-level initiatives are, indeed, sensible and feasible
- The aim of this study was to examine regional differences in sexuality education-related attitudes and practice among a statewide sample of Floridian teachers

# Procedure

- Methods
  - Community-Academic Partnerships (*Community-Based Participatory Research*)
  - Scientific review
  - Statewide survey (English & Spanish)
- In April 2006, a packet containing an explanation of the study, an informed consent form, paper survey, and postage-paid return envelope was mailed to the sample of teachers
- By July 2006, 462 teachers had responded, yielding a response rate of approximately 26%

# Measures

## Independent Variable

- Regional classifications. North, Central and South Florida

## Dependent Variables

- *Parental consent.* Teachers were asked “Which of the following best describes the situation at your school ?” They chose one of the following responses: “parents/caregivers must give active consent/ permission (sign a form); parents/caregivers must give passive consent/permission; or, sexuality education is a requirement for all students”
- *Abstinence instruction.* The federal guidelines of Section 510 of Title V of the United States Social Security Act were used to measure extent of abstinence instruction

# Measures

- *English language barriers.* Teachers were asked “*What percentage of students in your sex education classes do you feel had English-language barriers during the 2005-2006 school year?*”
- *Spanish curricula offered.* Teachers were asked “*Were materials (curriculum, books, pamphlets, etc.) in your sex education classes during the 2005-2006 school year available in any language other than English?*” Teachers indicating that materials were offered in Spanish (1) were distinguished from others (0)
- *Accurate information.* Teachers were asked “*Do you believe that young people should be given accurate information about birth control and safer sex in school, regardless of whether or not they are sexually active?*”

# Measures

- *Accurate information encourages sex.* Teachers were asked “*Do you believe that giving accurate information about birth control and safer sex to young people in school encourages them to have sex?*”

## Control variables

- *Age.* (M = 47.38, SD = 10.28) Measured in years
- *Race/ethnicity.* Determined by asking participants whether they were Latino, non-Latino Black, non-Latino White, or non-Latino Other
- *Formal Training.* Teachers were also asked, “Have you ever received any formal training to teach sexuality education?”

# Statistical Analyses

- T-tests
- Bonferroni
- Multivariate logistic regressions

# Table 1: Unadjusted Regional Differences in Outcome Variables

	North	Central	South
Parental consent required (% , n = 274)	79.5	66.0	91.2 <sup>c</sup>
Section 510 guidelines taught (out of 8, n = 196)	7.1	6.4 <sup>n</sup>	6.3 <sup>n</sup>
Students w/ language barriers (% , n = 220)	1.9	7.5 <sup>n</sup>	7.3 <sup>n</sup>
Spanish curriculum offered (% , n = 221)	15.3	25.0	35.6 <sup>n</sup>
Students should get safe sex info (% , n = 411)	89.3	95.8	98.6 <sup>n</sup>
Accurate info encourages sex (% , n = 389)	9.6	4.5	4.3

<sup>n</sup> statistically different than North Florida,  $p < .05$

<sup>c</sup> statistically different than Central Florida,  $p < .05$

## Table 2: Multivariate Logistic Regression Model

	Parental consent required	Abstinence guidelines taught	Students w/ language barriers	Spanish curricula offered	Students should get safe sex info	Info encourages sex
North (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Central	0.59	0.48*	3.92***	2.10	3.26*	0.47
South	3.92**	0.36**	3.72***	3.14*	8.52***	0.31 <sup>m</sup>
White (ref)	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Black	1.78	1.00	0.74	2.44 <sup>m</sup>	NA <sup>c</sup>	0.72
Latino	0.95	1.83	1.14	1.01	NA <sup>c</sup>	NA <sup>c</sup>
Other	1.56	4.53*	3.44*	2.60	0.22*	1.92



## Table 2: Multivariate Logistic Regression Model

	Parental consent required	Abstinence guidelines taught	Students w/ language barriers	Spanish curricula offered	Students should get safe sex info	Info encourages sex
Age (yrs)	1.01	1.04**	0.98	0.98	1.02	0.99
Formal training	0.51 <sup>m</sup>	1.44	0.79	1.14	0.55	0.68
-2 log likelihood	233.68	370.40	521.74	215.48	130.78	144.19
Chi-square	25.57***	21.25**	34.71***	15.09*	15.20**	5.54

\*\*\*  $p < .001$    \*\*  $p < .01$    \*  $p < .05$    <sup>m</sup>  $p < .10$

# Parental Consent to Teach Sex Education

- In terms of results, South Florida was more likely than North Florida to require passive or active parental consent for student participation in sexuality education
- Yet, the majority of all teachers reported that active parental consent was required for their districts, which suggests that some students may not have received sexuality education
- In light of the value of evidence-based comprehensive sexuality education for adolescents (American Public Health Association 2006), legislation for such sexuality education to be a requirement for all students in Florida would be of great benefit

# Abstinence Education

- North Florida teachers taught more Section 510 abstinence guidelines than Central and South Florida, and the odds of teaching these guidelines remained when covariates were controlled
- Teachers in all regions presented most components of government-endorsed abstinence instruction, which partially satisfies the desires of proponents for abstinence instruction

# English Language Barriers

- Although the percentage of teachers having students with language barriers was a minority in all regions, teachers in Central and South Florida had nearly four times the likelihood of doing so than North Florida teachers
- However, we note that Central Florida teachers were no more likely than those in South Florida to offer Spanish curricula to students
- South Florida teachers, on the other hand, apparently compensated for the disproportionate number of non-English-speaking students by offering an increased number of Spanish curricula
- Central Florida is home to some of Florida's poorest Latino students (United States Census Bureau 2007)

# Sex Education Attitudes

- Multivariate analyses also revealed a higher odds for North, in comparison to South, Floridian teachers believing that accurate information encourages youth to have sex
- Encouragingly, however, the majority of all teachers supported youth receiving accurate safer sex information, and relatively few believed that it encourages sexual activity
- Given that teachers generally have some discretion regarding the content of sexuality education (Landry *et al.* 2003), these positive attitudes toward safer sex information may lead to teachers disseminating it

# Limitations

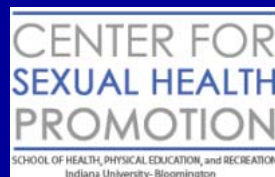
- As with all research, the findings from this assessment must be interpreted considering their limitations
- Our response rate of approximately 26 % is relatively low but typical for mail based surveys on sexuality-related issues (Delbanco *et al.* 1997; Dodge *et al.* 2005; Weinberg, Lottes, and Shaver 2000)
- Furthermore, the study design was cross-sectional with the possibility of recall bias when filling out the survey

# Recommendations for Policy

- Our study findings suggest that in order for teachers to provide effective sexuality education, state-level policies in Florida (and, perhaps, other states) must account for regional differences in factors related to sexuality education, especially parental consent requirements and language-related needs
- Researchers and policy makers seek to determine whether statistical differences have practical significance for understanding the nature of sexuality education in a given region, state, or country
- When regional differences are immense, policies specific to regions or individual school districts may be ideal
- Of great importance is that educational policies provide evidence-based sexuality education programs to all students (Santelli *et al.* 2006b)
- Those involved with the development and implementation of sexuality education programs may benefit from a clear understanding of regional variations within Florida and tailoring efforts to fit the needs of individual communities

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- Note: Manuscript currently in press, *Sex Education* (available in early 2008)



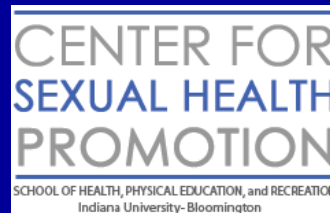


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