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Social attitudes towards issue of sexuality of intellectually disabled persons.

Disabled persons are often deprived of their sexuality, which is an integral part of their personality – independently from physical and intellectual efficiency of a human being. Sexuality is a gift received together with a life. The society is afraid of symptoms of intellectually disabled persons' sexuality, especially with profound intellectually disabled. This developmental sphere is most often ignored or persons are punished for symptoms of sexuality. Despite of thoughts about their daughters' and sons' sexuality, most of the parents remains silent. They do that because of helplessness, loss, ignorance and peculiar social shame. They use defense mechanisms. The most often one, is keeping an image of 'eternal child'. This enables to cherish illusions that alarming matters would never occur. Through this suppression they don't let face the thought about realization and acceptance of any symptoms of their children sexuality. 'They spread a protective cover, which inhibits development, which stops activity, taking social roles. «Husband», «boy», «girl» - these are words rarely used by parents. They can't imagine that their children start a family or meets with somebody. They think that this is «immoral». Everybody have dread of future, so there can be question paid: what they have done to make their children find their own place in world, when they will pass away?'(Dąbrowska A.,2003, p. 257) Some of the parents consider the possibility of getting married by their children. However they are aware of the constant assistance, that their children would need.

The similar approach is presented by school society. 'The society of teachers at special schools expressed the standpoint among which bringing up an issue of sexual problems of young people with intellectual disability is 'adding fuel to the fire', 'provoking something that has a chance not to occur', 'creating artificial, substitute problems'. Majority of educators expresses their uncertainty, lack of knowledge or skills.'(Wojtczak-Grzesińska I., Malinowska A.,2002, p.40.) What is the attitude of an ordinary citizen? Its knowledge about this issue is derived from media, which brings up that problem most often in context of sensations, pathologies or when matter of sexual abuse occurs.

Intellectually disabled person is 'putted into social scenario without any chance of its individual modernization, «the noble demand of support» can transform into practice of

its directing into stream of social roles and serving as appropriation of an individual human fate to society (Krzemińska D.,2003,p.278)

Such acute accusations provokes questions: Do we know to what we would like prepare disabled person, during its preparation to further levels of psychosexual development?

Does the society has a vision of adulthood of intellectually disabled persons?

If yes, does it has a proper law instruments, economical and system solutions?

Does the person biologically mature can be equal in emotional and social spheres (to be able to play social roles)?

Realities are not optimistic. Mentally disabled persons lives between incapability and desires. On the one hand they have numerous limitations coming from their disability and limitations made by society, and on the other, they have dreams and aspirations as any other person.

Persons concerned, expresses themselves that way: ‘Despite of the fact that we think less than others, we have rights to anything. To carry on our fate. ‘I’d like to live my life by myself. I don’t want my parents to live by myself.’ ‘What is going to be if people would not ask us for nothing, would not talk to us.’?

Sexuality – immanently - is not a problem. After all, everybody, despite of level of intelligence, is **born as** a man or a woman. The problem occurs in situation when social norms, obligatory in certain group, are violated. The norm is described as a lack of pathological behaviors such as: exhibitionism, touching other persons without permission, auto or hetero-aggressive sexual situations. There are numerous situations connected with sexuality and its aspects, which are copied by disabled persons as a pattern experienced at school, in family or TV. Therefore, there is no sense in considering sexuality in aspect of intellectual disability. If young woman seduce man with her charm – is this a pathology? If man pays woman compliments, acting gallantly – is this a pathology? Therefore, one should discuss sexual problems of intellectually disabled persons in context of violating above mentioned social norms. In other situations one should perceive the proper behavior. Every person decides about oneself sexual life by itself. If I am a guardian of my child I have no right to decide about his/her sexual life (intimacy). Does anyone decided about my sexual life?

It is dangerous for disabled persons to ignore this problem. Their sexuality cannot be denied. It is bond to their life and body, it is part of their humanity – alike other people. ‘We can try to suppress it or decide not to transform it to sexual activity, but no matter we do, we cannot get rid of it...Their sexuality is their immanent part, however they did not

invited it to their life. Similarly as at other people, emotions and matters connected with sexuality comes out at their certain developmental stage.'(Fairbairn G., Rowley D.,2005,p.12)

The most often problems reported by parents and personnel of educational units are:

- Public masturbation (at school, in the street),
- Shameless public baring,
- Less control on sexual needs (attempt to have sexual intercourse at school, usage of toys to do that, encouraging others to sexual activity, molesting weaker and submissive persons),
- Too trustful and frank behaviors towards acquaintances and strangers, fling one's arms around somebody's neck, kissing, squeezing, touching genitals (this can be read as a provocation),
- Problems with hygiene (menstruation, nocturnal pollutions),
- Problems with contraception, fear for sexually transmitted diseases,
- Promiscuity,
- Fear for sexual harassment (Mejnartowicz D., 2002,p.17-8)

These are problems most often perceived by parents and guardians - usually discussed when occurred. When discussing about them, one want to eliminate these symptoms. One look for immediate solutions to eliminate masturbation or to find a way not to allow him/her to meet with his/her sweetheart. People tend to forget that these behaviors are not pathological ones, but are symptoms of improper support of intellectually disabled person. One look for ready-made prescriptions. Often people from its background reacts too late. The overall support of development (also sexual development) must start in the early years of life. Negligence result in disorders and direction of sexual interests to socially unaccepted spheres. Parents often expects that school will deal with certain issues and, on the contrary, school counts on preparations made by family. Meeting of these parties and calm work-out of the common and systematical work in sphere of sexual education happens sporadically. Most often the cooperation is undertaken in case of intensification of the problem. Then, ad hoc modus operandi is worked out.

Why intellectually disabled persons should be informed about sex matters?

1. Disabled person, who wasn't informed about its sexuality and social expectations in this sphere, can show undesirable behaviors in public places. It can act too emotionally and improperly towards strangers. It doesn't keep proper distance and can show emotional 'stickiness'. Can behave lecherously towards strangers, snuggle up to them. These behaviors can be shocking, irritating, insulting, even terrifying for outsiders.
2. Disabled person – who doesn't understand many things – can be irritated or anxious, when its closest background would not pass him/her: in proper time and in proper way – the proper information. One can avoid it. Young woman without proper information about first menstruation can live in chaos. Possibly she could get to know about it from older friends, TV or magazines or maybe she was refused of any information. Intellectually disabled person needs simple information about what happens with its body. It needs also certain skills and awareness of social customs related to this sphere.
3. Guardians' fear of unaware conception often cause a behavior which can be perceived as a sexual abuse – sterilization or long term contraception – instead of proper assistance, education and health promotion. Most often, it happens without consciousness and knowledge of disabled person. Similarly, performing abortion without person's concerned knowledge, sterilization and long term contraception is a moral matter.
4. Lack of knowledge can expose oneself to sexual harassment. Disabled person can agree to make sex, expecting returned feeling. Whereas, the other person is interested only in making sex, not in building emotional relation. The proper education and promotion are aimed to understand certain rights towards ones' own body and in certain situations one can say 'NO'. Especially towards unwanted sexual provocations.
5. Next danger, resulting from ignorance, is falling ill or conception coming from not obeying principles of safe sex. On the one hand many persons are bound by contraception guidelines of the Church. On the other, there is actual danger of unwanted conception or sexually transmitted diseases.
6. Intellectually disabled persons needs knowledge in the issue of sex, because it can bring happiness to them. One should only present the ways leading to this happiness. When we recognize their full humanity, we recognize their full rights. One should

take care of their intimacy and privacy of living space. One should create conditions to enable these persons to create and engage in relations in which non-disabled persons engage during sexual activity. If there is a need of support of these persons in starting family – one should do this. Sexual behaviors which arouse embarrassment and wound of other peoples' feelings, i.e. masturbation in public places, which put other persons in a embarrassing situation, are a problem. It is necessary to make realize that masturbation is an intimate behavior and it should be limited to certain time and place. Are we able to prohibit this, simultaneously respect them as persons whose sexuality is a part of themselves? They have right to express their sexuality in a familiar and accessible way. Even if they don't get married, this sphere plays a significant role in their life. One want to respect these persons fully (also their sexuality) – one should take care of their health, needs and teach them these behaviors (Fairbairn G., Rowley D., 2005, p.17-22)

What constitutes adulthood in context of sexual life? **Having and keeping constant sexual partner, ability of procreation and taking care of the offspring.** Reaching such level by intellectually disabled persons is difficult because of social, psychological and economic reasons, as well as of the very fact of intellectual disability. 'Adult, capable of making proper choices, is not always capable of full-functioning as an adult. Possibly, it happens because society in which it lives doesn't allow to do that. Model patterns, condescending systems which stereotypically classify disability, acceptance together with social ignorance – all of these plays a significant role in life of disabled person.' (Brearily G.,2001, nr2, p5-6) I hope that times, when experts, parents and friends were avoiding sexual education of mentally retarded persons on purpose, belongs to the past.

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