

HOME-BASED SEX EDUCATION. THE CASE OF FAMILY INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN POLAND

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Abstract

In school practice, sex education is often a field of stereotypes. Also, very little is known about the quality and content of home-based sex education. Therefore, the objective of this research was the analysis of gender socialization experiences of young men and women in their families of origin. The quantitative and qualitative analyses of very detailed questionnaires were made in the context of the «null curriculum» theory proposed by Eisner (1979). The research showed that, in families, of every fifth man and every sixth woman, sexuality and sex activity were taboo topics. Parents tended to educate – mostly according to gender stereotypes – girls rather than boys, who gained their knowledge about sex either from peers or erotic media.

Keywords: sex education, sexuality, gender socialization, family relations.

Résumé

L'éducation sexuelle en famille. Le cas des relations familiales intergénérationnelles en Pologne

Dans les pratiques scolaires, l'éducation sexuelle fait souvent l'objet de stéréotypes. De même, beaucoup reste à apprendre sur la qualité et le contenu de l'éducation sexuelle dans le cadre familial. Par conséquent, l'objectif de cette recherche a été d'analyser les expériences de socialisation genrée de jeunes femmes et jeunes hommes, dans leurs familles d'origine. L'analyse quantitative et qualitative de questionnaires repose sur la théorie du «curriculum nul» d'Eisner (1979). Les résultats montrent que, pour tous les cinq hommes et toutes les six femmes, la sexualité et l'activité sexuelle sont des sujets tabou au niveau familial. Les parents éduquent – en se basant sur les stéréotypes de genre – les filles, plus que les garçons. Ces derniers accumulent de la connaissance sur le sexe soit des pairs, soit des médias érotiques.

Mots-clés: éducation sexuelle, sexualité, socialisation genrée, relations familiales.

Resumo

Educação sexual em contexto familiar. Um estudo das relações intergeracionais em famílias da Polónia.

Na prática escolar, a educação sexual é habitualmente um campo fértil para os estereótipos. Sabe-se pouco também acerca da qualidade e conteúdos da educação sexual realizada em contexto familiar. Por este motivo, o objetivo da presente investigação consiste em analisar as experiências de socialização em função do género de homens e de mulheres jovens nas suas famílias de origem. As análises quantitativas e qualitativas de dados, recolhidos através de questionários, foram feitas no âmbito da teoria do «currículo nulo» de Eisner (1979). A investigação mostrou que para um quinto dos homens e para um sexto das mulheres a sexualidade e a atividade sexual eram tabu. Pais e mães tendiam a educar – em consonância com os estereótipos de género – mais as raparigas do que os rapazes, procurando estes informar-se junto dos pares e dos meios de comunicação eróticos.

Palavras-chave: educação sexual, sexualidade, socialização de género, relações familiares.

Introduction

In Poland, as in other countries all over the world (Bragg, Buckingham, Russell e Willett, 2011), the progressive lowering of the age of sexual initiation is observed. Research conducted in Poland within the global project of World Health Organization – Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (Currie, Gabhainn e Godeau, 2009: 131-139) as well as data collected by Zbigniew Izdebski (2012) indicate that at present in Poland 20 percent of 15- and 16-year-old boys and 14 percent of girls at the same age engage in sexual activity. In comparison with the year 1990, the percentage of girls who have already had sexual initiation at the age of 15-16 increased almost threefold. Girls in the 17-18 age group also show greater dynamics of sexual initiation¹⁸. In 1990, 18 percent of girls at that age started having sex, while in 2010 the percentage doubled to reach 38.5. As regards boys at the same age, 36 percent were passed sexual initiation in 1990, whereas in 2010– 45.3 percent (*Ibidem*).

According to the latest research by the Ponton Group Sex Educators, young people hold strong stereotypical beliefs on sexuality, and their knowledge about sex often comes from pornographic materials (Skonieczna, 2014). In the wake of the digital revolution, both knowledge about sexuality and various information that may have adverse influence on the development of young people have become easily accessible. Various research studies conducted in Poland in recent years show that 70-80 percent of Polish youths aged 12-17 find pornographic materials on the Internet (50 percent of boys and 28 percent of girls find such materials quite often), including child pornography (Kunicka-Michalska, 2005). Children and very young people are exposed to child grooming and sexual violence both in the virtual and real world (Richter, 2010; Martino e Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005).

One possible solution to those problems is sex education free from stereotypical beliefs on gender relations (Helmer, Senior, Davison e Vodic, 2015). Although Poland, as other countries in the European Union, is obliged to provide sex education at schools, not only by internal regulations but also by international obligations, such school subject is actually absent from the majority of schools (Chomczyńska-Rubacha, 2010). Sex education classes do not feature in the curriculum at all, and if they do, only a few hours are devoted to the topic of sexual and gender relations. The classes are often taught by unqualified teachers and therefore such lessons present little methodical value. They are also strongly saturated with ideology. Moreover, textbooks recommended by the Ministry of National Education propagate stereotypes concerning gender-related roles and features (Chomczyńska-Rubacha, 2011). They promote double standards of socially accepted ways of meeting sexual needs by men and women, traditional and patriarchal model of a family and they are biased against homosexuals. The picture of reality is idealistic and based on wishful thinking, and it has little to do with actual problems of children and young people (Pankowska, 2009; Sadker e Silber, 2007).

In the public debate, sex education became one of the ideological tools used in political struggle. The changes of governments were followed by changes in the concept of what sex education at schools should look like, when it should be launched and how it should be presented to students. In Poland, sex education was first included in the curriculum in 1969 and at the very beginning it was taught as part of other subjects such as biology, Polish language, and lessons with the class tutor. In 1973, a new optional subject called «Preparation for life in the socialist family» was introduced, which, as previously, had a secular character. In 1981, sex education ceased to be a separate subject and it was to be taught during lessons with the class tutor (19 hours) by methodologically unprepared tutors. Together with the political transitions, the concept of sex education at school changed as well. Since 1994 the secular approach has been replaced by a model rooted in the Catholic perception of the family and sexuality. After a subsequent transition in 1997, the left-wing government obliged the Ministry of National Education to introduce the subject called «Knowledge of human sex life» with a statutory number of hours. Unfortunately, no money was assigned for the implementation of this regulation. Another government was formed – this time a right-wing one – which amended the «Act on Family Planning, protection of human life and permissibility of abortion» for the third time, which resulted in another turn towards the Catholic model of sex education. In 1998, the subject was called «Preparation for family life». In order to participate in the lessons (if they take place), children and young people need to have their parent's consent. The quality and the way of transmitting knowledge of sex still depends on the point of view of the school principal (Chomczyńska-Miliszkiewicz, 2002).

In school practice, sex education is often an area of ideological distortion, lies, stereotypes, constraints, things unspoken (Weaver, Smith e Kippax 2005; Chmura-Rutkowska, 2014) or it is just Eisner's «null curriculum» (Eisner, 1979), which is something that school cannot provide. If we agree that sex life is not only an important element of relationship and love between two people, but it is also a health, ethical, legal, esthetic and social problem, the absence of sex education poses a threat to positive personality development, the ability to create healthy and satisfactory relationships and proper functioning in society. Since sex education, being part of knowledge about a human being, is often neglected at school, the question arises: what does sex education as part of gender socialization look like at homes and in families (see: Walker, 2004)?

Home-based sex education – the context of the research

Before we started our research on home-based sex education, there had been no research on that issue in Poland at all. That is why we decided to analyze intergenerational relations in Polish families through the process of transmitting gender roles, focusing on the part of that process which is connected with sexual-

ity. So the objective of the conducted research was to analyze socialization experiences of young men and women concerning home-based sex education. It was also supposed to answer the question: to what extent were fathers and mothers involved in their children's sex education? Did the sex of the parents and the children affect the content and quality of messages addressed to the young people? How do young people evaluate the quality of home-based sex education? How do they perceive its impact on their self-acceptance, gender relations and emotions they derive from their sex life?

In order to answer those questions, we made quantitative and qualitative analysis of very detailed anonymous questionnaires with a lot of open-ended questions filled in by a group of 45 women and 43 men who were first-year students at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn. All respondents were Polish, aged between 19 and 21. Developmental psychology categorizes people at this age as young adults. One of the main developmental tasks of this stage of life is creating intimate relationships based on love, trust, and sex (Havighurst, 1972). Young adults want to share their identities with others, they experiment with roles, look for close relationships, partnership and affiliation. They are ready to take responsibilities and to develop devotion to a partner, connected with keeping intimate relationships with other people. This is the stage in which they can develop their sexuality in a relationship with a partner they love (Levinson, 1986; Newman e Newman, 2009). The additional criteria for selecting the respondents among first-year university students was the fact that young people in Poland start their independent life when they leave their family homes to study, and they are physically separated from their parents. This is the time when they often for the first time make their own choices and use schemes internalized during socialization.

The results were analyzed from the qualitative and quantitative perspective, with a focus on qualitative analysis in this article. In the quantitative part of the analysis, by means of χ^2 test, we measured the significance of relations between the following variables: independent ones – respondent's sex (male or female), respondent's parent's sex (male or female), parent's education, size of respondent's hometown, as well as dependent ones – the number of topics brought up during discussions by mother/father on their own initiative; age of the respondent when their mother/father started to talk about sex with their children; the person to whom the respondent addressed their questions about sex; the sources of information the mother/father referred to; the range of topics broached by mother/father on their own initiative while talking with their children, age of the respondent when their mother/father started to talk about sex with their children on their own initiative.

Using the mentioned above non-parametric test for the comparison between observed frequencies and expected frequencies of answers from the groups, all conclusions were drawn on the basis of significant differences that were found. The dependence was measured with the use of V-Cramer coefficient. The strongest

relations were recorded between parent's sex and the number of topics brought up in conversations initiated by the children (V Cramer = 0.49) and between respondent's sex and the person they turned to in order to get information about sex (V Cramer = 0.60). The answers to open-ended questions were analyzed with reference to qualitative content analysis.

In the following part of the article we present our analysis, discussing achieved results with their interpretation, that is compatible with the logic of narration adopted in the whole article. It is ended with the conclusions and reflections for the future studies.

Conversation topics between parents and children

The research showed that in case of every fifth male respondent and every sixth female respondent, the topic of sex was never brought up by parents (either mothers or fathers). Furthermore, the research proved that in Polish households, mothers are responsible for sex education of both sons and daughters, and that mothers more often than fathers started the topic of intimate life. Fathers, on the other hand, seldom – if ever – initiated that kind of conversations. When they did, they spoke only with their sons. When it comes to the daughters, they hardly ever or never talked about sex with their fathers. It turned out that knowledge about sex is shared between women: the mother and the daughter.

Mothers usually talked with their daughters about problems connected with puberty (64% of female respondents), love (64% of female respondents), fertilization, pregnancy and childbirth (58%) and the methods and efficiency of contraception (42%). Concerning female responses, fathers usually talked about love (20%), responsibility and trust in intimate relationships (11%), prostitution (11%), sex-related crimes (11%) and pornography (9%) (so called «3P syndrome»: *prostytucja – przestępstwa seksualne – pornografia* – prostitution, sex-related crimes, pornography). In the case of male respondents, the subjects initiated by mothers concerned love (56%), methods and efficiency of contraception (30%), topics related with fertilization, pregnancy and childbirth (30%), sexual initiation (28%), whereas fathers were willing to talk about methods and efficiency of contraception (26%), love (26%), sexual initiation (23%) and pornography (21%). In conversations with daughters, parents very seldom discussed the issues connected with legal regulations concerning sex life and forms of sexual activity, whereas while talking with sons, both mothers and fathers avoided the topic of communication in intimate relationships.

The biggest discrepancy between the male and female respondents as to the topics initiated by parents concerned the process of puberty and the problems arising from it: 64% of mothers and only 7% of fathers (!) brought up this topic whilst talking with their daughters. Regarding the sons, this topic was broached by 23% of mothers and 12% of fathers. Responsibility and trust is discussed more

frequently (40% of mothers and 11% of fathers). Only 16% of mothers and 5% of fathers talked about responsibility with their sons. 20% of mothers and 4% of fathers discussed the problem of dealing with peer pressure in relation to sex life with their daughters, whereas only 7% of mothers and fathers talked about this issue with their sons.

Analyzing the age of the respondents at which parents started talking with them about sex, the research showed that fathers started (and finished) sex education of their daughters when the girls were about 15 years old. What is interesting, this topic rarely came up as the girls were getting older. 15-year-old boys indicated that the most frequent topic connected with sex education that cropped up in conversations with their fathers was pornography. Fathers started such conversations when their sons were 12 and continued through the entire age of puberty. When their sons were 17, fathers concentrated on contraception and sex initiation. Mothers started to talk with their daughters about sex when the girls were 10 years old and with sons when they were 12, and just carried on with this topic. For fathers, the sex of the child (male or female) made a bigger difference than for mothers, and therefore they, unlike mothers, selected the topics depending on whether the child was a girl or a boy.

Sources of information about sex

In our research, we also intended to find out to whom the respondents addressed the problems and questions concerning sex life before their parents managed (or not) to initiate such conversations. The girls most often confided in their mothers (76% of female respondents). For boys, their friends (30% of male respondents) and girlfriends (19% of male respondents) were the most common sources of information about sex. The boys were more willing to talk about their problems with their girlfriends and fathers than mothers. In general, the girls more often than the boys sought information from other people, they talked about sex with their peers (53% with female friends and 7% with boyfriends). The men, unlike the women, equally often addressed their questions to their fathers (19%) and mothers (16%). The girls, on the other hand, were much more willing to talk to their mothers (76%) than to their fathers (only 7%). As we can see, the difference is quite significant. As many as 28% of the male respondents (and only 2% of the female ones) did not discuss their problems with anyone (they did not need to, they could not, they felt embarrassed, or they thought others could not help them, etc.). Regarding siblings, the girls sought advice from their elder sisters (31%), and the boys from elder brothers (11%). At the same time, sisters were more credible for the girls than brothers for the boys. 18% of the women, instead of searching for advice in their family and friends, confided in other people.

When parents did not want to or could not answer their children's questions concerning sex, they recommended books as the best source of useful information.

The most variable and the greatest number of sources were offered to the girls by their mothers. Only very few fathers recommended books to their daughters. Fathers were a little more involved in educating their sons, offering them mostly books (12%), magazines (5%) and brochures (5%). Mothers most often recommended additional sources to their daughters. In the case of sons, there was little difference between sources recommended to them by their mothers and fathers.

The respondents themselves were also involved in looking for sources of information about sex life on their own.

The girls looked for various available sources of information about sex more often. The most important sources for women (82%) were magazines (they mentioned women's and girls' magazines such as «*Twój Styl* [You Style]», «*Bravo Gir*», «*Nasza Miss* [Our Miss]». Almost half of the men (44%) also searched for information in newspapers and magazines, but of a different kind. 47% of publications chosen by men were erotic and pornographic newspapers/magazines («*Twój Weekend*» [Your Weekend], «*Cats*», «*Playboy*», X-rated magazines). The most important source of information for boys was TV (the respondents mentioned a popular erotic show on Polish TV titled «*Różowa landrynka*»[– «Pink candy»]). The women also quite often chose TV as a source of information, but they did not mention any erotic shows. School, sex education classes, biology classes and the school nurse constituted an important source of information only for the women (22%).

Manners of parents-children conversations about sex

The polled women not only had more opportunities to talk about different aspects of sexuality with their parents, but also these conversations were rated definitely higher by them than by the men. The female respondents spontaneously pointed to their mothers (only one pointed to her father) as a person they could talk to if any questions or doubts concerning sex life cropped up.

Female 16: For sure my mom had a big influence, because I never talked about it with my dad. It was mom who showed me around sex life. For sure, she helped me a lot because I could ask questions and honestly talk about problems if I had any. She is a person who probably knows everything about my sex life («my first time», my partners...). She is my confidant when it comes to the intimate part of my life.

The most valued qualities of conversation were: openness, «being cool», and friendliness but also emotions which often prevailed in such talks such as discomfort and embarrassment, sometimes double entendres. Many of the women emphasized that these talks also had moral value, especially in the context of warnings and prohibitions. Objectivity and reliability of the content was

mentioned more seldom. As the child was getting older, «talks» or «lectures» were replaced by discussions.

On numerous occasions, the women emphasized that conversations about love and sex took place sort of «by the way» while they were spending time together with their mothers in the kitchen, doing chores or discussing other topics. Mothers tended to refer to their own experience and feelings. The women emphasized many times that their mothers were more willing to talk about love than sex, or they presented their opinion on sex from an emotional perspective:

F15: In general me and my mom talked a lot about boys, mom told me about herself, about her girlfriends – it was often in the form of a story for example «I remember when I was 15 and I thought probably like you do now, that boys are...

F14: Mom was embarrassed, confused, nervous, she presented a given topic from the point of view of feelings, soul – something beautiful, romantic.

The men also emphasized openness and reliability as well as prohibitions, warnings and embarrassment if such talks took place. Conversations with their fathers almost always revolved around protection against unwanted pregnancy and proper use of condoms. Mothers were described by the male respondents as those who expressed their fears, worries and care about their sons. Both parents, more often than it was with the girls, referred to their sons' moral values:

Male 11: Mother – how to say it ... with tenderness in her voice, as if she was talking to a little child.

M27: Mom is «a drama queen», she always admonishes me cause she worries about me and on top of that she doesn't know how to talk about it.

It needs to be emphasized that neither the male nor the female respondents experienced any verbal aggression from their parents while talking about sexuality. Silence and embarrassment were far more common in such situations.

Ways of behaving as boys and girls

Taking into account parents' view on behaviors which could attract the opposite sex, the respondents mentioned the looks. That was the message which mothers sent to their daughters most often. For young girls, mothers were authorities as for looks and clothes, although their tastes differed significantly, which sometimes caused conflicts:

F15: When we went shopping for clothes – my mom told me what kind of clothes I look feminine in. She liked me more in such «feminine» clothes, and I as a teenager preferred more casual look (...). We had a little fight.

F19: I could always trust my mom when it came to clothes or beauty products. She told me how to look better and more attractive. Every time I needed, she took me to a hairdresser or a beautician.

Messages concerning clothes were most often related to stereotypes of the image of the woman as a seducer and an object of desire. The women were also told how to behave with men and how to attract their attention. They were told to be mysterious, modest and hard to get, as well as not to provoke boys. Messages also referred to woman's appearance in connection with traditional roles of women, ascribed to them by culture. This was often expressed by their mothers:

F27: I should smile, be sweet and dress to look attractive – a top or a short skirt is just fine.

F11: Taking care of myself, my looks (...) learning to how to run a house, cook, how to keep my house and everything around me nice and clean.

F12: «Good food can win a man's heart».

At the same time, however, the women emphasized the importance of being natural, being oneself against the odds and believing in what is right for them. They were supposed to search for inner beauty instead of looking for approval of other people, especially men. Only three women claimed that their mothers had also found intellectual and spiritual development important. They also told their daughters to work on their personality as the most important quality in a woman's life. However, this «rich» inner life was to attract men. If a man does not appreciate the daughter's rich personality, he is not worthy of her attention according to the mothers.

Fathers of the female respondents, were in their opinion much more reserved about revealing their thoughts. When they talked with their daughters, they mainly focused on taking care of appearance. In the respoebdernts' fathers' opinion, clothes should be natural, neat and modest, otherwise they would discourage the opposite sex. According to one respondent's father, sex appeal was mostly about taking care of her partner.

In the group of men, the answers were different from those of the women's. Most of all, sons were told by their fathers how to behave in order to attract women's attention. Messages conveyed by fathers concerned stereotypical image of manhood and behaviors which were culturally defined as manly. Some messages provided general hints about hygiene, appearance and ways of behaving:

M12: Hygiene, sense of humor, brains and wit.

M17: «Stand up straight son, take some money».

M40: A man needs to be tough, wear nice clothes, use perfume.

Only one respondent was taught by his father to be nice to girls, respect them and not to force them to anything.

Mothers seldom mentioned respect as well. They usually told their sons about hygiene and appearance:

M7: Manhood is about wit, nice personality and a big smile.

M17: «Take a shower, shave, change your socks (...), be courteous».

M37: «Take care of your teeth».

M21: «Son, a woman should be intelligent, she should understand you well, and share your sense of humor; she should be patient».

If the topic of behavior came up, it also concerned some stereotypical images of manhood or womanhood, just as in the case of fathers' opinions.

The importance of home-based sex education

Asked which of the messages concerning sex life they found valuable, the respondents provided answers, which were usually general: «all of them» or «none of them». The first answer referred to mothers, the other to fathers. The students admitted that it was difficult to evaluate something that in fact did not exist, or messages which were conveyed in an atmosphere which did not encourage openness or talk about their intimate life. For the women, the advice concerning feelings, maturity necessary for starting sex life, and also the role of the partner was extremely valuable:

F8: She was right when she told me it is worth to wait until I'm mature enough for sex. That it is something important but only when we love and trust our partner. I'm grateful to her that she taught me such values.

F43: I decided to start my sex life later than most of my friends and I avoided mistakes and traumas. In this case telling me: «you are too young» helped.

The female respondents found equally valuable conversations on the following topics: contraception, critique of treating sex instrumentally, importance of self-respect, respecting their own body, especially in the context of future motherhood, being faithful to their values and resisting peer pressure and also information about puberty and changes in a teenagers' body. The women were grateful to their mothers for their advice and talks. Probably, with time and taking into account their own experience, the female respondents can understand their mothers' motivation as well as the meaning of their words much better.

The messages received from their fathers were rated very poorly:

F11. My dad never talked a lot about sex issues.

F43: No comments. But at least I had fun.

The women, however, emphasized their fathers' input in their understanding differences between the world of sex for men and women, and also in their developing self-respect and respect towards their bodies. Two of the respondents, even though they did not talk about sex with their fathers, observed the parents' attitude towards each other and paid attention to the fathers' attitudes toward their wives – the respondents' mothers, and vice versa. They learnt more by observation than by direct relations with their fathers.

The male respondents highly valued their mothers' opinions about contraception, relations between love and sex and also responsibility and prudence concerning sex life. They also emphasized remarks concerning proper attitude and the way of treating their partners. One of the respondents also admitted that the most important for him was the attitude of his mother towards his father and that it taught him the most. In the respondents' opinions the most valuable information they got from their fathers – just like in the case of messages received from their mothers – concerned contraception, being cautious in sex life, and also respect for women.

In particular, huge differences in sex education of boys and girls were disclosed in the answers to the question: how did home-based sex education influence your approach towards sex and your satisfaction from sex life? It turned out that, unlike the women, the men in general rated parental opinions as totally insignificant, «hopelessly low», «almost none» or negative:

M5: In fact, I don't see any major impact of parents' lessons on my decisions and well-being in my sex life. Well, maybe only negative – I am not able to talk openly about sex, I'm at a loss for words, I don't know many things. This must be a legacy from my parents.

M6: In fact, scarce information about sex life intensified my low self-esteem, which strongly influenced my later relationships with women.

M12: Influence? Rather none – they didn't distort anything.

Only three men rated the influence of parental sex education as important and positive. The rest of them emphasized that other sources and people had bigger impact than their parents. In this context they often mentioned that the parents started to talk about sex too late:

M1: When it comes to sex, my elder brother had a bigger influence on me.

M28: My friends had a bigger influence on me. We started to talk about sex much earlier and they were more open than my parents.

The most disquieting, in the context of the future role of a father, seem to be opinions in which young men approve of the lack of sufficient sex education at home:

M16: Let's say that parents didn't particularly interfere but with hindsight, I think that it was ok. We just let each other know that «it was clear what's going on» and there was no need to talk.

M11: My parents never talked with me about sex, but I do think they didn't need to.

Over half of the women (and only 3 men) admitted that their parents' messages had considerable and positive influence on their attitudes to and behaviors in sex life. While talking about consequences of home-based sex education, the women emphasized the following qualities: wisdom, maturity, responsibility, ability to avoid mistakes, respect for their own body and honesty in talking about sex. Thanks to these conversations they learned not to treat sex or partners instrumentally, how to enjoy sex and use contraception, how not to perceive it as something wrong, sinful or shameful. However, there were a few female respondents who claimed that home-based sex education had «little» or «none» or even negative influence on them:

F16: I regret to admit that the knowledge my parents gave me only slightly influenced my approach towards sex. I had to learn everything by myself. I learned how to use this knowledge on my own mistakes.

F14: I had huge gaps in my knowledge plus the feeling that women in relationship with men are bound to «suppress» their emotions, behaviors. I know, I feel that I should think for myself and for my partner because he cannot be trusted. It's silly, but this is what I do.

Nearly one third of the women and only few men declared that they would not change anything in home-based sex education if they were parents. Once again it turned out that girls much more often than boys experience positive, open and responsible talks with their parents (especially mothers) about sex. But some of them declared that some changes should be made. Both the men and the women stated that such conversations should take place much more often. Especially the men emphasized that those conversations should take place at the right time and not too late, as it was in their case. They also missed openness when talking with their parents:

F8: For sure, I would talk more about details concerning sex. I wish my children would talk to me about every doubt and about their reservations, experience. More about contraception and «technical» issues.

F10: I would treat this topic as something normal and natural, I wouldn't avoid it. I wouldn't try to make this topic embarrassing and necessary to hide.

M17: If I were a father, I would definitely talk more with my child – about every topic – also about sex.

M 19: First of all, I would avoid preaching, and I wouldn't pose any obstacles.

It is disquieting that many of the men who had little or no home-based sex education think that initiative should be left to children, who «will ask if they want to know, and if they don't ask, it means that they know». They also stated that they would use additional sources of information more often. In opinions expressed by them, parents should not be too involved in home-based sex education of their children. At the same time, both male and female respondents expressed their worries that they would not be able to raise their children better than their parents did because they lacked good role models to follow:

F15: I think that parents should talk about most things concerning sex even with a small child – of course, at the appropriate level. But where can we learn this?

M5: I wish sexual development were one of many topics from the very beginning. But I don't have a good role model in this matter. I'm afraid that despite my good will, I will fail as a father.

The respondents' dilemmas reflect reproduction of parental educational inability in sex education. They also show that without support from other educational institutions, the family – rooted in traditional, stereotypical culture – has problems with preparing young people for life in the sphere of intimate relationships and for making use of their sexuality in a safe and healthy way.

Conclusions

The analysis shows the complexity of the issue of home-based sex education. Socialization to gender-related roles is effected by many factors. One of the most significant is primary socialization in a family. Meanwhile, our research shows that for every fifth male respondent and for nearly every sixth female respondent sex is still a taboo topic in their homes – parents did not even try to talk about it. The respondents' fathers turned out to be «the great absentees». The burden of educating children in the sphere of sexuality fell on mothers. Both girls and boys seem to be almost left alone regarding one of the most important spheres of life – their sexuality and gender relations.

If we treat home-based sex education as part of gender socialization, we can note that our research confirms different treatment of girls and boys by parents. Mothers and fathers do so because they have an idea marked by gender stereotypes about what girls and boys should like, look like and how they should behave (Bem, 1993) – also in the sphere of sexuality. Daughters are treated with care and sensitivity, they find more understanding, they are encouraged to show emotions, and are instructed in physical appearance. Sons are encouraged to activity and to control their emotions. Boys' aggressive behaviors and competitive attitudes are tolerated as part of masculine socialization. Advice given by parents is mostly connected with the traditional model of marriage and the fam-

ily. The results of such socialization are different behaviors and perceptions of gender roles – in the case of women, it is often lower self-esteem and lower level of aspirations, and the side effect – strengthening the belief that this situation is natural and should not/cannot be changed (Bradley, 2007).

Human sexuality, just like any other area of life, could be a source of many problems, failures and also pathology. Lack of knowledge and skills to express and fulfill human sexuality in a healthy and socially accepted way is a significant psychological and social problem. Therefore, the presented results of the research are disturbing (especially regarding young men) and provoke questions about the consequences of incompetent and stereotypical home-based sex education in the time of rapid social, cultural and gender order changes. Therefore, it is important to break the taboo and the silence surrounding sex education and leave stereotypical or ideological opinions on human sexuality and gender relations behind. We also believe that this task is school's responsibility in cooperation with a family. If we want to know how this area has been changed within years, more research should be done on home-based sex education, regarding for example parents' attitudes towards sexual development of sons and daughters, parents' communication competencies, as well as their ways of developing the relations with adolescents as a basis of informal learning in a family in general. Reproducing lack of knowledge in this area may result in pathology/suppressed development which will have to be dealt with on both individual and social levels.

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