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## **INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FIELD OF SEXUAL EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Dynamic and often difficult to predict processes taking place in the social and cultural space, and above all virtual reality, significantly determine the formation of human corporeality and sexuality, affect the creation of patterns of sexual and health behaviour, as well as the quality and durability of relationships, contacts, connections and interpersonal relations, styles and models of marriage and family and their role, functions and tasks. HIV / AIDS<sup>1</sup> epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STD / SDI) and the escalation of violent behaviour, especially sexual behaviour towards children, girls and women. Inevitably, these phenomena and problems affect children and young people, hence the need for both formal and informal upbringing and sexual education. And regardless of how much controversy it raises, the obligatory nature of its implementation is noticed both by parents, teachers, educators and political decision-makers, not only at the national but also international level.

One of the most important international organizations conducting a policy in the field of sexual education of children and youth is the United Nations and its specialized organizations (the so-called UN family), of which the WHO, UNAIDS, UNESCO, UNICEF and UNFPA are most strongly connected with the issue of sex education. The UN committees also cooperate with non-governmental organizations<sup>2</sup> whose reports are taken into account when creating recommendations in the field of sexual education of children and youth. The most important programs, declara-

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UNAIDS report from 2016, there were 33.3 million (2.2 million new infections) in 2010 in the world and 36.7 million people infected with HIV in 2015 (2.1 million new infections), UNAIDS Global AIDS update, Geneva 2016, [www.who.int/hiv/pub/arv/global-AIDS-update-2016\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/hiv/pub/arv/global-AIDS-update-2016_en.pdf)? ua = 1, [21.08.2017].

<sup>2</sup> e.g. International Planned Parenthood Federation, (Federacja na rzecz Kobiet i Planowania Rodziny).

tions, conventions and reports of the United Nations and their individual structures were selected to illustrate their activities for sexual education of children and youth. And so these became the background for discussions about the desired model, shape and standards of sexual education of children and youth.

**Sexual education of children and adolescents – beginnings.** The need to provide youth with access to information and services in the field of family planning was pointed out at the UN International Conference on Population in Mexico in 1984<sup>3</sup>, and then this issue was a subject of intense discussions at the conference, which include: the World UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994 and the Fourth World UN Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the so-called the conference summarizing Cairo + 5 in 1999 and Beijing + 5 in 2000, Beijing +10 and Beijing +15 in 2010<sup>4</sup>.

Currently, the most important documents in the field of the desired sexual education model include the Guidelines and Guides of the World Health Organization (WHO, *European Regional Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2001), the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO, *International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education*, 2009), Population Council, *It is All One Curriculum. Guidelines and Activities for a Unified Approach to Sexuality, Gender, HIV, and Human Right Education*, 2009) or the World Health Organization and the United Nations Development Program (WHO, UNDP, *Sexual Education Standards in Europe*, 2012) and reports of the non-UN International Planned Parenthood (IPPF<sup>5</sup>). However, only the selected representative of

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<sup>3</sup> Report of the International Conference on Population, Mexico City 1984, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/ICP\\_mexico84\\_report.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/ICP_mexico84_report.pdf), [20.05.2017].

<sup>4</sup> 23rd special session of the General Assembly (Beijing +5), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/beijing+5.htm>; 49th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing +10), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/english/news.htm>; 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing +15). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing15/>, [10.04.2017].

<sup>5</sup> Cf. IPPF, Reference Guide to Policies and Practices in Sexuality Education in Europe, Belgium 2006, [http://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexuality\\_education\\_europe\\_reference-guide\\_policies\\_practices.pdf](http://hivhealthclearinghouse.unesco.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexuality_education_europe_reference-guide_policies_practices.pdf); Framework for Comprehensive Sexuality Education, London 2006, <http://www.ippf.org/resource/ippf-framework-comprehensive-sexuality-education/>, [10.03.2017].

the proposed model of sexual education of children and youth, documents of UN will be analyzed.

**Sexual education – definition and goals.** Therefore, assuming that “being a sexual person” is an important part of human life, which can be both a source of pleasure, joy and happiness, a way of expressing love and feelings and the beginning of lasting relationships, marriage and family as well as a source of violence, negative impressions and experiences<sup>6</sup> sexual education has been defined as a way of sex and relationships adapted to age and culture that provides scientifically proven, realistic and non-judgmental information<sup>7</sup>. It is an education that also allows you to “discover” your own values and attitudes and build the ability to make decisions, communicate and reduce the risk in various aspects of sexuality<sup>8</sup>. Such defined education is also referred to as “holistic sexuality education”, but the term “Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE)” is most commonly used.

The most important goals of sexual education include, firstly, providing information to children and youth which they are interested in, and facts they should know. Secondly, creating opportunities to seek values, adapting one’s own attitudes and norms in relation to sexual behaviour, as well as social relations and relationships. Thirdly, promoting the acquisition and strengthening of interpersonal skills and, fourthly, encouraging children and youth to take on responsibility, own sexual and social choices and behaviours in a world marked by HIV / AIDS and to respect human rights, including sexual and reproductive<sup>9</sup>.

**Sexual education – content.** Adequately to the adopted definitions and objectives, it was agreed that the first component of a high-quality

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<sup>6</sup> UNESCO, International technical guidance on sexuality education. An Evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators Vol. I – Rationale for sexuality education. Paris 2009, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001832/183281e.pdf>, [10.06.07.2017].

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> UNESCO, International technical guidance on sexuality education. An Evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators Vol. II – Topics and learning objectives. Paris 2009, [http://data.unaids.org/pub/ExternalDocument/2009/20091210\\_international\\_guidance\\_sexuality\\_education\\_vol\\_2\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/ExternalDocument/2009/20091210_international_guidance_sexuality_education_vol_2_en.pdf), [10.06.2017].

sexual education program should be knowledge – reliable, complete and adapted to the age and stage of development of children<sup>10</sup> and teenagers.

In terms of content, it is therefore recommended to provide information about the human body and its development in a lifetime perspective. Anatomy and physiology, differences in development between women and men, the specifics of sexual and reproductive development and what is related to fertility knowledge, i.e. procreation, all available methods and contraception, their advantages and disadvantages, as well as about pregnancy and childbirth combined with the promotion of sexual and reproductive health.

It is also important to provide information on the diversity of interpersonal relations and their specificity (companionship, friendship, love) and marriage and family and different conceptions (heterosexual, homosexual) and the types and structures of married and family life, including topics of pleasure, love and friendship in marriage and family as well as problems and threats that can occur in any type of relations and relationships. The programs should also include knowledge about non-stereotypical relationships, behaviours and sexual orientation.

It is also recommended to show students a positive impact of sexuality on human development, health and well-being. In this context, an inseparable element of sex education programs should be the transfer of knowledge about the ways of researching, discovering and expressing one's sexuality (kisses, touch, caresses etc.) and about the variety of emotions (feelings) in relation to people of the same or different sex, behaviour and sexual experiences (love, tenderness, closeness, joy, pleasure, jealousy, anger, jealousy).

It is also underlined that it is obligatory to spread knowledge on all aspects (physical, psychological, social, cultural) related to sexual violence and aggression and ways of avoiding them, as well as on health care services and support systems for people affected by violence. In addition, it is necessary to provide detailed information on the causes, symptoms, types and consequences of risky or unwanted behaviours, contacts and sexual

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<sup>10</sup> „International technical guidance on sexuality education „from 2009 suggests starting education at the age of 5, while the „Sex Education Standards in Europe” issued one year later, they recommend starting it from birth. Regardless of these differences, however, there is a consensus that the youngest children will be included in the classes.

experiences (pornography, prostitution, sexoholism). In this aspect, it is strictly recommended to supply comprehensive information about sexually transmitted diseases, in particular HIV / AIDS<sup>11</sup>, treatment methods, centres and institutions of help and support, and systematic implementation of prevention campaigns.

It is also recommended to include in the school programs issues related to human rights, concerning sexual and reproductive<sup>12</sup> rights, socio-cultural conditions of sexuality (different cultures, religions, traditions different ways of understanding, constructing and managing corporality, sexuality, as well as behaviour, sexual activity and gender roles), sex and gender quality and gender roles, as well as the causes, symptoms and effects of discriminatory practices (age, sex, health, race, sexual orientation and other differences), and strategies and ways to combat and prevent them.

The second component of an effective sexual education program are skills. In this area, it is recommended to teach children and youth to acquire skills in the scope of: compliance with socio-cultural norms, communication (including the ability to use proper terminology regarding human sexuality and sex life), expressing one's emotions, needs, desires and wishes, protecting privacy and setting boundaries (saying "yes" and "no"), making decisions (e.g. about sexual intercourse), assertiveness and avoiding risky and unwanted sexual experiences. In this last aspect, it is necessary to teach young people the ability to search for and ask for help.

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<sup>11</sup> As the reports show in 2015, around 17, 800 million women over 15 years old and 1,400 million pregnant women infected with HIV lived in the world. In the group of children under 15, there were 1.8 million children and 1.8 million adolescents between 10 and 19 years of age infected with HIV. Every two minutes successive teenagers aged 15 – 19 years were infected, of which 2/3 were girls [for:] UNICEF, For Every Child End AIDS. Seventh Stocktaking Report, 2016, <https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HIV-and-AIDS-2016-Seventh-Stocktaking-Report.pdf>, UNAIDS, Ending the AIDS epidemic for adolescents, with adolescents. A practical guide to meaningfully engage adolescents in the AIDS response, [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/ending-AIDS-epidemic-adolescents\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/ending-AIDS-epidemic-adolescents_en.pdf), UNAIDS, Global AIDS update, 2016, [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/global-AIDS-update-2016\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/global-AIDS-update-2016_en.pdf), [12.04.2017].

<sup>12</sup> see e.g. WHO, European Regional Strategy on Sexual and Reproductive Health, Denmark 2001, 2.7, [http://www.euro.who.int/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/69529/e74558.pdf](http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/69529/e74558.pdf), [25.06.2017].

The third component of programs should be assistance in acquiring and shaping values and attitudes. In this area it is necessary to help young people in developing the acceptance of the image of their own body and sexuality, self-esteem, and in a special way, responsibility for their own health, behaviour, reactions, emotions and decisions (safe and pleasant sexual experiences). In addition, it should also enable young people to develop an attitude of respect, acceptance and tolerance towards other cultures, value systems, people, lifestyles and different ways of expressing sexuality, sexual orientation of various sexuality-related norms and a critical approach to cultural and religious norms in relation to sexual activity, procreation, parenting and gender roles.

It is also recommended that sexual education programs support raising public awareness of sexual and reproductive rights. This in particular concerns girls and women rights and ways to use them, promote the principle of equality and a model relationship between women and men<sup>13</sup>. The programs should also put emphasis on disagreement with all acts of sexual violence, discrimination and stereotypes regarding sex life, especially in relation to disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups<sup>14</sup>.

**Sexual education – the role of parents, teachers and society.** Those responsible for the implementation of sexual education should be parents first. An equally important role is attributed to school, in which sexual

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<sup>13</sup> see. e.g. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/hiv-and-aids/our-priorities-in-hiv/sexuality-education/>; <http://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education>; UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators, vol I and vol II, I Paris 2009; UNESCO, Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Global Review, Paris 2015, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/CSE\\_Global\\_Review\\_2015.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/CSE_Global_Review_2015.pdf), Population Council, It's all one curriculum. Guidelines and activities for a unified approach to sexuality, gender, HIV, and human rights education. New York 2009, [http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2010PGY\\_ItsAllOneGuidelines\\_en.pdf](http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2010PGY_ItsAllOneGuidelines_en.pdf), [http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2010PGY\\_ItsAllO99ne-Activities\\_en.pdf](http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/2010PGY_ItsAllO99ne-Activities_en.pdf), [10.06. 2017].

<sup>14</sup> Action Program of the Conference for Population and Development, Cairo 1994, 7.41; [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/PoA\\_en.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/event-pdf/PoA_en.pdf), IV Report of the World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4–15 September 1995, 108k, [http://www.tus.org.pl/uploads/dokumenty/raport\\_czwartej\\_swiatowej\\_konferencji\\_w\\_sprawie..\\_kobiet\\_pekini\\_1995.pdf](http://www.tus.org.pl/uploads/dokumenty/raport_czwartej_swiatowej_konferencji_w_sprawie.._kobiet_pekini_1995.pdf), [20.05.2017].



education through the involvement of teachers from different subjects and specialists (e.g. physician, nurse, midwife, psychologist<sup>15</sup>) should become an interdisciplinary subject and part of school life, i.e. should be present and visible in the rules of the school, its program and teaching methods and in school materials<sup>16</sup>. Thus, schools, media and social institutions were required to review and verify the already transmitted information and content, and if there is a need to develop new school programs, textbooks and didactic aids. The need to correct inappropriate teachers' attitudes in order to eliminate stereotypes concerning the cultural identity of the sexes, removing all forms of discrimination between women and men was also emphasized<sup>17</sup>. The greater effectiveness of the program will also ensure not only the organization of sexual education classes at school, but also active cooperation with parents, non-governmental organizations and communities in which pupils live and political decision makers who approve the core curriculum.

**Sexual education – supporters and opponents.** The creators and supporters of such a model of sexual education believe that it constitutes a liable chance to acquire reliable knowledge from an early age and thanks to it the ability to verify, coming from various sources (family, school, peers, mass media), incorrect information. Moreover, sexual education is believed to explain doubts as well as to shape responsible and based on equality and respect, attitudes in relation to sex life. In addition, by promoting and strengthening behaviours that prevent and reduce the risk of human sexuality<sup>18</sup>, it can help not only in avoiding the pitfalls and dangers associated with the conduct of sex life, but above all, teach the pleasure of sexuality, improve the quality of intimate life and help in creating happy

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<sup>15</sup> WHO / BZgA, Sexual education standards in Europe. Basic recommendations for decision-makers and specialists dealing in education and health, [https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/WHO\\_BzGA\\_Standards\\_polnisch.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/WHO_BzGA_Standards_polnisch.pdf), [15.05.2017].

<sup>16</sup> UNESCO, International technical guidance on sexuality education. Vol. I, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Report IV of the World Conference on Women..., 83a, 108k; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (the so-called Women's Convention), 1979, <https://amnesty.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Konwencja-Likwidacja-dyskryminacji-kobiet.pdf>, [15.09.2017].

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO, International technical guidance on sexuality education. Vol. I, op. cit. p. 3.

and safe interpersonal relations and intimate relationships. In addition, considering of the issues of gender equality, sexual and reproductive rights in early age, creates a space for building mutual relationships based on respect, facilitates understanding between the sexes, and especially in case of males, it increases the sense of responsibility for the quality and effects of sexual behaviour<sup>19</sup>.

On the other hand, such a model of sexual education arouses a lot of controversy and is the subject of criticism from organizations working to counteract the sexualization of children and youth<sup>20</sup>. They express a strong opposition to the series of recommendations, pointing out those that specifically destroy the children's chastity and the joy of childhood, pose a threat to the healthy development of children and youth.

First of all, the strong opposition concerns the promotion of sexual pleasure and promiscuity among children (at the age of 9–12) and presenting them as normal, safe and at the same time important elements of sexual health and the right of the child.

Secondly, the opponents of “comprehensive sexual education” strongly advocate against encouraging children and youth to sexual experiments (heterosexual and homosexual) and to experience their own sexuality in various ways, among others through masturbation, games and erotic toys<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, they emphasize the danger of seeking and practicing by children fast ways (self-stimulation) to relieve sexual tension. They can lead to becoming addicted to them and looking for only erotic stimuli in future that quickly release tension<sup>22</sup>. What is more, as Łukasz Dracz points out, «The sphere of impulse with aroused sexual curiosity, prompts the child to continue searching for information and experimenting, and re-

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<sup>19</sup> see. e.g. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/hiv-and-aids/our-priorities-in-hiv/sexuality-education/>; <http://www.unfpa.org/comprehensive-sexuality-education>; UNESCO, International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education: An Evidence-informed approach for schools, teachers and health educators, Paris 2009; UNESCO, Emerging Evidence, Lessons and Practice in Comprehensive Sexuality Education. Global Review, Paris 2015; UNESCO, [10.11.2016].

<sup>20</sup> see, for example, [www.stopseksualizacji.pl](http://www.stopseksualizacji.pl) or [www.stop-cse.org](http://www.stop-cse.org) or <http://www.comprehensivesexualityeducation.org>, [10.05.2017].

<sup>21</sup> UNESCO, International Guidelines on Sexuality Education, vol. I., p. 43.

<sup>22</sup> Stop the sexualization of our children. Do the WHO sex education standards prepare the child for the victim of sexual violence? [Www.stopseksualizacji.pl](http://www.stopseksualizacji.pl), [30.08.2017].



awakens. Children of such behaviour are more susceptible to seduction and sexual assault<sup>23</sup>”.

Thirdly, as a serious threat to children and youth’s health and their moral and psycho-emotional development, it is indicated to promote the use of condoms and contraceptives without reliable information on their effectiveness and describing abortion as safe and effective treatments that do not carry the consequences of human rights.

Fourthly, it points to the destructive influence by giving young people the right to experiment with sexual identities, orientations and styles in order to develop healthy sexuality. This is, as critics believe, the way to blur their intimate borders, their own gender identity and sexual orientation. In addition, allowing oneself to experiment with one’s sexuality, seeking pleasure and encouraging sexual play in an unnatural way concentrates children’s attention on the sexual sphere.

Fifth, attention is drawn to the danger of promoting disrespect for parents, religions and cultural values expressed in the conviction that “the majority of societal sexual and gender norms, especially those based on religion are repressive and harmful to health, and they should be changed.<sup>24</sup>” Such an attitude leads inevitably to the main goal of the CSE, which is, as its opponents claim, “a radical change in the cultural and sexual norms of society and the establishment of a law that will enable children to become sexually autonomous units<sup>25</sup>”.

The activities of the United Nations, regardless of their criticism, for the development of a generally accepted model of sexual education of children and youth and its international standards, result from the conviction that young people pay too high price for lack or inappropriate (of poor quality) education about human sexuality and rights, sexual and reproductive health. The most serious and most visible consequences include: early, unplanned and high-risk pregnancies among both girls and young women and what is connected with complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, and much higher than average perinatal mortality, unwanted and dangerous abortions. Irresponsible and risky, especially on the part of men, sexual and reproductive behaviours closely related to HIV / AIDS and other STI /

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.comprehensivesexualityeducation.org/history-of-cse/>, [10.05.2017].

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

STD infections, which should be dealt with in a radical and systemic manner at both individual and international level, were also pointed out. The serious consequences of the lack of proper sexual education, which pose a threat to development, health and well-being both in the individual and social dimension, include sexual violence, especially in relation to girls and women, as well as strengthening stereotypes, discrimination and gender inequalities increase.

Therefore, it was agreed that it is necessary to facilitate young people the access to information and guidance in all aspects of human sexuality and gender that are compatible with medical knowledge. It was also recommended that sexual education of children and youth would become an integral part of family and school life as well as constitute the development of reproductive and sexual health and thus lead to positive experiencing and reacting to one's and other people's sexuality and its proper shaping, as well as creating healthy, lasting and responsible relations and intimate relationships.

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## SUMMARY

Sexual education for children and youth is undoubtedly one of the most problematic subjects and curriculum being constantly discussed in various bodies and organizations. One is the United Nations and its specialized agencies (UN family), which pursue active policy in the field of sexual education for children and youth. The article presents the key components of the UN's high quality sexual education, the so called "comprehensive sexual education", i.e. goals, contents for learning outcomes, and framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists. It also discusses the role of school, parents and the social environment in the process of sexuality education. The paper also stresses the areas which can endanger health, development, happiness and safety of children and youth identified by critics and opponents of the proposed model, as well as standards of sexual education.

**Key words:** standards in sexuality education for children and teenagers, Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), United Nations and UN family, sexual rights, sexual and reproductive health.