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**Communication Methods of  
Sexual Education at Albanian  
Schools**

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### **Abstract**

Before 90's the guidelines for communication methodology on the institutionalized sexual education of young people in Albania, were considered a taboo. However, more than 20 years after the collapse of communist regime, very few things have changed compared to what the young people learn at schools about the hygiene and sexual health, sexual norms and ethics or linguistic methods that may be employed to convey a clear and non-ambiguous message to the young people. This is a sociological field of research which indeed remains unexplored in the Albanian society. Scientific research and analysis of the techniques used for the development of educational programs on sexual education and sexual ethics among the adolescents and young people at the Albanian high schools, are almost missing. The present study aims to analyze through the theoretical review of high school textbooks and empirical study of this focus group, the current situation of sexual education of the young people, forms of communication with them and to identify the causes bringing about these shortcomings in their life as adults.

**Keywords:** communication methodology, sexual education, sexual behavior, young people, educational program.

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## Introduction

Considering the historical background of Albania, it is still apparent that forms of sexual education are ideological and limited, establishing norms and taboos on sexuality issues for each adolescent. These moral standards or norms considered as ethical per se and the local social policies play a homogenous role. The sexual education in Albania is expected to have a moral ideological basis for the young people; otherwise they would not consider it education. This also occurs due to the social and political history of Albania, which has instilled anti-sexual beliefs for about five decades and moral values built upon ideological demagogies. Before 1990s there were no textbooks about sexual education of young people at schools. It was not about open methods in terms of sexual communication. Literature, books and texts with love, sexuality or erotic themes were forbidden. Reading these books might jeopardize the freedom of any youngster of that period.

In these circumstances, Albania exposed a facade which deep down was dangerous. As argued by Frayser, anti-sexuality does nothing but distorts the reality about sexuality, thus distorting the concept about the life of young people and the society as a whole (Frayser 1994).

Currently, the textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Science have some pages dedicated to sexual education but they are not sufficient and broadly treated. Accordingly, the subject of Biology and Health Education 7 (Ruka & Sokoli, 2007), at secondary schools includes only one chapter, basically covering reproduction organs, sexual maturity and pregnancy, puberty characteristics, contraceptives and sexually transmitted diseases. This chapter is deemed sufficient for the sexual education of students who follow secondary schools, although the statistics show a growing number of adolescents having sexual intercourse at that age.

Further, with the beginning of studies at general or professional high schools, regarding sex, sexuality and sexual education as a whole, the textbooks have only some pages of Career Skills and Lifelong Training 10 (Qirjako, 2008), dedicated to sex as gender, sexuality, sexual intercourse during the adolescence and sexually transmitted diseases. Definitions of terms of sex and sexuality, love or sexual intercourse and use of contraceptives are generally treated. The subject of Biology 11 (Ruka & Nashi, 2012) again covers a chapter on human reproduction and reproduction control. This closes the cycle of sexual education at Albanian schools and it would be the least disadvantage if it were not often associated with skipping or failure to elaborate these programs in classes due to the lack of teachers' professionalism. (Zenelaj, 2012. )

The purpose of this study is to stress the need for a democratic sexual education under open communication approaches, providing cooperation and conversation between teachers and students, and highlighting matters of concern caused by the present forms of sexual education.

The research assumptions raised in this study are as follows;

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Ideological sexual education does not affect open forms of sexual communication at high schools. **H<sub>1</sub>:** Sexual communication is not open and effective due to the ideological sexual education.

The operational definitions of concepts are related to sexual education, which refers to the learning programs on way how they address issues of sex, sexuality and decision making on sexual intercourses of young people. Sexual communication means the capacity of an individual to speak frankly about sexuality topics, either with the partner in case of young people in a relationship, or in the case of communication between teachers and their students. The young people are all students who attend general/public high schools in the city of Elbasan. By sexual behavior we have referred to particular behavioral patterns or actions purported to convey messages about sex and sexuality to the individuals who display interactions with each other, such as touches, seduction, flirts up to sexual intercourse.

Importance of this study lies in the fact it presents an overview of the reality of general public high schools of Elbasan regarding sexual education programs and communication methods at these institutions. The study contributes to the understanding of nature and sexual education programs at the Albanian schools and provides a platform and methodology affording the possibility of comparison and support for other researchers interested in this field.

Ideally, the study had to be conducted at all high schools of Albania but considering the nature of sexual education learning programs which have the same contents and character, and due to the timeline required, the study is limited only to the high schools of Elbasan.

## **Literature Review**

### *Ideological Sexual Education versus Democratic Sexual Education*

There are authors relying on morality for a supportive sexual education providing indications of truth, in order to not accept the ideology within the scope of their philosophical positions. According to Lickona, as an educational institution, school has to teach young generations the truths and positive values, where he argues that truth lies in the fact that pre-nuptial sexual relations remain harmful for the young people and value is represented by avoidance of sexual desires in early adulthood. (Lickona, 1991). However, there are many other authors and researchers who strongly argue that a successful sexual education is related to a comprehensive approach, stressing the need for learning programs with broad educational foundations at school institutions in respect of career, health and sexual education. This approach should not only cover learning programs such as biology and reproductive function of human beings, sexually transmitted diseases, desires and adolescence issues but it should also be based on sexual pleasures, communication and communication methods of sexuality in a society and homosexuality as a human right. Further, it stresses the importance of positive

aspects of sexual intercourses. It does not differentiate sexual pleasure from a protected sexual act. (Yaber, 1994)

On the other hand, through the theory of reasoned action, what Cooper, Shapiro and Powers have described as a functionalist perspective, is based on assumption that the decision to be involved in a behavior underlies the outcomes an individual expects to produce from that behavior. According to them, the motives or outcomes predicted for sexuality may be positive (pleasure, intimacy, attention) or negative (unplanned pregnancy, disease, refusal) (Cooper, Shapiro & Powers, 1998). It highlights the need for a direct communication about sexuality truths as to have a positive sexual behavior; one should be firstly informed through education and communication about its existence.

In her work, Ira Reiss clearly articulates the need to refuse dogmatic and dangerous philosophies on sexuality. She encourages the teachers and parents for open discussions and communication with children and adolescents about sexuality-related issues. According to her, only through democratic and open communication methods, children may learn about sexual truths, without distorting them. Thus, they will not need other alternative options such as media or Internet, which are often not related at all to sexuality. Yet, this approach should be initially applied to educators, who have to overcome traditional definitions of sexuality and sexual education of children, in order to understand the importance of sexual education for the socialization and life of a child. (Reiss, 1990). What is disguised as sexual education in most of the cases is not an education of young generations. Commonly, sexual education is rather a selective propaganda censuring the truths young people should know. (Kirby, 2010)

It should be understood whether the ideological traditional or the democratic liberal doctrine of sexual education provides a broader range of education for children and young people. Many authors admit that the non-democratic character of modern sexual education has disturbing implications. Sexual education programs blemished by ideology cannot accomplish the inalienable right of young people for freedom of information and action as similar educational programs do not contribute to a social democratic culture, and are not prevalent and educational for the young people (McKay, 1997). Because we often deem an act as immoral, non-ethical and irrational only for being sexual (Ellis, 1971), it seems as if we do not dare to admit what Michell Foucault expresses in his book "Care of the Self", that sexual relation is a biological need for the human beings as outdoor workouts, hygiene and health care for our body or conversations with our closest friends (Foucault, 1986).

In case of sexual education, the word democracy rather operates as a slogan which is often unclear. To go beyond slogans and say something pleasant and on the other hand safe within a limited space, seems a challenging and impossible requirement but indispensable one (Pearson, 1992). Democracy is little related to the identification of moral validity or empirical belief of different practices. Therefore, the fact that each belief is observed in accordance with consensual overlapping constitutes the very foundation of a



democratic society. Emotional, intellectual and moral tensions are those which make a society develop. Advanced communication methods and ideas introduced in a form of open face-to-face discussions cause civilized social conflicts bringing true democracy. (Rawls, 1993)

According to Winstein, the crucial value of democracy is the reproduction of social consciousness where we may identify of substantial value two principle-oriented limits on sexual education programs and education, such as the political and parental authority on the education of young generations (Winstein, 1991). In order to be democratic and instrumental, education should help people reflect over their responsibilities on the way how they are connected with consensus of pluralist democracy (McKay, 1996). According to Kaltsounis, democracy should not be merely understood as a type of political manifestation. It should be well defined in all fields, including the education of society and young generations, which should be provided a real civil and democratic sexual education. (Kaltsounis, 1994)

Through sexual democratic education, the parents and teachers should contribute to the increase of awareness, avoiding a potential historical amnesia in the life of each individual of the society (Pollis, 1985). A democratic sexual education is not dogmatic. It may be democratic by establishing more egalitarian relations between teachers and students, parents and children and would be considered ideal if it manifested social and sexual pluralism and diversity (Elia, 2000). Sexual modern education displays the need for an extended period of sexual education and involvement of the expectations of roles and behaviors (Kirkendall & Miles, 1968). Many authors favor the notion of a democratic sexual education. Firstly, as a right of young generations and secondly as an attribute and value of a democratic society which develops well-informed and skillful young people.

#### *Sexual Communication in Sexual Education*

In one of her books, Patricia Schiller, who has founded the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists, has written: “I have heard many parents who pride themselves on the way how they communicate with their children. They tell them: ‘You may ask me anything about sex, but the real non-verbal message they transmit is: I would be very upset if you had a sexual activity, if you committed sexual intercourse’, explains Schiller” (Kelly, 2012).

Thus, Schiller clearly expresses the failure of the parents for a clear and direct communication with their children about sexuality topics. This duty is notably attributed to the teachers and sexual education programs applied at schools but it commonly occurs these educational institutions convey contradictory messages for the young people. In the Albanian reality, distinguished authors who have paved the way to the development of present modern societies were barely taken into consideration. Such a social and cultural confusion about sex and sexuality does nothing but disturbs the life of many people (Reiss & Ellis, 2002), and this was obvious in Albania.

Many learning programs about sexual education may be drafted, which may clearly have different contents. However, their purpose should remain the same where the development of sexual communication skills and of efficient methodologies to meet this purpose is attached a special importance. (Freudenberg & Radosh, 1998; Haignere, Culhane, Balsley, & Legos, 1996; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000).

If communication about sexuality is developed under a healthy and open approach, people will be more relaxed in their daily life, more active, more assertive to the achievements and therefore, more critical to their behavioral patterns” (Kelly,2012). The sexual education programs at schools often disregard the fact that through sexual communication methods, these young people may learn how to treat their girlfriend/boyfriend or sexual partner. Hence, we learn to be good sexual citizens in the world of sex (Lamb, 2011) . The sexual education programs are generally successful in terms of the information about sexual health such as sexually transmitted diseases or prevention of undesired pregnancies but these programs rarely provide open discussions about social interaction and sexual communication (Brunner, 1992; Fine, 1992; Lamb, 1997; McLaren, 1992). Even schools which have established sexual education programs have restrictions, thus preventing an open communication approach (Weiss, 2002), as it might be the case of Albania. Troth and Peterson argued that adolescents educated on formal basis of sexual education are rarely capable of sexual communication and negotiation about sexual activity (Troth & Peterson, 2000).

In the framework of study on sexual communication among college graduate women, they admitted that formal sexual education was inappropriate, it did not teach any communication skills or effective attitudes to relations with a sexual partner. None of them stated to have acquired communication skills through sexual education methods applied at schools. (Cleary,Barhman, MacCormack, & Herold, 2002). Further, the study conducted in Albania revealed that women admit to be afraid of being open in terms of sexual communication as this initiative might cause prejudices between partners. On the other hand, they are taught to adopt patriarchal ideological attitudes and consider the communication on sexual relations as a taboo or violation of social norms (Zenelaj, 2012). There are authors who assume that sexual education programs include advanced communication methods because education on the reduction of sexual risks makes the young people be more open and create assertive and direct forms of sexual communication (Gidycz, Rich, Orchowski, King, & Miller, 2006). Other researchers reiterate the fact that sexual communication helps to enhance skills for self-protective sexual behaviors. (Catania, Binson, Dolcini, Moskowitz, and van der Straten, 2001; deVisser & Smith, 2001; Quina, Harlow, Morokoff, Burkholder, & Dieter, 2000). However, it remains clear that the lack of skills for sexual communication is harmful (Buysse & Ickes, 1999; Polit-O’Hara & Kahn, 1985). The feeling of being an incapable person to develop discussions about sexuality topics and sexual relations thwarts the relations of young people with their partners (Welch Cline, Freeman, & Johnson,1990). All of the above components make

the young people avoid sexual communication and commonly prejudice similar initiatives, as they are afraid that couple relationship is affected or the partner learns immoral values for them. Yet, above all, a dangerous phenomenon in Albania remains ambiguity by sexual education at the local public schools regarding too simple terms required for a healthy sexual activity.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is built upon a positivist approach with an objectivist ontological position, where the social reality is existent, which we, as researchers, may study independently. Knowledge about sexual education is based on what we as researchers may observe and outline from the reality, pursuing an objective unbiased judgment on the data and surveyed subjects. The study assumptions derive from the current reality and include casual relations between both study variables, such as the ideological sexual education and common forms of sexual communication. To prove the assumptions, factual data of easily observable value obtained from the survey of 353 high school students of Elbasan city, will be employed. Such data will be coded and be further analyzed through the statistical program SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 20). Means, standard deviations, frequencies and other descriptive statistics were performed to characterize the sample. Assumptions will be tested through Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests, where the level for statistical significance was set at  $p < .05$ .

#### *Sampling and Sampling Procedures*

The study sample population includes students from 7 general/public high schools of Elbasan city, respectively titled as follows: 1) Kostandin Shpataraku, 2) Mahmut Ali Cungu, 3) Kostandin Kristoforidhi, 4) Dhaskal Todri, 5) Vasil Kamami, 6) Mahir Domi, 7) Ahmet Dokli. According to the Educational Directorate, a total of 3531 students continue their studies at these schools in three grades. The tenth, eleventh and twelfth grades are followed by 1261, 1194 and 1076 students respectively, Educational Directorate of Elbasan. 353 students were surveyed out of the total of 3531 students at 7 general high schools of Elbasan, thus representing 10% of the total number of students, where 1 every 5 students were randomly selected to be part of our study on the basis of student register of each school. In case when a student refused to participate in the survey, the other following student was selected on register basis. The sample population included men and women between 16 and 20 years of age.

#### *Measurement Instrument*

Data were collected through reverse score standardized questionnaire, where questions started from the least important to the ones which were most fundamental for our study. The questionnaire contains 25 multiple choice questions previously specified and is divided in 3 sections: Demographic

section with questions about gender, age, school where studies are followed, ethnicity etc. Section on communication and sexual education with questions such as forms of communication between teachers and students about sexual education issues, the way how terms of sex, sexual intercourse, sexuality, sexually transmitted diseases, homosexuality are explained, sexual communication skills they have acquired at schools, school or family preferences to obtain sexual education ...etc. The third section is about the sexual activity, including questions such as: Have you had sexual intercourse? How old were you when you had sex for the first time? What kind of sexual intercourses have you committed? What are your sexual preferences? Do you use contraceptives during the sexual intercourse etc.

### *Results of the Study*

The students' sample population of 353 respondents per demographic section includes 57.8 % women and 42.2% men. According to the respective data, 183 students belonged to the groups of 15-17 years of age and 170 were 18-20 years old. The students' nationality was mainly Albanian, with about 89.2%, 9.6% were Roma and 1.1% had Egyptian nationality.

In the second section of the questionnaire built upon sexual communication and education, when questioned about the textbooks used at schools about sexual education topics, 158 students admit they are provided a similar education from the subject of Biology, 121 from the subject of Career and Lifelong Training, 34 from the subject of Psychology and 40 of them acknowledge there are no textbooks to address sexual education-oriented topics.

Regarding the question how they are explained the terms of sex, sexuality, homosexuality, sexual intercourse and sexually transmitted diseases, the respondents admitted as follows: 61.8% stated that by sex they mean someone's gender and 37.1% imply sexual intercourse. 30% of them admit that homosexuality is a congenital disease. 17.3% of them mean a degrading behavior for the society. 29.5% admit that homosexuality is a topic never developed at schools and only 23.2% stated it is merely a sexual preference of a person. By sexuality, 85.3% of the students mean sexual desires of a person. In the meantime, out of 353 students participating in the study, 79.8% assert that sexually transmitted diseases are spread from the sexual intercourse with infected persons; about 20% believe the disease is caused by body touches or when being close to someone infected. By sexual intercourse, 96.3% of the sample population meant the penis penetration in the vagina, anus or mouth and 3.7% consider lip kissing as sexual intercourse.

One of the key variables and questions of the questionnaire was related to the communication between the teachers and students in classrooms about sexual education related topics. Regarding this variable, 250 students admit there is no similar conversation and 103 of them affirm there is conversation but oriented to morality and ideology.

In the section about sexual activity, according to the data obtained, it follows that 146 students had sexual intercourse, with the youngest age of 13

years old. Accordingly, the age data group reveals that 51 students had sex at 13-14 years old, 48 at 15-16 and 41 students had sex for the first time at 17-18 years of age. Only 6 students had sex for the first time when they were over 18 years old. The highest frequency is at 14, totaling a number of 50 students. Of persons who admitted to have had sexual intercourse, 138 students stated they were heterosexuals, 2 students (Roma) had homosexual preferences and 6 students were bisexual (all of them being women).

To prove the assumptions raised in this study, the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test analysis and ANOVA test were carried out, in order to see the differences and links between the two main variables, dependent and independent ones. In table 2, following the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) analysis, it results that for the observed statistics of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) equaling to 203.030<sup>a</sup> and falling within the critical area, with a degree of freedom of 3 and importance level of 0.00 that is  $< 0.05$ , we admit there is a connection between both variables, therefore we reject  $H_0$  admitting that ideological sexual education does not affect open forms of sexual communication at high schools, and we take for granted  $H_1$  admitting that sexual communication is not open and effective due to the ideological sexual education. Also, through ANOVA test, in Table 3, where it results that Test F= 157.493, by importance level (column *Sec.*) that is  $0.00 < 0.05$ , per importance level 5%, we reject the null hypotheses admitting that there are differences between the groups.

## Conclusions

By this study we reach the conclusion that in Albania, respectively at 7 general public high schools of Elbasan, the sexual education programs of young generations do not have an adequate role during the teaching process and in a number of cases these programs are not taken into account. Communication between the teachers and students about sexual education topics is not satisfactory and in cases when there is communication, it is built on the foundations of morality and ideology of sexual intercourse.

The study clearly demonstrates there is a large number of young people who have had sexual intercourse and on the other hand, the communication methods used about sexual education topics do not offer clarity but ambiguity on connotations of each word on which an open and democratic sexual communication is launched. Though, in 2013 Albania unfortunately provides ideological sexual education.

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**Appendix**

**Table 1. Crosstabulation Open Conversation \* Education Type**

		Eductype				Total
		Built on the ideology and morality	Sexual education as a taboo	Is required and talk program open to	This program is not fully implemented / neglected	
<b>OpenConvers</b>	Count	30	2	67	4	103
	Yes % within Eductype	22.2%	2.5%	97.1%	5.9%	29.2%
	Count	105	79	2	64	250
	No % within Eductype	77.8%	97.5%	2.9%	94.1%	70.8%
<b>Total</b>	Count	135	81	69	68	353
	% within Eductype	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 2. Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	203.030 <sup>a</sup>	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	215.935	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.306	1	.012
N of Valid Cases	353		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5.

**Table 3. ANOVA**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	41.955	3	13.985	157.493	.000
Within Groups	30.991	349	.089		
Total	72.946	352			