



Young Men: Sexuality and Sex Education Health Promotion and Prevention in the Area of Sexual and Reproductive Health for Young Men Coming from Different Social and Cultural Backgrounds

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This policy letter presents the main results of the project on “Health Promotion and Prevention in the Area of Sexual and Reproductive Health: Developing Strategies to Promote the Participation of Young Men”, a study that was conducted at the European Centre and financially supported by the following Austrian institutions: Fonds Gesundes Österreich, Bundesministerium für Soziale Sicherheit, Generationen und Konsumentenschutz (Männerpolitische Grundsatzabteilung), Magistrat der Stadt Wien (Bereichsleitung für Strukturentwicklung), Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung (Abteilung Jugend, Generationen, Bildung und Wissenschaft), Amt der Tiroler Landesregierung (Landes-sanitätsdirektion).

I. Background

The number of HIV-infections in Austria is currently stable with one or two cases a day, but infections with other sexually transmitted diseases such as hepatitis, syphilis, gonorrhoea are on the increase in Austria. Regarding the number of teenage pregnancies, Austria has an average rate compared to other OECD countries. From several studies, it is known that boys tend to practice unsafe sex unless the girl insists on using a condom. People’s knowledge of, as well as value and approach towards sexuality, sex, and partnership are important for their ability to protect themselves against sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted parenthood.



It is more difficult to address boys by sex education programmes than girls

Health promotion and prevention in the area of sexual and reproductive health is therefore an important task of non-school based youth work. While it has been easier to address young females by information campaigns, information material and counselling programmes, it has been more difficult to reach boys in this way. Young boys make use of reproductive and sexual health services less frequently than girls do and show less interest in written information material on sex education. Evidence from research shows that young people with education deficits are more likely to engage in risky behaviour. Many children from migrant or working class families are disadvantaged in their access to education and leave the school system at the age of 15.

The aim of the study was to enhance the understanding of adolescent boys' needs in the area of sexual and reproductive health, taking into consideration their socio-economic and cultural background with a focus on migrants.

What are the sex education programmes from which especially young males benefit and how can these best be tailored to this specific target group and be provided within the framework of existing non-school based youth work?

2. Structure and Methodology

To study these questions, different qualitative research methods were adopted. First, a literature study and interviews with experts in the federal states of Vienna, Styria, and Tyrol provided a comprehensive overview of the practical work that is presently done in the field of sex education as part of youth work or programmes for boys. In addition, we analysed a selection of national and international good practice examples of sex education and prevention in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Main selection criteria were innovativeness, gender sensitivity and the provision of evaluation results. A core part of the study was a survey of boys' views, for which heterosexual youth from different social and cultural backgrounds and of different age (12-18 years old) were interviewed (49 interviews). According to the focus of the study, about half of them came from migrant families. In addition, three focus groups that brought together a total of 19 girls were conducted. The survey enquired into young people's attitudes towards gender roles, sexuality and partnership. Questions were also asked about, which information sources are used by young people and how they evaluate them.

The survey was carried out in 2006/07.

3. Which Extracurricular Sex Education Programmes are Available to the Male Youth of Austria?

In Austria, there is a need for more prevention offers for young men

The experts interviewed for this study all agreed that, in spite of the numerous activities of extracurricular youth work, the existing sex education and prevention programmes should be expanded and enlarged. The issue under investigation does not seem to get the attention it would deserve, compared, for instance, with programmes for violence prevention. Services for young men are provided by different institutions, most of which are small or medium-sized organisations. The degree to which they are affiliated with institutions such as the municipality or the church, determines their financial situation, but it is obvious that many of them have problems of funding. The vast majority of providers mainly depend on project money on an annual basis. To be able to meet demands, institutions heavily rely upon volunteer work and their staffs' readiness to sometimes accomplish under- or even unpaid work. Lack of continuous and sufficient project funding and job insecurity lead to high staff turnover resulting in loss of know how. Additionally, necessary training for staff and volunteers can rarely be afforded, which also affects the quality of non-school based sex education programmes. In this respect, an important finding from the study is that the criterion of innovativeness for granting money often has the detrimental effect that projects, which have been successful for some time, frequently are not successful to find the money for continuation.

Networking and financing of institutions is still to be improved

Another finding is that there is the need for improving the exchange of experience and methods as well as co-operation among the different institutions involved. Currently, there are only few networks across the federal states, and hardly any international networks. On the local level, exchange among service providers is not only hindered by competition, but also by the lack of personal resources, organisational structures and funding.

More tailor-made programmes are required to fit the needs of the various target groups

In the interviews, many experts requested that more uniform quality criteria and guidelines for Austria should be developed to improve quality of services and overcome fragmentation. Experts also stated that it would be beneficial if more male counsellors would participate in the programmes targeted for young men. In addition, more programmes should be tailored to fit needs of specific target groups such as to accommodate the needs of migrants from different regional or social origin.



4. Which are the Young People's Notions of Masculinity, Femininity and Partnership?

The experts interviewed for this study confirmed that the male gender role needs to be addressed explicitly when working with young males. Among the boys, highly traditional views of men and women are still widespread in some groups. These notions are perpetuated by the norms that dominate in the peer groups, and the boys are under considerable pressure to act according to these norms, which include “coolness”, physical strength, sexual activity, and heterosexuality. In general, boys find it hard to admit that they lack information.

Many experts have experienced that the communication between girls and boys is rather inefficient. The male gender role demands predominance of the boys in relationships and sexual contacts. It also ascribes the sexually active part to the males who should, furthermore, know how to act appropriate in sexual encounters. The experts describe the boys' approach to sex as being rather technical and performance-oriented. Asked to name characteristics a man should have, interviewed young males stated “to be of good character”, which is expressed by not being an alcoholic, not taking substances, not being violent, and by being faithful to one's wife. It is particularly the Austrian youth that emphasise that the “perfect man” should accept women as equal and should act accordingly. These young people finally also think that a man should achieve something in life, and they mostly understand such achievement in conventional terms – referring to education, work, the money one earns, marriage and children.

Communication among men or boys was also discussed and the boys said that it was less deep and emotional when compared to their communication with girls while the young and adolescent girls of the focus groups gave communication with boys a rather poor rating.

Traditional role models are widespread among attendants of secondary grammar or vocational schools as well as among migrant youth The male and female youth attending secondary grammar or vocational schools as well as migrant youth often had rather conservative attitudes towards relationships claiming, for instance, that man should be the leader or head in a relationship and that virginity was a value worth preserving for the husband (or the “right one”). Those girls and young women that in the discussion groups pictured the ideal male in traditional terms, qualified this statement by disapproving of a behaviour that was too dominant.

5. What Do Young People Know about the Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Unwanted Pregnancies?

Most young males know about the protective function of condoms but risky behaviour often prevails

The interviews with young males showed that most of them know that condoms protect against conception and contagion and that using a condom was more important when contacting strangers than in relationships that had lasted for some time. Only few of the answers indicate a lack of information or the belief in sexual myths. The latter are mostly found among boys from non-Austrian parents. In the interviews with boys, several statements hinted to the fact that boys often do not act according to what they know in principle. The experts interviewed confirmed that risky behaviour is a substantial problem and stated that closing the gap between theoretical knowledge and actual behaviour is one of the most important tasks of prevention in this field. It is known from other studies that boys frequently put on a condom only when the girl insists on it. However, the group discussions with the girls indicated that using a condom correctly was seen as the male partner's responsibility.

6. Where Does Young People's Knowledge of Sexuality and Prevention Come from and How Do they Evaluate their Information Sources?

Young men use the new media to visit pornographic rather than sex education websites

The interviews with experts confirmed that for boys the new media are the most important information source, with the Internet as predominant source. Not surprisingly, pornographic websites seem to attract much more attention than web sites offering material related to sex education. According to the experts interviewed, parents do not play much of a role as information source regarding sexuality, but the peer group certainly rates as an essential information source.

For many boys, especially from migrant families, it is taboo to talk of sexuality with their parents

The interviews with the boys show that relevance and utilization of the various information sources differ according to age, sex, as well as social and cultural background. For Austrian boys, their parents play a bigger role than for migrants. In most migrant families it is taboo to talk of sexuality and the children's relationship to their parents is described as more reserved. But there also seem to be quite a few Austrian boys who find it embarrassing to talk with their parents about sexual issues. For the girls in the discussion groups, however, the mothers and some older female relatives represent an important information source, and this also holds for migrant girls.



Sex education at school needs to be complemented by other offers Many Austrian and migrant interviewees from all levels of society and from the different federal states criticised that sex education at school was rather boring and too much focused on biological-technical aspects. But they also reported about experiences with very committed teachers. Several boys report about embarrassing situations when sex education at school denied gender- and/or culture-specific needs.

Boys' friends are not a trustworthy source of information Boys said that they talked to their male peers about sex, but, different from the experts' appraisal, that they did not consider this kind of information to be particularly trustworthy. Many of them pointed out that this communication mostly consisted of jokes and boasting. This is in contrast to the young females who spoke of their girlfriends as an important and useful information source.

Leaflets and books play a rather minor role in this field. The small number of male informants who explicitly mentioned that they profited from the print media were Austrian and at least 16 years old. Television and films are often used for learning the social behaviour of men and women. Many of the young men, even younger ones, finally said that they frequently consumed pornography in the company of friends. Such material can nowadays be easily accessed on the Internet. However, the boys knew that pornography was only of limited use to inform them about sexuality. All the boys knew little about availability of counselling services. Most of them had only heard of the youth telephone helpline "Rat auf Draht".

Boys know little about counselling services and feel sceptical about them Some of them participated in non-school sex education workshops facilitated in youth centres and reported about it mostly in a positive way.

7. What Would Young People Like to Know about Sexuality?

According to the experts, young men are less interested in information on the prevention of pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases than in information about sexual development as such and sexual practices. It is very important for boys to experience "normal" sexual development and to have sexual experiences early enough. As for sexually transmitted diseases, the young ones primarily want to know how to identify them. Many boys think that girls are responsible for prevention.

12-14-year old boys need basic information, older ones have more specific questions The interviews with the young men show that the youngest boys (12 years old) are more interested in basic information such as the onset of puberty or what exactly happens when one has sex. Boys of medium age and older boys want to get more detailed information on the "first time"



and on the emotional aspects of a relationship, but they are also interested in information on methods of contraception and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Some of the older boys showed interest in specific questions such as the age of consent for sexual activity or homosexuality.

The girls who attend high school would like to know more about the effects of hormones and are also interested in knowing details about the male body, while girls from vocational schools are interested in more information on a woman's fertile phase.

8. Which Settings and Which Persons Do Young People Prefer When They Want Information on Sexuality?

Competent and trustworthy mediators are important

An important result of the interviews with boys is that information about sexuality should come from somebody who was in their view neither too young nor "too old" (20 to 40 years of age). There is a general preference for men, and some of the boys would prefer a person they already know and can trust rather than somebody they do not know.

The boys find smaller groups, ideally in the company of friends, more comfortable than larger groups. In discussions of certain topics they prefer the sexes to be separated. The interviews also indicate that it would be good to have facilitators from the neighbourhood or community, i.e. persons whom the young men can trust and whom they know, especially when one wants to engage the boys as participants in a programme.

9. Which Target Group Should Be Given Special Attention?

Socially disadvantaged youth and those from other cultures have fewer and less sound information resources

The present study shows that young men can be put into two groups, which in many respects differ considerably. On the one hand there are the boys who attend high school or go to a technical college and who mostly come from Austrian families. These young people have access to a great variety of information sources and can often speak with parents and friends or girlfriends about sexuality. Their attitudes towards gender roles are mostly connected with the notion of men's and women's equality.

The second group consists of boys who go to secondary modern school or are apprentices and who mostly come from migrant families. Their information sources are relatively scarce, they can hardly or not at all speak about the topic at home (due to cultural norms); their friends are considered to be of little value as far as information goes, and their notions of male and female roles are rather traditional. During the interviews they often found it hard to talk openly about the topic and tried to avoid it by making lewd remarks. There are statements, which indicate that they think of sexuality in terms of performance or an achievement that would help them to enhance their image in the peer group.

Young people from families with education deficits as well as migrants become sexually active at an earlier age and feel exposed to more group pressure to do so

In the interviews of this study, the boys from secondary modern schools and apprentices, especially those from migrant families, feel exposed to more group pressure and become sexually active at an earlier age. Some describe promiscuous life concepts which they have observed in their social environment and which they think have to do with the fact that sexual needs cannot be satisfied in married life. They can observe that in their families and in their circle of friends married men frequently have contact with prostitutes. Nonetheless many of the boys consider trust and faithfulness to be important prerequisites for a relationship to function well.

In the conclusions of the study, the authors recommend that future programmes and measures should pay particular attention to boys from families with education deficits and migrant backgrounds. This would also help to promote the positive integration of migrants.

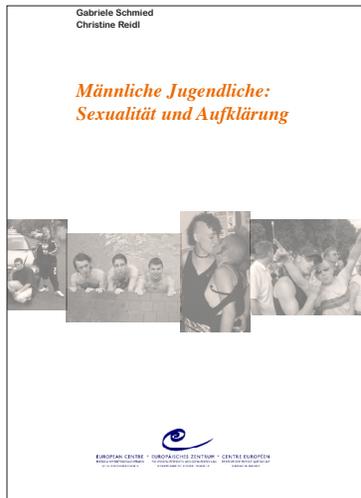
10. What lessons have been learnt about the design of Programmes of Extracurricular Sexuality Education or Pedagogy for Boys and Young Men?

The study results recommend the following aspects to be taken into consideration:

- The study should be extended to a more comprehensive stock-taking of the variety of programmes and services available in Austria. These should be listed and described in detail, allowing for further comparative analysis.
- To promote networking among providers and institutions, a competence centre should be established to serve as a common platform.



- Quality standards should be further developed and made available to the general public.
- To guarantee long-lasting effects, the institutions involved need more long-term funding arrangements. Successful programmes should be granted the opportunity for continuation. The policy for funding projects should include effectiveness to be as valuable a criterion as innovation. Staff training and further education programmes need targeted financial support.
- Staff of extracurricular programmes and services should be given adequate training on the basis of uniform training standards. The Institut für Sexualpädagogik is, together with its Swiss equivalent, developing a curriculum that would fit the task. The topic of sex education should become core part of the training of youth workers, for example as part of the curricula of the Fachhochschule für Sozialarbeit.
- The medical profession hardly, if at all, addresses boys. It would be good to make medical doctors cooperate with extracurricular youth centres and associations. General practitioners or specialists trained in sex education could, for instance, have regular office hours at youth centres or at their own offices.
- To reach the male youth, it is very important for the programmes to have low thresholds. This aspect would include cost-free access as well as the availability of programmes that make young men curious by taking a playful approach to the relevant issues, but it would also require a good combination of the separation of the sexes and co-education. Last but not least it needs trustworthy, competent, male counselors who mediate specific behaviours and attitudes in a language that reaches the young.
- The development of culture-specific sex education concepts should be systematically supported and funded. Young people from non-Austrian families should be given information in a way that does not offend them and in a form that is capable of reducing disorientation on account of different cultural norms and values.
- Electronic media such as the Internet, e-mail or mobile telephones offer a variety of opportunities to pass on information. Positive experiences of how to reach the target group have already been made with “Rat auf Draht” and “rbx.at/sexlove”. Existing programmes should be further developed and new services such as SMS-counselling should be designed.
- Practical work with male youth should emphasise participation. Empowerment in the sense of supporting the development of autonomous sexual identity or masculinity should be a basic principle. Subgroups, social classes, and cultural backgrounds should be taken into account as well as different age groups.



Männliche Jugendliche: Sexualität und Aufklärung

In der Adoleszenz formt sich die sexuelle Identität und es finden wichtige Weichenstellungen für Einstellungen und Werte bezüglich Sexualität und Partnerschaft statt. Außerschulische sexualpädagogische Aufklärungsangebote können einen wertvollen Beitrag leisten, um junge Menschen in dieser Lebensphase zu unterstützen.

In den letzten Jahren hat sich die Erkenntnis durchgesetzt, dass eine gendersensible Sexualpädagogik mit spezifischen Strategien für beide Geschlechter sinnvoll ist. Während weibliche Jugendliche bereits gut durch Informationskampagnen, -materialien und Beratungsangebote angesprochen werden können, sind männliche Jugendliche schwerer zu erreichen. Sie suchen seltener Beratungsstellen auf und sind an schriftlichen Informationsmaterialien weniger interessiert als Mädchen. Diese Studie zeigt auf, von welchen Aufklärungsangeboten vor allem männliche Jugendliche profitieren und wie Sexualpädagogik in der außerschulischen Jugendarbeit optimal auf die Bedürfnisse dieser Zielgruppe zugeschnitten werden kann.

Die Studie wurde im Zeitraum 2006/07 durchgeführt. Einen Überblick zur aktuellen sexualpädagogischen Praxis der Jugend- bzw. Burschenarbeit bieten eine Literaturstudie und ExpertInnenbefragungen in den Bundesländern Wien, Steiermark und Tirol. Der Bericht analysiert ferner eine Auswahl an nationalen und internationalen Beispielen „guter Praxis“ zum Thema Sexualaufklärung und Prävention im Bereich der sexuellen und reproduktiven Gesundheit.

Die Sichtweise der Burschen wurde durch Interviews mit heterosexuellen Jugendlichen (49 Interviews) verschiedenen Alters und mit unterschiedlichen sozialen und kulturellen Hintergründen erhoben. Etwa die Hälfte der Befragten hat einen Migrationshintergrund. Ergänzend wurden drei Fokusgruppen mit insgesamt 19 Mädchen durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, welche Einstellungen zu Geschlechterrollen, Sexualität und Partnerschaft die jungen Menschen haben, welche Informationsquellen sie nutzen und wie sie diese bewerten. Soziale bzw. Bildungsschichten und kulturelle Prägungen spielen dabei eine wesentliche Rolle.

Auf der Grundlage dieser Ergebnisse wurden Richtlinien ausgearbeitet, die konkrete Anhaltspunkte für die sexualpädagogische Burschenarbeit liefern. Es werden dabei gesellschaftlich-institutionelle Rahmenbedingungen ebenso thematisiert wie methodisch-konzeptionelle Umsetzungsanforderungen. Um männliche Jugendliche bei der Entwicklung einer verantwortungsvollen und partnerschaftlichen Sexualität zu unterstützen, sie vor sexuell übertragbaren Krankheiten und ungewollter Vaterschaft zu schützen bzw. sie mit diesbezüglichen außerschulischen Angeboten überhaupt zu erreichen, bedarf es Initiativen auf vielen Ebenen. Die Investition in die Aus- und Weiterbildung von haupt- und ehrenamtlichen JugendarbeiterInnen ist hier ebenso wichtig wie die Entwicklung von Aufklärungsangeboten, die auf Multikulturalität und den Umgang mit daraus resultierenden widersprüchlichen Normen eingehen.

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