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## THE PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS' REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER SOCIALIZATION

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*The article deals with the problems of reproductive health of young people in the context of gender socialization. The purpose of the article is defined as synthesis of psychological, and social and pedagogical problems associated with performing the tasks of strengthening reproductive health of students in the context of gender socialization. The author has defined the following objectives: to justify the interdependence of successful gender socialization and reproductive health of students; to show the impact of gender stereotypes on the process of socialization and the tendencies to destroy them among today's students; to summarize the experience of sexual education within the students' environment. The current trends of gender socialization of students and the impact of gender stereotypes on this process are highlighted in this article. Summarized results of the performed studies with the students from different Ukrainian regions in order to determine the levels of family relationship culture, and attention to the questions of reproductive health are presented. It is underlined that one of the ways of working with the students is sexual education that promotes social sex-appropriate behavior.*

**Key words:** student youth, reproductive health, gender socialization, gender stereotypes, sexual education, gender role behavior, femininity, masculinity, androgyny.

### Introduction

The present-day life of Ukrainian people is accompanied with a profound violation of the mechanism of its reproduction, the deterioration of not only quantitative but also qualitative characteristics of new generation, which characterizes the unfavorable demographic situation that becomes sustainable. Of course, this situation is caused by the peculiarities of the reproductive behavior and reproductive motivation of the population that depends on economic, social and psychological situation. Reproductive health is of essential importance for reproductive performance. At the same time, during the periods of political, economic and social instability in society, in addition to an increase in the youth asocial and criminal behavior, the situation is complicated by the increase of sexual irresponsibility, which negatively affects the reproductive health.

The analysis of scientific research works (O. Voropai, R. Kyrchiv, M. Kryshchuk, S. Kovalyov, V. Ste-shenko) confirms the idea that some relatively new trends concerning marriage and family are associated to some extent with the increased commitment of young

people not only to Western standards of living, but also to a different system of values and priorities, family traditions. Despite the everlasting Ukrainian traditions and relatively early marriage, now a part of young women (not to mention men) is not seeking to enter into formal marriage, while women sometimes prefer to have a child "for herself" and bring her up without her husband. Majority of women from the middle class, representatives of students want to create a family only after getting education and building a career. However, a common thing is to focus on career, achieve material prosperity, and strive solely to the professional fulfillment for the entire period of working life. Therefore, the alienation of family and parental roles occurs in which successful professional activity is carried out at the expense of raising children, and even at the expense of having children. It should be noted that according to the Ukrainian customs, a unity of two faithful loving hearts was preceded by quite a long acquaintance of young people: participating together in street festivals, parties, meetings. Cohabitation before marriage was strictly forbidden in Ukraine. Respect for

the girl's honor was characteristic of Ukrainian family life and human relationships (Kyrchiv, 1990, p. 134–135).

The church studied related documents of each pair very meticulously before giving its consent to the marriage. Wickedness is known as rare cases in our history. The wedding ceremonies, rituals, full of high moral inspiration, maiden honor and youth chivalry, love can be learned about from the works of O. Voropai, R. Kyrchiv, M. Kryshchuk, V. Skurativskyi (Voropai, 1966, p. 442). Unfortunately, now we witness the nation's degeneration, degradation of bodies and souls. Pure, true love is just ridiculed. Deep spiritual feelings of love are transferred to the sphere of physical relations. However, the initiation of eroticism in mass and elite culture, increase of the overall level of sexual freedom, weakening of external social control, early puberty and awakening of sexual interest lead to the evolution of sexual behavior of young people. It is now characterized by the following features: early sexual activity (long preceding the achievement of social maturity) and increase of its intensity, standardization of sexual behavior norms for boys and girls, the increasing number of premarital relations at a low level of sexual and contraceptive culture. Rather informal early marital relations, including "trial marriages", consensual unions and transit marriages are becoming increasingly common among young people. Young people often see a particular option of the above-mentioned ones as a temporary alliance formed for a certain period of life, divorce is accordingly regarded not only as a vital disaster, but also as likely, and even a natural phenomenon when "relations have exhausted themselves". This increases the number of personal tragedies and social problems.

Therefore, there is a need to improve sex education of today's youth, including the task of strengthening the reproductive health in dimensions of gender socialization.

The analysis of socio-pedagogical research works has proved that the following factors make the above-stated problems relevant: inability of young people to refuse to meet their own interests in favor of the family; negative social experiences in marital relations resulting from casual sexual relationships or living in civil marriages; limited expertise in the field of physiological and psychological differences between men and women; available pressure of sex-role stereotypes formed within the parent family, referent environment and natural social impact.

### **The aim of the study**

So, the aim of our research is to synthesize psychological and social and pedagogical problems associated with performing the tasks of strengthening reproductive health of students in the context of gender

socialization. We define the following objectives: 1) to justify the interdependence of successful gender socialization and reproductive health of students; 2) to show the impact of gender stereotypes on the process of socialization and the tendencies to destroy them among today's students; 3) to summarize the experience of sexual education within the students' environment.

### **Theoretical framework and research methods**

Analysis of current social trends reveals the fact of gender discrimination, which is to limit the social, professional and personal opportunities for men and women because of the inadequacy of public perceptions of a gender role. Therefore, the question of the dynamics of gender differences and their impact on individual way of life of a young person and the possibility of personal realization in the new socio-economic conditions are of considerable scientific and practical interest (Sh. Bern, M. Argyle, M. Mahuyr), as they reflect social trends within the academic environment. The social development is undergoing braking influence of gender stereotypes through unconscious excessive emphasis on the differences between men and women. Besides, gender differences are perceived as significant, as the Sh. Bern notes, in the fields in which their gender is evaluated as positive, and, vice versa, the value of a stereotype is tried to be reduced in an unfavorable characteristics of sex.

Recently, as the T. Hurleva points out, ideals of femininity have undergone some transformation. Today's femininity is based not on the weakness and dependence, but on spiritual strength, education, energy, that is harmoniously combined with tenderness, gentleness and compassion. But the essence of femininity in the past, today and tomorrow is a perception of emotional sensitivity, flexibility of nature, the specific attractiveness for men. High traits of women are and remain to be the traits of a mother, caring and gentle wife, true friend (Glavnyk, 2003, p. 12). Occupational expectations and social activity are more typical for men.

### **Results**

The development of gender roles as socially conditioned patterns of gender-role behavior occurs in the context of gender socialization based on regulatory requirements and expectations. Through the adoption and implementation of social roles, an individual is joining the group, society as a whole using the mechanisms of social adaptation and personal expression. Gender-role socialization is mastering by human being the gender roles, societal expectations on these roles and the formation and consolidation of relevant psychological symptoms, confirming the set of behavior forms

according to gender role (R. Hof, E. Shore, K. Haider). Thus, the sexual and gender roles have a special place in the process of socialization and are closely associated with that identity of the individual. If the real human behavior is different from social expectations according to gender, then the society makes a certain pressure, resorting to sanctions. In this case, social stereotypes concerning male and female gender roles can influence the gender development, thus limiting self-identity of each of them. It should be noted that gender-role socialization of men and that of women have many differences. Stereotyped for women is the commitment to family values, so they can have serious problems in the process of professional self-realization. Distinctive characteristics of female psychology reflect directly or indirectly the peculiarities of cultural context. However, even correctly received results indicate insignificant differences between women and men. Moreover, as it is proved by H. Craig, in recent decades, fixed differences are becoming less striking as it is happening due to the reduction of gender segregation processes of socialization.

Thus begins a new stage in the study of sex–role behavior, the model of which is called androgynous. A new concept was introduced by American psychologist Karl Jung in the 70's of last century, and S. Bem proved that masculinity and femininity are not opposed to each other, and demonstrated the possibility of combining the best demonstrations of both sexes.

In the current research, the tendency of rejection of simplistic ideas about femininity and masculinity based on character traits is observed. There is a sharp weakening of the polarization of male and female roles. A real model of masculinity – femininity has acquired features of continuity, which assumes that a man can be strong and energetic, but at the same time, he does not have to be rude and aggressive, and women's tenderness is not seen to be necessarily passive. A continual model allows variations, even transitions in wide ranges. Joint training greatly diminishes the differences in standards of conduct and psychology of men and women. The androgynous model of gender roles is getting more common.

A survey conducted among Ukrainian students from different regions (the total of 780 people) concerning the distribution of family responsibilities has shown a strong tendency towards the destruction of traditional stereotypes in this sphere, although years of staying in the parental form of a family form the relationship patterns that are directly related to the expectations of sexual-role behavior models in the future marriage. However, having analyzed the obtained experimental data we can estimate that modern young people tend to form gender parity by changing nature and mechanisms of reproduction of socially constructed

traits, roles and relationships. Thus 85,9 % of the surveyed have no tendency to strict regulation of family responsibilities by gender affiliation, they are more comfortable with mutual support when performing household chores.

In order to determine the levels of formed culture of family relationships within the student youth, their attention to the reproductive health we used a survey, questionnaires, purposeful pedagogic observations, individual and group interviews, solving problem situations, watching and analyzing thematic television programs.

The questionnaire questions predicted receiving answers on issues that concern young people, their attitude to marriage and family awareness of marital roles of husband and wife, the functions of the today's family, focusing on creating their own family and conditions of making the family "happy". The choices offered for every question were a kind of listing of certain family values in this field. A separate unit was made of questions that made it possible to clarify the understanding of the nature of young people's reproductive health and the risks associated with it. Respondents were asked not only to mark just one answer but also to hold their ranking. Among the used methods there were the methods of resolving problem situations, the content of which reflected the ways of young people's behavior in the case of having tempting offers (Sorochynska, 2003, p. 132–135). Generalization and systematization of the obtained empirical material allowed us to define three typological groups of students, each of which is characterized by certain features.

*The first group.* Students have a thorough knowledge of the family's functions, conditions of its creation and successful existence; rules, regulations and samples of cultural communication; understand their importance for effective interpersonal relationships in a family environment; reveal attitudes to the family as important personal values; have intention to create a family, respect the partner as a significant one; possess empathy, interpersonal skills to build relationships based on moral norms of coexistence, have developed communication skills. The issue of reproductive health is analyzed occasionally, mainly associated with the general state of health. The concept itself is treated by them only as the ability to implement physiological functions. Premarital sex is not approved. However, the respondents allow the opportunity of having it in case of mutual love; they do not see the value of previously acquired sexual experience for building full-fledged family relationships as they are based on mutual respect and love. This group constitutes 8.7 % of the total number of the surveyed students.

*The second group.* The students are informed enough about the functions of the family, conditions of its creation, but they attribute the family successful functioning largely to material factors; knowledge of the culture of communication is characterized by a certain inconsistency; the same tendency is typical to their notions about the importance of standards and rules for relationships in the family environment; demonstrate a positive attitude to creating a family, but they believe that first you need to live in a civil marriage more so that the public morality does not put serious obstacles to this; are inclined to believe that early sex relationships are connected with specific risks, so extensive information on the prevention of such risks is needed; they cannot assess unambiguously the value of previously acquired sexual experience for family relationships; the ability to build interpersonal relationships with the opposite sex is marked as fragmented, although they have well-developed communication skills; the term “reproductive health” is interpreted only as the ability to have children, the risk factors are not associated with their own style and way of life. The total number of respondents in this group is 71,2 %.

*The third group.* The students have wrong ideas about the family, conditions of its building and existence; their knowledge of cultural norms and rules of behavior and communication culture is fragmentary and often associated with negative samples, which are perceived as justifiable for family cohabitation; the family is treated from purely utilitarian positions or just negatively; partners for interaction and communication can be treated with arrogance, disrespect, contempt; they reveal a cynical attitude toward human sexuality; premarital sex is fully justified, considered essential for acquiring sexual experience; they are skeptical of any intentions to expand informational awareness of reproductive health and risk factors; they emphasize that it's their personal life, which young people cope with independently. This group amounts to 20,1 % of respondents.

Student's awareness of the need to be prepared for creating a stable family is a system of social and psychological affirmations of an individual that defines the emotional and psychological attitude to the style and values of marriage. There are two main types of sex education programs. The principle of the first is the belief that it makes no sense to call young people to change their behavior and therefore proposes to learn to protect their health by using contraceptives. The principle of the second program is the belief that young people can be convinced to abstain from sexual relations before marriage. The third variant is also possible: to convince in abstaining from sexual relations before marriage, but to acquaint with contraception.

An integral part of gender socialization of students is enhancing the educational component because the primary sexual socialization occurs through evolutionary mechanism of identification with adult members of their own sex. The low level of pedagogical culture of microenvironment often leads to social exclusion in the implementation of gender roles. Therefore, one of the ways of educational work with students is sexual education as a process of systematic impact on the sexual consciousness of the individual in order to optimize personal development, development of social sex-appropriate behavior. Moreover, the system of educational work with students successfully applies the elements of the problem resolving that direct students to a reflection, systematization of information and the development of social and perceptual skills, that's the ability to imagine themselves in specific situations, exercise moral choice. The method of selecting the didactic tasks of problematic nature in the sex education of students allows them to learn to compare known and unknown, common and scientific knowledge, to formulate a paradoxical problem solution of the type: “Love is the foundation of happy intimate relationship. Nevertheless, marriages based on love break down much more frequently than those based on rational calculation. Perhaps it is not necessary to love, but to learn to choose a partner sensibly?”

The most efficient forms of educational work are heuristic discussion, group problem solving situations (so-called mini-debates) and plot-role-playing games. Heuristic discussion is a series of interrelated issues, each of which is a consistent step towards solving a major problem. Questions to the audience are the basis of dialogue communication. Each of them seems to push to searching for arguments in a particular direction. For example, stating the reason for a divorce the former bride and bridegroom usually write: “We are people of different temperaments”. Maybe they are wrong, and it would be more honest to say: “We are people of similar temperaments?”, “What reason is more truthful”?

Plot-role-playing game as a form of sex education is particularly effective in clarifying moral and psychological foundations of the relationship. Participants must find the solutions to ethical problems in interactive communication; bring the solution of a specific life situation to its logical conclusion. A moderator can replace the members of the game in the course of a dialogue especially in order to aggravate the situation in order to penetrate deeper into the moral and psychological nature of the phenomenon. For example, students are proposed to model relationships of an ideal family, to hypothesize on possible difficulties and their causes.

The effective but the most labor-intensive method of sex education is the research method within the use of which college students are involved in the formulation of self-moral and psychological problems related to gender or sexual behavior, and in the search for solutions to the problems. For example, the students are proposed to comment on the moral idea of the story "The Fanlight" by F. Kryvin or to compare the modern idea of gender equality with the words of P. Beaumarchais: "The Nature said to a woman: "Be wonderful if you can, be wise if you want, but prudent you should be certainly".

The most important task of sex-role socialization of young people is to develop ability to love, in the broadest sense of this word, to respect yourself as a representative of a particular sex, to take care of your mental and physical development, to learn to understand your own body and sexual feelings, to strive to create harmonious relationship with the opposite sex on the basis of friendship and respect that are the foundation of reproductive health.

## Conclusions

Important social and pedagogical conditions allowing modern youth to adopt of values-based sense of reproductive health is the development of positive motivation in creating a family; formation of adequate ideas about the nature of family roles of a husband and a wife, a father and a mother within the family; understanding the concepts of "family values" and "responsible parenthood"; development of moral qualities of a future family man based on the ideal of love; humane treatment for themselves and other family members, especially children; formation of skills in order to prevent domestic violence, to guarantee children's rights and to find constructive ways of conflict resolution.

As a result, social and pedagogical aspect of the researched problem implies expanding educational interpretation of family values, which involve and include a set of traditions, rules and standards of conduct, moral and aesthetic priorities and identifies educational and developmental opportunities for family life, family

traditions, modern forms of family life built on respect for the principles of a healthy life.

At all times, all peoples passed their knowledge about family, the structure of family life, performance of marital and parental roles to the younger generation. The further research of the issue requires proper scrutiny of the past heritage, analysis of the research done by modern scientists who have not received adequate coverage and require more attention. In particular, the formation of the moral foundations of responsible parenthood deserves attention of researchers.

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