

Parental attitudes towards sexuality their intellectually disabled children

Issues related to sexuality of people with intellectual disability are subject to numerous considerations by theoreticians in various fields of science. With these considerations that the consent for intellectually disabled people have the experience of sexuality, it allows them more fully experience of their own humanity. A huge influence on the attitudes towards their own sexual behavior are the parents [I. Obuchowska A. Jaczewski, 2002]. Fathers and mothers, through their deliberate actions and habits, communicating the desired and expected patterns of behavior for their children. Parental attitudes towards sexuality are often a model for future thoughts, emotions and sexual behaviors of the offspring.

Attitudes towards sexuality

Sexuality is an innate and natural human need is the physiological potential of every person. However, the position of this need in the hierarchy of values is dependent on the degree of individual development, experiences, beliefs and ideological forces of other needs. In turn, attitudes, according to Nowak, „[...] in a sensible or unsensible way, they satisfy human needs or values, without clearly defining what they need to do to and what kind of their attitudes and shape „[A Kozubka, 2000, p.121].

In encyclopedia outlines sexology attempts are made to define the term “sexual attitudes”, which are defined as „persistent assessment systems, emotional feelings and tendencies to act. They are shaped by experience and are individually diverse mental dispositions. They are linked with the whole endeavor, which human differs from other people and which define him as a human. „[1985, K. Imieliński].

These definitional proposals indicate a multifaceted relationship attitudes towards sexuality and hierarchy of needs and a system of values of a particular man, which cannot be considered without taking into account the impact of education and individual life experience. The educational practices are shaping individual attitudes towards sexuality, in turn, stem from their attitudes towards the sexuality of the offspring.

Typology of parental attitudes towards child sexual was proposed by Kozakiewicz [by M. Huszcza, 1999]. He identified five types of beliefs presented by the parents.

The first group consists of parents rigorous and traditionalists. In their families apply traditional standards of bourgeois-catholic ethics. Those parents do not give consent to sexual contact their descendants, and indeed for upholding premarital chastity.

Sexual contact may take place only in the sacramental marriage. Adults who were numbered among the Kozakiewicz to this group, consider all manifestations of sexuality as evil, do not talk with their children on issues of physicality and curb their curiosity. They discern the erotic subtext in the activities of their children is not related to this sphere of life.

The second group includes parents, liberal and progressive. They look at the child through the prism of their childhood are especially tolerant in relation to their sons. All manifestations of sexuality they consider to be a normal state of affairs and the voice of nature, which should not be inhibited. Sexual education in such families begin fairly quickly and without limitations, especially in the techniques and physiology of intercourse and pregnancy prevention.

Parents are the largest group of confuse and helpless people. If they would properly raise their children, even in the sphere of human sexuality, but do not really know how to do it. Often they lack of courage to meet the appropriate knowledge and curiosity of children to give complete answers to the questions. They usually do not raise issues of sexuality with their children, believing that in this field school will provide an adequate education.

The fourth group are the parents upbringing passive, who do not pay attention to education, including for sex education. They do not put limits, but they do not pass the appropriate knowledge that will facilitate the start of sexual their offspring. All manifestations kind of sexuality, are considered as the next phase of the life which every must deal with.

The fifth group includes parents who deliberately raise their children according to those adopted by their moral views and assessments. They interact in a conscious development of their children, instilling them with ethical standards and attitudes towards sexuality. Prohibitions and ordinances through which parents influence their children, are derivatives of existing in that society values.

Attitudes towards sexuality of people with intellectual disability

In 2002 Worlds Sexual Society published the Declaration of Sexual Rights. These rights are universal and apply to everyone regardless of age, race, religion, social class, physical and emotional disability. They should guarantee the sexual equality. This statement concerns the right to freedom, autonomy and privacy of sexual, emotional, sexual expression, make free and responsible decision to have children, information, sex education and sexual health. Respect and protection of these rights might make influence for the healthy development of human sexuality as individuals and society as a whole [por. Z. Lew - Starowicz, 2002].

Promoting this approach to sexuality of people with intellectual disability is not common, but more and more people recognize sexuality as an integral part of humanity. Among the ideas on this subject there has been extracted different orientations.

The breakdown of researchers related to sexuality of disabled persons proposed by Nowak-Lipińska [1996] takes into account views on sexuality and the possibility of

its implementation, and also the resulting to life consequences and individual development.

1. Avoiding-destruction orientation. The basis of this approach is the belief that with a lower level of intelligence, psychosexual development will be stopped. Mental disability causes the disorder of the psychobiological grounds of sexuality and related functions, and thus does not disclose an interest in the opposite sex. Such an approach has been taught by scholars from different disciplines in the 80 ,and earlier. Currently observed trends are rather to talk about the fact that sexuality of people with profound intellectual disability is a fact. Nevertheless, among those who are not close to the disabled people, the view on their asexuality is still present and alive.
2. Sexual-totally-accepting orientation. The main thesis of this orientation is the acceptance of sexuality and the need to create identical conditions for growth and living for the disabled people, and for fully able people. The author singled out two currents in this approach.
3. The first one is total sexual hedonism, which is identified with the full consent of the implementation of sexual needs without taking into account of mental plane. Under this approach, sexual experiences are more important in people profoundly handicapped. Sexuality in this conception is the positive, independent to orientation or form of expression. The only restrictions that should be imposed on disabled persons is due to the problem of uncontrolled breeding and the fear of negative reaction from the environment. That people should be assured that the socialization of sexual behavior and contraception, which are the tasks of society.
4. The second of the currents is clasping sexuality more comprehensively, taking into account a psychological dimension. Significant role in shaping of sexual behavior play an interpersonal contacts and social context. Therefore great importance in this context is sexual education, whose task is to prepare to take a normal sexual life. Other forms of satisfying sexual needs are also accepted. This approach gives the right to mentally disabled persons to develop solid relationships, including marriage. This orientation is quite common in Western Europe, in countries such as Holland.
5. Sexual- sublimation orientation. Beliefs, on which this orientation is based, are derived from the Christian philosophy, wherein each is a wholesome, endowed with the same emotional sphere. The need for closeness and love are the same to people with disabilities, like to able people. According to the direction of this trend, directing attention to the people of the opposite sex is not a manifestation of sexual needs, but the search for warmth and acceptance. Hugging, kissing and similar behaviors are a means of reducing tensions caused by negative experiences with loved ones. Any sexual practices are assessed negatively, as there is a risk of this type of activity as a response to internal unrest. Sexuality of the mentally disabled people, which is secondary to the emotional, not disclose, when need of psychosocial contacts will be appeased.

Mejnartowicz [ibid] distinguishes another group of attitudes, which refers as ambivalent. Belong to her: elimination, tolerance, and improvement of sexuality. The main

objective of the first of these is the frustration of all forms of sexuality, because it is only for able people. To serve this use bans, corporal punishment as well as medical procedures such as sterilization and pharmaceuticals. Tolerance of sexual means consent for sexual activity, treated as entertainment for children, but without granting the status of the disabled adult. The improvement comes down to a matter of coping, how to help the disadvantaged people in an appropriate expression of their needs.

Parents approach to the sexuality of their intellectually disabled children

Parents are a group for which the sexuality of their intellectually disabled children is the biggest problem. Indeed, they feel responsible for the upbringing and the child's behavior in society.

Parents of intellectually disabled children treat them as childish, even if they are already adults. Confirmation of this phenomenon are Shepardson's studies from 1992. [D. Mejnartowicz, 1999]. According to them, as many as 63% of parents wouldn't leave their child alone at home for longer than 15 min., and 35% of teenagers cannot leave the house alone.

Studies by the same author in 1994. [ibid], show that many parents understand the needs of their child, and over 50% develop some degree of tolerance for sexual activity. Overbalance but only in the context of heterosexual love and relationships, 65% of parents see the need for awareness of sexual assault, including 12% assume responsibility for education, while 15% would prefer that the school do it. A significant part of parents, about 51%, would agree to marriage, and some even for having children in special circumstances (23%). As the years past, we observe a significant increase in tolerance towards sexuality of people with disabilities [ibid].

Polish studies represent different positions of parents. Over half of mothers surveyed identified problems with sexual life of people with Down syndrome as very important. Unfortunately, despite the fact that they recognize their needs, they know that they cannot deal with them and cannot rely on others [D. Mejnartowicz, 2002]. Approximately 60% of mothers would not agree to their child sexual intercourse. Among the arguments for this position, appeared most fear of handicapped child's birth (38%) and the belief that intercourse will be not pleasant for them as they will not know what to do (19%) [ibid]. Among Polish parents are also much less consent to the marriage of persons with intellectual disability (67.2%), explaining by the lack of independence and accountability of their child. Greater acceptance gained the marriage with a person without disabilities, but a significant proportion of mothers questioned the intentions of such partners [ibid].

Attempt of classification attitudes towards sexuality of people with disabilities has Kościelska [2004]. Distinguished the following four positions of their parents.

1. Ignored sexuality: genetic defects, delayed development, the concentration on defects can encourage postponement by the parents of a confrontation with his sexuality. Parents have difficulty in identifying sex of the child or deliberately ignore it. Adoption of such an attitude towards their child entails many consequences. Seeing

offspring as asexual, often dressed in a way that is unattractive, without highlighting the elements of his sex. Despite clear signs of becoming a woman / man is treated in a childish way. Primarily neglected is education. Parents do not prepare their children for changes associated with puberty. Often provides an intellectually disabled adults in unreal explanations of phenomena related to human sexuality [M. Kościelska, 2000]. Parents representing such an approach often feel a strong fear of the erotic awakening of their children through their referral comments on matters connected with sexuality. Openly deny all forms of sexuality, their descendants.

2. Sexuality is carried out by frustrated parents who are aware of the sexuality of their children, but did not agree to it. They believe that all contacts with persons of the opposite sex can affect the taking of sexual activity. Therefore, opponents of coeducation are and remain alone with other disabilities. This approach is associated with fertility awareness and fear of having their offspring. Crucial importance of belief in the failure of education and heredity of any disability.
3. Tolerated sexuality is the position of the parents existence of conscious sexual needs of their children. However, the lack of sufficient concern among them about sexual development, his support and give it the desired shape. The author stresses that in this attitude is contained an element of helplessness. Parents consent to sexual activity at all regardless of location, time or circumstances. Children in such families are entirely free, may freely leave the house, the parents do not respond to masturbate. This parents, believe that sex education is an important element in supporting the development of intellectually handicapped children and should be limited only to emergency contraception.
4. Accepted sexuality is based on the recognition of sexuality as a normal attribute of being human. Intellectually disabled children's sexuality is an expression of their normality. Parents are aware of various restrictions on their children, but are able to enjoy their physical health and attractiveness. The author distinguishes several variants of this approach. One of them comes to the image of the child, to his physicality. Beauty is emphasized by an attractive dressing of the child. The second is the nature of compensation to the limitations of the child. Parents give great importance to the neat appearance and good manners. In elderly children, parents exhibit concern about how best to adopt their own forms of sexuality associated with the period of adolescence. They express pride in the fact that their child becomes a woman / man. They adopt the attitude of the guides in matters of sex. An important distinguishing features of this group is that acceptance of the dreams and plans of their children about love, marriage and future family. Some parents who were convinced of the unreality of these plans, has sought to clearly explain the limits of their children in their functioning and consequences of these restrictions in adulthood. Some parents help their children to meet the needs of sexual violence. They take actions that are intended to familiarize your child with a possible partner, they are in favor of coeducational and integrated classes.

Occupying a position on the sexuality of handicapped child, parents face additional dilemmas on the responsibility, autonomy. It can be assumed that the sexual attitudes of parents in relation to a disabled child are changed by their beliefs about intellectual dis-

ability and related restrictions. In this review, in parental attitudes can be found analogies to the positions of researchers presented in an earlier chapter. It is therefore noteworthy role of popularizing scientific data in the process of shaping the attitudes of parents.

Summary

Parental attitudes towards sexuality of their intellectually disabled children include both aspects related to the need, as well as aspect related to the values and socio-cultural norms. Worth stressing is the fact that by the attitudes of parents, people with intellectual disabilities are learning referring to their sexuality and their own sexual needs. Thanks to their attitudes, parents transmit to their children in which socially acceptable way to express and satisfy those needs.

An important element of sexuality, indicated above, is the sexual education of persons with disabilities. For sexual activity, does not only affect the hormonal changes, but also the atmosphere at home, acceptance and openness to parents. Sexual development may be somewhat inhibited, if the parents will closely monitor the behavior of their children, in a manner of inappropriate talk about issues related to human sexuality or when they refuse doing the sexual education [Mejnartowicz, 1999].

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