

Sexuality Education: Analysis of Public Awareness, Attitudes and Opinions

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Qualitative research report

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Acronyms

NC – National curriculum

STDs – Sexually transmitted diseases

CSE – Comprehensive Sexuality Education

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

SRH – Sexual and Reproductive Health

SRE – Sex and Relationship Education

WHO – World Health Organization

JAMA – Journal of the American Medical Association

Summary

Introduction

Goals of comprehensive sexuality education

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is defined as: “age-appropriate, culturally relevant approach to teaching about sex and relationships by providing scientifically accurate, realistic, non-judgmental information” (UNESCO, 2016b). Sexuality education aims to provide reliable information about the process of sexual development, a prerequisite for having a healthy sex life and making conscious decisions to engage in sexual relationships throughout one’s life. Providing youth with scientifically accurate, authentic information is a central factor in healthy and safe sexual development process, especially in the environment where individual health is still threatened by HIV infection, STDs, cases of unwanted pregnancy, gender-based violence and gender inequality. (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2018).

Operationalization

CSE entails a full spectrum of information, skills and values allowing youth to exercise their sexual and reproductive rights and make decisions about their health and sexuality (UNESCO, 2016b).

CSE consists of eight main parts that overlap and entail the following issues related to relationships, values and rights – culture and sexuality, understanding gender, violence and staying safe, skills for health and well-being, the human body and development, sexuality and sexual behavior, sexual and reproductive health (Herat et al., 2018). Sexual behavior is usually operationalized with the following variables – sexual violence, sexism, attitudes toward sexuality, dogmatic and tolerant religiosity; as well as social, couples’ and family constructs.

To enable youth to protect their sexual and reproductive health (SRH), global community has created a sexuality education policy framework. In recent years, organizations like the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as a number of researchers and practitioners underline social context, especially gender and human rights, in programs that support comprehensive sexuality education. Sexuality education is focused on supporting gender equality and youth, especially women and marginalized groups and enabling them to view themselves and others as equal parties in relationships, protect their health and become active members of the society (Haberland & Rogow, 2015).

In an attempt to clearly define all elements of CSE, UNFPA has outlined concrete components in its operational guidance for comprehensive sexuality education (UNFPA, 2014), which includes provision of thorough and scientifically accurate information on the following issues: *human rights, gender norms and relationships; the body, including puberty and human reproduction; relationships, communication and decision-making; sexual health, gender equality*. Key component of CSE is cultural relevance and attitudes that are tailored to needs of different groups of the society. The operational

guidance underlines the need to create safe and healthy educational environment, develop participatory teaching methods for personalization of information and strengthened skills in communication, decision-making and critical thinking.

Sexuality education in the context of human rights

Sexuality education is viewed in the context of human health and education rights. Sexuality education is part of a quality education. UNESCO (2018) has been promoting theoretical and methodological postulate of comprehensive sexuality education, as through it students began to perceive their sexuality by understanding values of respect and responsibility from early age. CSE is based on human rights and it aims to empower individuals to free themselves from stigma that suppressed and censored their sexuality and reduced it to a sexual intercourse, leaving them in the environment of myths and fears that were rarely or never based on contributions of scientists in this field.

High quality sexuality education is based on internationally recognized human rights, in particular, the right to receive health-related information. This right has been recognized by the *UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*; in addition, sexuality education is supported by the Programme of Action adopted at the International Conference on Population and Development in 1994; its importance was underlined by the UN Special Rapporteur on education in his 2010 report before the UN General Assembly especially dedicated to this issue; sexuality education was supported by the European Court of Human Rights in 2011.

UNFPA underlines the importance of comprehensive sexuality education in the process of realization of the UN sustainable development goals 2030¹.

Sexuality Education in Georgia

Teaching about a healthy lifestyle, which is part of comprehensive sexuality education, has been introduced in the educational system of Georgia over the recent years, against the background of certain opposition. The process has been accompanied with intense debates – while some are resisting, others believe that this is a taboo topic, which is one of the results of low level of public awareness about goals and contents of sexuality education. National survey on sexual and reproductive health and rights conducted with the support of the UNFPA highlights systemic problems in the field of reproductive and sexual health and rights in Georgia, which are mainly related to social barriers and low level of awareness. According to the survey, adolescents lack comprehensive education, they lack complete information about their bodies and reproductive health, which increases the likelihood of threatening behavior and results in high rates of child marriage and abortion. The situation especially

¹ See: <https://www.unfpa.org/pcm/node/16944>

affects rights of ethnic minorities, women and girls with disabilities, those living in rural areas. As specified in the Public Defender's Report (2018), child marriage is especially problematic in Georgia, rates of teen birth, factual cohabitation at early age, forced marriage, bride kidnapping and unintended pregnancies and abortions is high. Against this background, despite a number of projects implemented with the support of international organizations, efforts of the Ministry of Education and NGOs, the need of sexuality education and its possible adverse effects is still debated in Georgia. There are many myths and misconceptions about sexuality education in our society. Lack of awareness and knowledge creates a fertile ground for formation of negative attitudes about sexuality education in the society. This is further encouraged by the cultural environment that usually determines prohibitions, taboos and norms in the society.

Previous surveys suggest that public attitudes toward sexuality education in Georgia are inconsistent and more precisely, polarized. Large groups of the society have not realized that sexuality education, together with access to health services, will have a positive and long-lasting effect on youth health and well-being.

Research Design

Purpose of the Research

It is the purpose of the present research to study public awareness and attitudes about sexuality education in Georgia, to identify the factors that determine public attitudes and sentiment toward sexuality education. Through this research, we wanted to receive updated, comprehensive, reliable and valid information on public awareness about sexuality education issues and its emotional/behavioral dimension (attitudes, opinion, engagement), as well as factors that influence it. This will allow institutions that work on issues of sexuality education to design effective systemic measures to improve the existing situation.

Within the research, we evaluated awareness of different segments of the society, their involvement in the process of sexuality education (receiving information/learning and/or imparting information/teaching), attitudes and opinion toward sexuality education; strategies and barriers of communication about sexuality education issues; self-efficacy of each segment during discussions about issues like sexual development, relationships between sexes, reproductive health and safety (e.g. STDs, unwanted pregnancy, abortion), etc.

The research focused on examining characteristic of micro and macro social environment where values, attitudes and competencies of students (and the entire society) are formed (family, school, education system...). A variety of contextual data was gathered on sexuality education, factors that shape public attitudes toward sexuality education were identified.

For analysis of public attitudes toward sexuality education and contextual factors, we used qualitative research methodology and in particular, focus groups discussions and interviews, as well as the method of content analysis.

Target population

In view of the importance of the subject and the goals of this research, it covers a broad spectrum of our society. It also involves institutions that have an important influence on attitudes toward and public awareness of sexuality education. Family, media, civil sector, religious and other institutions play an important role in formation of public attitudes toward sexuality education. The research therefore involves parents that can be viewed as representative of public attitudes, as well as representatives of religious institutions and civil sector. In view of the critical importance of compulsory education in ensuring awareness of future generations, helping them understand their rights and responsibilities, targets of the research include important “actors” of school education: teachers, principals, pupils... A key part of the research is analyzing the national curriculum that serves as a foundation for constructing pupils’ knowledge. Analysis of contents of the national curriculum is presented on the basis of topics of UNESCO frame. To get the full picture, third generation national curriculum has been analyzed based on the information obtained through interviews with curriculum experts. Issues of sexuality education have also been studied from the perspective of ethnic minorities.

Such research design is important in order to receive not only descriptive information on public attitudes and awareness about sexuality education, but also means to analyze the information (effects of the environment, evaluation of influences) and interpret the results.

Within the research, 25 interviews and 7 focus-group discussions were conducted (some in person and others using Zoom application):

- Curriculum experts: 2 interviews
- Teachers: 3 focus-groups (including 1 with ethnic minority representatives)
- School principals: 4 interviews
- Students: 1 focus group
- Pupils: 1 focus group (with ethnic minority representatives);
- Parents: 1 focus group, 9 interviews (including three with ethnic minority representatives);
- NGOs: 1 focus group, 3 interviews;
- Church representatives: 3 interviews with representatives of white clergy of Orthodox Church.

Report for each target group contains sections about awareness, attitudes, challenges and recommendations. The report includes opinions of ethnic minority representatives (teachers, parents, youth...) as a separate chapter. Here we would like to also explain that terms that are more common in Georgia – “sexuality education” or “sex education” are used interchangeably in this report to refer to comprehensive sexuality education.

Findings and Main Conclusions

It is not justified to generalize findings of a qualitative research to a broader population; however, we must note the trends identified by the research. Main conclusions are as follows:

Despite a positive dynamic, level of public awareness is low; attitudes are polarized; introduction of comprehensive sexuality education in the system of school education in Georgia is facing difficult challenges.

These conclusions are based on comprehensive information obtained from target groups and analysis of key documents that regulate formal education. Below are main trends and findings of the research, according to different target groups and key topics.

National Curriculum

Focus of the research on the national curriculum is due to the fact that it represents main regulatory document that determines specificities of teaching sexuality education issues. This document determines when and what the pupils will learn. It also determines main outcomes of learning/teaching process. Analysis of the NC focuses on subjects where issues of sexuality education are concentrated the most. Contents of the national curriculum are analyzed using a framework provided in the UNESCO guidance on sexuality education.²

National curriculum: compliance of its contents with the UNESCO Framework

Analysis of contents of the national curriculum shows that the document more or less addresses all issues provided in the UNESCO framework, however there are important challenges that should be taken into account in textbooks that accompany the curriculum and teachers' training programs. One of the most important challenges related to the curriculum is the fact that it does not include at all several key notions that are important for constructing the knowledge in the field of sexuality education. These are the notions of gender, gender-based violence, sexual behavior, stigma, etc. In addition, the curriculum lacks interdisciplinary approach and it does not illustrate the linkage between physiological processes that pupils learn within the framework of natural sciences and behavioral aspects discussed within civic education.

² Women, U. N., & UNICEF. (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach*. UNESCO Publishing.

National Curriculum: conceptual compliance with the UNESCO framework

From the perspective of conceptual compliance, comparison of the NC with the framework of reference has revealed one major difference. In the UNESCO framework, as the age of pupils increases, focus gradually shifts from general issues to aspects of personal development. In contrast, in the national curriculum, as the age of pupils increases, the focus gradually shifts from personal aspects to more general processes – issues of state organization and global processes. As a result, there is a gap in the curriculum in addressing personal aspects, which hinders the process of discussing more complex issues of personal development in a consistent manner as the age of pupils increases (in upper grades). Comparison of the NC with the UNESCO framework has revealed another important conceptual challenge – in particular, in the NC topics of gender-based violence, conflicts are mostly viewed in the normative frame. It fails to adequately address how human behavior in general is related to physiological processes. It does not illustrate linkages between social and natural sciences, to help pupils understand objective (including physiological or psychological) causes of unacceptable social behavior. This is important in order for pupils to understand the problems and plan effective strategies for managing and correcting their behavior.

National Curriculum: other challenges

Contents of civic education are structured in a way that topics of personal development and interaction of micro social groups will be replaced by issues of state organization and global policy. Therefore, aspects of personal development are discussed in a more in-depth manner in elementary grades and in grade VII, compared to grades VIII-IX. Under these circumstances, the curriculum does not offer an opportunity to focus on issues that are important for specific age groups (e.g. adolescence, parenthood, sexual behavior in the ninth grade).

For consistent discussions about issues of sexuality education, structure of the subject “biology” according to different grades creates certain difficulties. Pupils usually learn about human anatomy and physiology in the eighth grade, in the 7th grade puberty is discussed in absence of this basic knowledge, while the ninth grade program focuses on issues of cytology and genetics. Therefore, far less attention is paid to human anatomy and physiology, as well as aspects of sexual behavior and specificities of adulthood during the age when these issues are especially relevant for students. In addition, within civic education, teaching in grades VIII and IX focuses more on state organization and global processes; problems related to asynchronicity and the lack of interdisciplinary connections between biology and civic education are identified.

Topics of sexual behavior, bodily integrity, positive bodily image fall under the category of issues that the national curriculum addresses the least.

Expert assessment of the curriculum: new initiatives and compromises

Introducing the third-generation national curriculum began in 2018. Final version of the new generation NC was prepared as a result of lengthy consultations with relevant experts, representatives of academia, schools and NGO sector, as well as other stakeholders. According to international organizations (WHO, UNESCO, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, International Conference on Population and Development), sexuality education should be based on facts, it should not be biased, ideologically motivated or subject to censorship (Center For Reproductive Rights, 2010). However, even the new generation NC is not free from such influences. We can assume that some of the challenges associated with the national curriculum (discussed above) are the result of public's demand and making a compromise in consideration of attitudes of different stakeholders. In addition, as result of a compromise, the plan does not include "acute" and sensitive issues like gender identity and sexuality education. According to teachers, public resistance toward such issues negatively affects institutions that should be serving the purpose of destroying the existing taboos and not reinforcing them instead.

In the new NC, issues concerning sexuality education are integrated in topics of reproductive health, child marriage and STDs; generally, topical issues of sexuality education are reflected in the NC in a fragmented manner. However, this is not the problem of only our school education. According to the 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report, in a number of countries basic educational programs and educational standards rarely entail holistic sexuality education (UNESCO, 2016a). Research reports indicate that educational programs are mostly focused on reproductive psychology, underlining abstinence or postponement of sex life, rarely or inadequately provide information about contraception and other issues of sexual health (Lopez, L. M., Bernholc, A., Chen, M., & Tolley, E., 2016; UNESCO and UNFPA, 2012).

The new concept of NC that organizes learning topics around target notions, seemingly provides more freedom and the opportunity to teach all issues related to gender identity and sexuality education. However, due to resistant attitudes in the society, including in some parents, teachers are not showing much initiative and are trying to prevent possible problems and confrontations. Notably, textbook authors had freedom to discuss in detail topics related to gender education, within corresponding topics. However, such precedent has not been found in any of the textbooks.

Compared to the old generation national curriculum, the area of civic education has been broadened and expanded, however due to the existing public attitudes, the topic of homophobia could not be integrated. According to the experts, this will be possible if an agreement is reached between relevant stakeholders. In addition, experts believe it is crucial that topics of sexuality and sexual behavior are included in the NC for secondary education. To ensure that issues of sexuality education are adequately reflected in the NC, the group of experts believe that certain topics can also be integrated in the NC for primary education, during the next stage. UNESCO document provides similar recommendation. In particular, it says that teaching should be age and developmentally appropriate. For example, 4 to 6 year-old children will be learning about topics like friendship, emotions During

the next stage, topics like sexual maturity, family planning, contraception, etc. will be gradually introduced. Children recognize and are aware of these relationships long before they act on their sexuality and therefore need the skills and knowledge to understand their bodies, relationships and feelings from an early age (UNESCO, 2009).

Research shows that legitimization of comprehensive sexuality education through national curriculum is an important but insufficient component of ensuring sexuality education. Both individual studies, as well as international framework documents focus on the need to have a comprehensive approach toward introducing the curriculum, which entails training teachers, developing teaching approaches and learning resources, monitoring and evaluating learning outcomes and creating enabling conditions in schools.³

“Sexuality education” in schools

Social norms and cultural expectations that exist in schools have a significant impact on forming attitudes toward sexuality education and understanding its importance, and vice-versa, public attitudes affect teaching/learning processes in schools related to sexuality education. The research has shown that schools need institutional support. Taboos and stereotypes that exist in the society form a significant barrier in the process of teaching sensitive topics associated with sexuality education in schools.

Adolescents have heard a lot of myths about their physical development, bodily changes, effects of hormones on reproductive system, chronological maturity and its psychological manifestations school should replace these myths with age-appropriate information and medical knowledge. Despite the role of family, schools have a bigger responsibility and educational institutions should guide and facilitate formation of correct attitudes toward sexuality education among adolescents. They should ensure development of relevant skills and competencies.

According to youth, school plays a minor role in raising awareness of youth. Schools cannot even provide the minimum information necessary for healthy sexual development of adolescents, for understanding their rights and responsibilities.

Assessments of pupils and students: level of satisfaction of pupils and students with regard to learning sexuality education topics in schools is extremely low. Majority of pupils confirm that school teachers simply omitted issues of sexuality education (did not explain these issues at all) or explained them but never tested students on them. In addition, youth believes that it is critically important to raise awareness of pupils during secondary education and school should play a leading role in that regard. In order for adolescents to be able to avoid influences of incorrect or inappropriate information obtained from various sources, against the background of technological progress and digital

³ International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group 2011; Haberland 2015; Haberland and Rogow 2015; UNESCO 2015

development, it is extremely important for them to know that they can address a qualified individual in school with topics of their interest.

Assessments of parents: some parents that participated in the survey recognize central role of schools in informing future generation. They believe that school's efforts for informing their children are insufficient and more specialists, including psychologists need to be engaged in the teaching process in order for pupils to be able to discuss issues of their interest during direct communication with specialists.

Assessment of teachers: majority of teachers recognize that over the last three decades no substantial changes have been made in teaching sexuality education issues. However, the number of teachers that are motivated and driven to teach these topics have been increased.

Low level of awareness and aggressive attitudes of the society, including some parents toward sexuality education issues is an important obstacle for the teaching process. Often teachers themselves actively disseminated gender-related stereotypes. According to teachers that participated in the survey, pupils are the ones with highest level of acceptance in this process.

Teachers with initiative, who start teaching issues of sexuality education and discussing the taboo topics that are necessary for physical, mental and psychological health of pupils, mostly have to face opponents alone. Teachers believe that in response to criticism of parents and colleagues, school administration should provide more support, especially in dealing with the community and parents.

Assessments of school principals: school principals understand these difficulties and believe that teachers need "institutional support", so that sexuality education can be taught openly and without obstacles. According to them, improving the situation with regard to sexuality education directly depends on changing radical attitudes that exist about these issues in the society as a whole or in individual groups. It is important to conduct intensive work and comprehensive campaign for raising awareness about importance of sexuality education, its goals and necessity. In a number of instances, lack of awareness among teachers is visible. According to principals, the reality in which influential religious or public groups express extremely aggressive attitude toward teaching of sexuality education in schools, is the number one obstacle in conducting the teaching in relevant form. Often these attitudes significantly influence position of parents. Changing attitudes is only possible through long-term comprehensive, intensive awareness campaigns, teaching and training, which requires increased involvement and efforts of public organizations and donors.

Learning resources and supporting professional development of teachers

For effective introduction of the National Curriculum

Changing attitudes of teachers and consequently, improving practice is fragmented and inconsistent process, however according to curriculum experts, certain progress is still evident.

Effective implementation of sexuality education largely depends on competencies of teachers. Framework documents view supporting professional development of teachers, promoting use of effective learning approaches and providing access to quality learning resources as one of the important factors of implementing sexuality education. In that regard, our teachers are facing serious challenges. There are expectations that topics that are not directly included in the national curriculum (certain key issues related to sexuality education and sexuality), will be elaborated on by teachers themselves while topics of sexuality education are not addressed or inadequately addressed by textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia. Under these circumstances, it is critically important to support professional development of teachers.

Teachers and principals underlined lack of learning resources and insufficient professional support and have stated that qualifications of teachers need to be improved with regard to both content and methodology.

In addition to professional development of teachers, creating additional learning resources and providing access to such resources is equally important. Access to textbooks that are relevant with regard to content and culture is of critical importance, as well as underlining taboo topics in teachers' training programs, additional textbooks or instructions, helping teachers learn strategies for teaching these topics and designing a guidance for creating enabling learning environment (especially about communicating with pupils about these issues and protecting confidentiality).

Teachers have different levels of competencies and preparedness; therefore, they prefer a set of proven, experienced resources that they can directly use during their class. Teachers believe that they need more long-term trainings, as well as consultation with psychologists and sexologists in order to overcome barriers of communication about these topics. Here we must note that interpersonal skills of teachers, their openness when answering any questions that pupils may have is especially important. According to experts of this field, effectiveness of teaching these issues largely depends on the desire to receive new information, creativity, empathy and good communication skills, use of simple and easily understood language (Alexander, Salas, 2017), as well as culturally relevant approaches that should be taken into account in programs for professional support of teachers.

School psychologists

All representatives of school community have noted unanimously that effective management of different cases of sexual and reproductive health requires school personnel with adequate education and competencies, who will provide qualified support to students. Students, teachers and church representative underline the importance of involving psychologists, medical practitioners and sexologists in this process, which in their opinion will greatly increase reliability and validity of information delivered to pupils, this increasing trusts of pupils toward school.

Clearly, difficulties that policy-making institutions and schools are facing in the process of implementing sexuality education limit access of adolescents to quality sexuality education. Despite changes in the third generation NC, this field continues to face substantial challenges. Public should

understand that sexuality education, in addition to access to healthcare services, has a positive and lasting effect on health of youth and their well-being. This issue requires serious advocacy, while education system requires serious support.

Awareness, attitudes and involvement of parents

To protect new generation from confusion, suspicious taboos and prejudices, responsibilities related to sexuality education should be distributed among parents and schools. Sexual health of young people largely depends on the important role that parents should be playing in sexual socialization of their children.

The research clearly shows that awareness of parents is low and due to this fact, as well as communication barriers when talking about issues related to sexuality, involvement of parents in raising of awareness of their children is also low.

Most parents that participated in the survey believe that school has the primary responsibility in providing sexuality education to their children. Low awareness of parents is usually the prerequisite to “escaping” the responsibility – parents don’t know when to start talking about these topics, what kind of age-appropriate information to provide and how... It is a major challenge for them to select adequate ways of communicating about these issues. Some parents are concerned about how distorted information or unreliable sources affect their children. Therefore, they prefer that their children receive information about sexuality education issues in a regulated and systemic way, within formal education. As a result of low level of awareness, often parents delay discussing these issues with their children. During the delay period, adolescents receive information from other sources... It is ineffective to wait for the time when children themselves raise this topic.

Parents believe that it is important to inform their children about development of organ systems, bodily changes, effects of hormonal changes on reproductive system, chronologic maturity and its psychological manifestations, different issues associated with sexual health, however they are not convinced that they themselves will be able to fulfill the function of informing their children in a qualified manner. This may be caused by lack of knowledge and other factors varying from individual to domestic, public and social factors.

The research clearly shows that parental attitudes toward sexuality education are mostly positive, with slight differences with regard to different aspects of sexuality education. Attitudes of parents that live in rural areas are different and overall, more reserved. Parental attitudes also differ according to levels of education.

Adolescents and students that participated in the survey underline the importance of open and timely communication with parents. Parents need certain competencies in order to create a mutually respectful and open environment, without any privacy intrusion and excessive personalization. Achieving such balance requires high level of competency in communication and feeling of self-efficacy on part of parents.

Parental readiness is high with regard to informal sexuality education and in this process, they need serious support, even in the form of educational programs for adults.

The research has shown that planning and implementation of measures for raising awareness is important for all target groups. Awareness of school personnel as well as parents should be ensured. Parents especially need to be knowledgeable about how to obtain trust of their children, how to deliver to them information about topics of sexuality education without inflicting any trauma or stress, when and how to begin communication about this topic.

Youth: Awareness and Attitudes

Adolescents are the direct target group of sexuality education. Students also participated in the survey. Attitude of youth toward implementing sexuality education is clearly positive. According to them, raising awareness of pupils during secondary education is important and school should play a leading role in that regard. In order for adolescents to be able to avoid influences of incorrect or inappropriate information obtained from various sources, against the background of technological progress and digital development, it is extremely important for them to know that they can address a qualified individual in school with topics of their interest. The reality is the following: the level of satisfaction of the youth surveyed with information and knowledge received about topics of sexuality education in school is extremely low.

Young respondents are concerned about gender stereotypes and gender inequalities in the society (e.g. sexual relationships are allowed and even encouraged for boys and not for girls). They believe this is due to low level of awareness. In addition, they believe that glib and ridiculing remarks by adolescent boys, bullying of girls during discussion of issues of sexuality education like, for example, reproductive system, is due to low level of awareness.

Young respondents highlighted difficulties of communicating with parents, feeling of embarrassment and other barriers, one of the reasons of which is lack of psychological readiness of parents. However, they believe that ideally parents are key agents conducive of sexuality education and underline the importance of open and timely communication with parents.

Communication

Sources of Information

Pupils identify several sources of sexuality education: friends, Internet, social media, parents. They acknowledge that information provided by their friends may be far from reality, however they find it comfortable to communicate about these issues with their friends. Internet and social media are another major sources of information (different thematic groups, information webpages). Since in the contemporary digital world adolescents are able to access technologies without any additional

challenges, digital media is one of the primary sources of sexuality education. Young respondents note that through Internet, wide range of information is available and it is necessary to filter this information, however they find digital media to be comfortable, as it allows to receive information anonymously. As noted earlier, according to them, school plays a minor role in informing young people. Parents are essentially the last ones they turn to for information, while parents should be playing a dominant function among sources of information for issues of sexuality education.

Barriers to communication

Certain factors influence the process of communication about sex, including gender of parent and child, specific nature of issues to be discussed, embarrassment, parents' style of communication, etc.

Gender, gender-related dynamics

Gender was identified as one of the key factors during communication. Apparently, girls tend to discuss sexual issues with their mothers. Mothers are able to find a common language with girls rather than with boys, and girls find it more "comfortable" to talk to their mothers.

Fathers surveyed did not have experience in talking to their children about issues of sexuality education. During their early teenage years, children turn to their mothers with any questions that they have. Later friends become their "educators". Nevertheless, fathers believe that sexuality education protects youth from traumatizing experiences, and risks arise when information is received from incompetent sources. To sum up, it is safe to say that usually mothers play a leading role in communication about sexual issues in the family setting, while father's functions in that regard are mostly ambiguous. These results are consistent with other research data (Toboy, Hillman, Anagurthi, & Somers, 2011).

Awareness and communication style

Low level of awareness or inappropriate strategy and tone for talking about these issues can be an important obstacle in the process of communication between parents and their children. Most importantly, how parents affect their children's sexual behavior largely depends on quality of communication, not frequency – how openly they talk to their children, whether or not they provide them with relevant and necessary information.

According to youth, parents should not postpone answering their children's questions. In addition, they shouldn't impose these topics on their children before they demonstrate any interest.

Contents of communication

The research has clearly shown that contents of communication between parents and children mostly focuses on identification of threats related to the children's future, as opposed to raising their awareness. Parents talk to their children about abstaining from early sexual activity, as an important prerequisite for their success in the future. Parents often share their own or someone else's

experience, underlining negative rather than positive aspects of the experience, in an attempt to protect their children from any unwise decisions. Such findings have also been revealed by other surveys, which clearly illustrate that during communication about sex in families, future plans are often underlined and these plans prioritize education (McKee & Karasz, 2006); sexual behavior is viewed by parents as an obstacle to realizing the dream (education, employment, success) (Jaccard et al., 2003 Akers et al., 2010; Meschke & Peter, 2014; Murray et al., 2014).

It is less likely that shifting parent's focus from awareness to warning will be as effective as providing age-appropriate authentic information. Many studies have found that informed adolescents are more protected from sexual violence and other traumatizing experiences. Lack of information creates serious problems like child marriage, underage pregnancy, etc.

Embarrassment

Feeling of embarrassment is one of the most common obstacles to communication about sexuality education issues. Issues of sexuality are a taboo in our society. The research has shown that discussing these issues creates discomfort at every level.

Parents are reluctant to talk to their children about these issues. They feel uncomfortable, embarrassed and often refrain from direct communication. Discomfort is a barrier not only for parents but also for teachers, who find it difficult to overcome the feeling of embarrassment and prefer not to talk about sensitive topics at all. The fact that mothers find it easier to talk to girls, rather than to boys is a manifestation of embarrassment. Parents believe that children too are embarrassed to talk about issues of sexual development – both sides are uncomfortable talking about these issues.

Teachers have also pointed out embarrassment associated with discussions about issues of sexuality education. Even teachers that are motivated to openly talk about issues of sexuality education are not fully ready, experience certain discomfort, fear and embarrassment, as they too are carriers of social constructs that are saturated with censorship, fear and “silence” related to the topic of sexuality. This hinders provision of vital information in a timely and appropriate manner. Similar trends have also been described in other studies, in relation to teaching/learning process (Aguilar, 2015; Bejarano and Mateos, 2016; Díaz and Anguita, 2017; Montero et al., 2017; Cordero and Dumrauf, 2017; Navarro et al., 2018; Manzano and Jerves, 2018).

Discussions about sexual and reproductive education issues during a lesson or in an informal format are less problematic for pupils. According to teachers, despite natural embarrassment that pupils feel in the beginning of communication, which soon disappears if the right strategy is chosen, pupils are open and sincere. They understand the importance of the subject and demonstrate interest, which is confirmed by assessments of pupils surveyed within this research, their motivation and interest.

Properly planned learning process decreases the feeling of embarrassment. An illustrative example of this is ready-made lesson plans prepared by the NC biology group in partnership with Tanadgoma Foundation on puberty and adolescence (for the seventh grade). Piloting confirmed that if a lesson is

planned adequately, neither teachers nor pupils will feel any embarrassment in the process of learning about issues related to puberty/adolescence.

Sexuality Education from the Perspective of Ethnic Minorities

The afore-described trends are also true for ethnic minorities, however problems in their case are far more intense.

Ethnic, cultural characteristics, religious aspects or customs in general are currently an insurmountable obstacle to teaching sexual education and reproductive health issues in schools or in other educational formats. This barrier was especially apparent when studying attitudes of teachers, parents and youth in the community densely settled with ethnic Azerbaijanis. Families lack the tradition of talking about not just sexuality education issues but also inevitable physiological changes, while talking about these issues is unacceptable for majority of the community. Despite recent awareness-raising measures concerning child marriage, rate of child marriage remains high and such facts are considered a norm.

Teachers are also hostages of customs and widespread attitudes – lack of resources is a clear but a secondary problem. Teachers exercise extreme caution with regard to teaching the subject to the full extent and with the necessary format, often they provide only the very basic explanations. Even though they highlight the need for support, trainings, resources, it is clear that widespread attitudes and discomfort making it impossible to teach are the main problem.

Teaching the subject under these circumstances, even without the explicitly sensitive topics, will be possible in single-gender classes – all participants of the survey that support or have less radical attitudes toward sexuality education agree with this and believe that it is the only way.

Based on the analysis of information obtained, it is safe to say that overcoming the existing radical or passively negative attitudes, resistance to receiving and providing information will most likely be possible with generational change. As to information and awareness campaigns, as well as promoting sexuality education in and outside of schools, such initiatives can serve the purpose of intensifying these afore-mentioned change.

Pupils and youth are likely supporters of sexuality education in schools – they evaluate this issue more progressively and fully realize the need to receive qualified information about sexual, reproductive education and health, especially in view of the existing reality (taboo topics, early marriages, information vacuum). They are quite critical of teachers' attitudes, who in their view essentially refrain from teaching sexuality education issues provided in the NC and even taboo the topic even more. They are also critical of categorically negative attitudes of parents and the society in general toward these issues.

Pupils with disabilities and sexuality education

According to civil society representatives and school principals, pupils with mental impairments and other disabilities face far more obstacles than their peers. Studies show that they tend to become victims of sexual violence three times more. Researchers recognize that the society is not yet ready to address sexual problems, especially in case of youth with mental impairments. “Moreover, they often experience sexual unacceptability or become victims of violence by their peers or care-takers” (Elissa M. Howard-Barr, Barbara A. Rienzo, R. Morgan Pigg, Jr, Delores James; 2005).

In view of challenges and difficulties in this field, relevant institutions should take meaningful steps to ensure more effective protection of sexual and reproductive health and rights of persons with disabilities.⁴ Having access to authentic information about sexuality education issues and relevant services is critically important in order for each and every one of them to live a fully-fledged, dignified life.

Attitudes of representatives of the church toward sexuality education

Sexuality education is closely related to cultural values, social context and the predominant ethics code elaborated largely based on religion. Although influence of religious and social values on sexuality education has been reduced, while the influence of scientific knowledge is growing, church’s influence on formation of attitudes toward sexuality education are still visible today, especially in Georgia. Recently debates and discussions about sexuality education have become more rigid, which is natural because different religious views (including within Christian and secular traditions) about sex and gender are vastly different.

The church respects secular schools and recognizes freedom of secular education, however its role in the educational narrative related to sexuality education should not be discounted. Interest of representatives of religion toward issues of sexuality education are natural, as sexual behavior is related not only to biological, psychological, social, behavioral but also religious and moral dimensions of human life. Church representatives that participated in the survey are concerned about increased number of abortions, divorces and other damaging practices among youth. They believe lack of knowledge is an important prerequisite of these problems. Therefore, they believe that youth should have scientific knowledge about human reproductive system and health issues. However, majority sees more threat than benefit in open discussions about these issues, outside formal education. Triggering unhealthy interest is one such threat, which may be damaging for youth. Based on biblical teachings, clergymen surveyed within the research support teaching that would emphasize love as a value, loyalty, responsibility, strong will, restraint and respect of other people’s feelings. Positions

⁴ In order to bring the legal base and programs in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in 2020 UNFPA Office in Georgia prepared “Study on Legislative Analysis and Recommendations on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girls with Disabilities in regards to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (<https://georgia.unfpa.org>).

about implementing sexuality education in formal educational field are varying – some believe that sexuality education of children does not fall under the school’s prerogative (rather, parents have the responsibility), while others believe that the process of informing youth should take place in the format of consultations (individual meetings, based on individual context and needs). In addition, skeptical attitudes toward implementing sexuality education in an adequate manner were also expressed, due to lack of professional competencies. Church representatives believe that professionals that are child-oriented, have high morals and adequate mental readiness (psychologists, medical practitioners, specialists of pedagogy) should work on contents and form of sexuality education issues (textbooks or other resources, training of teachers, formal or informal format, etc.). According to them, the existing challenges can be addressed by involving professionals in the process of implementing sexuality education and ensuring transparency of the process.

Advocacy of sexuality education and obstacles

Through advocacy, research, awareness raising activities, trainings and monitoring, civil society promotes implementation of sexuality education in Georgia. The present research, focusing on problems with regard to introduction of comprehensive sexuality education and ways of solving these problems, has been conducted with the support of a non-governmental organization.

To get a full picture about public attitudes toward issues of sexuality education and the existing challenges, NGOs working on advocacy of sexuality education,⁵ as well as representatives of the so-called religious-conservative groups were involved in the research.⁶ Similar to the society in general, attitudes in these two segments of civil society are also polarized.

Majority of civil society representatives believe that the primary cause of formation of negative attitudes toward sexuality education in the society is lack of public awareness and stereotypical views. According to them, varying attitudes in the society toward sexuality education are one of the obstacles of implementing sexuality education in the field of formal education. Access to reliable and valid information is another important factor.

Although church representatives understand the need to increase awareness of pupils in sexuality education issues, representatives of the so-called religious/conservative groups are taking a more radical stance and categorically oppose implementation of sexuality education in schools. They believe that it may seriously undermine religious or national values.

It should be noted that attitudes toward sexuality education (in terms of radicalism of stance) are different within the organizations that advocate sexuality education.

Majority of civil society representatives agree that lack of information about sexual relationships, hygiene, reproductive health and safety and other issues associated with sexuality education results

⁵ UNFPA, GYDEA, GrizWave, RPRV, Hera XXI, Public Defender’s Office

⁶ Psychological assistance center of Patriarchy, “Georgian Idea”

in dramatic increase of use of harmful practices among youth. Only a few far-right organizations are an exception (so-called religious conservative group), as they believe that raising awareness of youth provokes their early sexual activity and results in frequent harmful practices. In reality, research data proves the opposite: CSE increased trust, self-esteem and self-efficacy among pupils. Young people that receive such education usually refrain from early sexual activity, avoid underage pregnancy, voluntarily test for HIV infection, tend to engage in safe sexual behavior and are empowered to reflect critically on their environment, which promotes gender equality (UNESCO, 2015; Rojas et al., 2017).

Representatives of organizations that advocate sexuality education, as well as far-right organizations are concerned about the role of the state in reducing the existing polarized public attitudes: the state's attitude toward violent actions of far-right groups – fear and inaction – is alarming for respondents that work on the advocacy for sexuality education, while far-right organizations themselves believe that they are in an “offside” position and believe that international organizations and associated Georgian NGOs have a strong influence on the state, forcing the state to pursue liberal ideology.

Low level of public awareness and the existing polarized attitudes toward sexuality education are an important barrier in the process of implementing sexuality education. All target groups involved in the present research had recommendations for supporting sexuality education in one way or another, which is indicative of certain positive trends in terms of attitudes toward sexuality education. Within religious and secular traditions, views about sex and gender, sexuality education are quite different not only in Georgia but also worldwide. According to experts, problem exists in secular freedom, as well as in religious regulation (Jakobsen, 2005). We should therefore allow existence of conflicts around thousands of interpretations and give way to debates – asking questions, loudly and talking clearly is the solution (Butler, 2006: 289). Programs and events that focus on raising awareness, quoting and spreading scientific data about effective strategies of sexuality education will eventually lead to increased public awareness and changes in public attitudes. This will be an important prerequisite for effective introduction of comprehensive sexuality education.

1. Sexuality Education in Schools: Overview of International Experience

The situation in European and former Soviet-Union countries with regards to implementing sexuality education in schools is diverse. In majority of European countries, sexuality education is part of school and sometimes pre-school curriculum. Countries however differ in terms of regulatory instruments. In some countries of northern Europe, sexuality education is part of a compulsory education. In that regard, Sweden where compulsory sexuality education was introduced in 1955, is a pioneer. Minimum standards that entail fields like anatomy, gender and relationships, are set by the national agency of education. Sexuality education is also compulsory in Finland, Denmark, Estonia, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxemburg, Flemish region of Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Albania and Ukraine.

Beginning from 1970s, in some countries sexuality education was gradually gaining its foothold in the form of a mandatory component of curriculum, while in certain countries of southern Europe, the high degree of independence of religious units, as well as schools or territorial units grew into the resistance against introducing universal sexuality education. Similar situation exists in the U.S. and Canada. Therefore, access to sexuality education greatly varies between schools and territorial units. However, attitudes of public and government in European countries are in favor of sexuality education. Sexuality education is currently widely spread in countries of southern Europe (e.g. Spain and Portugal) and even in Ireland, where resistance on religious grounds was quite strong. In Ireland, sexuality education became mandatory in 2003 at the primary and basic levels of education.

Compulsory sexuality education was first introduced by Estonia among former Soviet countries and Czech Republic within the Communist Bloc. Weak legislative regulations in European Countries are usually explained by lack of consensus on religious grounds (e.g. Italy, Greece, Cyprus). In many former Soviet and Communist countries, sexuality education is not mandatory (see Table 1 in Annex).

Learning/teaching objectives

Countries also differ in terms of learning objectives for sexuality education. In some countries, education entails issues related to anatomy, gender and relationships (e.g. Sweden, Finland, Norway),⁷ while in other countries it is limited to issues of sexual health in biology lessons (e.g. Italy, Portugal, Latvia, England).⁸ This issue is even more acute in medium and low income countries.⁹ Therefore, as countries acknowledge the importance of sexuality education, the role of international organizations with regards to conceptualizing sexuality education objectives has gradually increased.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, international organizations have been actively involved in supporting development of sexuality education. In 2006, under the leadership of the WHO regional

⁷ Parker et al. 2009

⁸ Milburn 1995; Ogden & Harden 1999; Macdowall et al. 2006

⁹ Keogh et al, 2020

office in Europe and German federal health education center, a conference on sexuality education of youth was held, followed by elaboration of “European standards for sexuality education” in 2010. At the same time, the International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) began to work in this regard in 2005 and in 2010, a framework for comprehensive sexuality education was created. In 2009, UNESCO published “International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach”. The document contained a curriculum for young people aged 5-18.

UNESCO’s International technical guidance on sexuality education provides objectives of sexuality education that entail “promoting the well-being of adolescents, enhancing gender equality and equity as well as responsible sexual behavior, and protecting them from early and unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual abuse, incest and violence.”¹⁰ In 2010, UNESCO revised the technical guidance. The revised version is based on the concept of sexuality education improved overtime and is grounded in human rights, especially young person’s right to education about their bodies, relationships and sexuality. The International technical guidance on sexuality education was developed “to assist education, health and other relevant authorities in the development and implementation of school-based and out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education programmes and materials” (UNESCO, 2018).

The holistic concept of UN’s technical guidance entails a vision about sexuality education that supports young people to develop the knowledge, skills, ethical values and attitudes they need to make conscious, healthy and respectful choices about relationships, sex and reproduction. According to the document, “comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is a curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and, understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives.” In view of this concept of sexuality education, teaching/learning objectives entail the following eight notions:

1. Relationships
2. Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality
3. Understanding Gender
4. Violence and Staying Safe
5. Skills for Health and Well-being
6. The Human Body and Development
7. Sexuality and Sexual Behavior
8. Sexual and Reproductive Health

¹⁰ United Nations Population Fund, 2000.

The key concepts are further delineated into two to five topics, each with key ideas and knowledge, attitudinal, and skill-based learning objectives per age group. Knowledge provides a critical foundation for learners, while attitudes help young people shape their understanding of themselves, sexuality and the world. At the same time, skills such as communication, listening, refusal, decision-making and negotiation; interpersonal; critical-thinking; building self-awareness; developing empathy; accessing reliable information or services; challenging stigma and discrimination; and advocating for rights, enable learners to take action. For example, notion “relationships” is one of the topics, while learning objectives are differentiated according to the following age groups: 5-8 years; 9-12 years; 12-15 years and 15-18+ years (UNESCO, 2018).

Table 1: Overview of key concepts, topics and learning objectives

| Key concept 1: Relationships | Key concept 2: Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality | Key concept 3: Understanding Gender |
|---|---|--|
| Topics: | Topics: | Topics: |
| 1.1 Families | 2.1 Values and Sexuality | 3.1 The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms |
| 1.2 Friendship, Love and Romantic Relationships | 2.2 Human Rights and Sexuality | 3.2 Gender Equality, Stereotypes and Bias |
| 1.3 Tolerance, Inclusion and Respect | 2.3 Culture, Society and Sexuality | 3.3 Gender-based Violence |
| 1.4 Long-term Commitments and Parenting | | |
| Key concept 4: Violence and Staying Safe | Key concept 5: Skills for Health and Well-being | Key concept 6: The Human Body and Development |
| Topics: | Topics: | Topics: |
| 4.1 Violence | 5.1 Norms and Peer Influence on Sexual Behavior | 6.1 Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology |
| 4.2 Consent, Privacy and Bodily Integrity | 5.2 Decision-making | 6.2 Reproduction |
| 4.3 Safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) | 5.3 Communication, Refusal and Negotiation Skills | 6.3 Puberty |
| | 5.4 Media Literacy and Sexuality | 6.4 Body Image |
| | 5.5 Finding Help and Support | |
| Key concept 7: Sexuality and Sexual Behavior | Key concept 8: Sexual and Reproductive Health | |
| Topics: | Topics: | |
| 7.1 Sex, Sexuality and the Sexual Life Cycle | 8.1 Pregnancy and Pregnancy Prevention | |
| 7.2 Sexual Behavior and Sexual Response | 8.2 HIV and AIDS Stigma, Care, Treatment and Support | |
| | 8.3 Understanding, Recognizing and Reducing the Risk of STIs, including HIV | |

Source: UNESCO, 2018

For example, topics for the key concept of “Relationships” includes “families”. Learning objectives for the age group of 5-8 years includes the following key ideas:

1. There are many different kinds of families that exist around the world;
2. Family members have different needs and roles;
3. Gender equality is often reflected in the roles and responsibilities of family members;
4. Family members are important in teaching values to children.

Each key idea entails different categories of competencies. For example, for key idea 4, learners will be able to: define what values are (knowledge); list values that they and their family members care about (knowledge); acknowledge that family members’ values affect children’s values (attitudinal); express a personal value (skill).

Learning objectives become broader and deeper with age. For example, as show below, the notion of family gradually evolves with different age groups.

Table 2: Key concepts of family according to different age groups

| 5-8 years | 9-12 years | 12-15 years | 15-18+ years |
|---|---|--|--|
| There are many different kinds of families that exist around the world; | Parents/guardians and other family members help children acquire values and guide and support their children’s decisions; | Growing up means taking responsibility for oneself and others; | Sexual relationships and health issues can affect family relationships; |
| Family members have different needs and roles; | Families can promote gender equality through their roles and responsibilities; | Conflict and misunderstandings between parents/guardians and children are common, especially during adolescence, and are usually resolvable; | There are support systems that young people and family members can turn to when faced with challenges related to sharing or disclosure of information related to sexual relationships and health issues. |
| Gender equality is often reflected in the roles and responsibilities of family members; | Health and illness can affect families in terms of their structure, capacities and responsibilities. | Love, cooperation, gender equality, mutual caring and mutual respect are important for healthy family functioning and relationships. | |
| Family members are important in teaching values to children. | | | |

In addition to the UN’s technical guidance about sexuality education, a framework document of competencies related to sexuality education was also prepared under the leadership of the WHO regional office in Europe and Germany’s Federal Centre for Health Education.

European standard of sexuality education, similar to the UN document, addresses learning objectives of sexuality education in a detailed and broad manner. However, unlike the UN recommendation, the European standard recommends starting sexuality education at the age of 4. According to the

standard, at this age children should acquire age-appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes about issues like human body and human development, reproduction, sexuality, emotions, relationships and lifestyle, health and well-being, rights, etc. For example, with regard to reproduction, children should know about pregnancy and childbirth, as well as human reproductive system (“where children come from”), they should know that a child may come from adoption and not everyone has a child. Having skills about reproduction issues means that a child is able to talk about this topic using appropriate words; development of attitudes means that, for example, it is acceptable to a child that a child can become a member of family in different ways.

Third important framework document for European countries was created by the International Planned Parenthood Fund.¹¹ The document identifies the following seven essential components of comprehensive sexuality education:

1. **Gender** – difference between gender and sex; exploring gender roles and attributes; understanding perceptions of masculinity and femininity within the family and across the life cycle; society’s changing norms and values; manifestations and consequences of gender bias, stereotypes and inequality (including self-stigmatization).
2. **Sexual and reproductive health and HIV** – sexuality and the life cycle (i.e., puberty, menopause, stigma, sexual problems); anatomy; reproductive process; how to use condoms; other forms of contraception (including emergency contraception); pregnancy options and information; legal and safe abortion; unsafe abortion; understanding sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV, including transmission and symptoms; HIV and STI prevention, treatment, care, and support; HIV voluntary counselling and testing (VCT); antiretroviral therapy and living with HIV; prevention of mother to child transmission; injecting drug use and HIV; virginity; abstinence, faithfulness; sexual response; social expectations; self-esteem and empowerment, respect for the body; myths and stereotypes.
3. **Sexual rights and sexual citizenship** – knowledge of international human rights and national policies, laws and structures that relate to people’s sexuality; rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health (SRH); social, cultural and ethical barriers to exercising SRH rights; understanding that sexuality and culture are diverse and dynamic; available services and resources and how to access them; participation; practices and norms; different sexual identities; advocacy; choice; protection; negotiation skills; consent and the right to have sex only when you are ready; the right to freely express and explore one’s sexuality in a safe, healthy and pleasurable way.
4. **Pleasure** – being positive about young people’s sexuality; understanding that sex should be enjoyable and not forced; that it is much more than just sexual intercourse; sexuality as part of everybody’s life; the biology and emotions behind the human sexual response; gender and pleasure; sexual wellbeing; safer sex practices and pleasure; masturbation; love, lust and

¹¹ IPPF, 2010

relationships; interpersonal communication; the diversity of sexuality; the first sexual experience; consent; alcohol and drugs and the implications of their use; addressing stigma associated with pleasure.

5. **Violence** – exploring the various types of violence towards men and women and how they manifest, particularly gender-based violence; non-consensual sex and understanding what is unacceptable; rights and laws; support options available and seeking help; community norms (power, gender) and myths; prevention, including personal safety plans; self-defense techniques; understanding the dynamics of victims and abusers; appropriate referral mechanisms for survivors; preventing the victim from becoming a perpetrator; men/boys as both perpetrators and allies in violence prevention
6. **Diversity** – recognizing and understanding the range of diversity in our lives (e.g., faith, culture, ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability/disability, HIV status and sexual orientation); a positive view of diversity; recognizing discrimination, its damaging effects and being able to deal with it; developing a belief in equality; supporting young people to move beyond just tolerance (see ‘Olsson’s Stairs of Tolerance’ below).
7. **Relationships** – different types of relationships (e.g., family, friends, sexual, romantic, etc.); that relationships are constantly changing; emotions, intimacy (emotional and physical); rights and responsibilities; power dynamics; recognizing healthy and unhealthy or coercive relationships; communication, trust and honesty in relationships; peer pressure and social norms; that love and sex are not the same.

Analysis of these main framework documents suggests that:

- Goals and contents of sexuality education in schools should go beyond anatomical aspects of sex and reproduction. According to its modern understanding, comprehensive sexuality education entails gender, relationships, health and safety, human rights and personal freedoms and contemporary values of choice and aspects of well-being. In view of multidisciplinary nature of sexuality education, it should be a part of the curriculum of several subjects.
- CSE entails knowledge, competencies/values and skills.
- Sexuality education should begin from an early age, in a way that will ensure development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of children in all areas of sexuality education, including sexuality, relationships or human rights. Naturally, learning objectives and contents should be tailored to characteristics and needs of the child and adolescent, in view of their age/development.

The foregoing framework documents represent a useful resource for preparing a national curriculum for sexuality education. In addition, studies and framework documents underline importance of contextualizing contents. For example, a study published by the UN in 2015 reads: “contents of sexuality education should be tailored to context and needs of youth. Such adaptation is a critical part of culturally relevant planning and it entails sharing of messages (positive or negative) that culture

dictates on gender, sex and sexuality. This might entail agreed focus on issues like gender discrimination, sexual and gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, child marriage and harmful traditions.¹²

Additionally, adaptation process should not become the reason of violating fundamental principles of receiving sexuality education. According to the UN's "International technical guidance about sexuality education",¹³ these are the following principles:

- **Scientifically accurate:** the content of CSE is based on facts and evidence related to SRH, sexuality and behaviors.
- **Incremental:** CSE is a continuing educational process that starts at an early age, and where new information builds upon previous learning, using a spiral-curriculum approach.
- **Age- and developmentally-appropriate:** the content of CSE is responsive to the changing needs and capabilities of the child and the young person as they grow. It accommodates adapts content when cognitive and emotional development is delayed;
- **Curriculum based:** CSE is included within a written curriculum that includes key teaching objectives, the development of learning objectives, the presentation of concepts, and the delivery of clear key messages in a structured way.
- **Comprehensive:** provides opportunities to acquire comprehensive, accurate, evidence-informed and age- appropriate information on sexuality.
- **Based on a human rights approach:** CSE builds on and promotes an understanding of universal human rights – including the rights of children and young people – and the rights of all persons to health, education, information equality and non-discrimination.
- **Based on gender equality**
- **Transformative:** contributes to the formation of a fair and compassionate society by empowering individuals and communities, promoting critical thinking skills and strengthening young people's citizenship.
- **Able to develop life skills needed to support healthy choices:** this includes the ability to reflect and make informed decisions, communicate and negotiate effectively and demonstrate assertiveness.

Effective implementation of sexuality education in schools

Research shows that legitimization of holistic sexuality education goals and its recognition as compulsory component of curriculum is an important but insufficient component of ensuring sexuality education. Individual studies, as well as international framework documents underline the need to introduce a comprehensive approach, which would entail training of teachers, development of

¹² UNESCO, 2015. p. 20.

¹³ UNESCO, 2018. p. 16-17

learning methods and resources, monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes and creating enabling conditions at the school level.¹⁴ Sexuality Education Review and Assessment Tool (SERAT), designed by UNESCO, offers the following criteria in addition to integrating the afore-discussed goals in the NC, different age groups and different subjects:

Teaching and learning

This particular criterion concerns principles, methods and guidance that orient the implementation of the sexuality education in schools. Studies as well as international framework documents underline superiority of interactive learning methods.¹⁵ Studies specifically about sexuality education methodology are rare. For example, studies about effectiveness of sexuality education in schools in Finland suggest that it is largely teacher's motivation, attitudes and skills, as well as use of participatory learning methods that positively affect knowledge and attitudes in learners.¹⁶ Kirby and colleagues have come to the same conclusion after evaluating several programs of sexuality education. In addition, generally studies about health issues suggest that pupil-oriented learning methods that are most effective. Therefore, the three framework documents discussed above recommend use of cooperative and interactive learning methods for teaching sexuality education. According to SERAT, teaching and learning criterion includes the following aspects:

- *Promoting the use of effective learning methods.* In particular, sexuality education program should include clear and detailed guidance on the following pedagogical principles: establish a learning environment based on equality respect and human rights; use of a wide range of strategies to engage learners; respect for the uniqueness of each learner (including social, cultural, emotional and sexual background; and different learning aptitudes); use of learner-oriented learning methods (participatory classroom learning, peer education, self-learning activities, computer-based or online learning); involvement of colleagues and other stakeholders (e.g. healthcare providers) in the learning process.
- *Ensuring teachers with access to learning materials.* Teachers have access to teaching materials and tools that include detailed guidance on the following: learning objectives of each lesson, expected results of each lesson, approximate time of each lesson, evaluation methods, required materials to deliver the lessons, etc. According to SERAT, such teaching materials should be pre-tested prior to use by teachers and it should be possible to adapt the teaching materials to specific local contexts.
- *Providing pupils with learning resources.* This entails access to all learning materials for classroom activities, cheap and easy reproduction of classroom materials, access to textbooks, cultural relevance of textbooks. Textbooks should also reflect youth diversity in the country.

¹⁴ Kirby 2007; UNESCO 2010; International Sexuality and HIV Curriculum Working Group 2011; Haberland 2015; Haberland and Rogow 2015; UNESCO 2015

¹⁵ Milburn 1995; Ogden and Harden 1999; Macdowall et al. 2006; UNESCO, 2018; IPPF, 2010.

¹⁶ Kontula, 2010

- *Guidelines for creating appropriate learning environment, means for protecting confidentiality of pupils;* Ensuring free participation of pupils without them feeling vulnerable or excluded; responding to sexual violence cases shared by pupils.
- *Ensuring access to relevant services.* This entails access to contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health services through school medical personnel.

Training of teachers

Effective implementation of sexuality education largely depends on competencies of teachers. However, according to UN, teachers are not provided with adequate opportunities in that regard. Usually, teachers are trained in the field of sexuality education within professional development only. Therefore, teachers often feel uncomfortable and are reluctant to discuss sensitive issues like sexual behavior, sexuality, access to contraceptives.¹⁷ Framework documents and SERAT view training of teachers as one of the criteria for implementing sexuality education. This particular criterion entails curriculum of programs for training and re-training teachers and professional development and support of teachers. It includes indicators like access to programs, coverage of sexuality education issues in teacher training programs, recognition of such programs by the Ministry, possibility to learn about specificities of teaching sexuality education, etc.

Monitoring and evaluation

Both “European standards of sexuality education” and comprehensive sexuality education framework of Europe, as well as UNESCO’s technical guidance on sexuality education identify the need to have an effective system of monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring and evaluation is included in SERAT evaluation system and it includes sexual and reproductive health needs among youth at the national level; whether or not elements of sexuality education are integrated in the national information systems (e.g. education management informational systems, national demographic and health surveys, tools for evaluation of schools, etc.); is there national-level information on coverage of the sexuality education programme for young adults, student perceptions of their learning experience; statistics of school-level regulations on physical safety, stigma and discrimination, sexual harassment and violence; statistics on qualifications and professional development of school teachers, etc.

Sexuality education has a long-standing history. Over the last two decades, as a result of interventions and cooperation between international organizations, goals of sexuality education were substantially broadened and terms for implementing CSE nationwide were determined. These terms include dissemination of learning methods, access and development of teaching and learning resources, access to additional services, improving qualifications of teachers and monitoring and evaluating sexuality education. Framework documents and evaluation tools represent a useful resource for evaluating the implementation of sexuality education in the country.

¹⁷ UNESCO, 2015

2. Sexuality Education – Analysis of Contents of the National Curriculum

Goals of the analysis and methodological issues

Concept of the national curriculum and goals of the analysis

The National Curriculum is the main regulatory document that determines specific issues related to teaching of sexuality education in schools in Georgia. This document defines main outcomes to be achieved at different stages (elementary, basic, secondary) and in different grades. NC also provides contains recommended content based on which pupils' knowledge is constructed.

NC in turn is based on the document about national goals for general education, defining what kind of generations Georgia's general education system should help raise.

Even though the NC is amended constantly, it is possible to identify three main phases in the dynamic of these changes. 2018-2024 National Curriculum reflects the most recent changes within the third wave and it is based on a new approach to building a curriculum.

This new version of the National Curriculum includes main elements of knowledge structure – notions and the so-called key concepts.

Within specific areas (e.g. sexuality education), existence of a system of notions is the basis of a comprehensible knowledge. Teaching and learning entail the following three elements: terminology (a word that denotes a notion), contents of a notion (essential characteristics that define a notion) and volume of notion (number of examples / cases with such characteristics);

Key concepts are general understandings that should be formulated in pupil's long-term memory in the process of learning about the topic, based on the pupil's previous assumptions. According to the teaching plan, key concepts are the basis of thinking and understanding.

Notions and key concepts can overlap for several subjects.

To simplify the process of teaching and learning, the learning plan includes topics and thematic blocs, as well as key questions that consolidate topics with learning outcomes to be achieved according to the National Curriculum.

Similar to previous national curriculums, the newer version divides the process of teaching and learning into the following three categories: declarative, procedural and conditional. Pupils should have a specific knowledge and be able to use this knowledge in practice.

Within the analysis of contents of the National Curriculum, the main question was the following: how are the issues of sexuality education unpacked in terms of notions, key questions, competencies and key concepts.

Methodological issues

It should be noted that the 2018-2024 curriculums exist only for elementary and basic levels. Therefore, the curriculum analysis is limited to these levels.

For the analysis of contents of the National Curriculum, the so-called strategy of selection of critical cases was used for selection of subjects – in particular, the analysis focuses on subjects where issues of sexuality education are concentrated in the most. These are the following subjects: civic education and biology.

For elementary level, civic education is integrated with other public sciences. In third and fourth grades it is presented in a subject called “Society and I”, while in the fifth and sixth grades it is presented in the subject called “My Georgia”. At the basic level, civic education is taught separately and the subject is called “Citizenship”.

For content analysis, we also chose natural sciences for elementary level and biology for basic level (grades VII, VIII and IX).

UNESCO’s guidance on sexuality education is used as a framework for content analysis.¹⁸ We chose this particular framework because it shares certain similarities with the model of knowledge structure used in the new National Curriculum.

More specifically, in UNESCO’s framework recommendations with regard to sexuality education are broken down into topics, while topics are broken down in key ideas. In terms of formulation, this reminds us of the key questions and key concepts provided in the National Curriculum.

Key ideas and sub-issues are provided in UNESCO framework for the following age groups: 5-8 years, 9-12 years, 12-15 years and 15-18+ years, which allows us to understand incrementality of topics according to different age groups. Such structure of UNESCO framework makes it easy to compare it to the National Curriculum, as it provides an opportunity to make a comparison according to specific age dimensions.

It should be noted that implementation of the new NC is currently in the piloting process. Teacher training programs are also being developed and more detailed guides are being designed in partnership with them. Therefore, the present analysis cannot reflect subcategories of issues and additional explanations that will be included in additional guides.

In addition, the concept of the new NC provides for an active involvement of teachers in determination of contents and strategies. Results of interviews with NC experts and teachers confirm our assumption that certain issues in the NC are formulated in a general manner in order to offer a more flexible model to teachers and allow tailoring to an individual school context and specific needs of learners.

¹⁸ Women, U. N., & UNICEF. (2018). *International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach*. UNESCO Publishing.

Inability to analyze the curriculum with these additional materials in a comprehensive manner is one of the limitations of the present research, however main findings allow us to understand dimensions that need to be explained/elaborated in more detail in the additional materials.

First part of the content analysis provides a detailed overview of the NC according to the following eight main topics in the UNESCO framework: 1. Relationships; 2. Values, Rights, Culture and Sexuality; 3. Understanding Gender; 4. Violence and Staying Safe; 5. Skills for Health and Well-being; 6. The Human Body and Development; 7. Sexuality and Sexual Behavior; 8. Sexual and Reproductive Health.

The second part summarizes main findings of the content analysis of the curriculum.

3. Analysis of Curriculum Contents according to Topics in the UNESCO Framework

1. Relationships

Relationships are the first topic in UNESCO framework and it is broken down into the following subtopics: (1.1) families, (1.2) friendship, love and romantic relationships, (1.3) tolerance, inclusion and respect (1.4) long-term commitments and parenting.

Families

The topic of “family” is addressed in broad terms in the curriculum of civic education. According to the NC, recommended content for this particular subject entails almost all sub-topics and illustrative goals provided in the UNESCO technical guidance for different age-groups:

Table 3

| Key concept 1: Relationships | | Society and I (grades III-IV) | My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.1. Families | | 5-8 years | 9-12 years | 9-12 years | 12-15 years | 12-15 years |
| Key ideas | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | There are many different kinds of families that exist around the world; | | | | | |
| | Family members have different needs and roles; | *** | | | | |
| | Gender equality is often reflected in the roles and responsibilities of family members; | ** | ** | | | |
| | Family members are important in teaching values to children. | *** | *** | | | |
| 9-12 years | Parents/guardians and other family members help children acquire values and guide and support their children’s decisions; | | *** | *** | * | * |
| | Families can promote gender equality through their roles and responsibilities; | | ** | ** | * | * |
| | Health and illness can affect families in terms of their structure, capacities and responsibilities. | | *** | *** | * | * |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|--|-----|-----|---|---|
| 12-15 years | Growing up means taking responsibility for oneself and others; | *** | *** | * | * |
| | Conflict and misunderstandings between parents/guardians and children are common, especially during adolescence, and are usually resolvable; | ** | ** | * | * |
| | Love, cooperation, gender equality, mutual caring and mutual respect are important for healthy family functioning and relationships. | *** | *** | * | * |
| 15-18+ years | Sexual relationships and health issues can affect family relationships; | | | * | * |
| | There are support systems that young people and family members can turn to when faced with challenges related to sharing or disclosure of information related to sexual relationships and health issues. | | | * | * |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

The curriculum broadly addresses the following topics: different roles and responsibilities of family members, importance of cooperation, support and open communication among family members, as well as the leading role of family members in formation of the child's values.

The only exception is "many different kinds of families". According to the UNESCO framework, the topic should be raised with the youngest age group (5-8 years) and at this age, learners should be able to: (1) describe different kinds of families (e.g. two-parent, single-parent, child-headed; guardian-headed, extended, nuclear, and non-traditional families) (knowledge); (2) express respect for different kinds of families (attitudinal); demonstrate ways to show respect for different kinds of families (skill). The standard and the recommended content provided in the NC does not include this sub-topic at all, for elementary or basic education.

We have found the following interesting trends in the NC with regard to depth of sub-topics and contents covered:

- Civic education standard and plans for individual grades does not use the term "gender" at all. The curriculum only refers to the issue of equality in a family in general. Therefore, the aspect of gender inequality is not addressed clearly and broadly in the civic education curriculum. The fact that the curriculum does not refer to gender as a social construct at all makes it difficult to understand in-depth the issue of gender inequality.

- When talking about a family, the curriculum focuses more on positive aspects of relationships between family members – support, mutual respect, cooperation, and it focuses less on possible conflicts, disagreements and ways of solving these problems. The issue of interpersonal conflict appears in the curriculum after the topic of “family” is replaced by issues related to peers and school.

From conceptual point of view, comparison of the National Curriculum with the frame of reference has revealed one crucial difference. In the UNESCO framework, as pupils get older, focus shifts from external to internal issues, i.e. from general issues to aspects of personal development – in the beginning, learners perceive diversity of events and processes in general, while in later grades they become more familiar with dynamics of these processes and are able to connect them to their personality – analyze their role in these processes. In contrast, as learners get older, the focus of the national curriculum shifts from internal to external issues, i.e. from personal aspects to more general processes:

- Contents of civic education is structured in a way that topics of personal development and interaction of micro social groups at each stage (elementary, basic) will be replaced by issues of state organization and global policy. Therefore, the topic of families is discussed in depth during grades III-IV, as opposed to V-VI, while at the basic level the topic is addressed more broadly in grade VII, compared to grades VIII-IX.
 - In higher grades, concepts of civic education mostly deals with issues of state organization and global processes, which creates a gap in the curriculum in addressing personal aspects of relationships between family members. This hinders more in-depth discussions about issues of personal development as learners get older (in higher grades).

Friendship, love and romantic relationships

According to the frame of reference, second sub-topic under “Relationships” is “friendship, love and romantic relationships”. As the title suggests, the purpose of the sub-topic is to allow learners to identify between different forms of relationships and analyze dynamics of relationships in the context of these different forms.

Main ideas provided under this sub-topic can be divided into the following three categories: first category concerns typology of forms of relationships, second – value aspects of these relationships, and third – how relationships affect an individual.

Table 4

| Main concept 1: Relationships | | Society and I (grades III-IV) | My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|--|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.2. Friendship, love and romantic relationships | | 5-8 years | 9-12 years | 9-12 years | 12-15 years | 12-15 years |
| Key ideas | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | There are different kinds of friendships | | | | | |
| | Friendships are based on trust, sharing, respect, empathy and solidarity | *** | *** | | | |
| | Relationships involve different kinds of love (e.g. love between friends, love between parents, love between romantic partners) and love can be expressed in many different ways | | | | | |
| | There are healthy and unhealthy relationships | *** | *** | *** | * | * |
| 9-12 years | Friendship and love help people feel positive about themselves | *** | *** | *** | * | * |
| | Friendship and love can be expressed differently as children become adolescents | | | | | |
| | Inequality within relationships negatively affects personal relationships | *** | *** | *** | * | * |
| 12-15 years | Friends can influence one another positively and negatively | | | *** | | |
| | There are different kinds of relationships | | | ** | | |
| | Romantic relationships can be strongly affected by inequality and differences in power (e.g. due to gender, age, economic, social or health status) | | | * | | |
| 15-18+ years | There are healthy and unhealthy sexual relationships | | | | | |
| | There are different ways to express affection and love as one matures | | | | | |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

A significant portion of the civic education curriculum is dedicated to relationships between peers. However, in the Georgian version first sub-topic – different types of relationships – is not addressed in detail at all. The curriculum does not include romantic relationships as a separate category and therefore, during discussion of dynamics of relationships it seems that this particular dimension remains out of focus.

For example, the civic education curriculum entails strategies for encouraging discussions about results of peer relationships, as well as ways of solving problems between peers and mediation. However, since romantic relationships as a sub-category of relationships is not clearly identified, the curriculum does not address the issue of managing relationships in the context of romantic relationships.

Tolerance, inclusion and respect

Third important topic in the Relationships bloc deals with issues of tolerance, inclusion and respect. Within this topic, important aspects include stigma, its causes and outcomes. The National Curriculum broadly addresses these issues. The only difference is that the term “stigma” is not used in the curriculum (the standard and recommended content). The curriculum generally talks about oppression on various grounds, inequality, importance of solidarity, mutual assistance and cooperation.

In grades III-IV, the subject “Society and I” addresses these issues within the context of family, peers, school, community and state. Same issues are addressed in the subject “Citizenship” for grades VII, VIII and IX.

Table 5

| Main concept 1: Relationships | | Society and I (grades III-IV) | My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|---------------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1.3. Tolerance, inclusion and respect | | | | | | |
| Key ideas | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | Every human being is unique, can contribute to society and has a right to be respected | *** | | | | |
| 9-12 years | Stigma and discrimination are harmful | | *** | *** | | |
| | It is disrespectful and hurtful to harass or bully anyone on the basis of their social, economic or health status, ethnicity, race, origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other differences | | *** | *** | | |
| 12-15 years | Stigma and discrimination on the grounds of differences (e.g. HIV, pregnancy or health status, economic status, ethnicity, race, origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other differences) are disrespectful, harmful to well-being, and a violation of human rights | | | | *** | *** |
| 15-18+ years | It is important to challenge stigma and discrimination and promote inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity | | | | *** | *** |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

Long-term commitments and parenthood

Unlike other topics under the Relationships bloc, issues of long-term commitments and parenthood are not addressed in-depth in the National Curriculum.

Civic education curriculum for elementary grades and higher grades does not address different concepts of family and marriage.

From issues included in this topic, the issue of child marriage is more or less clearly defined in the curriculum. In the subject called “Citizenship” for grade VII, within the area “Healthy lifestyle” the issue of how early marriage affects health is discussed. This issue is also addressed in the subject “Citizenship” for grade IX.

However, unlike UNESCO’s reference framework, the following issues are not addressed in detail in the National Curriculum: responsibilities that come with long-term commitments and parenthood, how legislation, culture, religion and public affects forms of long-term commitments, parenthood and marriage.

Table 6

| Key concept 1: Relationships | | Society and I (grades III-IV) | My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) | Natural sciences (grade I-VI) | Biology (grade VII) | Biology (grade VIII) | Biology (grade IX) |
|---|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 1.4. Long-term commitments and parenthood | | | | | | | | | | |
| Key ideas | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | There are different family structures and concepts of marriage | | | | | | | | | |
| 9-12 years | Child, early and forced marriages (CEFM) are harmful and illegal in the majority of countries | | *** | *** | * | * | | | | |
| | Long-term commitments, marriage and parenting vary and are shaped by society, religion, culture and laws | | ** | ** | * | * | | | | |
| | Culture and gender roles impact parenting | | * | * | | | | | | |
| 12-15 years | There are many responsibilities that come with marriage and long-term commitments | | | | | | | | | |
| | People become parents in various ways and parenthood involves many different responsibilities | | | | | | | | ** | |
| | Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and unintended parenting can lead to negative social and health consequences | | | *** | | | | | | *** |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 15-18+ years | <p>Marriage and long-term commitments can be rewarding and challenging</p> <p>There are many factors that influence if, why, and when people decide to have children</p> |
|--------------|--|

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

2. Values, attitudes and skills

Values, attitudes and skills related to sexuality are another topic in the UNESCO framework. This topic entails the following three sub-topics (2.1) values and sexuality, (2.2) human rights and sexuality, (2.3) culture, society and sexuality.

Values and sexuality

This particular topic from the reference framework is addressed in the NC in detail. In particular, the aspect of values is addressed in the curriculum of Civic Education for all grades. The curriculum discusses the importance of values, focuses on topics of cooperation, mutual support, equality, fairness and inclusion.

Discussions about values begin quite early, as Civic Education component is introduced in the third grade. These issues are discussed in detail in the context of relationships between family members, with peers, school and community. Further, the aspect of values is also visible in the curriculum of subjects concerning state organization issues (Society and I – grades V-VI, citizenship – grades VIII-IX).

However, against the background of such focus on values in the NC, unlike UNESCO's reference framework:

- (1) The curriculum does not address the process of formation of values – the role of social institutions and social interactions in their formation.
- (2) The curriculum does not use at all the term "Sexuality", making it difficult to analyze the relationship between the value system and sexuality.

Table 7

| Key Concept 2: Values, attitudes and skills | | Subject: Society and I (grades III-IV) | Subject: My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|---|---|---|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2.1. Values and sexuality | | | | | | |
| Key ideas: | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | Values are strong beliefs held by individuals, families and communities about important issues | ** | | | | |
| 9-12 years | Values and attitudes imparted to us by families and communities are sources of what we learn about sex and sexuality, and influence our personal behavior and decision-making | | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| 12-15 years | It is important to know one's own values, beliefs and attitudes, how they impact on the rights of others and how to stand up for them | | ** | *** | *** | *** |
| 15-18+ years | It is important to know one's own values, beliefs and attitudes, in order to adopt sexual behaviors that are consistent with them | | | | | |
| | As children grow up, they develop their own values which may differ from their parents/ guardians | | | ** | ** | ** |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

Human rights and sexuality; culture, society and sexuality

In the second conceptual bloc of UNESCO – values, attitudes and skills – the topic of “sexuality” entails two other important subtopics – human rights and social/cultural context.

As noted in the previous chapter, terms “sexuality” and “sexual behavior” are not used in the NC at all. Therefore, even though the topic of human rights as well as the importance of social/cultural context is addressed in detail in the NC, it is up to the initiative of the teacher and the pupil to connect them to the issue of sexuality.

Table 8

| Key concept 2: Values, Attitudes and Skills | | Subject: Society and I (grades III-IV) | Subject: My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 2.2. Human Rights and Sexuality | | | | | | |
| Key ideas: | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | Everyone has human rights | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| 9-12 years | It's important to know your rights and that human rights are outlined in national laws and international agreements | | *** | ** | ** | ** |
| 12-15 years | Everyone's human rights include rights that impact their sexual and reproductive health | | | | | |
| 15-18+ years | There are local and/or national laws and international agreements that address human rights that impact sexual and reproductive health It's important to know and promote human rights that impact sexual and reproductive health | | | | | |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

Table 9

| Key concept 2: Values, attitudes and skills | | Subject: Society and I (grades III-IV) | Subject: My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 2.3. Culture, society and sexuality | | | | | | |
| Key ideas: | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | There are many sources of information that help us learn about ourselves, our feelings and our bodies | | | * | * | * |
| 9-12 years | Culture, religion and society influence our understanding of sexuality | | | | | |
| 12-15 years | Social, cultural and religious factors influence what is considered acceptable and unacceptable sexual behavior in society, and these factors evolve over time | | | | | |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| 15-18+ years | It is important to be aware of how social and cultural norms impact sexual behavior while developing one's own point of view |
|--------------|--|

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

3. Understanding gender

In the UNESCO framework, the section about gender is constructed around the following three issues: (3.1) The social construction of gender and gender norms, (3.2) Gender equality, stereotypes and bias, and (3.3) Gender-based violence.

These issues clearly show the logic behind teaching the topic: a learner should understand the importance of gender as a social construct, critically evaluate his/her own perceptions and perceptions of others, and gender stereotypes and be able to analyze how these perceptions influence behavior.

In addition to formation of negative attitudes toward gender inequality, as a learning outcome the reference frame underlines the importance of understanding the process of formation of perceptions about gender.

In contrast, the National Curriculum does not contain the same logic.

Even though discussions about gender equality are introduced in the NC with elements of civic education, in the third grade, the curriculum does not use the term “gender” anywhere. Analysis of contents of the document suggest that instead, the words “girls and boys” are used. This is also true for higher grades.

Therefore, the NC does not address gender as a social construct at all. Further, it does not address the differences between biological sex and gender.

Without these key concepts, it will be difficult for learners to analyze issues like social and cultural norms and how religious beliefs affect gender roles, and to critically evaluate their own gender beliefs and stereotypes as well as those of others.

Notably, the civic education curriculum addresses ideas of inclusivity and tolerance in broad terms, however, it does not mention at all diversity of gender identity as an example of diversity in the society.

Generally, one of the most important challenges to improving the NC is raising the idea that human perceptions are the result of social construction. The NC clearly defines the goal – formation of negative attitudes among learners about stereotypes and social inequalities. It is however difficult to achieve this goal without in-depth understanding of the process of formation of stereotypes.

4. Violence and staying safe

The topic of violence and staying safe entails the following three sub-topics in the UNESCO framework: (4.1) Violence, (4.2) Consent, privacy and bodily integrity, (4.3) Safe use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Violence

Trends that were evident with regards to other topics in the NC are also true for the topic of violence. In particular, within civic education the topic of violence is discussed in broad terms, however the curriculum does not clearly include information about gender and sex-based violence.

For example, discussions about issues of violence, bullying from the stage of elementary education within civic education. Recommended topics include encouraging learners' discussion about forms of bullying and violence and their manifestations in different contexts (peer relationships, school, community). Interestingly, for elementary grades the curriculum includes "violence in the name of religion" as one of the sub-topics.

Topics of violence and bullying are also addressed at the level of basic education. In the seventh grade, within the subject "Citizenship", learners discuss problems of bullying and violence and their solutions and learn how to cooperate with others to address these problems.

In the eight and ninth grades, the civic education curriculum views non-violent action as one of the principles of democracy and sustainable development (with equality, rule of law, transparency, responsibility and inclusivity). According to the curriculum, pupils should be able to apply these principles: a) in the process of planning and implementing personal and community activities; b) in the process of analyzing ecological, environmental, cultural heritage problems; c) in the process of evaluation peace and political processes.

Although the issue of violence is broadly and consistently addressed in the curriculum, it still lacks certain depth.

Interestingly, generally the curriculum lacks focus on factors causing the behavior discussed. It also lacks focus on analysis of causes of behavior. Connections drawn between teaching of physiology within biology and specificities of behavior are weak. Learners are unable to connect hormonal changes that take place in their bodies to corresponding changes in behavior. Due to lack of clear connections, as well as lack of focus on analysis of behavior in the curriculum, learners will probably not possess sufficient knowledge to critically analyze and correct their behavior.

Table 10

| Key concept 4: Violence and staying safe | | XC | Subject: My Georgia (grades V-VI) | Citizenship (grade VII) | Citizenship (grade VIII) | Citizenship (grade IX) |
|--|---|-----|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 4. 1. Violence | | | | | | |
| Key ideas | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | It is important to be able to recognize bullying and violence, and understand that these are wrong | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| | It is important to be able to recognize child abuse and understand that this is wrong | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| | It is important to understand that violence between parents or romantic partners is wrong | ** | ** | ** | ** | ** |
| 9-12 years | Sexual abuse, sexual harassment and bullying (including cyberbullying) are harmful and it is important to seek support if experiencing them | * | * | * | * | * |
| | Intimate partner violence is wrong and it is important to seek support if witnessing it | * | * | * | * | * |
| 12-15 years | Sexual abuse, sexual assault, intimate partner violence and bullying are a violation of human rights | * | * | * | * | * |
| 15-18+ years | Everyone has a responsibility to advocate for people’s health and well-being free from violence | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

Consent, privacy and bodily integrity

These issues are not addressed by the NC at all, while in the reference frame issues of bodily integrity are taught from primary level.

More specifically, pupils in primary grades should understand what is good and bad touch. They should be able to resist a perpetrator, when needed; identify a threat and ask for adult assistance.

From issues provided in the UNESCO framework, the following topics are not included in the NC:

- Everyone has the right to decide who can touch their body, where, and in what way (elementary education)

- It is important to understand what unwanted sexual attention is and the need for privacy when growing up (basic education)
- Everyone has the right to privacy and bodily integrity (basic education)
- It is important to understand what unwanted sexual attention is and the need for privacy when growing up (secondary education)
- Everyone has the right to be in control of what they will and will not do sexually, and should actively communicate and recognize consent from their partners (secondary education)

Safe use of information and communication technologies

ICTs are taught from the primary level, within civic education. Pupils learn why unverified information can become a cause of conflict, what kind of information they can receive from media outlets, how to use information and communication technologies not only for receiving but also for disseminating information. However, as with other cases, the curriculum does not clearly refer to connection of the topic with sexuality education. Addressing the issue in this context is up to teachers and learners.

5. Skills for Health and Well-Being

This particular sub-chapter of the reference frame addresses the following five issues: (5.1) Norms and peer influence on sexual behavior; (5.2) Decision-making, (5.3) Communication, refusal and negotiation skills (5.4) Media literacy and sexuality, (5.5) Finding help and support.

As was revealed during analysis of other components (see above), these issues are not sufficiently covered by the civic education curriculum. Beginning from the primary education level, pupils learn about the importance of effective communication. They discuss how they can find help if they are threatened. Civic education curriculum for the primary education level clearly notes that peer influence can be both positive and negative. Pupils learn about negotiation and mediation techniques and use them in different projects.

At the basic education level, more attention is paid to decision-making and cooperation processes. The curriculum notes that learners should be able to “identify important problems at the level of school, community, state, analyze them and ensure their solution based on democracy and sustainable development principles (equality, rule of law, transparency, responsibility, non-violent behavior and inclusivity).”

Notably, in the civic education curriculum, citizenship and safety, healthy lifestyle are provided as intersection subjects for different grades.

Civic education curriculum provides an opportunity to cover this particular bloc of the reference frame in an in-depth manner. However, teachers and pupils continue to play an important role in choosing which specific issues to focus on for discussions.

6. The Human Body and Development

Sixth topic of the UNESCO frame of reference brings together the following four sub-topics: (6.1) Sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology (6.2) Reproduction, (6.3) Puberty, (6.4) Body image.

Sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology, reproduction

Issues of sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology are discussed in the UNESCO frame of reference in three different ways. Firstly, learners should possess knowledge related to sexual health and reproduction in the field of anatomy. Secondly, it is important for learners to be able to connect physiological processes with sexual behavior. In addition, learners should be able to understand sex, gender and sexual behavior within the influence of social and cultural patterns.

In the NC, issues of anatomy and physiology are covered in a broad manner. Pupils begin to learn about human anatomy at the primary level of education. The subject called “Biology” offers an opportunity to deepen the knowledge.

In the seventh grade, when learning about life cycle and its general rules, pupils familiarize themselves with different stages of physical development, characteristics of puberty and possible risks associated with these stages.

In the eighth grade, pupils will learn about anatomy and physiology of human nervous, endocrinological and reproductive systems in more detail.

According to the eighth-grade curriculum, learners should also be able to connect the knowledge received about human reproductive system to “issues of healthcare, childlessness, prevention of diseases, artificial insemination and immunology.”

Ninth grade is dedicated to reviewing processes that take place at the cellular level and genetics in more detail. Pupils learn about mitosis and meiosis processes, designing a genetic scheme for crossbreeding. According to the curriculum, they should also be able to connect the knowledge received about cytology and genetics to healthcare issues.

Overall, issues of sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology are broadly covered by the curriculum for natural sciences. However, more challenges become evident when comparing the NC to UNESCO’s frame of reference with regard to two other dimensions. More specifically:

Although pupils acquire in-depth knowledge about physiology, the curriculum does not include questions to encourage learners to think about how physiological processes are connected with sexual behavior and with behavior in general.

Generally, the curriculum lacks illustration of connections between physiological processes taught within natural sciences subjects and behavioral aspects discussed within civic education. As noted earlier, such interdisciplinary approach would have significantly made it easier for learners to critically analyze their behavior and correct it.

As noted earlier, the curriculum lacks focus on in-depth analysis of cultural patterns on gender-related perceptions.

Another important challenge revealed by comparing the NC to UNESCO frame of reference is the fact that the NC does not focus at all on the fact that children's interest in anatomic and physiological processes related to maturity, reproduction and sexual relationships is completely natural and they shouldn't feel embarrassed to ask questions about these issues and openly discuss them.

Table 11

| Key Concept 6: The Human Body and Development | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 6.1. Sexual and reproductive anatomy and physiology | | Society and I (III-IV) | My Georgia (V-VI) | Citizenship (VII) | Citizenship (VIII) | Citizenship (IX) | Natural sciences (I-VI) | Biology VII | Biology VIII | Biology IX |
| Key ideas | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | It is important to know the names and functions of one's body and it is natural to be curious about them, including the sexual and reproductive organs | | | | | | * | | | |
| | Everyone has a unique body that deserves respect, including people with disabilities | *** | *** | *** | *** | *** | | | | |
| 9-12 years | Everyone's body has parts involved in one's sexual health and reproduction, and it is common for children to have questions about them | | | | | | | *** | *** | *** |
| | Women's bodies can release eggs during the menstrual cycle, and men's bodies may make and ejaculate sperm, both of which are needed for reproduction | | | | | | | *** | *** | *** |

Table 12

| Key Concept 6: The Human Body and Development | | Society and I (III-IV) | My Georgia (V-VI) | Citizenship (VII) | Citizenship (VIII) | Citizenship (IX) | Natural sciences (I-VI) | Biology VII | Biology VIII | Biology IX |
|---|---|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| 6.3. Puberty | | | | | | | | | | |
| Key ideas | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5-8 years | Puberty is a time of physical and emotional change that happens as children grow and mature | | | | | | | *** | *** | * |
| 9-12 years | Puberty signals changes in a person's reproductive capability | | | | | | | *** | *** | * |
| | During puberty, hygiene is important to keep one's sexual and reproductive anatomy clean and healthy | | | | | | | *** | *** | * |
| | Menstruation is a normal and natural part of a girls' physical development and should not be treated with secrecy or stigma | | | | | | | ** | ** | |
| | During puberty, adolescents may experience a variety of physical responses (e.g. erections and wet dreams) | | | | | | | ** | ** | |
| 12-15 years | Puberty is a time of sexual maturation that leads to major physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes that can be exciting as well as stressful throughout adolescence | | | | | | | *** | ** | |
| 15-18+ years | Hormones play a major role in a person's emotional and physical changes over their lifetime | | | | | | | *** | *** | * |

*** The topic is clearly defined in the curriculum, ** The topic is less clearly defined in the curriculum, * The topic is not defined clearly in the curriculum.

Body image

Positive body image is one of the least focused on topics in the National Curriculum. Even though the NC clearly underlines negative aspects of bullying, oppression or humiliation, it does not cover (directly or indirectly) the following important issues that are provided in the framework of reference:

- All bodies are special and unique and people should feel good about their bodies (elementary level);
- A person's physical appearance does not determine their worth as a human being (basic level);
- There is wide variation in what people find attractive when it comes to a person's physical appearance (basic level);
- People's feelings about their bodies can affect their health, self-image and behavior (secondary level);
- Unrealistic standards about bodily appearance can be challenged (secondary level).

7. Sexuality and Sexual Behavior

The bloc on sexuality and sexual behavior in UNESCO's reference framework consists of the following two topics: (7.1) Sex, sexuality and the sexual life cycle, (7.2) Sexual behavior and sexual response.

In the NC, this particular bloc is the least represented. As noted earlier, terms "sexuality" and "sexual behavior" are not used at all in the NC. Therefore, the curriculum does not cover the topics that would encourage self-reflection among learners based on these concepts.

More specifically, the following topics from the reference framework are missing in the NC:

- It is natural for humans to enjoy their bodies and being close to others throughout their lives (elementary level);
- Human beings are born with the capacity to enjoy their sexuality throughout their life (basic level);
- It's natural to be curious about sexuality and important to ask a trusted adult questions (basic level);
- Sexual feelings, fantasies and desires are natural and occur throughout life although people do not always choose to act on those feelings (basic level);
- Sexuality is complex and includes biological, social, psychological, spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions that evolve over the lifespan (intermediary level).

NC also does not cover the issues related to sexual behavior. Sub-topics that fall under the topic of sexual behavior in the UNESCO reference frame can be divided into three groups. None of these groups are mentioned in the NC.

The first group brings together the issues related to sexual response cycle and peculiarities of sexual behavior in general. As early as at the elementary level, pupils learn that: people can show love for other people through touching and intimacy and there is a “good touch” and “bad touch” (inappropriate touching). At a later stage, pupils learn about sexual response cycle and realize that sexual stimulation (physical or mental) can produce a physical response.

Another group of issues concerns management of sexual behavior. According to the reference frame, learners should be able to make informed decisions about their sexual behavior (e.g. decide when to delay sex or become sexually active). They should understand that sexual behavior can negatively affect health and well-being of an individual. There are ways to avoid or reduce risks caused by sexual behavior. Making sexual decisions requires knowledge of these risk reduction strategies, in order to prevent unwanted pregnancy and STDs including HIV infection.

The third group of issues concerns analyzing how social patterns influence sexual behavior. Learners should be able to understand that all societies, cultures and generations have their own perceptions about sexual behavior and it is important that learners know how to manage information and distinguish between myths and facts.

8. Sexual and Reproductive Health

This block is one of the largest categories in the UNESCO reference framework. It consists of three main topics. The first topic reviews pregnancy and pregnancy prevention issues. The second and third topics are related to the identification, prevention and management of AIDS and HIV, as well as various sexually transmitted diseases.

As already mentioned, the National Curriculum addresses issues related to pregnancy, parenting in the blocks of physiology and anatomy (within the natural sciences). Also, a separate direction is dedicated to these issues - a healthy lifestyle within the civic education curriculum. However, the curriculum (compared to the reference framework) discusses aspects of contraceptive use in less detail. In particular, different forms of contraception have different efficacy rates, effectiveness, benefits, and side effects. Also, the curriculum is less elaborating on issues of access to relevant services and means of protection.

The National Curriculum addresses the issues of AIDS and HIV, as well as sexually transmitted diseases. However, the focus is mainly on prevention rather than on treatment and management. This characteristic is the main distinguishing feature between the National Curriculum and the reference framework.

Main Findings

Analysis of contents of the National Curriculum shows that the document covers more or less in depth almost all the issues and sub-issues that are considered within the framework of UNESCO.

However, the analysis highlights several aspects that need to be considered in the curriculum accompanying manuals and teacher training strategies. In particular:

- One of the major challenges of the curriculum is that it does not mention at all some key concepts that are important for constructing the knowledge needed for sexuality education. One such key concept is gender. Without the knowledge of meaning of the key words defining the term and the concept "gender", the learner cannot form a solid notion that gender is a social construct. Consequently, (s)he finds it difficult to understand the dynamics of gender stereotypes and to critically assess and correct his own gender perceptions. The curriculum also does not mention concepts such as sexual violence, sexual behavior, stigma, etc.
- The lack of strategically important concepts in the curriculum also poses problems with linking those concepts to other important topics in sexuality education. For example, the learner is introduced to the issues of bullying and violence, although (s)he cannot separate the forms of violence related to gender, sex or stigma.
- In general, links between the physiological processes studied in natural sciences and the behavioral aspects discussed within civic education are few within the curriculum. Although the learner studies human physiology in depth, there are few questions in the curriculum that would encourage the learner to think about the connection between physiological processes and sexual behavior and behavior in general. As already mentioned, such an interdisciplinary approach would greatly facilitate the learner's critical assessment and correction of his or her own behavior.
- Conceptually, one very important difference emerges when comparing the National Curriculum with the reference framework. Within UNESCO framework, as a learner ages, the focus gradually shifts from the outside to the inside, that is, from general issues to aspects of personal development - if the learner initially perceives the general diversity of events and processes, in the upper grades s(he) goes deeper into the dynamics of these processes and connects them to his or her own personality, analyzing his or her own role in these processes. Contrary to this logic, as the age of the learner in the National Curriculum increases, the emphasis shifts from the inside out, that is, from the personal aspects to more general processes - state organization issues and global processes. As a result, there is a kind of interruption in the curriculum with regards to covering of the personal aspect, which hinders the consistent discussion of more complex issues of personal development as the learner ages (in the upper grades).
- The content of civic education is structured in such a way that within each stage (primary, basic) the topics of personal development and interaction of micro-social groups are replaced by issues of state organization and global policy. Consequently, aspects of personal development are discussed in more depth at the elementary level in grades III-IV and not in grades V-VI, and at the basic level they are more extensive in grade VII, compared to grades VIII-IX. Given this, it is less possible for the curriculum to focus on issues relevant to specific

age groups (e.g., puberty, parenting, sexual behavior in ninth grade). According to grades, conveyance structure of the subject "Biology" imposes difficulty with regards to discussion of the issues related to sexuality education in a consistent manner. Learners are mostly introduced to human anatomy and physiology in the eighth grade, talking about puberty in the seventh grade is in the absence of this basic knowledge, and the ninth-grade program focuses on cytology and genetics, consequently, less attention is paid to human anatomy and physiology, as well as to the aspects of sexual behavior and the peculiarities of the age of puberty, when these issues are especially relevant for learners (ninth grade). Encouraging discussion on these topics is also difficult in the context of civic education, as the content of teaching in the eighth and ninth grades will shift to the study of state organization and global processes. In the context of this structural constraint, it is very important to strengthen interdisciplinary links between biology and civic education.

- The National Curriculum does not say at all that interest in anatomical and physiological processes related to maturation as well as reproduction and relationships between the sexes is completely natural in children and they should not shy away from asking questions and talking openly about these issues.
- The topics of sexual behavior, bodily integrity, positive body image belong to the category of the least discussed issues in the National Curriculum. It is implied that the teacher will contribute to the discussion of these issues, who, in the context of curriculum flexibility, will better select an approach for their own learners. Given this, it is important to highlight taboo issues in teacher training programs and additional textbooks and instructions, and to assist teachers in mastering their teaching strategies.
- Another important conceptual challenge that emerges when comparing the National Curriculum to the UNESCO Framework is that the themes of gender and sexual violence, conflicts are mainly discussed in a context of normality. The learner understands that violence is "unacceptable to society", although the curriculum pays less attention to the connection between aggressive behavior and human behavior in general, with physiological processes. It is important to strengthen the links between the social sciences and the natural sciences so that the learner can better understand the objective (including physiological and psychological) causes of unacceptable social behavior. It is also important for the learner to understand more deeply the role of society, social groups in the formation of norms, views. These preconditions are very important for the learner to develop a constructive approach instead of feeling guilty - to be able to understand problems and better plan strategies for managing and correcting their own behavior.

4. New National Curriculum: Evaluations of Curriculum Experts and Teachers

The main purpose of sexuality education, as described in the policy and strategy document, both internationally and nationally, has been expanded to include human rights, life skills and their empowerment (UNESCO, UNFPA, 2012; UNFPA, 2014). This document emphasizes the need to develop a curriculum that will not only increase in-depth knowledge among young people, but also develop their protective behaviors (UNESCO and UNFPA, 2012); The curriculum should help young people to perceive themselves and others as equal members in relationships, to protect their own health, and to be active participants in public life (Haberland, N. & Rogow, 2015, pS16).

Despite the “rights and opportunities expansion approach” in sexuality education, research shows that the enhancement of sexuality education is less widespread. The 2016 Global Education Monitoring Report found that in many countries, basic curriculum and education standards rarely include comprehensive sexuality education (UNESCO, 2016a). A research report by Haberland and Rogow (2015) reviewing examples from a number of countries regarding the introduction of sexuality education found that progress in developing national sexuality education policies and strategies, or high-quality large-scale programs, was less visible (UNFPA, 2016).

This time, we will discuss the views of curriculum experts and teachers on the achievements and challenges of the third generation National Curriculum in Georgia and its implementation. Clearly, the topic of discussion is a component of sexuality education in the new generation curriculum.

Curriculum Experts: New National Curriculum

The third-generation National Curriculum, unlike previous versions, reflected substantial changes. In addition to changing the system of delivery of teaching materials and organization of teaching, from the elementary level teaching the basics of social sciences was started in the form of a new subject – “Society and I”. In addition to the basics of history and geography, this subject covers issues of civic education as well. Accordingly, in order to achieve the objectives, set out in this subject, it was decided that the main thematic units would be the agents of socialization. Accordingly, it was within the framework of this subject that the discussion of topics related to gender equality and identity issues was considered.

“As you know, socializing agents are the phenomena that lead to the formation of a member of society. This is family, this is school, yard, street, etc. We relied on this mainly when we were working on this topic.” (NC Civic Education Expert).

The addition of this subject to the National Curriculum was followed by a mixed reaction from some part of the community. Prior to the final drafting and approval of the National Curriculum, as a result of long discussions and deliberations with industry experts, academics, schools and the

representatives of non-governmental sector, as well as other stakeholders, some changes were reflected in the first version of the National Curriculum.

According to curriculum experts, the introduction of the new subject was mainly opposed by one radical group in the society. As experts point out, this protest was not aimed at removing any specific topic, however, the curriculum group still needed to make some compromises, for example regarding the inclusion of the topic of religious diversity in the National Curriculum. Persons / experts (psychologists, lawyers) associated with the Georgian Patriarchate and the Orthodox Church believed that the teaching of this topic should be carried out in the direction of ecclesiastical dogma, and the curriculum group's attempt was to reflect the topic of religious diversity and tolerance.

Due to the fact that the agreement could not be reached, this issue was not reflected in the National Curriculum at all. Similarly, as a result of this discussion, it was decided that the term gender should not be used in the National Curriculum. Considering such type of disagreement, it is not surprising that the National Curriculum does not mention more "acute" and sensitive topics related to gender identity and sexuality education. However, as a field expert points out, the main goal of the National Curriculum was to make learners of this age understand that boys and girls are equal at school, in the family, in society. Therefore, the word gender was replaced by the equivalent words - boy and girl, woman and man - thus the achievement of the goal set by NC could not be hindered.

“NC is a public agreement on some important issues: what to teach, how to teach. The last two generations of NC really claim to be a public agreement. Due to the fact that life changes rapidly and changes take place, many different stakeholders are involved in the NC development process. Therefore, this text was formed only after a long and thorough discussion.” (NC Group Civic Education Expert).

Curriculum experts believe that the new ESG concept, which considers organizing learning topics around its target concepts, allows the teacher to be taught all the issues related to gender identity and sexuality education issues. In particular, 5 target concepts are identified within the framework of civic education: democracy, sustainable development, socialization, initiative and entrepreneurship, civic participation. These concepts fall into sub concepts, where, for example, equality and pluralism come together under democracy, even though these topics are not so extensively explored in NC. Accordingly, it is up to the teachers and the authors of the textbooks to decide what issues to select in order to finally get to the main gradual objectives and in this case to get the learner to understand the concept of democracy. For this purpose, the latest version of the National Curriculum does not provide a list of terms.

In contrast to the National Curriculum, terms related to the teaching of sub concepts may be reflected in the National Curriculum Guide, which does not represent a legal document and which is developed and disseminated by teachers themselves. In addition to the guide, thematic details should be present in the school curriculum, as the concept of the new school model is for schools to develop their own curriculum based on NC, and the main supporting document for this is the guide.

In addition to civic education topics, the new National Curriculum also reflected changes in the teaching of biology. Issues related to sexuality education are integrated into the topics of reproductive health, premature marriage and sexually transmitted diseases. As the biology expert points out, the curriculum group gradually added new topics as they developed each new version of the National Curriculum. The subject of AIDS was added to the biology curriculum first, then - early marriage, and finally - other sexually transmitted diseases. According to the curriculum expert, such step-by-step approach has led to the fact that there has not been much resistance to the changes made in the new curriculum. Moreover, they even received a recommendation from the Georgian Patriarchy that the term "early marriage" was not a common and acute problem for the Georgian society, it was problematic only in the ethnic minority group, so it was better to replace "early marriage" with the phrase "premature sexual relationship" (Note: the term "early marriage" is still used in NC).

The concept of the new National Curriculum was based on the principle that basic education should be ten years long. Therefore, according to the original initiative, reproductive health should be discussed in the 8th grade, which would be logical, since the 8th grade is mainly composed of 13-year-old learners and it is at this age that it is desirable to get the information about puberty issues. However, because the proposed NC concept was not given legal form, along with reproductive health, issues related to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases moved to the 9th grade.

According to the biology group curriculum expert, they have worked with the Tanadgoma Foundation for many years to ensure that issues related to reproduction and sexuality education were properly addressed in the National Curriculum. The biology curriculum covers all systems of the human body and hygiene of all systems. Nevertheless, the National Curriculum does not contain any content related to behavior, in particular sexual behavior. Therefore, the current version of NC does not mention the terms "sexual", or "sexuality" at all.

Textbooks and other resources

Civic education

There is only one certified textbook in the subject "Society and I" at the elementary level. There are three certified textbooks in 7th grade and 2 textbooks in 8th grade.

A competition has been announced for the development of the 9th grade textbook and it will be ready by Summer 2021. It is important that potential authors of the textbook hold workshops with experts from the NC Group as well as other stakeholders, including "Tanadgoma" representatives.

As the civic education expert points out, although the authors of the textbook had more freedom to expand on gender identity topics within the relevant topics, no precedent for this has been identified in any of the textbooks. According to the expert, this is also due to the limited class hours (2 hours per week are allocated to civic education in 7th grade and only 1 hour in 8th grade), which is why it is not possible to cover all issues and focus is drawn on relatively essential topics.

Due to the fact that topics related to sexuality education are not sufficiently covered in certified textbooks, even more important are the additional learning resources that will help teachers of this subject to teach specific topics. Teaching resources on gender equality in the framework of civic education (in the form of complex tasks) are also available on the portal el.ge.

As far as gender minority issues are concerned, these issues are reflected in the guidelines developed by the Council of Europe (Compass and Compassito). According to the expert, those publications explain how these topics should be taught using academic and correct pedagogic approach. Moreover, these books are well-known resource in civic education teacher circles and are easily available to every teacher.

In addition, certain types of resources are developed by PH International and are available on the Civics.ge portal.

Biology

Biology textbook for 8th grade was prepared by two groups. One has more boldly addressed certain topics (e.g., the need to use a condom, sexually transmitted diseases), while the other book discusses similar topics more restrictively.

Importantly, in collaboration with the Tanadgoma Foundation, the NC Biology Team has prepared ready-made lesson scenarios on several topics for puberty and adolescence (7th grade) to equip teachers with resources. These lessons were piloted in three schools and later in ten schools, both in Tbilisi and in the region. The pilot revealed that neither teachers nor learners had any discomfort in teaching age-related issues under appropriate training conditions.

“Teachers have a stronger position. From what we have observed, teachers who explain these topics confidently and without embarrassment are more able to ease the embarrassment for the learners in any class (7th and 8th grades). The following topics are being added in the 8th grade: STDs, premature marriage. There were scenarios on these topics as well, the learners were very involved.” (NC Biology Expert).

Importantly, based on the material of these ready-made lesson scenarios, 24 trainers were trained accordingly to work with biology teachers from 365 schools and assist them in implementing the new curriculum. In addition, it is important that these scenarios were introduced by the NC experts together with the representatives of "Tanadgoma" to the potential authors of the 9th grade textbooks with the recommendation that the relevant topics be reflected in the textbook.

New Topics in Sexuality Education and Gender Identity – Development Perspectives

In order to better reflect the issues of sexuality education in the National Curriculum, the Biology Group considers realistic the possibility of integrating certain topics at an early stage as well. In

addition, it is important that the topic of sexuality and sexual behavior emerges at the intermediate level in the NC.

According to the expert, it is desirable to integrate sexuality education issues at the elementary level as well. For example, elementary school teaches how fruit is produced and how plants reproduce. It is possible to draw a parallel between how the embryo originates in plants, animals and humans, and to discuss this topic with learners in an understandable and delicate manner.

According to the civic education expert, at the next stage, it is realistic to integrate the topic of discrimination, for example the topic of homophobia, into the NC at the secondary education level, if the agreement of the interested parties is reached on this topic. According to the expert of the field, it is difficult to show the initiative and reflect such topics in the NC, on which the general public will have a negative attitude. The field of civic education has been expanded, compared to the National Curriculum of the previous generation. Previously, it was taught only in the 9th grade as a compulsory subject, and in the secondary education level - as an elective subject. Now the teaching of the basics of civic education and social sciences starts from the 3rd grade. The teaching of these sciences was greatly enhanced in the 5th and 6th grades - at these levels the ideas of values and equality and human rights are discussed more. "Citizenship" is an independent subject from the 7th grade. Such an increase in the scale of the subject also allows for the diversification of issues, and if all topics could not be reflected in the approved version of the National Curriculum, it is possible to elaborate on these topics in the guidelines.

After discussing the knowledge and competencies within the teaching framework of UNESCO sexuality education with NC experts, we described which part of this framework is reflected in the current National Curriculum.

Table 13. Civic Education

| Main concept | Topics | The extent to which these topics are reflected in the NC |
|---|--|--|
| 1 Relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families Friendship, love and romantic relationships Tolerance, inclusion and respect Long-term commitments and parenting | All issues are discussed, except for non-traditional families. Much attention is paid to the issues of equality in the family, including gender equality. In the case of early pregnancy, the need to resolve the problem with the help of the family, to discuss early sexual relationship with family members is not discussed in the NC or support resources. |
| 2 Values, rights, culture and sexuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Values and sexuality Human rights and sexuality Culture, society and sexuality | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexuality is discussed neither in the civic education nor in the biology curriculum. Nevertheless, the management of sexual behavior may be discussed by teachers mainly in the 7th grade, within the topic of healthy living. |

| | | |
|---|----------------------------------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoiding sexual harassment or seeking help. There is an auxiliary resource prepared on this topic by one of the NGOs. |
| 3 | Understanding Gender | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Social Construction of Gender and Gender Norms Gender equality, stereotypes and biases Gender-based violence <p>Teachers discuss social, workplace, ethnic stigmas. Gender identity issues and stigma may also be discussed; however, this is not reflected in the NC.</p> |
| 4 | Violence and security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Violence Consent, privacy, and bodily integrity Safe use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) <p>The teacher may develop some activities related to these topics (e.g., avoiding cyberbullying), however, they are not explicitly reflected in the NC.</p> |
| 5 | Skills for health and well-being | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Norms and peer influence on sexual behavior Decision-making Communication, refusal and negotiation skills Media literacy and sexuality Finding help and support <p>This topic is less represented in both NC and teaching resources.</p> |

Table 13. Biology

| | Main Concept | Topics | The extent to which these topics are reflected in the NC |
|---|--------------------------------|---|--|
| 6 | Human body and its development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexual and Reproductive Anatomy and Physiology Reproduction Puberty Body image | These issues are discussed only in the context of reproductive health, however, often teachers avoid talking about these topics and instruct the learner to look through the reading material at home. Sexual behavior, attitudes, and part of the correction of attitudes are not discussed at all. No activities related to these topics are held at the elementary level. |
| 7 | Sexuality and sexual behavior | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sex, Sexuality and the Sexual Life Cycle Sexual behavior and sexual response | Sexuality and sexual behavior are not represented in the NC at all. However, it is possible to discuss these topics with learners as part of non-formal education (e.g., tutoring hours) or in consultation with a school psychologist. |
| 8 | Sexual and reproductive health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pregnancy and pregnancy prevention HIV and AIDS Stigma, Care, Treatment and Support Understanding, Recognizing and Reducing the Risk of STIs, including HIV | Existing issues are represented in the NC the most. However, in some cases, some teachers do not teach the mentioned material, or give it to the learners as an assignment, they do not answer questions or talk about the related topics. There are frequent cases when girls and boys are taught lessons about reproduction separately. |

National Curriculum for Secondary Education

A new National Curriculum for secondary level has not yet been finalized. As mentioned earlier, the new National Curriculum initially provided for the introduction of a ten-year basic education. Accordingly, it would be possible to introduce training courses in 11th and 12th grades, including elective and short-term courses. As NC experts point out, at this stage it has not been decided what the structure of the curriculum will be for the secondary level.

“As for the mission of the National Curriculum, there are two main goals in connection with biology: a healthy lifestyle and protection of the environment. It is not at all necessary for a child to remember whether ribosomes are present in the cell or not, but he should graduate from school in such a way that he is well acquainted with all the topics related to these two goals. Therefore, at the secondary level, I think we will continue to work in these areas.” (NC Biology Expert)

Like biology, with regards to civic education, it is not entirely certain what the content of the National Curriculum for the secondary level will be. However, according to the curriculum expert, they are ready to reflect all actual and relevant topics, including topics related to sexuality education, gender identity and homophobia, in the curriculum if there is readiness from academic circles and stakeholder organizations.

Teacher readiness, competence and teaching practice

When talking about the teaching aspects of sexuality education issues, the National Curriculum experts note that the change in teachers' attitudes and consequently the improvement of their practice is fragmentary and inconsistent, however, some progress is still noticeable.

“I have not done any research and I do not know exactly how the teachers' mentality and approach to these issues have changed, however I can observe that gradually teachers' attitudes toward these issues are improving. A few years ago, for example, in mountainous Adjara, teachers had a very aggressive reaction to this topic [here: Reproductive Health]. Today, teachers say that, of course, pupils should know everything.” (NC Biology Expert)

“This is also a certain evolution: [in teaching reproductive health issues] they used to do it like this: they flipped through it altogether, skipped it, did not give children any instructions or explain themselves, moving directly to the next topic. The next step was like this: the teachers gave the topic to read and review at home – without the possibility to ask questions. The third step was: if you have any questions, write them down for me, bring them to me and I will answer in writing, and now there are far more teachers teaching the lesson than there recently used to be.” (NC Biology Expert)

Similarly, with regards to civic education, the curriculum expert notes that topics that are not directly reflected in the National Curriculum (including issues related to sexuality education and sexuality) are being expanded by teachers themselves.

Clearly, the difficulties that the policy-making institution faces in the process of introducing sexuality education limit access of adolescents to quality sexuality education. Despite significant changes to the third-generation curriculum, this area still faces significant challenges. Society needs to realize that sexuality education, along with access to health services, has a positive and long-lasting effect on young people's health and well-being. This issue needs serious advocacy and the education system needs serious support.

5. Teachers: school community attitudes and challenges

In order to assess the needs, motivation and readiness of teachers, the study conducted two focus groups with biology and civic education teachers from schools in Tbilisi and the regions. 10 teachers participated in each focus group. It is important to note, that some of the teachers in the focus groups work in the schools involved in the pilot program for the introduction of the new school, therefore, they are well acquainted with the new National Curriculum and the challenges associated with its implementation.

In order to ensure that the teachers involved in the discussion had high competence, in-depth knowledge of the subject and National Curriculum, high motivation to reflect on the issue and a comprehension of the importance of understanding professional responsibility, the teachers participating in the focus group were invited with the help of professional associations – the Association of Biology Teachers "Bio" and the Civic Education Teachers' Forum.

School community attitudes toward teaching sexuality education

Civic education

Majority of civic education teachers point out that the main obstacle in teaching sexuality education topics is the low level of education and attitudes of the parents. This view is also the cause of criticism from colleagues. Parents and, unfortunately, a large number of teachers of other subjects find it unacceptable to teach issues related to sexuality education and gender identity. Civic education teachers believe that teachers are the most active propagators of gender stereotypes. Moreover, they think that it is unfortunate that female teachers, who make up the majority in general education, are more likely to contribute to the formation of such stereotypes: *"I have often heard a colleague point out that her competence in the professional field was rejected only because she was a woman. But in a different context, during discussion, she rejects the others because of their gender."* In addition, some teachers often urge boys to learn in order to achieve a successful professional career, however, they do not set the same goal for girls, learning is not a necessary condition for them, because the best future for a woman is to start a good family.

As teachers point out, learners have the highest acceptance in this process. Not all learners are equally able to freely discuss gender and sexuality, although if these issues are addressed correctly, delicately, the primary anxiety in the classroom environment will soon disappear.

In some cases, learner's inconvenience is reinforced by stereotypes in the family. However, over time, learners find it less difficult to engage in discussions about similar topics.

"Mainly [teachers find it difficult to discuss] the topic of sexuality. Gender is less so, because it is a more social term and is more or less well discussed, but topics related to sexuality,

physiology, and personal life are not understood the right way. I tried to use this term once or twice and I noticed extreme discomfort, even though I did not change my intonation and discussed it as a normal topic." [civic education teacher, male].

Teachers also point out that changes in social arrangements and the fact that both the learner's father and mother are involved in economic activities, have entrusted school with the educational function more. Consequently, the role of the class tutor has increased. However, due to lack of relevant competence, the tutor may have neither the knowledge nor the proper form of providing information on certain topics. At this time, the role of the school psychologist, who can give appropriate advice to the learner and create a friendly environment for honest conversation is important. One of the teachers participating in the discussion is also a school psychologist and notes:

"Even if I have informal meetings, I notice that if I work on discussing these issues in a group, it is a step backwards, because it is very difficult for them to discuss these issues in a group. Age-related changes ... They pay too much attention to their appearance, they get used to their appearance – everything is connected. My practice has shown that learners are willing to discuss everything individually, have questions, ask a lot of clarifying questions, but prefer to do it individually. Why? Because peers have the same questions, they shy away from talking about it, it is a taboo to talk about it with parents, there is a sea of information on the internet and they can't sort out what is trustworthy and what is not. And he needs such a person and an environment where he can ask these questions calmly, without anxiety. "
[civic education teacher/school psychologist.

One of the teachers at the school in the region also confirms that the example of cooperation with an NGO, where professional psychologists talked about sexuality education with 8th grade learners of his/her tutoring class, made it much easier to learn about reproduction topics and discuss these topics freely in biology lessons.

In general, civic education teachers are more willing to take the initiative to teach sexuality education issues, despite the rejection not only of parents and the general public, but also of colleagues. They understand that without such initiatives it will be impossible to discuss the taboo topics in school that are essential for learners, for their harmonious physical, mental and psychological health, especially when there is a great deal of interest from learners about these topics.

However, teachers also point out the importance of system's support and the state's willingness to properly address and elaborate on these issues.

"We all remember what the resistance was like when introducing the subject 'Society and I', it was a problem in schools too, but we overcame it slowly and got there and now we're teaching it. There are no resources, it is very problematic. I also mean human resources here. Civic education is a valuable teaching and it is very important who teaches this subject and who also deals with teaching sexuality education. Many teachers are not ready in this direction. But we have to start working, with the help of NGOs, non-formal education, eventually if there is a will, resources will be created and teachers will be trained. This issue

needs to be properly integrated into the various subjects. When a teacher does not teach learners reproductive health and does not discuss it in class, it is difficult to think about teaching sexuality in this reality." [civic education teacher].

It is important that at least school leadership supports the teachers in the face of criticism from parents and colleagues, although in some cases there is a lack of readiness in this regard:

"I had training sessions about gender with school principals, and it is noteworthy that it was easier to talk to children about these issues than with the principals." [civic education teacher/trainer].

"There are taboos in schools, I think we should be brave and remove these taboos. Otherwise, we will have the reality that there will be learners who have a lot of questions and teachers who avoid these questions and discussions about those questions." [civic education teacher].

"In general, the term sexuality already causes inconvenience. This word only occurs once in the 10th grade when we go through trafficking. And it is written here that the purpose of trafficking is exploitation and there is also a list, forced labor, organ trafficking and sexual exploitation, the learners always skipped the latter on this list. Since this subject has been introduced, no learner has ever mentioned it. This year was the first time that one learner mentioned all of the items from this list." [civic education teacher].

Biology

Talking to biology teachers, it became clear that the pressure from parents and colleagues on them is even greater.

"When I had to explain the reproductive system, the grade master came to me and asked me how justified and correct it was that I was addressing these issues. Of course, I wondered where it all came from and I found out that it was the parents' call to the tutor. That is, this information disseminated from the children, it happened that the children used certain words with each other, this reached the parents' ears, there was a call to the tutor and the tutor checked to what extent I was working properly within the National Curriculum and was going in the right direction. Therefore, I think not only parents but also teachers are not informed about teaching these issues." [biology teacher].

The negative attitude of parents is caused by their low level of education. Several teachers cited the example where mothers of girls were advised to consult a gynecologist due to hormonal or other problems, which was completely unacceptable to the parents.

"I had a 12th grade learner, a 17-year-old girl did not have a period, I called her mother and she was worried that her father-in-law and husband would take in terribly that their 17-year-old unmarried child went to the gynecologist, because a woman should go to the gynecologist

only if she is pregnant. Knowledge of the public about these topics is such low. If we do not speak up, nothing will be done about this!" [Biology teacher]

Public knowledge and attitudes about sexually transmitted diseases are also problematic:

"The public has very little knowledge about this topic, it is a global and acute issue. It is a one thing that the knowledge about this issue is very low and the other is the problem of attitudes, that a person with AIDS should be stoned to death. They do not know that they have to fight the disease and not the sick." [Biology teacher]

Challenges

Most teachers acknowledge that nothing has changed in the field of sexuality education over the past three decades. Clearly, the number of teachers who are motivated and diligent in teaching these topics has increased. However, as a result of changes in the new NC, it is completely up to teachers to determine how to deliver certain topics to pupils. While the content of these topics is unacceptable to the public, the teacher is left alone in the face of opponents and needs to defend his/her position. In such conditions it is not unexpected if teachers avoid possible problems from the very beginning. For example, one teacher notes that in a parallel class, her colleague missed the part of reproduction altogether because she felt that learners would be able to satisfy their curiosity through television, social networks, and the internet.

It is also important to note that public resistance to these issues has a negative impact on institutions that, as a rule, should serve to break existing taboos rather than reinforce them. For example, one of the teachers and trainer recalls:

"One of the publishing houses contacted me - they wanted to produce a human body anatomy model with assembling parts, for kindergartens and schools. The main idea was to encourage exchanging knowledge between parents and children from an early age. But they refused [to include] genitalia. Our collaboration obviously did not happen, because this model would have all organs except genitalia. By that I mean that society is not ready! " [Biology teacher/trainer]

"Of course, problem is in all schools. I am a biology teacher and I teach about musculoskeletal system, blood circulation, respiratory system and when the turn comes for it, of course, I should teach about reproductive system as well. Why should I restrain myself? Why should I be embarrassed about teaching these issues?"

Even civic education teachers recognize that biology teachers need more help:

"When I was talking to my pupils and I remembered my school days, when the teacher told us to read about reproduction issues at home, or skipped them altogether, they told me that this is how they covered this part in biology. It was a culture shock to me, and I really did not think that biology lessons could still be taught like that!" [Civic education teacher].

National Curriculum: Achievements and Challenges

Civic education teachers are familiar with the new curriculum and like the fact that teachers have more freedom in teaching the subject. However, it is difficult for them to see the space where they can discuss sexuality. As the teachers point out, in the 8th grade, the new NC for civic education is built around 5 target concepts. These mandatory topics are related to self-government and civil society and are so concrete and specific that they make it less possible to teach sexuality-related topics. For example, they might discuss how media covers this content. However, by that time the learner should have acquired relevant prior knowledge on these issues. It is even more difficult to teach these topics in 9th grade, where the main topics are central government and international relations and economics. It is true that it is possible to teach these topics when discussing a healthy lifestyle in 7th grade, however, according to teachers, this is a very problematic age group and special preparedness of the teacher is required.

Biology teachers point out that the old curriculum included some issues, but not in the same dose as the new one. Most teachers like both the new National Curriculum and the new school model. Target concepts of the new biology curriculum focused on the following issues: Sexually transmitted diseases, premature marriage, anatomy and regeneration. Consequently, teaching can be organized in a way that does not cause inconvenience to the teacher. However, it is also important to note that some teachers believe that in the 9th grade discussions about changes characteristic of puberty is overdue, as at this age, learners have mostly already passed this stage.

Textbooks and Other Supplementary Resources

Civic education

According to teachers, certified civic education textbooks do not provide sufficient information on gender identity and sexuality education. In addition, they believe there are other useful resources - in particular, online resource called "Civic Education for All" (www.civicseducation.ge), where chapter 4 covers these topics in detail.

In addition, according to teachers, Georgian Democracy Initiative has created reading material for civic education teachers (these are not supplementary materials). This material has not been disseminated yet, as the organization's position is to prepare the teacher accordingly (training module) and then provide the reading material. According to teachers, this initiative is one of the first steps in helping teachers overcome their own stereotypes about sexuality, because if the teacher is not willing to talk about these issues in a healthy way, it is better not to talk about sexuality with the learner at all

As the conversation between civic education teachers shows, diversity of resources is not a particularly acute problem, however, teachers constantly have to defend their own positions:

"When we were discussing tolerance in the 7th grade, I used one of the videos from the resources of civicseducation.ge, where the word "gay" is used. A parent immediately wrote

to me outraged that (s)he had personally heard about these issues only at the master's level and asked why his/her child needed to learn about it in 7th grade. I calmly explained that children at this age are ready to discuss and even talk about these issues." [civic education teacher].

In addition to teaching resources, teachers also talk about the need for professional training in this area. A small number of civic education teachers admit that they have had the opportunity for professional development, although they need more long-term counseling, for example, from psychologists, sexologists, as even teachers who are motivated to talk openly about sexuality education, do not have full readiness, have difficulty speaking without feeling embarrassed. Which directly affects the learners' awkwardness and confusion.

Most biology teachers also obviously use the textbook when discussing reproductive health issues. However, they wish to have a set of ready-made lessons where these issues will be given in an appropriate and interesting way. In particular, biology teachers think that the level of competence and willingness of teachers is so different, that it is better to have a proven, agreed, experienced resource that the teacher will use directly in the lesson¹⁹.

"I mostly use the textbook, but I try to find resources. I found a documentary about a married 11th grade girl in a mountainous village of Adjara. If you help pupils see the reality from this perspective, I think they will understand the severity of the issue more, however, I think that such resources for teachers are lacking." [biology teacher].

Since there is nothing in the current National Curriculum about sexuality, the internal changes related to this behavior, value systems and processes, naturally, the topics covered in existing international frameworks for sexuality education (including the UNESCO framework) are rarely discussed in civic education or biology lessons. Teachers may have talked about certain topics that are at least partially related to the target concepts in the National Curriculum, although these issues are usually discussed based on the interest expressed by learners themselves. Teachers admit that they avoid talking about homosexuality, the LGBT community, homophobia on their own initiative and if they do talk, the context is generalized. For example, they talk about the states where homosexuality is punished by law and what the forms of punishment are. Or remember musicians, actors, dancers, scientists who have achieved great success despite their non-traditional sexual orientation. The examples given by teachers do not serve to provide an in-depth understanding of the problem, but rather to provide a superficial summary of the facts.

Such restraint on the part of teachers not to consider additional issues is likely to be caused by two reasons. The first is the unpredictable reaction of the community (colleagues, parents, learners), in

¹⁹ The biology curriculum expert mentions in the interview a collection of lesson scenarios prepared in collaboration with the Tanadgoma Foundation. Information about the use of these scenarios was delivered to 24 teacher trainers who will work in 365 schools involved in the new school model. Consequently, the teachers participating in the focus group were not aware of the mentioned material yet.

the event of which the teacher does not have an ally, a like-minded colleague or school leader who will defend the position of the teacher. The second may be low-level of teacher readiness. As mentioned earlier, teachers themselves admit that they lack self-confidence because they do not have the appropriate knowledge and strong perceptions.

Support system

Support from the system

In addition to talking about the need for professional development and diversity of teaching resources, teachers also point out that it is essential for the Ministry of Education and Science to take into account the opinion of a wide range of the public when making decisions related to education. According to them, this involvement entails not only participation in discussions, but also in the decision-making process. As a result, the public will responsibility for the decisions made in order to increase acceptability in the future.

Support from the community

According to teachers, it would be useful to work with NGOs, to involve psychologists, doctors, and other professionals not only in teacher training but also in communicating with learners, as learners often find it easier to talk to strangers (doctors, psychologists) about certain topics than to their own teacher.

Support from school

According to teachers, school administration should provide more support, especially in dealing with the community and parents.

6. Attitudes and opinions of school principals

Awareness

School principals presented a picture of awareness about sexuality education and reproductive health for several segments of the society:

Parents - According to the principals surveyed, as parents are a mini model of the society, the level of their awareness varies - most parents in the capital city are more or less informed, however practice proves that this information is often superficial and parents cannot properly use it when necessary or do not show any desire to do so.

Influence of disinformation is also evident in the capital city – i.e. accepting information disseminated by specific political, religious groups, communities, etc. as the only resource and protesting teaching of the subject due to lack of awareness.

Respondents believe that lack of information is not a problem for **pupils** but rather, youth often receive information on issues related to reproductive or sexuality education through a number of channels: Internet (priority channel), sharing information among peers, media, etc. (practically there was no mention of family, parents talking about these issues, as one of the ways of getting information). Respondents considered it more important to pay attention to the quality of this information, as the proportion of information received in the school is small, and the information received through the mentioned channels may be inaccurate or age-inappropriate

“Learners, for the most part, actually have quite comprehensive information on issues related to sexuality education, and the generation is much more open to any conversation.”

Consequently, according to the respondents, lack of information cannot be the main or the only reason for the unfortunate statistics we have in the country today (unwanted pregnancies, abortions, premature marriages, STIs, etc.), although actualization the information is of great importance.

Teachers - According to the principals, teachers should be a key figure in the process of informing the youth, however, the problem of qualified, updated information appears even in this segment. “In reality, sexuality education is still taught by teachers of other subjects.” Often teacher's point of view is limited to the scarce information provided in textbooks - in absence of information, the teacher finds it difficult to equip young people with authentic, age-appropriate scientific knowledge.

In terms of teaching the subject, the principals avoid criticizing the existing policy or curriculum. However, lack educational resources is mentioned as a significant difficulty and shortcoming, and they emphasize on the need for different types of educational resources, the need for accessibility (guidelines, supporting materials).

In terms of access to information, the principals noted that teachers are concerned with the scarcity of more qualified, additional materials rather than general lack of information, although in some cases

lack of information on the part of teachers may also be present. As for the parents, in some cases there is a problem created by lack of information, incorrect information, which also affects parents' behavior and attitudes.

The need for an awareness raising campaign on the goals and importance of sexuality education and the need for educational work in all levels and segments of the society was emphasized, as respondents believe that the problem of awareness is also evident in the community.

Attitudes

According to the principals, the effective introduction of sexuality education and the improvement of the existing situation directly depend on the change of radical attitudes towards these issues in the society in general or in different groups.

Respondents mainly considered it important to emphasize the negative and aggressive attitudes towards sexuality education – tensions, aggression of public organizations on religious grounds, statements of church, clergy, negative position expressed by the so-called active parish has a significant impact on the formation of attitudes in the school environment and in a significant part of the community. The school principals themselves systematically feel this influence when dealing with specific cases, problem solving, or the conduct of the learning process.

Existing attitudes also affect parents, while sexuality education requires close cooperation with parents. They named the existing attitudes as the reason why the school cannot do more (even with the existing limited resources) in terms of sexuality education – even the implementation of additional, extracurricular projects in terms of reproductive education causes obvious dissatisfaction of some parents. The educational activities carried out by non-governmental organizations at the school were also met with rather aggressive attitudes from some parents.

Explicit aggression towards the issue also poses a problem for teachers, especially when some **teachers** and parents sympathize with the position of radical groups in the society.

Learners in this case were also described as a segment relatively free from such attitudes. Some discomfort due to the peculiarity of the subject was highlighted, however, it was noted that it is not difficult for an experienced teacher to select age-appropriate approach or phrases and such discomfort is often fragmented. In any case, talking to children about this topic during a lesson or in an informal setting is not a problem. Overcoming barriers caused by discomfort depends on the art of the teacher and the school.

“There may be certain discomfort on the part of learners or teachers, but this is usually resolved soon.”

Challenges

Respondents consider **resistance in the society** to be a real challenge. In this reality, schools are practically unable to conduct educational process in the format provided in the curriculum and syllabus.

Qualification of the subject teachers was also identified as a challenge – it was noted that most teachers have taken on this subject along with another subject that they teach primarily, and on the other hand, talking to adolescents about sensitive issues requires special attention and knowledge of appropriate approaches. Lack of supplementary resources was also highlighted, which is also a shortcoming and an impediment to the effective teaching of the subject.

According to the respondents, the issue of "trust" is also important. Learners ask questions about sexuality education only to teachers that they trust. But not all teachers are ready to give a competent, comprehensive and correct answer. There are practically no learning resources – additional literature, multimedia, etc. Teachers have to rely only on small amount of information provided in the textbook, so teachers need a comprehensive support.

Specific case management – managing relationships with parents and learners: It is quite difficult for the school administration and teachers to manage specific cases without proper support (examples given in interviews were related to coercion of early marriages, the problem of dropping out of school after marriage, cases of masturbation by a pupil with disabilities in class, parents protesting participation of their children in sexuality education classes). Such cases, require proper communication with parents and their children on the one hand and provision of information in the appropriate format on the other. This can be achieved far more successfully with knowledge of specific approaches.

Involvement of a qualified psychologist is important, and schools often do not have the luxury of doing so.

Recommendations

According to the principals, the school's support lies in creating better resources for sexuality education, introducing adequate methodology to teachers, caring for their professionalism and, most importantly, developing the right attitudes towards these issues in the society (the latter, they say, is beyond the school's competence).

When talking about support or available resources, the following attitudes were identified: principals avoid criticizing existing education policies as well as curriculum and try to shift the focus to other issues.

"Politics is good, but more effort is needed to implement the policy".

"The problem with the curriculum is not the existing situation – the plan alone is not enough to get results".

According to the principals, the following is necessary:

- **Quality teaching resources** that will make it easier for the school and the teacher to achieve results in terms of sexuality education;
- **Guidelines** that will make it easier for the teacher to achieve the goals set in the curriculum and provide detailed information on how to work with children and parents;
- **Raising qualification of teachers and supporting their professional development** – not all educators are able to provide relevant information to children. More resources are needed – qualified information, supporting materials, especially providing teachers with methods and approaches of introducing this information, which would take into account the specifics of the subject, topics and age of learners (however, it was also mentioned that such assistance – training - only makes sense when the trainer himself/herself is qualified);
- **Qualified psychologist** – it has been emphasized that a qualified psychologist is a luxury for the school, however, the involvement of a psychologist is very important when managing specific cases or properly planning or conducting the sexuality education process.

In order to balance the opinion differences and radical attitudes around the issue, principals consider it necessary to work permanently (including parent-focused work) to raise awareness.

Parent-school collaboration is extremely important for teaching the subject, preparing various school projects and involving learners in them. In this regard, great efforts are needed from the state or public organizations to develop a sound and rational attitude over time and to enable the school to conduct the teaching process in an adequate format.

In addition to the state's increased involvement, the involvement of public organizations, international organizations, as well as the creation of a platform where it will be possible to constantly communicate about the problematic issue, is considered necessary in information or awareness raising campaigns.

Despite emphasizing the need for awareness and constant work, one of the principals noted that the issue is so sensitive for our society that only future generations could change this attitude; more precisely, they will not consider the radical attitudes that exist in some groups, because of religious or other factors. Inclusive education project was cited as an example.

“10-15 years ago, some parents had sharply negative attitudes towards the fact that children with disabilities went to school with their children. Moreover, due to lack of information, these diseases were often even considered contagious. Efforts made over the years have paid off and today this problem is almost solved. It also takes time and effort to develop the right attitude towards sexuality education”.

It should also be noted here that learners with mental disorders and other disabilities face greater difficulties than their peers, studies show that they are more likely to be victims of sexual violence. Society must be more willing to solve their problems in order to ensure effective protection of the sexual and reproductive health and rights of people with disabilities.

7. Youth Awareness and Opinions

Awareness

Key agents of information

Pupils tend to get information about topics of sexuality information from the following main sources: friends, Internet, social media, parents and schools.

Within the focus group, we drew a hypothetical²⁰ diagram that illustrates the distribution of main sources of information for sexuality education in the existing reality. We also prepared an imaginary diagram to illustrate an ideal scenario for distribution of sources of information. Real and ideal versions differ drastically. As shown on the first figure, in reality pupils mostly receive information from friends and Internet. Involvement of school and parents is extremely low. In ideal reality, according to respondents, school and parents should play a leading role. We will discuss sources of information in detail below.

Figure 1.

Sources of information now

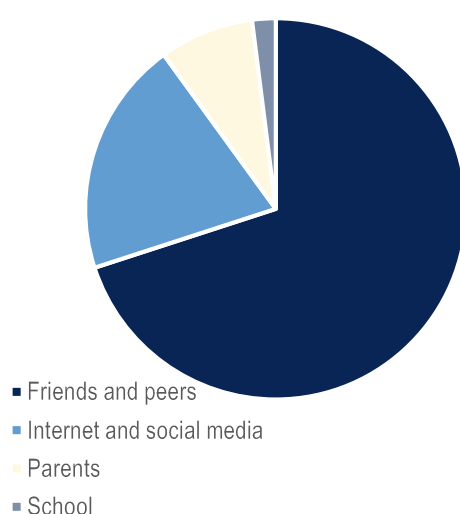
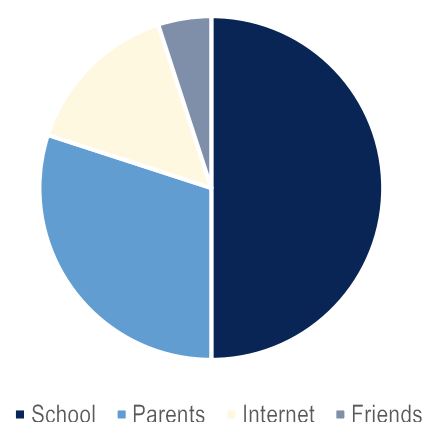


Figure 2.

Ideal model of sources of information



In school, topics of sexuality education are mostly integrated in the course of biology, where pupils should receive information about physiological characteristics of women and men, hormones, reproductive system, STDs. The level of respondents' satisfaction with information received in this field at school is extremely low.

²⁰ Here hypothetical diagram means that quantitative research has not been performed about this issue. Percentages on the diagram are conditional and they reflect the information provided by respondents.

According to majority of focus group participants, the learning process for materials integrated in the biology course was superficial and involved non-serious attitudes and remarks, which was completely inadequate and it didn't address their questions about issues related to sexuality. This prompted them to resort to self-education and obtain information on their own, from other sources. The most popular and comfortable alternative was **Internet and social media**, which is in fact one of the leading sources of sexuality information.

"There was a case when I needed information about STDs. I hadn't learned about STDs and I didn't know whom to ask about it, so I googled it."

Some read different types of research available online, while others become followers of Instagram influencers and receive information that way to fill any gaps in their knowledge.

"Internet and movies are useful for my generation, however there are certain exceptions, who are embarrassed to search for such information or their parents don't let them do it..."

"Friends, Internet, social media, I use all sources to find information that I am interested in."

Majority of focus-group participants said that issues provided in the NC were covered superficially, while some teachers omitted such issues or spent only a single lesson talking about them, without testing knowledge of pupils.

"They don't provide any information, they don't give you any opportunity to be satisfied even a little bit. This could have been a biology teacher or a form master, they could have discussed this topic within the so-called class hour."

One of the challenges in the school context is low level of willingness of pupils to listen to information about issues of sexuality education and to discuss them. With regards to willingness, respondents are underlining gender differences. Boys are not taking these issues seriously, which makes it difficult to manage the class and even hinders the process of discussion about these issues.

"On the most part, boys are not willing to listen to information about this topic, so it is very difficult for teachers to manage the group and still discuss issues of sexuality."

"13-14 year-old girls are more willing to discuss the topic and they have fewer complexes. Parents tend to explain these issues more to girls, which is why the role of a teacher is very important. A good teacher should be able to explain to boys well and effectively that this is not something to joke about, that these are the issues that they need to know in order to have healthy relationships."

According to youth, teacher's qualification is important. In rare cases where the teacher explained the topic in the usual regime and in an in-depth manner, similar to other topics, learners became interested.

"We had a teacher of biology that provided scientific explanations about the issue and she didn't omit anything. However, I know that in a parallel grade, they omitted this topic because it was uncomfortable for the teacher to talk about it."

“We talked about what is necessary for health relationships, how to protect ourselves, the teacher provided information about STDs and this information was quite useful.”

“I was in the tenth grade when we had a lesson about female and male hormones. The teacher provided more detailed information about reproductive health. The teacher was young and she had a European approach. This topic was not a taboo.”

We had an opportunity to compare attitudes toward sexuality education in Georgian and foreign (an international school in Dubai) schools. A pupil from an international school noted that discussions about sexuality issues began in the 8th grade. In a culturally and ethnically diverse environment, pupils demonstrated certain resistance and/or non-serious attitudes, however the teacher was able to quickly eliminate it. The teacher underlined that the topic is an important part of the curriculum, just like other topics and materials that pupils had already learned. Such attitude and reaction of the teacher changed the climate in the classroom and talking about issues of sexuality no longer caused non-serious or inadequate feedback.

To sum up, young people receive some of the information spontaneously and later, the information is received as a result of their efforts, from media and to a certain extent, from parents. Some respondents note that embarrassment always accompanies discussions about different aspects of sexuality education, both in **school** and during communication with **parents**. Young people mostly refrain from talking to their parents or they discuss different issues without going into details. According to them, this is due to the fact that they feel embarrassed.

“Although I always have open communication with my mother, I feel embarrassed to talk about this topic.”

“My parents didn’t imply in any way that this is a taboo topic that shouldn’t be discussed, however, I am embarrassed to discuss this topic and we haven’t discussed it. My friends were the primary source of information.”

“I haven’t talked to my father and I don’t want to ask him about details.”

Information about sexual maturity, reproduction and STDs (to a certain extent) is mostly received within the subject of biology. Some teachers give extracurricular reading material to pupils; in some schools, the so-called tutor discusses some components of sexuality education, together with different topics, e.g. early marriage, family planning. “In our school this is an ordinary topic and there were no moments of embarrassment”, however questions still remain (“I feel that I don’t know some things and we haven’t talked about them sufficiently”); To obtain information about such issues, respondents resort to **Internet**. According to a respondent, some of her acquaintances, as a result of influence of certain authoritative institutions, believe that topics related to sex are related to “depravity”. Adolescents and students note that receiving informal knowledge from Internet involves a risk that adolescents will receive unreliable and wrong information about certain topics.

“It is not very difficult for our generation to distinguish between accurate information and disinformation; you can tell at a glance what type of source it is, whether or not it publishes correct information.”

Respondents note that they resort to different ways to verify information in order to protect themselves from wrong information.

“As I grew up, I realized more that they are lying about some things there... So, I am more careful, I verify whether or not a website is certified.”

“I used the following principle for finding information on the Internet: I check several websites and if the answer is the same, it means that the source is reliable.”

Sometimes information is verified with reliable persons, including medical professionals. It seems that interlocutor's education is viewed by adolescents and students as an important factor that determines credibility of information. This way, they avoid receiving unreliable information and having to categorize and analyze large volumes of irrelevant information available on Internet.

“My sister is the most reliable source. She is a medical professional and I believe that I will receive the most valid information from her. Although Internet offers unlimited opportunities, I'm not competent enough to distinguish what is right and what can be trusted from the huge amount of information available. Therefore, I rely on my sister from ready and credible answers.”

Attitudes toward sexuality education

Interview and focus-group participants agree that sexuality education is extremely important and necessary, especially at the level of secondary education, and school as a provider of compulsory formal education should be playing a leading role in this process.

When talking about the goal and the purpose of sexuality education, respondents agree that the main goal is to create more acceptance toward taboo topics, which will encourage formation of healthy society in the future.

“The main goal is to normalize this issue, so that it's not “uncool” to talk about it, these are important stages of life ... Everyone should get used to talking about it and learn more... They shouldn't have a negative attitude...”

Participants note that it is important to answer all questions that adolescents may have at different stages of life about their puberty and hormonal changes. The answers should be provided gradually and in an appropriate form. One of the key barriers in this process is the fact that parents postpone answering these questions. Often, in an attempt to avoid discussing such issues, parents tell their children to talk to their peers or simply postpone such conversation. This approach is viewed by adults as an important problem in the process of communication. Schools do not provide adequate

information, while parents are reluctant to engage in such conversation. The two most important links fail to effectively perform the function of a reliable communicator.

Respondents believe that environment is the strongest factor that influences formation of views and attitudes of adolescents toward sexuality issues. Environment greatly affects formation of their attitudes. Society, public attitudes and opinions form vision of youth about sensitive issues, including sexual issues. However, participants have noted that relative sand older generation tend to have negative attitudes toward education as well as the practice or multiplicity of relationships. It is considered a depravity to address sexual issues even within a compulsory education, in a centralized form. It is also unacceptable for women to have an experience of having several partners or being married several times, etc.

“Often I hear people badmouthing women that were married several times. Therefore, I don’t have the desire to talk to adults about this topic. I believe it is inappropriate for family members and relatives to talk about this topic and to criticize.”

Respondents believe that public attitudes and stereotypes are the reason why they are reluctant to talk about sexual issues with parents. However, as it is critically important for them to have accurate information about sexual issues, respondents agree that irrespective of negative public attitudes, sexuality education should be integrated in the formal education. They believe that school should play a leading role in sexuality education of adolescents. This will guarantee adequate and valid information for youth. However, within the school context, in addition to physiological aspects that can be integrated in topics of biology, it is also necessary to address social dimension. Gender stereotypes and taboos that exist in the Georgian society should no longer maintain its strength in younger generations. The main tool is raising awareness, which should begin from school age, when children begin having natural interest in sexuality issues. Respondents underline that receiving adequate information at the right time will not only help them understand and effectively manage their own sexual development but will also serve as the basis of forming socially correct opinions, opinions that are free from bullying, gender discrimination and are not offensive in nature due to different details of private life; they are based on the principles of equality, freedom and independence.

According to respondent, law of awareness is the cause of early marriage, unwanted pregnancy, factual cohabitation in early age, spread of STDs in early age, abortions and gender-based psychological and physical violence in the country. The result of having inaccurate, incorrect, ambiguous information about sexual issues is so grave that it is crucial to no longer include this topic among taboo issues, to start targeted discussions with youth and their parents, as well as teachers. All agents that will be involved in sexuality education, at any level, should understand the goals of sexuality education, value of information provided through academic and scientific means, mental harm that can be caused to a child by providing information in a wrong way, and become involved in these process based on those values that are fundamental for universal sexuality education.

Accomplishments and challenges

Based on the research conducted with adolescents and students, it is safe to say that dynamic technological progress and digitally available information has encouraged youth to receive information about sexual issues, to balance out the insufficient knowledge provided by school and parents. However, access to and abundance of information is both an accomplishment and a challenge for youth. In the sea of information it is first and foremost difficult to determine which one is trustworthy and valid. Moreover, in the process of searching for information, adolescents join different social networks, and as a result they may come to face different types of threats that they are unaware of. Although according to respondents one of the biggest advantages of finding information on the Internet is anonymity, there is a real threat that after disclosing information about their personal relationships and personal life in social networks, they will become victims of undesirable manipulation. If we compare generations, progress is clear – today adolescents are far more informed, they speak openly with each other and more or less with their parents, they are more aware of their own responsibilities and obligations. They talk about freedom, equality, health, healthy and safe relationships openly and consciously. This is the result of accessibility of information; however, they also understand gravity of potentially negative consequences of false or irrelevant information and they underline the importance of verifying credibility of information. This is one of the most valuable accomplishments not only with regard to topics of sexuality education but also, in general – adolescents that know they should only review and consider relevant and credible sources are most likely to follow the same principle in other areas of life, which is one of the important indicators of development of the society.

According to youth, sexuality education is currently facing important challenges:

1. Absence of any relevant institution that will undertake the task of advocating for sexuality information and ensure quality education in this field;
2. Discussions about sexual issues is still a taboo in the society, which is one of the important factors hindering access to sexuality education.
3. Awareness about sexuality education should be raised, especially for persons directly or indirectly involved in education – these are parents, teachers, school personnel and pupils. All agents that will be involved in sexuality education, at any level, should understand the goals of sexuality education, value of information provided through academic and scientific means, mental harm that can be caused to a child by providing information in a wrong way.
4. Personnel with relevant qualification should exist and they should provide information to target groups in an adequate manner.
5. It is important to raise awareness of pupils not only about topics of sexuality education but also about methods of analyzing and selecting information and importance of these methods. With technological progress, it is becoming more and more important to control the kind of information that adolescents have access to. Therefore, it is important for them to know that

not all information is true and not all sources disseminate adequate information. They should know how to spot real and fake news.

To summarize, insufficient readiness of the society is the main challenge. In addition, one of the obstacles is the embarrassment associated with conversations about and teaching of different issues of sexuality education. This is equally true for school and parents.

A number of studies have been conducted internationally about the role of parents in receiving sexuality education. Parents have a critical influence on sexual health of their children. In 2015, The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) published a report of 30 year-long analysis about communication between parents and children about sexual health. According to results of the analysis, communication between parents and children about issues of sexual health has a positive effect on teaching of sexual health issues to youth (Widman et al., 2016). It is therefore believed that parents are one of the most important links in sexuality education (National Guidelines Task Force, 2004). Usually, majority of American parents talk to children about sexual issues (Planned Parenthood Federation of America & Family Circle Magazine, 2014). However, they are often reluctant to discuss sensitive topics like staying safe, protection, birth control, etc. Although in the U.S. meaningful activities for implementing sexuality education in the U.S. took place as early as in 1960s, according to the research results, communication between parents and children about this issue is still not free from complexes and taboos. Against this background, results of our research revealing difficulties and embarrassment associated with conversation about topics of sexuality education between parents and children is completely natural.

Some respondents believe that single-sex classes for sexuality education may be a solution, while others think that more interaction between girls and boys will reduce “misunderstandings between sexes and discomfort.” Majority of respondents is convinced that they will gradually “get used to talking about it and the discomfort will disappear in time.”

Respondents said that factual resource of receiving information about sexuality education is Internet. Adolescents feel somewhat protected online and they rely on their own media-literacy: “Our generation is more or less capable of spotting true and false information,” However, according to respondents, media is associated with certain risks, as in this case, young people “satisfy their curiosity in an informal, superficial and inadequate form.”

Recommendations

Interviews with adults have revealed that their awareness about issues of sexuality education is ambiguous. Moreover, they can discuss only few topics/components of sexuality education, while with other issues or terms it is clear that they need additional information and examples to better perceive links or contents, which is natural in view of the fact that they have not received corresponding knowledge in school. However, as they themselves have shared with us, they are actively reading and are talking to parents and friends about these topics intensively.

Respondents note that they would like to see sexuality education taught as a separate subject.

“Sexuality education should begin no later than the age of 12-13, because this is an optimal age considering the already acquired knowledge and readiness.”

Learners believe it is important to raise awareness of adolescents as well as teachers and parents, in order to protect the society from many negative consequences.

“Cases of early pregnancy and abortion will be decreased, if they will be informed in advance about protection.”

“We don’t know, no one has taught us, we should find the answers ourselves.”

Awareness raising activities should be planned not only in schools but also in universities, if requested by the audience. Further, media navigation/filtration guidance should be prepared specifically for adults, to make it easier for them to receive adequate answers to their questions and to protect themselves from “incorrect knowledge”; further, it is important to focus on cyber-security issues and “lying” to adolescents. To that end, it is recommended to prepare information meetings and brochures, to warn adolescents to “be more careful in the virtual world.”

Further, it should be taken into account that according to studies about the role of school, sex and relationship education (SRE) and sexual health services available in schools is an effective way to improve sexual health. Professionals agree that effective programs are age-appropriate, interactive and are implemented in a safe environment (Pound et al., 2017).

8. Awareness, engagement and attitudes of parents

Awareness

The sexual health of most adolescents and young adults is greatly influenced by the powerful role that parents play in children's sexual socialization; the messages conveyed are influential in shaping adolescent sexual decision-making (Dilorio, Pluhar, & Belcher, 2003). Parents, through communication about sex in the home, have been identified as ideal sex educators because they are able to reach youth early to provide sequential and time-sensitive information that is responsive to the adolescent's questions and anticipated needs (Krauss & Miller, 2012; Mustanski & Hunter, 2012). However, another study found that directive parents who tend to have a more authoritarian communication style do not invite open discussion and questions from children (Heller & Johnson, 2010; Jerman & Constantine, 2010; Martin & Torres, 2014; Meschke & Dettmer, 2012; Pluhar et al., 2006).

Parental awareness was assessed within our study. Essentially all parents involved in our study believe that youth sexuality education is crucial for their well-being and health. Even though parents don't have clearly formulated opinions as to what should be done and how for sexuality education of adolescents, none of the focus group participants questioned the necessity of sexuality education – *"it is clear that something needs to be done and in a qualified manner."* However, what the concept of sexuality education will look like, the theoretical framework that will serve as the basis for implementing this process, will greatly determine attitudes of parents surveyed toward this issue.

"Generally, I think it is very much important to implement sexuality education in school. I have certain discomfort when talking to my child about this topic. If someone else will help, whether it is school or some other organization and they will give certain sexuality education to my child, I will be very satisfied."

"It is important that the child learns some things in a correct manner. I don't have an answer as to whether this should happen in school and whether biology teachers should be responsible for it. At this stage I think that our society is not ready, my children aren't ready to talk about these issues comfortably, without excessive nervousness, openly, in the classroom, with boys and girls. I understand that the more education we have the better and only because of this I say that there should be [sexuality education]. Whether or not I will agree to implementation of sexuality education depends on what the concept will be like."

Respondents possess general information about contents and goals of sexuality education. They lack knowledge about specific issues that are thought within sexuality education and to what end. In most cases, parents have heard nothing about such learning activities. The only exception was the parent who is a teacher of biology and is professionally more "close" to issues of sexuality education. Parents directly note that it is difficult for them to talk about this topic with their children because they lack information about how to have a conversation about sexuality issues and how to provide their children with necessary information. Some respondents noted that they are not trying to avoid talking about

this topic with their children – quite the opposite, they are trying not to miss their children’s attitudes and first steps toward sexuality life. However, according to them, children are reluctant to discuss this topic with their parents. According to respondents of focus groups as well as in-depth interviews, currently children/adults receive information on issues of sexuality education through informal means – mostly from their friends, from online resources, etc. According to them, it is wrong to expect that children will start talking to their parents about these issues. Instead, they will resort to accessible and comfortable sources (Internet, friends). Respondents underlined that adolescents should receive authentic information and knowledge about topics like sexual development, intimate hygiene, reproductive health and safety from professionals – specially trained teachers that are thoroughly familiar with this topic and can raise awareness of youth through age-appropriate explanations. In such case, parents can rest assured that their children receive information based on medical knowledge. Families are quite different from one another and some of them may not even touch upon the topic of sexuality or use inappropriate ways of informing adolescents. In school, all learners will receive more or less adequate information. Further, it will be more comfortable for children to discuss these issues with other people rather than with parents. It was stated that it will be effective to involve not only biology teachers but also other specialists in sexuality education – doctors, psychologists, civic education teachers.

“Threat of receiving this knowledge inappropriately is so high that it is better to educate adolescents in school, using a uniform rule...”

“Specialists should explain these issues, as not everyone will have parents that are doctors and can provide adequate explanations. Besides, they will not be embarrassed to ask any questions that they may have. Further, if they learn in school, they will think that there’s nothing to hide.”

Notably, fathers essentially aren’t aware of the situation that exists in schools with regard to sexuality education. According to them, sexuality education aims to prepare children for sexual life and inform youth in the following two ways: 1. Physiological aspects of reproductive system (structure, function, development and mechanism of operation) and 2. STDs and other risks associated with sexual life. Youth should understand how reproductive system works and should be able to prevent threats.

Fathers lack experience of talking to their children about issues of sexuality education. In early stages of adolescence, children ask questions to their mothers. Later, their friends become their “educators”.

The role of parents in the process of receiving sexual education is underlined by the U.S. academy of pediatricians, who advise parents to speak openly and sincerely with their children about issues of sexuality education and to have such conversations repeatedly (Mattson & Breuner, 2016). These conversations will foster trust between parents and children and ensure effective communication. However, according to majority of respondents surveyed, parents themselves usually are not ready and don’t know how to talk to their children and are avoiding this topic. In most cases, adolescents limit themselves to self-education and “handle” problems that they face on their own (satisfying curiosity or solving any given problem). This clearly indicates the need to promote adult education.

Communication barriers and lack of initiative

Answers of focus group and in-depth interview respondents clearly reveal barriers to communication between parents and children when it comes to issues associated with sexual life. Regardless of parent's opinion about sexual education, everyone has barrier to direct communication with children and they prefer to have someone else provide sexuality education to their children (someone who is a professional), rather than to overcome this barrier. In these processes, lack of knowledge is the main obstacle for respondents. They don't know what to say, when or how to say it, how to provide age-appropriate information, whether they should start talking or wait for questions, etc. Due to the lack of information and embarrassment, all parents have certain fears/anxiety about talking to their children.

"I am forcing myself, preparing myself as to what to say, how to say it, whether s(h)e'll like i tor not – will s(he) be embarrassed, feel uncomfortable, etc."

Other studies also indicate that parents are passive. Most mothers admit they only discussed sex-related issues at their daughters' initiation and they didn't talk about sex unless asked (Baier & Wampler, 2008; Elliott, 2010a). Parents believed their children would approach them if they have questions, while children reported they were unlikely to do so even if they had concerns (Collins, Angera, & Latty, 2008; Fitzharris & Werner-Wilson, 2004).

General issues of communication

Conversation of parents with their children is directed toward identification of threat related to their future, rather than raising their awareness. Parents talk to their children about abstinence, pregnancy and delaying sex as an important prerequisite of their success in the future. In such conversations, future sex and unplanned pregnancy is portrayed as a threat, an obstacle to achieving a dream (Afifi et al., 2008; Jaccard et al., 2003).

Gender dynamics

Based on the information received from respondents surveyed, mothers are more involved in sexual education of their daughters, while fathers are mostly entrusted with informing their sons.

"I find it difficult to talk about these topics with a boy, it would be easier if it was a girl."

"We haven't yet talked about this issue. When the time comes, his father will explain. He hasn't yet expressed any interest in these issues" [mother of a 15-year old boy].

"I've entrusted my husband with everything, he'll do the explanation if needed" [mother of a 16-year old boy].

Research makes it clear that gender dynamics between parents and their children substantially affects communication about sex; majority of discussions take place between mothers and daughters (daughters find it easier to talk to their mothers than fathers about sexual health issues (Kapungu et al., 2010; Marhefka, Mellins, BrackisCott, Dolezal, & Ehrhardt, 2009; Miller et al., 2009; Pluhar, Dilorio, & McCarty, 2008; Sneed, 2008; Wisnieski, Sieving, & Garwick, 2015), while sons mostly receive the same information from their mothers (Tobey, Hillman, Anagurthi, & Somers, 2011). We must also note that in majority of literature about sexuality education, mothers play more important role than fathers in educating their children (Harris et al., 2013; Sneed, Somoza, Jones, & Alfaro, 2013; Wilson, Dalberth, & Koo, 2010).

To summarize, it is safe to say that awareness of parents is low and due to this fact and barriers to communication, their involvement in raising their children's awareness is also low. One of the parents that teaches biology in school believes that providing information only *"will not protect a child from undesirable outcome"* but rather, this process requires a more comprehensive approach.

Attitudes and opinions

Absolutely all respondents believe that sexuality education will have a positive effect on everyday life of adolescents and make it more stable and calmer. According to them, this fact will be especially evident in regions: firstly, the number of undesirable pregnancies and early marriages will decrease. It is likely that prevalence of STDs will decrease also.

According to respondents, there are all kinds of attitudes in public toward sexuality education (both negative and positive, as well as neutral). Opinions of focus group participants are clearly positive, they believe that on the most part, this is the trend in the capital city, while the situation is different in regions – opinions are more negative or neutral and negative (they mostly believe that sexuality education *"is unnecessary"* or *"these are bad issues and talking about them is impolite."* *"Children should not have such information because it will lead to their degeneration."*). Parents are afraid that information delivered to their children will be wrongly perceived; such trends are also evident in other studies – for example, parents are reluctant to discuss this topic because they fear that this way they will promote risky sexual behavior of their children and these conversations may be perceived by their children as *"green light"* for a sexual act (Aronowitz et al., 2007; Meschke & Dettmer, 2012; Wilson, Dalberth, Koo, & Gard, 2010). Parents fear that discussions about sex may trigger curiosity and encourage sexual experiments (Aronowitz et al., 2007; Elliott, 2010a; Ohalet et al., 2010).

According to parents, in the process of implementing sexuality education, peculiarities of relationship with opposite sex should also be taken into account (we aren't talking about all issues with opposite sex). Therefore, it needs to be decided whether girls and boys will have these classes together or separately (some respondents believe that discussions about sexuality issues may prompt adolescents and trigger more interest toward their classmates. Here we must also note that single-sex classes do not exclude the possibility of arousing/strengthening interest toward opposite sex).

One of the respondents that works as a teacher in school noted that after the subject “Society and I” was introduced, public attitudes dramatically changed:

“It is a very good subject, here the main thing is how we deliver it. In the beginning, people were against it but now they are silent because they saw that it doesn’t create any danger. Quite the opposite, it teaches civic responsibility to children and from an early age. I believe it was a good thing that they introduced this subject.”

According to respondents, acute public reactions were due to the fact that society is always cautious about new things, resistance of part of the society was due to lack of awareness. Essentially, everyone underlined the fact that they themselves lack education in this area, *“they don’t know what should be done and how.”*

Parents mostly noted that in our society, the topic of sexual education is somehow a taboo. Discussions about it create discomfort at any level, which in turn results in resistance toward including such subject in the NC separately or within different subjects. *“Teachers don’t know what to do with the discomfort”* and they prefer not to discuss this topic at all. This is also true for the society – if they disregard the issue/swipe it under the rug, there won’t be any discomfort or embarrassment. However, *“the new generation has a different approach and attitudes are slowly but gradually changing.”*

“Generation of parents is a taboo generation that did not talk about this topic. Their parents also didn’t talk about it and believed that one shouldn’t talk about this topic.”

Generational attitudes toward formal or informal sexuality education are different according to other studies as well. Parents view their parents as ineffective educators about sexual issues (Kenny & Wurtele, 2013); in addition, parents would like to “do better than their parents had done with them” (p. 460; Ballard & Gross, 2009; LaSala, 2015), and they intend to discuss sex when their children are younger compared to when they themselves were taught about it or when they were forced to contend with sexual silence (Alcalde & Quelopana, 2013; El-Shaieb & Wurtele, 2009; Kenny & Wurtele, 2013). Our respondents too note that parents should be better educators for their children. To that end, they need more awareness and knowledge, however school and information based on scientific knowledge should play a dominant role. Effective steps should be made for implementing sexuality education.

“It would be good if sexuality education is implemented in school, from about the fifth grade. They should start to gradually discuss certain topics, at the very least to decrease potential embarrassment in higher grades as these questions become more difficult. I don’t know when this embarrassment will disappear and when we will reach that point of development when no one is laughing or leaving class when this topic is discussed. However, I do believe that the process should start. I think there’s already some readiness for it.”

“In reality, all children have information about this topic and it would be better if they receive the information from professionals. In my opinion, the society didn’t see any threat. Simply, they can’t talk about it and that’s it.”

Generally, respondents believe that when an issue is a taboo in the society, its introduction requires serious preparation and preliminary works. *Any decision, no matter how correct and good it is, can be implemented only when we can argue successfully about the need, the necessity of making concrete steps and its possible effects.*

It was noted that in certain part of the society, not only negative attitudes exist about teaching this subject but also, changes that take place in the period of puberty are inadequately evaluated. Schools lack adequate/empathetic attitudes toward adolescents. Often the difference becomes the cause of stigma and in many cases, formation of stigma is encouraged by teachers themselves.

“Say, a teacher received some information about her pupil. She can sit down and freely talk about it in the teachers’ lounge and say things about the child, then a stigma will be formed about the child. The problem is not just about one side, these issues are completely misunderstood from all sides. I receive lot of information about children that I shouldn’t know. Grade master should have this information and then s/he can tell me quietly to take it into account. I shouldn’t be hearing about these things in the teachers’ lounge.” [Parent who also works as a school teacher]

According to parents, negative public attitude toward teaching of these issues is the result of their law awareness – a significant part of the society is unaware of goals of sexuality education and problems that adolescents face due to lack of awareness.

According to parents, low awareness of pupils may be the cause of bullying other pupils:

“For example, a boy starts going through puberty early, his voice and tone changes, facial hair appears. Others are laughing about it and he may feel oppressed because of it.”

Fathers surveyed clearly believe that awareness is important. They find it unacceptable to taboo topics that a lot of people have natural interest in. Young people should be provided with scientifically correct information that will fulfill their interest. They should know when they are ready for sexual life, what are prerequisites for it, they should understand consequences and responsibilities; they should also have information about risks associated with sexual relationships. Education protects youth from traumatizing experience. Its effects are more positive than risky. Awareness reduces prevalence of early marriages, STDs, etc., while risks are created by receiving information from incompetent sources (e.g. peers or Internet). In this case, youth is not protected. Distorted, inadequate information can foster perverse perceptions. Delivery of information in a correct, conscious and planned manner will eliminate the risk of children having unhealthy interests toward this topic.

According to fathers surveyed, the responsibility of raising awareness of children should be equally borne by schools and families. However, implementation of sexuality education in schools has the following several advantages: accuracy of information, correct methods and adequate resources are more or less guaranteed. There are mechanisms of quality control and process standardization. It is very important that school and parent communicate in this context.

Parents greatly vary in terms of understanding the importance of these issues and being involved in child's sexuality education. Different attitudes can be explained by different levels of parents' education. Clearly, it is impossible to generalize this conclusion based on qualitative research, however such trend has been revealed.

Challenges

What do parents think about challenges and obstacles in the process of implementing sexuality education? Measures that are implemented in the education system? What is the involvement of parents like in this process and what information/knowledge do they share with adolescents and how?

Parental involvement: essentially, the respondents are not aware of issues/areas that are taught, resources that are available to students within school education. It is difficult for them to evaluate whether or not learners are provided with age-appropriate and relevant information, what are the problems in this area and how they can be solved. Only a respondent with pedagogical experience is able to discuss these issues in a qualified manner. According to this respondent, issues included in the NC are general in nature and more information is necessary. Issues provided in the civic education curriculum are not addressed in an in-depth manner.

"What we deliver is quite superficial. I dedicate a maximum for two weeks to all this and I share this information in the eight grade. I may also share this information in the ninth grade. First of all, its late and second of all, I don't have relevant resources and we only use a textbook (technological resources are not available for the teacher to show quantitative indicators, visual material in class). 4 lessons that are dedicated to these topics aren't sufficient" [biology teacher].

Social media and risks. Parents underlined that since everyone has a cellphone these days and therefore, access to Internet, it is difficult to filter and control the information available through social media, television and online channels. In light of this, they prefer that children receive information based on age-appropriate sexuality education plan.

Contents and barriers of communication: when discussing their role in sexuality education of their children, parents note that they prefer qualified individuals – teachers fulfill this function. They are insecure about themselves and feel embarrassed to have such conversation with their children. In the best-case scenario, contents of communication with children are provision of information about sexuality education/puberty, physiological changes and how these changes affect their personality. Some parents prefer to give books to their children instead of having the conversation or to offer them to find the information themselves.

"When I am talking about early marriage, STIs, they just listen and nod but if we ask them to find statistics and draw their own conclusions and they will see that these numbers are real,

that it does happen to people, and they are able to touch these problems, then they develop different emotion.”

“I always tried to prevent my children from hearing about these horrible examples, things that are happening around us. I think they should hear these things, perhaps they will become somewhat depressed but it’s better for them to have the information about what is happening.”

In contrast, some parents believe that even at the age of 15 it is too early to have sex communication with their children. Some choose different tactics and, in an attempt to avoid traumatizing information they stay silent and constantly try to be careful, observe their children’s mental health and find cause of any changes. Some ascribe changes in their child’s behavior and mood to puberty and simply wait for this period to be over, so that everything goes back to normal again.

“For the last two years, my child hasn’t asked me anything. He’s no longer close to me, he’s distant.”

According to the vast majority of respondents, children are not comfortable talking about issues of sexual development. Talking about these issues is uncomfortable for both sides.

“I have a very sensitive girl and I can’t say that this was easy for her. When we started talking about this topic, she was surprised first. She was about 11 years old. She had begun puberty and we needed to talk about this topic. I explained to her about hormones, how they are produced and when and what kind of bodily changes they cause. I was very nervous, thinking whether the information I was providing was understandable, whether it would have any negative psychological effect.”

The role of school: according to majority of parents surveyed, the school does nothing to raise awareness of pupils. Only several biology classes are dedicated to these issues in the eighth grade. However, it should also be noted that in Georgia, eighth grade pupils don’t receive similar information during a biology class. This may be due to the discomfort experienced by teacher.

Some respondents noted that school’s efforts are inadequate and more specialists need to be involved in the learning process, e.g. psychologists, in order for learners to be able to discuss issues that they are interested in during direct communication with them.

It was also noted that sexuality education is essentially absent from church schools. Such institutions basically disregard sexuality education.

“Our school is a church school and I think more should be done.”

Parents surveyed believe that the biggest challenge of implementing sexuality education is training of teachers. According to them, teachers that are selected should be prepared and knowledgeable about how to deliver knowledge about sexuality issues to pupils.

“Whether this issue will be delivered the right way, what kind of teachers will be selected is very important. I remember we skipped this topic because the teacher felt the attitude of

boys... This needs to be regulated. This will be more difficult than deciding whether or not it should be taught... It can be introduced in theory but not implemented in practice by teachers."

Recommendations

The last part of meeting with respondents naturally concerned future steps – what should be done, what are some of the first steps in this area? According to majority of respondents, this process should start. For many of them, adult (parent) education programs are attractive and they are eager to participate in them. It was clear from the conversation and they too noted that the more information they receive, the better they will be able to help their children, which is a very strong argument for them – *"A mother is ready to do anything for her child, at any cost, no matter how embarrassed she may feel, she'll learn everything."*

Creating resources for parents and introducing adult education programs will have parents that wish to find an effective strategy for communicating with their children and to provide them with adequate and reliable information. Quality resources should be prepared, social media should be used and training should be delivered on sexuality education by healthcare professionals. Since parents are willing to be involved but they lack confidence, access to such resources will increase their motivation and level of awareness about sexuality education issues. Clearly, parents have moral, ethical opinions. Trainings should be responsive to this diversity. Such support will enable parents to actively get involved in the education process. This will break the weak communication cycle between parents and children about sexual health issues.

According to respondents, in parallel with adult training programs, any and all public awareness activities will be beneficial (short videos, TV programs, social networks...). According to one of the respondents, the entire society should clearly see the existing problems – high prevalence of early/child marriage, unwanted pregnancies and abortions. If they society realizes these problems, they might change their nihilistic attitudes toward sexuality education:

"All media outlets, including social media should be involved. Statistics should be published. The simplest way is to have meetings with parents in school. However, we shouldn't break it to them at the very first meeting that we are going to teach [sexuality education], they will immediately become aggressive and will refuse to hear anything. We should start by discussing the problems and then they will come up with solutions together."

It was noted that through involvement of specialists, a sexuality education concept should be elaborated. Experience of Western countries should be taken into account; however, it was also underlined that transposing the experience directly would be ineffective. With involvement of specialists, cultural characteristics of our country should be taken into account and reflected in the concept.

Respondents have different opinions about the age when sexuality education should begin, when children become interested in sexual issues and when (in what age) sexuality education should begin.

Opinions about what different age groups should know about sex vary or parents simply don't have any knowledge about it. Parents that deal with these topics directly, due to their profession, believe that contemporary children become interested in these issues much earlier than parents can ever imagine and far before parents themselves began to think about these issues when they were young.

"[Sexuality education] is necessary, talking about this topic should begin, textbooks should also be [published and reviewed]. But it should be discussed first. Before it is introduced, before we think about how to do it, we need to discuss it first, in order to raise awareness for public at large."

"As to age and when it should begin, I think that earlier it begins, the better. Fifth grade is already late. If you ask me, they should start giving the information to children from kindergarten, in slow doses. The biggest problem here is textbooks and personnel. They should be carefully chosen."

"You'll be lying to yourself if you think that children don't know these things and shouldn't hear about these things. They know these things and from a very early age."

According to one of the parents, it would be good to change the name of the subject, so that after hearing the name people don't think immediately that the subject is about intimate relationships between two people.

Some respondents stated that it is important to talk about issues like different orientation in schools because "later it will be very difficult to change attitudes, if children develop wrong and aggressive attitudes toward people that are different."

"Once a boy who was in the eleventh grade told me, if my child has such propensities, I'll kill him. We spent the entire lesson talking about the physiological processes that cause this, however it was already pointless. They already have misconceptions about these things."

Parents underlined that not only biology teachers should be involved in teaching of these topics. It would be very good if these topics are broadly incorporated in other subjects like, for example, civic education. Pupils should receive information about these issues from different sources. It was also noted that we need to carefully think about how frequently these issues should be discussed. We must choose an optimal option – not too often and not too seldom.

We need to also mention recommendations of fathers. According to them, the purpose of sexuality education should be explaining to learners that sex is not just means of reproduction but it is also an important area of people's life. Parents and youth should understand that sexuality education protects from unwanted pregnancies, serious STIs, physical and moral traumas. In addition, introducing sexuality education in schools should not entail having a separate subject but rather, adequate time should be allocated to it (certain number of meetings) within biology and civic education. This will not create any financial burden for the Ministry and for schools. It will be more difficult to show political will, in view of the position of Georgian society. In this context, communication with parents is

important, they should be ready to provide their children with age, context and culturally appropriate information about sexuality education issues (this will be more difficult to achieve in the regions).

To summarize, main recommendation of respondents is training teachers and supporting parents, so that both sides can talk about sex-related issues with children and provide them with age-appropriate education. *“As we are saying that it should be introduced in schools, teachers will have to be trained. Teachers should begin and then parents should be ready to handle the information that teachers provide.”*

9. Church Representatives: Attitudes toward Sexuality Education

Awareness

Awareness about education policy issues

In the contemporary Georgia, which is a secular state, **it is safe to say that church awareness about education policy issues is low**. Only one of the respondents is familiar with school education goals, NC plan and different textbooks. This is due to the fact that the respondent is working with the Patriarchy's educational division, he is a representative of one of Patriarchy's schools and is involved in administration of academic process. He is concerned about the situation in this field and the work of the Ministry of Education. To illustrate legislative gaps and lack of qualified human resources, the respondent provided an example of the process of certification of school textbooks. Respondents that are not involved in educational issues in an organized manner and lack awareness about educational policy or practice, **believe that the situation in the field of education in Georgia is alarming** and they are very concerned about it.

"Unfortunately, there has been a breakage in the fields of culture, education, research, science for 70 years... Mentally we are still in the Soviet Union. This is clearly evidenced by Georgian March. Nothing has been done during this time, in order to escape the Soviet mud, there hasn't been any intellectual development"...

One of the respondents sees problems in schools of Patriarchy, which are mostly the source of darkness (the respondent is using a Russian term "marakabesie"), as opposed to the source of education.

Respondents unanimously note that **effective functioning of education system is extremely important for development of the country and the society**.

"The system of education is crucial and without it, everything is ruined. Ignorance ruins everything everywhere, including in church"...

"Knowledge is very important, physics is the entire universe... Biology is an amazing science – Pavlov once said, it is impossible not to become a believer after you study human blood"...

Cooperation between the Ministry and Church on education issues

As noted earlier, respondents underline the central role of education for development of the country and therefore, **they believe it's necessary to cooperate with the Ministry of Education and be involved in working on education issues**.

“The society is one – clergymen and laymen, we share common problems. We often criticize each other but in reality, we are two sides of the same medal... We should try to make cooperation between clergymen and laymen possible”...

“The church should be involved in everything, why is it separate?! There are people in the church from public life, as they say, no one was born in a cassock”...

“Everyone should be involved in everything. I’m not saying that a shoe-maker should become a baker, but such division between the church and the nation is unacceptable. When a priest goes out in the street, shouldn’t he be concerned about street cleaning?! Should this only concern the city hall?! Church’s representative is also a representative of the society”...

The Church’s involvement/participation in the education system can be seen in the fact that there are 40 schools of patriarchy nationwide. These are ordinary public schools where religion is taught as an individual subject. However, generally we must say that cooperation between the Church and the Ministry of Education is far from intensive. Georgia is a secular state. Clearly, this limits participation of the Church representatives in planning and management of issues of education or other issues of public life. On the other hand, in absence of a declaratory separation, it would be difficult to control involvement of statesmen in church’s affairs.

“They would start [instructing] – appoint him here, appoint him there”...

“It would have been difficult to draw the line”, “Church should be free in its administrative decisions”...

Even if there is a willingness to cooperate, according to one of the respondents, there will be important obstacles in this process – clergymen and statesmen have radically different ideas about the origin of a human being and his/her essence. This makes it difficult to focus on the right issues (from the perspective of the Church) in schools providing general education.

“How can you teach a child who a human being is? How was s/he created? Who created him/her? As soon as the soul leaves the body, a human being becomes a board. We can think about a human being as a vehicle, his heart is the engine, his blood is the fuel... However, the car won’t drive without the spark, the soul is the driving force of everything.”

Awareness specifically about goals, contents, teaching forms and goals of sexuality education

Only one of the respondents is aware of education policy in general and sexuality education in particular. Together with the head of the Patriarchy’s educational division, for a certain period he was involved in the task force that aimed to design a curriculum for the subject “Society and I”. Therefore, he is familiar with issues of a healthy lifestyle provided in subjects “Society and I” and “Our Georgia”. The respondent is not happy with the approach to teaching these subjects. **He believes that the work of the task force was quite heavy.** According to him, this was due to attitudes of the task force members toward religion. To the respondent, delivering knowledge to a child about any issue means

delivering the knowledge from religious perspective. For example, according to him children should be familiar with the idea of the creator, even without mentioning God; or they should be familiar with Svetitskhoveli not just as a cult building, as explained in the corresponding textbook. According to the respondent, members of the task force and representatives of the Ministry didn't share his position (and the position of other representatives of the Church) about these issues.

"The process was quite difficult ... They had extremely heavy attitudes toward religion... I'm not saying that you should include religion everywhere, however this universe is God and just like air that you can't see, God is scattered everywhere in the world, He is the creator... They were explicitly against it. Their attitudes were quite rigid"...

Unfortunately, the respondent did not discuss issues of sexuality education or healthy lifestyle in particular, which are provided in the subject "Society and I". He addressed the negative atmosphere and attitudes in the task force.

Opinions and attitudes

The role and importance of sexuality education

The respondents have essentially similar opinions about the need and importance of sexuality education – all three respondents believe that an individual **should have knowledge** about any aspects of life, especially about important aspects. However, it should be noted that representatives of the Church view this knowledge differently. When speaking about the necessity of education, they often underline that it is important to focus on love, family, importance of reproduction within the context of sexuality education.

"People should be aware. Everything that people do, they should do it based on knowledge. Whether you are the head of the country or a maid, you should have the knowledge to do your job."

"Ignorance is unacceptable. It is an essential part of life and therefore, medical knowledge [here the respondent possibly means physiological knowledge] is necessary"...

"Sexuality education is systemic, and this system is part of our body. These organs are just as alive as others. It is impossible to stop them from working – you can't stop heart, right?! These organs should realize their mission, while this mission is related to moral issues. It is wrong to escape from what is systemic" ...²¹

²¹ To illustrate that sexual relationship is a natural, systemic event for a person, one of the respondents provides an example of representatives of the Church ("often newcomers to the church immediately become monks. Then often it turns out that these people were not ready for abstinence, not everyone can do it"...). In that regard, problems are quite severe in the Catholic Church, which requires all of its representatives to be celibate ("This is where the horrible situation in the Church comes from"... "Everything that we do artificially, by disregarding the reality, is doomed for failure. We need to look the reality in the eye"...).

One of the respondents believe that **lack of awareness is the cause of harmful practice.**

“Divorces, abortions, violence, pedophilia is the result of ignorance”...

Respondents underline that **according to religious views, relationship between two people has been established by God.** It is the value – love, family is the value. According to the Bible, Adam and Eve received their first blessing for reproduction.

“The following is the first blessing received by people from God: revive, master everything that God created for you and recreate – so He blessed reproduction”...

“There is the following law in the church – if a statesman or a clergyman believes that this relationship is a sin, then it deserves a certain punishment”...

“This is a physical expression of love and knowledge about it should be appropriately provided to children from romantic and medical perspective”...

Love is the most important part of social life.

“Without love between a man and a woman, art, Galaktioni, van Gogh wouldn’t exist, nothing would exist. A woman and a man together are an image of and similar to God”...

To illustrate the Church’s opinion about sexual relationship, one of the respondents provided a metaphor of wine: wine is valuable to the Church. It is a manifestation of Christ’s blood, however, on the other hand, “drunkards will not enter Paradise”. **Church supports “moderation”.** According to respondents, it is natural that both extreme liberalism and conservatism exists within the Church (just like within the society as a whole), however, **it is important that the Church remains faithful to Christ, as opposed to someone’s opinions.**

“We should not fall into some extremes – something is categorically prohibited and something is categorically allowed. We should choose something in the middle”...

Lack of awareness and distorted information is an important factor that causes harmful practices

As mentioned earlier, all three respondents are representatives of white clergy. They note that youth (and not only) frequently turn to them about problems related to sexual life.

“Just like in other spheres of life, quite often questions arise about this sphere. When a person has a problem, s/he turns to the one s/he trusts the most”...

However, respondents have different ideas and opinions about these problems and their solutions.

One of the respondents especially underlines the importance of harmonious sexual relationships – he is concerned about the fact that more and more couples turn to the Church for marriage annulment than for marriage. According to them, there are several reasons for that:

1. After marriage, sexual relationships become secondary, which becomes a subject of dispute and disagreement in this sphere, as well as with regards to other issues of life.

"If you fail to cook dinner for your spouse for two years, what is s/he going to do? Go to another diner, right?!"

2. **Sexual life problems are a taboo** – It is commonly assumed that if we aren't talking about a problem, it doesn't exist. In reality, there is such a thing as sexual incompatibility, which often is the reason why couples get divorced. (The respondent didn't directly raise the issue. Instead, he indicated that Christian couples are able to discover sexual incompatibility only after marriage). According to the respondent, it is important that for a husband and wife to have a problem-free (harmonious) sexual relationship, as evidenced by the fact that this is the only sphere where an individual may not have a different partner, a "yokemate".

"You can find another yokemate for all areas, e.g. you can discuss art with your friend, child upbringing with your parent but you can't share your bed with someone else"...

3. The most important problem that youth is facing is **that they aren't ready to take on the very important responsibility**.

"Sometimes youth feel exalted about marriage, sexual relationships, without realizing the huge responsibility – they are able to see only a fragment of the painting, they aren't able to see the entire painting, the entire picture"...

The respondent cited the following quote from Saint-Exupéry: *"You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed"*. With this quote, the respondent underlines that youth often fail to handle very simple responsibilities, e.g. parents end up caring for their domestic animals, they frequently become bored with things, just like young children do with their toys. Same is true for marriage and sexual relationships, when a couple gets married very young, at the age of 18-19.

"They are playing with one toy for a short period of time, they do everything to get it and then they throw it away soon, they are no longer interested. Soon they'll want to have the same thing, etc. This is also true for having a wife – he'll do everything to get married but in 3 months, he's no longer interested, he becomes bored. So-called gloomy everyday life... When a young man wants to get married, I tell him, first buy fish, take care of them, if they don't die in 6 months, then I'll give you the blessing to [get married]."

The respondent provided an example of European countries, where people get married at the age of 30. They take into account the very strict attitude of Catholic Church toward marriage annulment (documents proving unfaithfulness should be submitted to court). They also realize that a person has not fully developed before the age of 25-30, and only after that age he or she is ready to make such a serious decision.

"A person who is 18-19 years old is not developed at all. With age, you reevaluated certain things – for example, when we look at our old work, it seems stupid and we are surprised and embarrassed how we wrote it. The same thing happens with evaluating another person"...

According to the respondent, **informing youth about family planning** is a way to avoid divorces, early marriages and other harmful practices (e.g. abortions).

“They need to learn how to plan a family”...

Another respondent has an absolutely different position about family planning. Although the respondent believes that lack of awareness is a possible reason for the increased rate of abortions, to him, family planning means acting against God’s blessing.

“There is this terms – unwanted pregnancy. In all of his sermons, the Patriarch is preaching to reproduce, as this is God’s blessing, and then we say that a pregnancy is unwanted... Such approach – I don’t have time now, number isn’t important, it doesn’t increase quality – is unacceptable. It’s the same thing as abortion, it’s homicide. People should know that abortion is crime. This needs to be taught”...

Challenges

Threats/benefits of informing pupils about issues of sexuality education (sexual development, intimate hygiene, relationship between the sexes, reproductive health and safety)

All three respondents believe it is essential to provide pupils with age-appropriate, authentic information. However, certain differences have been identified with regards to knowledge contents and form of delivery.

Respondents agree that one of the important challenges that the system of education is facing is **selection/offering trustworthy sources of information** to children. Today children have access to many sources of information (online or other media), where they mostly receive distorted information. According to one of the respondents, associated information about sexual life with “obscenity” is based on the Soviet traditions.

“These values have been covered in mud a lot, they are represented with images that contain obscenity... Due to atheism, during the Soviet times and later in the 90s, people received information about this field in an obscene way”...

One of the respondents especially underlined the role of Imedi TV with regard to providing “undesirable models” to children.

“There are some TV hosts that don’t have much reputation in the society. Why should they host programs?! They become influencers for 10-12 children. Children that watch them tell their parents – why are you forbidding this, isn’t it allowed there?!”...

Respondents discuss different strategies for addressing this challenge. According to respondent 1, **a competent individual** should openly talk to pupils, someone who they respect – a teacher or a consultant – and address their questions. **It is important for pupils to receive correct information.**

“Today we are in the ostrich’s position – if we’re not talking about it, the problem doesn’t exist. It is important that a person that pupils respect the most explain to them everything the right way”...

However, respondent 1 is in minority, as he believes lack of open conversations about this topic is a problem. Other respondents believe that **openly talking about these issues is more problematic than beneficial**. They believe it is even problematic to mention the topic itself – the word “sexual”, even in the context of education, leads a child’s mind in an undesirable direction.

“There was esthetic and psychological education, then we had sex-related education and now sexuality education is coming. Name changes but contents don’t change. I am categorically against “sexual” – the term itself already emboldens them... it creates some special attitudes in a young person.... They start having certain opinions, thoughts about these things because they are adolescents and they are starting to understand the universe... Upon birth, humans are prone to evil, this is their inborn nature and this awakens an interest in them”...

Conversations about these topics awakens a child’s curiosity toward them. Children are trying to satisfy their curiosity with different ways. At this time, it is essentially impossible to control what type of information they’ll try to get and from where.

“Humans are interested in everything in this world. If a child runs towards a fire, you’ll try to stop him, he resists as he doesn’t understand why you’re stopping him”...

One of the respondents provided a church analogy – issues of sexual relationships often become a topic of confession. Priest should be very careful when talking about them, in order to not touch upon certain issues that will insult the confessor.

“[The priest] shouldn’t prompt any thoughts that the confessor didn’t have before. He should not raise any topics that will corrupt his mind”...

Another respondent greatly limits the list of sexuality education issues that can be discussed with pupils. According to him, by explaining certain issues of sexuality education to children, they are urging them to choose the Christian way of life.

“When you start explaining safe sex to a child... Don’t abstain but rather, use this for safety – You shouldn’t go in this direction. Today people can’t even imagine how to abstain... These relationships emotionally wear people out, such way of life is a wound for the soul and people have many other wounds. Today a human is very weak because he is without God... And when they create a family, these wounds will manifest themselves in lack of trust or other things”...

Respondent 2 has somewhat moderate position. According to the respondent, sexual relationships should be discussed in the context of love.

“Love ennobles this feeling”...

According to the respondent, it is important to introduce this topic in education, however much caution and professionalism is required to make the right steps. **Creating adequate learning resources is a serious challenge**, ones that will be acceptable to majority of the society, to parents and will not bring any psychological harm to children. Copying European ones, without adapting them to the

Georgian context, which was planned a few years ago, is completely unjustified – while using resources enriched with illustrations directs children's minds toward obscenity.

Despite their completely different views about sexuality education issues within the formal education system, all three respondents agree that **the topic of sexual relationships is very intimate and it is not advisable or even possible for teachers and pupils to talk about them during class.**

“No matter how good a teacher is, s/he may fail to give it the right direction. It may be possible to discuss these things with a single pupil but there are 20 children in one class”...

According to all three respondents, **another important challenge is competencies of individuals that should deliver this knowledge to pupils.** In the very important field of sexuality education, lack of teachers' competence may be severely harmful. Respondents draw parallels with teaching religion. In the 90s there were attempts to have theological academy or seminary graduates teach religion history using specially designed textbooks (by Rezi Tvaradze), but these attempts were unsuccessful.

“If you ask me whether Christianity should be taught in schools, my answer is clear – I was teaching in school a long time ago. As my experience grew, I realized that it is extremely important who teachers [a subject] and how. If you deliver the knowledge in an incompetent way, you may distort it and it's better not to teach at all... Everyone, a priest or a seminary graduate, has their own personal approaches and they can make a mistake... After leaving meetings about teaching religion in schools, my only hope is with God – I don't see any resource for it in our system. Same is with sexuality education”...

Dissonance between scientific knowledge and the so-called biblical knowledge remains a challenge. Issues of biology, history, civic education about how humans were created, their origin or contributions of different clergymen or laymen, etc. are in a complete disagreement with biblical doctrines and ideas.

Polarized attitudes of the society about the process of implementing sexuality education

Respondents clearly see the polarized attitudes in the society about implementing sexuality education. However, they provide different factors as the reason of this polarization.

According to one of the respondents, unlike Europe where the level of education is standardized (and the foundation is created by state institutions and mostly schools), **in the Georgian society the level of education varies a lot** – *“From a high level of professionalism to a complete darkness”*. Often this becomes the basis of radically different attitudes within the society. **The society is afraid of initiating a healthy conversation** about completely natural events, systems for humans. People have lost a common language; understanding doesn't exist anymore and the same event is interpreted in different ways.

“Even a text written by an individual can be understood in a different way – implementing sexuality education may be called propaganda of obscenity... The environment where we live in is very difficult... If you are initiating something, they are already condemning you”...

According to this respondent, the Church is not yet ready to facilitate such conversations. Any novelty and especially sensitive topics like sexuality education should be implemented carefully, slowly and step-by step.

“We need to walk on a minefield in order to explained the need of sexuality education to retrogrades”...

Another respondent is also underlining fear but from a different perspective. According to the respondent, public fears that sexuality education will be provided to children in a wrong, unhealthy way. This fear has some real basis – about 15-20 years ago, they were planning to introduce a sexuality education in schools that contained age- and culture-inappropriate contents.

“...It was filled with illustrations; it was embarrassing to even flip through it with someone else...”

According to respondents, fear and the resulting polarization is caused not by giving the knowledge to children but rather, contents and form of delivering this knowledge. The respondent sees signs of polarization in church also, however none of the extremities are acceptable to the respondent.

“Extreme liberalism – “everything is allowed” – is unacceptable, so is extreme conservatism – “the topic is a taboo”. Extremities are always wrong, they are bad”...

The respondent underlines the necessity of cooperation between the Ministry of Education and media, in order to provide public with correct information about trends that exist in Europe about this topic.

“The society should make steps that won’t trigger any hate toward Europe in the society, it shouldn’t lock our society in unhealthy conservatism”...

According to the third respondent, resistance in the society is natural. People don’t like it when their missteps are pointed out and “disclosed”.

“Why didn’t the society accept Jesus Christ? When they were going to stone a sinful woman to death, he wrote down on the ground the gravest sin that each and every individual who was there had committed, so no one was able to throw a rock at her... Not many can accept this, when you point out [their missteps] they are upset”...

According to them, the main challenge, the main reason of resistance is seeing sexual life from a different perspective – from the perspective of religion. God blessed Adam to reproduce, however God also established that a man should be the husband of one woman and vice versa. To church, restraint is important, which is an expression of freedom – free will – while means of restraint is prayer and labor.

“Anton the Great once said: two things are interchangeable: labor and prayer. Both are a relationship with God”...

The Church is not reluctant to talk about this topic. It explains issues of sexuality life to adolescents from its own perspective.

“Children have these questions, as we teach the Gospel from the sixth grade: there were Adam and Eve, they had children – Cain and Abel. Cain killed Abel – they don’t find this odd, was is odd, is how they reproduced. When they learned about Adam and Eve also had daughters, they ask: “did he marry his sister?”. This is odd to them and you should explain that God gave them right to do so, in order to reproduce. Now that reproduction is no longer a challenge, God no longer gives this right, etc.”...

The respondent is convinced that majority of the society – 80% is against his position. Certain skepticism is also evident.

“I guess, there’s no escape from this.”

Recommendations

The role of schools in raising awareness of pupils on sexual health issues and understanding their rights and responsibilities, and at the same time facilitating their moral development

The respondents provided unanimous recommendations. More specifically, they think it is important to deliver knowledge to children, give them the right information, answer questions that they have in different ages and provide explanations. **To church, “knowledge is light”.** It is also one of the most effective ways for protecting children from harmful information.

“Instead of them receiving distorted information from the street, from Internet, we must give them the right direction, information is like river – if you don’t build a bed, it will flood everything, and if you build a bed, it will become beneficial for everything”...

To respondents, it is essential that the process of delivering knowledge is well thought-out and organized, highly-professional, child-oriented and it is administered by honest people and is based on public consent.

“There should be the will and professionals that will execute this will. Prerequisite for success of any project is honesty”...

“The process should be prepared very seriously; it cannot be done otherwise”...

Professionals should make decisions about the teaching **format** (lessons, individual consultations, single-sex classes, etc.), **contents**, **intensity** and **resources**, as well as who will teach the subject should be made by professionals.

“It is impossible for everyone to participate in the process if implementing sexuality education. Everyone should do their job and therefore, only professionals should be involved, those who are ready for it mentally and are knowledgeable”...

Participation of specialists with high level of competence will increase trust toward the process and it will be a step forward to eliminate resistance that exists in the society. Polarization can also be reduced by raising awareness of the society about the process.

“We should know what we are teaching – self-control, correct and healthy approaches, as opposed to depravity” ... “In this case, Christianity will not be against it”....

The respondents have their own views about each of these components:

What should be taught

It is essentially for the respondents that **knowledge about sexual relationships is based on religious teaching – respect between the spouses, faithfulness, responsibility, moral readiness, self-restraint should be underlined.**

“Associating this relationships with obscenity should be reduced to a minimum, the issue should be ennobled by teaching it based on the Bible... This is an intimate sphere that concerns certain depths of human life; therefore, it should be free from any cynicism and obscenity”...

“If we give the right direction to a child’s interests and tell him/her: yes, we are two different individuals, a woman and a man, and we are like this because God blessed human reproduction... It would be good to have the Bible as a starting point”...

One of the respondents has especially underlined issues of **freedom and free will**. Today freedom is associated with the right to do anything and everything with no control. However, freedom means owning yourself and the ability to make decisions according to your will.

“Why did Adam commit a sin? God could have created Adam as a perfect human being, then he would have been a robot. Human free will should manifest somehow, right?!... However, free will doesn’t mean that you can do anything that you want. According to Paul the Apostle, everything is allowed for me but humility is the manifestation of free will”...

The respondents believe it is important to deliver to children within the subject of biology scientific information about functioning of human reproductive system, its healthy, healthy lifestyle, etc. The material taught within biology can be more extensive and comprehensive than it is now.

Who should teach it?

The respondents underline risks of inflicting psychological damage to children. Therefore, **they recommend the Ministry to put a particular emphasis on training personnel.** However, certain skepticism was also evident among the respondents about this issue.

More over, one of the respondents **believes a school does not have the capacity to conduct implement sexuality education of children in the right way.** Therefore, the respondent believes that parents should have this function.

“Parental involvement is the best – fathers with sons and mothers with girls. Moreover, according to an ancient Christian tradition, godmothers are for girls and godfathers are for boys, because they are spiritual teachers”...

Upbringing of a child begins even before s/he is born. Before the child goes to school, s/he learns all behaviors from his/her parents.

“There are some things that come from the mother and the father. School cannot fulfill this function, the function of upbringing, schools teach and what they teach is a separate issue... These books “Society and I”, “Our Georgia”, “Citizen” ... We grew up without these books, no one taught us from books that you shouldn’t throw garbage on the streets.”...

Parent is able to notice even the slightest physical or psychological changes in the child, s/he constantly follows the child’s spiritual development in the period of puberty.

“Parents are the closest to their children, so they should have more role... Parents are always more open with their child than teachers... Parents should talk to their children... This will deepen the relationship between them. There may be some barriers but this will deepen their relationship even more”...

At the age of 10-12, as soon as the child starts puberty, parents should talk to him/her before the child starts asking questions about characteristics of puberty.

“Parents should explain to their children that they are starting puberty... After puberty, it will be your function to become a husband/wife, you can’t explain everything at once, they won’t understand it, even if they are geniuses. If a man climbs a mountain slowly, he won’t start gasping for air. It should be explained slowly and in the right form”...

On the other hand, the respondent also sees problems related to parent’s education, morality, his/her involvement in the child’s upbringing.

“How a parent should be brought up? (Laughs) We need to start somewhere, something should happen”...

According to the respondent, churches, Sunday schools of churches, sermons can serve as a source of parental education.

How it should be taught

According to the respondents, to make implementation of sexuality education in schools possible, **adequate textbooks should be created, which requires significant resources.** It is important to

involve experts in this process and conduct empirical research – piloting of training program and textbooks (or other resources).

“Best teachers should participate in piloting, to ensure that their opinions and comments are taken into account. The program and teachers’ training process should be adjusted based on that”...

However, it should also be noted that according to the respondents, creation of textbooks or other resources is not necessarily related to the format of teaching (**it does not necessarily needs to be introduced as a separate subject**). According to one of the respondents, it is possible to supplement one or two chapters in the biology textbook with information about reproductive system and health.

At what age it should be taught

It was difficult for the respondents to state the appropriate age of the child for starting sexuality education. **Learning should take place after assessing individual readiness.** Sexuality education should be taught only to those children that are ready for it. Children react differently to events and therefore, their readiness to talk about the topic of sexual relationships varies. This should be taken into account. Teaching should begin very carefully, moderately, in consideration of the context of the child. It is necessary to monitor the course of teaching and its consequences.

From the age of 8-12, a child first starts having questions about this topic – e.g. how was s/he born. At that stage, it is important to talk about values – love, family should be perceived as values.

“When a child sees the environment of love in the family, he or she is able to understand that s/he is the product of this love. This is sufficient for the child”...

From the age of 12-13, the period biological maturity begins and it is important that the child be adequately informed about processes in his/her body, hygiene, health issues, etc.

How it should be taught

The respondents have different views about the form of teaching. As noted earlier, one of the respondents believes that family is the main source of receiving sexuality education. The respondent is therefore against having sexuality education as a separate subject.

Other respondents too **don’t see the process of receiving sexuality education in the format of a formal lesson.** To them, it is more acceptable for the process to have the form of consultation. It should be conducted as an individual (or if appropriate, group) conversation between the adolescent and the professional, in view of the adolescent’s needs and interests as well as context. However, decision about the format and other aspects of teaching should be made by professionals.

Involvement of parents in sexuality education

In addition to the fact that according to one of the respondents, providing sexuality education is parents' prerogative, other respondents too note about the importance of parental involvement. They are concerned that in the contemporary situation, communication between children and parents is reduced to the minimum.

"Essentially, communication no longer exists"...

"There is certain shyness about this topic. However, a child may turn to his/her parents if s/he sees readiness for it"...

The importance of our research

It should be noted that all three respondents **welcome studies about sexuality education**.

"We still need to work. It was just said that there are so many ignorant people, this is not good for the cause"...

They have concrete recommendations for future research. More specifically, **they think it is important to compare public attitudes across regions and cities; they are interested in results of such study**.

"When you finish it and summarize it, it would be good if you have a presentation at the Patriarchy's Educational Center (this is the name of the division now)... It is important to have the real picture, it would be good if you do it"...

The respondents hope that through the research it would be possible to identify ways for implementing sexuality education in a culturally relevant form.

10. Sexuality Education from the Perspective of Ethnic Azerbaijani Population

Awareness

Awareness of ethnic Azerbaijanis on sexual education and reproductive health is quite low and this is part of their tradition – they rarely share everyday, practical experience, let alone search or receive trustworthy information.

“I always try to have a reputation with my children and be someone they can look up to. I believe it is completely unacceptable to talk to them like this because there would be no curtain in our relationship. Children will think that I’m not serious or they can do whatever they want with me. I don’t want to create such situation. Time will come and they will learn everything.”

Research has revealed that main and often the only way for youth to receive information is Internet. There is no communication about sexual issues within families and it is often considered unacceptable. In consideration of the existing attitudes, school provides a very small amount of information to adolescents. It should also be considered that adolescents themselves realize that information received from Internet is unqualified and often they try to verify the information obtained online based on interviews with doctors, opinions of specialists. The fact is that those who attended trainings about such or associated topic, recognize the effectiveness of these measures in raising their awareness.

As noted earlier, school is quite limited and it is completely up to an individual teacher’s efforts but these efforts mostly entail talking about select topics. As to consequences of lack of information (early sexual activity, abortions, early marriage), attitude of adults is the following – “early marriage is a tradition and a custom, while other inappropriate things” (early sexual activity, pregnancy, infections, etc.) don’t happen with them. According to the respondents, such problems don’t exist in their community.

Only one respondent talked about having the conversation with her child. According to her, the conversation was quite difficult, uncomfortable, and she too needed a consultation with a doctor because she didn’t have any information.

“Initially, I didn’t even think that I needed to talk about these issues. To the contrary, I thought it was better to not be open about this issue. I could have never imagined that I would have to talk about it with my child, especially a boy. However, something happened to my boy and I had to find information and talk to him about it. I honestly never thought about this.”

Attitudes

As noted earlier, openness and readiness toward the need of sexuality education exists among youth and teachers – they are requesting that the subject be taught in a qualified manner, they also see the need of other, additional activities. They believe that it is also necessary to train teachers and relevant resources are needed but they also note the attitudes that exist in the community and recognize that full implementation of the subject will be associated with certain difficulties.

The support of parents toward teaching of the subject and awareness raising campaigns is remarkably little. Negative attitudes and opinions are far more common among parents. They believe that teaching these issues to children is in conflict with their culture and traditions. In addition, they don't see the need of receiving information about such issues.

“This is unacceptable. I don't understand how they can learn sexuality in school. No matter what it is, whether we call it education or something else, it is unacceptable. I won't let my child attend the lesson. I fear that school is not the place to study these things. There are thousands of other important subjects, they should teach those, there's no time for sexuality, people are uneducated and we're teaching sexuality.”

Respondents that are somewhat positive and understand the necessity of reproductive or sexuality education are extremely careful and are refraining from clearly expressing opinions. Teachers recognize the need of sexuality education; however they believe it should be taught in view of requirements and traditions of their community.

Challenges

Obstacles caused by traditions and religious factors were identified as the main challenge. In case of ethnic minorities, cultural peculiarities play a very important role in attitudes toward the subject and they greatly affect opinions of parents. The existing mentality and traditions, Soviet-style thinking and attitudes among parents and in the society are an important challenge for teachers and they find it very difficult to teach the subject appropriately due to these factors. They however realize that adolescents need information about these issues. Even though part of the population (parents, teachers) realize the harm caused by early marriage, they don't have clearly negative attitudes or in some cases, they maintain that this tradition needs to be protected from “depravity”. School is essentially unable to change these attitudes. They are unable to say anything about effects of quality sexuality education on early marriage, abortions, diseases – they don't have an opinion as to what they would change in that regard. They believe that there are no such problems in their community.

Parental attitudes were also divided about the role of school – on the one hand, it was stated that school is essentially unable to teach the subject and lacks adequate resources and opportunities for it. On the other hand, it was stated that school has nothing to do with it.

The most open age group – the age group of youth believe that it would be impossible for girls and boys to attend these lessons together, due to discomfort and traditions. On the one hand, youth has underlined the need and necessity to teach the subject, as well as the reality that exists in schools – adolescents are unable to receive the necessary information from teachers. Moreover, they have clearly stated that teachers are against discussing the topic and often their approach is prohibition, as opposed to explanation.

The respondents have especially underlined the problem of inadequate resources.

“There are no visual aids, literature, etc.”; “There are no trainings”.

“Resources essentially do not exist – there are no adequate guides (the material is lacking in the existing guide)”

With regard to sexuality education and health, school is unable to organize any projects or other events. Everything is up to the teacher;

Mostly negative attitudes were expressed about sexuality education, raising awareness. According to one of the participants, there is a need to have attitudes that are reinforced with traditions. The position was similar about adult sexuality education. Only one participant acknowledged that she needs such information, however it is embarrassing for her to get involved in such activity.

Recommendations

Recommendations mostly concern increasing qualification of teachers, the need to raise public awareness and increase accessibility of resources. Ethnic Azerbaijanis (parents and teachers, as well as adolescents) believe that the problem associated with receiving sexuality education in school is “embarrassment”. Therefore, it is recommended to discuss these issues in a single-sex class.

- One of the strategies for improving learning process is to increase the number of hours – this recommendation is based on the need to teach sexuality education in a single-sex class;
- Supporting professional development of teachers;
- Delivering educational resources to schools – more information in textbooks, visual aids, additional literature;
- Having a psychologist in school;
- Training new personnel in the field of sexuality education;
- Promoting adult education – conducting trainings for parents, about issues of sexuality education for youth, early marriage;
- Raising qualification of teachers, trainings;

- Having a psychologist in school to communicate with parents and adolescents, if there are any problems;
- Having visual aids;
- Increasing the number of hours to make it possible to teach sexuality education in a single-sex class;
- Organizing events to raise awareness of children and their parents (trainings, meetings, etc.);
- The need to have new, better prepared personnel – they will be able to deliver the information adequately, in consideration of age and psychology of the child and will be able to avoid any ambiguities and misinterpretation of the information delivered;
- Allocating additional hours for this subject, to make it possible to work with boys and girls separately – this is essentially in consideration of customs of the ethnic group (Azerbaijanis). Teachers themselves believe it is unacceptable to talk to boys and girls together about these issues.
- Generally, trainings about the topic of early marriage are conducted for parents as well. Further, more efforts are needed for educating parents and involvement of a psychologist in schools should be ensured.

11. Civil Sector: Advocacy and Obstacles

Awareness

Majority of respondents is aware of the essence of sexuality education, their goals and contents. This is natural as we selected respondents that have experience in working on issues of health, youth or other related social issues. Moreover, some have advocacy experience for implementing sexuality education in schools.

It should be noted that awareness of the respondent that represent religious/conservative group is also high and she is categorically against introducing sexual education in formal education. She is familiar with initiatives of the Ministry of Education and has peculiar views about them and about school and education policy in general. In her view, school is a powerful ideological weapon that all political or religious forces are trying to use. Therefore, it may pose a great threat, since despite the declared democratic values, the power holder does not respect representatives of different political or religious beliefs and is harassing them.

“Generally, I think that school hasn’t been created from a good life. It has been created because parents are unable to educate their children well... School is a huge ideological weapon and any power is trying to use it... Liberals are trying to pull it toward themselves, Russian propaganda – to itself... Everyone is pulling school to themselves... School should not be mandatory”....

Discussions about schools as an ideological weapon led us to the specific evaluation of its educational function. To religious/conservative groups it is acceptable and even desirable for school to have an important educational function, if its goal will be to instill moral, Christian values, as opposed to liberal democracy values.

“If by a harmonious individual, we mean an individual who is free from consciousness, moral, of course, such education is unacceptable. I see that our educational system is connected to the world, it stands on these rails... The fact that you have decided to educate a child is already positive, the main thing is how you educate him/her! In some cultures, it is considered sexism if men let the woman go first. If they are going to teach that, it’s better if they not teach anything at all... We are weak with respect to national values... Unfortunately, our school creates more threat... If someone with my ideology is in charge of planning education in school, then school would be empowered and I would be happy about that”...

The respondents follow the process of implementing sexuality education and is trying to obtain information about international experience. According to the respondent, in Georgia, reforms in any area and including in education policy field are planned according to pre-determined guidelines. The basis of these guidelines is Georgia’s participation in a number of international agreements. Historically, the process was also implemented in European countries, where according to the respondent, sexuality education didn’t bring anything but harm.

“Europe used to be a Christian culture, and it wasn’t normal for that culture for teachers and parents to talk with children about sex... I don’t think they had any referendums with people before introducing [sexuality education] ... It was introduced there through deceit or by force.. The same thing is happening here... It seems that you have to talk to children about sex, whether you want it or not, and it is up to you where you do it – in school or at home”...

Awareness is an issue for two respondents only. They work with youth; however they aren’t aware of goals of sexuality education and its content. Moreover, one of the respondents has a completely distorted view about contents of sexuality education.

“I don’t know if (pupils) are using these classes to study or to act the fool. School doesn’t need to provide yet another opportunity for pupils to act the fool, it doesn’t need a class where pupils will talk about sex, sexual positions and scenes”...

Notably, although majority of respondents were aware about sexuality education goals and contents, often NGO representatives aren’t familiar with initiatives of their colleagues for the promotion of sexuality education. They also lack awareness about the vision of the Ministry of Education about implementing sexuality education.

Within the context of their professional activity, majority of respondents have communication with youth. Based on that, they believe that youth lack awareness about issues of sexuality education. For example, adolescents often apply to the Center for Psychologic Assistance of Patriarchy for information or advice, as well as with very severe problems related to sexuality life.

“They don’t have a basic knowledge. I am amazed, don’t they have a mother or anyone?!”...

Therefore, they see the need to provide basic knowledge about issues of sexuality education to pupils within formal education.

Initiatives and projects implemented by civil sector

Majority of NGO representatives surveyed work in the field of advocacy for sexuality education. To promote sexuality education, they implement diverse projects like research (to prepare recommendations about sexuality education), organizing trainings, meetings or youth camps within informal education, cooperation with the Ministry of Education and associated public institutions (e.g. with the Teachers’ House, the Youth agency), etc.

In that regard, we must note a research performed in 2018 (Public Defender of Georgia, www.ombudsman.ge, 2019) about youth awareness and readiness to receive sexuality education. According to the research findings, the situation in the field of youth awareness is alarming.

“Many didn’t know the meaning of the word “contraceptive”... Expert had to explain words that she never thought needed explaining... I can’t say that we didn’t expect such results, however we got worse results than we imagined”...

Representatives of NGOs that work on sexuality education advocacy believe that informal education is an important area for the promotion of sexuality education. These organizations have a significant experience in organizing youth camps or trainings. This format is especially effective for youth to acquire knowledge about healthy lifestyle, reproductive health and safety, hygiene, violence, drug prevention and other issues. Informal education events are implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education, children and youth national center. It is possible to inform a significant part of youth within these events.

“We met with about 70000 young people within youth banks. We mostly promoted healthy lifestyle”...

According to them, among informal education events/activities, the practice of creating youth consultation centers is especially interesting. There youth can receive qualified information from trained med students about which organization works on certain issues of their interest, related to sexuality education.

Some NGOs work on creating and disseminating digital content– videos, charts, etc. on social media

“We are trying to focus on all issues equally, especially topics that are associated with certain health risks”...

It is important that in addition to schools, youth also receive information in different forms – “in a non-didactic way”.

“When they google themselves and find this information, I think it is very important”...

According to NGOs that specialize in sexuality education advocacy, information should be accessible to youth in terms of contents, language and from technical point of view.

“We are trying to create content using a simple language, e.g. since they don’t know what contraception is, we try to explain it whenever we can... For example, we are trying to help boys see why it is important for them to have information about menstruation, although they will never have it”...

One of the strategic areas that civil society focuses on is promotion of sexuality education through formal education. Therefore, organizations are actively working in different areas, including school, teachers, parents or other stakeholders. They have important initiatives in the areas of policy and practice. For example, we must note adaptation of UNESCO standards in partnership with the Teacher's Professional Development Center.

“We’ve already been able to prepare three independent standards for civic education teachers as well as for biology and natural sciences teachers, we adapted the standard mostly within the subject – Society and I... However, it is difficult to say whether or not this will be accepted and shared”...

NGO representatives discuss the importance of creating learning resources for sexuality education. Some of them proposed to create a peer education textbook with regards to sexual and reproductive health,²² which can be disseminated in print and online form.

“We took protection of personal data as a sexual and reproductive rights and we took advocacy of these issues online or offline... Although this is mostly for young workers and peer educators, it can be used as a resource”...

Civil society representatives are able to see the critical importance of parents, teachers, grade masters in sexuality education issues, so they propose interesting initiatives in this regard – they have created mobile apps for parents (FORPARENTS.GE) and teachers (FORTEACHERS.GE). Through these applications, they can provide children with age-appropriate, qualified information about healthy lifestyle and reproductive health. However, even though these apps have tens of thousands of unique viewers, unfortunately other representatives of NGO sector are not familiar with them.

From activities implemented by civil sector representatives, we must note cooperation with international organizations and foreign NGOs on women’s rights, reproductive health and other issues.

The respondent that does not work on reproductive health advocacy positively evaluates these activities and expresses a concern that they are fragmented.

Activities of NGOs that can be categorized as religious/conservative group are radically different. They are actively trying to resist initiatives that they think are harmful for youth.

“We are against initiatives that are a bomb and a mine for new generation... We removed transgender posters at some school, where they talked about democracy, liberalism, being different and being a transgender”...

Attitudes

The role and importance of sexuality education – threats/benefits of informing pupils about sexuality education issues

Majority of civil society representatives note the importance of sexuality education:

“Living life unaware of these things destroys people”...

Representatives of organizations that advocate for sexuality education view it as an important human right.

“Clearly, to us this is a rights issue”...

When speaking about the importance and the role of sexuality education, they especially focus on the serious threats and problems associated with lack of awareness. One of these problems is unwanted

²² Civil Development Agency (CIDA), “Peer education training guide”

pregnancy or abortion of an unwanted pregnancy, when youth often face important financial or social barriers. Due to these barriers, there is a risk that they are forced to turn to the so-called underground abortion services, which puts their life and health at risk. Lack of information about sexual relationships increases the risks of STIs. They believe that one of the most important aspects of sexuality education is understanding of private space by children (adolescents). Without it, there is a risk that children will become victims of violence, e.g. pedophilia.

“On of the important factors of sexuality education is perception of private space. I think that due to lack of this perception and knowledge, a child may continue to be a victim of pedophilia for months... Without being able to articulate it or realize what is going on, or be embarrassed. The child may not know how to protect himself/herself, s/he may not be able to report it to a parent or to law enforcement authorities... S/he may not be able to protect his/her own rights... This is the basics of why sexuality education is important especially for adolescents”...

Lack of awareness and having distorted information are important factors causing harmful practices. Majority of civil society representatives sees the importance and the need of sexuality education in the context of elimination of such practices. Among harmful practices, they especially note early marriage, child pregnancies, gender-biased sex selection...

“Research proves that young people lack information. Research also shows that sexuality education, i.e. provision of adequate information about these issues does not result in early sexual activity but rather, increases the level of responsibility”...

However, survey participants also included many public individuals that have radically different positions. According to them, liberal values and education has brought disastrous consequences, including single-sex marriage, adoption by single sex couples, surrogacy, etc. One of the respondents believes that this is related to sexual revolution, which is based on incorrect interpretation of Sigmund Freud's theory. Further, the respondent believes that majority of problems are caused by misinterpretation of freedom.

“From Christian point of view, freedom is owning oneself, being able to make one's own choice, as opposed to being under the influence and doing whatever you want... It is not owing to me, you or EU that people are free, neither it is due to NATO, Russia or Turkey... God gives us free will and we used it to be like animals, a piece of furniture or a human. A human is an image of God. Being a human entails having free will and choice. In short, the main problem is in values and the system of coordinates. So, sexuality education has led to early abortions and everything else”...

The respondents are talking about starting sexual activity at an early age, which has become a trend among youth. According to the respondents, this is due to sexuality education, liberal attitudes toward sexual relationships, and often it leads to mental or physical harm.

“It is not allowed to be a virgin at 16 years old... There are certain rituals of losing virginity, etc., but of course no one knows why. This is becoming like a tradition”....

One of the respondents underlined that it is necessary to give knowledge to youth and no one should be against it (which is exactly the position of another respondent); According to her, extreme caution should be exercised in this process and age-related peculiarities of a child should be taken into account. The respondent's arguments are as follows: in latent phased (11-12 years) children don't have any interest toward sexual life. Therefore, we shouldn't impose any irrelevant information on them (e.g. about sexual orientation). After 11-12 years, when secondary sexual characteristics start to develop, interest toward different aspects of sexual life becomes stronger. Children should overcome many crises (here the respondent provides an example of onanism) and if they have problems in this process, they will need assistance of professionals, which goes beyond the scope of a teacher's competencies. While (hormonal) changes associated with puberty are ongoing and interest toward sexual relationships becomes stronger, providing children with information about issues of sexuality education is quite risky. For example, conversations about STIs or means for preventing unwanted pregnancy may prompt adolescents to start sexual life.

"It is very important that these topics are discussed with a doctor, as opposed to, say, a civics teacher, whose knowledge is suspicious. Reputation is very important; it is important whether or not this person has an authority"...

"When a teacher starts talking about protection, the pulsation that already exists becomes stronger and – [children think] I'm already a grown up and I can do it... – The situation becomes a bridge that connects allowing an action and implementing the action"...

"These are rough examples but I still have to provide it – they are teaching girls how to put on a condom... Or how homosexuals have sex... This has a very bad influence on children. It incites interest and provokes passions that exist in every human at some level"...

According to one of the respondents, another negative result of open conversations about sexuality education is that children no longer feel ashamed. In the contemporary (liberal) society, shame is viewed as a complex, while in reality, according to the respondent, talking about such intimate issues "destroys" a person's spiritual life and honesty.

"When they discuss these topics with a child, disguised as science, this is very intimate (in Georgian language, we don't even have corresponding words), which means that the feeling of shame will be destroyed in children and certain passions will be provoked, including homosexuality and heterosexuality"...

According to respondents with religious/conservative orientation, if a person has any problems in sexual life, s/he may apply to a doctor, share the problem with a friend, but it will be completely artificial and wrong, if a parent decides to have a conversation about sexual life as soon as his/her child becomes 16, without any context and solely because "the time has come".

"We must agree that there is no need to talk about these things with children. It will do more harm than good"...

According to the respondent, when discussing issues of sexuality education with children, we must focus on self-restraint. This is the ability that distinguishes humans from animals. Unfortunately, it is natural for humans to have many sexual partners, i.e. from moral point of view – to cheat. However, education should help young people understand that this will be harmful to them, this will come back in the form of physical or mental (unprocessed emotions) problems or diseases.

“An animal cannot restrain itself and you cannot demand them to do so... You can’t tell them that they are dishonest and you can’t use such terms to talk about animals... They are unable to make a choice... Decent life is the most effective prevention”...

“They don’t teach them how to manage their passions... We should teach children morality, as opposed to sex. Sex is already an instinct for humans”...

Respondents realize that at questions that children start having at a certain stage need to be responded in a competent way – for example, questions about non-traditional relationships. However, they are against focusing on this issue in learning resources (school textbooks).

“Of course, there are non-traditional relationships and if they have questions about these relationships, they need to be answered. However, it doesn’t necessarily mean dedicating a separate chapter, separate paragraphs or books to it. I don’t think this is right”...

“If my 8-year old child asks me how children are born, why should I describe a sexual act? I’m just going to say that when a man and a woman love each other, they create a family and they have a child... My children already have information about the most important moments in that regard... And this happens naturally, in every epoch... Humans understood it, sometimes at a younger age and sometimes at an older age... What does it mean to provide this information professionally?!... It’s not math, it’s natural, these are instincts. I am deeply convinced that if a teacher shows an image of a sex organ through a projector, or if it places a poster of a sex organ and starts a conversation about female and male sex organs and what are differences between the two, this is a provocation, this is too much, no one needs to be taught these things... People will understand these things on their own”...

Respondents underline the importance of parents and teachers as a role model in sexuality education of adolescents. One of the respondents provided the following analogy in that regard:

“Some parents teach children curse words... He’s going to learn them anyways, so I might as well teach them... “He’s going to learn them anyways” – does this mean that I’ll teach them grammatically correct curse words?! I need to give them an example of what is correct... I know, you know and everyone knows that they’re going to teach curse words anyways”.

One of the respondents supports imposition of regulations in the process of sexuality education, just like gambling or drugs. If the can’t prohibit them entirely, then it must impose regulations. It is also important to teach children responsibility toward another person.

“I’m not saying that it should be prohibited entirely but there are some regulations, right?! In reality, we are losing these generations, they are dying from drugs, gambling... Everyone is

tense and more families are destroyed than created. Because of sexuality education, people know they have rights but do they know they also have obligations?!... And responsibilities?!"

The respondent clearly suggests that she is against introducing sexuality education in formal education, however she is also aware of Georgia's international obligations and commitments and understands that these commitments need to be fulfilled.

"I understand that there are some grants and you are forced to do it but we can't put our country at risk. Then do it without burning the steak or the pan... To our country, the archetype of Natsarkekia [character of a Georgian fairy-tale] is important – you must be smart, you can't beat the giant eve if you fight against him... Like with casinos, if there's a need to have (sexuality education), then it should exist with certain regulations... Even better if they prohibit it altogether"...

Another representative of the so-called religious/conservative group is even more radical. She is categorical against any conversation with children about sexuality education and she even thinks this is a crime.

"Those who think of themselves as parish, 99% of them thinks that it is a crime to talk to [children] about this topic"...

To her, one of the arguments is lack of terminology about sexuality life in Georgian language (in this case, Georgian language mostly uses Latin terms). She thinks this is due to the Christian culture. The society within Christian culture knows that talking about this topic is harmful in general and especially for children. This serves the purpose of provoking children to begin sexual activity early, as opposed to raising their awareness. According to respondent, this is confirmed by the example of European countries, where people begin sexual life in early age. These countries are facing acute demographic problems.

"Example of West shows that they began sexual life much earlier... They learned how to manage abortions. Abortions haven't decreased but rather, they are using medications for early abortion... Sexuality education has corrupted people even more worldwide (from my point of view as a Christian)... This science is pseudo-science for me, which negatively affects morals, reproduction... Nations have become dying nations in countries where sexuality education was introduced"...

Negative attitudes of the respondent are further intensified by the fact that she is aware of goals of comprehensive sexuality education and she believes it is categorically unacceptable to discuss issues related to different sexual orientation with children.

"Recently this has been coupled with the topic of homosexuality. No matter how hard we try, we can't separate the two because they are a package deal"...

Evaluation of measures implemented by the Ministry of Education

As noted earlier, civil society representatives that work on sexual education advocacy are more or less aware of measures implemented by the Ministry of Education for increasing awareness about sexual and reproductive health, education and services. Several NGOs continue to be actively involved in development of a policy document and the process of introducing novelties in the field of sexuality education in practice. Despite certain changes that in view of civil sector representatives are a step forward, their attitudes about the work of the government and more specifically, the Ministry of Education for promoting sexuality education is less positive. Although the Ministry is working to broaden the range of sexuality education issues taught to pupils, these efforts mostly focus on less sensitive issues.

“For example, now they’ve added early marriage, which is not a sensitive topic, so it was easier... The fact that the Ministry of Education has introduced some issues in the standards for school subjects is a major step forward at the education policy level. There is political will but the Ministry is facing great challenges – the problem of our public sector in general is that decisions are not made fast. It is difficult for them to make systemic decisions and they are being very careful”...

Important policy documents are also prepared – for example, a five-year youth strategy for 2020-2025. Youth organizations are also involved in strategy discussions. According to civil sector, all main issues of reproductive health will be presented in the strategy.

“I believe that some things will be included in the strategy quite well... Regions had a very good feedback about the strategy and essentially, we covered all components of reproductive health and everyone agrees that the education component is crucial”...

As noted earlier, according to NGO representatives, there has been a positive trend in incorporation of sexuality education issues in the field of formal education. However, according to some respondents, the Ministry should make bolder steps in that regard. It fails to properly assess readiness of the society to receive knowledge about this topic. It is therefore being too cautious.

“This is a policy issue. All parties had it in their election program. Therefore, they were extremely careful – they don’t want to upset anyone. In reality, the society is ready and the government shouldn’t be scared. It is almost like under a psychological pressure – we’ll lose identity... But in reality, this has nothing to do with sexuality education”...

Other representatives of the same sector don’t share this position. According to them, in view of sensitivity of the topic, education policy-makers need to be extremely careful, in order to avoid formation of negative public attitudes toward this issue.

“Ultra feminist groups will harm this cause. Even in European countries, this education is not referred to as sexuality education – we need a careful approach. Therefore, healthy lifestyle is the most adequate name for it. That way, we can avoid radical opinions”...

Challenges

Lack of awareness and misconceptions

Inconsistent attitudes towards sexuality education in the society are one of the main obstacles on the way to its introduction in formal education. Some civil sector representatives name lack of public awareness and stereotypical perceptions as one of the main reasons for the formation of negative attitudes.

“There is no information as to what this teaching entails... Just as they intimidate the masses with homophobia, they do so with this teaching as well”...

“They don’t know that it can be the means of protecting a child – if the child does not know what is unwanted touching, she or she won’t come to you and won’t tell you about it... Nobody in Georgia knows what sexuality education is, that it’s not a teaching of ‘sex techniques’ or some other nonsense like that”...

“Education about sexuality – even the society’s attitude toward this name varies. Parents, society do not know what it entails. They have distorted perceptions – they think it’s all about LGBT context, sex propaganda, and when children leave the room, they should immediately have sex”...

This view is supported by the fact that even one of our respondents that leads a very active social life, has a completely distorted view of the content of sexuality education (See page 2, Awareness).

Civil sector representatives consider parents and teachers as the main "players" in this context. Their awareness and adequate attitudes will substantially contribute to the introduction of sexuality education in the country. According to a 2017 study by one of the NGOs, there is some acceptance in parents about teaching sexuality education issues if these issues are delivered to the children in a proper, age and culturally relevant manner.

“There used to be a very difficult environment, issues about abortion, for example, were perceived very radically. Currently, level of readiness is higher among parents and teachers, as well as representatives of ethnic minorities, including men. If we show them what we do in the right way, parents will not object. It is important for them to have the right knowledge and some things will be reconsidered”...

According to the study participants, parents see a great threat in the fact that children receive distorted information from the internet and other media outlets and, generally, in the massive influence the internet (media) has on young people. Consequently, they prefer systemic and regulated provision of information to their children about sexual relationships, health and safety within the framework of formal education.

“Every parent, after all, wants what’s best for their children. They prefer this process to be systematic and regulated, rather than internet being the mass influence. That is why parents

are ready for sexuality education introduction in schools... They prefer their children to receive information from school, rather than receiving distorted information from the internet”...

However, it should be noted that the parents of boys and girls differ significantly in terms of openness.

“Boy’s parents were interested, because when the time comes, they would know what to do and how to help their children satisfy their needs... And girl’s parents did not even consider their children as sexual beings”...

“Often they make a distinction between girls and boys [...], that sex education is more important for one than the other”...

We must also mention skeptical attitude of one of the respondents towards the involvement of parents in the sexuality education of their children. In the respondent’s opinion, the state, the school should take on this responsibility.

“I created school for parents, but very few were interested, the involvement was very low. A parent cannot provide sexuality education to a child ”...

A respondent who actively interacts with the parents of pupils due to her profession has a different opinion. She says that she is aware of parental attitudes towards introduction of sex education in the formal education system and these attitudes are negative. The respondent notes that parents who were outraged by actions of clergy on May 17, 2012, are now seeking help because their underage children are under the influence of LGBT groups. The respondent recalls a case when parents expressed a serious resentment toward her for discussing a topic of reproductive system with an English-language biology textbook, which also contained some information about human sexuality. Parents asked her to focus on a different topic. The respondent underlines that within the society, there are groups with different values and these values should be respected and taken into account by formal education system.

“There are different groups, there are different people who believe that the soul is immortal. For those who believe it, want to save their souls... Today, for example, someone will come out and ask not to cut trees ... Ecologists fight about this... Someone will come out with concerns about food safety ... If your child was fed a bad bun at school, of course you would protest... And when your child is taught at school how to protect himself/herself during sex, some will object to it, because they think that their child does not need it yet... Because people have different opinions... And they have different value systems”...

Some civil society representatives consider the lack of reliable sources to be one of the important factors contributing to the lack of information about sexuality education issues for young people, as well as their parents or teachers.

Shortage of Georgian language resources is especially problematic (resources are available mainly in English). The problem of resources is acute in the regions, including those populated by ethnic minorities. Unlike the capital and larger cities, in some regions young people even have trouble

accessing the internet. They have no information about where or from whom they can get advice on issues like contraception, abortion and more.

"They share information about contraception or abortion informally"...

We must especially note the role of media in informing the public about healthy living, reproductive health, sexual relationship ethics and safety.

"Reliable sources and verified information is already a big problem in the Georgian media space, especially when it comes to issues related to sexuality"...

It is important to analyze the extent to which media outlets contribute to the spread of myths about sex education, what terminology they use when covering events related to it, what they appeal to, how they protect personal information, and so on. It is essential that journalists are aware of and follow the appropriate standards of coverage.

The process of introducing sexuality education: polarized attitudes in the society

According to some representatives of the civil sector, one of the critically important factors hindering the introduction of sexuality education in formal education is the varying attitudes of the society towards sexuality education. From this point of view, we must identify two different categories of positions: on the one hand, there is a difference between the positions within NGOs themselves that advocate for sexuality education, and, on the other hand, these NGOs are opposed by so-called religious/conservative or far-right groups with their radical positions (represented by individuals and organizations - the Orthodox Parents' Union, "Zneoba", "Georgian Idea"...). The latter even contributes to polarization of the society. For another set of respondents, it is unacceptable to express an extremely positive or negative attitude towards sexuality education (and not only).

"Their way of thinking is bound by a frame, a tunnel... They see the world in black and white, which is disastrous. God tells you, do not divide the world like this, he has created many colors... They say things that make me feel sick just by hearing them... The nation is stuck in its teenage, rebellious age"...

Representatives of organizations working to advocate for sexuality education see the causes of polarization in the lack of public education and stereotypical way of thinking, which leads to increased conservatism. They believe the Church plays an important role in this controversy, however, 70 years of experience as a Soviet country should be considered, during which sexual relationships were a complete taboo.

"As the older generation has grown up with these views, it is very difficult to demand from them [anything different] ... This is what these people have learned... We may not be able to change the views of a 70-year-old man"...

Representatives of the civil sector who are actively working on topics of gender equality, reproductive health, sexual minorities, sexuality education, etc., have a harsh experience of confronting a far-right group. According to them, forms and contents of behavior of this group are completely unacceptable.

"The propaganda that this (sexuality education) is a teaching of 'sex techniques' is very active... These myths probably come from the fact that they say incest was legalized in Sweden and some similar nonsense is spread by these groups... They are manipulating with religion, nationality, when in fact, they have completely different interests"...

Several respondents recall personal experiences when they were almost physically abused.

"We were discussing gender stereotypes in training and they rushed into the room... They almost crucified us... It was the first time in my life I felt so afraid"...

"Representatives of NGOs receive threatening messages on social media... Life threats and so on... Everyone has turned to violence... They vandalized our graffiti and filmed it"...

It should be noted that these respondents are angry not so much at the "perpetrators" but at the state authorities, which do not have an adequate response to this type of action.

"How does the system respond to such stunts?! ... I'm angry, people have freedom of expression, but it's quite simple - your right ends where someone else's begins... And where mine started, nobody finished anything there - to the contrary, the first message was that the training stopped"

"Emboldened by the state, they allow themselves to do these things"...

Civil society representatives working on advocacy point out that there are too many barriers even at the legislative level to start a legal dispute. It is obvious that the system fears the religious-conservative groups.

"Even some terms are an issue with the Ministry of Education... It's not because they don't agree with us... Because of fear and in an attempt to avoid possible aggression they are reluctant to cooperate on certain issues"...

The reasons for this fear are seen by some civil society members in perceptions about female sexuality. There is a fear in the society that sexuality education will threaten the control of women's sexuality. The title itself, "Comprehensive Education on Sexuality", suggests that gender equality, violence against women and other similar issues should be addressed in the context of sexuality education. Relevant UNESCO standard covers 7 different topics, including all major areas of women's reproductive health and rights.

"There is clearly a double standard regarding female sexuality ... When they talk about 'teaching sex', immorality, it is mainly about girls... Because boys already have sex at this age ... In fact, society is afraid that a woman will find sexual freedom at an early age"...

Regarding boys, civil society representatives also mention other, equally important problems - boys are victims of certain kind of violence, as they are encouraged/forced to start having sex at an early

age and have as many sexual partners as possible (*"It is precisely patriarchy that oppresses everyone equally"...*). Sexuality education is the very tool that can be used to deal with these problems. And that is why it faces such strong resistance from far-right groups.

"The wave against sexuality education is similar to the wave against the adoption of the anti-discrimination law or before the Pride Parade"...

One of the respondents says that gender equality is a made-up problem. According to him, there are cases of violence against both women and men around the world and Georgia is no exception in this regard.

"We are all equal in dignity before God ... Even more so are women, with their multifunctional thinking, their multifunctionality... All this is very artificial and it is made up by NGOs"...

This respondent also addresses the issue of sexual minorities as she tries to distance herself from radical assessments of the far-right group. However, she considers non-traditional sexual orientation as a problem and talks about the psychological basis of problems arising in sexual or other sphere of life. According to her, this is also the reason why some social groups are radicalized.

"I do not think this is normal... Is it natural to have two right legs? Or two left legs? You could and it may be better than not having legs at all, but it's not natural. The basis of everything lies in childhood... There are certain needs from 0 to 6 years, and they are not met, for example, the need for idealization... Or the need to be like someone else... and Mirroring - if the parent did not validate you, then no matter who applauds you, you don't feel validated"...

As suggested by a particularly radical far-right respondent, the topic of gender and sexual minorities is the cornerstone of polarization of the society. The respondent focuses on these issues when discussing different positions in society. Advocating for sexuality education, she says, is an action that is driven not by people's sincere beliefs, but by the fact that it is a so-called mainstream trend. In contrast, people who oppose the introduction of sexuality education in the school system and in particular, the introduction of a new subject – Society and I - act on the basis of their own religious beliefs and ideology. From the perspective of this belief or ideology, it is completely unacceptable to openly discuss the content of sexuality education with learners, especially in the primary grades, when children are not ready to understand new concepts correctly. Among these contents is the difference between gender and sex. The respondent is outraged by methods they planned to use to explain this difference (inviting a transgender person to a lesson and offering as a supplementary material of "Compass and Compasito" to teachers, which contains an exercise about change of gender of fairy tale characters). It is also unacceptable, for example, to explain to a child where s(he) should not be touched in order not to become a victim of violence.

Challenges in the process of implementing sexuality education, within the context of education system (policy, learning resources, training of personnel)

Representatives of organizations working on advocacy for sexuality education also see a number of challenges in the education system itself, which affect the process of implementing sexuality education. These include teacher preparedness, teaching methods and forms, learning resources, and learning environment.

Sexuality education issues are currently taught in several subjects. These are Civic Education, Biology, Society and I, and Our Georgia. Among them, civic education textbooks are especially criticized.

“Textbooks for the ninth and tenth grades of civic education need to be burned, they were published in 2012 and it’s simply harmful for children to learn from them”...

A respondent with radical religious/conservative views, talks about the problem of educational resources. However, her pathos is completely different. She strongly criticizes (expresses concern about) the resources recommended by the Council of Europe, which were used by the Ministry of Education of Georgia as a guide for teachers.

“Teachers wouldn’t have found this information anywhere but in “Compass and Compasito”... When it comes to gender and sex, children wonder: what is it? And teachers have to explain it with the help of the textbook introduced by the Ministry of Education of Georgia, and say that it’s not about gender but about who you want to be... and they tell this to teenagers, this is a disaster”...

Among the forms of teaching, civil society representatives support innovative and informal methods that can be adapted based on the experience gained in informal education. There might be some inconvenience when discussing sexuality education issues in formal education format with learners in early stages of puberty, however the teacher should be able to shift the conversation into another area and give students scientific knowledge.

“With the sandwich method, I start to talk about something and then suddenly I mention, for example, that some contraceptives can prevent pregnancy, but they don’t provide protection against STIs. And then I continue talking... And I know for sure that they will memorize it”...

According to civil society representatives, challenges related to teacher preparedness and competencies are especially serious. In general, teachers’ career growth system is not established, it has been changed many times. Recently, with cancellation of the teachers’ professional development scheme, the motivation of teachers to carry out additional activities outside the academic process and spend extra time on acquiring new competencies, has been decreased. Without it, they won’t feel ready to teach about sexuality education.

“Sometimes we even laughed when teachers skipped some topics or told us some nonsense (during trainings) ... Teaching by incompetent teachers can do more harm than good”...

According to them, teacher training is a very difficult process, because it involves not only acquisition of knowledge, but also understanding of values, changes in the value system.

"Factual knowledge alone is not enough. It is important that teachers themselves have the right attitude towards these issues"...

Representatives of the civil sector point out that the school administration has an important role in the introduction of sexuality education.

"No matter how we work with teachers, if the school principal is not ready to let this inside his space and have communication with the parents, there is no use"...

NGO cooperation with the Ministry of Education

Cooperation of civil sector with the Ministry of Education remains a challenge. It lacks intensity and stability. Most NGOs do not have the experience of such cooperation, most organizations are not even aware of the Ministry's initiatives (for example, the introduction of the subject "Society and I"). Only few (2-3) organizations are involved in the introduction of sexuality education.

"Lack of such cooperation is disappointing... Sharing experiences would be very good, even about what can be adapted and how"...

According to the representatives of these organizations, without political will, their efforts will be in fact ineffective.

"We could create resources, disseminate them and so on... without political will, there is no use... This is also an obstacle"...

It should be noted that the experience of the center "Tanadgoma" is provided as an example of a somewhat successful cooperation with the Ministry of Education.

"Tanadgoma" has a lot of experience in this regard, working with the Ministry of Education itself, and we have really often shared with each other information about barriers that we faced, that we have to advocate for each and every topic, in order for the topic to be introduced"...

"Tanadgoma" works effectively with decision-makers"...

Civil society representatives emphasize the need for a dialogue, not only between individual NGOs but between NGOs and the Ministry of Education. At this stage, the work of NGOs is fragmented and has only a local impact at best. Coordination between organizations is lacking and, in many cases, they are not even informed about each other's projects.

"What's the point of having one NGO publish a guideline that others won't use because they don't know it needs to be read, they don't know it exists and they don't know where it exists"...

Religious-conservative group representative is not very optimistic about cooperation. According to her, due to radically different values and opinions, it is impossible to come to an agreement. It is impossible to overcome polarization, it is kind of a struggle in which one side should prevail.

"We cannot agree... You have to win"...

The respondent recalls one negative experience, when religious groups tried to compromise and removed religious symbols (icons, prayers) from schools. However, Christian values have been replaced by liberal ones, which, in his view, are harmful for youth. On the other hand, it is impossible for a school to be free from values and ideology. That is why it is important to "win" and reinforce "true, traditional" values in schools.

"There is a void that will be filled by something ... and if you do not fill that void with kindness ... It's not like you can remove icons and there will be an empty wall... Something else will be hung in their place ... If you take down the Georgian flag, then the flag of Russia, or the US, or the European Union will be hung in its place... It's not possible for school not to have any values and to teach a little bit about this, a little bit about Christ, a little bit about Islam and so on, it can't happen. There is no such thing as neutral ... we adopted liberal LGBT ideology in the name of neutrality ... the school must have true values"...

According to the respondent, it is legitimate for the Georgian society to want to strengthen the traditional Christian values in schools as the education system core, because traditionally, such cores used to be established in monasteries. Christianity is the most tolerant religion, Christian ethics does not oppress any other confessions and ideologies, which is currently done by the ideology disguised as liberalism.

"For example, now that they have adopted a certain code, it says that if you don't allow children to develop the way they want to, you will be at risk of having the child taken away from you... A Christian would not do something like that... The ideology that's coming now tells me that things need to be sorted out and we need to reach an agreement. Education system should be in the hands of Christians, like it was during the times of the most powerful Georgian king, when different groups lived well. Similarly, they'll live well [if the control] is in our hands"...

According to the respondent, the Ministry of Education is trying to create the illusion of cooperation by pretending to make some compromises. However, in reality nothing changes and the positions of the religious-conservative group are becoming weaker, the education system is becoming less national and Christian. The process is merely "packaged" as democratic by presence of representatives of the religious-conservative group in different commissions. Creating an illusion of collaboration when ideas are not actually shared is even more offensive to the respondent but she is reluctant to refuse to communicate.

"It is impossible for an LGBT activist and an archbishop, who are sitting in different rooms, to work on education system together. It is an absurd and a mockery. Actually, they are mocking

us, because it is in their hands. If it was in our hands, we might have listened more... Unfortunately, they are just solidifying their positions. I'm not saying we should end communication. Because we have a relationship, we are still holding some things together. But we should not have high hopes ... we are being excluded; I believe that we are"...

Recommendations

The role of schools in raising awareness of pupils about sexual health issues and helping them understand their rights and responsibilities

Representatives of organizations working in the field of sexuality education advocacy believe that it is crucial to provide youth with knowledge about issues like healthy lifestyle, ethics of sexual relationships, sexual and reproductive health, etc. It is important to regulate sexuality education as a system, in order to guarantee appropriate provision of information. Political will and systemic vision are prerequisites for introducing sexuality education in schools, which in turn will ensure that youth is provided with high-quality education.

Although civil society is actively working in the field of youth sexuality education and is implementing a number of interventions (while resources are quite limited), its efforts are not as effective, especially in the regions, where formal education is the only source of information. Further, informal activities of NGOs make it difficult to control quality, as there are many civil society organizations that are working on sexuality education issues and each has their own vision/way of doing things.

As noted earlier, respondents with religious/conservative orientation (two respondents) are against introduction of sexuality education in the school education system. Therefore, their actions and recommendations are directed toward reducing the harm brought on by youth awareness. For example, one respondent (with especially radical views) supports removing the paragraph about reproductive system from anatomy textbook. According to her, schools (and higher education institutions) have a significant impact on formation of human values and worldview. Therefore, abusing them as ideological weapons will cause irreparable harm not only for individuals but for the entire country.

"School has a very big leverage. We see that children from the same school or university share the same ideology. Those who graduate from Vasadze's school are mostly conservatives, while those who graduate Bendukidze's school are liberals... (School) provides ideology rather than education"...

This particular respondent recommends revising education policy in general, instead of introducing sexuality education. According to her, education goals and declared values of the system are the starting point. If these values are based on national and religious values, as opposed to different

international agreements, the education system and the entire country will be able to develop in the right way.

“First of all, we must say that we are independent. As Ilia once said, we should belong to ourselves... We receive recommendations, advice but we are independent... Independence, as opposed to some guidelines, will help us find the right way.”

Raising awareness

According to civil society representatives, increasing acceptability of parents and the society in general is an important prerequisite for successful implementation of sexuality education. As noted earlier, certain positive trends exist in that regard, however more systemic work is needed from the state, the Ministry of Education and schools, to ensure that as many parents as possible have correct information about what sexuality education is.

“First of all, correct messages are important, that sexuality education doesn’t entail teaching ‘sex techniques’ or some other nonsense”...

Informal education will also help increase public awareness (in parallel with formal education component).

What should be taught

According to respondents that support implementation of sexuality education, youth need to have medical knowledge (at the anatomy level) about the structure of reproductive system and its functions. One of the respondents with religious/conservative orientation shares this view. According to her, physiological issues need to be examined more in-depth than what is envisaged by today’s program. It is important to teach basics of genetics and embryology. All of this should be accompanied with moral/ethical issues: understanding the importance of sexual relationships and family; values of honesty and self-restraint (not necessary from religious but from medical perspective).

“One chapter should be dedicated to importance of sexual relationships in people’s lives and the importance of family. Family consists of a mother, a father and children. Family is purity, honesty, giving some things up, compromising... It’s better to exercise self-restraint than be unrestrained... I can provide a list of many somatic diseases brought on by lack of self-restraint... I won’t mention immortality of the soul. This is not my topic. Someone may not have appropriate knowledge and they talk about their concerns”...

Respondents that support implementation of sexuality education also note that beyond biological, physiological or medical knowledge associated with sexual relationships, there are a number of important aspects – emotional aspects of sexual relationships, responsibilities, attitudes, opinions, for example about sexual orientation, which should be discussed within sexuality education.

“...To avoid psychological collapse of a person, who will discover that s/he has a different orientation”...

Although young people are especially interested in one of the major issues of sexuality education – pleasure, many places including schools lack readiness to discuss this topic. Parents and the society in general prefer to provide information to youth about health issues and avoiding violence, i.e. less sensitive topics. However, this promotes stigmatization of the topic and requires a special caution in that regard.

“This doesn’t happen only in Georgia. In the U.S. they are joking about it: they scare children so much that they think they’ll die if they have sex”...

Avoiding this stigma requires age and context-appropriate, balanced approach.

Who should teach

Representatives of NGOs that support sexuality education believe that involvement of qualified personnel, teachers is especially important. The question of who should teach sexuality education may have different answers – biology teacher, civics teacher, external experts, psychologists who are familiar with age-related peculiarities of children, have knowledge about different methods/approaches to learning.

“If it were up to me, I would only allow psychologists to deliver this subject. So far, it should not be allowed for ordinary teachers to teach [sexuality education]”...

According to one of the religious/conservative respondents, although biology teachers can teach issues of sexuality education, involvement of psychologists would be most appropriate if sexuality education is taught in an informal setting, in the form of a consultation.

“Every year many psychologists graduate and they don’t know where to go, neither do they have jobs ... They can be trained in this area – to have conversation with adolescents. Of course, their moral, values are equally important. If I am a mess and I’ve had nine husbands, I can’t teach you what to do... I mean, setting an example is very important”...

In any case, training or retraining of teachers is important. This is a systemic issue. In consideration of constantly changing professional development system for teachers, it is unclear in which component (stage, level) or in what form (training, online module...) it should happen. However, clearly the process of training/retraining should address not only knowledge but also conceptual issues. It is important to raise awareness of teachers, for them to understand their own values.

“It is important that teachers themselves have the right values and attitudes toward these issues. Raising their awareness is necessary”...

Before sexuality education is integrated in the curriculum, teachers should be ready for this process. One of the ways of ensuring their readiness is creating adequate resources/guides for teachers. These resources should take into account peculiarities of a concrete subjects. It should include relevant

activities, instruction time in hours, etc. Some organizations are working with the Teachers' Professional Development Center to create such resources.

"Only textbooks are not enough. Teachers should know how to talk to pupils"...

Some respondents have concrete recommendations about subjects where sexuality education issues can be integrated. Although most of these issues are integrated in biology ("information that will remove the menstruation stigma, explain that this is a normal process, etc. should be provided in a style of scientific information"...). Civic education as a multifaceted subject provides an opportunity for broad discussions about relevant issues related to human rights. Another argument that these respondents provide is age and profession of civics teachers (they are usually younger).

"Economists teach it, lawyers teach it... These topics can be discussed effectively... I think it is more appropriate to discuss issues like HIV-AIDS and the associated stigma within civic education".

One of the respondents has a different view about age of individuals involved in sexuality education. According to the respondent, a person should reach the age of 30 – the age of personal formation – to be able to teach others.

"I would impose an age limit – 30 years or older. Until then, they need to study. Why should I be a director or a president or something else at the age of 20, when a person under the age of 30 is unable to give, they only take the knowledge, like vampires... They may be geniuses but they cannot give... At the age of 30, a person accepts himself/herself the way s/he is"...

What should be taught

According to some respondents, preparing adequate learning resources is a prerequisite for introducing sexuality education. To that end, cooperation with the Ministry of education is required, in order for textbooks to contain information that corresponds with relevant scientific knowledge.

"Certainly, new books are needed... We need to advocate with the Ministry to include at least some component in the ninth-tenth grade civic education textbooks, at the very least, stigma about HIV-AIDS is very important"...

It is also important to consider cultural characteristics and mentality of the society. In this case, teachers, parents and pupils will have more acceptability toward teaching resources.

"If we take German or other European textbooks and just translate them, nothing good will come out of it. They have a completely different mentality. Textbooks should be tailored to our mentality"...

The guide should be created with the involvement of several different professionals, who will study experience of the West, European guides and based on that, they will prepare a document tailored to Georgian mentality and culture.

In view of contemporary (and possibly, very unfortunate) trend, according to which younger generation is not interested in books and prefers other sources of information, it is important to create different types of resources – smaller videos.

“Only a few people read books in schools. These children aren’t reading anything. Someone will see a video and share with others”...

At what age should sexuality education be taught?

Respondents that support sexuality education refrain from providing a concrete age for teaching sexuality education to children. According to them, “individual context” is far more important than age, as it may indicate the need to receive information. However, according to one of the respondents, within the format of formal education for under 12-year-olds, it is not advisable to include these topics in school textbooks.

Some respondents point to a higher risk and say that sexuality education and more specifically, healthy lifestyle can be integrated in the 11th or 12th grades only, with biology. It is possible that these respondents are not informed about school curriculums, according to which biology is no longer mandatory in the 12th grade. It should be noted that the respondent is not informed about sexuality education goals.

“It may be physiology, there’s not need to have sexology as a separate subject... It can be a subject about mental/physical health of an individual, what this health depends on, that healthy living is the most important thing”...

The form of teaching

Opinions of respondents about format of introducing sexuality education in schools varies. Some recommend sharing Western experience – in particular, a Scandinavian one, according to which sexuality education should not be introduced as a separate subject, but rather, be integrated in all subjects that are somewhat associated with it. Currently, the Ministry of Education is working in that regard and it mostly focuses on the following three areas: biology, natural sciences and civic education.

“Any issue can be viewed within the context of human rights, as well as within purely medical or biological context... Therefore, it is important that these issues are delivered in each subject according to relevant standard”...

“Appropriate approaches should be used in every subject, at the level of values”...

“Information should be integrated in the learning process”...

Respondents support introduction of informal elements in formal education field. To some, sexuality education is a prerogative of informal education.

"It is important to enrich formal education with informal components"... "I don't think we'll lose anything if we transfer learning methods from informal to formal education. It is more likely that this will benefit us... I haven't been in school for a long time, however being an expert of informal education and having appropriate experience helps me a lot to adequately plan and conduct my lessons"...

An additional argument that supports this is the problem of protecting confidentiality during a formal lesson, attended by 25-50 learners. They may hear information provided by teachers but choose not to ask any questions.

"When there are 30 children in class, even if you're very much interested in protection, you may still not ask this question because you don't know how your classmates might react... We cannot talk about introducing sexuality education without addressing confidentiality"...

"School should ensure additional space for individual meetings."

"Some are interested in some things, others aren't... Some have a particular problem, others have a different one"...

All of the above suggests that careful approaches to implementing sexual education are required.

"...We shouldn't harm children more by introducing [sexuality education]... By raising these issues, the problem of bullying may become more severe"...

Some civil society representatives mentioned Tanadgoma in this context and positively evaluates its gradual, moderate approaches.

Although he doesn't welcome introduction of sexuality education in schools, one of the respondents supports use of elements of informal education, in case of an urgent need. According to him, it may require certain funds from the school budget but it would be good if the school invites a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a doctor or a sexologist, in order to allow learners to discuss different issues of sexual relationships with professionals individually or in small groups.

"If this is the assignment and if they won't accept us without it, of course it would be more appropriate for the state to do it. These topics can be introduced in school but in an informal manner... Then everyone will calm down... A priest's child has problems just like a liberal's child does... It doesn't matter, they both need help"...

As noted earlier, a respondent with radical religious/conservative (far-right) views was also surveyed. She is categorically against introduction of sexuality education in schools in any way or form.

Measures implemented by NGO sector for supporting the process of implementing sexuality education

Some civil society representatives positively evaluate the work of NGO sector – many things are done in terms of informal education, online platforms, research. In some cases, this is a real fight, at the expense of one's health, however without the state these efforts will not be effective.

"They have some meeting, adopt some policy document... Yes, this is important, they say, but they don't do anything more... No matter how beautiful it looks on paper, they're not doing anything... I work on issues of sexuality education for persons with disabilities but [the state] is not doing anything there... I am civil sector, I can post, I can appear in media, I can fight, but if there's no will from the government... I guess, I'll continue yelling, we don't have any other tools of activism"...

Because of this problem, civil society is trying to advocate for implementation of sexuality education at the international level, using international human rights tools. There's some experience to that end.

"For example, CEDAW recommendations required the State to introduce age-appropriate sexuality education within the formal education system... After this recommendation, they started working on the standards for Society and I and integrating certain issues in the subject of civic education"...

Some respondents highlight the need to have a dialogue with involvement of all relevant organizations. The issue of creating a network or a platform is also raised, through which it will be possible to disseminate information about individual NGOs. To increase sensitivity toward sexuality education topics, it is important to broaden the group of experts that work on this issue. Only then will it be possible to achieve the shared goal – implement sexuality education in formal education system.

"To me the most important thing is a dialogue, with everyone's involvement"...

"I think we're missing one thing – when I write about one issue, it is important that everyone else talks about it the same way and disseminates the information using all means available"...

One respondent with religious/conservative views talked about strengthening civil sector and parents' movements. However, instead of introducing sexuality education in schools, her goal is to provide learners with academic knowledge about these issues and ensure their moral upbringing.

"I believe civil sector should be strengthened, including parents' movements... I cannot compete with any parent, as they want what's best for their children... Academic knowledge, spirituality, moderacy – I think this Triade will be the best"...

According to another respondent, who supports introduction of sexuality education in schools, civil sector should work on this sensitive topic based on shared principles – from language, form and content point of view. Unfortunately, sometimes there are disagreements.

“Agreement needs to be reached among NGOs, it is important to ensure balance, moderation... Far-right groups are ruining the cause”...

Some respondents express readiness for a more intensive cooperation with the Ministry, however choosing the right strategy is required.

“I don’t know what they are going to do, but I will gladly get involved in all processes that the Ministry will have in this area”...

“The only way is Tanadgoma’s way. It is working effectively with decision-makers”...

An important civil society contribution would be to create teaching resources for interactive lessons – e.g. videos. Civil society can also help strengthen the role of the Youth Agency – it is an important platform for systemic cooperation.

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Annex

Table 1: Indicators of sexuality education in 26 European countries

| | Compulsory sexuality education was introduced in | Minimum age for receiving sexuality education | Minimum standard for sexuality education |
|-----------------|--|---|--|
| Austria | 1970 | 10 | + |
| Belgium | 1995 | 6 | + |
| Bulgaria | | 11 | |
| Cyprus | | 14 | |
| Czech Republic | 1970 | 7 | + |
| Denmark | 1970 | 12 | + |
| Estonia | 1996 | 10 | + |
| Finland | 1970 | 7 | + |
| France | 1998 | 6 | + |
| Germany | 1968 | 9 | + |
| Greece | 1995 | 6 | |
| Hungary | 1975 | 10 | |
| Iceland | 1975 | 11 | + |
| Ireland | 2003 | 6 | |
| Italy | | 14 | |
| Latvia | 1998 | 11 | + |
| Lithuania | | | |
| Luxemburg | 1973 | 6 | + |
| The Netherlands | 1993 | 13 | |

| | Compulsory sexuality education was introduced in | Minimum age for receiving sexuality education | Minimum standard for sexuality education |
|----------|--|---|--|
| Norway | 1974 | 12 | + |
| Poland | | 12 | + |
| Portugal | 1999 | 5 | + |
| Slovakia | 1996 | 12 | |
| Spain | | 14 | |
| Sweden | 1955 | 6 | + |
| UK | | 5 or 7 | + |

Source Parker et al. 2009; Ketting et al., 2018

