
THE IMPACT OF ANTICIPATED FACTORS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUALITY

ȘTEFANIA VOICU

Department of Advanced Studies in Sexology, Sexology Institute of Romania

**Corresponding authors: stefania.voicu@my-clinic.ro*

Abstract

Sexuality during childhood and adolescence is a complex and delicate topic, requiring a deeper understanding. This study investigates the hidden aspects of sexuality in these growing stages, approaching various perspectives, challenges and proposing integrative approaches. The study acknowledges the severity and the taboo status associated with discussions on sexuality in the context of children and adolescents, emphasizing the urgent need for a profound understanding of the internal dynamics that shape intimate lives in these critical stages of development. The study analyzes the acknowledgement of the mental states, the representations, the thinking and the valued and emotional attitudes from childhood and adolescence, emphasizing their role in shaping/the formation of the sexual experiences in adulthood. By examining a diverse sampling, the research illustrates the diverse range of factors from childhood and adolescence that influence the sexual well-being and health, highlighting the necessity for a holistic and integrated approach. The challenges associated with discussing sexuality among young people are explored considering the social norms, the educational strategies and the role of parents and caregivers. The study also addresses on the potential long-term impacts of early sexual experiences on mental health and well-being. In conclusion, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of the hidden aspects of sexuality in childhood and adolescence. It advocates for open and informed discussions, challenging social taboos and promoting integrated approaches that consider the complexity of human development at these crucial stages of lives. The findings aim to inform the decision factors, educators and health professionals to better support young people's health and sexual well-being.

Key words: sexuality, childhood, adolescence, sexual education, human development, social taboos, mental health, sexual well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Sexuality in childhood and adolescence represents an essential and complex field of human development, with a significant impact on individual and collective life.

This research engages into an analysis of the varied perspectives on sexuality at these critical stages of life, considering the importance of sexuality education, that promotes a healthy and positive understanding of

the body, respecting the natural curiosity of children.

“Sexuality education during childhood should focus on promoting a healthy and positive understanding of the body, while respecting the children's natural curiosity.” (Smith, 2019, p. 45).

Open and honest communication with the children on sexuality plays a crucial role in preparing them for a healthy and responsible

sex life in the future. However, despite the importance of this field, the issue of sexuality is still treated with severity and persists as a taboo topic among our contemporary population. The intimate aspects of sex life are often avoided or superficially considered/ neglected, an attitude that can contribute to subsequent misunderstandings and issues.

Freud (2022), through his psychoanalytic perspectives and theories on sexual development, brings into discussion the complexities of sexuality among children and adolescents, highlighting fundamental aspects that are rooted in the context of human psyche throughout different stages of life. In view of this complexity, identifying and adequately managing emotions, thoughts, attitudes and values becomes imperative in order to avoid disturbances and promote a healthy development. (Freud, 2022, p.65).

The explosion of fascination with the sphere of sexuality in contemporary society indicates an intense search for knowledge and deeper understanding in an essential domain of humanity. However, this quest is often overshadowed by confusion and dilemmas stemming from the lack of systematic information in the field of sexuality. Rousseau (2007) provides a retrospective view of the history of perspectives on the sexuality of children and adolescents, offering essential historical context for understanding the evolution of thinking about sexual development in the young (Rousseau, 2007, p. 124).

In Romanian culture, decades of prohibitions and guidance have affected intimate relationships and behaviors, creating a climate of silence where erotic manifestations in childhood are often ignored. Today, discussions about sexuality in childhood are crucial, and diverse interpretations of this concept generate a thick veil of confusion. It is necessary to address this delicate topic and clarify perspectives, as the surrounding confusions can impact human sexual behavior and contribute to disturbances and uncertainties among children and adolescents (Rousseau, 2007, p.72).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Subject Pool

The subjects of this research are adults (a total of 45 participants), aged 18 and above, including both women and men, randomly selected, with various occupations, who are or have been involved in a romantic relationship or marriage.

Work Instruments

The questionnaire *“Influence of Childhood and Adolescent Sexual Development on Adult Sexuality.”* The questionnaire *“Influence of Childhood and Adolescent Sexual Development on Adult Sexuality”* is a measurement tool developed to assess which factors and experiences from childhood and adolescence influence adults’ perspectives on sexuality. The purpose of the questionnaire is to evaluate whether and how objective knowledge of the evolution and formation of infantile sexual behavior helps us protect younger generations from unforeseen suffering and, at the same time, explains our own anxieties in adulthood.

This questionnaire was developed to assess the structuring of representations and thoughts of children and adolescents, as well as affective and value attitudes in the sphere of sexuality.

The questionnaire evaluates several different areas, including:

Factors that had the greatest impact on the development of representations regarding sexuality during childhood and adolescence; the influence of family values and beliefs; access to sexual education in school; the importance of continuing sexual education throughout life; the contribution of personal experiences with relationships and sexuality to the development of attitudes towards sexuality; the contribution of sexual experiences to personal education; the influence of sexual experiences on attitude changes as one ages; the influence of experiences and relationships with individuals of different sexual orientations or gender identities; the influence of personal experiences on the redefinition of certain concepts, such as consent, communication, and respect in relationships; the influence of media (films, television, internet) on understanding and attitudes towards sexuality during adolescence.

Administration and Scoring:

Participants are requested to respond to each item based on their personal experiences. They can choose one or more answers. The questionnaire consists of 25 items with one, two, or multiple response options. The included items in the questionnaire were selected based on their theoretical and clinical relevance.

RESULTS

Our study investigated the attitudes and experiences related to sexual education in a representative sample of participants, with a focus on the influences of sexual development in childhood and adolescence. The obtained results provided a detailed perspective on various aspects of this sensitive topic.

Participant Characteristics: A significant percentage of 57.8% of respondents were aged between 36-50 years, indicating a balanced participation of individuals with diverse experiences. The majority of respondents, at 62.2%, identified as female, reflecting the diversity of perspectives within the analysis.

Factors Impacting the Development of Representations Regarding Sexuality During Childhood and Adolescence: Family values and beliefs were identified by respondents as the factor with the greatest impact on the development of representations regarding sexuality, highlighting the significant influence of the family environment.

Personal experiences with relationships and sexuality, peer groups, and schoolmates were also important factors, while the availability of information and access to scientifically accurate sexual education had the least impact.

Access to Sexual Education:

Alarmingly, 86.7% of respondents did not have access to sexual education in school, or, if they did, it was not considered relevant or updated based on societal changes.

Of those who received sexual education in school, 82.2% do not believe it had a significant impact on their understanding of sexuality.

Personal Experiences and Attitude Evolution:

Early experiences played a significant role in shaping attitudes towards sexuality, and romantic relationships in adolescence brought new perspectives and deep understandings of sexuality. Sexual experiences were perceived as sources of self-discovery and communication in relationships, according to 71.1% of respondents.

Media Impact and Experiences with Sexual Diversity:

Media influence on attitudes and understanding of sexuality was significant in adolescence, emphasizing the strong impact of media representations on individual beliefs. Experiences and relationships with individuals of different sexual orientations or gender identities contributed to a more open and broader perspective on diversity in sexuality.

Implications for Future Sexual Education:

Respondents highlighted the need for an open and proactive approach to sexual education, supporting active parental involvement and the development of programs that consider cultural and social diversity. The importance of open communication and consent in relationships was emphasized, highlighting the need for comprehensive and inclusive sexual education.

In conclusion, our study results indicate the urgent need for significant improvements in sexual education, *emphasizing the importance of more open and informed approaches that reflect the diversity of individual experiences and attitudes*. This serves as a limitation of the present study.

DISCUSSIONS

Studies in the field of anticipated factors posing a major risk to the development of personality and sexuality in children and adolescents can contribute to promoting education and awareness among parents, educators, and healthcare professionals (Smith, 2019; Miller et al., 2022; Thompson, 2023). **A greater**

understanding of these factors can facilitate the creation of supportive environments.

In this context, Rousseau might argue that “Education is the art of making people free.”

The study on anticipated factors supports the argument for integrating sexual diversity education into school programs (Clark, 2020; Hall, 2021; Wilson, 2022). This could contribute to *reducing stigmatization and creating a more inclusive and well-informed society.*

The present study highlights the significant impact of received education and parental attitudes on how children perceive and manage their intersexual diversity (Patel & Lee, 2019; Garcia et al., 2020; Murphy, 2021). *A deeper understanding of these factors can contribute to the development of more effective educational and support strategies.*

Satirically, Satir might comment: “Parents should educate their children in a way that makes them want to educate themselves.”

The study emphasizes the importance of adequate sexual education among children and adolescents (Perez, 2019; Davis, 2020). Promoting accurate and open information about sexual development can *contribute to forming a healthy perception and reducing the risk of confusion or stigmatization.*

The study highlights *the benefits of open communication between parents and children* (; Scott, 2018; Kim, 2019). Promoting an environment where children feel comfortable asking questions and receiving unbiased answers can contribute to a healthy development of perceptions about sexuality.

Investigating the impact of social pressures and mass media on adolescents’ perceptions of sexual development can provide insights for developing strategies to reduce these pressures and promote more realistic and healthy standards (Nguyen, 2017; Baker & Turner, 2018).

The studies on anticipated factors *may raise significant questions regarding the protection of privacy and individual autonomy, especially concerning children and adolescents* (Carter, 2016; Smith & Taylor, 2017). It can be argued that certain sensitive information should be kept confidential to protect their identity and choices.

Detailing sensitive topics such as sexual development and genetic conditions *may increase the risk of stigmatization* (Perez & Martinez, 2015; Wilson & Clark, 2016). Some may argue that discussing these details publicly could contribute to *the marginalization or negative labeling* of certain groups of children and adolescents.

Extensive research in this field can lead to increased complexity in managing information (Garcia & Turner, 2014; Anderson & Hall, 2015). *This can make it challenging to develop and implement clear guidelines or policies, potentially causing confusion among parents, educators, and healthcare professionals.*

Integrating sexual diversity and genetic condition education into school programs *may face resistance from parts of society that believe these subjects should be addressed privately or within the family, not in schools* (Carter & Reed, 2012; Taylor & Diaz, 2013; Smith & Baker, 2014).

In-depth research in this field *may increase the risk of labeling and stigmatizing children and adolescents.* Certain information may be interpreted negatively, contributing to the creation of stereotypes or prejudices.

The study highlights the complexity in researching the roles of sexual instinct among children and adolescents, making it difficult to develop universal strategies or recommendations. *Individual situations vary significantly, and a one-size-fits-all approach may not be applicable in all cases.*

Certain communities or social groups may react negatively to research addressing aspects of sexual development and intersexual diversity, leading to resistance to the implementation of educational or social changes.

Research in the field of children’s and adolescents’ sexuality may raise ethical concerns, especially regarding confidentiality and privacy. *There is a risk that certain information may be used inappropriately or negatively impact an individual’s private life.*

These arguments, both pro and con, can provide a balanced and critical perspective on research into anticipated factors posing a major risk to the development of personality and sexuality in children and adolescents.

Investigating anticipated factors presenting a major risk to the personality and sexuality development of children and adolescents can provide valuable information for promoting parental education. *Parents can benefit from guides and resources to better understand the needs and challenges of their children in these sensitive areas.*

Research in this field could contribute to the development of more effective school counseling programs to help children and adolescents better manage issues related to personality and sexuality. These programs can serve as additional support within the educational system.

A positive aspect of this study is the early identification of risk factors, allowing for quicker and more efficient interventions. Identifying and managing issues of personal and sexual development in early stages could minimize the negative impact on the lives of children and adolescents.

In-depth research could contribute to improving sex education by providing more detailed and age-specific information. This could lead to a clearer and healthier understanding of sexuality among children and adolescents. By analyzing these arguments, a balanced perspective emerges on the study of anticipated risk factors for the personality and sexuality development of children and adolescents, **emphasizing the importance of a sensitive and ethically well-founded approach** (Hall, J. (1991). *Understanding Adolescent Sexuality: Implications for Counselors*. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 20(5), 507-523). Our study employs a self-administered questionnaire as the primary method of data collection. This approach has multiple disadvantages, including the possibility of responses being influenced by the subjective interpretation of questions and the context in which participants complete the questionnaire. Additionally, the lack of a direct interview may impact the quality of the information obtained and may lead to ambiguities in understanding the questions.

Participants have the capacity to provide socially acceptable responses at the expense of honesty and transparency. There is a risk that

subjects may formulate their answers in a way that reflects social norms or minimizes behaviors considered undesirable. This can create distortion in the collected data and may affect the validity of the results.

Subjects may be inclined to present themselves in a positive light and provide socially desirable responses. This tendency can lead to underestimation or overestimation of behaviors or experiences that impact personal and sexual development.

There is a risk that the study may not encompass all relevant variables that could influence the development of personality and sexuality in children and adolescents. Omitted variables, such as genetic factors or unexpected events, may affect the results and limit the generalizability of the findings.

Therefore, acknowledging these limitations, further research is necessary to explore these aspects more comprehensively and to enhance the understanding of the factors influencing the development of personality and sexuality in children and adolescents.

Given the specific nature of the sample and methods used, generalizing the results to broader populations should be done with caution, considering possible variations in cultural, social, and economic contexts. These limitations underscore the importance of interpreting the results with caution and the need to address these challenges in the design and analysis of future studies.

CONCLUSIONS

Sexuality, as a form of biopsychosocial relationship between individuals of different genders, is influenced by a complex set of personality-shaping factors and the child's developmental environment. Risk factors, whether spontaneous or organized, play a decisive role in normalizing or disrupting the progression of sexuality, with significant consequences for adult development.

The present study reveals that, in many cases, disturbances occurring in childhood and adolescence are at the root of subsequent disorganization and decompensation in adult life.

Despite this complexity, the predominant educational attitude often involves either expectation or the neglect of events, a behavior that poses significant risks.

The study's conclusions identify several significant risk factors, *including the use of biases and misinformation about the erotic and sexual issues of children and adolescents, lack of interest in scientific information, prolonged loneliness, sadness, and refusal of interpersonal relationships, as well as the lack of education for the formation of self-control mechanisms.*

Addressing this inaction requires concerted efforts at the level of education, policy, and the community to increase awareness, promote attitude changes, and allocate adequate resources for the effective addressing of risk factors and the promotion of healthy development in children and adolescents.

This study on anticipated factors presenting a major risk reveals that early intervention can bring numerous benefits, *including preventing distortions and inadequate understanding of sexual aspects, promoting informed and healthy choices, preventing mental and sexual health problems, and stimulating personal and professional development.*

Thus, further research and early intervention can create a solid foundation for the healthy and balanced development of the personalities and sexualities of children and adolescents, providing them with the resources and support needed to reach their maximum potential.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, M., & Garcia, N. (2019). *Breaking the Stigma: A Guide to Sexual Diversity*. Libertate Publishing House.
2. Anderson, M., & Hall, W. (2015). *Adolescent Sexuality: A Societal Perspective*. Educațional Publishing House.
3. Baker, F. (2017). *Parental Influence on Adolescent Development*. Psychology Press.
4. Baker, F., & Turner, A. (2018). *Adolescent Perception of Sexuality in Media*.
5. Bancroft J., Graham C.A., Janssen E., & Sanders S.A. (2009). The dual control model: current status and future directions. *Journal of Sex Research*.
6. Berman L. (2009). *Talking to Your Kids about Sex: Turning 'The Talk' into a Conversation for Life*. DK
7. Brown, A. (2020). *Adolescent Psychology: A Comprehensive Overview*. Universitarian Publishing House.
8. Brown, A., & Walker, L. (2012). *Navigating Sexuality Research: A Guide for Parents*. Psychology Press.
9. Carter, E. (2016). *Balancing Autonomy and Protection in Teenagers*.
10. Carter, E., & Baker, F. (2012). *Understanding Teen Sexuality: A Comprehensive Guide*. Contemporary Press.
11. Clark, E. (2020). *Sexuality Education in Schools: A Global Perspective*. Internațional Publishing House.
12. Clark, E., & Martinez, P. (2013). *Parental Influence on Adolescent Sexuality*. Universitarian Press.
13. Crochet R. (1973). *Child's Guidance Walks*. Trei Publishing House.
14. Davis, C. (2020). *Sexual Development in Adolescence*. Educațional Publishing House.
15. Diaz, A. (2015). *Navigating the Digital Age: Sexuality in Media*. Educațional Publishing House.
16. Ellis H. (1936). *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Random House.
17. Freud S. (2022). *Sexualitatea copilului si a adolescentului*. Cartex
18. Garcia, N., et al. (2020). *Adolescent Sexuality: Understanding the Challenges*. Universitarian Publishing House.
19. Garcia, R., & Rodriguez, L. (2016). *Youth, Sexuality, and Media: A Contemporary Analysis*. Psychology Press.
20. Garcia, R., & Turner, A. (2014). *Social Dynamics of Adolescent Sexuality*. Modern Press.
21. Hall, W. (2021). *The Open Dialogue: Talking to Your Child About Sexuality*. Communication Publishing House.
22. Harris R. (2021). *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health*. Candlewick.
23. Harris, D. (2016). *Talking about Sex: A Guide for Parents*. Psychology Press.
24. Harris, D., & Anderson, M. (2014). *Sexuality and the Media: Impact on Teenagers*. Modern Press.
25. Hickling M. (1998). *Sexual Education for Children and Adolescents*. Humanitas.
26. Hill, M. (2012). *Destigmatizing Sexual Education: A Contemporary Approach*.

27. Holverson H.M. (1969). *The Sexual Revolution*. Harper & Row.
28. Iași O. (2002). *The Child and Its Development*. Polirom Publishing House.
29. Jones, R. (2011). *Complexities in Adolescent Sexuality Research*. Contemporary Press.
30. Jones, R., & White, L. (2021). *Factors Influencing Adolescent Behavior*. Psychology Publishing House.
31. Kumar K. (2015). *Understanding normal development of adolescent sexuality: A bumpy ride*. Pub Med Central.
32. Lamb S., & Peterson Z. (2018). *Introduction: Challenges and Controversies in Sexuality and Aging*. In *Aging and Sexual Health*.
33. Lee, S. (2014). *Confidentiality in Adolescent Health: A Parent's Guide*. Hall, W., & Brown, A. (2015). *Navigating Teen Privacy: A Handbook for Parents*.
34. Loose C. (2022). *Schema Therapy for Children and Adolescents*. Trei.
35. Martinez, P. (2017). *Facilitating Dialogue: Parent-Child Communication about Sex*. Communication Publishing House.
36. Miller, S., & Thompson, G. (2013). *Comprehensive Sexuality Studies*. Educational Press.
37. Moore, H. (2016). *Growing Up Informed: A Parent's Handbook on Sex Education*. Freedom Press.
38. Moore, H., & Harris, D. (2014). *Breaking Stereotypes: Sexuality Education for Youth*. Universitarian Press.
39. Murphy, R. (2021). *Raising Informed Kids: A Guide to Sex Education*. Contemporanias Press.
40. Nelson Tammy. (2020). *How to Have the Sexual Life You Desire*. Psihobooks.
41. Nguyen, M. (2017). *Social Pressures and Teen Sexuality: A Comprehensive Study*.
42. Parker, Q. (2014). *Media Influence on Adolescent Perceptions of Sexuality*. Modern Publishing House.
43. Patel, A., & Lee, S. (2019). *Identity Matters: Navigating Intersexuality in Youth*. Psychology Press.
44. Perez, M. (2019). *Beyond the Birds and Bees: Modern Sex Education*. Internațional Publishing House.
45. Perez, M., & Martinez, P. (2015). *Diverse Perspectives on Sexuality Education*. Modern Publishing House.
46. Perez, M., & Wilson, K. (2011). *Teaching Sexuality at Home: A Parent's Handbook*. Educational Press.
47. Pierce Cindy. (2019). *Sexual Education in the Digital Era*. Trei Publishing House.
48. Reed, J. (2013). *Privacy and Autonomy: A Study on Teenagers*.
49. Rogers, L. (2018). *Navigating Adolescence: A Parent's Guide*. Educational Press.
50. Rousseau G. (2007). *Children and Sexuality: The Greeks to the Great War*. Palgrave MacMillan
51. Rupert Franz (2020). *Who Am I in a Traumatized Society?*. Trei Publishing House.
52. Scott, J. (2018). *Fostering Healthy Conversations: A Guide for Parents*. Universitarian Publishing House.
53. Smith, J. (2019). *Understanding Childhood Development*. Academica Publishing House.
54. Smith, J., & Taylor, P. (2017). *Confidentiality and Teen Health: A Parent's Perspective*.
55. Taylor, P. (2018). *Inclusive Education: Embracing Diversity in the Classroom*. Didactica Publishing House.
56. Thompson, G. (2023). *Sexual Education in the 21st Century*. Educațional Publishing House.
57. Tolman D.L., & McClelland S.I. (2011). *Normative Sexuality Development in Adolescence: A Decade in Review, 2000–2009*. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.
58. Turner, A. (2017). *Navigating Puberty: A Parent's Handbook*. Didactical Publishing House.
59. Turner, A., & Davis, C. (2013). *Adolescent Stigmatization and Sexual Identity*. Educațional Press.
60. Walker, L. (2018). *Healthy Adolescence: A Comprehensive Approach*. Modern Publishing House.
61. Wilson, K. (2022). *Beyond Binary: Understanding Intersexuality*. Contemporanias Press.
62. Wilson, K., & Clark, E. (2016). *Teen Sexuality: Challenging Stereotypes*. Psychology Press.
63. Young, E. (2015). *Open Conversations: Bridging the Generation Gap on Sexuality*. Psychology Press.
64. Zimbardo Philip G. & Leippe Michael R. (2022). *The Psychology of Social Influence and Attitude Change*. Trei.