



The Impact of High School Sexual Health Education on College Sexual Stigma



UC San Diego

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science

Liana Melikian, Shivani Panchal, and Kylie Schwartz

Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science, UC San Diego

Background

- Adequate sexual health education encompasses topics such as consent, anatomy, and STIs,¹ and is crucial in empowering individuals to establish healthy sexual relationships and make informed decisions regarding their health.²
- The presence of sexual stigma in formative years poses a significant obstacle to cultivating a healthy and safe sex life, heightening the risk of unintended pregnancy and negatively impacting mental health.³

Objective

To examine the relationship between receiving sexual health education in high school and its impact on sexual stigma among UC San Diego undergraduates.

Methods

- Conducted a **cross-sectional** online survey of **101 UCSD undergraduates** (April-May 2024)
 - Included questions on **sexual health education history** and **attitudes towards sex topics**
- Recruited participants via campus flyers, word-of-mouth, social media, and UCSD BSPH email
- Exposure:** Receiving sexual health education in high school
- Outcome:** Sexual stigmas held in college (Comfort with Sexual Communication⁴)
- Assigned scores according to comfort levels for each topic, with **higher total scores indicating less sexual stigma**
- Differences in sexual stigma by education were analyzed via **linear regression** using R statistical software

Results



Sample Characteristics

Sexual Health Education Received	Yes, N = 87 ¹	No, N = 14 ¹
Gender		
Female	68 (78%)	13 (93%)
Male	19 (22%)	1 (7.1%)
Age		
≤19	16 (18%)	4 (29%)
20-21	51 (59%)	7 (50%)
22≤	20 (23%)	3 (21%)

Female: 81; Male: 20



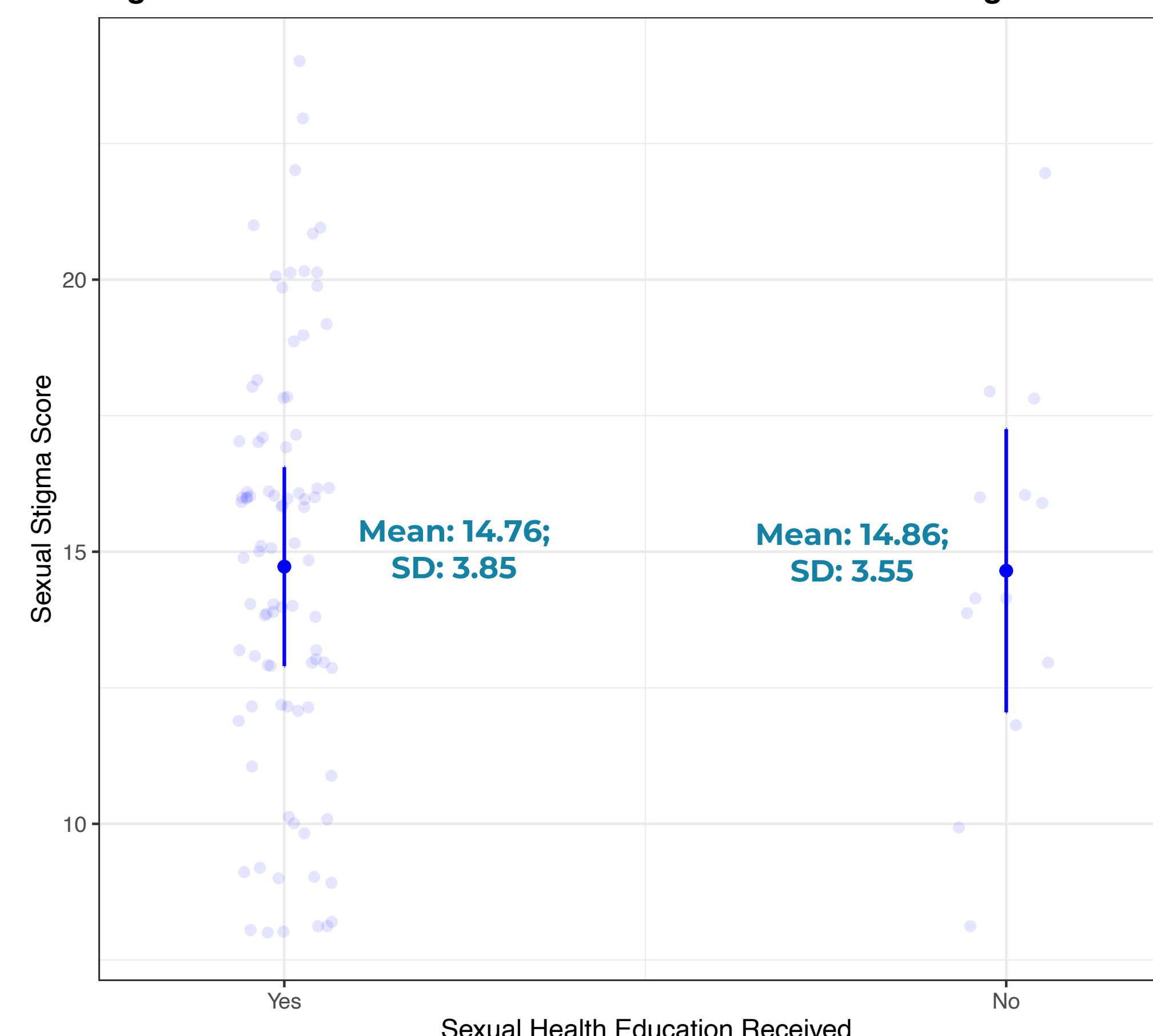
Linear Regression Analysis

Characteristic	Beta	95% CI ¹	p-value
Sexual Health Education Received			
Yes	—	—	
No	-0.08	-2.4, 2.2	0.95
Sex			
Female	—	—	
Male	-0.19	-2.1, 1.8	0.85
Age			
≤19	—	—	
20-21	0.37	-1.7, 2.4	0.72
22≤	-0.61	-3.0, 1.8	0.61

¹ CI = Confidence Interval

- Sexual Health Education Received:** No difference in sexual stigma by sex education received was observed (B = -0.08, [95% CI = -2.4, 2.2], p = 0.95)
- Sex:** No difference in sexual stigma by sex education received was observed between males and females (B = -0.19, [95% CI = -2.1, 1.8], p = 0.85)

Figure 1: Sexual Health Education Received and Sexual Stigma Score



Conclusion

- Sexual health education in high school **does not appear to be associated** with sexual stigma among UCSD undergraduates.
- There is also **no significant difference** between sexual stigma in either gender or age.
- Limitations** include gender disparity, insufficient data on those who did not receive sexual health education, and the small sample size.
- Further research** should prioritize obtaining a larger, more diverse sample with participants from across the country to better reflect regional variations in sex education policies.

Policy Implications

Sexual health education should be upheld in all public high schools throughout the country, and school boards should advocate for appropriate, expansive sexual health education.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr. Matthew Stone and Araz Majnoonian for their support and guidance, as well as the participants in our study.

References

