



Discussing Sexuality with Young People WEBINAR SUMMARY 8 Dec 2016

I. Experts:

Szilvia Gyurko is Terre des Hommes' regional juvenile justice advisor is a freelance child rights adviser and researcher. Currently she runs Hintalovon Foundation, developing child rights and educational projects.

Ivet Pieper is a senior project manager at Stitching Alexander, a Dutch NGO specialized in youth participation and participatory action research. She has over 17 years worth of experience in child and youth development.

II. Content:

Ms. Piper started by explaining that the webinar is inspired by the LEAP Project, funded by the European Union. The Project supports children and young people affected by sexual violence in Europe by strengthening and facilitating participatory practice in four countries: the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Romania and The Netherlands.

One of the key goals of the LEAP Project is to ensure youth participation in discussions on topics that directly concern them, in order to be able to influence decision-making. An enable factor in participation is young people's ability to talk about issues of importance to them. Sexuality is one of the subjects that it is important to talk about, not just in terms of risks, but also good sexual practices as well.

When talking about sexuality, young people find important:

1. building a relationship: it is difficult to talk with strangers about private issues. It is therefore crucial for the professionals to not place any blame, share their experiences, be human and show weaknesses;
2. the essence of the conversations: professionals often struggle engaging on such issues. It is important to follow one's instinct when talking to the young people, while following their cues and signs;
3. setting: some suggestions would be going for a walk, not look in the young people in the eye to avoid making them feel embarrassed. It is better to have the conversation in the youth's space to make them feel more comfortable.
4. desired outcome: young people want to be closer to a solution, but even more so they want to feel more understanding and respect as well as comprehend their own situation better;
5. specific questions: blame should not be placed on them and details should not be requested too much; still, questions that help understand better should be asked: 'Do you know what you like sexually and what not? Do you dare say no and how? Did you ever go too far? Did you feel it was your fault?'

Mrs. Gyurko then proceeded by presenting the Hintalovon Foundation, a nonprofit in Hungary launched in 2015, to promote children's rights and well-being, including child participation, education and abuse prevention.

The Foundation's first project and main goal is sexual education. Sexuality is more than sex, it is about emotions, body and self-image as well as love.

These days, children and teenagers are often online, so the available platforms must be used to reach young people.



It is also crucial to hear children and their voices. Children have the right to be informed about sexuality, but it is still a taboo subject in Europe. Parents and school representatives often feel uncomfortable addressing sexuality-related issues with youth.

Therefore, the latter try to find answers online and appeal to the Internet as a source of knowledge and information about sexuality. Instead, they often run into pornographic content, since one third of the internet is currently unfiltered and explicit pornography without proper explanation on sexuality and love, which can harm the youth's body image, their sexual behavior and can increase sexual violence among them. At the moment, every fifth child in Europe is affected by sexual violence.

Sexual education is crucial in preventing sexual violence. Children and teenagers want to pose sexually-related questions anonymously and get clear answers to them.

The Hıntalovon Foundation has two sections of the website: one dedicated to caregivers/parents and one for children aged 10-18. The site also provides an online chat system that allows people to ask questions and get answers directly.

The Foundation is a nonprofit applying the child-rights approach, with both child and parent participation seen as crucial. The professional team currently comprises a psychologist, a body image educator, a drama teacher as well as a mediator.

Ms. Gyurko highlighted that there are clear pros to using internet-based solutions:

1. it is very democratic
2. widespread in Europe, both in rural and urban areas, because many projects are held in the capital and big cities, excluding a large number of children and youth.
3. more than 60 percent of kids/youth under 16 have internet, laptops and smartphones.
4. asking questions online allows for anonymity and an intimate atmosphere.
5. it allows for questions and quick answers, which would be intimidating to ask in person.

The expert acknowledged that internet-based solutions also pose some disadvantages:

- limited personality and no face-to-face;
- difficulty to communicate emotions: there is no possibility to reach out and touch the personal;
- difficulty in preventing children/youth from multitasking while chatting, so the chat can be really long, when the kids get distracted;
- high rate of knocking conversations, when the youth just tests to see reaction, by sending some rude content, in an effort to build credibility and trust.

For the chat, volunteers are recruited through a two-month long process, which includes a detailed call, an attitude and knowledge test and an e-learning exam. There is incorporated knowledge and skills-building training on how to build chat skills and detect trauma as well as how sexual education can prevent sexual violence. There is an intense risk assessment, in order to select and filter risky volunteers.

Once the volunteers start, there is ongoing monitoring and supervision to ensure the chats are highest quality and that the children/youth can get all the information they need without using misinformed or uninformed sources. The volunteer received need-based and general support, as part of risk management and in order to prevent burnout.