

Teachers' conceptions about sexual health education in Ukraine

Jolien van der Geugten¹, Olena Shyyan², Yevheniya Slyvka² & Fred Brinkman^{1*}

¹*INHolland University of Applied Sciences
Research Centre of Media, Culture & Citizenship
Diemen, The Netherlands
E-mail: Jolien.vanderGeugten@INHolland.nl
E-mail: Fred.Brinkman@INHolland.nl*

**The contributions of Nikki van Gool and Eileen Huussen, students of Pedagogical studies at the INHolland University Amsterdam, to the research and development in this project are greatly acknowledged.*

²*Lviv In-service Teacher Training Institute
Department of Life Competence
Lviv, Ukraine
E-mail: olshyyan@hotmail.com
E-mail: slyvka_zhenya@mail.ru*

Abstract

This paper is about the sexual health education situation in Ukraine and the conceptions of Ukrainian (student) teachers, consultants and trainers in health education. The major problem in sexual education in school in Ukraine is the overcoming of psychological barriers by teachers to address a question about «sex» with students. A problem is predefined that most teachers belong to the generation, educated in a spirit of Soviet Union where sexuality was a taboo. In independent Ukraine, the theme of sexual education is part of the school and the university curriculum. So, most of the teachers are interested in means to educate sexual health.

Key words: sexuality, health education, Ukraine, taboos, HIV/AIDS

1. Introduction

Sexual health education is a relevant topic in teacher education. One of the most convincing reasons, that forces society to spare more attention to sexual education of their children is a statistic one. It shows that in Ukraine sex begins in 13-14 years - more than ten percent from the children of this age already had sexual experience. Twenty percent from those, who were 15-16 years and 25 percent from 13-14 years old didn't use contraceptive during sex and almost every third was drug influenced or consumed an alcohol before entered into a contact with a partner (statistics of International Bank of Reconstruction and Development).

Apart from that, Ukraine stands in the first rows among the European countries that makes an epicenter of AIDS distribution. So far the AIDS epidemic, which spreads over all the territory of

Ukraine, is concentrated in the «groups of risk» - mainly among those, who accept drugs through injections. But, after prognoses, during only ten years an epidemic will spread on a general population by a transmission from the persons of one floor to another. So, for the last decade of distribution of infection among those, who pricks drugs, fallen down from 84 percent to 40 percent. However much the fate of cases, when an infection was got during sexual relations, grew from 11,3 percent to 38 percent (statistics of International Bank of Reconstruction and Development).

For education, especially teachers in biology and health (care) have opportunities to focus on sexual health topics. In this paper we focus on the situation of sexual education in Ukraine. We also report about research on conceptions of pupils and teachers of sexual education. The research questions were: Which conceptions about sexual health education of teachers in health education in Ukraine can be found? And which of these conceptions can be used in developing a teaching strategy for effective sexual health education?

In the first paragraph the sexual health situation in Ukraine is described. The research question that is investigated in Ukraine is explained in paragraph 3. Paragraph 4 reports about the results of the investigation. Finally the conclusion and discussion on what consequences for teacher education can be formulated.

2. Theoretical background & situation in Ukraine

2.1 Sexual education in general

Some authors (Horbunova, 2006) consider that actuality of the problem of sexual education is conditioned by a lot of reasons. The first is related to the absence of the differentiated approach to the children in accordance with their sexual belonging. The second one is the incompetence of teachers and parents in the questions of sexual education of children, which results into the swift growth to the absence of early orientation on implementation of social role in life (father, mother, wife and husband). Especially sharp are the contradictions between: on one hand the increasing of family's role as bases of modern society and on the other hand youth's unreadiness to create a family; the confession of the growing role of woman in society and man's unwillingness to accept it in their own family; understanding of family's values and standards of sexually-role relations and instability of modern matrimonial relations; the increasing number of divorces, especially among young people; declared equality of women and men in family and failure to carry out by men their social roles of husband and father.

In Ukraine the main task of actual sexual education is the promotion of a harmonious development of a rising generation and into moral intersexual relations, an into the strengthening of marriage and family. Therefore sexual education can not be examined dissociated from the general questions of

education, which prepares the young generation not only to work and to public activity but also to the personal life. Together with that «sexual problem» is also a social-hygienic problem, related to the health, capacity, mood of people and their way of life.

2.2 Sexual education in the school curriculum in Ukraine

The theme sexual education is part of the school and the university curriculum. It fragmentary takes place in such subjects as: Biology, Valeology, Health Basics, Psychology and others. The problem decision of healthy conduct choice is fixed on the new integrated course of the school program – Health Basics, the task of which is to influence by pedagogical methods on consciousness and conduct of students by development of their values, relations, vital and special skills, friendly to the health, safety, harmonious development and success.

In the courses of Valeology and Health Basics sexual education is seen as the basics for a healthy family and as a prophylaxis of sexually transmitted diseases. It occupies such problems as: evolution of carnal knowledge; physiological and social-psychological preparedness to sexual relations; physical health as a necessary condition for valuable sexual relations in the family; gender context of the children's and teenager's sexual education system; marriage and law; family's functions in society; planning of the pregnancy; genetic counseling; methods of contraception; abortion and its consequences; venereal diseases and AIDS as a result of casual relations and unprotected intercourse; narcotic and toxic elements like alcohol using as a factor that stipulate inherited diseases and violates sexual functions in future.

Actually, great expectations are laid on the subject of Health Basics; teaching of disciplines that form motivation on the healthy way of life for students requires a new, high-quality method of research on teaching, that is based on the principle of knowledge's acquisition, not seen as a task of for teaching. These methods form a competence approach (knowledge is for the sake of abilities) which is based on forming and development of vital skills. It also grounds the necessity of forming the realized behavioural reactions, which would allow successfully deciding a task of self-defence from a risk conduct, overcoming of vital difficulties, everyday problems and other problems which open up in maintenance of educational subject (Voroncova & Ponomarenko, 2006-2007).

Health Basics – is an obligatory subject in Ukraine for pupils of 5-9 classes (10 – 14 years old pupils). The continuation of this subject is “School against AIDS” for 9-11 classes, and is not obligatory. Health Basics is a cross curricular subject with Valeology, Biology, Basis of Life Safety and Physical education as the main subject areas.

In sexual socialization an important place also is occupied by the lessons of Physical Education, which promote the perfection of both physical and moral qualities of man, eliminate possibility of provocation of early sexual interest, form honest, friendship, sincere between the persons of

different sex. Physical education, from one side, must eliminate or weaken harmful influences on child's organism, which would stimulate a premature sexual learning. From the other side – to create terms which are instrumental in switching from hormonal activity of the sexual ripening on other activity and the same to improve physical and mental development of rising generation (Kolbanovskyy, 1979).

It is known that harmony in sexual intercourse is determined by a good physical preparation. It is well-proven by Ukrainian and foreign sexologists, that a good physical condition of a man to a great extent determines his sexual desires (Kravets' V., 2005). Women, which execute physical exercises regularly, have fewer problems with a menstrual cycle (Kravets' V., 2005). The physical loadings are useful to the girls, the muscles of abdominal press and pelvis become more elastic that is enough important in the period of maternity.

Today in scientific circles precede a discussion about the speciality of teachers which can lay out the subject "Health Basics". At the same time numerous scientific labours (Polulyah, 2002; Horashchuk, 2005; Kyryl'chenko, 2007 etc.) lead to efficiency of intercommunication between the health of children and physical education which confirms an idea about expedience to inculcate this discipline by teachers from physical education.

Unfortunately, the system of Physical Education teacher's preparation, which exists today, does not answer these requirements, connected with the inclusion of Ukraine into European educational space. Achievement of the proper high-quality level of PE teachers' professional readiness has to become the purpose of pedagogical processes for athletic education and for the development of youth's motivation on a healthy life style by facilities of physical education (Shyyan & Slyvka, 2008). So, the task of finding new technologies in teacher's preparation is immediate for Ukrainian education, and the best results can be found with interchanging and account of cross cultural experiences (Van der Geugten, et al., 2008).

The main problem in educational philosophy is the question about new methods of research, which can make a mind enough sharp and flexible for an "unstereotype thought" – such, that could absorb and retain information and be creative during all working process.

In school Biology acquaintance with the differences of man and woman individual's role in the process of kind preserving begins in the section "Plant". Here pupils get the first knowledge about sex organs and cells, differences in their structure and functions. The section "Animals" acquaints pupils with differences in a structure and role of man and woman individuals. In a section "Man and his health" pupils, studying the features of organism systems structure, meet with the differences in their structure for man and woman. In a theme "Locomotory system", the features of pelvic bones structure, skeletal muscles of man and woman are examined; in a theme "Blood" goes speech about content of red corpuscles for the individuals of different sex; in a theme "Respiratory organs" a

question is studied about the sexual differences of vital capacity of lights. The special place in a biology course occupies theme "Reproduction and development of man's organism". The structure of the sexual system features of its functioning for men and women processes of impregnation and pregnancy, disease of the sexual system, and their prophylaxis. A separate place in this theme is occupied by the questions of birth and equal responsibility of man's and woman's control of the most favourable terms creation for womb development, birth and growth of a child.

The school biology program, unfortunately, small attention is given to psychosexual teenager's development, stages of sexual appealing and differences of this process for girls and boys. Extra education is needed here.

2.3 Historical backgrounds

The analysis of maintenance of school curriculum shows that the proper place is taken to the question of sexual education, but, unfortunately, it does not give the desired results. There is a row of reasons, why sexual education at school is ineffective. One of them and, probably, the major, there is a problem of overcoming of psychological barrier by teachers to affect a question about «sex» with students. A problem is predefined that most teachers belong to the generation, educated in a spirit of Soviet Union where, as it's known «there was no sex», so there was no necessity to speak about sex. Except for that, the totalitarian modes repress the sex appeal of the citizens in general, so as the last is the most powerful method of expressions the unique human individuality, which are hostile to essence of totalitarianism. Obviously, that formed in society in which it is not accepted to affect the question of sexual education, and the educational process is build on principles of serving the knowledge and its control, it's psychologically hard for teachers to tune on principles of competence forming for students in the problem of sexual education. Consequently, today's state of the problem is a direct investigation of "sexless pedagogic" of the past years in a collision with expansion of «sexual revolution», and its basic criterion are the teachers that didn't have special preparation and are not acquainted with the methods of sexual education.

Pupil's lack of information about elementary questions in sexual education is an alarm signal. Most teenagers hear about sexual life and baby birth from the persons of the same age, or as we got used to talk - "in the street", on television and internet. Only 19% of young men got necessary advices from parents, which feel free them to tell about intimate. Only third part of future mothers can get such information in the own family.

Educators who stand opposite to formal sexual education says that "school sexual education" can authoritatively curve the nature of sexual attitudes, because they are interpreted exceptionally in terms of biological instinct, and because it takes place in a neutralizing "laboratory" atmosphere. They argue the position with the fact that, when children will not hear about sex at school, in any

case, they'll hear about «it» in the street. But such argument can serve as only evidence of necessity for parents in the proper and deferential method informed their children about carnal knowledge, and beginning from the age of 2-3, when sexual integration of child – boy or girl started. Parents have to know, that relationships teenagers enter in intimate not only through an especially physical train. They just want to try new feelings, wish to grow up quickly, feel a requirement in love and closeness, and they are afraid to fall behind from the children of the same age... And only correct sexual education can help young men and girls to say „yes”, if they indeed want it and ready to the intimate relationships, and „no” – if they against (Putilina Y., 2009).

2.4 Cultural backgrounds

An addressing to the best traditions of Ukrainian culture which equates sexual education with education of senses can, to a significant degree, help parents and teachers to get success in sexual education of the children. The prime example of it is comparing between concepts “to have sex” with a concept “to have love”. From the ancient time the Ukrainian woman differed by self-respect, she always was a guard of home morality; she didn't stand infidelity of the man. Relations in the Ukrainian family were built on confession of equality of rights between man and woman. The emancipation of the Ukrainian woman is related not only to tailings of matriarchy in Ukrainian character, but also often with the forced absence of man at home (liberation wars, kozakuvannya, chumactvo). A woman often was responsible to stay ahead of the family and to execute masculine work. The important element of the system of costs of family education is equilibrium of paternal and maternal, masculine and womanish elements (Vyshnevskyy, 1996).

3. Field research in Ukraine

Research question

The project ‘East West’ of INHolland University investigates for several years health education in order to develop effective teacher strategies in The Netherlands, Ukraine and Belarus (Brinkman, Van der Geugten & Jager, 2006; Van der Geugten, et al., 2008).

This year the project focused on the following questions: *How can (student) teachers in Ukraine educate youth effectively about sexuality? And how can pupils in Ukraine effectively be educated about sexuality?*

Target group

A visit to the Ukrainian cities Kiev and Lviv is made. There have been investigated 69 pupils between 14 and 16 years at three different schools and 52 (student) teachers and trainers in health

education in the age of 17 till 70 years old at different institutions: Salus Foundation (trainers), Lviv Inservice Institute (consultants Health Education and student teachers Health Education) and National Taras Shevchenko University Kiev (student teachers).

Research method

The research method consisted out of three parts. First all the respondents made as a pretest a Hierarchical Concept mapping and drawing test (HC-test) to inventory their conceptions about sexuality and sexual education (Boschhuizen & Brinkman, 1995; Kievits, et al., 1998).

Secondly the respondents played 'the cup game', a game to make people realize about the fastness sexual transmitted diseases (std's) like HIV/Aids spread when having unsafe sex (Rutgers Nisso Groep, 2008). All the respondents got a cup half filled with water, two of the cups were filled with lots of salt (the respondents weren't aware of the salt). The respondents got the assignment to pour over water with people they like. In this way the salt spreads. After a couple of minutes the respondents are asked to sit down and take a sip of their cup. Everybody who tastes salt had to stand up, in general all the respondents stood up. The fast spread of salt shows the fastness of the spread of a std when having unsafe sex. For the pupils the game is to emphasize the importance of having safe sex, for teachers and trainers this is an example of an educational mean for sexual education.

Finally the respondents filled in an questionnaire to inventory the opinion of the pupils about the game, to check if the pupils understood the meaning of the game, to inventory how the teachers and consultants think about sexual education and education means for sexual education before and after the cup game.

4. Results

4.1 Pupils

According to the HC-test the investigated pupils in Ukraine associate positive aspects with sexuality, like feelings and relations. The pupils drew hearts, couples and flowers, this is mainly related to emotional aspects of sexuality. According to results from the questionnaires the pupils have knowledge about several std's, nevertheless their knowledge is low. The pupils write that sex with an unknown partner is unsafe sex. Somehow this is true, on condition that no prevention method is used. Pupils don't mention that.

Even though pupils in Ukraine aren't very used to active learning, they think the cup game is nice and instructive. This corresponds to the research results that youth prefers to be informed about sex by discussion, games and images (De Graaf, et al., 2005). The majority of the pupils would like to play a game like the cup game more often, they are not specific about the content of the games they

prefer in future. The pupils find it difficult to speak about this subject in the classroom, this had to do with feelings of shame and insecurity. With the cup game pupils are in a relaxed way introduced to sexual education.

Based on the research there have been formulated some recommendations: (1) Separation of girls and boys in some topics of sexual education. In this way girls and boys feel more free to discuss gender related topics. Educate girls and boys together about sexuality to achieve that they learn from each other. (2) In sexual education in Ukraine the educators should make use of the emotional and positive feelings the pupils have when they think of sexuality, to introduce sexuality and to educate effectively. Because following Ausubel (1986) 'the most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows'. (3) Use active means of education. Pupils like it and they learn more than only listening to the teacher. (4) The teacher can inventory the conceptions of the pupils about several aspects of sexuality before they educate about sexuality, for example with a mind map.

4.2 Teachers, trainers and consultants

The teachers, trainers and consultants made also a HC-test, played the cup game and filled in a questionnaire. This field research confirmed the taboo on sexuality, even with teachers and trainers in health education. The respondents were the whole time very interested, but at the same time when the subject sexuality came up most of the respondents laughed and started feeling uncomfortable.

According to the HC-test the respondents think physiology and anatomy are important in sexual education. Consultants find it important that youth knows about their physical development in puberty. The drawings consist of relationships, love, lots of hearts, flowers and couples.

According to the questionnaires the respondents think the cup game is suitable for sexual education, and most of them will try the game with their own pupils. The respondents think they can educate youth better on sexual health with games as educational means. They expect youth to remember the message better. The respondents think std's, pregnancies and lack of knowledge is the biggest problem in their surroundings. In their opinion this should be more emphasized in the school program. The respondents think school and parents are an important source of sexual education. Next to the teacher and the parents, they think psychologists and doctors are the right persons for sexual education.

From the interviews it becomes more clear that Ukrainian parents seem to be reserved concerning the sexual development of their child. Delfos (2003) says the relation between parents in the family influences the sexual development of the child. The Ukrainian children can take over the shyness of their parents and think it's strange to talk about such subjects. Moreover parents seem to be

frightened when their children talk about sexual health related issues. Parents complain to the teacher that they shouldn't promote sexuality and having sex. This can be a reason why teachers don't want to educate sexual health. Next to that most of the respondents don't write about HIV/Aids or homosexuality in their HC-test on sexuality, nor in the questionnaire or the interview.

In general there wasn't a visible change in conceptions about sexual education in the HC-test before the cup game and in the questionnaire after the game. But the respondents mention especially the importance of the way sexual education is given in the questionnaire. Most of the respondents are not satisfied about the present sexual education. They think most problems in their environment are caused by lack of knowledge. According to the respondents the education should be improved with using activating didactic means (like the cup game), then sexual health education will be effective. Then pupils learn in a playfully way, that is positive for communicating the message of the didactic mean. Based on the research there have been formulated some aspects to take into account for Ukrainian teachers and trainers in sexual education. (1) Parents are reserved concerning sexuality, it is important that teachers talk to parents before they educate sexual health in the classroom. With this you prevent parents who complain and disagree with talking about the topic. It is important that teachers emphasize that sexual health education is about risks and sexual development of the children, and not to promote sexuality. Part of the respondents tell that parents but also colleagues think you promote having sex or becoming a homosexual if you talk about these topics in the classroom. To educate about sexual health the teacher can inventory the conceptions of the children (also mentioned in the previous paragraph).

(2) Teachers should be prepared to educate sexual health. On one hand the teacher should have the knowledge and the skills to educate sexual health. On the other hand the teacher should be aware of his or her own conceptions about sexuality.

(3) Sexuality must become part of the school curriculum. Then teachers have to educate about sexuality, and parents can't complain. Of course it's still uncertain which topics teachers talk about in the classroom.

(4) Inviting a guest from an organization makes it sometime easier to talk about sensitive topics for teachers and pupils.

(5) Teachers can use an anonymous box for questions and topics of pupils. The teachers knows what pupils like to know and the pupils will not feel insecure. In this case it's not up to the teacher to choose the topics, but up to the pupils. (6) Teacher can make appointments about language, there are different (rough) words to use for genitals and sexual intercourse. With these appointments teachers and pupils feel less ashamed about the words they say, and everybody knows what's allowed and what isn't. (7) Using active didactical mean in sexual education stimulates pupils to

discover ideas and insights by themselves. The teacher challenges the pupils by using active educational means to think critical and to reflect on their learning process.

5. Discussion

This paper described the sexual education situation in Ukraine and reported about field research on conceptions of Ukrainian teachers and pupils about sexuality.

Sexual education of the children is the complex task for parents, teachers, physicians, psychologists, social services, government etc. But sufficiently often responsibility holds from one shoulder on other, as a result children that weren't explained and educated suffer of, and didn't know how they have to manage with their natural necessities. This paper provides some points of discussion.

How do cultural aspects of sexual education have to be taken into account? For example sex before marriage, how do people think about sex before marriage in Ukraine? Is it uncommon, is it allowed? Do adults think different than youth on this topic? No matter what the answer is, teachers should know what to do in sexual education. Do they have to prevent youth from having sex, or do they have to prepare them on having relationships and (save) sex?

Besides, important is the issue if sex is still a taboo in Ukraine. As earlier explained in independent Ukraine sex isn't a big secret anymore. Nevertheless the generation that grew up in Soviet Union times - when sexuality was a taboo - are today's parents and teachers. Sexual health is part of the school and university curriculum, and teachers are interested in means to educate sexual health. The conditions are improved to talk about sex and sexuality more freely. Although a taboo can not disappear with the independence of a country, it is embedded deeply in peoples thoughts and behavior. That is also experienced during field research by Dutch researchers in Ukraine. Sexuality appears on adverts on the street, television and internet. But the subject is still difficult to talk about in the classroom. Teachers don't feel free to talk about it and parents are also not positive if children learn about sexuality (some say that you then promote sexuality). Moreover the reactions of Ukrainian pupils and teachers in the past years on games about relations, love and prevention of sexual transmitted diseases made by Dutch researchers were received with lots of laughing and tension.

Another point of discussion are the goals of Physical education in Ukraine. As described before Physical education in Ukraine tries to change hormonal activities of children. But we need to know more about the practical application and effectiveness of this goals for education. How is it possible and why is it necessary to change hormonal activities of children by (sexual) education?

It is clear that in developing programs for sexual education, the historical and cultural aspects of Ukraine have to be taken into account. Most relevant is how the goals of sexual education in Ukraine fit the goals of other European colleagues, and how we can prevent children from (sexual)

risks with education and educational means.

References

- Boschhuizen, R., & Brinkman, F. (1995). Proposal for a teaching strategy based on preinstructional Ideas of pupils. environmental education: The use of pupils' ideas about cycles of nature and health. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 14(1), 45-55.
- Brinkman, F., Geugten, J. van der. en Jager, T. (2006) Teachers and student teachers in Belarus, Ukraine and The Netherlands use value dilemmas of life, developing HIV/AIDS related strategies for education. Paper presented at the ATEE conference in Slovenia 2006.
- Delfos, M. (2003). Seksuele oplichting, je weg vinden als kind in het seksuele oerwoud. Jaarboek 2003: Jongeren Seksualiteit, Janusz Korczak Stichting, Uitgeverij Narratio Amsterdam.
- Geugten, van der, J., Shyyan, O., Brinkman, F., Jager, T. (2008). Using research methods and educational means to investigate pupils' and teachers' cultural concepts in The Netherlands, Belarus and Ukraine. Workshop for ATEE Brussels, August 26th 2008.
- Gool, van, N. (2009). Seksuele voorlichting? Oekraïne is er aan toe... Bachelor Thesis, INHolland University, School of Pedagogical studies.
- Graaf, de, H., Meijer, S., Poelman, J., Vanwesenbeeck, I. (2005). Seks onder je 25^e. Seksuele gezondheid van jongeren in Nederland anno 2005. Rutgers Nisso Groep/Soa Aids Nederland.
- Huussen, E. (2009). "... en het is beter wanneer er sprake is van liefde". Seksuele voorlichting in Oekraïne. Bachelor Thesis, INHolland University, School of Pedagogical studies.
- Hildebrand, von, D. (1972). «Sex Education». In: Sex Education: the Basic Issues.
- Hovorun, T. (2002). Your sexual and reproductive health.*
- Kievits, L., Huisman, L., Brinkman, F. (1998). Pupils' conceptions about food in contaminated areas. Paper presented at the ERIDOB-conference in Goteborg November 1998.
- Kravets, V. (1997). School psychologist activity in pupils' preparation for creation the family.*
- Kuznetsova, O. (2004). Pupils' sexual education.*
- Petrun'ko, O. (2004). Actual problems of pupils' sexual education.*
- Rutgers Nisso Groep. (1998). Aids-bekerspel. Rutgers Nisso Groep. Retrieved from: http://www.seksuelevorming.nl/index.php?option=com_material&task=view&material_id=19&searchtheme_id%5B%5D=0&Itemid=57, August 4th 2009.
- Shyyan, O., Slyvka, Y. (2009). The particularities of school health education in Ukraine.*
- Vasyanovych, G. (1994). Ethnopedagogic and morally-ethically pupils' education.*
- Vyshnevskyy, O. (1996) Modern Ukrainian education. Pedagogic essay.*

World Health Organization. (n.y.). Sexual health. Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html#3>, 14 October 2008.

**Reference is translated from Cyrillic.*

Acknowledgements

The contributions of Nikki van Gool and Eileen Huussen, students of Pedagogical studies at the INHolland University Amsterdam, to the research and development in this project are greatly acknowledged. We thank the Lutheran Orphanage Home Amsterdam for their financial support. We thank the Lviv Inservice Teacher Training Institute, National Taras Shevchenko University Kiev, SALUS Foundation, Aids Foundation East West, School 318, School 2 and School 115 for their cooperation.