

## **Need for sexual education in Georgian reality**

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### **Abstract**

Sexuality education is a combination of high-quality teaching methods that include not only the medical aspects of sexuality, but also focus on human sexuality, personal relationships, psychological characteristics of development, anatomy, sexually transmitted diseases, intercourse, sexual orientation, gender identity, contraception, and sexual If around reproductive rights and responsibilities. The goal of sexuality education is to equip young people with the necessary information and values to develop safe and fulfilling sexual relationship skills that include pleasure as well as a sense of responsibility for their own sexual and reproductive health and well-being.

Sexuality education is an integral part of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), without which it is difficult to fully implement this policy. It is likely that adolescents in Georgia are not given enough information about sexuality education to be ready to start a sexual life. Although the state policy is aimed at integrating sex education components into various educational subjects, we think that the current situation in schools requires more drastic steps. This process can also be hindered by several factors - society does not understand or misunderstand the principles of sexuality education, sexuality and gender terms.

As we know, adolescence comes with certain challenges. The developmental process varies substantially, both individually and culturally. Over the past 2 decades, advances in neuroscience have revealed how this process takes place at the brain level. Biological changes in the brain have been shown to underlie the dynamic

cognitive and psychological shifts that occur at this age. When adolescent development is successful, the result is a biologically mature individual equipped with an independent sense of self, the ability to relate to peers and groups, and the cognitive and psychological resources to meet the challenges of adult life. Modern developmental theorists generally view development as a process that continues throughout life. Change may not be as rapid and tumultuous as adulthood, but adolescence presents new developmental challenges, such as the ability to form stable, intimate relationships and the pursuit of a fulfilling career. In a healthy person, adolescent development precedes additional growth.

An adolescent who begins a sexually active life without education is potentially vulnerable to sexual harassment, coercion, unwanted pregnancy, and the dangers of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV. That's why we decided to study this issue with this group (adults 14-18 years old).

### **Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)**

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process that includes the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to: realize their own health, well-being and dignity; to develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own and others' well-being; to understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout life.<sup>1</sup>

### **The benefits of comprehensive sexuality education**

According to the United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) is a rights-based, gender-focused approach to sexuality education in both school and non-school settings that aims to equip young people with the necessary knowledge, skills and values to develop their own emotional and form a positive vision of your own sexuality in the context of social development.<sup>2</sup>

School-based sexuality education as a discipline first appeared in Europe from the second half of the 20th century, namely, in parallel with the sexual revolution of the 70s and the AIDS epidemic in the 80s. In 1994, at the ICPD Conference for States and Non-Governmental Organizations, attention was paid to understanding the needs of adolescents around the world in the direction of sexuality education. After that, the final goal, content and methods of sexuality education began to be developed. One radical side of these struggles is the abstinence before marriage model (AEUM), which advocated abstinence for young men as a way to address risks and concerns surrounding sexual and reproductive health. The introduction of this model was

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office - The opportunity for in East Asia and the Pacific digital sexuality education, 2019

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA), United Nations Population Fund. UNFPA Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Focus on Human Rights and Gender. New York: UNFPA. 2014. (p. 5)

actively promoted in the USA, where the Bush administration spent millions of dollars trying to introduce this idea and bring it to the international arena.<sup>3</sup>

### **Analysis of the current situation in Georgia in the direction of sexual education**

An important source for the analysis of the local situation of sexual and reproductive health and rights is the research report conducted by the Public Defender in 2017-18. The Office of the Public Defender is one of the important constitutional bodies that oversees the situation in the country in terms of gender equality and women's rights, an integral part of which is sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The report issued by the Public Defender in 2017 assessed the current situation in the country in terms of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The second stage of the research was aimed at determining how SRHR is implemented in practice.

The 2018 report highlights the systemic and practical shortcomings that, despite some progress achieved in the direction of sexual and reproductive health and rights, remain current and acute problems in the country. It covers three main areas of sexual and reproductive health and rights: maternal health, family planning, and comprehensive human sexuality education. The fact mentioned in the report that women's access to health care services and their autonomous decision-making is often limited by family and community perceptions of reproductive function, indicates the absence of sexual education that takes into account their sexuality and autonomy. On the other hand, the lack of information about contraception and, as a result, its rare use is problematic, which increases the cases of unwanted pregnancy and artificial termination of pregnancy.

An integral aspect of sexuality education is providing information on family planning services and contraception. It determines access to family planning services. The frequent use of abortion as a means of protection against unwanted pregnancy is precisely related to the lack of awareness about contraception.

### **The current situation in the country and its problematic aspects**

According to the opinion of the majority of experts, despite the fact that in recent years the state has taken some steps in the direction of integrating sexual education components in the general education system, the provision of sexual education to students is still fragmented. The ineffectiveness of this kind of progress is due to the fact that the information provided in this form does not include such fundamental issues that relate to human sex, gender and sexuality. For example, textbooks of civics and biology, in which the entries in the chapters related to sexuality are scarce or too simplistic (mainly about discrimination and non-acceptance of violence). In addition to the form in which this issue is presented in different subjects and textbooks, it is important to consider how it is taught: taking

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<sup>3</sup> UNFPA), United Nations Population Fund. UNFPA Operational Guidance for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Focus on Human Rights and Gender. New York: UNFPA. 2014. (p. 6)

into account the cultural context and taboos, question marks appear about how fully teachers provide students with information about the mentioned topics.

Experts also point out that conservative and far-right forces in the country strongly oppose the policy of the Ministry of Education related to sexuality education. The Ministry of Education has to make some concessions. For example, the concept of gender was removed from school textbooks. It is often the case that the ideological views of these groups are considered public opinion, even though this has not been studied. It is noted that those groups of parents who have correct information about the issue, their attitude is not negative and often share the opinion that providing information about sexual health among young people is important. We can say that the real attitude of the society regarding the teaching of sexual education has not been thoroughly studied.

### **Our research with teenagers**

In recent years, we hear information about sex education, reproductive health and problematic sexual behavior of adolescents more often. It is interesting what kind of attitude the society has towards the mentioned issue. Accordingly, the aim of the study was to study the interest and need for the components of sexual education of adolescents. Also, the ability to deal with challenges related to adolescence and the role of society in this process. As we have already mentioned, sex education programs are successfully implemented in many countries, which is confirmed by various studies. I wonder how ready society and the school environment are for sex education? The first step is awareness and preparedness, and then developing an effective and culturally appropriate program.

Based on the objectives of the research, we expanded our hypotheses, which were tested:

- It is likely that adolescents do not have enough information about the basic principles of sexual education;
- It is likely that adolescents have a desire to receive qualified information about important issues of sexual education;
- After studying the existing issue, we will know the attitude of adults towards sexual education.

We used both quantitative and qualitative research methods in the research. At the initial stage of the research, we conducted a focus group with teenagers. We used the questionnaire prepared by us as a research tool of society's attitudes regarding sexuality education. The questionnaire was developed for adults, according to the questionnaire compiled by WHO (Illustrative Questionnaire for interview-Surveys with Young People).

452 adolescents from the Adjara region participated in the study, 50 of them were piloted, 100 participated in the focus group. The data of 302 participants were processed by SPSS statistical program.

During the research, several important issues were identified in which adolescents were interested:

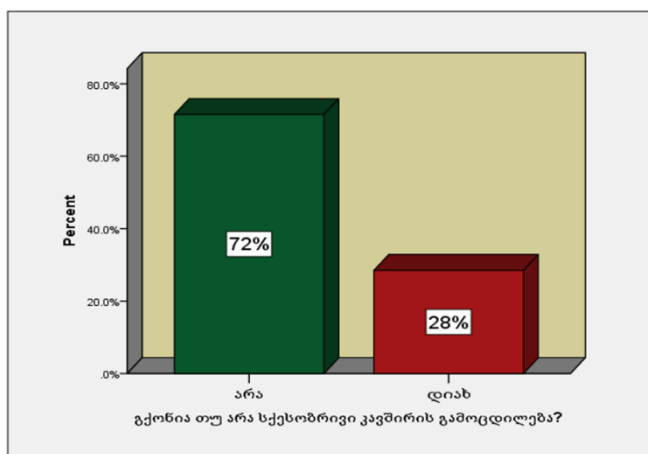
- Why is the age of transition important?

- Many teenagers were interested in when this period will end or if it will end at all.
- As the majority of them mentioned, they have questions to which they cannot get answers from competent persons.
- They are very embarrassed to talk about this issue with their parents.
- The majority expressed the wish that it would be good if they had the opportunity to talk about these issues at school, in a specific lesson.

Below are some of the results of the research:

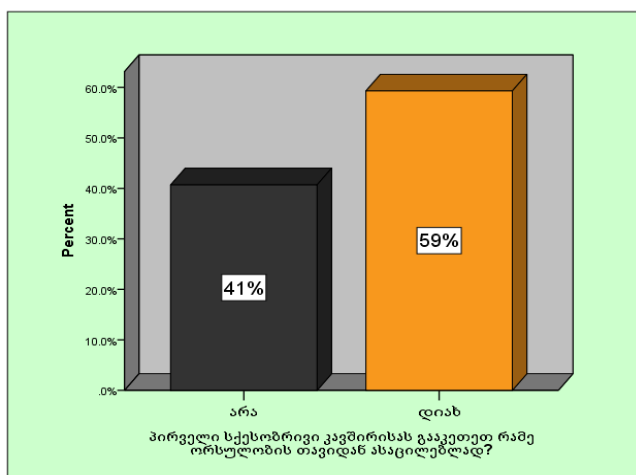
59% of the respondents answer the question positively, and 41% negatively.

**fig. 1 answer to the question "Have you had sexual intercourse?"**



28% of the respondents answer the question positively, and 72% negatively.

**fig. 2 answers to the question "Did you do anything to prevent pregnancy during the first intercourse?"**



Most of the respondents (59%) thought about preventing pregnancy during the first intercourse and acted accordingly. The 41% who did not act in this way is noteworthy for us. It is interesting that they did not know about the need for this, if they knew, but did not consider it necessary.

**Answers related to desired sources of information on sexuality education issues**

	Responses		P ercent of Cases
	N	P ercent	
Psychologist/Mental Health Specialist	1	1	4
teacher	8	1	2
mother	9	1	3
father	3	3	9
brother	1	1	5
and	1	1	4
family members	2	3	7
friends	7	9	2
doctors	7	9	2
Books/Newspapers	7	9	2
Internet	1	1	3
Movies/Videos	4	5	1
Poster/Brochure	1	2	6
other	9	1	3
<b>Total</b>	7	1	2

To the question "Would you like sex education classes at school?" most respondents (75%) answered positively, 16% negatively, and 9% did not know the answer to the question.

Based on the obtained results, we can see that most of the interviewees would like sex education classes at school.



		Age											
		under 14 years	14-18 years	19-24 years	25-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	41-45 years	46-50 years	51-55 years	56-60 years	61-65 years	66-70 years
<b>Would you like sex education classes at school?</b>	do not know	0.0%	6.0%	1.5%	0	4.5%	0.3%	0.5%	0.7%	0.3%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%
	no	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%	3	8.8%	5	0.0%	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%
	yes	0.0%	6	4.0%	2	9.2%	6	6.7%	6	4.7%	7	7.1%	3

Gender difference between indicators The questions for which the gender difference is statistically significant are yellow. Chi-square - The statistic is significant at the 0.5 level. a. - More than 20% of the cells in this subtable have an estimated cell count less than 5. Chi-square results may be incorrect. b. - The minimum expected number of cells in this subtable is less than one. Chi-square results may be incorrect.

**Interpretations and conclusions**

According to the results of the quantitative research, it was found that the teenagers have some knowledge about the issues of sexual education, this is confirmed in their answers. For example, 65% of teenagers think that the male hormone is called testosterone. Also, 62% of respondents think that masturbation does not seriously harm health.

According to the obtained results, most adolescents believe that self-protection during sexual intercourse is necessary and also know how to protect themselves. Despite the fact that the majority (72%) had no experience of intercourse, it is likely that in the future, when they decide to take this step, they will know how to protect themselves from sexually transmitted diseases.

**According to the age index**, the following trend was revealed - with increasing age, young people think less about protecting themselves during the first sexual intercourse. This indicator was unexpected for us. It is also interesting to note that the majority of respondents under the age of 14 (33%) trust a psychologist. 17-

year-old respondents prefer to receive more information about the sexual and reproductive systems of men and women from a psychologist (22%) and a teacher (18%). To the question **"From whom or where do I get more information about contraception and sexual health?"** 31% of 14-year-old respondents indicate the Internet as a source of information, which indicates their interest in the issue, although the source can be considered unreliable. This age is especially sensitive and it is important to choose the right source of information. Finally, regardless of age, the majority would like sex education classes in school.

Most teenagers prefer to get more information about the body changes in boys and girls during adolescence from a psychologist. For them, the Internet is also a reliable source. We can consider this source as a risky source, because as we know there are many unreliable sources on the Internet and teenagers can get non-empirical information on the mentioned issue. Also, most teenagers get information about contraception and sexual health from the Internet. This may be due to the fact that they are embarrassed to ask someone about these issues, so they consider the Internet to be the easiest way. Then comes the doctor, the circle of friends and the psychologist. It seems that parents and teachers are less involved in this process, which is most noteworthy. As mentioned earlier, information obtained from the Internet is not always reliable, and it is risky, especially when discussing such sensitive topics as contraception and sexual health. It is better to discuss these issues with a specialist or, in the best case, the parent should be actively involved in this process.

As a result of the research, it was revealed that most teenagers (75%) want sex education lessons in school. It seems that adults see the need for this and express their desire accordingly.

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