

# PARENTS' AND TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILD SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR\*

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*Sexuality is not just sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Sexuality can be defined thus: "being female or male in the way females and males are alike and different, how they look and act; how they view their bodies and relationships with each other; how they grow and change over the years; who they are as women and men (girls and boys); and how they reproduce"(Sexual & Reproductive Health, p.3-4). Each adult "begins" in childhood and children too are sexual persons (Freud, 1905). Sexual behaviour of children is a universal source of concern for professionals, as well as parents all around the world (Friedrich et al. 1998, Beisert 1992, 2006, Izdebski 1992, Obuchowska, Jaczewski 2002, Wanzeck-Sielert 2008). The aim of the present research is to study the attitudes of parents and teachers towards child sexual behaviour.*

*Keywords:* Child sexual behaviour; Questionnaire; Statistical analysis.

## 1. Developmental tasks of the child

In the preschool period we can find out the subsequent important developmental tasks:

- "The development of games, the emergence of group play, mastery of the rules of group;
- mastery of basic concepts relating to social and physical development;
- the development of causal thinking, the development of readiness to master written speech (reading and writing), socializing and objectification of emotions;
- moral development - learning what is a good and what is evil, the beginning of the development of conscience;
- learning gender roles, the experience of shame associated with sex, identification with their own gender, learning about oneself and the formation of a sense of their own identity" (Brzezińska 1992: 56).

The last, but not the least important phase shows incredible cognitive curiosity, which allows one to initiate fun and experiment with one's own body. During a child's sexual play, the opportunity arises to establish relationships with peers and develop interactive skills, including communication and recognition of their needs or for determining the boundaries (Arens 2005, Pankowska 2004). It is worth noting, due to the aforementioned curiosity and social opportunities presented, that there is an argument for the recognition of sexuality as a natural component in child development. Consequently this phase is referred to as "small puberty" (Wanzeck-Sielert 2008).

Freud (1905) proposed that psychological development in childhood takes place in a series of fixed stages: oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital. Furthermore, Freud stressed that the first five years of life are crucial to the formation of adult personality.

In order to broaden the knowledge of teachers, educators, parents and other people interested in development issues, it is important to understand the attitudes of teachers and parents, and in turn this presents practical implications. Knowledge in this area is evolving, which can be seen in the increasing amount of research in this field as well as in the nature of institutional choices. What is

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\* The article is a modified version of the fragment dissertation Authors, Parents 'and Teachers' attitudes towards child sexual behaviour, Torun 2013

more, nowadays more and more specialists in the field of sexual education are needed in many different environments, including special schools.

## 2. Methods

The aim of this research is to study the attitudes of parents and teachers towards children's sexual behaviour. The attitudes that were studied include aspects such as: *cognitive, affective and behavioural*. The research question additionally explored whether the different variables such as gender; status (teacher, parent or teacher who is a parent); the phase of education in which the teacher works (kindergarten, primary school, and others); the family ethos around sexuality and religious commitment are related to the perceptions of children's sexual behaviour?

## 3. Participants and Questionnaire

The study comprised 415 research participants (370 women, 42 men, 3 gender unknown), whose age ranged 33 years (M=33,21; SD=7,64; Me=32). Participation in the survey was voluntary, anonymous and free from any time pressure. During the research procedure, participants received a questionnaire asking them to provide comments for the descriptions of children's sexual behaviour.

For the purpose of the study, two questionnaires were constructed: 1) Questionnaire of Attitudes towards Child Sexual Behaviour (QACSB) (Ratkowska-Pasikowska, Pasikowski 2013);

2) Affective and Behavioural Questionnaire of Attitudes towards Child Sexual Behaviour (ABQCSB) (Ratkowska-Pasikowska, Pasikowski, 2013).

The first questionnaire, QACSB, was constructed on the basis of knowledge about the development of children's sexual behaviour, which is considered normal according to the contemporary standards of children's development (Wenzeck-Sielert 2008, Beisert 1991, Beisert 1997, Beisert 2006a, Beisert 2006b, Fredrich 1991, Friedrich 1998). It comprises 28 items.

The second questionnaire ABQCSB, comprised 11 statements which reflected the content of the QACSB as similarly and as close as possible. These 11 statements were taken on the basis of the analysis of the AQCSB's content and the results of the agglomeration of these statements in the cluster analysis (Ward's method).

## 4. Results

First we analyzed the attitudes of the adults. In our sample about 70 % achieved results in the range of about 70 to 132 (cognitive), in the case of the affective aspect about 23-47, and 22-44 in the case of the behavioural aspect (Table 1). In addition, 75 % of the respondents showed middle value on the scale. Thus, negative characteristics are dominating.

Table 1. Values marked on the scale of attitudes

	n	M	SD	Me	1 quartile	3 quartile
cognitive aspect	415	100,09	31,51	101	80	119
affective aspect	415	35,24	11,97	35	26	42
behavioural aspect	415	33,29	11,24	34	26	40

In the second step, in order to determine how the variables in the research model determine attitudes towards sexual behaviour of preschoolers, the multiple regression analysis was conducted separately for each of the aspects of the attitudes. Variable: status, education levels (each separately), religious involvement (analyzed dichotomous).

As can be seen in Table 2, from all the predictors taken into account on the level of the dependent variables only such as: sex, religion, ethos around sexuality in the family are possible to estimate

significantly. It means that when the variable “religion” changes its position from low to high, the cognitive aspect becomes more negative, and the cognitive aspect of the attitude is also negative. In contrast, when the ethos around sexuality in the family turned out to be more favorable, positive attitudes increased.

Table 2. Summary of the regression of the dependent variable: cognitive aspect of attitude

predictor	b*	SE	t (392)	p	model
sex	-0,11	0,05	-2,02	0,0436	adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = ,05 F(12,392)=2,95 p<,0006
status	-0,05	0,21	-0,23	0,8197	
evel of education: kindergarten	0,11	0,19	0,60	0,5512	
level of education: primary school	0,01	0,18	0,05	0,9635	
level of education:other	0,14	0,10	1,34	0,1807	
religious commitment	-0,15	0,05	-2,92	0,0037	
atmosphere around sexuality in the family generational	0,16	0,05	3,27	0,0012	

The next step was to evaluate the role of all the variables included in the study in connection with the cognitive aspect of attitude (Table 2). The resulting model was well fitted to the data, which indicates a statistically significant factor F test. This model explained only 11 % of the variation of this aspect of attitude, which means that it is more difficult to estimate it based on discrete variables in comparison to the cognitive aspect. But this data again shows that when religion changes from low to high, the cognitive aspect becomes more negative. When the ethos around sexuality in the family is more favourable, the intensity of the attitude increases towards the positive side, both in the group of teachers and parents.

Table 3. Summary of the regression of the dependent variable: the affective aspect of attitude

predictor	b*	SE	t (392)	p	model
sex	-0,11	0,05	-2,02	0,0436	adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = ,05 F(12,392)=2,95 p<,0006
status	-0,05	0,21	-0,23	0,8197	
evel of education: kindergarten	0,11	0,19	0,60	0,5512	
level of education: primary school	0,01	0,18	0,05	0,9635	
level of education: other	0,14	0,10	1,34	0,1807	
religious commitment	-0,15	0,05	-2,92	0,0037	
atmosphere around sexuality in the family generational	0,16	0,05	3,27	0,0012	

The same variables are substituted into the model of the affective aspect of attitudes (Table 3). The model, although well suited to the data ( $F(12,392) = 2.95$ ,  $p < .0005$ ), explained 5 % of the variation of this aspect of attitude. It means, that it is not easy to assess this aspect of attitudes based on the variables. In other words, there are probably many more important variables, than those included in the study. But this data again shows that when religion changes from low to high, the affective aspect becomes more negative. When the atmosphere around sexuality in the family is more favourable, the intensity of the attitude increases towards the positive side, both in the group of teachers and parents.

Table 4. Summary of regression of the dependent variable: the behavioural aspect of attitude

predictor	b*	b.std.	t(392)	p	model
sex	-0,07	0,05	-1,32	0,1874	adjusted R <sup>2</sup> = ,06 F(12,392)=3,02 p<,0005
status	-0,03	0,21	-0,13	0,8980	
level of education: kindergarten	0,08	0,19	0,44	0,6577	
level of education: primary school	-0,03	0,18	-0,18	0,8611	
level of education: other	0,08	0,10	0,77	0,4409	
religious commitment	-0,17	0,05	-3,35	0,0009	
atmosphere around sexuality in the family generational	0,17	0,05	3,37	0,0008	

The same variables are substituted into the model of the behavioural aspect of attitudes (Table 4). The model, although well suited to the data ( $F(12,392) = 3.02, p < .0005$ ), explained 6 % of the variation of this aspect of attitude. It means, that it is not easy to assess this aspect of attitudes based on the variables. In other words, there are probably many more important variables, than those included in the study. The number of significant predictors in the case of the behavioural aspect fell to two. These are religion and the ethos around sexuality in the family. The direction of explanation is the same as in the case of cognitive and affective aspects of attitude.

## 5. Discussion

Analysis of the attitudes towards sexual behaviour of preschool children indicates a negative position, both among teachers and parents (Ratkowska-Pasikowska, Pasikowski 2013: 85). The analysis demonstrated that from the variables included in the model, only gender, religious involvement and the ethos around sexuality in the family were significant for shaping the nature of attitudes. In correlation with the *cognitive aspect of attitude* only variables such as gender, religious involvement and the ethos around sexuality were significant. In the case of the *affective aspect* the correlation with such variables as gender, religion and the ethos around sexuality in the family was significant. However, in the case of the *behavioural aspect* the variables of religious involvement and the ethos around sexuality in the family proved to be significant. It is interesting to note that there was no correlation between aspects of attitudes and status (being a teacher or parent) and level of education.

Children's sexual expression is often uncomfortable for adults, its subject matter becomes more "real than reality" (Baudrillard 2005: 31) and when it combines with the adult triggers of sexuality and desire (their own ideas and desires) the problem increases. It is possible to find explanations for this from historical perspectives. Kehily and Montgomery noted that this problem is visible primarily in Western culture, which produced "ways to control and suppress sexuality of children, moving to the denial of children's knowledge and experience in this matter (...)" (2008: 85). Children's sexual behaviour and sexuality in general is often perceived as a sign of perversion, lust, and influential evil forces including black magic.

Rank (1932) argued that "sexuality is not natural for a child", it is wrong and improper for a child. Only children of Nobles (as history demonstrates) could afford themselves this form of expression. For example, Louis XIII, as a child, "got out of bed, didn't want to put on the shirt and said: "*no shirt, no Heroard liked to imitate children's chatter*) *first I want milk from my bird*", and with his hands made the movements, and made the sounds "*pss, pss...*" pretended that he milked the bird"<sup>2</sup> (Ariès 1995: 105).

Arguably, this could be seen as a starting point for discussion relating to the results obtained in this particular study where it was found that both teachers and parents demonstrated negative attitudes towards sexual behaviour in preschool children.

Summing up, it is possible to conclude that the participants of this study (adults: teachers and parents) are of the view that children's sexual behaviour, if present, could be seen as an abnormality in the sphere of a child's functioning and development. Moreover, on the basis of the obtained results, it might be argued that adults generally believe that the sexuality of a child could be a disturbing factor, not only for the development of the sexual sphere of the child, but because of the numerous links of this area and with other areas of a child's functioning and for a child's psychosocial development in general.

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<sup>2</sup> The records are from the diary Heroada doctor Henry IV, King of France. He wrote daily on the life of a prince.

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