

Sexually transmitted diseases as a threat to psychosomatic human health

Karolina Kaczmarczyk

Student Scientific Society at the Division of Nursing in Gynecology and Obstetrics,
Department of Women's Health, Medical University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION: (A) Study Design · (B) Data Collection · (C) Statistical Analysis · (D) Data Interpretation · (E) Manuscript Preparation · (F) Literature Search · (G) Funds Collection

SUMMARY

Sexually transmitted diseases can be the cause of serious medical, sexual, psychological, and emotional threats. The factors which contribute to the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases are often casual sexual contacts without barrier protection. Young people start their sexual activity earlier, and this is connected with, among others, easier access to the media and topics related with sex, and is a result of a low level of sexual and health education.

The aim of the work is to assess the level of knowledge in the field of sexually transmitted diseases and the consequences of risky sexual behavior of women and men. The surveys were conducted in a group of 118 men and women aged between 18–50 years, based on the author's questionnaire.

The author's own research reveals that the interest in sexually transmitted diseases is predominant among young people. Of the respondents, 83.9% were sexually active. The average age of sexual initiation was 19 years for both women and men. The respondents mostly assessed their knowledge as low (30.6% women and 42.4% men) and sufficient (43.5% women and 33.3% men). There is a need to educate the society regarding medical, sexual, and psychological consequences of sexually transmitted diseases.

Key words: sexually transmitted diseases; knowledge; health; consequences

Address for correspondence: Karolina Kaczmarczyk
Student Scientific Society at the Division of Nursing in Gynecology and Obstetrics, Department of Women's Health, Medical University of Silesia in Katowice, Department of Nursing in Gynecology and Obstetrics
12 Medyków Str., 40-752 Katowice, Poland
Mobile phone: +48 794705431
E-mail: karolinakaczmarczykpl@gmail.com

Word count: 1418 **Tables:** 4 **Figures:** 5 **References:** 12

Received: 30.07.2018

Accepted: 07.09.2018

Published: 28.09.2018

INTRODUCTION

Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) affect a large number of people, more and more often including young persons starting their sex lives. Despite educational programs, more and more cases of STD are still being reported. Sexually transmitted diseases are not only a medical problem, but also a social and economic one [1,2]. The factor predisposing to the occurrence of STDs is often casual sexual encounter without barrier protection. Young people decide to begin sexual activity very early, and this is associated with, among others, easier access to the media and related topics, and is a result of a low level of sexual and health education. Early sexual initiation, a high number of sexual partners and the lack of protection cause the spread of genital inflammatory conditions as well as an increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases [3–7].

AIM

The aim of the work was to assess the level of knowledge in the field of sexually transmitted diseases and consequences of risky sexual behavior among women and men.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The survey was carried out in a group of 118 men and women aged 18–50 years. The author developed her own questionnaire with 23 questions regarding the studied problems. The questions were categorized, closed and open, allowing individual responses. The questionnaire was posted on the website www.surveymonkey.com. Pilot studies were conducted before the proper tests.

RESULTS

Sociodemographic characteristics of the studied group of women and men
Eighty-five (72%) women and 33 (28%) men aged 18–50 participated in the study. The

majority of them were in the 18–29 age group (61.1% of women and 63.6% of men). Higher education was declared by 44.7% of women and 42.5% of men, and secondary education by 30.6% of women and 18.2% of men. As for the type of relationship, 35.3% of women and 42.4% of men declared informal relationships, 41.2% of women and 21.2% of men were married, and 23.5% of women and 36.4% men were single. Most of them lived in urban areas (60% of women and 63.6% of men).

Characteristics of the studied group of women and men based on sexual activity

The study group included 94.1% of women and 93.9% of men of heterosexual orientation, 1.2% of homosexuals, and 4.7% of women and

6.1% men with bisexual orientation. The vast majority of women (83.5%) and men (84.8%) were sexually active (Figure 1). Sexual initiation before the age of 18 years was declared by 49.4% of women and 51.5% of men (Figure 2).

Having one sexual partner was declared by 37.6% of women and 27.3% of men. A sexual relationship with 2–3 people was declared by 27.1% of women and 36.4% of men, while 22.4 % of women and 27.3% of men had 4 or more partners (Tab.1).

The level of knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases in the studied group (women and men)

The state of knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases in the studied women and men is illustrated in Table 2. The highest level of social

Fig. 1. Sexual activity in the studied group

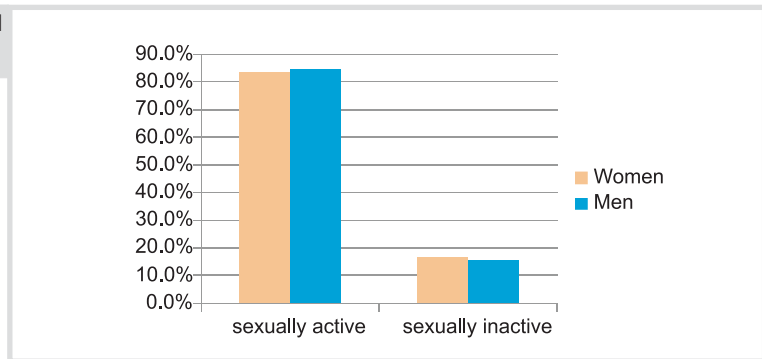
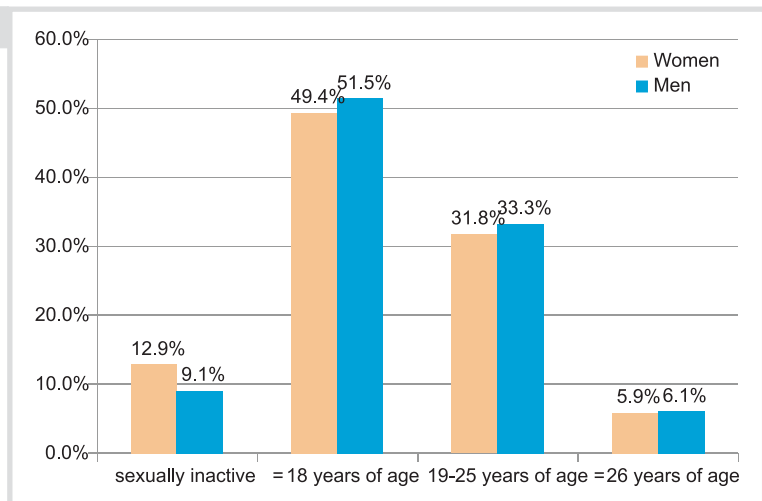


Fig. 2. Age of sexual initiation



Tab. 1. Number of sexual partners

Number of sexual partners	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
0	11	12.9	3	9.1
1	32	37.6	9	27.3
2–3	23	27.1	12	36.4
≥ 4	19	22.4	9	27.3

awareness concerned AIDS in both women and men.

The knowledge of factors and risky behaviors conducive to the occurrence of sexually transmitted infections is presented in Table 3.

Among the consequences of risky sexual behaviors, the respondents most frequently mentioned: sexually transmitted diseases (83.5% of women and 75.8% of men), unplanned pregnancy (41.2% of women and 27.3% of men), mental disorders, depression (8,2% of women and 12.1% of men), death (3.5% of

women and 12.1% of men), relationship breakdown (3.5% of women and 9.1% of men), and long-term and expensive treatment (2.4 % of women and 6.1% of men). All categories of answers are presented in figures 3 and 4.

The state of knowledge on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases is comparable among women and men. Condom use was most often indicated (92.9% of women, 93.9% of men). Another preventive measure often reported by the respondents was the avoidance of accidental sexual contact (88.2% of women and

Tab. 2. The state of knowledge of the respondents when it comes to sexually transmitted diseases

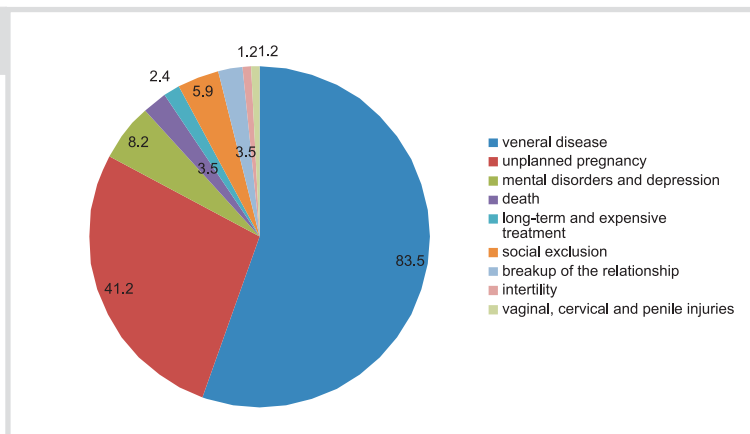
Sexually transmitted diseases	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Syphilis	74	87,1	27	81,8
AIDS	80	94,1	31	93,9
Viral hepatitis type B	24	28,2	7	21,2
Viral hepatitis type C	27	31,8	9	27,3
Genital herpes	79	92,9	27	81,8
Anogenital venereal warts	20	23,5	5	15,2
Venereal ulcer	9	10,6	4	12,1
Gonorrhea	78	91,8	27	81,8
Vaginal yeast infection	53	62,4	13	39,4
HPV (human papillomavirus)	60	70,6	11	33,3
Venereal lymphogranuloma	42	49,4	7	21,2
Inguinal granuloma	14	16,5	5	15,2
Phthiriasis	53	62,4	20	60,6
Sarcoptic acariasis	53	38,8	14	42,4
Chlamydia	44	51,8	14	42,4

Tab. 3. Factors and behaviors conducive to the occurrence of sexually transmitted diseases in the opinion of the surveyed women and men

Factors and risky behaviors favoring the occurrence of STD	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Frequent changes of sexual partners	84	98.8%	32	97.0%
Prostitution	75	88.2%	28	84.8%
Genital intercourse, anal, oral – without protection	70	82.4%	27	81.8%
Inappropriate genital hygiene	50	58.8%	25	75.8%
Using the same underwear, towels, cleaning agents	40	47.1%	13	39.4%

* (multiple choice options available)

Fig. 3. Consequences of risky sexual behavior in the opinion of women

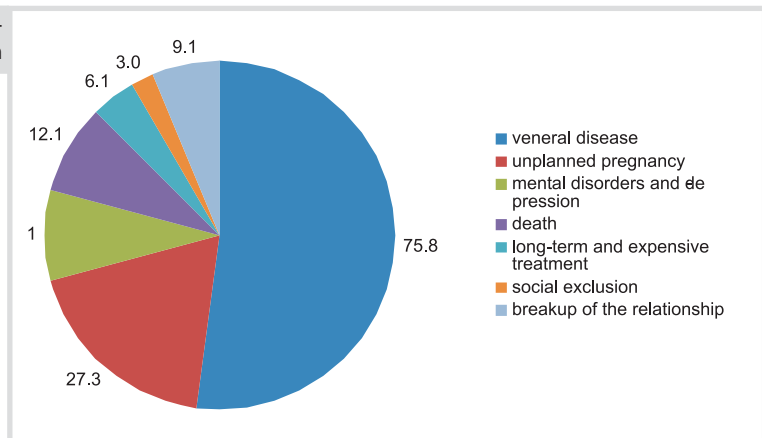


87.9% of men), and appropriate hygiene (37.9% of women, 60.6% of men). A low percentage of women (4.7%) and men (9.1%) provided other methods of protection from STD infection, such as: examination of the partner before commencement of sexual intercourse, observation of possible symptoms, or regular check-ups with a gynecologist (Tab. 4).

Figure 5 presents the assessment of knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases among the respondents.

The respondents assessed their knowledge on a scale from 0 to 5. The following interpretations were adopted: the lack of knowledge (0), a low level of knowledge (1–2), sufficient (3), good (4) and very good (the highest state of knowledge) (5). Knowledge at a low level (score 1.2) was declared by 30.6% of women and 42.4% of men. The highest percentage of respondents declared their knowledge to be at a sufficient level (score 3): 43.5% of women and 33.3% of men. A good level of knowledge

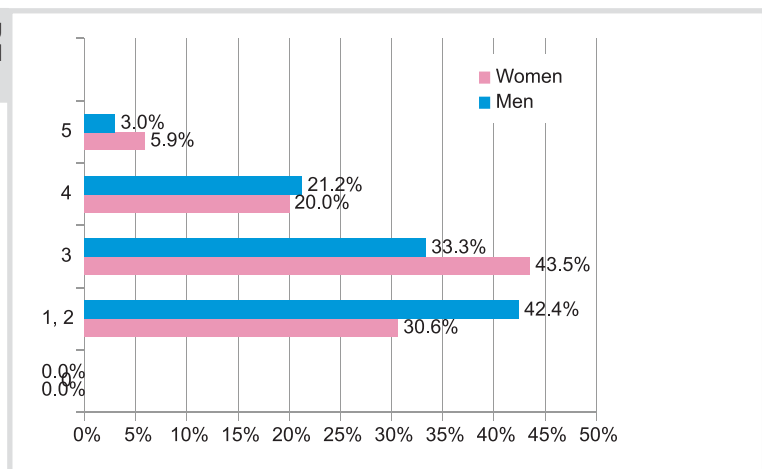
Fig. 4. Consequences of risky sexual behavior in the opinion of men



Tab. 4. Knowledge of women and men about the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases

Preventive action	Women		Men	
	n	%	n	%
Condom	79	92.9	31	93.9
Avoiding accidental sexual contact	75	88.2	29	87.9
Appropriate hygiene	32	37.6	20	60.6
Vaginal diaphragm	8	9.4	6	18.2
Cervical cap	6	7.1	0	0
IUD – intrauterine device	2	2.4	2	6.1
Pharmacological contraception	4	4.7	5	15.2
Other (medical examination, observation of symptoms)	4	4.7	3	9.1

Fig. 5. Self-assessment concerning the level of knowledge in the field of sexually transmitted diseases



(4) was declared by 20% of women and 21.2% of men, while 5.9% of women and 3% of men stated that their knowledge was very good (5) (Fig. 5).

DISCUSSION

Sexually transmitted diseases can cause serious medical, sexual, psychological, and emotional consequences. Medical problems, such as pain, vaginal discharge, skin problems, dysuria, and others, force the patient to consult a doctor and implement immediate pharmacological treatment. However, STDs are very often also a cause of psychological dysfunctions. Lew-Starowicz and others point out that sexually transmitted diseases, especially undiagnosed, can cause sexual consequences: orgasm disorders, problems with desire and excitement, loss of self-esteem, or disintegration of relationships [7]. In own studies, the occurrence of mental disorders and depression as a consequence of STD was indicated by 8.2% of women and 12.1% of men, and disintegration of a relationship was reported by 3.5% of women and 9.1% of men.

The risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases increases with the number of partners, frequency of sexual partner changes, and the number of casual sexual contacts [5,8]. It also depends on sexual preferences, and on the type of sexual intercourse. The awareness of the Polish society in this area is diverse. In the analyzed research material, the vast majority of women and men were highly aware of the fact that risky behaviors favor the occurrence of STD. The present research confirms that the interest in sexually transmitted diseases is predominant among young people. Of the respondents, 83.9% were sexually active. The average age of sexual initiation was 19 years for both women and men. Many publications emphasize the initiation of sexual activity at a very early age [5,7,9,10]. According to literature data, the average age of sexual initiation in Central and Western Europe is 17–18 years, while in Eastern Europe: 20 years [10]. In the analyzed studies, 49.4% of women and 51.8% of men

started sexual activity below 18 years of age. The early age of sexual initiation is one of the most common risky sexual behaviors. Sexually transmitted infections and diseases are a result of early sexual initiation, frequent change of partners, low knowledge about hygiene and preventive healthcare [6]. One of the effective methods of protection against STD is a permanent relationship. Although in the present study 98.8% of women and 97% of men indicated frequent changes of sexual partners as the main risky behavior favoring the occurrence of STD, at the same time a high percentage of respondents prefer having more than one partner. A sexual relationship with 2–3 partners was declared by 27.1% of women and 36.4% of men.

Having 4 and more partners was declared by 22.4% of women and 27.3% of men. In the present study, the main risk of accidental sexual contacts according to the respondents was the possibility of contracting STD and an unplanned pregnancy. According to other authors, young people report only unscheduled pregnancy as the main threat of risky sexual behavior [10].

Due to a significant increase in STD cases in recent years, many authors draw attention to sexual consequences of sexually transmitted diseases and to the need to promote sexual health and educational programs in this area [5,7,11,12]. According to the self-assessment of the respondents, the level of knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases is low (30.6% of women and 42.4% of men) or sufficient (33.3% of women and 43.5% of men). In studies by Olejniczak and others, 80% of men declared sufficient level of knowledge [2]. The present study confirms the necessity to undertake educational activities.

CONCLUSIONS

A low level of knowledge about sexually transmitted diseases, as perceived by the respondents, indicates the need for educating the society in this area and creating effective preventive programs.

REFERENCES

1. Reszke R, Reich A. Aktualne wytyczne dotyczące chorób przenoszonych drogą płciową. *Dermatol. Prakt.* 2016; 24-41.
2. Olejniczak D, Wodzyńska K, Religioni U. Wiedza uczniów klas maturalnych na temat chorób przenoszonych drogą płciową. *Problemy Pielęgniarstwa* 2012;20(3):317-326.
3. Jarząbek-Bielecka G, Pawlaczyk M, Pisarska-Krawczyk M et al. Choroby przenoszone drogą płciową u nastolatków. *Curr Gyneocol Oncol.* 2015;20-26.
4. Mroczkowski TF. Choroby przenoszone drogą płciową. Wydawnictwo Czelej Lublin, 2012.
5. Izdebski Z, Wąż K. Zdrowie seksualne i reprodukcyjne młodzieży. *Zdrowie publiczne i Zarządzanie* 2014; 12(1): 45-55.
6. Imacka J, Bulsa M. Ryzykowne zachowania seksualne młodzieży jako czynnik zwiększający ryzyko zakażenia chorobami przenoszonymi drogą płciową. *Hygeia Public Health.* 2012;47(3):272–276.
7. Lew-Starowicz Z, Łukasiewicz M. Seksualne aspekty chorób przenoszonych drogą płciową. *Postępy Nauk Medycznych* 2008;4:228-230.
8. Choroszy-Król I. Choroby przenoszone drogą płciową – zagrożenie na wakacjach. *Family Medicine and Primary Care Review* 2011;13,2:287–29.
9. Mazur J, Małkowska-Szcutnik A. (red.), Wyniki badań HBSC 2010. Raport techniczny, Instytut Matki i Dziecka, Warszawa 2011.
10. Mężyk I, Skrzypulec-Plinta V. Ryzykowne zachowania seksualne w aspekcie szerzenia się chorób przenoszonych drogą płciową. *Dermatol Prakt.* 2015;7(1):40-44.
11. Izdebski Z. Seksualność Polaków na początku XXI wieku. Studium Badawcze, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2012.
12. Młynarczyk-Bonikowska B, Rudnicka I, Majewski S. Praktyczne wytyczne postępowania w chorobach przenoszonych drogą płciową. *Med Dypl.* 2016; 17-19.