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# Parents Towards the Topic of Their Children's Sexual Education. Research Report

## ABSTRACT

In this article it is assumed that the family is an important environment for children's sexual education. Family education can affect the knowledge, behaviour and development of adolescents in the area of their sexuality. The first part of this article introduces the thesis that family is an important environment in determining the sexual behaviour of adolescents.

Next, the methodological assumptions of the research are presented. It answers the following question: what is the parental attitude to the sexuality of their children. Subsequently, there specific research problems are presented: what is parental activity in the field of sexual education, what are the difficulties with sexual education, what are the parental needs identified in this area? The research has been carried out by means of a diagnostic survey. The group of respondents comprised 66 women and 11 men, parents of children aged 15–18. The respondents were aged 33–58 and came from Szczecin.

In the middle part of the text, results of scientific research are presented connected with pedagogical proposals. The research results show that most respondents undertake the task of the sexual

## KEYWORDS

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education of their children. Parents also perceive that many behaviours are causally connected with sexual education, for example – with the quality of relationship in marriage. The character of the conversation about sex between parents and children is rather instrumental than relational. The whole article contains pedagogical reflection on the topic of sexual education in the families of adolescents.

## Introduction

Adolescence is a unique time in the person's life. It falls on the age from 10/12 to 20/23. It is a transitional stage, between childhood and adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Because of extremely abrupt and massive changes taking place during this period, in fact in every area of the young man's life, it is sometimes referred to as the time of storm and stress (*Sturm and Drang*).<sup>2</sup>

A great number of educationalists including J. Mastalski emphasise that adolescence is a time when young people are particularly prone to manipulation and following fashions and trends, not always (rarely) contributing to their harmonious development. To cite the scholar mentioned above, “teenagers are like a sponge soaking up novelties and ideas offering the visions of happiness and self-fulfilment.”<sup>3</sup> Young people experience the pressure of many unfavourable phenomena and proposals from the postmodern world in which they live. These include for example the supermarketisation of sex<sup>4</sup> or sexualisation.<sup>5</sup>

The adolescent sphere of the person's sexuality seems to be particularly prone to being influenced by these external factors. It is at

<sup>1</sup> There may be considerable individual differences concerning the beginning and end of adolescence. Cf. A. Oleszkowicz, A. Senejko, “Dorastanie,” in: *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, ed. J. Trempała, Warszawa 2001, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. H. Bee, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, trans. A. Wojciechowski, Poznań 2004, pp. 326–327.

<sup>3</sup> J. Mastalski, “Zaniedbane paradygmaty formacyjne nastolatka,” *Studia Pedagogica Ignatiana* 2017, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. Szlendak, *Supermarketyzacja. Religia i obyczaje seksualne młodzieży w kulturze popularnej*, Wrocław 2008.

<sup>5</sup> K. Waszyńska, M. Zielona-Jenek, “Zjawisko seksualizacji jako wyzwanie dla współczesnej edukacji,” *Studia Edukacyjne* 2016, no. 39, pp. 351–375.

the same time an area where numerous opposing internal impulses typical of teenagers clash with each other. For many young people it is a sphere in which, for different reasons, they tend to decide on their own what is good for them and what can have a detrimental effect or they do not reflect on these issues, accepting what comes in from the external world or what requires to be done most forcibly at a given moment.

In these deliberations a thesis is proposed that the family is an essential environment of sexual education. As such, it may constitute a valuable source of support and knowledge for adolescents in the context of sexuality. A normally functioning family accompanied by good relations between individual members and sexual education directed at supporting the development of sexual integration may be a safe anchor in the period of storm and stress in driving back what is harmful for adolescents. Due to the significance and topicality of these issues the subject of this article is the family in the context of children's sexual education. The first part of the text is devoted to the thesis that the family is an essential environment of sexual education.

Further on methodological assumptions of the research conducted are presented. The question is: What is the parents' attitude to the sexual education of their children? The following research problems have been taken on: What is parents' educational activity in the context of their children's sexuality? What difficulties connected with children's sexual education are perceived by their parents? What are parents' needs connected with their children's sexual education?

The middle part of the text presents the results of the research, accompanied by conclusions. The whole article is a pedagogical reflection concerning the issues of sexual education taken on by the adolescents' parents.

## Family as an essential environment of sexual education

The thesis that the family is an essential environment for the person's development is unquestionable. It has been proved many times, in the field of social sciences as part of such disciplines as pedagogy, psychology and sociology. In the context of its educational character the family is characterised among others by: the existence long-lasting and direct relationships and strong bonds between its members;

the fact that the family satisfies the needs of its individual members and that it creates and hands over role models and identification models for children.<sup>6</sup> The character of family relations filled with love and lasting from the moment of the child's birth in all spheres and periods of their life makes the family a unique environment for the person's development.

The need of activity in the field of sexual education is emphasised by numerous scholars specialising in the development of children and young people, representing such fields and pedagogy, psychology and medicine. However, certain differences are observed in the perception of this process taking into account the objectives set and means to achieve them. Moreover, W. Póltawska emphasises one should not talk about sexual education as such: "instead one should talk about a need to develop an attitude to sexual issues, as the upbringing process has to take the reality of gender into account, it is the sexuality that decides about the structure of personality and anything a person does has the hallmarks of their gender."<sup>7</sup> This view seems to be rare nowadays. What is stressed, however, is the thesis, vital from the educational perspective, that the person's sexuality is a dimension of his or her existence and as such it cannot be marginalised or ignored in the person's development.

On account of the pluralism of views concerning sexual education, it is of key significance to discuss the presented concept of sexuality. This is because its consequence is a specific way of understanding sexual education. For the purpose of this papers it is assumed that:

Sexuality is a basic element of the person's existence throughout his or her life, covering sex, gender identification and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, desire, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, experiences, beliefs, values, behaviours, roles and relationships. Sexuality is a result of the interactions of biological, psychological, social, economical, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual factors.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> B. Kołodziej, "Rola rodziny w kształtowaniu postawy wobec życia jako fundamentalnej wartości," in: *Rodzina: źródło życia i szkoła miłości*, ed. D. Kornas-Biela, Lublin 2001, pp. 233–234.

<sup>7</sup> W. Póltawska, "Rola rodziców w wychowaniu seksualnym młodzieży," in: *Wychowanie w rodzinie*, ed. F. Adamski, Kraków 2010, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> M. Laphimon, *A Glossary of Term In Gender and Sexuality*, Seul 2005, as cited in: Z. Lew-Starowicz, "Seksuologia psychospołeczna," in: *Podstawy seksuologii*,

It is the integral understanding of sexuality as a dimension of the person's functioning. Sexuality perceived in this way is inextricably connected with all other aspects of human existence, and it is involved in all of them. One can talk about a double link. Sexuality permeates every area of the human existence, as people always act as sexual beings, never isolated from their sexuality. On the other hand, the multidimensional nature of sexuality makes every aspect of the person's life – physicality, mental sphere, emotionality, morality and spirituality – involved in it. This concept of sexuality seems to be in line with the personalist conviction about the indivisibility and integrity of the human, and the educational efforts follow the spirit of integral pedagogy, according to which a person is “an indivisible being, not divided into a number of separate particles.”<sup>9</sup>

As a consequence of the above holistic approach to human sexuality it is assumed that sexual education is a process the objective of which is sexual integration. Sexual integration is

... a result of the process of harmonising all dimensions of the person's life related to sexuality. The foundation of sexual integration is realising the complex, multidimensional essence of sexuality connected with the person's entire life. The integral vision of sexuality consists in accepting that sexuality is one of the dimensions of the person's life and as such it is not an autonomous value. Sexual integration results from a conscious self-education process aiming to blend together all dimensions of the individual's personality related to sexuality according to proper hierarchy. Sexual integration manifests itself in taking into account all dimensions of sexuality: biological, mental, emotional, social and moral. Sexual integration consists of having a positive and integral vision of the person's sexuality, the acceptance of gender identity and the roles connected with it, biological maturity, emotional maturity of sexual dimension, its psychisation and humanisation.<sup>10</sup>

Sexual education understood in this way is a long process, which lasts the whole life. It covers both intentional and non-intentional action. In the end it should aim at assuming responsibility for

ed. Z. Lew-Starowicz, V. Skrzypulec, Warszawa 2010, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> L. Górska, *Podmiot i podmiotowość w wychowaniu. Studium w perspektywie poznawczej pedagogiki integralnej*, Szczecin 2008, p. 28.

<sup>10</sup> E. Rojewska, *Personalistyczna orientacja wychowawcza rodziców a integracja seksualna młodzieży. Badania empiryczne*, an unpublished doctoral dissertation written under the supervision of Prof. Zdzisław Kroplewski, Szczecin 2015, pp. 119–120.

the development of integration by the person themselves, that is self-education.

In this broad understanding of the process of sexual education special place is held by the family. The first justification of this thesis is quite pragmatic. According to A. Mazan, adolescence lasts around 25 years. In this long period only the family is constantly present in the child's life, other educational institutions take rather insular action, though not infrequently intensive, aiming to satisfy a variety of the person's developmental needs.<sup>11</sup> Essential features in this context, which show its significance in sexual education, are the neutrality and continuity of the educational process.<sup>12</sup>

I. Obuchowska and A. Jaczewski stress three essential roles of the family environment in children's sexual education. The first role is connected with the fact that what is shaped in childhood by parents are the psychological features which have effect on their future attitude to sexuality. Among features included by the authors are: being receptive to the world and a moral attitude. Being receptive to the world is understood as a seeking approach, which a creative person shows in selecting and developing models and values. The approach of being receptive to the world understood in this way counterbalances conformism. In the case of the morel attitude it is important for children go follow the way from being controlled from outside to self-controlled conduct. This happens as a result of developing a specific, stable moral orientation related to fundamental values in life. According to I. Obuchowska and A. Jaczewski, "early moral orientation formed in childhood is a point of reference in new, difficult situations, in which young people have to make moral decisions on the own."<sup>13</sup> Parents' second role in the context of sexual education concerns the development of an ability to communicate one's feelings,

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<sup>11</sup> A. Mazan, "Metody integracji w wychowaniu rodzinnym," in: *Rodzina przestrzeni rozwoju osoby. Perspektywa pedagogiczna*, ed. M. Jeziorański, D. Opozda, A. Rynio, Lublin 2012, p. 131.

<sup>12</sup> E. Jundziłł, "Środowiskowe uwarunkowania kształtowania się postaw młodzieży wobec seksu," in: *Miłość i seks w percepcji uczniów*, ed. R. Pawłowska, E. Jundziłł, Koszalin 1999, p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> I. Obuchowska, A. Jaczewski, *Rozwój erotyczny*, Warszawa 2002, p. 57.

and the third one is shown in the social role models connected with gender provided by parents.<sup>14</sup>

Taking the above into account, the family, as no other environment, is the place where gender identification is developed. Gender identification, understood as the acceptance of one's gender and the performance of a specific gender role, takes place in the family from early childhood through emotional ties between parents and children, imitating the parent of the same sex, building up a picture of one's own sex and a different way of bringing up girls and boys in the family.<sup>15</sup> What matters in the process of sexual identification is good contact not only with the parent of the same sex, but actually with both parents. Thanks to positive relations with the parent of the same sex the child acquires a personality model and a model of one's social role. When parents accept each other, this role is considerably strengthened. If the relations in the family are not normal in this respect, the process of the child's sexual identification may be improper.<sup>16</sup>

The process of imitating is also of vital significance in the sexual education in the family. The parent's personal model, as the first one and the one the child is strongly connected with, forms the basis for future views and behaviours concerning sexuality. According to E. Jundziłł, "parents' every behaviour connected with the issues of sex to the smallest degree provides a model of conduct."<sup>17</sup> Watching parents, the child learns to express emotions, gender roles, communications, to deal with conflicts, attitude to corporeality, closeness between individual family members and adopts the values cultivated in the family. As noted by the educationalist and family therapist J. Juul, adults' life has greater influence on their children than any other attempts and upbringing methods.<sup>18</sup> This approach is connected with parents' special responsibility for the sexual development of

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ibidem, pp. 56–63. Insufficient fulfilment of these roles by parents affects the quality of their children's life, also in the context of their sexuality, in their adult life.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Z. Lew-Starowicz, *Seksuologia sądowa*, Warszawa 2000, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> E. Jundziłł, "Środowiskowe uwarunkowania kształtowania się postaw młodzieży wobec seksu," op. cit. p. 106.

<sup>18</sup> J. Juul, *Twoja kompetentna rodzina*, trans. D. Syska, Podkowa Leśna 2007.

their children. Parents' life choices and attitudes are a key element in the sexual education in the family.

It is in the family that children experience extremely strong ties and fulfil fundamental personal needs. These include the need for love, safety and acceptance. It is on the quality of the fulfilment of these needs and the quality of ties between parents and children that their further development, including the sexual one, depends.<sup>19</sup> E. Jundziłł proves that the need for the child's emotional contact with parents correlates with his or her future maturity in the sexual aspect. Then the decisions connected with experiencing sexuality have an appropriate base. By contrast, when the need for emotional contact in childhood and adolescence is not fulfilled, sexual activity may aim to compensate for emotional shortages.<sup>20</sup> In the case of parents and children's such fundamental needs as for love, safety, emotional contact and ties, the role of the family is irreplaceable, and any disturbances in the fulfilment of these needs may lead to disturbances in the process of sexual integration. An example can be young people's early sexual initiation, which correlates with family factors such as the parents' divorce, their failed marriage, no father in the family, family pathology,<sup>21</sup> the lack of strong ties between the mother and daughter, parents' addiction to work or loneliness.<sup>22</sup>

What is emphasised in the above deliberations is the quality of family inner relations. Apart from them, another important element of sexual education in the family are conversations concerning explicitly sexuality between parents and children. The content, way and circumstances of these talks should depend on the children's needs and whether they are ready to be provided with specific information. In practice, they are also conditioned by parents' attitudes in this aspect (their knowledge, emotional attitude and the action taken up in this respect). As shown by a large amount of scientific research, most

<sup>19</sup> M. Ryś, "Poziom zaspokojenia potrzeb w dzieciństwie a zaspokojenie potrzeb w małżeństwie," *Problemy Rodziny* 1993, no. 1, pp. 20–21.

<sup>20</sup> E. Jundziłł, "Rola prawidłowo zaspokojonej potrzeby miłości w życiu dorosłego człowieka," in: *Miłość i seks w percepcji uczniów*, ed. R. Pawłowska, E. Jundziłł, Koszalin 1999, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Z. Lew-Starowicz, *Encyklopedia erotyki*, Warszawa 2004, p. 256.

<sup>22</sup> U. Kempieńska, *Małżeństwa młodocianych. Cięża, ślub i co dalej...?*, Toruń 2012, pp. 63–65.



children expect such conversations with their parents, they want these talks to be held in a competent way, both when it comes to facts and methodology. The respondents taking part in the research conducted by J. Kurzępa emphasised that a competent parent in this field is the one that builds an atmosphere of trust, competence and reliability. What was also important for respondents was whether parents freed them from the feeling of shame and fear of embarrassment. Young people expect their parents starting talks about sexuality characterised by a high level of empathy, assertiveness, considerable factual knowledge, correct language and not avoiding even the most difficult questions.<sup>23</sup>

Although they often concern instrumental questions, talks related to the sexual sphere, due to its intimate character, should not be of instrumental character. What is required is an attitude of mutual openness, mutual respect and accepting differences. Talks on sexuality should be an element of personal dialogue between the parent and the child.<sup>24</sup>

To sum up, it may be assumed that the family's significance for the development of young people's sexual integration is holistic. Two aspects are observed. First, potentially every aspect of family life is important for the development (or its lack) of the child's sexual integration. It is in conformity with Z. Lew-Starowicz's view, according to whom, the whole upbringing in the family, all its aspects, are important in the process of the development of models of attitude to sexuality in a broad sense of the word, so among other things sex, gender, relations with partners and relationships.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, the holistic understanding of the family for sexual education is expressed in the fact that the family exerts influence on all the aspects of the child's life, all dimensions of his or her existence, also in the context of sexuality: the biological, mental, emotional, social and moral one. The family can influence attitudes to oneself and other people, ways of thinking, handing over specific values, knowledge and explanations concerning the world around.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. J. Kurzępa, *Zagrożona niewinność. Zakłócenia rozwoju seksualności współczesnej młodzieży*, Kraków 2007, p. 184.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. W. Bołoz, *Promocja osoby w rodzinie*, Warszawa 1998, p. 173.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Z. Lew-Starowicz, *Seks partnerski*, Warszawa 1983, p. 9.

Accepting the claim that sexual education in the family is of holistic character results in numerous challenges. They concern above all parents. What seems fundamental is the awareness that parents have an overwhelming influence on the sexual development of their children. As shown, the atmosphere at home, the parents' way of addressing each other and children, the content and way of holding conversations, performing sexual roles – all this is not unimportant in the process of sexual education. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the family environment's influence on young people's sexual integration is not determining. People brought up in the families that do not create optimal conditions for development may achieve sexual integration, although the process of achieving it will be harder compared to that of the children experiencing appropriate family models. Furthermore, it is expected that parents will be competent guides in the extremely complex world of the child's developing sexuality, demanding greatest sensitivity. Facing up to this task seems to demand not only personal maturity of the parents, but also not infrequently methodological support, e.g. in the form of workshops run by a specialist at school.

The adoption of the holistic upbringing in the family poses challenges not only for parents, but also for professional researchers of this phenomenon. It covers a great number of different issues, concerns children, young people and adults and all the spheres of the person's life. Choosing this concept of sexuality, and in consequence sexual education leads to the need to integrate knowledge from various disciplines while studying this particular area of the functioning of the family and its individual members. Emphasising the inter- and trans-disciplinary character of pedagogy, R. Włodarczyk and W. Żłobicki claim that “without going beyond its own borders, obligatory use of the achievements of philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology or political sciences [pedagogy – note E.R.] is sometimes helpless as an instrument of describing, understanding or a tool preparing for action.”<sup>26</sup> This also concerns the pedagogy of family. Defining the subject of family pedagogy as the family, Z. Tyszka

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<sup>26</sup> R. Włodarczyk, W. Żłobicki, “Wstęp,” in: *Interdyscyplinarność i transdyscyplinarność pedagogiki – wymiary teoretyczny i praktyczny*, ed. R. Włodarczyk, W. Żłobicki, Kraków 2011, p. 9.

refers to it as an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary subject of research.<sup>27</sup> This situation demands of the researchers special caution, insight and competence in their analyses.

## The methodology of the author's own research

The subject of research was parents' attitude to the sexual education of their children. The main purpose of the study is the identification of parents' attitude to the sexual education of their children. Detailed research goals included the identification of parents' educational activity in the context of their children's sexuality, the identification of difficulties experienced by parents in the context of their children's sexual education and the identification of needs connected with children's sexual education. The chosen aim gave the study a diagnostic character.

The main research problem was expressed in the form of the question: What is parents' attitude to their children's sexual education? The following detailed research problems were chosen: What is parents' educational activity in the context of their children's sexuality? What difficulties connected with the sexual education of children are observed by parents? What needs connected with the sexual education of children are felt by parents?

For the purpose of this article empirical analyses with the use of a diagnostic survey were conducted. The technique of conducting a survey was used, and the study tool was the survey form compiled by the author of this article. The survey was conducted on 77<sup>28</sup> parents of children aged 15–18, students of the last years of primary schools and secondary schools from the area of the Municipality of Szczecin. Among the respondents there were 66 women and 11 men aged from 33 to 58 lat ( $M = 43.64$ ;  $SD = 5.84$ ). Prevailing were people with higher education (80.1%), then secondary education (17.6%), one person with primary education. The survey was carried

<sup>27</sup> Z. Tyszka, "Socjologia rodziny a pedagogika rodziny. Przedmiot badań – możliwości współdziałania badawczego," *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny* 1998, vol. 10, p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> In isolated cases parents did not answer a question in the survey. It was taken into account in statistical calculations, therefore sometimes number N is less than 77.

out in September 2018. The statistical analysis was conducted in the IBM SPSS Statistics V25 software. Techniques used included the statistical description and Pearson's chi-squared test was applied to verify the relation between data with the nominal and ordinal level of organisation. The value  $p < 0.05$  was chosen as the full statistical significance factor index, whereas the value  $p < 0.1$  as the not fully significant statistical tendency.

Due to the not very big group of respondents, in particular men, the results obtained are of signalling character, narrow in scope, and refer exclusively to the analysed individuals, not the whole population. Nevertheless, because it was very difficult to receive the acceptance of the adolescents' parents to take part in the study concerning sexuality and the fact there are few up-to-date analyses of this type, the presentation of the results and conclusions drawn from them seems appropriate.

### The educational activity of parents in the context of young people's sexuality

An overwhelming majority of respondents (71.1%) declared they got involved in the sexual education of their children in the family environment. The opposite answer was given only by 6.6% of the respondents. Interestingly, over one fifth of the parents said it was hard to say whether they get involved in this activity. These data are shown in table 1. Perhaps this situation is caused by the fact parents found it difficult to say explicitly which of their actions has an effect on the sexual education of their children.

Table 1. Parents getting involved in sexual education in the family environment

Parents getting involved in their children's sexual education in the family environment	The whole group, n=77		Women, n=66		Men, n=11	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	54	71,1	45	69,2	9	81,8
No	5	6,6	4	6,2	1	9,1
Hard to say	17	22,4	16	24,6	1	9,1

Source: conducted research

What dominated among the respondents was the wide understanding of the sexual education process, according to which almost all of the parents' behaviours are related to it. Despite the fact differences in parents' responses were only slight, and with reference to all the situations presented in the survey the respondents said they were definitely or rather connected with sexual education in the family, parents were most convinced about the fact that talking to children about sexuality directly (average 4.49) and giving information concerning sexuality, for example menstruation or sexually transmitted diseases (average 4.48) are part of sexual education. Similar intensity concerned a conviction that kindling values (average 4.43) and the way parents talked to each other (average 4.37) were the elements of sexual education in the family. No significant statistical differences between men and women were noticed in this respect. Data can be seen in table 2.

**Table 2.** Parents' conviction concerning which behaviours and situations are part of sexual education in the family

Parents' conviction concerning which behaviours and situations are part of sexual education in the family	Definitely yes		Rather yes		Hard to say		Rather not		Definitely not		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Friendly atmosphere at home	37	50	22	29,7	9	12,2	3	4,1	3	4,1	4,18
Direct talking to children about sexuality	49	64,5	20	26,3	4	5,3	1	1,3	2	2,6	4,49
Values kindled in the family	43	58,1	24	32,4	5	6,8	0	0	2	2,7	4,43
Giving information connected with sexuality, sex (e.g. about menstruation and sexually transmitted diseases)	49	65,3	18	24,0	5	6,7	1	1,3	2	2,7	4,48
The way mother/father fulfils her femininity / his masculinity	33	45,2	25	34,2	10	13,7	3	4,1	2	2,7	4,15
The way parents talk to each other	46	61,3	18	24,0	6	8,0	3	4,0	2	2,7	4,37

Parents' conviction concerning which behaviours and situations are part of sexual education in the family	Definitely yes		Rather yes		Hard to say		Rather not		Definitely not		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
The way parents talk to children	38	51,4	24	32,4	6	8,1	2	2,7	4	5,4	4,22
Talking about emotions in the family and showing them	39	52,0	24	32,0	8	10,7	1	1,3	3	4,0	4,27
Taking care of health (e.g. mother going to the gynaecologist)	35	48,6	21	29,2	12	16,7	1	1,4	3	4,2	4,17
Taking care of the close relations between individual family members (e.g. spending time with each other)	34	45,9	22	29,7	11	14,9	5	6,8	2	2,7	4,09

Source: conducted research.

An overwhelming majority of the respondents appreciated the family's essential role in young people's sexual education (92.2% of the respondents), regardless of their gender. Moreover, what was observed was a statistically essential relation between the conviction about getting involved in sexual education in the family. These data are presented in table 3. It seems justified from the psychological point of view that the more a person believes in a given idea – in this case the essential role played by the family in young people's sexual education, the more willingly he or she turns it into practice. The fact that parents are aware of the essential role of the family environment in the process of sexual education is worthy of respect. This may form the basis for supporting the carrying out of the process, and not just initiating it.

**Table 3.** Relation between parents' conviction about the significance of the family in the sexual education they get involved in

The family's significance in young people's sexual education	Getting involved in the sexual education of one's child in the family environment					
	YES		NO		Hard to say	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitively important	37	69,8	0	0	8	47,1
Important	13	24,5	3	60,0	8	47,1
Hard to say	2	3,8	0	0	1	5,9
Rather not important	0	0	0	0	0	0
Definitively not important	1	1,9	2	40,0	0	0

$\chi^2=25,508$ ;  $df=6$ ;  $p<0,001$

Source: conducted research.

Among the people taking part in the survey, the sense of parents' competence in the issue of sexual education may be described as moderate (average 3.79). In this respect no differences were noticed between women and men, but a statistically significant dependence was observed: the higher the sense of competence of the examined parents in the issue of sexual education, the more often they fulfil it in the family (data presented in table 4). This result is understandable from the psychological point of view, and it also has pedagogical overtones. Accepting the essential role of the family in sexual education, worthy of note is parents' preparation to perform it. It can be drawn from the analysed survey that the better parents feel prepared to perform this form, the more often they undertake it. On the other hand, in sexual education in a broad sense of the word, almost all of the parents' behaviours, conscious and unconscious, have educational overtones, either positive or negative. It is worth reflecting on and then taking action concerning the way of helping parents in performing their role of their children's educators in the context of their sexuality and supporting them in building up the sense of competence in this respect. The stronger the conviction about one's own competence in the field of the sexual education of one's children, in

the case of the people who took part in the survey the more frequent they undertake this action.

**Table 4.** Relation between the parents' sense of competence concerning the issue of sexual education and getting involved in it in the family environment

The sense of competence in the field of children's sexual education	Getting involved in the sexual education of one's child in the family environment					
	YES		NO		Hard to say	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Definitively yes	14	27,5	1	20,0	2	11,8
Yes	29	56,9	1	20,0	7	41,2
Hard to say	5	9,8	1	20,0	5	29,4
Rather not	0	0	2	40,0	3	17,6
Definitively not	3	5,9	0	0	0	0

$\chi^2=22,031$ ;  $df=8$ ;  $p<0,005$

Source: conducted research.

Analysing parents' answers concerning the issues they talk to their children about one may hazard a guess that they are more of instrumental than relational character. Parents taking part in the survey most often talk to their children about changes in the looks and behaviour associated with adolescence (68.8%), menstruation/nocturnal emissions (64.9%), falling in love and first relationships (63.6%), the question where babies come from (57.1%) and how to avoid unplanned pregnancy (53.2%). These data can be found in table 5. Only one of the above issues concerns personal relations. It was also noted that mothers indeed more often held conversations concerning the relation between sexuality and values ( $p=0.003$ ) and the subject of menstruation and nocturnal emissions ( $p=0.013$ ). Moreover, the female respondents showed the fully significant statistical tendency to enter into a conversation about changes in the appearance associated with adolescence ( $p=0.087$ ) and the subjects of falling in love and first relationships ( $p=0.086$ ).



Table 5. The issues parents talk to their children about

The issues parents talk to their children about	The whole group		Women		Men	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Avoiding unplanned pregnancy	41	53,2	35	51,5	6	54,5
Preventing sexually transmitted diseases	38	39,4	33	50,0	5	45,5
Sexual initiation	25	32,5	23	34,8	2	18,2
Menstruation/nocturnal emissions	50	64,9	47	71,2	3	27,3
Changes in the looks and behaviour associated with adolescence	53	68,8	48	72,7	5	45,5
Falling in love, first relationships	49	63,6	45	68,2	4	36,4
Relationship between sexuality and values (love, respect, responsibility, fidelity)	40	51,9	39	59,1	1	9,1
Assertiveness/sexual pressure	17	22,1	15	22,7	2	18,2
Where babies come from	44	57,1	38	57,6	6	54,4
Pornography	19	24,7	16	24,2	3	27,3
Marriage and family life	29	37,7	27	40,9	2	18,2
Role models/ essence of femininity/masculinity	26	33,8	24	36,4	2	18,2
Emotions, solving conflicts	41	53,2	39	59,1	2	18,2

SOURCE: conducted research.

Parents taking part in the survey expressed their opinions also about the objective of sexual education. It can be observed that what respondents appreciate in this process is both the instrumental aspect, associated with sharing knowledge (e.g. about contraceptives and natural family planning) and formative aspect (e.g. linking sexuality with such values as responsibility, respect). Although the intensity of responses concerning individual goals is comparable, according to the parents taking part in the survey, the issues regarded as the essential objective of sexual education were: avoiding unplanned pregnancy (average 4.65) and preventing sexually transmitted diseases (average 4.61). The third place was taken by the relationship between sexuality

and values (average 4.60) and being able to resist sexual pressure, and assertiveness (average 4.57). The least important aim (though still important) for the respondents was developing an attitude of tolerance (average 4.22). These data can be seen in table 6. This area, the same as it was the case of conversations with children, is dominated by the instrumental attitude, though the relational attitude and the one focussing on forming children's responsible attitudes to sexuality can also be observed.

**Table 6.** The significance of individual aims of education

The significance of individual aims of education	Important		Rather important		Hard to say		Rather not important		Definitively not important		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Contraceptives/ natural family planning	59	78,7	11	14,7	4	5,3	0	0,0	1	1,3	4,69
Preventing sexually transmitted diseases	50	67,6	21	28,4	2	2,7	0	0,0	1	1,4	4,61
Assertiveness / resisting sexual pressure	50	67,6	18	24,3	5	6,8	0	0,0	1	1,4	4,57
Preparation to marriage and family life	45	58,4	24	31,2	6	7,8	0	0,0	2	2,6	4,43
Preventing hazardous sexual behaviours	41	53,9	27	35,5	5	6,6	2	2,6	1	1,3	4,38
Help in psycho-sexual maturing	43	55,8	21	27,3	10	13,0	2	2,6	1	1,3	4,34
Help in integrating sexuality and all spheres of life (e.g. the spiritual, emotional one)	35	45,5	28	36,4	13	16,9	0	0,0	1	1,3	4,25
Support in the development of psycho-sexual identity	32	42,1	32	42,1	11	14,5	0	0,0	1	1,3	4,24
Linking sexuality with values (e.g. responsibility, love, respect)	50	66,7	22	29,3	2	2,7	0	0,0	1	1,3	4,60

The significance of individual aims of education	Important		Rather important		Hard to say		Rather not important		Definitively not important		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Developing attitudes of tolerance (e.g. for homo-sexual people)	34	50,7	16	23,9	16	23,9	0	0,0	1	1,5	4,22
Other	2	50,0	0	0,0	1	25,0	0	0,0	1	25,0	3,50

Source: conducted research.

The issues discussed by parents were connected with certain objectives of sexual education. The parents regarding the knowledge of contraceptives and family planning more often talked to their children about such issues as menstruation/nocturnal emissions [ $X^2(4)=10.578$ ;  $p=0.014$ ] and falling in love/first relationships [ $X^2(3)=9.188$ ;  $p=0.027$ ]. Preparation to marriage and family life was connected with the subject of avoiding unplanned pregnancy [ $X^2(3)=8,578$ ;  $p=0,035$ ] and marriage and family life [ $X^2(3)=7.809$ ;  $p=0.050$ ], help in psycho-sexual maturing with the subject of changes in looks and behaviour [ $X^2(4)=10.114$ ;  $p=0.039$ ] and falling in love and first relationships [ $X^2(4)=14.544$ ;  $p=0.006$ ].

A bit over one third of the respondents declared they did not have any difficulty in the sexual education of their children (36.4%). The parents who experienced impediments (63.6%) most often mentioned: the child's reluctance to talk about sexuality with parents (37.7%), insufficient knowledge concerning what the child needs (20.8%), no idea how to start or hold such a conversation, (18.2%) and the parent's feeling of embarrassment when talking about sexuality (15.6%). These data can be seen in table 7. It is worth-emphasising that at the same time when answering the question whether their child wanted to talk about sexuality freely with their parents, most parents said yes (65%). It seems a possible way to avoid future problems most often or solving the existing ones – children's reluctance and lack of knowledge concerning their needs – is entering into a more intimate relation. While such impediments as the lack of knowledge or time for calm conversation may be removed in

a relatively easy, instrumental way, impediments of relational character, such as the child's reluctance need parents' time and personal commitment in order to decrease or remove them completely. They in a way prove the thesis that strong sexual education in the family is connected with the quality of interfamily relations.

**Table 7.** Impediments experienced by parents in the process of their child's sexual education

Impediments experienced by parents in the process of their child's sexual education	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Embarrassment when talking to one's child about sex/sexuality	12	15,6	65	84,4
Child's reluctance to talk to parents about sex/sexuality	29	37,7	48	62,3
Fear of not knowing the answer	9	11,7	68	88,3
No time for calm conversation	8	10,4	69	89,6
No idea how to start/hold the conversation	14	18,2	63	81,8
Pressure of other, more important upbringing issues	9	11,7	68	88,3
Problems in the relationship with the spouse / dissatisfaction with the quality of marriage	3	3,9	74	96,1
Lack of knowledge what my child needs at present	16	20,8	61	79,2
Fear that it is too late for such talks	5	6,5	72	93,5
Fear that it is too early for such talks	3	3,9	74	96,1
I have no difficulties	28	36,4	49	63,6

Source: conducted research.

What the parents who took part in the survey considered the greatest threat to the sexual development of young people was their making use of drugs and alcohol (average 4.46), pornography (average 4.32), the axionormative chaos of the contemporary world (average 4.29), the lack of time for the family (average 4.27) and prostitution (average 4.19). Parents were least concerned about access to contraceptives (average 3.09) and the decreasing significance of the

Church in the issues concerning upbringing (average 3,07). These data can be seen in table 8. Parents have at their disposal potentially a great number of means of counteracting the unfavourable influence of the above phenomena on their children’s lives. Numerous empirical research proves that the quality of family education has effect on young people’s being prone to unfavourable environmental or cultural factors (drinking alcohol or choosing utilitarian values). The quality of family life in this context is shown in the satisfaction of children’s needs – love, safety, acceptance, affiliation, building trust in the parents-child relation, spending time together and non-directive talks. Furthermore, the areas posing a threat to the harmonious sexual development of young people indicated in this research may become an element of preventive action, addressed to adolescents and the educational one, addressed to parents.

In the survey in question 81.8% of parents considered pornography a source of threat to the sexual development of their children; however, only 24.7% of them talked about it with their children. The lack of time for the family as a threat in this context was mentioned by 84.5% of the respondents, but only 37.7 % of them talked about marriage and family life with their children. Based on these examples one may draw a conclusion that parents are aware of certain threats connected with sexual education, but in practice they do not hold conversations with their children on these subjects.

**Table 8.** Phenomena parents believe may pose a threat to the harmonious sexual development of young people

Phenomena posing a threat to the harmonious sexual development of young people	Definitely yes		Rather yes		Hard to say		Rather not		Definitively no		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Pornography	45	58,4	18	23,4	8	10,4	6	7,8	0	0	4,32
Prostitution	40	51,9	19	24,7	12	15,6	5	6,5	1	1,3	4,19
Pop culture	27	35,5	21	27,6	18	23,7	7	9,2	3	3,9	3,82
Consumerist culture	20	27,4	24	32,9	20	27,4	7	9,6	2	2,7	3,73

Phenomena posing a threat to the harmonious sexual development of young people	Definitely yes		Rather yes		Hard to say		Rather not		Definitively no		Average (from 1 to 5)
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Using drugs, designer drugs, alcohol etc.	49	64,5	16	21,1	9	11,8	1	1,3	1	1,3	4,46
Lack of time for the family	36	46,8	29	37,7	10	13,0	1	1,3	1	1,3	4,27
Clear presence of sexuality in young people's lives	31	41,3	23	20,7	17	22,7	4	5,3	0	0	4,08
Chaos in the world of young people's values	38	50,7	24	32,0	10	13,3	3	4,0	0	0	4,29
Change in the patriarchal model of the family	19	25,7	14	18,9	23	31,1	12	16,2	6	8,1	3,38
Easy access to contraceptives	14	18,9	15	20,3	20	27,0	14	18,9	11	14,9	3,09
Decreasing significance of the Church in the upbringing issues	15	20,3	13	17,6	20	27,0	14	18,9	12	16,2	3,07
The current form of family life education	17	23,6	8	11,1	29	40,3	12	16,7	6	8,3	3,25

Source: conducted research.

Considering the analysed state of sexual education in the family based on this research, research conducted by other scholar and literature on the subject, it seems reasonable to offer parents professional support in the carrying out of this process. The answer to the question what could help the respondents in providing sexual education in the family was the partner's support (59.7%), the support offered by the school pedagogue and psychologist (35,1%) and the child's participation in family life education (28.6%). Only one fifth of parents mentioned workshops/meetings for parents and specialist literature as useful forms of support (26% and 23.4% respectively). These data can be found in Table 9. An overwhelming majority of mentions concerning spouse's support as a preferable form of help in the

process of sexual education shows the significant role of intrafamily relations not only for children, but also for parents. Modern forms of support, such as Internet training for parents or support groups, were assessed by the respondents as of little use.

**Table 9.** Preferred forms of support provided to parents in carrying out sexual education in the family

Preferred forms of support offered to parents in carrying out sexual education in the family	YES		NO	
	N	%	N	%
Support offered by the spouse	46	59,7	31	40,3
Support offered by the school pedagogue / psychologist	27	35,1	50	64,9
Participation in workshops /meetings for parents	18	23,4	59	76,6
Literature for parents concerning young people/s sexual education	20	26,0	57	74,0
Internet support groups	2	2,6	75	97,4
Support offered by a priest / clergyman	2	2,6	75	97,4
Internet training for parents	7	9,1	70	90,9
Participation in family life education	22	28,6	55	71,4

Source: conducted research.

## Conclusion

It is assumed that the complex objective of research has been accomplished in the research carried out, the attitude of the parents taking part in the research to the sexual education of their children has been identified. As to the parents' educational activity, an overwhelming majority of them is involved in their parents' sexual education. The more parents feel competent in this respect and the more they appreciate the significance of the family in children's sexual education, the more often it happens. The above dependencies are strong in the group in question. Moreover, it has been noted the respondents understand the process of sexual education broadly, noticing

many situations in daily life, such as the way of parents' addressing each other or the values cultivated in the family, are not indifferent to the sexual education of their children. Nevertheless, the subject of parents' conversations with children is more instrumental than relational. It is similar in the case of the aims of sexual education that the respondents assessed as most important. Relational aspects are present in both cases, but those of instrumental character come to the fore.

In the case of difficulties experienced by adolescents' parents, the respondents most often said this was young people's reluctance to talking to their parents, the lack of knowledge on what the child needs at a given time and no idea how to hold this conversation. It seems one, of no doubt many, possibilities of eliminating these difficulties is developing a closer personal relationship with their child. The way of accomplishing this aim requires detailed decisions and goes beyond the frames of this thesis. What can be seen yet another time is the significance of the quality of intrafamily relations for the process of sexual education.

Among the threats to sexual education which the parents taking part in the survey have noticed are drugs and alcohol, pornography, and the axionormative chaos in which young people function. No doubt these are real threats to young people's harmonious sexual development. Children should be provided with preventive measures in this respect. Perhaps parents' support could prove useful in this context. What weighs in favour of the fact that despite the fact that the parents participating in the research are aware of this threat, they do not talk to their children about it. J. Mastalski emphasises that one of the neglected formative paradigms of a teenager, yet needed nowadays, is the detoxification paradigm. Parents' role is to make children aware of the threats, warn against the consequences of hazardous behaviours and encourage to get involved in preventive activity.<sup>29</sup>

The respondents definitively most often that their spouse's support would help in the process of the sexual education of their children. They expect the support provided by the school pedagogue and

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. Mastalski, "*Zaniedbane paradygmaty farmacyjne nastolatka*," op. cit., pp. 110–111.



psychologist slightly less often. Parents were least interested in the innovative forms of support, such as Internet training.

The results of research, with the reservation, marked in the methodological part, concerning the impossibility to generalise the conclusions due to the small group of respondents, in general men, confirm the thesis about the considerable significance of the family in young people's sexual education. The research, narrow in scope, shows further research prospects, which may serve cognitive and practical aims. It is certainly a legitimate decision to extend the research on the representative group of respondents. The research effects so far allow to assume that intrafamily relations are of considerable significance for the process of the sexual education in the family, both for its individual participants and the process itself. Their detailed analysis, in particular when both parents and their children at the same time would may result in many essential conclusions from the pedagogical point of view.

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