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## Efficacy of No-Nit Policies: An Integrative Literature Review

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# Efficacy of No-Nit Policies: An Integrative Literature Review

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## Introduction

In an effort to fight head lice outbreaks in schools in the mid-1980s, school districts around the country developed No-Nit Policies, an exclusionary program forcing any student to be found with active lice or nits--lice eggs--to be banned from attending class until completely removed. Soon backlash developed from parents due to the excessive amount of time students were missing from school, and the overall associated costs. Despite the American Academy of Pediatrics condemning the policy, a number of schools still implement it today.

## Purpose

Is the No-Nit Policy effective in reducing the transmission of lice in school aged children?

Should the Policy continue to be implemented by school nurses as a way of controlling head lice infestations among vulnerable populations?

Does the No-Nit Policy have a psychological impact or stigmatize children and families suffering from the policy's ramifications?

## Methods

### Research Design

An integrative literature review will examine the efficacy of the No-Nit policy in schools, summarizing the past and present literature in an effort to provide an inclusive look at the problem with the policy. This method of study is beneficial to use in efforts to advance the field of nursing and increase evidence based practice. By synthesizing other nurses' research, while comparing findings and hypotheses through a literature review, nurses have the ability to make an informed decision related to the issue of concern.

### Search Methods

Articles for this integrative literature search were those that were peer-reviewed and published between the years 1998 and 2016. All articles were related to the No-Nit Policy in school settings and their effects on various aspects of a child or parent's lifestyle. Search strategies involved the use and review of articles in numerous databases including, PubMed, ProQuest Nursing & Allied Health Source, and Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL) Complete.

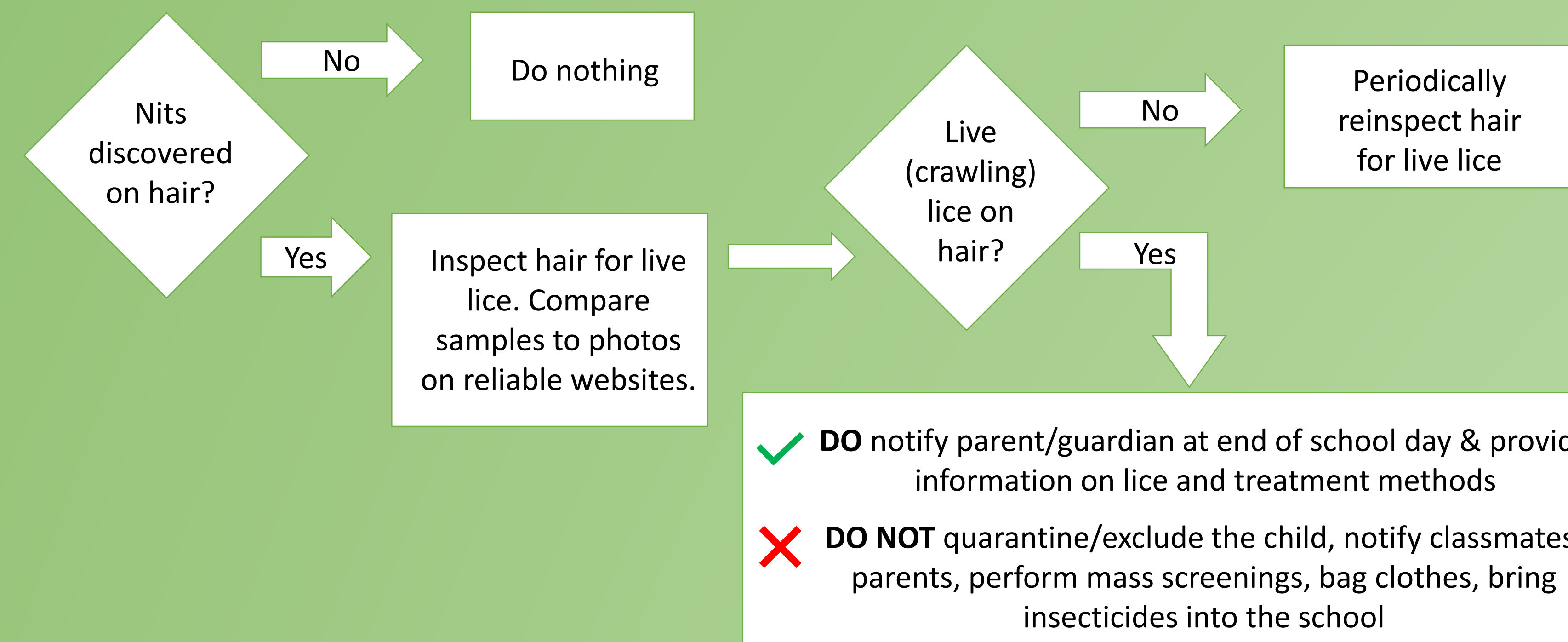
### Data Analysis & Synthesis

The research articles found and used for this integrative literature review were evaluated based on rigor and relevance in an effort to increase the quality and complexity of the information incorporated. For this literature review, the main fields were Community Health, School Nursing, and Healthcare, the organization of the information would, ideally, point out how lice infestations play a role in individuals' lives, and how the No-nit Policy also has an effect in different ways for those infected.

## Findings

The No-Nit Policy used in schools, particularly elementary and middle schools, is an ineffective effort to manage lice infestations in children. With unnecessary days of school lost, high treatment costs, and indirect consequences on parents and a child's morale, there needs to be another option to handle a diagnosis. Additional research shows that a school is less of a place of transmission than initially reported in the 1980s, as well as shows evidence that nits do not have as great of a chance of developing into lice as once proclaimed. Keeping students from school is an isolating and futile effort in an attempt of a total elimination of pediculosis from the school community.

Furthermore, informing and suggesting treatment of all those who were in the vicinity of the infected student is unnecessary and one of the reasons there is an increasing rate of resistance among pediculicide agents. The literature suggests complete removal of the policy from schools, and research into potential ways to combat lice breakouts in classrooms without ostracizing students, disrupting parental work life, and overtreating other students and siblings.



Sciscione & Krause-Parello, 2007

## Discussion

The present policies are based on fear and misinformation by administrators and parent groups, as opposed to research proven scientific evidence. School districts across the United States, in collaboration with school nurses, need to re-think the way lice outbreaks are handled in the classroom, with a bigger emphasis on teaching helpful methods for removal than fear-mongering by disgusted parents. Major school health based organizations, including the National Association of School Nurses, the American School Health Association, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, have taken stances in accordance to the research condemning the use of such policies in school settings. Despite the recommendations of such organizations, schools and districts are still found to be implementing stringent policies.

The numerous implications caused by the No-nit Policy alone is a serious burden to place on the backs of small children, who have done nothing wrong but interact with their friends. Lice does not indicate uncleanliness and is not associated with specific socioeconomic statuses. The continuance of the policy in American school systems is playing into the overall resistance of treatment options and hinders a child's education and social development.

## Nursing Implications

Research suggests that there are a number of flaws regarding this policy that a school nurse would have a direct impact on incorporating change.

Increased education for parents and school teachers would offer a change in how individuals with particular clout react to outbreaks within the school.

- Offering information sessions at school open houses, parent teacher conferences, and PTA meetings
- Sessions would include literature that is clear and understandable for parents of all educational backgrounds
- Having face-to-face conversations with parents and teachers worried about the spread would allow for increased communication from all parties with nurses and allow for thorough explanation regarding school policy.

School nurses could use the research to encourage different methods of ridding a child of lice that does not solely rely on pediculicides.

- Nurses may decrease the chance of resistance of certain insecticides in that particular school community
- School nurses could offer educational seminars on how to properly wet-comb a child's head that helps engage the child rather than having parents fight with the child throughout the process.

School Nurses could use the research as a way to handle headlice outbreaks similarly to the precautions taken during cold and flu season in schools.

- Offering to wash dress up costumes regularly for preschool and kindergarten classes
- Providing information to parents on how regularly and the best methods to wash winter headwear and sports related headwear

## Future Research

Additional research on the subject would be beneficial to have a better idea of how No-Nit policies continue to pervade children's' education. The following would be beneficial avenues for further research:

- How many school continue to implement No-Nit policies, and how does it affect absence rates in the US?
  - Long term potential with these school studying psycho social pressures from peers and familial impact.
- The transmission rates and prevalence in school settings, particularly with elementary and preschool aged children.
- What is the best method to scan large numbers of children within a particular time frame, such as at the beginning of the school year?
- Creation and Implementation of an educational program for school administrators and teachers on the transmission and spread of lice in schools.
  - Long term surveying would allow researchers to see if more education on the subject could dispel the fear behind lice infections and outbreaks. Could teacher awareness lead to parental awareness on the subject?