



THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEX EDUCATION AND GENDER PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Received: June 21, 2024

Accepted: September 13, 2024

Published: December 31, 2024

Suggested Citation:

Erengin, M., Nuri, N., & Bağlama, B. (2024). The relationship between the attitudes towards sex education and gender perceptions of parents of children with special needs. *Turkish International Journal of Special Education and Guidance & Counseling (TIJSEG)*, 13(2), 115-138.



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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the relationship between the attitudes towards sex education and gender perceptions among parents of children with special needs. A relational survey model using quantitative methods was used in this study. Participants of the study consisted of 191 parents of children with special needs attending schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and Culture of the TRNC in the academic year 2021-2022. Some participants were reached through visits to institutions where their children received education, while others were reached online via Google Forms. A personal information form, the Attitudes toward Sex Education Scale and the Gender Perception Scale were used for data collection. The research findings showed that the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards sex education are positive and their levels of gender perception are positive and egalitarian. Significant differences were found between variables such as gender, marital status, educational status, monthly household income, receiving a training on sex education and parents' attitudes towards sex education. Regarding gender perceptions among parents of children with special needs, significant differences were found in terms of gender, marital status, educational status and monthly household income. However, no significant differences were found in terms of age, receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and the parents' perspective on sex education. A positive and statistically significant relationship was found between the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards sex education and their perceptions of gender.

Keywords: Sex education, attitudes towards sex education, gender perception, parents of children with special needs.

INTRODUCTION

The attitudes and gender perceptions among families of children with special needs towards sex education have become increasingly important in the context of evolving social norms and values. The determination of societal gender roles significantly influences children's sexual identity development and their integration into society (Bartın, Gür, & Nuri, 2021; Güneş, 2017). Therefore, research in this field has become a crucial focal point for families of children with special needs.

Sexual development encompasses all areas of an individual's development, beginning at birth and continuing throughout life (Yılmaz, 2015). The sexual development of an individual varies from culture to culture, based on upbringing and the sexual patterns learned from their environment.



Personal attitudes and behaviors acquired through individual experiences can directly impact sexual development throughout life (Çakmak & Çakmak, 2018; Ertekin & Bağlama, 2020). Appropriate delivery of sex education is crucial for the development of healthy sexual identity. Sex education aims to gain behaviors necessary for individuals to learn about the physical and sexual characteristics of both genders and to control their sexual impulses. Alternatively, sex education is designed to teach individuals how to behave in relationships concerning sexual matters with others. This education positively influences emotional development and plays a significant role in societal acceptance (Bulut, 2007; Bartın, Gür, & Nuri, 2021; Güneş, 2017). The goal of sex education is for individuals to learn about their responsibilities, make informed decisions and establish proper communication with their surroundings. Moreover, acquiring accurate information is essential for healthy sexual life. Another crucial aspect of sex education is to gain an understanding to children and adolescents about the potential dangers related to sexual matters and making them aware of these risks. Hence, sex education programs tailored to the appropriate age of individuals form an integral part of the content of sex education (Taşçı, 2010). Providing regular and accurate sex education contributes to healthy sexual development (Gürsoy & Gençalp, 2010). When examining the sexual development process in individual with special needs, it is essential to consider their cognitive and developmental characteristics rather than their chronological age (Artan, 2005). While sexual development follows the same sequence in every individual, individuals with special needs may progress more slowly in their sexual development than typically developing individuals and may lag behind their peers (Çerçi, 2013). As children spend most of their daily time at school and home, both parents and teachers should actively participate in every stage of sex education. It is believed that the proficiency of parents and teachers in sex education is crucial for providing accurate and reliable answers to children's questions (Durukan 2004; Değirmenci et al. 2021). Establishing healthy and safe communication with their children is of great importance for their sexual development and it also prevents them from seeking information from various sources out of curiosity (Kadioğlu, 2005).

Families of children with special needs may exhibit differences in their attitudes toward their children's sex education. The special needs of children can influence the sensitivity and approaches of families to sex education. In particular, some families may approach sex education differently, considering the special needs and individual characteristics of their children, whereas others may resort to more traditional and conventional methods. In this context, understanding the impact of families' attitudes toward sex education on the development of their children's sexual identities and their awareness of sexuality-related issues is crucial. The content of sex education programs intended for individuals with special needs encompasses a broad range of topics including body parts and functions, gender knowledge/sexual identity, masturbation, menstruation, sexual relationships, dating, friendship, pregnancy, childbirth and contraception, sexually transmitted diseases, teaching social skills, different sexual orientations, privacy and sexual abuse or harassment (Ailey et al., 2003). Adequate education on these topics for children will not only prevent potential abuse or the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, but also positively influence the societal acceptance of individuals with special needs. While some families advocate for sex education to be provided by teachers at school, some teachers believe that such education would be healthier if delivered by parents (Değirmenci, Nuri, & Direktör, 2021). Experts on this field suggest that both families and schools should coordinate to provide this education in a collaborative manner (Çelik, 2013). An individual sex education program tailored to children with special needs will facilitate the setting of goals, achievement and delivery of successful sex education (Çakmak & Çakmak, 2018).

Social gender is a social construct that defines the behaviors, beliefs, values, expectations and images of women and men. Individuals live within the rules and values considered appropriate by the society. These societal values are transmitted from generation to generation and individuals learn behaviors considered as normal by living within these societal norms from birth (Şıvgın, 2015). Differences in the values attributed to girls and boys have also been observed in other societies worldwide. Societies differentiate between girls and boys based on gender roles and instilling different values.



Social gender perception has different roles for women and men; for instance, it characterizes women as passive and silent in the face of problems, accepting their spouse's wishes without questioning and taking care of all household chores and meals, while it describes men as active and aggressive individuals who cover the economic expenses of the household. Such perceptions create inequality between women and men (Yılmaz et al., 2009). Stereotypes are the main factors in the creation of inequality and discrimination between women and men. In many societies worldwide, men are described by stereotypes as individuals reflecting powerful characteristics, such as being strong, confident, fearless, independent and assertive, while women are stereotypically defined as individuals with weak characteristics, such as being weak, indecisive, fearful, dependent, submissive, emotional and fragile (Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2003). Stereotypes explain how women and men are perceived by the society according to behaviors that are accepted as normal. Stereotypes differ in values attributed to women and men in every society worldwide. Especially in early childhood, children tend to reflect on existing gender stereotypes in their play. This directly affects the choice of game and toy. While boys tend to prefer games/toys such as balls, vehicles, soldiers and wars, girls are more inclined toward games/toys such as dolls, household items and playing houses (Çakmak & Çakmak, 2018).

In order to understand gender roles in families of children with special needs, it is crucial for parents to comprehend the characteristics of the family structure and the societal expectations placed on mothers and fathers. When examining gender roles for mothers and fathers in families of children with special needs, it is observed that mothers play a significant role in meeting the child's physiological needs. Mothers inevitably face emotional, social, physical and economic challenges within their families, social environments and societies. Therefore, seeking support is important for mothers to cope with the challenges they encounter. Fathers are considered responsible for bearing the economic burden on the household. Fathers of children with special needs are observed to work longer hours to achieve the goal of meeting increasing economic expenses, resulting in spending less time with their families at home (Yıldırım Sarı, 2007).

Furthermore, mothers of children with special needs experience physical complaints, anxiety disorders, depression and other issues more prevalently than mothers of typically developing children. This situation is believed to be associated with stress experienced by the mothers of children with special needs. Additionally, it has been suggested that the influence of societal gender roles plays a role in the emotional, physical, economic and social difficulties faced by mothers of children with special needs (Sarisoy, 2000). Aykara (2015) evaluated the experiences of individuals with siblings with intellectual disabilities and concluded that societal gender roles are present in families of children with special needs, affecting the entire family, including siblings. Therefore, assessing gender roles in families of children with special needs and discussing the topic within the context of gender roles and perceptions is considered important. It is believed that developing social policies by the government is crucial for achieving gender equality in families of children with special needs (Serdarhan & Duyan, 2017).

Examining the relationship between the attitudes of families of children with special needs towards sex education and their gender perceptions can provide valuable insights for special education experts, psychologists and social work professionals. In addition, this research holds critical importance in increasing awareness among families regarding sex education and in contributing to the healthy development of children's sexual identities. The findings of this research may facilitate a more effective design of education and guidance programs in this field by clarifying the connections between the attitudes towards sex education and gender perceptions of families of children with special needs. Moreover, it can contribute to shaping the general societal perceptions of sex education. Thus, positive changes in societal gender perceptions may positively impact the healthy sexual development of children and gender relationships in the society. In this context, the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between attitudes towards sex education and gender perceptions of parents of children with special needs. It is expected that this study will contribute to the field of special education. In line with this aim, the following sub-aims were also addressed in this study:



1. What are the attitudes towards sex education and the levels of gender perception among parents of children with special needs?
2. Do the attitudes of parents of children with special needs toward sex education and their gender perceptions differ significantly based on variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational status, monthly household income, receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and parents’ perspective on sex education?
3. Is there a relationship between the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards sex education and their gender perceptions?

METHOD

Research Model

A relational survey model was used in this study, which examined the relationship between the attitudes of parents of children with special needs towards sex education and their gender perceptions. Studies conducted by applying correlation tests to determine the association between multiple variables and obtain information on cause and effect are called relational survey models (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2014).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 191 parents of children with special needs in special education schools affiliated with the Ministry of National Education and Culture of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in 2021–2022 academic year. Some of the parents were reached at the institutions where their children receive education and some were reached online electronically through Google Forms. The distribution of parents of children with special needs according to demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, educational status, and monthly household income was examined by frequency analysis and descriptive statistics were given regarding the Attitudes toward Sex Education Scale and Gender Perception Scale scores. The distribution of the participants in the study group according to their demographic characteristics is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of parents of children with special needs.

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	20-29 years	47	24.61
	30-39 years	78	40.84
	40-49 years	48	25.13
	50 years and above	18	9.42
Gender	Male	55	28.80
	Female	136	71.20
Marital Status	Single	47	24.61
	Married	144	75.39
Educational status	Primary school	22	11.52
	Middle school	35	18.32
	High school	60	31.41
	University degree	56	29.32
	Postgraduate degree	18	9.42
Monthly household income	Low income	48	25.13
	Moderate income	126	65.97
	High income	17	8.90
Total		171	100



When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that 24.61% of the participants in the study are in the age range of 20-29, 40.84% are in the age range of 30-39, 25.13% are in the age range of 40-49 and 9.42% are 50 years and older. Furthermore, 28.80% of the participants are female, 71.20% are male; 24.61% are single and 75.39% are married. Regarding educational status, 11.52% of the participants are primary school graduate, 18.32% of them are middle school graduate, 31.41% are high school graduate, 29.32% have a university degree and 9.42% have postgraduate degrees. In terms of monthly household income, 25.13% of the participants reported that they have low income, 65.97% have moderate income and 8.90% have high income.

Table 2. Sex Education received by parents with special needs children, incidence of sexual abuse in the family and parents’ perspectives on sex education.

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percent (%)
Receiving a training on sex education	Yes	45	23,56
	No	146	76,44
Being around someone who has been sexually abused before	Yes	42	21,99
	No	149	78,01
Parents’ perspective on sex education	Positive	152	79,58
	Negative	39	20,42

According to Table 2, it was found that 23.56% of the participants received training on sex education, while 76.44% did not. Additionally, 21.99% reported that they know someone who has been sexually abused before in their environment, while 78.01% of them reported that there is no one who has been sexually abused before in their environment. Moreover, 79.85% of the participants indicated that they have a positive perspective regarding sex education, whereas 20.42% expressed a negative perspective on sex education.

Data Collection Tools

Demographic Information Form

Demographic Information Form was prepared by the researchers and aimed to obtain information about variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational status, monthly household income, receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and their perspective on sex education among parents of children with special needs.

Attitude towards Sex Education Scale

The Attitude towards Sex Education Scale was developed by Ceylan, Artan and Adibatmaz (2020). The scale consists of 39 items distributed across four factors. The first factor (Avoidance) includes 8 items, the second factor (Belief in its necessity) comprises 8 items, the third factor (Professional support and respect for differences) consists of 12 items and the fourth factor (Parental role) involves 11 items. The minimum score that can be obtained from the scale is 39, while the maximum score is 156. A high score on the scale indicates a positive attitude toward sex education for the participants. It is considered important that all questions containing negative judgments about the first factor, avoidance, are located at the end of the scale to enable participants to respond more attentively. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale was found to be 0.90. According to the research data, the results obtained from the scale were deemed valid and moderate significant relationships were identified among the sub-dimensions.

Gender Perception Scale

Gender Perception Scale was developed by Altınova and Duyan (2013) and is used to measure individuals’ gender perceptions. The scale includes 25 items and is a 5-point Likert type scale consisting of one dimension (I completely agree 5, I agree 4, I am undecided 3, I disagree 2, I completely disagree 1). 10 of the items were designed as positive, while 15 of the items were reverse-scored as negative. The range of scores that can be obtained from the scale varies between 25-125 and higher scores indicate higher gender perceptions of individuals. The Cronbach Alpha value of the



scale was found to be .87 and it was stated to be highly reliable. In this study, the Cronbach Alpha value was found to be .907.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved the application of the “Demographic Information Form”, “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale,” which were shaped through validity and reliability studies. The data were collected from parents of children with special needs in schools under the Ministry of National Education in the TRNC. Some participants were reached through visits to the institutions where their children receive education, while others were accessed online via Google Forms. An application was made to the XXXXXXXX Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee to carry out the research and it was found ethically appropriate with the decision of the research committee on January 17, 2022, EKK21-22/08/008.

Data Analysis

The collected data from the parents were analyzed using the SPSS 26.0 for Windows package program. Cronbach’s Alpha Test was applied to the responses provided by parents of children with special needs for the “Attitude towards Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale”. The alpha coefficient was found to be 0.939 for the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and 0.934 for the “Gender Perception Scale”. The scores of parents of children with special needs on the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale” were examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Findings related to the normal distribution of the scores indicated that the scores did not exhibit a normal distribution. The distribution of parents of children with special needs based on demographic characteristics was analyzed through frequency analysis and descriptive statistics were provided for the scores on the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale”. The scores of parents of children with special needs on the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale” were further examined using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Normality tests of attitudes towards sex education scale and gender perception scale scores.

	Statistics	Std.Dev.	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	.839	191	.000
Parental Role	.932	191	.000
Belief in its Necessity	.862	191	.000
Avoidance	.929	191	.000
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	.972	191	.001
Gender Perception Scale	.923	191	.000

The findings regarding the normal distribution of scores on the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale” for individuals included in the scope of the research as presented in Table 3. Results showed that the scores do not follow a normal distribution. Non-parametric hypothesis tests were utilized to compare the scores on the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale” based on the demographic characteristics of parents of children with special needs. Specifically, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied for the comparison of scores based on participants’ gender, marital status, receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and the parents’ perspective on sex education. For the comparison of scores based on age, educational status and monthly household income, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was employed. In addition, the Spearman test was used to examine the correlation between the scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and “Gender Perception Scale” among parents of children with special needs.



RESULTS

Results on the Attitudes of Parents of Children with Special Needs towards Sex Education

In Table 4, the Attitude Scale toward Sex Education scores of parents of children with special needs included in the research are given.

Table 4. Attitude scale toward sex education scores of parents of children with special needs.

	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	191	28.12	4.12	12	32
Parental Role	191	25.96	4.69	12	32
Belief in its Necessity	191	41.88	5.97	22	48
Avoidance	191	29.89	10.10	11	44
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	191	125.84	18.95	67	156

When Table 4 is examined, it is observed that the participants received an average score of 28.12±4.12 points in the “Professional Support and Respect for Differences” subscale of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale”, with a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 32 points. In the “Parental Role” subscale, parents obtained an average score of 25.96±4.69 points, ranging from a minimum of 12 to a maximum of 32 points. For the “Belief in its Necessity” subscale, parents achieved an average score of 41.88±5.97 points, with a minimum of 22 and a maximum of 48 points. In the “Avoidance” subscale, they scored an average of 29.89±10.10 points, with a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 44 points. The overall average score for the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” was 125.84±18.95 points, with a range from a minimum of 67 to a maximum of 156 points. Upon examining the general averages of parents on the sex education attitude scale, it can be concluded that their attitudes towards sex education are positive.

Results on Parents’ Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Age

Table 5 compares the scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” according to the ages of parents of children with special needs in the research using the Kruskal-Wallis test.

Table 5. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the age of parents of children with special needs.

	Age	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	X ²	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	20-29 age	47	28.96	3.22	30.00	105.19	3.636	.304
	30-39 age	78	28.31	4.12	29.00	98.65		
	40-49 age	48	27.25	4.47	29.00	85.32		
	50 age and above	18	27.39	4.97	28.00	88.97		
Parental Role	20-29 age	47	27.09	3.72	28.00	107.57	4.114	.249
	30-39 age	78	25.53	4.38	26.50	88.33		
	40-49 age	48	25.48	5.52	26.50	93.86		
	50 age and above	18	26.17	5.72	28.50	104.72		
Belief in its Necessity	20-29 age	47	42.40	4.96	43.00	96.33	3.966	.265
	30-39 age	78	41.06	6.22	42.00	87.51		
	40-49 age	48	42.42	6.42	43.00	105.80		
	50 age and above	18	42.61	6.13	45.00	105.81		
Avoidance	20-29 age	47	29.30	10.85	29.00	93.03	.620	.892
	30-39 age	78	29.90	9.91	31.00	95.75		
	40-49 age	48	30.75	9.70	32.50	100.90		
	50 age and above	18	29.11	10.66	31.00	91.78		

**Table 5 (Continued).** Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the age of parents of children with special needs.

	Age	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	X ²	p
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	20-29 age	47	127.74	18.28	130.00	100.40	.455	.929
	30-39 age	78	124.79	18.31	125.50	93.56		
	40-49 age	48	125.90	19.96	126.00	95.53		
	50 age and above	18	125.28	21.83	126.00	96.33		

When Table 5 is examined, it was determined that there was no statistically significant difference ($p > .05$) in the general scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and the sub-dimensions of the scale, including professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity and avoidance, according to the age group of the participants in the research. Participants in the age groups of 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50 years and above had similar calculated scores for professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in necessity and avoidance, as well as Attitude toward Sex Education Scale.

Results on Parents’ Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Gender

The scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” according to the gender of the participants were compared using the Mann-Whitney U test and shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the gender of parents of children with special needs.

	Gender	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	Male	55	27.35	4.05	28.00	82.25	-2.210	.027*
	Female	136	28.43	4.12	30.00	101.56		
Parental Role	Male	55	25.84	4.57	27.00	93.71	-.366	.715
	Female	136	26.01	4.76	27.00	96.93		
Belief in its Necessity	Male	55	41.71	5.14	42.00	90.81	-.830	.406
	Female	136	41.95	6.29	44.00	98.10		
Avoidance	Male	55	26.95	10.81	25.00	80.24	-2.508	.012*
	Female	136	31.08	9.59	32.50	102.38		
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	Male	55	121.84	18.51	121.00	82.98	-2.070	.038*
	Female	136	127.46	18.96	130.00	101.26		

* $p < .05$

When Table 6 is examined, it is seen that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) in the general scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” and the sub-dimensions of the scale, including professional support and respect for differences and avoidance according to the gender of the participants. Female participants obtained statistically significantly higher scores in professional support and respect for differences, avoidance and the general “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” compared to male participants. However, there was no statistically significant difference ($p > .05$) in the scores of the sub-dimensions including parental role and belief in its necessity of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” based on the participants’ gender. Although the scores for the parental role and belief in its necessity were higher for male participants compared to female participants, this score difference due to gender was not statistically significant.

Results on Parents’ Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Marital Status

Table 7 shows the scores of the “Attitude toward Sex Education Scale” according to the marital status of the participants analyzed with Mann-Whitney U test.



Table 7. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the marital status of parents of children with special needs.

Table with 9 columns: Dimension, Marital Status, n, Mean, Std.Dev., M, SA, Z, p. Rows include Professional Support and Respect for Differences, Parental Role, Belief in its Necessity, Avoidance, and Attitude toward Sex Education Scale.

*p<.05

According to Table 7, it is seen that there was a statistically significant difference (p<.05) in the scores of the sub-dimensions of the "Attitude toward Sex Education Scale", including professional support and respect for differences and parental role, based on the marital status of the participants.

Results on Parents' Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Educational Status

Scores of the Attitudes toward Sex Education Scale according to the educational status of the parents were compared using the Kruskal-Wallis test and the results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the educational status of parents of children with special needs.

Table with 10 columns: Dimension, Educational Status, n, Mean, Std.Dev., M, SA, X^2, p, Difference. Rows include Professional Support and Respect for Differences, Parental Role, and Belief in its Necessity.



Table 8 (Continued). Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the educational status of parents of children with special needs.

Table with 10 columns: Educational Status, n, Mean, Std.Dev., M, SA, X^2, p, Difference. Rows include Avoidance and Attitude toward Sex Education Scale with sub-categories (1)Primary school to (5)Postgraduate degree.

*p<.05

When the results on Table 8 are examined, it can be seen that there was a statistically significant difference (p<.05) in the general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and the sub-dimensions of the scale including professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity and avoidance according to the educational status of the parents of children with special needs.

Results on Parents' Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Monthly Household Income

In Table 9, Kruskal-Wallis test results on the scores of the Attitudes toward Sex Education Scale according to the monthly household income of the participants are provided.

Table 9. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the monthly household income of parents of children with special needs.

Table with 10 columns: Income Level, n, Mean, Std.Dev., M, SA, X^2, p, Difference. Rows include Professional Support and Respect for Differences, Parental Role, Belief in its Necessity, Avoidance, and Attitude toward Sex Education Scale with sub-categories (1)Low income to (3)High income.

*p<.05



According to the results shown in Table 9, it can be seen that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) in the general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and the sub-dimensions of the scale including professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity and avoidance according to the monthly household income of the parents of children with special needs. Participants with higher monthly household incomes had statistically significantly higher scores in overall scale and its sub-dimensions compared to participants with lower monthly household incomes. In addition, no significant difference was observed between the sub-dimensions including parental role and belief in its necessity of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale according to the parents' monthly household income.

Results on Parents' Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Status on Receiving a Training on Sex Education

In Table 10, the scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale according to the participants' status of receiving a training on sex education were compared using the Mann-Whitney U test.

Table 10. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the status on receiving a training on sex education of parents of children with special needs.

	Received a Training	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	Yes	45	29.40	2.91	30.00	112.23	-2.277	.023*
	No	146	27.72	4.36	29.00	91.00		
Parental Role	Yes	45	27.29	3.39	27.00	107.96	-1.666	.096
	No	146	25.55	4.97	27.00	92.32		
Belief in its Necessity	Yes	45	43.11	4.21	43.00	103.50	-1.047	.295
	No	146	41.50	6.38	42.00	93.69		
Avoidance	Yes	45	31.11	10.42	33.00	102.67	-.926	.354
	No	146	29.51	10.01	31.00	93.95		
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	Yes	45	130.91	16.55	132.00	109.67	-1.897	.058
	No	146	124.28	19.42	123.50	91.79		

* $p < .05$

When Table 10 is examined, it is seen that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) between the scores of the professional support and respect for differences sub-dimension of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and parents' status on whether they received a training on sex education before. It was found that the scores of participants who received a training on sex education were statistically significantly higher than the scores of participants who did not receive such training in terms of professional support and respect for differences sub-dimension. There was no significant difference ($p > .05$) in the scores of the sub-dimensions, namely parental role, belief in its necessity, avoidance and overall scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale based on whether the participants received a training on sex education or not.

Results on Parents' Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Status on Being Around Someone Who Has Been Sexually Abused Before

Table 11 shows Mann-Whitney U test results on the scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale based on the presence of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse in their close environment among the parents.



Table 11. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to the status on being around someone who has been sexually abused before.

	Being Around Someone	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	Yes	42	29.21	2.76	30.00	107.73	-1.573	.116
	No	149	27.81	4.39	29.00	92.69		
Parental Role	Yes	42	27.02	3.97	27.50	107.02	-1.469	.142
	No	149	25.66	4.85	27.00	92.89		
Belief in its Necessity	Yes	42	42.67	4.25	42.00	97.44	-.192	.847
	No	149	41.66	6.37	43.00	95.59		
Avoidance	Yes	42	30.60	12.19	36.50	101.21	-.693	.488
	No	149	29.69	9.47	31.00	94.53		
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	Yes	42	129.50	19.50	133.50	105.86	-1.309	.191
	No	149	124.81	18.74	125.00	93.22		

*p<.05

According to Table 11, there is no statistically significant difference (p>.05) in the general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions based on whether parents have someone who have experienced sexual abuse in their close environment. Although parents’ score on the overall scale and its sub-dimensions were high, no significant difference was observed.

Results on Parents’ Attitudes toward Sex Education According to Parents’ Perspective on Sex Education

Table 12 shows Mann-Whitney U test results on the scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale based on the parents’ perspective on sex education.

Table 12. Comparison of attitude toward sex education scale scores according to parents’ perspective on sex education.

	Parents’ Perspective on Sex Education	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z	p
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	Positive	152	28.91	3.27	30.00	104.54	-4.261	.000*
	Negative	39	25.03	5.50	26.00	62.71		
Parental Role	Positive	152	26.67	4.17	27.00	103.21	-3.572	.000*
	Negative	39	23.18	5.59	23.00	67.90		
Belief in its Necessity	Positive	152	42.74	5.08	44.00	102.26	-3.108	.002*
	Negative	39	38.54	7.83	40.00	71.60		
Avoidance	Positive	152	30.26	10.32	32.00	98.05	-1.012	.311
	Negative	39	28.46	9.19	29.00	88.01		
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	Positive	152	128.57	17.40	129.00	102.96	-3.436	.001*
	Negative	39	115.21	21.14	117.00	68.87		

*p<.05

According to the results, there is a statistically significant difference (p<.05) between the overall scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions namely professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity and the parents’ perspective on sex education. Parents who reported a positive perspective on sex education were found to have statistically significantly higher scores in overall scale and professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in necessity sub-dimensions compared to parents who reported a negative perspective on sex education. It was found that there is no statistically significant difference (p>.05) in the avoidance scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale based on the parents’ perspective on sex education.



Results on Gender Perceptions Among Parents of Children with Special Needs

Table 13 presents the scores of the parents of children with special needs on Gender Perception Scale.

Table 13. Scores of the gender perception scale of parents of children with special needs.

	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Gender Perception Scale	191	94.23	21.56	50	125

According to Table 13, it is seen that the average score obtained from the Gender Perception Scale by the participants in the research is 94.23 ± 21.56 points, with a minimum of 50 points and a maximum of 125 points. Average scores obtained from the Gender Perception Scale revealed that parents' gender perceptions are high.

Results on Parents' Gender Perceptions According to Demographic Characteristics of Parents of Children with Special Needs

In Table 14, comparison of the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the demographic characteristics of the participants are provided. Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were used to compare their gender perceptions and demographic characteristics.

Table 14. Comparison of gender perception scale scores according to parents' demographic characteristics.

	N	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z / X ²	p	Difference
<i>Age</i>								
20-29 years	47	97.15	23.84	105.00	105.32	7.783	.051	
30-39 years	78	93.55	19.85	95.50	92.82			
40-49 years	48	96.83	19.76	99.50	103.33			
50 years and above	18	82.56	24.54	73.50	65.89			
<i>Gender</i>								
Male	136	96.88	20.81	102.00	102.99	-2.747	.006*	
Female	55	87.67	22.15	84.00	78.73			
<i>Marital Status</i>								
Single	47	101.77	22.94	113.00	117.35	-3.050	.002*	
Married	144	91.76	20.58	91.50	89.03			
<i>Education Status</i>								
(1)Primary school	22	88.32	20.06	91.00	78.43	19.257	.001*	1-5
(2)Middle school	35	87.51	20.24	82.00	80.60			2-5
(3)High school	60	90.10	21.78	85.50	85.76			3-5
(4)University degree	56	100.89	20.01	106.50	111.97			1-4
(5)Postgraduate degree	18	107.50	20.13	115.00	131.86			2-4
<i>Monthly Household Income</i>								
(1)Low income	48	80.90	19.34	76,00	62.36	24,219	.000*	1-2
(2)Moderate income	126	98.14	20.57	103,00	106.12			1-3
(3)High income	17	102.82	19.54	110,00	115.94			

*p<.05

When Table 14 is examined, it is seen that there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of the parents on Gender Perception Scale based on their age groups ($p>.05$). Results showed that there is a statistically significant difference between the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the parents' gender ($p<.05$). In other words, female participants got significantly higher scores on the Gender Perception Scale compared to male participants. There is also a statistically significant difference in the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the marital status of the participants ($p<.05$). Single participants have significantly higher scores on the Gender Perception Scale compared



to married participants. According to the results on participants’ educational levels, there is a statistically significant difference in the scores of the Gender Perception Scale ($p < .05$). Participants with postgraduate degrees have significantly higher scores on the Gender Perception Scale compared to participants with primary school, middle school and high school degrees, while participants with university degrees have significantly higher scores compared to participants with elementary and middle school degrees. It was also found that there is a statistically significant difference in the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the participants’ monthly household incomes ($p < .05$). Participants with higher monthly household incomes have significantly higher scores on the Gender Perception Scale compared to participants with moderate and low monthly household incomes.

Results on Parents’ Gender Perceptions According to Status on Receiving a Training on Sex Education, Being Around Someone Who Has Been Sexually Abused Before and Parents’ Perspective on Sex Education

In Table 15, the scores of the Gender Perception Scale are compared based on the participants’ sex education, the presence of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse in the family, and the family’s perspective on sex education using the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

Table 15. Comparison of gender perception scale scores according to status on receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and parents’ perspective on sex education.

	n	Mean	Std.Dev.	M	SA	Z / X ²	p
<i>Received a Training</i>							
Yes	45	97.69	21.11	103.00	103.93	-1.101	.271
No	146	93.16	21.65	93.00	93.55		
<i>Being Around Someone</i>							
Yes	42	98.12	22.97	109.50	105.40	-1.249	.212
No	149	93.13	21.09	93.00	93.35		
<i>Parents’ Perspective on Sex Education</i>							
Positive	152	95.20	21.29	100.50	98.44	-1.203	.229
Negative	39	90.41	22.44	83.00	86.50		

* $p < .05$

Table 15 shows the results on the comparison of Gender Perception Scale scores according to status on receiving a training on sex education, being around someone who has been sexually abused before and parents’ perspective on sex education. According to the results, it was determined that there is no statistically significant difference between the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the participants’ status of receiving sex education ($p > .05$). There is also no statistically significant difference between the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on whether there is someone who has been sexually abused before ($p > .05$). In other words, gender perceptions of parents are similar regardless of having someone around who has been sexually abused before. Similarly, there is no statistically significant difference in the scores of the Gender Perception Scale based on the participants’ perspective on sex education ($p > .05$). The scores on the Gender Perception Scale are similar for participants who reported a positive and negative perspective on sex education.

Correlations Between Attitudes Toward Sex Education Scale Scores and Gender Perception Scale Scores Among Parents of Children with Special Needs

In Table 16, correlation results between the scores of the Attitude Toward Sex Education Scale and the Gender Perception Scale of parents of children with special needs are provided.



Table 16. Correlations between attitude toward sex education scale scores and gender perception scale scores of parents of children with special needs.

		Professional Support and Respect for Differences	Parental Role	Belief in its Necessity	Avoidance	Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	Gender Perception Scale
Professional Support and Respect for Differences	r p N	1 . .	.611 .000*	.627 .000*	.383 .000*	.738 .000*	.351 .000*
Parental Role	r p N		1 . .	.657 .000*	.217 0,003	.675 .000*	.123 .091
Belief in its Necessity	r p N			1 . .	.438 .000*	.816 .000*	.350 .000*
Avoidance	r p N				1 . .	.786 .000*	.456 .000*
Attitude toward Sex Education Scale	r p N					1 . .	.461 .000*
Gender Perception Scale	r p N						1 . .

*p<.05

According to Table 16, it was determined that there is a positive and statistically significant correlation (p<.05) between the general scores of the Attitude Toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions, namely professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity, avoidance and the general scores of the Gender Perception Scale. As the scores obtained from Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions increase, the scores on the Gender Perception Scale also increase positively and significantly.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, and SUGGESTIONS

Discussion on the Parents’ Attitude toward Sex Education and Demographic Variables

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between the attitudes towards sex education and gender perceptions among parents of children with special needs. Results of the study showed that parents of children with special needs have a positive attitude towards sex education. Parents of children with special needs may seek expert support to teach their children certain skills later than their peers and it is thought that parents who receive expert support can understand the importance of sex education within the scope of special education earlier. Akdemir (2019) investigated the attitudes of teachers providing education to individuals diagnosed with intellectual disabilities toward sex education and found that teachers exhibited positive attitudes toward sex education. Ceylan and Çetin (2015) aimed to examine the views of parents on sex education for children aged 3-6 years and found that all parents expressed that sex education is necessary. Similar positive attitudes were also observed in the study conducted by Tuzcuoğlu (2013), which examined the difficulties parents faced in terms of sex education. The majority of parents stated that they believed sex education was necessary. Parents may argue that sex education requires a special approach considering the special needs, physical and mental disabilities of their children. Therefore, it is considered essential for sex education to collaborate with teachers and specialists to understand their children’s learning styles and needs. Some parents, however, may believe that sex education should be provided in a standard manner despite their children’s special needs. They may even believe that their children should receive the



same education as children with typical development. Conversely, some parents may oppose providing sex education to their children. For various reasons, some may not want their children to have early knowledge on these matters, either due to religious or cultural reasons or simply not considering it appropriate for their children. In summary, the attitudes of families of children with special needs toward sex education can be different based on various reasons. However, it should be emphasized that sex education is important for the health and safety of children and should be planned in a way that suits the needs of the children.

It was determined that there is no statistically significant difference in the general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions according to the ages of the parents of children with special needs participated in the study. Children with special needs might need more support in certain skills compared to typically developing children and parents seek more research and expert support to find solutions to this situation. Therefore, it is considered that every parent with a child with special needs is aware of the necessity of sex education for their children. In a study by Akdemir (2019), which examined the connection between the attitudes of teachers of children with intellectual disabilities towards sex education and ethical considerations, it was determined that the age variable did not create a significant difference. However, a different result was observed in the study conducted by Yavuz, Tekcan and Vural Batık (2013), which investigated the attitudes of special education teachers towards sex education. In this study, it was stated that younger teachers had higher attitude scores compared to older teachers.

Results showed that female participants scored higher than male participants regarding Attitude toward Sex Education Scale. This result is considered to be influenced by societal expectations placed on women. Given that society expects women to be responsible for childcare, maintaining the household and meeting the needs of the family, it is believed that women may be more sensitive to sex education and in need of professional support. Shin, Lee, and Min (2019) conducted a study with 360 families of children with special needs at elementary school age and found that mothers had higher scores in sexual knowledge and sexual attitude compared to fathers, although this difference was not statistically significant. Additionally, Xiong et al. (2020) investigated the views of 30 pre-service teachers who graduated from a national pre-service teacher education program in China and figured out that male teachers perceived their knowledge of sex education as sufficient, while female teachers felt inadequate and expressed a need for training in this area. The higher scores in the role of parents for female participants are thought to be related to their acceptance of societal roles attributed to them, which may contribute to passing on these roles to future generations and shaping societal norms. Tuğut and Gölbaşı (2019) examined the attitudes of parents towards sex education and found that parents' attitudes were similar regardless of gender. Similarly, Eroğlu and Gölbaşı (2005) carried out a study to examine the importance of parents in the sex education process and determined that parents considered themselves sufficiently knowledgeable about sex education regardless of gender. Similar findings were also reported in a study by Nagpal and Fernandes (2015) that aimed to determine parents' attitudes toward sex education.

Participants who were single had statistically significantly higher scores in professional support and respect for differences, as well as parental role, compared to participants who were married. This can be interpreted in the context of traditional marital roles and responsibilities being less pronounced among unmarried participants. Şahin and Özbey (2007) concluded that fathers' involvement in the process is as crucial as mothers' involvement for children's intellectual development, academic success and acquiring a healthy gender role. In contemporary times, it is considered important for both parents to participate in family education programs, even if they are not married, emphasizing the significance of shared involvement in parenting.

Results showed that participants with postgraduate degree had statistically significantly higher scores in overall scale and its sub-dimensions compared to participants with primary school, middle school and high school degrees. Results also revealed that university graduates had statistically significantly



higher scores on avoidance sub-dimension of Attitude toward Sex Education Scale compared to participants with middle school degree. According to these results, it is presumed that the attitudes toward sex education among parents of children with special needs become more positive and egalitarian as their educational level increases. Similarly, Çerçi (2013) found in a study on the knowledge and attitudes of parents of children with intellectually disability towards the sexual development and education of their children that the attitudes of parents varied according to their educational levels indicating higher-educated parents having more knowledge. Eliküçük (2011) also found that knowledge and thoughts of parents of 6-year-old children attending preschool education institutions about their children's sexual development and education that parents with higher educational levels had higher levels of knowledge. However, Çankırı (2018) examined the influence of parental educational levels on the child's sexual identity acquisition and found that the educational level of parents did not have a significant influence.

When the overall results on monthly household income are examined, it is seen that participants with higher monthly household incomes had statistically significantly higher scores in overall scale and its sub-dimensions compared to participants with lower monthly household incomes. According to these results, it is found that as income levels increase, families may have more opportunities to receive additional education and expert support, leading to more positive attitudes toward sex education. There are different research findings in the literature. In a study on the knowledge and attitudes of parents with preschool children regarding sexual development and sex education, İşler and Gürşimşek (2018) found that as income levels increased, parents not only exhibited higher levels of knowledge but also demonstrated more positive attitudes. Similarly, Çerçi (2013) arrived at a comparable conclusion in a study focusing on the knowledge and attitudes of parents of children with intellectual disability towards the sexual development and education of their children. The study revealed differences in the knowledge levels of parents of children with intellectual disability based on their monthly income status.

It was found that the scores of participants who received a training on sex education were statistically significantly higher than the scores of participants who did not receive such training in terms of professional support and respect for differences sub-dimension. There was no significant difference ($p>.05$) in the scores of the sub-dimensions, namely parental role, belief in its necessity, avoidance and overall scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale based on whether the participants received a training on sex education or not. These results suggest that previous training in sex education for parents of children with special needs positively influences their attitudes in this regard. Sex education is a lifelong process, and providing individuals with sex education from an early age has a significant impact not only on their knowledge about sexuality but also on developing healthy sexual attitudes. Similar findings were reported by İşler and Gürşimşek (2018) in their study on the knowledge and attitudes of parents with preschool children regarding sexual development and sex education.

Results showed that there is no statistically significant difference ($p>0.05$) in the general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions based on whether parents have someone who have experienced sexual abuse in their close environment. Akdemir (2019) explored the relationship between the attitudes of teachers providing education to individuals diagnosed with intellectual disabilities and their ethical stances regarding sex education. The study revealed a significant shift in attitudes toward sex education based on whether individuals in their environment had experienced sexual abuse. Yaşar, Şenol, and Akyol (2015) conducted a study to investigate the perceptions of pre-service preschool teachers regarding child abuse. According to this research, pre-service teachers who had individuals in their environment with experiences of sexual abuse exhibited more positive attitudes (Diken & Sucuoğlu, 1999; Pala, 2008). This outcome can be attributed to their heightened awareness stemming from prior knowledge about sexual abuse and the cultivation of empathy resulting from the presence of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse in their environment.



There exists a statistically significant difference in the sub-dimensions of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale, including professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in its necessity, avoidance scores and general scores, based on the parents' perspective on sex education. Participants from families with a positive perspective on sex education demonstrated significantly higher scores in professional support and respect for differences, parental role, belief in necessity, avoidance, and general scores of the Attitude toward Sex Education Scale compared to participants from families with a negative perspective. However, there was no statistically significant difference in the avoidance scores of participants based on their perspective on sex education. The avoidance scores of participants with positive and negative perspectives on sex education within their families were similar. According to these results, parents of children with special needs who hold a positive perspective on sex education exhibit higher attitude scores towards sex education. Positive attitudes are believed to foster positive behaviors, increase interest and enhance skills in the task at hand. Similar findings can be observed in the literature; Kakavoulis (2001) identified diverse opinions on the necessity of sex education in a survey study conducted with parents about family and sex education. Kır (2013) emphasizes in his research that sex education for individuals requiring special education is essential. Gürbüz (2018) reached findings indicating that children with special needs and their parents require sex education in their study.

Discussion on Gender Perception of Parents of Children with Special Needs and Demographic Variables

Average scores obtained from the Gender Perception Scale revealed that families' gender perceptions are high. This suggests that the gender perceptions of parents of children with special needs are positive, indicating an egalitarian perspective. Reviewing the literature reveals similar findings. In her study involving a participant group of 324 women, Çökelez (2023) found that working women exhibited higher gender perceptions compared to non-working women. Similarly, Özkan (2019) determined in his research on the relationship between gender perceptions and athlete self-efficacy among female football players studying at the university that, despite variations related to age and region of residence, female university football players generally held egalitarian gender perceptions.

The results of the present study showed that there is no statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores of parents of children with special needs according to age groups. In other words, participants aged 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 and 50 and above have similar Gender Perception Scale scores. This finding suggests that parents of children with special needs should engage in further research to facilitate their children's independence and seek expert opinions. Expert opinions are believed to promote egalitarian attitudes. However, when examining the literature, contrasting results emerge. Aksu's (2021) study revealed that participants aged 18-25 exhibited higher average scores on the Gender Perception Scale compared to other age groups. Conversely, Kurşun (2016) arrived at a different conclusion, observing that younger employees in Samsun demonstrated more positive attitudes than their older counterparts. This discrepancy might be attributed to the younger generation's greater receptivity to innovation and lower levels of burnout compared to older individuals.

A statistically significant difference exists in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on gender. Female participants scored significantly higher on the Gender Perception Scale compared to their male counterparts, indicating that female participants hold more egalitarian gender perceptions. It is posited that women tend to develop these attitudes to combat societal discrimination against women and challenge perceptions of them as weak or vulnerable individuals. Examining relevant literature reveals varying findings. Öngen and Aytaç (2013) discovered in their study that university students exhibited more egalitarian attitudes and accepted gender roles compared to men, though the study groups differed. Özpulat (2017) observed differences in gender perceptions among nursing students, with girls demonstrating more egalitarian views. Similarly, Çökelez (2023) found positive and egalitarian gender perceptions among women in her study with 324 literate volunteers. Özpulat (2016) observed gender-based variations in gender



perceptions among nursing students, with female students exhibiting more egalitarian attitudes. Conversely, Çetinkaya (2013), in a study on university students' inclinations towards violence, found that girls displayed more egalitarian gender perceptions. However, contrasting conclusions exist in the literature, such as Önder et al.'s (2013) study, which found that male students in the Health Management department of a university held more egalitarian attitudes towards gender perceptions compared to their female counterparts.

A statistically significant difference exists in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their marital status. Single participants scored significantly higher on the Gender Perception Scale compared to their married counterparts. This finding suggests that married parents, who typically shoulder more responsibilities, may have lower levels of empathy compared to unmarried parents. Examining relevant literature, Çifçi's (2018) study with individuals residing in Mardin revealed that married women exhibited more egalitarian gender perceptions compared to unmarried women, despite differences in study groups.

There is a statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their educational levels. Participants with postgraduate degrees scored significantly higher than those with primary school, middle school and high school degrees. Similarly, participants with university degrees scored significantly higher than those with primary school and middle school degrees. These findings suggest a positive correlation between parents' educational levels and their gender perceptions, indicating more egalitarian attitudes as educational attainment increases. Examining relevant literature, Gökçay and Akça (2020) found in their study with 350 women attending the Kafkas University Obstetrics and Gynecology Clinic that higher education levels were associated with more egalitarian gender perceptions. Similarly, Savaş (2018) concluded in his nationwide study in Turkey that as education levels rose, perceptions of gender equality also increased.

A statistically significant difference exists in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their monthly household income. Participants with higher monthly household incomes scored significantly higher than those with moderate and low incomes. It is hypothesized that parents with higher incomes possess greater awareness of gender equality, likely due to increased participation in social environments facilitated by their financial resources. Examining relevant literature, Kaya and Uysal (2015) found similar results in their research on the relationship between religious views and Gender Role Perceptions, where individuals with lower monthly incomes exhibited lower levels of acceptance toward gender roles compared to those with higher incomes. Additionally, Altuntaş and Altınova (2015) aimed to explore the association between socioeconomic status and gender perceptions in their study involving 511 parents from Ankara. They observed that as individuals' financial statuses improved, their gender perceptions tended to become more egalitarian.

There is no statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their sex education status. The scores of participants who received sex education and those who did not are similar. This result suggests a lack of impact of sex education on gender perceptions, potentially due to consistently high scores across both groups. Examining the literature, Bayyigit (2021) found in a study involving 235 special education teachers that in-service training did not influence teachers' gender perceptions. However, conflicting findings exist. May (1980) discovered in his study that special education teachers who underwent pre-service training applied their training in their professional lives. Similarly, Saracaloğlu, Karasakaloğlu and Gencil (2010) found in their research on the self-efficacy levels of Turkish language teachers that education significantly influenced self-efficacy.

There is no statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on the presence of individuals who have experienced sexual abuse in their environment. The scores of participants with a family member who has experienced sexual



abuse and those without such experience are similar. It is observed that parents of children with special needs often engage more actively in areas such as their children's health and education, which may contribute to more egalitarian gender perceptions. While similar findings were not found in the reviewed literature, there are studies with differing conclusions. For instance, Akdemir (2019) discovered in his study that trainers providing education to students with intellectual disabilities displayed significant changes in their attitudes toward sex education based on the presence of someone around them who has experienced sexual abuse.

There is no statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their attitude toward sex education. The scores of participants with a positive attitude toward sex education and those with a negative attitude are similar. Parents of children with special needs often demonstrate positive attitudes toward sex education, likely influenced by the delayed independence of their children in various skills compared to their peers. This positive attitude is believed to contribute to more egalitarian gender perceptions. Although no supporting findings were discovered in the reviewed literature, Bakır, Vural and Demir (2019) found a different result in their study involving 564 university students. They found that girls exhibited higher levels of positive attitudes toward sex education and more egalitarian gender perceptions compared to boys. This suggests that individuals with positive attitudes toward sex education may also hold positive and egalitarian gender perceptions.

There is no statistically significant difference in the Gender Perception Scale scores among parents of children with special needs based on their attitude toward sex education. The scores of participants with a positive attitude toward sex education and those with a negative attitude are similar. Parents of children with special needs often demonstrate more positive attitudes toward sex education, likely influenced by the delayed independence of their children in various skills compared to their peers. This positive attitude is believed to contribute to more egalitarian gender perceptions. Although no other findings supporting this perspective were found in the reviewed literature, a different result was obtained by Bakır, Vural and Demir (2019) in a study with a sample of 564 university students. They found that girls exhibited higher levels of positive attitudes toward sex education and more egalitarian gender perceptions compared to boys. This suggests that individuals with a positive attitude toward sex education may also hold positive and egalitarian gender perceptions.

A positive and statistically significant correlation exists between the overall scores of the Attitude Toward Sex Education Scale and its sub-dimensions (professional support and respect for differences, belief in necessity, and avoidance) with the overall scores of the Gender Perception Scale for parents of children with special needs. As participants' scores on professional support and respect for differences, belief in necessity, and avoidance increase, their overall scores on the Attitude Toward Sex Education Scale also increase positively and significantly correlate with the overall scores on the Gender Perception Scale. This finding suggests that positive attitudes are associated with the development of positive perceptions. Similar findings were observed in the study conducted by Bakır, Vural and Demir (2019) on the attitudes toward sex education and gender perceptions of university students. They found that girls exhibited higher attitudes toward sex education compared to boys and had more egalitarian gender perceptions. Therefore, it is concluded that higher overall scores on the Attitude Toward Sex Education Scale significantly enhance the overall scores on the Gender Perception Scale in a positive direction.

Based on the findings obtained from this research, some recommendations have been made for further research and applications. It is recommended to conduct informative and awareness-raising activities on sex education to improve the attitudes of families with children with special needs towards sex education and to prevent potential sexual diseases and abuse. Sex education courses should be added to the curriculum of special education, preschool, primary, and secondary schools to become part of education policy and practices. Making sex education courses mandatory in departments such as Special Education Teaching, Classroom Teaching and Preschool Teaching in universities can also be

suggested. Awareness about sex education from early childhood can be increased through appropriate cartoons, visual books, and similar awareness-raising activities. Providing parents with education on gender equality can support the upbringing of their children with egalitarian attitudes from a young age. Visual materials promoting awareness of gender equality can be prepared and disseminated to the public through various mass media channels. The attitudes and gender perceptions of families with children diagnosed with different disability groups towards sex education can be examined. A deeper investigation using qualitative methods can be conducted to identify the difficulties experienced by families regarding sex education.

Ethics and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted according to ethical and research standards. All participants participated to study were volunteers. Information about study subject, aim and researchers were given to the participants. As the authors of this study, we declare that we collected data in accordance with ethical rules during the research process and acted in accordance with all ethical rules. We also declare that there is no conflict among the authors.

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