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# PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SEXUALITY: RELATIONSHIP WITH MENTAL HEALTH, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** The article presents the results of a study aimed at analysing the impact of sexuality on the psychological well-being of an individual.

**Objectives:** The study aimed to identify the key aspects that influence the perception of sexuality and its relationship with mental health.

**Methods:** The methodological basis of the study included psychological testing, which determined the personal potential of the respondents, their level of self-esteem and subjective sexual well-being. The participants in the experiment were young people aged 21 to 39. A variety of methods was used for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between sexuality and mental health and the key factors that influence the perception of sexuality and the psychological well-being of individuals.

**Results:** The analysed modern scientific achievements identified topical issues in this area, which contributed to the development and implementation of a training course aimed at raising the level of education of respondents. The course was based on modern theoretical concepts and empirical research and included practical exercises that developed participants' skills in self-reflection, intimate communication, and understanding personal emotions and needs.

**Conclusion:** The analysis of the data showed a significant impact of sexuality on the mental state of the respondents. In particular, the indicators of the respondents in the experimental group before the course indicated a reduced level of general psychological well-being (mathematical expectation (M) – 6.65, standard deviation (SD) – 1.36). And after attending the training course, these figures were significantly higher (M=10.34, SD=1.35).

**Key words:** intimate relationships; emotional stability; dysfunctions; communication; negative patterns; therapeutic environment.

## INTRODUCTION

The study and understanding of sexuality have always been important for research in psychology and human behaviour. Throughout history, various approaches to analysing this phenomenon have been developed. First, sexuality is seen as an important factor

that affects the physiological aspects of human life, the formation of interpersonal relationships, mental health and individual self-determination. The growing attention to the psychological aspects of sexuality is determined by several factors, among which the key ones are socio-cultural changes that

affect standards and perceptions of sexual identity. Many people, especially young people, have difficulty establishing positive attitudes towards their sexuality and forming satisfactory relationships. In this regard, there is a need to conduct research aimed at revealing the psychological mechanisms of sexuality formation, as well as its impact on the psycho-emotional well-being of a person. At the same time, it is important not only to understand the processes taking place at the level of an individual but also their connection with the social environment, cultural standards and other aspects of human existence.

The problem of sexuality has attracted the attention of researchers for many decades. This has shaped various approaches to understanding this phenomenon. Analysing the current state of research, several key trends can be identified. First, research focuses on sexual identity, sexual relationships, sexual orientation and sexual role expectations. Researchers are actively studying the impact of socio-cultural, psychological and biological factors on the formation and expression of sexual identity, as well as its relationship with mental health and relationships [1-2]. However, most of these studies focus on the problems of sexual dysfunctions, their definition and treatment, including medication and therapy. At the same time, P. Hegarty [3] and D.R. Samek et al. [4] define that sexual identity issues are related to psychosocial factors, such as socio-cultural pressures, stereotypes and internal conflicts. They point to the importance of an individual psychotherapeutic approach to solving such problems, as well as the need to integrate medication with psychotherapy to achieve optimal results. Similar conclusions are reached by N.B. Brown et al. [5], T.U. Koops et al. [6], B. Grabski and K. Kasparek [7] pointing out that constructive sexual relationships are built on healthy communication, mutual respect, empathy, and openness to expressing personal needs and desires. In exploring the issue of sexual dysfunction, they emphasise the importance of mutual support and cooperation between partners in overcoming sexual difficulties.

At the same time, Y. Sulimani-Aidan et al. [2] and T. Wright et al. [8] address these issues from the perspective of understanding one's sexual orientation, not only in terms of gender acceptance but also in terms of preferences and feelings of attachment. They analyse the role of biological and socio-cultural influences in the formation of sexual identity and draw attention to the importance of individual reflection on these aspects for psychological self-determination and social adaptation. In addition, the researchers also reveal the importance of sexual role expectations, noting that they are key in shaping sexual stereotypes and influencing individual behaviour. In contrast, K. Dickman et al. [9], M. Al Atoom et al. [10] and M. Deniz et al. [11] addressed the issue of sexual role expectations not only in terms of sociocultural influences, but also in terms of psychological dimensions, reflecting their interconnection with power structures, societal norms, and individual identity. By studying this issue, they analyse the influence of sexual role expectations on the formation of individual stereotypes about roles and functions in sexual relationships, in particular, stereotypes of gender behaviour, expectations of sexual satisfaction and distribution of responsibility in partnerships. They also emphasise the role of cultural and historical contexts in shaping sexual expectations and the importance of studying their impact on individual beliefs and behaviour.

Thus, scientific research shows that the formation of sexual identity and self-acceptance becomes a difficult task for many people due to socio-cultural pressure and stereotyping. Sexuality has a significant impact on mental health and can contribute to emotional well-being, but it can also cause stress, depression and other disorders if unresolved issues arise. Failure to acknowledge and address sexuality in interpersonal relationships can lead to conflicts and breakdowns. These aspects of sexuality require detailed research to develop practical approaches to support mental health and improve satisfaction in interpersonal relationships. In addition, it is necessary to identify individual needs and

preferences in the context of sexual relations, as well as to develop a programme aimed at developing communication skills and mutual understanding in sexual partnerships.

The main purpose of the study is to reveal the main factors that influence the formation of an individual's sexuality. In this regard, the study aims to address the psychological aspects of sexuality to reveal their relationship with mental health and psychosocial factors in general. In addition, it is necessary to apply obtained scientific results in practice through the development and implementation of psychotherapeutic measures to improve the mental health and psychosocial functioning of people with sexual problems. Therefore, the key objectives of this study include:

1. Identification of factors that influence the formation of sexual identity.
2. Identification of factors that contribute to sexual dysfunction and how they affect mental health and relationships between partners.
3. Identification of strategies that are effective in solving sexual problems to preserve interpersonal relationships and mental well-being.

Furthermore, the study of the theoretical foundations of the research problem was used to formulate a hypothesis:

$H_0$  – Raising the level of sexuality education and understanding of sexual aspects helps to resolve sexual conflicts and improve relationships and mental well-being in general.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The sample consisted of 202 people, including 138 women (68.3%) and 64 men (31.7%) aged 21 to 39. The average age of the respondents was mathematical expectation (M) – 29.4. The participants of the study were people from different fields of activity. The sample was purposive (non-random). The demographic profile of the respondents was not addressed. The study was randomised and conducted online. Participants were involved by sharing information on social media and mobile messengers. The inclusion criteria were having a

regular sexual partner, voluntary participation in the study, written consent to data processing, completion of the questionnaires, and full attendance at online classes between the survey dates. The exclusion criteria were non-compliance with the selection requirements and the minority of the participants.

An online questionnaire was used to assess the participants' subjective sexual well-being, self-identification, and attitudes towards themselves [12]. The developed questionnaire was divided into 3 stages of testing and included 170 questions, based on a combination of the Sexual Wellbeing Questionnaire by V. Hupalovska [13], Personal Orientation Inventory (POI) by E.L. Shostrom [14] and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale by M. Rosenberg [15]. This combined test was used in the study as a pre-test and post-test. The data was analysed and differentiated by levels according to the results of each stage of testing (low <45%; average 46-79%; high >80%). To compare statistically significant changes before and after the experiment, the Student's t-test was applied to the dependent samples. The data were evaluated using the statistical processing software SPSS v. 25, which determined the impact of the experiment on the studied parameters.

The experimental study aimed to identify the factors of sexual development and the influence of the level of knowledge on their formation. To influence the education of the experiment participants, a training course "Sexuality and Mental Health: Interconnection, Impact and Strategies for Preservation" was developed, which aims to increase awareness and understanding of various aspects of sexuality. The course lasted for 2.5 months and included theoretical materials and practical assignments (presentations, assignments for independent work) that contributed to the development of skills and improved self-awareness. Teaching methods included lectures, discussions, case studies, practical exercises, and role-playing games. The key topics of the course were sexuality and mental health; partnership and support; sexual identity and self-acceptance; internal conflicts; methods of improving psychological well-being; and

the role of psychotherapy and self-help. After processing the pre-test results, the respondents were randomly divided into a control group (CG) (n=101) and an experimental group (EG) (n=101). For the EG, 12 online meetings were held, during which participants completed practical exercises and joined the discussion of the lecture topic. For CGs, the course was delivered to them via email with presentation materials. Each group had access to a closed chat in the messenger for mutual support and information exchange. After completing the course, participants took a post-test to assess the effectiveness of the programme.

All participants were informed about the objectives of the study and provided written consent to participate. Confidentiality of personal data was guaranteed. The study was conducted following the ethical standards of psychological research. The equipment used includes a computer, electronic communication equipment and software: online platforms (Google Forms, Zoom), statistical software (SPSS v. 25), e-mail, messengers (Viber, Telegram), social networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter), office software (Word, Excel, PowerPoint).

## RESULTS

### Identification of key aspects of sexuality development

Sexuality is an important component of human identity and self-knowledge. The concept of sexuality covers a wide range of aspects, such as orientation, self-identification, erotic preferences, sexual activity and intimate communication in interpersonal relationships. In conjunction, this is not only determined by the physiological manifestations of a personality but also plays an important role in mental life.

A comprehensive analysis of sexual development identified several factors that collectively determine the formation of a person's sexual identity and influence the perception and expression of their sexuality. The genetic and biological aspects of sexuality establish the basis for physiological manifestations

(orientation, reactions to stimuli), while socio-cultural norms and values reflect how society defines acceptable sexual behaviour (standards, expectations). At the same time, family upbringing influences the formation of sexual values and attitudes, which are reflected in a person's perception of sexuality. At the same time, religious beliefs can change attitudes toward sexuality and define moral boundaries. Education and the level of education also have an impact on the understanding of sexuality and on the ability of a person to adequately express their needs and desires. At the same time, the social environment, including the availability of information and support, also plays an important role in shaping a person's sexual attitudes and values. Studying sexuality from a psychological perspective helps to reveal how these factors interact with other aspects of the personality, such as emotional state, self-esteem and social interactions.

Human sexual development begins during foetal development. This process is influenced by biological mechanisms (genetic and hormonal factors). At this stage, biological sex (male or female) is determined, and the main organs of the reproductive system are formed. With the formation of gender characteristics, this influence begins to cover psychosocial aspects. They are subject to a wide range of factors, including social influences, family and peer relationships, cultural values and social norms. In adolescence, the process of accepting oneself as a man or woman becomes more important, accompanied by psychological and emotional challenges, including the need to understand one's feelings, desires and identity in the context of gender roles. At the same time, psychosocial factors can be reinforced by stereotypes about gender roles, which can also affect a person's perception and personal acceptance of gender identity. The concepts of gender roles that are enshrined in culture can shape expectations and norms about how men and women should behave and feel.

Considering the problem of human psychosexual development in the psychological literature, it is possible to identify key periods, each of which is marked by certain characteristics

and conflicts associated with the formation of sexual desires and identity [6-7; 10; 16-17]. In particular, the childhood period (from birth to about 12 years of age) is characterised by the development of oral, anal, phallic and latent stages. During this period, basic sexual urges are formed, and sexual identity is formed. By the age of 6-7, a child develops awareness of the body and its functions, sexual skills (touching) are formed, and interest in genitals and erogenous zones appears, which is not yet associated with sexual desire or behaviour. Later (up to the age of 12), a child develops a sexual identity and gender role. Children begin to show interest in sexual concepts such as sex distinction, knowledge of reproductive processes and emotional connection to different genders. In addition, during this period, children may also show interest in erotic themes and awareness of their sexual bodies. During adolescence (from about 12 to 18 years), sexual exploration and experimentation, including the development of emotional and social competence in the field of sexual relations, is actively expanding. Adolescents begin to experience the first manifestations of sexual attraction to other people, and sexual preferences (sexual, gender) are formed. They actively explore their bodies, responding to erotic stimuli and sensations. This period also marks the formation of the first romantic and sexual relationships, as well as the development of interpersonal communication skills and interaction in a sexual context.

Young adulthood (18 to 40 years) is marked by the formation of stable relationships and intimate partnerships, as well as the development of sexual identity and the definition of sexual priorities. Young people actively explore their sexuality through intimate relationships and interactions with partners. In addition, at this age, a person's personality stabilises, thus developing a clearer understanding of sexual needs and identity. At this stage, sexuality is developed in the context of a deeper understanding of sexual rights, health and responsibility. During middle age (40 to 65 years), new challenges and revisions in sexuality arise, including physiological changes, the search for

new sexual experiences and the establishment of new relationships with partners. A person may experience a decline in sexual function or the onset of chronic illnesses that affect their sexual activity and satisfaction. At the same time, this period can also be a time of increased emotional closeness and intimacy in relationships. In addition, in adulthood, people may experience a more stable sexual identity and more distinct sexual preferences. Furthermore, over time, sexual needs and priorities may change, which affects a person's sexual life. Later life (65 years and older) may include adaptation to changes in physical abilities and health, as well as a decline in sexual activity. Challenges in sexuality can include a decrease in physical endurance and medical problems. However, maintaining intimate relationships and enjoying sexual activity remains an important element of well-being for many people in this age group.

At the same time, the development of human sexuality and the emergence of problems in this process are the result of the interaction of various factors. Common factors include family, social, emotional, physical, economic, cultural, educational and technological environments. However, together they can interact with each other, complicating or facilitating the development of a person's sexuality at different periods of their life. It is worth noting that the internal aspects that are formed under the influence of these factors, in particular, personal characteristics of a person (self-esteem, fears, values, beliefs, emotions) play a key role in the formation of sexuality. For instance, the level of self-confidence and awareness of personal desires can influence sexual behaviour and interactions with others. Furthermore, each age period is accompanied by sexual problems and challenges that require attention and adequate response from the individual and the social environment (Table 1).

Thus, it is possible to determine that sexuality is a significant element of an individual's identity and understanding of themselves. This phenomenon is formed not only under the influence of biological factors but is also the result of the interaction of psychological,

**Table 1. Age periods and their characteristics in the context of the influence of psychophysiological and social aspects on sexual development**

Period	Characteristics of the problems
Childhood period (0-12 years)	Development of bodily self-awareness: children may experience certain inconveniences or troubles related to the development of their bodies
	Conflicts with parents arise due to unresolved problems in the context of meeting physiological needs and adult upbringing requirements
	Excessive dependence: some children may have problems developing autonomy due to excessive dependence on their parents to meet their needs
Adolescence (12-18 years)	Identity and self-knowledge: adolescents may face stress and uncertainty about their identity and place in the world
	Sexuality and experiments: there may be problems with addressing sexual and emotional needs, which can lead to risky behaviour or conflict in relationships
Younger adults (18-40 years)	Stable and unstable relationships: Young adults may face conflicts in relationships or seek stability in partnerships
	Career-related stress: finding a job and a stable career can be a source of stress and affect relationships and sexual activity
Middle age (40-65 years)	Physical changes: Changes in the body, such as a decrease in sexual function or the onset of chronic diseases, can affect sexual activity and satisfaction
	Conflicts with adult children: the emergence of new problems in relationships with adult children can be a source of stress and conflict
Late age (65+ years)	Health and physical endurance: decreased physical stamina and medical problems can make sexual activity and satisfaction difficult
	Social isolation: loss of loved ones and social isolation can lead to a deterioration in mental health and affect sexual activity

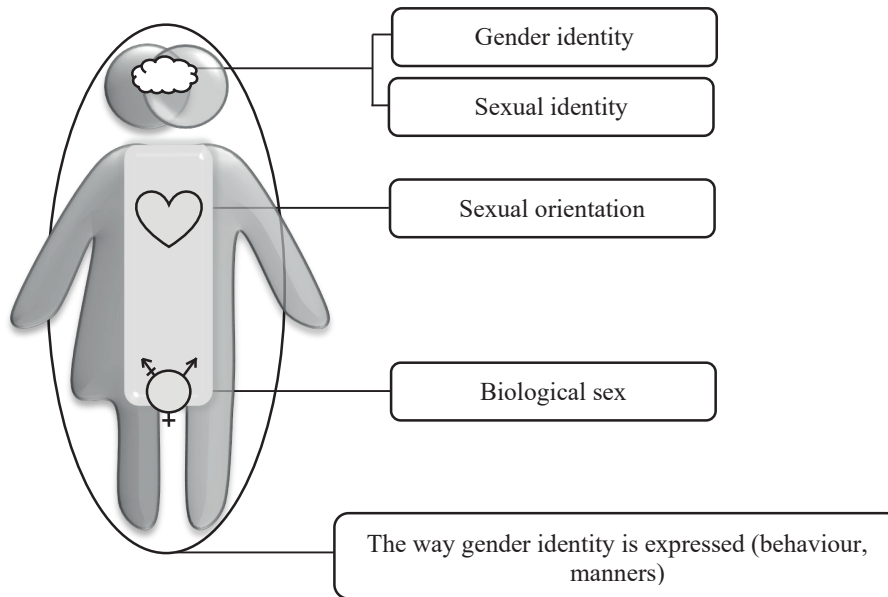
Source: compiled by the author based on [3; 5; 10; 16-17]

socio-cultural and personal determinants. Sexual identity, or the way a person experiences and understands their sexual orientation, gender identity and role in relationships, is determined by a combination of these influences. Therefore, it is possible to define what the main aspects of sexuality include: sexual orientation, which is reflected in feelings of sexual attraction and affection for persons of a certain sex; self-identification, which includes the perception of oneself as a sexual person based on the internal concept of gender identity; erotic preferences, such as various sexual fantasies, physical aspects of sexual attraction and desires; sexual activity, including the amount and nature of sexual activities that express sexual needs and desires; relationships and intimate communication, where communication, interaction and relationships with a partner are key, as well as understanding oneself and a partner in the sexual sphere.

Thus, a person's sexual development goes through different stages of life, and each of

them is marked by characteristics, challenges and opportunities for development and satisfaction in the sexual sphere. At the same time, considering the issue of sexuality in the context of the sexual and gender model, it is possible to identify key factors that contribute to the formation of a person's sexual identity and influence the process of their sexual development. This model is illustrated in Figure 1.

When analysing psychological approaches to defining sexuality in the context of its impact on mental health, it should be noted that satisfaction of sexual needs and feelings of sexual satisfaction can have a positive impact on a person's overall psychological well-being, contributing to increased self-esteem, reduced stress and improved mood in general [4; 19-21]. At the same time, mental factors (emotional state, relationship with a partner, fears and complexes) also have a significant impact on sexual function, and the negative impact of these factors can lead to sexual dysfunctions and a decrease in the quality of sexual life.



**Figure 1. The sexual and gender model of identity**

Source: compiled by the author based on [3-4; 6; 10; 18]

A variety of factors can precede the onset of sexual health disorders. Psychological factors can include stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and negative beliefs about sexuality or body. This can lead to complexes and affect physical functions (erectile dysfunction, problems with orgasm, vaginal dryness) [5; 17; 21]. Mental and sexual health can also be affected by age-related changes and the physical factors that arise against their background. In particular, with age, hormone levels may decrease, or chronic diseases may develop, which directly affect not only physical aspects but also cause stress and dissatisfaction with oneself or a partner. At the same time, sexual and mental health problems can be caused by a lack of awareness of sexual health, lack of access to adequate medical care, or stigma associated with sexuality.

In addition, cultural and social factors can also influence the formation of psychological problems in the context of sexual health. Cultural norms and social expectations affect perceptions of sexuality and can create tension in relationships. For instance, taboos about certain aspects of sexuality can suppress pleasure and lead to sexual dysfunction. Conflicts and communication problems in relationships can be another factor. Misunderstandings, conflicts, and tensions can develop if there is a lack

of openness about sexual needs and desires. At the same time, the inability to discuss problematic issues exacerbates the discrepancy in sexual preferences and reduces the overall level of psychological health of both partners. At the same time, stereotypes and fear of rejection can contribute to the formation of negative beliefs about sexuality and body, which becomes a significant obstacle to satisfying sexual relationships. It is also worth noting the problem of incompatibility of partners, where the key criteria are differences in sexual needs, desires and ideas about sexuality and pleasure. Such incompatibility can cause tension and conflict in relationships, as well as lead to sexual dysfunction in one or both partners.

#### **Organising practical activities to raise awareness of sexuality**

The identification of the theoretical foundations of sexuality gave grounds for considering this issue in the context of the practical basis for developing communication skills and improving sexuality education in general. The analysed previous scientific studies indicate that there is no structured framework for organised improvement of understanding of the psychological aspects of sexuality, which would allow different age groups not only to understand the peculiarities of human sexuality formation

but also to provide practical tools for targeted influence on these processes.

The determinants of the course development were the increased interest in sexuality and mental health issues in modern society, as well as the growing number of problems related to these aspects. In addition, the intensification of discussions and research in these areas creates the need to organise an educational space with elements of psychotherapeutic methods. At the same time, this indicates an increase in public awareness of the importance of mental health and its relationship to sexuality, which creates a demand for education and support in these areas. Thus, the key point was to create a course that meets modern needs and considers scientific discoveries, and which is not only a source of information but also a practical guide for people who want to improve their understanding of various aspects of sexuality and support mental health. This approach combined the transfer of knowledge with active engagement methods and the involvement of participants in their development, which contributed to psychological self-discovery and positive change.

The “Sexuality and Mental Health: Relationships, Impacts and Strategies for Preservation” training course was developed to highlight the importance of the relationship between sexuality and mental health. The motivating force behind the development of this course was the need to provide participants with information and skills to help them better understand the impact of sexuality on their mental well-being and overall health. In developing the course, the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical tools was ensured to deepen the understanding of the information and its application in real-life situations among participants. Training materials (presentations, self-study exercises, case studies, interactive tasks) were developed to help learners absorb information effectively and interestingly. The main topics of the course included consideration of various aspects of sexuality, from physiological processes to psychological and sociocultural influences, and strategies for maintaining and restoring mental health in the context of sexuality. This allowed participants

to be actively involved in the learning process and gain practical skills to support mental well-being. In addition, the participants were given access to a closed group in the messenger (Telegram) to discuss the information received during the course, share experiences, and receive expert and mutual psychological support.

The training course was designed to last 2.5 months. The duration of the course was determined by the specifics of the material and its purpose. Addressing these factors and the goals set for the course, an optimal schedule was developed that considered the balance between the richness of the material and the ability of participants to absorb and understand the information. In addition, the duration of the course is also determined by the practical possibilities of organising and conducting training activities, as well as the needs of participants to ensure sufficient time to reflect and make changes in their daily lives. Thus, an educational environment was created with elements of therapeutic influence, in particular:

- the group format allowed participants to support each other in the process of change and showed them that they were not alone with their problems and that their problems were quite common;
- expert support helped to understand strategies for solving sexual problems in a psychological context;
- group dynamics helped participants master the skills of effective communication and mutual understanding in intimate relationships and relationships with their partners in general;
- stimulating self-reflection ensured internal development based on the diverse experiences of other participants;
- increased awareness of the various aspects of sexuality has contributed to the development of positive relationships;
- learning strategies for managing stress and anxiety contributed to the improvement of mental well-being in general.

The topics of the training course, their content, methods and objectives are presented in Table 2.



**Table 2. Structure of the course “Sexuality and Mental Health: Interconnection, Impact and Strategies for Preservation”**

Topic	Description of the topic, content and objectives of the block	Methods
Introduction to sexuality and mental health	Overview of the course and its purpose. Definition of basic concepts: sexuality, mental health, interpersonal relationships. Objectives: Introduction to the course objectives and basic concepts.	Introduction to the purpose of the course, key terms, participants
Emotional aspects of sexuality	The joy and pleasure of sexual relations. Fear, guilt and their impact on mental health. Objectives: Understand the impact of emotional aspects on sexual behaviour and mental well-being.	Group discussion, personal experience, reflection on emotional reactions
Mental disorders related to sexuality	Depression, anxiety and their connection with sexual problems. Stress and its impact on mental health in the context of sexuality. Objectives: Understand mental health disorders that may arise in the context of sexuality and learn strategies for coping with them.	Psychologically oriented educational materials, open discussions, training in stress management strategies
Communication in sexual relationships	The importance of honesty and openness in communication with a partner. Development of effective communication skills in sexual situations. Objectives: Improving communication skills and conflict resolution in sexual relationships.	Role-playing games, exercises to develop communication skills, and discussions
Partnership and support	The role of partnerships in mental health care. Mutual support of partners in solving sexual problems. Objectives: Understanding the importance of support and cooperation in partnerships and addressing sexual issues.	Group discussions, mutual exchange of experience, exercises to develop cooperation with a partner
Sexuality and intimacy	The importance of developing intimacy in sexual relationships. Maintaining a balance between sexuality and emotional intimacy. Objectives: Learning skills to support and develop emotional intimacy in sexual relationships.	Group exercises to increase empathy and develop mutual understanding, discussion
The impact of sexual identity on self-esteem	The role of sexual identity in shaping self-acceptance. Strategies for increasing self-awareness and positive attitude towards oneself. Objectives: Promoting positive self-image and self-awareness in the context of sexual identity.	Reflection exercises to increase positive thinking and self-acceptance, discussion
Overcoming internal conflicts	Identification of internal conflicts in the context of sexuality. Strategies for overcoming internal barriers in relationships. Objectives: Development of skills for managing internal conflicts and maintaining mental health in sexual relationships.	Group discussions, individual consultations, exercises to develop reflection
Maintaining emotional and mental well-being	Strategies for maintaining emotional and psychological well-being in sexual relationships. The role of independence and self-regulation. Objectives: Learning skills to maintain mental and emotional well-being in sexual relationships.	Psychologically oriented educational materials, case discussions, self-regulation exercises
Practical tips to ensure a positive experience	Organising healthy and satisfactory sexual relationships. Developing practical strategies to improve the quality of sexual life. Objectives: Receive practical tips and strategies to improve the quality of your sexual life and satisfaction in sexual relationships.	Role-playing games, group discussions, psychologically oriented educational materials
Discussion of important aspects	Discussion of the main topics of the course and answers to participants’ questions. To consolidate the acquired knowledge and skills. Objectives: Summarising the knowledge and skills gained, sharing experiences and understanding the main aspects of sexual and mental self-sufficiency.	Group discussions, practical exercises, support and mutual assistance
Wrap-up meeting	Summing up the course and discussing the experience. Celebrating the successful completion of training. Objectives: Summarising the results of the training, assessing achievements and supporting participants in completing the training process.	Reflection, final discussions, awards ceremony

Source: compiled by the author.

Thus, the course is designed to provide participants with the knowledge and skills that will contribute to their education. In particular, the course topics are designed to provide comprehensive information on the importance of honest communication with your partners, the ability to open up new horizons in sexual life, setting priorities in relationships, stress and fear management, and the importance of professional help (psychologist, sexologist, doctors). In addition, the course programme included consideration of useful tools for overcoming psychological problems in the context of sexuality, such as a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, self-knowledge and self-exploration, mutual support and respect for the partner, flexibility and openness to change, as well as the importance of continuing education and development.

#### **Analysis of the data obtained during the experiment**

The analysed scientific studies of human sexuality in the context of psychological well-being indicate a complex interaction between sexual function and the mental state of an individual [7; 10; 17; 19-21]. In particular, the study determined that individual levels of satisfaction can be influenced by various external factors, such as socio-cultural norms, personal beliefs, past relationship experiences, and the degree of emotional support from a partner. Research also confirms that emotional and mental stability can contribute to the quality of relationships. On the other hand, psychological disorders (anxiety, depression) can affect sexual function and cause a decrease in sexual desire. The emotional aspect of sexuality is revealed in the context of the influence of emotional reactions to sexual situations. At the same time, self-acceptance and self-determination include acceptance of one's sexual preferences, which can affect mental self-sufficiency and the overall state of well-being of an individual. It is also worth addressing the impact of partnerships and open communication on the psychological aspect of sexuality.

Given the combination of these factors, it is important to determine the likelihood of a

relationship between sex education and psychological well-being. Participants who met certain criteria, namely, were in a relationship, were of legal age, filled out the entire survey (pre-test, post-test), and agreed to participate in the study and to process the results, were recruited to participate in the experiment. Since the sample was purposive, the number of respondents involved was 202 people (21-39 years old), with 31.7% of men and 68.3% of women. However, participants were divided into CG (n=101) and EG (n=101) without regard to age or gender. In addition, the participants in the experimental group were required to attend all online classes of the training course. The developed online questionnaire was based on three methods, which were used to determine the level of respondents' awareness of personal sexuality, their satisfaction with relationships and acceptance of their desires and preferences in the context of sexuality. In addition, the test was also combined since it was used as a pre-test and post-test. According to the defined conditions, the results were differentiated according to the lowest (<45%), average (46-79%) and high (>80%) levels. It is worth noting that the pre-test results showed insignificant differences in the level of awareness of respondents in both groups, and therefore this will not have a significant impact on the result of the experiment. The final survey of the respondents determined the development of their skills in interpersonal communication with their partner, the degree of self-acceptance and the overall level of their psychological well-being. The data were processed using SPSS v. 25 (Student's t-test). The results of the EG respondents before and after the course "Sexuality and Mental Health: Interconnection, Impact and Strategies for Preservation" are presented in Table 3.

Thus, the results of the study in the experimental group show an increase in the average score of respondents in all categories. This indicates that the targeted development of communication and interaction skills in the context of sexuality in adults is an effective means of improving the psychological well-being of individuals. In addition, the creation of an educational environment with a practical component

**Table 3. Summary t-test of EG before and after completing the online course**

Category	Pre-test, n = 101		Post-test, n = 101	
	M	SD	M	SD
Sexual communication	6.94	1.23	10.41	1.32
Relationships as a value	5.59	1.42	11.23	1.59
Satisfaction with sexual life	7	1.21	10.69	1.61
Sensitivity	7.23	1.51	10.81	1.25
Self-acceptance and self-esteem	7.2	1.71	10.67	1.12
Self-esteem	5.94	1.09	8.24	1.21
General indicator of psychological well-being	6.65	1.36	10.34	1.35

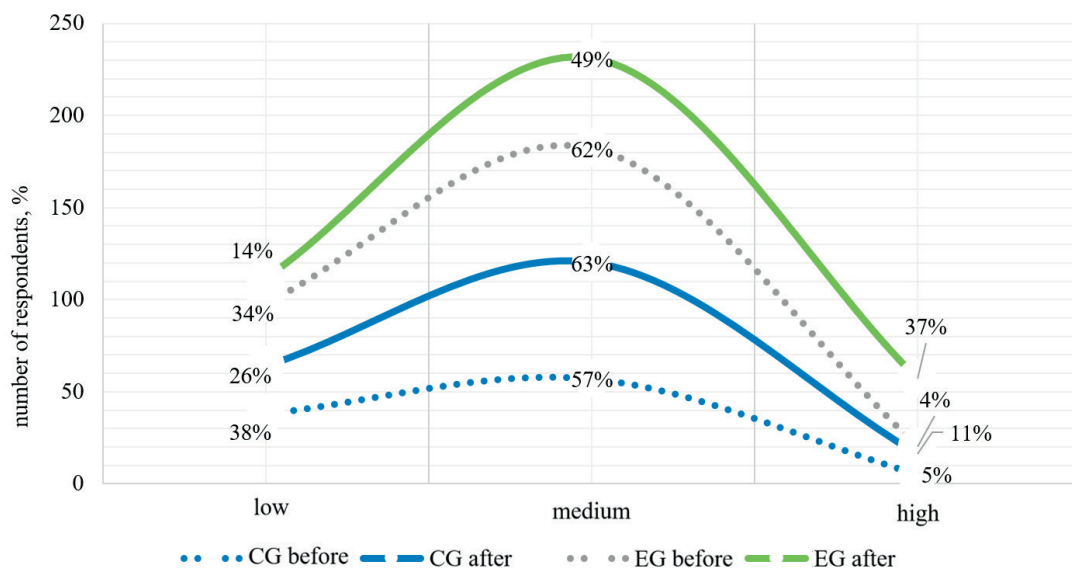
Note: SD – standard deviation. Source: compiled by the author.

of tasks can effectively influence the development of psychosocial competencies of participants and improve their relationships and quality of life. This confirms the importance of the psychological approach in building skills and developing healthy relationships in the field of sexuality. In particular, it demonstrates that an emphasis on developing communication, understanding and empathy skills can contribute to improved psychological well-being and satisfaction in sexual relationships.

The empirical study also showed that CGs for whom the course information was presented in the form of presentations without the possibility of live communication with participants were less interested in the training and additional tasks. In addition, their post-test

scores are significantly lower than EG. This may indicate that the direct communication and interactive exercises provided by the course programme have a significant impact on learning and skill development. Therefore, it is possible to determine that the lack of opportunities to actively discuss topics and share experiences with like-minded people leads to less motivation and engagement of participants in the learning process. The analysed results of the respondents' survey after the post-test were divided into scales according to the level of their overall psychological well-being. The results of both groups before and after the training programme are shown in Figure 2.

Thus, the results of the study confirm the effectiveness of the identified approach to



**Figure 2. Analysis of the pre-test and post-test results of respondents from both groups before and after the training course**  
Source: compiled by the author.

raising awareness of adults in the context of sexuality. In particular, live communication, group dialogues and practical exercises contribute to better learning and more active involvement of participants in the learning process. At the same time, the current survey of the experimental group respondents during the course of the course shows that deepening their knowledge of the psychological aspects of sexuality contributed to a reduction in conflicts in intimate relationships with partners, as well as a better understanding of sexual needs. In addition, participants also noted that better education in this area provided a higher understanding of their partner and felt more mutual trust and open communication about sexual issues. This indicates a positive impact of the course programme on the psychological state of participants and the quality of interpersonal relationships between them. This approach to sexuality education can open up new opportunities to improve the quality of adult sexuality, contributing to psychological well-being and harmony in personal and interpersonal terms.

In the context of the proposed programme, psychotherapeutic approaches were used, which are an important component of the process of solving psychological problems of sexuality. These approaches included elements of cognitive behavioural therapy, psychodynamic techniques, as well as relaxation and meditation techniques. This approach provided practical advice to participants on setting healthy boundaries in relationships, methods of developing empathy and effective strategies for overcoming conflicts. The participants noted that they had improved their understanding of the causes of sexual dysfunctions, improved their skills of open communication in intimate relationships, and gained an understanding of how to manage stress and anxiety in their sexual life and what factors contribute to their aggravation. In addition, respondents emphasised that expanding their understanding of sexuality and related processes helped them overcome emotional difficulties in discussing intimate topics in the context of sexual problems. The participants also indicated that during the course they began to transform

their negative patterns in communication with their partner, which were used to set personal boundaries and maintain a balance between intimacy and autonomy.

Thus, raising awareness of the participants of the psychological course "Sexuality and Mental Health: Interconnection, Impact and Strategies for Preservation" contributed not only to changes in the respondents' knowledge of sexual aspects and psychological factors related to them but also to a positive transformation of their mental state. Respondents reported a reduction in anxiety and fears about some sexual issues and experienced improved psychological well-being in terms of self-esteem, self-respect and self-acceptance. Changes in relationships were also noted, including an increase in trust between partners, mutual understanding, openness, communication, and satisfaction with sexual interaction in a couple. In addition, according to respondents, changes have also occurred in sexual practices and behaviour (frequency, comfort). Thus, the comparison of the results before and after participation in the programme indicates the effectiveness of the proposed course, as well as the improvement of the mental well-being of its participants in general. The results obtained in the course of the study indicate a close interaction between the psychological aspects of sexuality and the mental well-being of the individual. At the same time, they confirm that developing an understanding of sexual issues can effectively contribute to improving mental health and the quality of interpersonal relationships.

## **DISCUSSION**

Psychosexual developmental research addressed the relationship between mental health and important aspects of individual sexual function. This approach includes exploring the impact of mental health on various aspects of sexuality, including those that can determine the quality of sexual life and mental well-being. Such an analysis reflects the importance of a balanced mental state for the healthy functioning of sexuality and the support of the individual's overall well-being.

In the context of this study, a person's sexuality plays an important role in their way of sexual communication in relationships, determining the significance of relationships, satisfaction with sexual life, as well as a certain sensitivity and empathy for the desires and preferences of a partner. In addition, the study also found that psychological well-being is also influenced by a person's level of self-esteem and self-acceptance. Acceptance of oneself and one's own sexual needs can help increase the level of satisfaction from intimate relationships and create a positive psychological state. At the same time, there can be an opposite effect, when low self-esteem or lack of sex education can lead to stress, anxiety or general dissatisfaction in relationships. Similar conclusions were reached by T.M. Çörekçioğlu and E. Cesur [22]. Studying the relationship between sexuality disorders and psychosocial characteristics, the authors emphasise the close connection between sexuality, self-esteem, stress, anxiety and self-acceptance. In particular, the combination of these aspects affects not only the mental well-being of a person but also personal psychosocial adaptation in society. Therefore, the study of these factors requires considering individual and social characteristics.

According to the study, high levels of sexual satisfaction and healthy sexual function contribute to a person's overall mental well-being. Individuals with positive attitudes towards their sexuality and higher levels of sexual satisfaction tend to be more confident in their own abilities and experience greater satisfaction in their intimate lives. However, problems arise when there are dysfunctional patterns of sexual behaviour or when a person experiences sexuality as a source of stress or conflict. These factors can lead to a decrease in self-esteem and a deterioration in mental health. The similarity of these findings can be seen in the research of D.L. Rowland et al. [23] and T. Seitz et al. [24]. Studying the issue of sexual dysfunctions in the context of psychosomatic problems, the authors emphasise that a person's self-esteem plays an important role in identifying and overcoming these disorders. A high level of self-esteem can contribute to a more effective resolution of

sexual difficulties by seeking support or therapeutic help. At the same time, insufficient attention to the importance of psychological aspects of sexuality and low self-esteem can be an obstacle to seeking help and lead to further deepening of problems. Understanding the relationship between self-esteem, sexual satisfaction and mental well-being allows a person to influence personal sexuality education.

It is also worth noting that stress levels can also affect sexual function and satisfaction in intimate relationships. Following M. Meyers et al. [25], high levels of stress can lead to a decrease in a person's sexual desire and contribute to the development of physiological problems. By studying changes in physical desire and stress levels, the authors determine that high-stress levels reduce sexual desire, in particular, men may experience problems with erection and orgasm, and women may experience decreased sexual compliance and increased vaginal dryness. From a medical point of view, this relationship can be explained by the impact of stress on hormonal balance and physiological processes that regulate sexual response.

Current surveys of respondents have also shown that most study participants (63%) experience stress, and against this background, women experience emotional instability (hormonal fluctuations, pain of various aetiologies, deterioration of relationships with partners), and men experience an increase in aggression due to the inability to control certain situations. In addition, the findings are also confirmed by S. Liao et al. [26], A. Ågmo and E. Laan [27], M.G. Di Benedetto et al. [28]. By studying the influence of psychological aspects on physiological changes in people's sexuality, the authors determined that psychological factors can affect the level of sexual satisfaction and functioning, and vice versa, physiological aspects can affect a person's mental state. This highlights the importance of understanding the complex impact of different aspects on an individual's overall sexual and mental well-being. Thus, stress and anxiety have a negative impact on people's sexual functions. For instance, low sexual self-esteem and a poor sense

of self-attractiveness can reduce sexual function and satisfaction in intimate relationships. The participants also noted that low self-esteem affects their sexual well-being, with negative thoughts about themselves and lack of confidence creating barriers to intimate satisfaction, leading to increased emotional instability. In addition, women stated that under the influence of such factors, they experience a deterioration in their overall health and the development of conflict in their relationships with their partners. Thus, it is possible to determine that a person's mental state and sexual function are interrelated and have a mutual influence on each other.

The study also points to the importance of self-acceptance, where understanding and positive attitudes towards sexual preferences play a significant role in a person's mental well-being. It is worth noting that acceptance of one's sexuality is an individual process, as each person has personal unique beliefs, values and experiences. However, under societal pressure, adequate and positive self-acceptance can be disrupted and lead to various problems, including internal stress, depression, social isolation, poor physical health and relationships with a partner, and sexual dysfunction [29]. In addition, respondents also noted the existence of fear of judgement from partners, but these issues were addressed during the training course. Active work on understanding and acceptance of their sexuality contributed to the improvement of respondents' attitudes towards themselves, as well as influenced their anxiety in these matters and improved communication with their partners. At the same time, the created educational space contributed not only to raising awareness of sexuality but also to developing self-expression skills, openly discussing sexual issues and revealing ways to build healthy and empathetic relationships. An important component of this course was the introduction of group psychotherapy elements in online classes, where participants could safely share their thoughts, feelings and experiences. This allowed respondents to develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their sexuality. It is worth noting that the

results of the control group show fewer positive changes compared to the experimental group. However, based on the results of the post-test, the respondents still used the tools provided to them for self-regulation and self-help in maintaining their psychological health, despite the problems they had come to the course with. It is also worth noting that the proposed online format of the training course was convenient for the participants and allowed them to study and practice at their convenience. Thus, the course was not only an informative event but also an effective method for developing positive self-acceptance of the participants.

Thus, the psychological component of sexuality plays a key role in a person's perception of body, thoughts, desires and preferences. Lack of education in these matters leads to unconscious or incorrect perception of sexuality, which can affect a person's mental state and overall sexual well-being. It is especially necessary to support and create an enabling environment for free discussion of sexuality and self-acceptance, which will allow people to understand, accept and value their sexuality. Understanding personal needs and desires is key to healthy and satisfying intimate relationships, as well as to the mental and emotional well-being of each individual. The importance of psychological support is also reflected by P.J. Kleinplatz and A.D. Ménard [30], J. Camp et al. [29], K.C. Davis and J.L. Anderson [31], M.C. Bowlen [32]. Studying the peculiarities of supporting people with sexual problems, the authors note that psychotherapy is a powerful tool for improving the quality of life and health of a person in terms of sexuality. The support of a psychologist or psychotherapist can help discover and understand the components of sexuality and resolve conflicts and problems that may arise in this area of life. In particular, psychotherapy aimed at addressing the psychological aspects of sexual problems can include individual or group sessions, visualisation, art therapy, cognitive behavioural techniques and other methods. This creates conditions for the development of positive self-determination and increased self-realisation in the sexual sphere of life.

In addition, according to A.A. Rogers et al. [33], E. Mandal and M. Lip [34], A.C. Zarski et al. [35], M. Tuncer and Ü.Y. Oskay [36], psychotherapeutic interventions positively influence relationships with partners. By examining psychological interventions for sexual dysfunctions and the relationship between sexuality and relationship conflict, the authors found that psychotherapeutic interventions can address and alleviate sexuality-related couple conflict. These activities should provide opportunities for open communication, and deepening empathy and understanding between partners, which in turn helps improve relationships and intimacy. Through working together with a psychologist or psychotherapist, partners can learn to express their needs, discuss and solve pressing problems, changing negative perceptions and attitudes that hinder healthy intimate relationships. It is also important to raise sexual awareness. Respondents noted that before taking the course, their knowledge of sexuality issues was limited. In particular, in the areas of empathy, own intimate boundaries and desires, understanding of sexual safety and health, and the ability to have open conversations about sexual topics. Sexuality education allows people to better understand themselves and others, and to make more informed and conscious decisions in sexual relationships. Therefore, the development of sex education programmes and initiatives can be an important step towards ensuring healthy and satisfactory sexual lives.

The research indicates the need to improve people's education. At the same time, it is important to take a systematic approach to solving sexual problems, in particular, physiological problems associated with age-related hormonal changes should be addressed comprehensively with a doctor and a psychotherapist [32]. This will ensure full coverage of the problem from different angles and allow us to find the best way to improve the sexual and psychological well-being of each person. This approach involves not only treating symptoms but also considering psychological and emotional aspects that can affect sexual function

and the general state of mind. A comprehensive treatment that combines pharmacotherapy, psychotherapy and sexuality education can ensure the achievement of satisfaction in a person's sexual life.

Thus, this research indicates the importance of implementing educational programmes to develop knowledge and skills in the context of sexuality. It is especially important to adapt these programmes to the age of the participants, with the mandatory inclusion of effective strategies that can ensure the development of skills for self-regulation, communication and interaction with a partner, including openness in communication, joint problem solving, providing support to each other, creating a positive sexual environment, managing emotions, stress and anxiety. In addition, it is also necessary to consult with specialists promptly and to increase one's education on sexuality.

## CONCLUSIONS

The complexity of the phenomenon of sexuality is reflected in its various factors and impact on human life. Sexuality encompasses not only physiological aspects, such as sexual organisation and function but also psychological and sociocultural components. It is determined by genetic and biological factors, cultural norms, education, religious beliefs, social expectations and experience. The expression of sexuality takes many forms, including sexual preference, orientation, identity and behaviour. Each individual has a personal experience of sexuality, which is shaped throughout their lives by various factors. Studying sexuality from a psychological perspective developed an understanding of how these factors interact with other aspects of the individual and how they affect their mental health. Furthermore, sexuality is a dynamic phenomenon, which means that it can change over time and in different situations.

The research shows that the psychological aspects of sexuality are key determinants of the formation of a person's sexual identity. The results of the theoretical study indicate that

understanding and acceptance of one's sexuality is important for ensuring mental well-being and quality interpersonal relationships. The study also determined that psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, and self-acceptance disorders can cause sexual dysfunctions and serve as a lever for the development of conflicts in relationships. At the same time, the empirical data obtained emphasise that psychotherapeutic approaches are effective in solving psychological problems related to sexuality. In addition, the study determined that increased education on these issues improves a person's sexual and mental health. The study also identified key factors that contribute to the development of sexual dysfunctions, including psychological factors (stress, low self-esteem), physical causes (injuries, illnesses), interpersonal problems (conflicts, misunderstandings), socio-cultural factors (expectations, standards, stereotypes), and negative past experiences. To solve sexual problems and preserve interpersonal relationships, it is necessary to implement effective strategies such as open communication with a partner, psychotherapy, mutual support, raising awareness, and adapting to new challenges and changes.

The results of this study show that targeted education about sexuality, as well as the development of skills in intimate communication, self-regulation and self-help, plays an important role in improving sexual satisfaction. The training course helped to overcome the psychological problems of the participants. The data obtained indicate an increase in the level of overall mental well-being of respondents. Before the course, participants in the control and experimental groups had high rates of low mental well-being (CG=38%; EG=34%), while after the programme, these rates decreased (CG=26%; EG=14%). Respondents also noted an improved understanding of sexual preferences, increased self-esteem, improved self-regulation skills, and openness in intimate relationships.

Given the conducted study, it is necessary to further study the relationship between the psychological and physiological aspects of sexuality, as well as to develop effective

psychotherapeutic methods and conduct trials of sexuality education programmes in different population groups. In addition, the study's limitations are caused by the small sample size and lack of participation of different age groups, and therefore it is important to develop and implement accessible sexuality education courses for different categories of the population, including young people, adults, adolescents and older adults.

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