

Survey of the sexual health of adolescents and young adults carried out in the course of the project “European Flirt Expert”. Selected results.

2017



Erasmus+

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Preface

The present survey “Sexual health of adolescents” is the result of the EU-sponsored project “European Flirt Expert”. It was carried out between February 2015 to January 2017 and organisations from Austria, Poland, Rumania and Spain participated in the project.

Basic objectives of the project relate to adolescents and non-violent sexual interactions. The promotion of consensual sexual relations among adolescents from the moment of getting to know each other and flirting, as well as the prevention of sexual violence among adolescents represent the main focus. International studies and criminal statistics account for the fact that a majority of sexual assaults against young people are also committed by young people. The causes for this are complex and can be found, among other things, in inadequate sexual education, a culture of violating boundaries, traditional role models and a lack of possibilities for adolescents to deal with the subjects of love, relationships and sexuality, to build a positive approach towards these topics and consult competent persons of trust about their questions.

The consequences of sexual violence are multifaceted and develop differently for each individual. They may occur in the short, medium and long-term and become manifest on a psychological and physical level. The effects of sexual violence may occur over the course of a life-span and concern different areas: Relationship problems, sexual dysfunctions, addictive disorders, disturbed adaptations, depression, eating disorders, anxiety disorders, etc. compromise the lives of many adults, who have experienced sexual violence in their childhood or youth. The impacts concern not only the individual, but also their social environment. Therefore, the benefit of prevention intervention is vast when considering individuals as well as the overall economy.¹

The project “European Flirt Expert” is based on the interaction of scientific research with social practice. Part of the project and a contribution to preventive research was the cross-national survey on the sexual health of adolescents.

¹ cf. Fegert et al. 2013: p. 51 ff.

The objective of the survey was to collect and compare data on the situation of adolescents in different countries. It contained questions on the topics of flirting, relationships, sexual education, sexuality and sexual violence. The results show the level of knowledge of adolescents about their sexual education, how their culture of dealing with each other when flirting or getting to know each other presents itself and if they are able to respect their own and other's boundaries. What is more, the survey ascertained their attitudes towards gender role models, love and sexuality, their sources of information and who their contact persons regarding these topics are.

Some of the questions relate to existing experiences with sexual violence. With the insights gained through this survey it is possible to develop adequate, empirically based preventive services for adolescents that reach beyond national and cultural borders. The aim is to strengthen sexual health and promote consensual sexual interactions without crossing boundaries or provoking sexual violence.

In the first part of this paper the theoretical background is explained, on which the concept for the survey was based. In the second part the most significant results of the survey are presented and interpreted.

The following is a summary of the study results. The detailed long version is available for download on the home page of the "European Flirt Expert" project <http://www.european-flirt-expert.eu/> and from the association Hazissa.

1 Sexual health and sexual violence among adolescents

One of the relevant challenges of adolescence is the development of a healthy and mature sexuality. Sexual health implies the avoiding of negative consequences from sexual intercourse, such as the infection with sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies on the one hand, but also a healthy sexuality on the other. Healthy sexuality covers attitudes, experiences and knowledge about sexuality.² A definition by the WHO from 1975 already included the perception, that sexual health not only comprises physical, but also emotional, mental and social aspects.³

In a publication by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the BZgA (Federal Centre for Health Education), sexual education is considered an important contribution to the promotion of health in general, as it not only adds to the avoidance of negative consequences of sexuality thanks to preventive measures, but also helps to improve quality of life, health and general well-being.⁴

The holistic approach sees sexuality as a human potential, as general life energy and helps children and adolescents in developing basic abilities, with which they themselves can determine their sexuality and relationships in the different developmental stages. It encourages them to live their sexuality and partnerships in a fulfilling and responsible way. These abilities are furthermore vital when it comes to protecting oneself from possible risks.⁵

One possible risk is sexual violence. Sexual violence among adolescents is a problem relevant to society. This is documented by police crime statistics and sociological studies: In 2015, 4198 crimes against sexual integrity and self-determination were reported in Austria.⁶ A majority, being 94.1 %, of the possible offenders were male, and only 5.9 % female. What is striking apart from this gender distribution, is that in adolescents the percentage of girls among suspects is higher than the female proportion in adults: the most common crime in girls aged 14 to 18 is the pornographic representation of minors (§ 207a). Equally remarkable is the fact

² cf. Doherty et al. 2003, qtd. in BMG 2015: p. 54

³ "Sexual health is the integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual and social aspects of sexual being in ways that are positively enriching and that enhance personality, communication and love." (cf. BZgA 2011: S.19)

⁴ cf. BZgA 2011: p. 7

⁵ cf. BZgA 2011: p. 5/6

⁶ cf. BMI, 2016, p. B9

that 13.4 % of suspects are between the ages of 14 to 18 (471 suspects), which also constitutes a rather large proportion compared to older age groups.

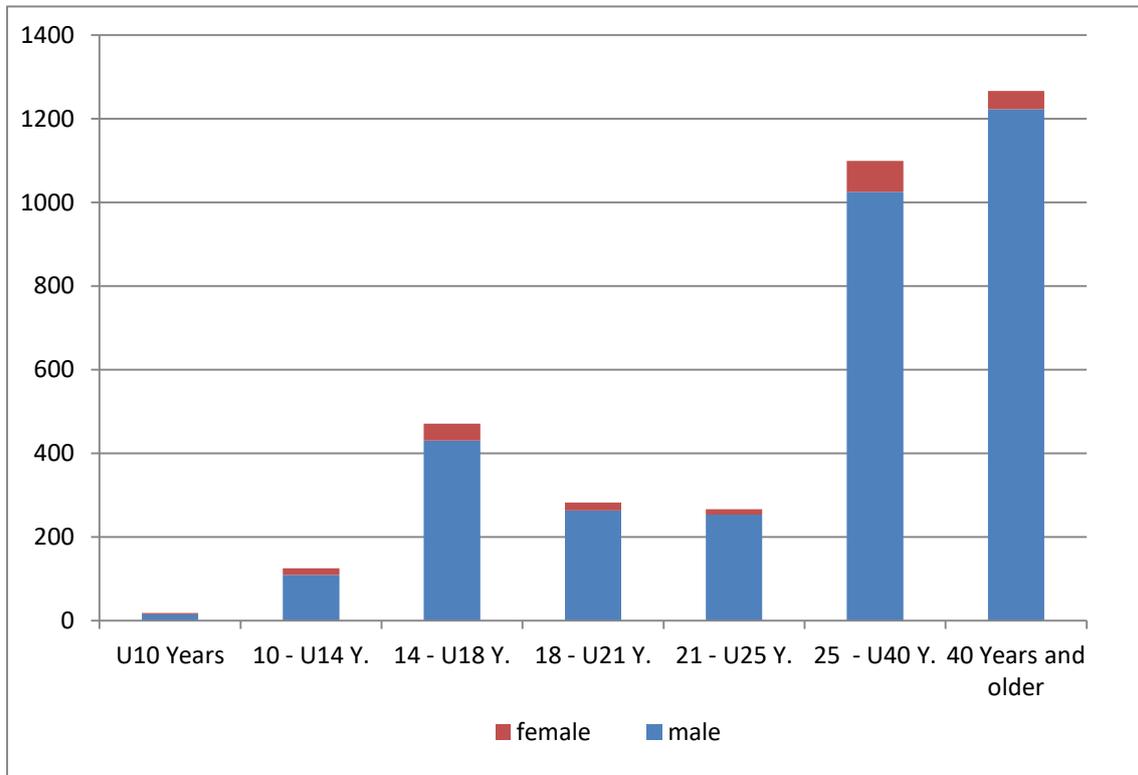


Figure 1: Suspects by sex and age⁷

The percentage of adolescent suspects below the age of 21 amounts to 25.4 %.⁸

With regard to these numbers it needs to be taken into account that only a fraction of the cases of sexual violence is reported and even less are convicted: according to Statistik Austria 899 cases were reported for those under 21 in the year 2015, but in only 82 cases a suspect was convicted – which is a fairly small number. The most common crimes are serious sexual abuse of minors (§ 206) and pornographic representation of minors (§ 207a).⁹ These are the data available for Austria. In the German statistics of criminal complaints similar numbers can be identified, showing that young suspects are overrepresented.¹⁰ In Germany sexual offenses occurring in

⁷ cf. BMI, 2016, S. B9

⁸ cf. BMI, 2016, S. B9

⁹ cf. Statistik Austria 2016, www.statcube.at per 8.8.2016

¹⁰ cf. PKS Bundeskriminalamt www.bka.de; cf. Allroggen/Spröber/ Rau/Fegert 2011, S.9

a group context are reported separately, and these cases 60 % of suspects are below the age of 21.¹¹

In addition to criminal statistics, social studies also document the high proportion of adolescents among sexual offenders. In the US according to Katz, more than 50 % of all sexual acts of violence against children and 20 % of all rapes are committed by adolescents under the age of 18. These numbers are substantiated by an American study, according to which one in five rapes and 30-50 % of the cases of sexual abuse are committed by adolescents. Another survey carried out in the US in 2009 among high school students revealed that 50 % of girls and about 25 % of boys have already experienced abusive behaviour. Also, 5.4 % of students aged between 12 and 19 stated that they themselves had already demonstrated sexually aggressive behaviour.¹²

An investigation conducted in Switzerland shows that 40 % of all sexual offenders are minors, adolescent offenders are, however, far less often reported to the police than adult offenders, accounting for 3 % against 17 %.¹³

In the survey “Sexual health of adolescents” conducted in Styria, Austria, 11.2 % of adolescents interviewed stated already having experienced sexual violence (“Kissing or more against your will”), 61 % of offenders were described as being under 18 years of age.¹⁴

In the survey on adolescent sexuality conducted by the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BzgA) in 2015, which interviewed 14 to 25-year-olds about their sexual experiences, one in five young women (about one in four among those sexually active) reported having experienced sexual violence. Among male adolescents the number of those affected is much smaller, (only 4 % stated having been forced to partake in sexual acts), even though among homosexual or bisexual male adolescents and young men this number was significantly higher: in this group, too, one in five had experienced sexual assault. For homosexual and bisexual male adolescents the offenders can be found mainly among new acquaintances. For girls and young women, offenders are in equal parts either new acquaintances as well as

¹¹ cf. Allroggen/Spröber/Rau/Fegert 2011, p. 9

¹² cf. Katz, 1990, Johnson, 1998 S. 342, Young et al., 2009 a/b, qtd. in Schrenk/Seidler, 2017

¹³ cf. Eisner/Riboud, 2006

¹⁴ cf. Harlander/Maier-Wailand/Seidler/Wochele, 2011, p. 20

friends or ex-partners. Especially those girls and young women, who did not or barely know the partner with whom they had their first sexual intercourse, referred to forced sexual acts.¹⁵

Even if the number of studies on the prevalence of adolescent sexual offenders in German-speaking regions is not very large, it can be noted, based on the data available, that sexual violence among adolescents represents a major social problem, which also influences their mental and social development of identity.

Important stages of psychosocial development involve the development of an independent, self-determined sexual identity, the ability of classifying one's own emotions and learning to empathise with others, as well as the development of one's own sexuality: it is essential that adolescents learn to live their sexuality in a way that is socially acceptable, self-determined but also responsible. It is thus a question of being able to live sexuality in a consensual way, and developing this ability seems to present a great challenge to adolescents.

In the above-mentioned study a large part of sexually active adolescents, almost 40 %, stated not being able to determine how far they were willing to go, i.e. perceiving themselves to be directed by others.¹⁶ We can therefore speak of a 'grey area', which describes that adolescents often perform sexual acts 'voluntarily', try something and thereby go beyond their personal boundaries. Some things may not be considered as sexual violence in individual self-interpretation, neither however as self-determined. This means that there is a fine line between self-determination and heteronomy, between voluntariness and force.

1.1 Risk factors for involuntary sexual contacts

There are three factors that can be considered as risks for involuntary sexual contacts in youth and adulthood:

1. The willingness to engage in sexual contact with no strings attached, i.e. having sexual partners without entertaining a relationship towards them or only a very superficial one. A large number of sexual partners and starting to be sexually active

¹⁵ cf. BzGA 2015: S. 196-198, qtd. in Schrenk/Seidler, 2017

¹⁶ cf. Harlander/Maier-Wailand/Seidler/Wochele, 2011, p. 20

at a young age also contribute to sexual aggression and increase the risk of becoming a victim.

2. The second risk factor is the consuming of alcohol and drugs in the context of sexual interaction. It has been proven that these substances may increase sexual aggression and increase the risk of becoming a victim.

3. The third relevant risk factor is the ambiguous communication of sexual intentions: it is referred to as 'token resistance', when sexual advances are verbally rejected even though, in fact, willingness exists. On the other hand, we speak of 'compliance', when sexual acts are agreed to even though the consenting person does not actually want to do so. This kind of ambiguous communication and interpretation of situations represents a major problem in the interpersonal communication among adolescents. The rejecting of sexual advances while at the same time being willing to engage promotes sexual aggression. Consenting to sex even though not wanting to blurs boundaries and makes it difficult for adolescents to understand where the boundaries of others lie.¹⁷ Since these behavioural patterns are highly gender-specific, it is a vital aspect of prevention to encourage girls in finding out what they want and communicating it, while supporting boys in behaving responsibly. For both sexes it needs to be ensured that they make decisions in a responsible way and question predetermined role models.

¹⁷ cf. Krahe, 2011, p. 134

1.2 Motives for sexual violence

1.2.1 Where does sexual violence begin?

A study from the year 2001¹⁸ on the motives of sexually harassing behaviour shows that many adolescents do not know where sexual violence begins and that it is considered to be something rather normal: 43 % of the boys and 34 % of the girls interviewed stated that it was “no big deal”, something that “a lot of people do” or that it was “part of school life”. Of only 10 % (boys) and respectively 12 % (girls) wanting to exercise power over others, further motives for sexually harassing behaviour and violence are the wish to establish a relationship. Some of the respondents said for example: “I was interested in the person, I thought the person likes it, I wanted to date the person”. This shows the attempt of making contact and the wish to lead a relationship with the targeted person. However, it also reveals the fact that there is insecurity and ignorance regarding the way of dealing with others and knowing which behaviour is socially appropriate for the first contact, the establishing of mutual agreement and the building of a relationship. Peer pressure plays a part here that must not be underestimated: 23-24 % of adolescents stated that they were put up to it by friends.¹⁹ These data prove that raising awareness among adolescents for how to empathise with other people and explaining to them where sexual violence begins is a crucial matter.

1.2.2 New media

For adolescents ‘sexting’, i.e. the sending and receiving of sexual images and text messages, continues to play an important role in connection with experiences of sexual violence. A European survey among 4564 adolescents from Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy and Norway between the ages of 14 and 17 years, could establish a clear correlation between sexting and real-life experiences of violence. Despite great differences between adolescents in the different countries, those reporting violence in their relationships were also more than twice as likely to have sent or received sexual image or text messages. A significant part of the girls interviewed (between 9 and 42 %) said that the pictures or messages sent by them had been forwarded to others.

¹⁸ cf. AAUW 2001, qtd. in Allroggen/Spröber/Rau/Fegert 2011, p. 17

¹⁹ cf. AAUW 2001, qtd. in Allroggen/Spröber/Rau/Fegert 2011, p. 17

Furthermore 17 to 41 % of the girls and 9 to 25 % of the boys in this study said that they had experienced sexual violence from their partner.²⁰

Based on the above-mentioned results the following can be noted: The promotion of sexual health and education in adolescents is necessary. Preventive measures have a high priority, especially since consensual sexuality is an area in which adolescents have a lot to learn, however, in many cases it is not put into practice appropriately and sexual violence is frequent.

²⁰ cf. STIR Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships, 2015, Briefing paper 2, p. 5 ff. <http://stiritup.eu/project/>

2 The survey

2.1 Design and collection of data

The design, data collection and analysis of the survey “Sexual health of adolescents” was carried out during the EU-project “European Flirt Expert” over the course of two years, from 01.02.2015 to 31.01.2017. The association Hazissa in Graz, Austria prepared a written questionnaire based on literature and research results with regard to the current state of knowledge, which was completed with relevant questions specific to the culture of the different participating countries Poland, Romania and Spain at the kick-off meeting in April 2015. The questionnaire was distributed electronically per e-mail and via a link to the survey (on the home page of the project “European Flirt Expert” set up by the association Hazissa, on Facebook and via newsletter). In addition, the questionnaire was distributed in paper form, for example in the during workshops or in schools.

The survey period was from 06/2015 to 07/2016 in the four countries participating in the project. The survey was targeted at adolescents and young adults between the ages of 14 and 24.

2.2 Demographic data: description of the sample

1043 adolescents and young adults have processed the questionnaire and 973 valid completed questionnaires were included in the evaluation. 85 of the respondents were from Poland, 156 from Austria, 266 from Spain and 466 from Romania. The highest response rate was among the 15 to 17-year-olds (between 12 % and 13 % for each age), and 18 to 19-year-olds (10.5 % and 11.2 %). In Poland the age distribution was striking, because the majority of respondents were between the ages of 15 to 17, while at the same time the sample size was relatively small with only 85 evaluated questionnaires.

In total considerably more female than male adolescents and young adults responded to the questions: 606 female participants (62.3 %) as compared to 367 male (37.7 %) participants. In Romania and Austria in particular it is noticeable that almost twice or even three times as many female participants responded, in Poland the answers are almost equally balanced between the sexes and in Spain, even

though more female participants responded, the difference in numbers to the male participants is not very big (cf. Figure 2). With regard to the results the high proportion of female respondents in Austria and Romania needs to be taken into consideration.

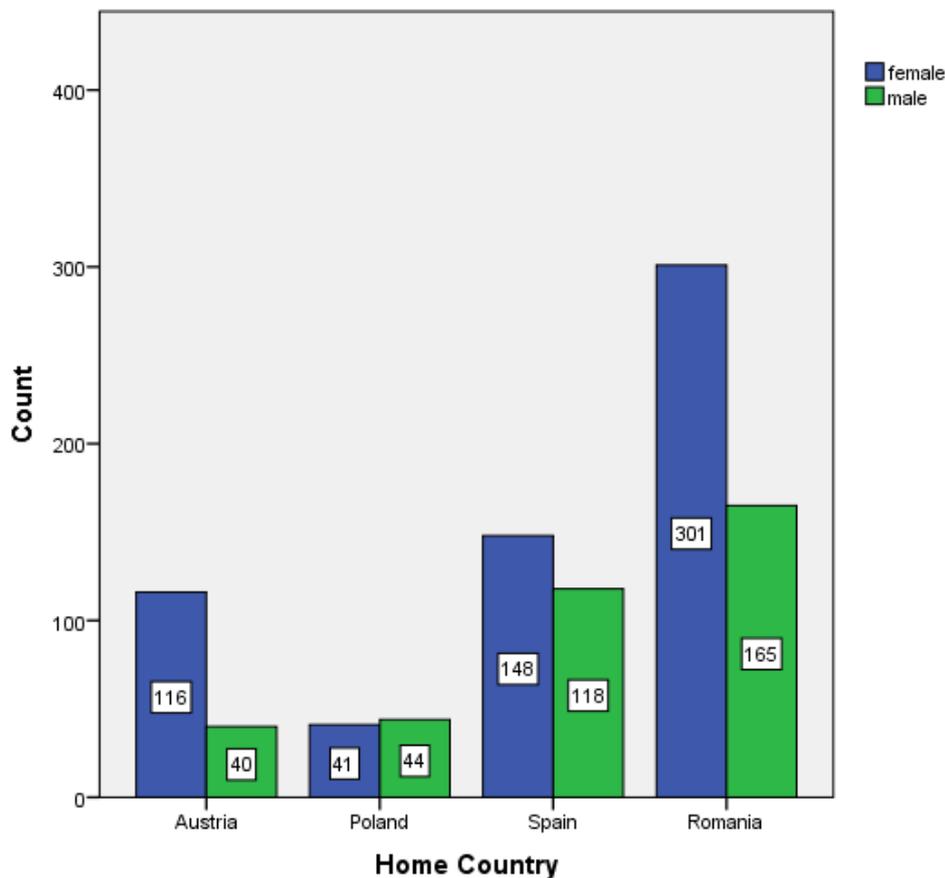


Figure 2: Survey participants by sex and country

2.2.1 Country of origin, educational background, social status, religion, place of residence

The adolescents and young adults in the four countries were asked about their nationality. 9 % of all of respondents stated having a different nationality than that of the participating country they were currently living in. For this survey persons of a different nationality were included in the evaluation and no distinction was made on how long they had been living in the participating countries or how well they were socialised there.

One area of questioning was aimed at ascertaining the educational situation of the participants. 77 % (750) of all participants said that they were attending school, by conclusion the other 23 % do no longer go to school. It was enquired which

occupation the participants were currently pursuing. Of the 245 people answering this second question about their education almost half are studying, a large part are undergoing an apprenticeship or are employed.

A few indirect questions were asked to determine the social status of the participants. These were: "How many cars do the people in your household own?", "How often have you been on a holiday trip in the last 12 months?", "How many computers are in your household? (PCs, laptops, tablets)?" and "Do you have your own room?". A question on the household income would have been more meaningful for determining the social status, but it was not asked because it was assumed that many of the participating adolescents would not know and can therefore not give a reliable answer.

The evaluation of these indirect questions on the social status hardly allows for the deduction of secure knowledge. Since most of the adolescents have cars or computers in their household and also go on holiday frequently, this could be interpreted as their social status being good, i.e. that the earning capacity of the households are such that a car/cars, a computer and holidays can be afforded. However, the information provided regarding the frequency of holidays does not clarify whether they are talking about expensive long-distance trips or lower-cost visits to relatives. It is also possible that there are cultural differences when it comes to housing, e.g. if it is standard to have a separate room or if confined housing is normal. These evaluations thus permit only very limited interpretative conclusions and therefore further reliable correlations with other areas of questioning cannot be established.

Most of the participants declared their religion as orthodox, (41 %), almost all of them were from Romania, followed by roman-catholic (25 %, mostly from Austria) and persons without religious affiliation (24 %): here Spain holds a large share, 73 % of Spanish participants declared having no religious affiliation.

All in all, the majority of respondents indicated living in the city (82 % compared to 18 % in the countryside), with Austria having by far the highest percentage of participants living in rural areas (34 % live in the countryside).

Most of the adolescents interviewed (57 %) (still) live with their parents, in particular in Poland. In contrast it is noticeable that in Austria a relevant proportion (almost

30 %) share a flat with friends. In the other countries shared flats are rare or do not exist at all (Poland). Furthermore, the proportion of participants living with their partner is also the largest in Austria (about 10 %).

2.3 Representativeness

This survey does not claim to be representative. The questionnaires were nevertheless distributed more or less randomly (via the home page but also during workshops), so that the responses came from adolescents/young adults from an academic environment but also from vocational training schools. In Romania the questionnaires were mostly distributed to schools online or in paper form during workshops. In Poland they were mainly distributed in paper form and in Spain mostly during workshops in the course of after-school supervision. The samples are, however, to some extent rather small and show an exceptional age and gender distribution. With regard to age Poland stands out, with regard to gender it is Austria. This is why the interpretation of data when comparing the different countries needs to be done with caution.

3 Results

3.1 Environment and approaches to sexuality

Four questions were used to survey what kind of environment the adolescents grew up in, which approaches to sexuality were formative to them, if they were sexually educated and by whom, and whether they had contact persons for discussing intimate topics.

One statement was: "I can/could talk about intimate questions with someone at home". 35 % of adolescents from all countries completely agreed with this statement. It is remarkable, that in Poland the percentage of those who agreed is the smallest with only 21 %. The significantly predominant part of respondents thus had no contact person.

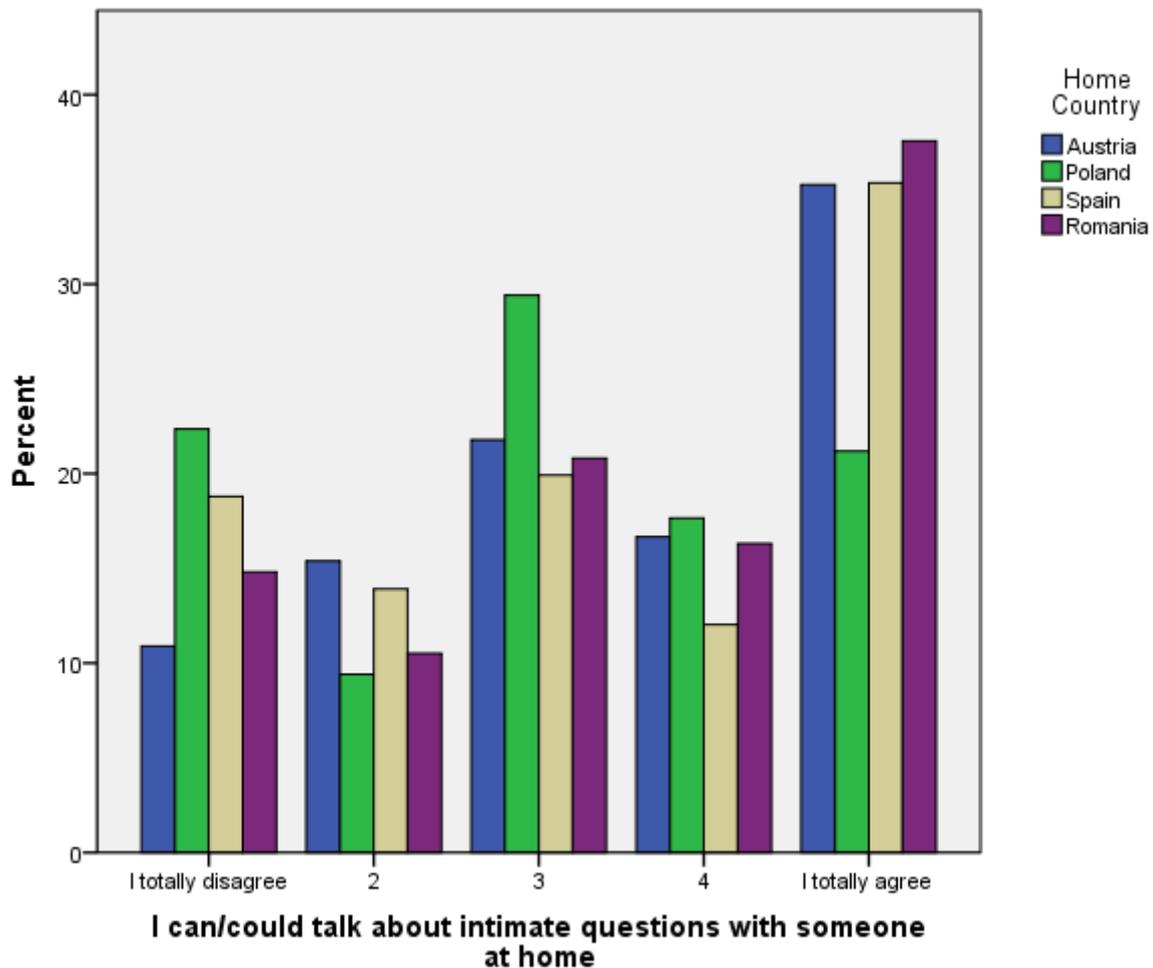


Figure 3: Contact persons for intimate questions

In Austria more than twice as many male adolescents than female had no contact person (“I totally disagree”), with 20 % of boys compared to 8 % of girls. It is noteworthy that in Poland a high percentage of girls (34 %) indicated not having a contact person for this intimate questions.

The question “Who are the most important persons for you to talk about questions regarding sexuality?” was aimed at ascertaining which persons of trust the adolescents and young adults turn to with intimate questions. Throughout all countries most of them listed friends, partners and the mother (also stepmother, foster or adoptive mother), followed by siblings. These are also ahead of the father as relevant contact person (even stepfather, foster or adoptive father). It is obvious that for adolescents, peers of the same age are the most important group for exchanging questions related to sex.

With regard to the statement “No one minds if I have sex/If I have had sex nobody was against it” the answers vary greatly. In Austria most of the adolescents totally agree with this statement (42 %), thereby standing out from the other countries, in which about 30 % totally disagree, and it thus appears to be undesirable to have sex at a young age. In the three other countries the proportion of those responding with the opposite (I totally disagree) is generally quite high.

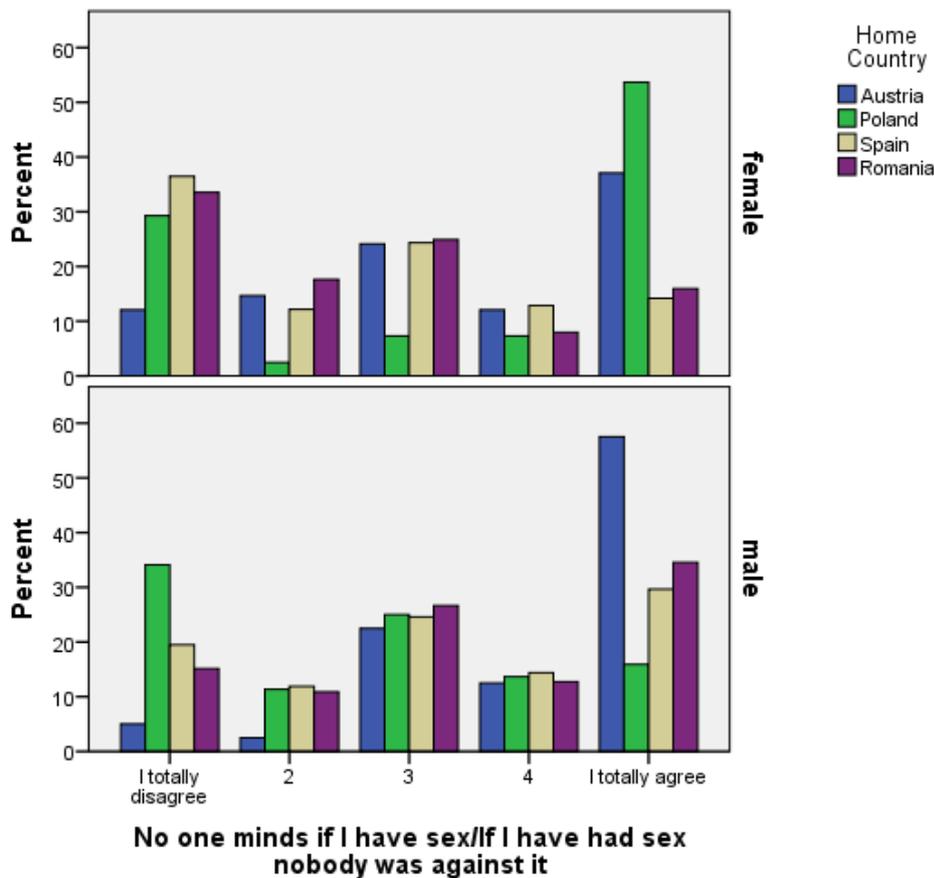


Figure 4: Situation at home regarding sexual relationships by sex and country

It is hardly surprising that in total across all countries the boys agree more with this statement, which implies that they have experienced less restrictions to having sex than girls, (cf. Figure 4). Sexual permissiveness still appears to be granted to boys much more than girls. The results from Poland, however, surprises again: 54 % of the girls totally agreed with this statement compared to only 16 % of the boys. This may be explained by the very small sample size in Poland, which does not allow for a lot of meaningful conclusions.

3.1.1 Summary and conclusions for social environment and approaches to sexuality

The responses to the questions regarding the social environment and approaches to sexuality vary remarkably among the different countries. In general, the Austrian adolescents are most likely to live in a social environment that allows them to have relationships and live their sexuality. Most of the responses from Romania and Spain place in the middle categories. Especially in Poland the adolescents came from a social environment in which relationships and sexuality are little discussed and tolerated. In Austria on the other hand, where the adolescents seemed to have a very liberal and open-minded environment, the boys were the ones who had significantly more difficulties talking about intimate topics.

3.2 Sexual education

“Do you think you are informed about sexual topics?” was the question concerning self-perception with regard to sexual education. The majority of participants across all countries considered themselves to be “pretty much” (51 %) or “very much” (37 %) informed about sexual topics, the categories “little” or “not at all” only account for 10 % and 2 %. There are no relevant differences between the sexes. When comparing the results from the different countries, there is, however, a significant difference between Austria and the other three. Austria has the highest percentage of adolescents who consider themselves to be very much informed about sexual topics (64 %). In Poland, Romania and Spain most of the participants responded as being “pretty much” sexually educated.

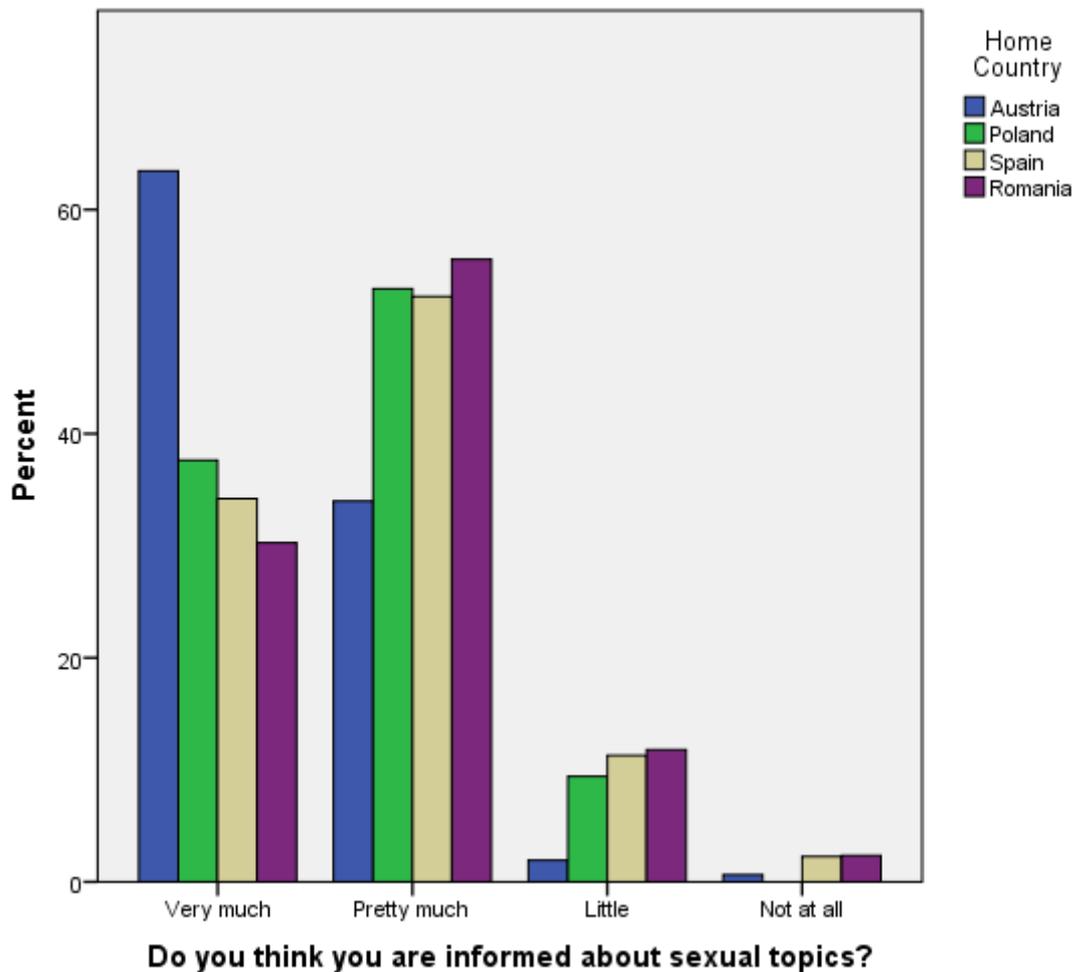


Figure 5: Level of sexual education by country

These results show that the overall level of sexual education among the participants is quite good, even though the percentage of adolescents considering themselves to be little to not at all informed about sexual topics (12 %) should not be overlooked. Almost none of the adolescents responding with “little” and “not at all” were from Austria, in contrast the percentage was a little higher in the other countries. Since this question was aimed at finding out about their self-perception, it needs to be taken into account that the adolescents consider themselves sexually educated, but nevertheless possibly do not know a lot of things or have incorrect information (e.g. falsehoods learned from older siblings or pornographic media).

In response to the question who they were sexually educated by, most of the adolescents in all countries referred to friends, followed by the mother in second place. “Magazines, books, brochures” were another frequent answer. “(Internet) pornography” was listed even more often as a source of sexual education than the father.

3.3 Values, attitudes and approaches to meeting people and sexuality

The adolescents and young adults were presented with ten statements on values, attitudes and approaches to meeting people and sexuality, in order to find out what they consider to be good and proper or, respectively, what they oppose. The results for three of these statements are given below.

Boys should make the first step when flirting.

Most of the participants throughout all countries responded with an answer in the middle categories between “I totally agree” and “I totally disagree”.

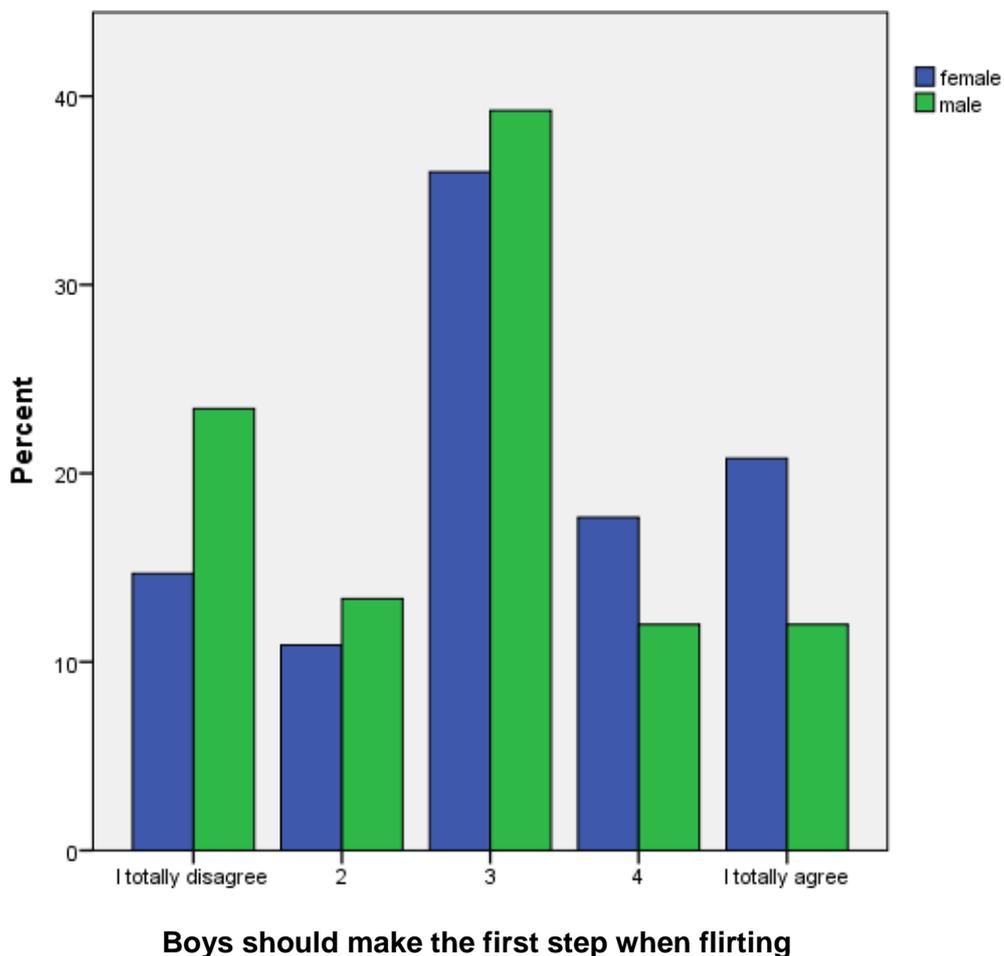


Figure 6: Attitude towards flirting by sex

There are, however, great discrepancies in the answers according to gender: Girls agreed with this statement significantly more often than boys, who tended to disagree. It is possible that boys wish for it to be accepted that girls may also make

the first step. Apparently girls adhere more strongly to traditional role models, maybe because a passive role is more familiar to them or even more comfortable.

When looking at results in all four countries it can be noted that in Spain the lowest number of adolescents of both sexes agreed with this statement. It therefore seemed equally acceptable for boys as well as girls to make the first step when flirting. In Austria and Romania, the differences between the sexes were the greatest: the girls agreed more strongly that boys should make the first step, the boys tended to disagree. This can be interpreted as the boys wishing for it to be acceptable both ways.

When a girl drinks too much, she is responsible for being molested or raped.

The vast majority of all adolescents did not agree with this statement at all (53 %) or gave an answer in a middle category. Only 10 % of adolescents totally agreed with this statement, without there being noteworthy differences between the sexes. These only become apparent when looking at the individual countries, where Poland stands out again: Polish boys increasingly agreed with this statement (about twice as often as Polish girls). In Austria and Spain this statement met the least approval among both sexes.

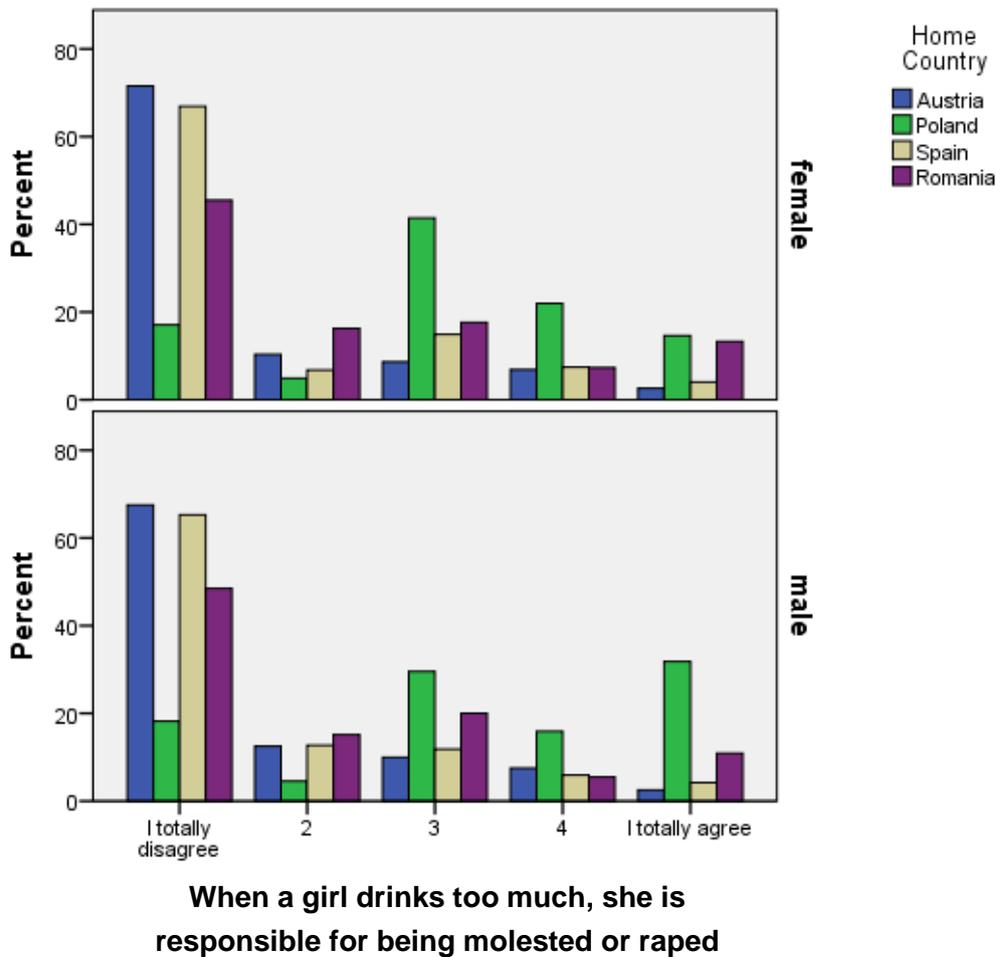


Figure 7: Apportioning of blame to intoxicated girls by sex and country

Homosexuality is totally okay

The reactions to this statement vary greatly among the different countries: Austrian adolescents showed by far the strongest approval, followed by the Spanish. In Romania significantly less adolescents approved of homosexuality and Poland came in last. Homosexuality is still highly discriminated against in Poland²¹ and this social stance evidently also influences the adolescents attitude towards it. It is also interesting that in all countries the female adolescents are more tolerant towards homosexuality, and among Polish and Romanian boys in particular, the number of those strongly disagreeing with the statement was significantly higher than that of girls.

²¹ cf. also the European Values Study <http://www.atlasofeuropeanvalues.eu>, providing additional results on this topic. Eastern European countries have a much more negative attitude towards homosexuality than northern and western European countries.

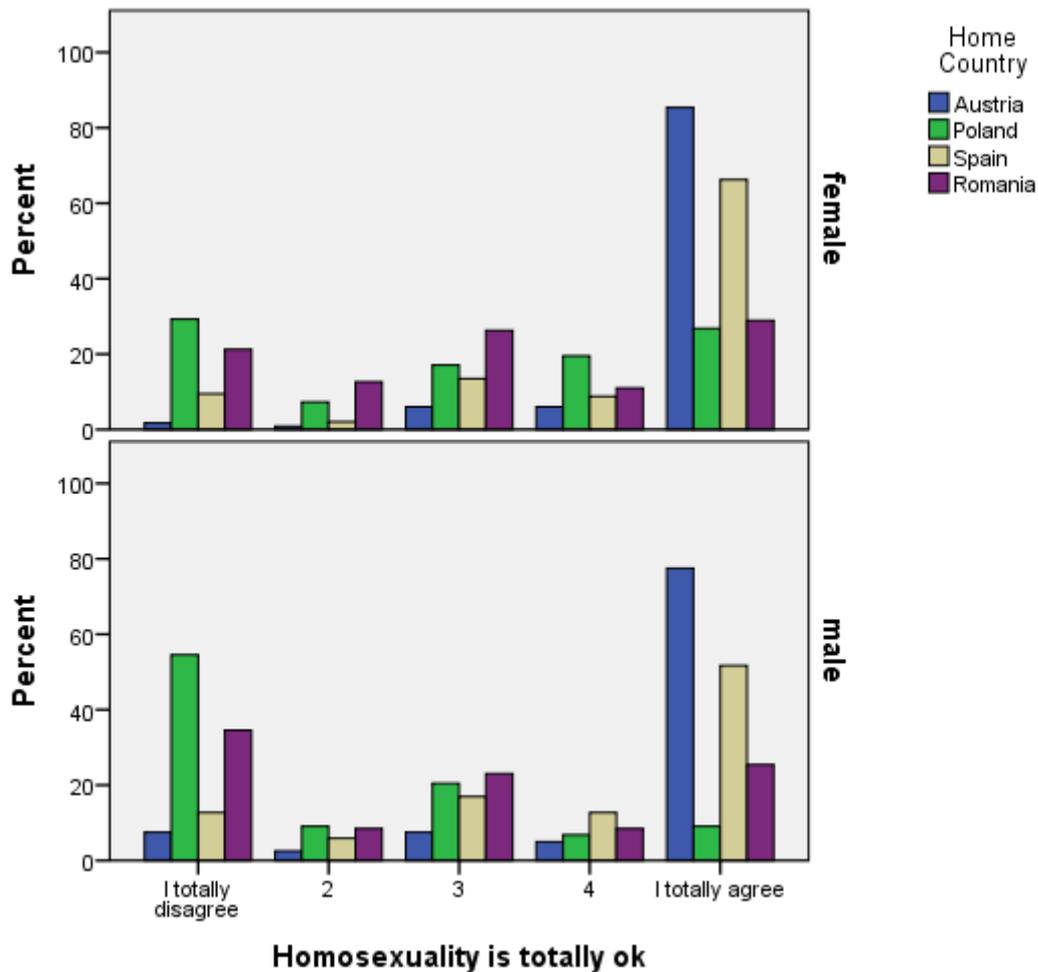


Figure 8: Attitude towards homosexuality by sex and country

3.3.1 Summary and conclusions for attitudes and values

Summing up the results on values, attitudes and approaches to meeting people and sexuality, it is striking that there are partly very big differences between the countries as well as the sexes.

The results from Poland show the most conservative, gender unequal and homophobic attitude (e.g. towards homosexuality, responsibility of girls for being molested when drunk etc.). Adolescents from Spain and Austria have the most liberal and gender equal attitude. The answers from Romania lie mostly in the middle categories.

Gender differences are most distinct in response to the question, if boys or girls should make the first step. Girls tend to take the view that boys should be the ones making the first step, while boys rather have the opposite opinion. Among Polish adolescents in particular, some of the discrepancies between the sexes are obvious.

For example, girls should not have sex before they are married, to them relationships are more important than to boys, and they themselves are responsible for being molested or raped, when dressing in a sexy way. Polish girls therefore seem to have a more conservative or self-restrictive attitude than Polish boys. One explanation for this could be that traditional and social ideas still influence girls more strongly than boys and that they need to fear greater repressions.

When it comes to the question if homosexuality is totally okay, the difference in responses by sex is similarly significant: Boys and young men in all countries appear to be more homophobic than girls. The data suggest that boys and young men link homosexuality to being 'unmanly' and therefore disapprove of it more strongly.

3.4 Meeting and getting to know people / flirting

A fundamental part of the EU project was the topic of respectful flirting and getting to know people, which is why a lot of the questions on this topic were incorporated in the survey. First of all, five statements regarding the attitudes towards sexuality and relationships with focus on the personal behaviour of the adolescents and young adults were analysed, two of them are described below.

I will not have sex before I am married.

Only 12 % of adolescents answered this question with "Yes", and 88 % with "No". Gender differences cannot be detected, but a remarkable difference between the countries: in Austria the proportion of adolescents rejecting this statement is very high (97 %). This leads to the conclusion that the first time they have sexual intercourse is not linked to a marriage.

I like to make the first step when flirting.

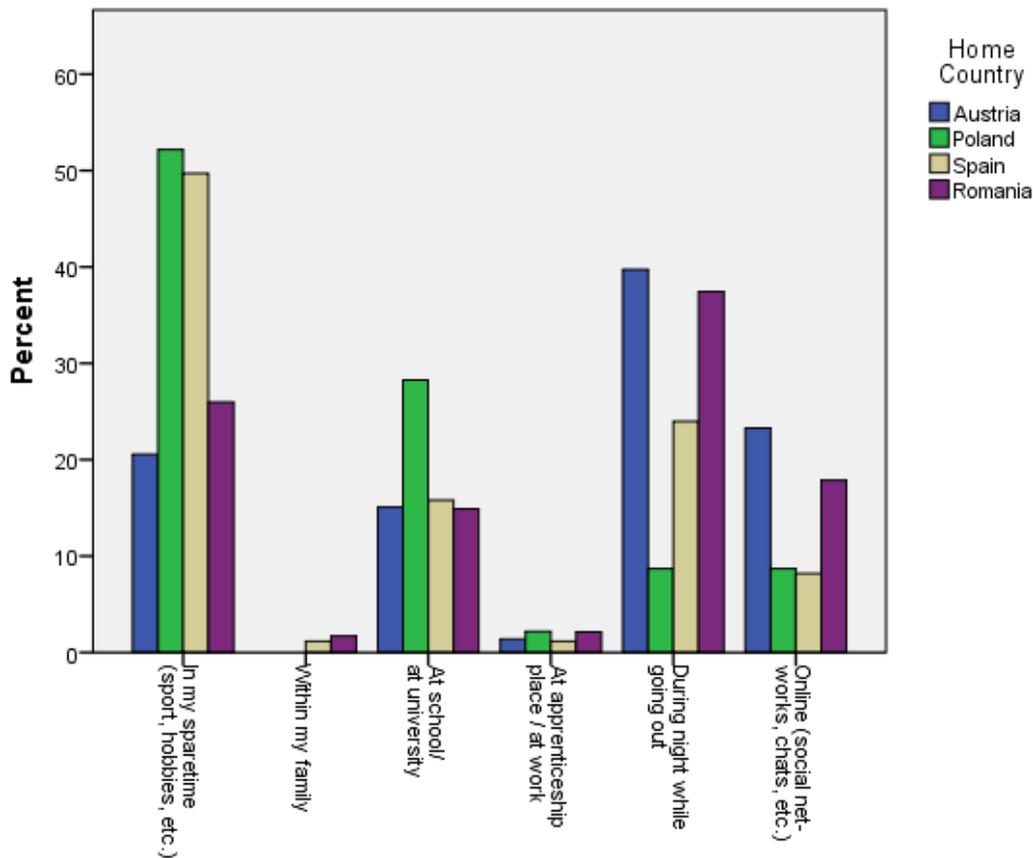
Here there is a big difference between the two sexes: almost 70 % of boys but only 57 % of girls agree with this statement. Gender-specific socialisation and traditional role models seem to come into effect – but not as much in Romania: here altogether 90 % of adolescents like to make the first step when it comes to flirting and there are no important differences between the sexes. It is interesting that their own behaviour when flirting is nevertheless different than their attitudes towards it (cf. question 2.6).

3.5 Personal relationship experiences

"Are you have in a love relationship at the moment?" was one question for the adolescents and young adults. About half of them stated that they were currently in a love relationship (31 % have a male partner, 15 % have a female partner) and 54 % are single at the moment.

Another question on the topic of meeting new people / flirting was: "If you want to flirt and/or get to know a partner: where does this happen the easiest?" Here, most of the adolescents (35 %) said "In my free time (sports, hobbies, etc.)", followed by "At night while going out" (31 %). It is remarkable, that girls and young women listed going out in the evenings significantly more often as an easy way to meet a partner. On the other hand, there is a big difference in the category "Online": More boys/young men said that it was easiest in social networks or chats to get to know a partner (19 %).

Austria and Romania had the highest numbers of adolescents stating that getting to know a partner was the easiest at night while going out, in Poland and Spain this seemed to be easier for them in their free time.



**If you want to flirt and/or get to know a partner:
Where does this happen the easiest?**

Figure 9: Where does flirting/getting to know a partner happen the easiest, by country

When asking the adolescents where they actually met their partner, (“Where did you meet your current partner?”), their answers show a different result: The majority (33 %) of adolescents responded with “In my free time (sports, hobbies, etc.)”, closely followed by the category “At school/university” with 31 %. The category “At night while going out” comes in third with 17 %, and a few answers were among the category “Online (social networks, chats etc.)” with 14 %.

3.6 Sexual experiences

A part of the survey was aimed at finding out what kind of sexual experiences the adolescents had already made. In this section the topics of contraception and the experience of the first time having sexual intercourse are presented.

The first time

When asked the question “How old were you when you had sex for the first time?”, 526 of the adolescents responded.

Most of the adolescents were 16 or 17 years old when they had sex for the first time, with boys of all countries on average being younger than girls. (15.9 compared to 16.5 years old, which is more than half a year younger). By comparison, Romanian adolescents were the oldest at the time of their first sexual intercourse, while the Spanish were the youngest. When comparing the different countries (excluding Poland) the above statement on gender differences is put into perspective: in Austria girls were on average younger when they had their first time, in Spain and Romania, however, the boys were younger.²²

Contraception during first intercourse

“Did you use contraception during your first sexual intercourse?” was a follow-up question, to which 526 adolescents gave an answer. 79 % responded with “Yes” and 21 % with “No”. There were great differences between the countries and the answers from Poland could not be taken into account due to the small sample size. Austrian adolescents are the most responsible, with 94 % having used contraception. The most popular contraceptive were condoms: 84 % of participants used them, followed by the birth control pill with only 13 %. The other forms of hormonal contraception (vaginal rings, hormonal implant IMPLANON, contraceptive patch) have little incidence during the first time. It is noteworthy that in Austria the pill was used much more commonly than in the other countries, namely in 27 % of cases. Thus, condoms on average only made up a small share in Austria.

Experiencing the first time

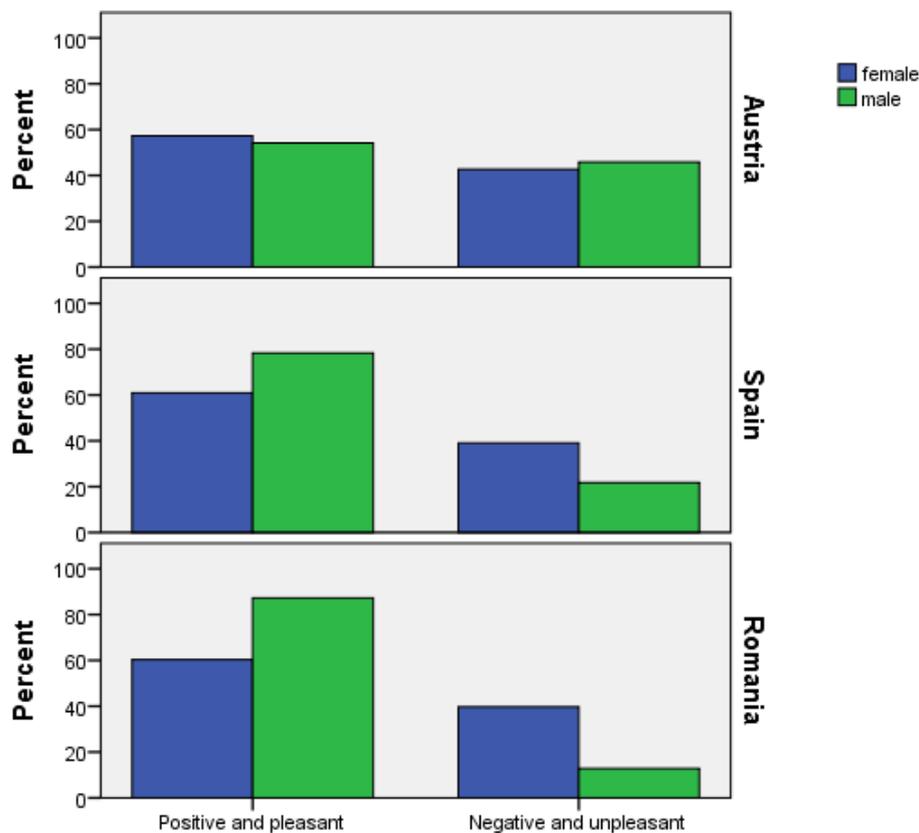
The last question related to the first sexual intercourse was with regard to their personal experience: “How did you experience your first time?”.

The 526 responses were very different depending on the sex of the participants: while the majority of male respondents from all countries (81 %) had positive and

²² The results for the average age at the first time can be compared to results from other surveys, e.g. the survey on adolescent sexuality from 2015 by the BZgA: on average, 16, 39 % had had their first time by the age of 16, by the age of 17 more than half of the participants, namely 58 % (cf. Bundesgesundheitszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung 2015: Studie Jugendsexualität).

nice experiences, far fewer females (61 %) responded in the same way. When comparing the countries (with the exception of Poland due to the small number of cases there) there were no significant differences among the girls, but only among the boys in the different countries: Romanian boys seemed to have had the most positive experiences, followed by the Spanish boys and young men.

It is interesting that there are hardly any differences in female and male Austrian participants when it comes to their experiences: the percentage of boys having made negative and unpleasant experiences during their first sexual intercourse is similar to that of girls.



How did you experience your first time having sex?

Figure 10: Experiencing the first time, by sex and country

3.7 Sexting

In this survey experiences with sexting, the sending of sexual messages and images, were also enquired. The first question in this context, to which all participants responded, was: "Have you ever sent sexual messages or pictures of yourself to any

of your partners?” During the relationship the majority of participants (64 %) said never having done so, the other 36 % fall between “once”, “a few times” or “often”. In total, 12 % stated having sent sexual messages and images “often”. In the figures below the results from the different countries are shown, with no remarkable differences. Gender-specific differences are not evident either.

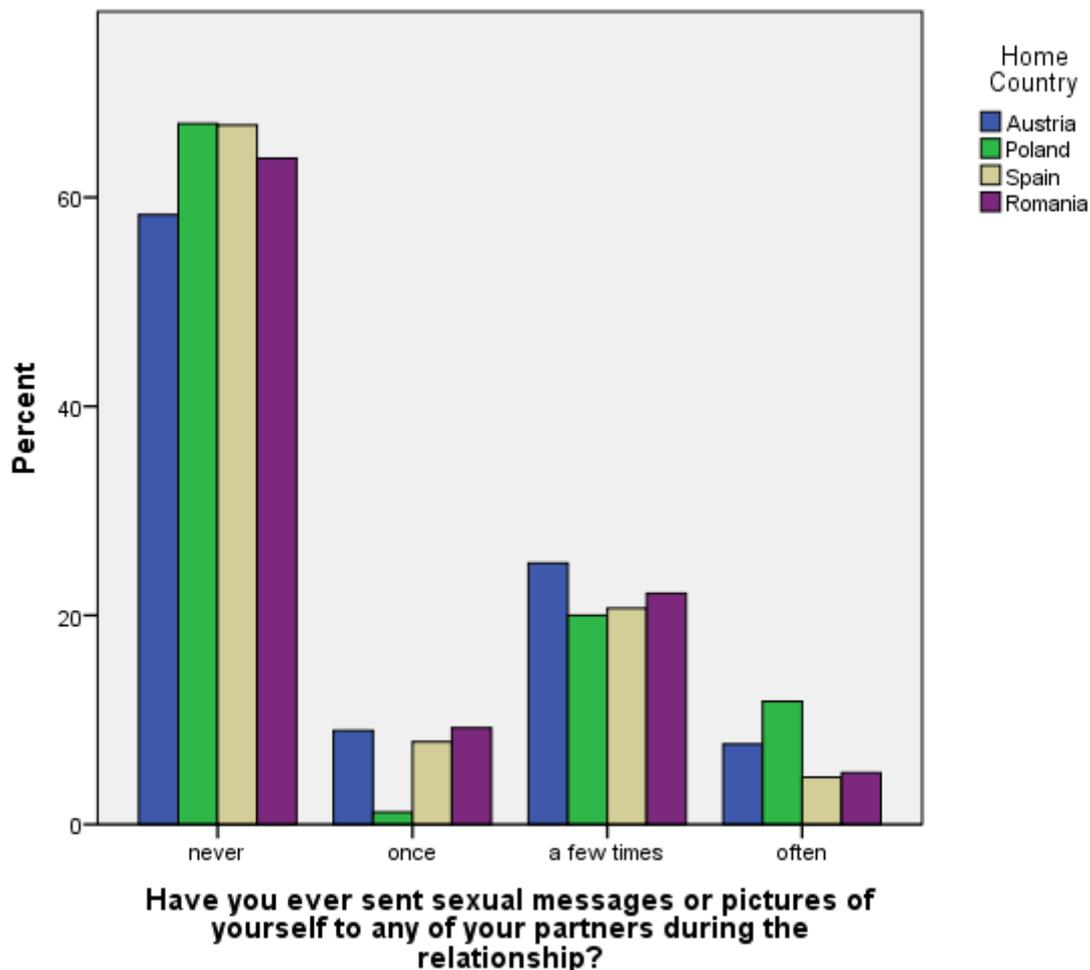


Figure 11: Sexting during a relationship by country

A point of interest in this survey was why the adolescents practiced sexting: “Please select all the reasons why you did this”. Multiple answers were possible. Most of the answers were in the categories “in order to feel sexy/for flirting” (44 %), “as a response to a similar message from my partner” (44 %) and “as a joke/to be important” (35 %). Relevant differences between the sexes could only be determined in the categories “to show off” (more boys) and “for other reasons” (more girls). When it comes to the feelings during sexting it turned out that the adolescents and young

adults mostly associated positive feelings with the sending of sexual messages or pictures of themselves.

Only a very small number of participants (18 people) stated, that the message/picture sent was shared with someone else, 27 persons were not sure if this was the case.

In summary, it can be said that the majority of adolescents and young adults deals with sexting in a very responsible way and does not forward the messages and pictures to others. They seem to be informed about possible criminal penalties or do not distribute the messages for other reasons. The boys interviewed are in general more involved in sexting, they receive and send more messages and also ask more frequently for them.²³

3.8 Experiences of sexual violence

Part of the survey was aimed at collecting data on existing experiences with sexual violence. In this part it was of special interest to find out what kind of differences exist between the sexes, but also possible interconnections to answers to other questions. For example, are the adolescents who practice sexting more frequently also more likely to be affected by sexual violence than others? Are adolescents who describe themselves as being sexually very educated less prone to experience sexual harassment? Another part of the questions was to determine how many of the adolescents and young adults become offenders themselves.

3.8.1 Sexual harassment without physical contact

All participants answered the question “Have you ever been sexually harassed without physical contact (exhibitionism, passing on of private photos etc.)?” The majority of participants from all countries (91 %) responded with “No”. 9 % (85 persons) stated already having experienced this kind of sexual harassment, in total 66 of them were girls/young women (11 %), and 19 were boys/young men (5 %). This shows that, as expected, there is a big difference between the sexes because girls

²³ In another European survey the results on transmitting sexual messages or pictures are higher: between 9 and 42 % of young women from four out of five countries investigated, stated that a message they had sent to their partner had been forwarded, cf. STIR Safeguarding Teenage Intimate Relationships, 2015, Briefing paper 2, p. 7, <http://stiritup.eu/project/>. However, other surveys from the US also established that sexting is not very commonly practiced among adolescents (15-20 %) and only a small minority (under 10 %) have made negative experiences with sexting. Yet when sexting is used as mobbing, this mostly affects girls. (cf. Döring, 2012: p. 4-25).

and young women are affected twice as often as boys and young men. When comparing the results from the different countries, it is noticeable that Austrian girls particularly often answered with “Yes” (17 %) and thereby stand out from girls from the other three countries and boys in general.

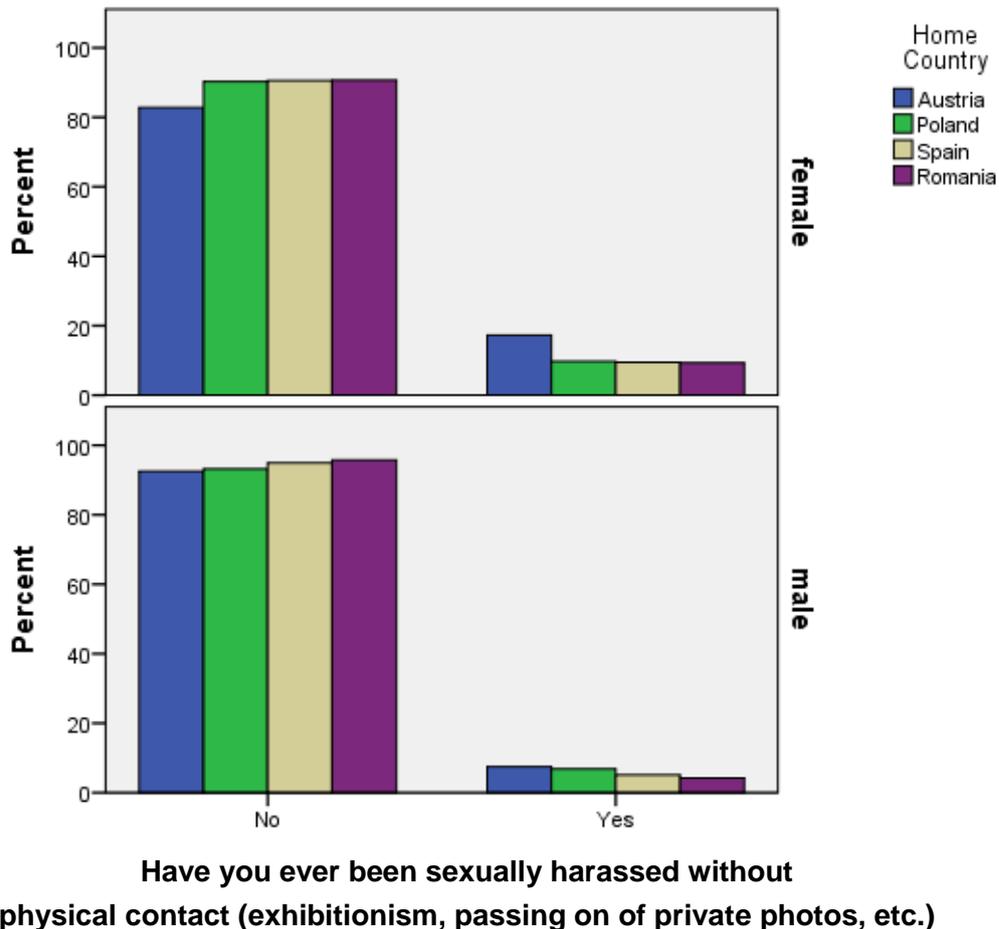


Figure 12: Sexual harassment without physical contact by sex and country

3.8.2 Sexual harassment with physical contact

All participants answered the question “Have you ever been sexually harassed with physical contact (groping, kissing, or more against your will)?”. In total the percentage of persons affected is slightly higher: 87 % of both sexes responded with “No” and 13 % with “Yes” (126 persons). Among them, girls and young women were twice as often victims of molestation (17 %) than the boys and young men (7 %).

The high rate of Austrian girls and young women affected by sexual harassment compared to those in the other countries is especially striking, as is shown below:

42 % of Austrian girls reported having made such experiences (13 % of Austrian boys), 17 % of Spanish, 9 % of Romanian and only 2 % of Polish girls.

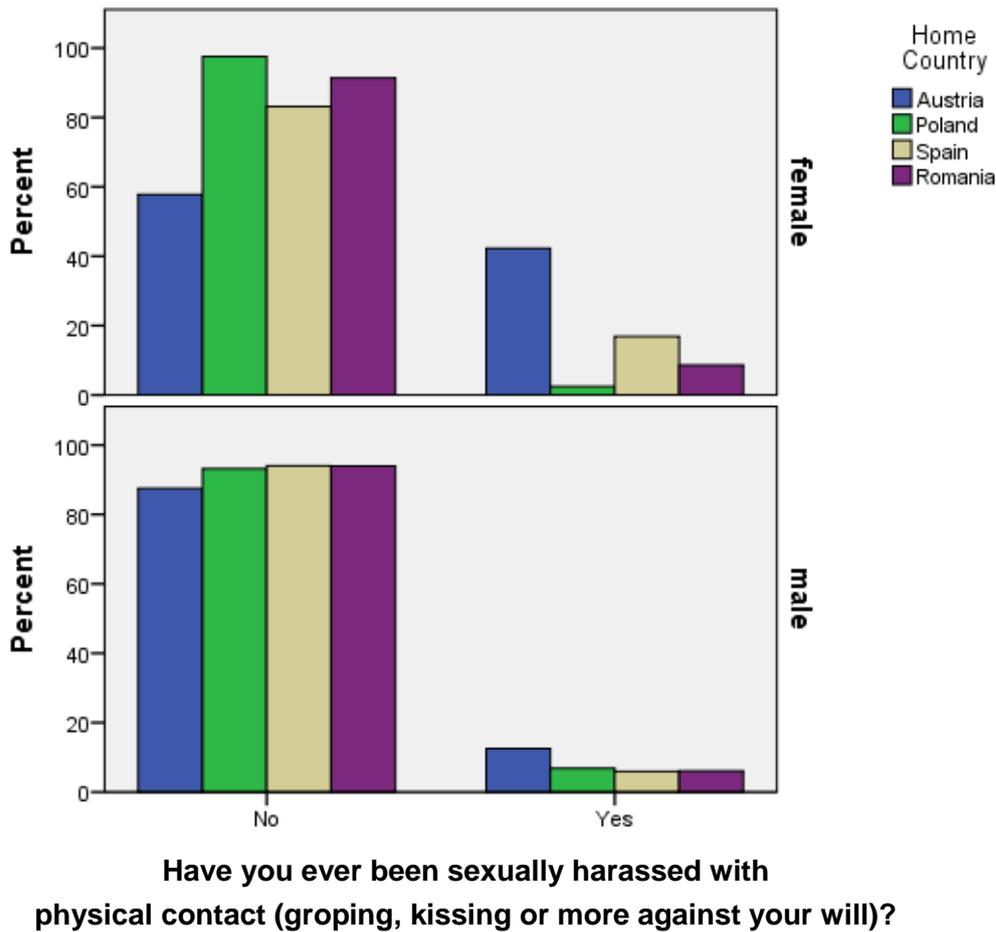


Figure 13: Sexual harassment with physical contact by sex and country

It is possible that there are cultural differences in the denomination and classification of sexual violence in the different countries, which results in the fact that Austrian girls perceive experiences of sexual violence more often as such and label them accordingly. Another possible interpretation is that Austrian girls have a greater awareness for the existence of sexual violence. It is also conceivable that, in comparison to other countries, the prevention of sexual violence is increasingly dealt with in school, education or during out-of-school activities. The questionnaire may have incited the adolescents to reflect on the topic of sexual violence and become aware of experiences they have made. Regarding the smaller number of boys being affected, the fact that they less often classify involuntary physical contact as sexual violence and therefore do not label it as such may also play a role.

In summary it can be said that the risk for girls and young women to experience sexual harassment with physical contact compared to boys and young men is about 6 times higher in Austria, 1.7 times higher in Spain and across all countries it is about 2.5 times higher. These results are not surprising, since they show the greater sexual victimisation of girls and women, as do other studies carried out in this field.²⁴

3.8.3 Contact persons

If the respondents had experienced sexual activities involuntarily, the follow-up question was if and with whom they talked about this experience.

182 adolescents responded to this question and it turned out that across all countries, friends were the most frequent contact persons, namely for 63 % of those concerned. Partners come in second with 31 %, mothers make out 20 %, and information centres only account for 9 %. The gender comparison reveals that girls indicate friends as contact persons even more frequently than boys (69 % compared to 43 %), while for other statements there were no striking gender differences.

3.8.4 Getting help

One question was aimed at finding out if the adolescents having experienced sexual violence had received any form of help, to which 181 participants responded.

The majority of adolescents received help (64 %), 36 % however, did not, which is still a very high percentage. There are barely any gender differences and also when comparing the results from the different countries no statistically significant differences can be found.

3.9 Connections to other categories

This survey was aimed at finding out, whether the experiencing of sexual violence is linked to other variables.

Firstly, it was of interest whether there is a connection between sexting and becoming a victim of sexual violence, specifically when image or text messages were sent during or after the end of a relationship. It became clear that there is a strong connection between sexting during a relationship and the experience of sexual

²⁴ cf. Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung, 2011, p. 105-112; cf. Averdijk /Müller-Johnson/ Eisner, 2011

violence *without* physical contact: 21 % of those stating that they had practiced sexting during a relationship where affected by sexual violence without physical contact, but only 6 % of those never having practiced sexting in a relationship. There is also a connection between sexting and experiences of sexual violence *with* physical contact: 10 % of those never having practiced sexting in a relationship had become victim of this kind of violence. Those participants, who had practiced sexting once, a few times and often, were, however, twice as often victims of sexual violence with physical contact.

When sexting had been practiced after the end of a relationship, the incidence of sexual abuse *without* physical contact was even higher still, especially among those having responded with “often” (46 %). Experiences of sexual violence *with* physical contact were also more common, when sexting occurred after the end of a relationship. This result could be interpreted to the effect that undesired sexting is a form of sexual harassment without physical contact and therefore the connection is accordingly more evident.

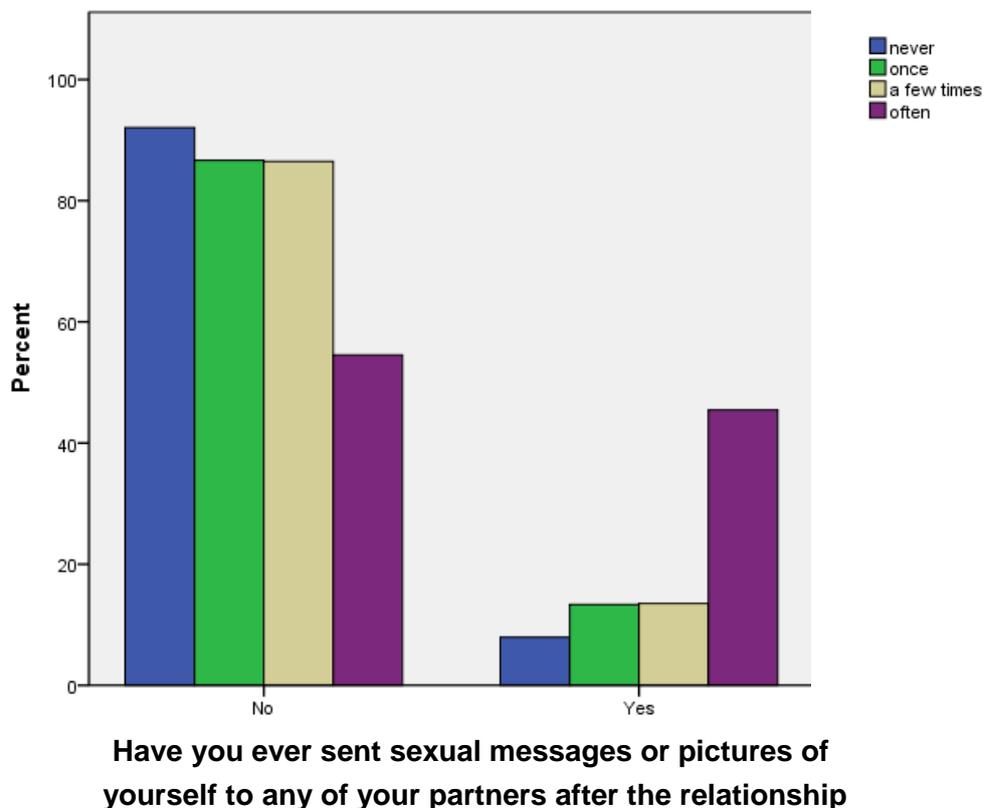


Figure 14: Connection between sexting after a relationship and being affected by sexual violence without physical contact

4 Summary

The objective of the present survey was to collect and compare data on the attitudes and values regarding flirting and sexual behaviour, the sexual experiences and numbers of adolescents and young adults affected by sexual violence in the four countries of Austria, Poland, Romania and Spain. It became apparent that there are differences between the countries and the sexes when it comes to certain topics.

Values and Attitudes: Regarding the values and attitudes when it comes to sexuality, it is particularly striking that adolescents in Austria live in an environment that, compared to the other countries, seems to have the most liberal approach towards sexuality, in particular concerning the possible ways of living in partnerships and living sexuality, as well as the discussing of intimate questions. In the latter case the gender difference becomes apparent: Austrian boys have significantly less contact persons for intimate questions than girls. Spain is on about the same level of tolerance, gender equality and liberality as Austria when it comes to attitudes and values regarding sexuality and relationships. In Poland, relationships and sexuality of adolescents are less tolerated and therefore often not (openly) lived – Polish girls in particular experience strong restrictions.

The results from Poland often stand out when compared to the other countries. In reaction to many of the opinions stated, a conservative, gender-unequal and homophobic attitude was revealed (for example regarding the boys' sexual drive, homosexuality, responsibility of girls when they drink alcohol or dress in a sexy way and are molested etc.). The Polish girls display an even more conservative and self-restricting attitude regarding certain topics. This became apparent in the ideas that girls should not have sex before they are married or that they themselves are responsible for being molested or raped when dressing in a sexy way. Across all countries it can be noted that boys disapprove of homosexuality more strongly than girls, but in Poland homosexuality is discriminated against the most.

Meeting people and flirting: When it comes to meeting and getting to know people and making the first step when flirting there are only small differences between the countries, but rather important gender differences: significantly more boys than girls stated that they could get to know a partner through online networks. The girls on the other hand, said that it was easier to find a partner at night while going out. In Austria

and Romania most adolescents said it was easiest for them to meet potential partners at night while going out, while in Poland and Spain this is easier for adolescents in their free time. In reality, the adolescents met their partners most commonly first of all in their free time, secondly at school/university and thirdly in at night while going out. Gender differences became evident in response to the question who should make the first step when flirting: more boys than girls were of the opinion, that girls should make the first step, whereas the girls in many cases hold on to a more traditional approach, meaning that boys should make the first step.

Sexual experiences: The results for sexual experiences also show some cross-country and gender differences. The majority of participants considered themselves to be very or pretty much sexually educated. Most of the adolescents are between 16 and 17 years of age when they have sex for the first time, which is similar to the results from other surveys. The number of Austrian and Spanish adolescents already having had sex was significantly higher than that of Romanian and Polish adolescents, the Romanian participants were, in comparison to the other countries, the oldest when they had their first sexual intercourse. It became apparent that the majority of adolescents were very responsible when it comes to contraception even during their first time, meaning that most of them used contraception. The Austrian adolescents are clearly in the lead compared to the other countries regarding contraception during their first sexual intercourse.

When it comes to the number of sexual partners and the experiences of sex, certain differences between the sexes can be made out: boys indicated a higher number of sexual partners than girls. Across all countries the girls had made more negative and uncomfortable experiences during their first sexual intercourse – only Austria stands out. Here the number of positive and negative experiences of both sexes are very similar, in the sense that proportionately, boys have also had more negative and uncomfortable experiences during their first time.

Sexting: Regarding the experiences with sexting there are no significant differences between the countries. Most of the adolescents have a very responsible way of dealing with the sending of sexual messages and pictures. The positive experiences with sexting prevail, and only a minority of the respondents has experience with the forwarding of text messages or pictures with others. Among those having done so or who have experienced this, there are only very few negative assessments. The

gender comparison shows that boys are more often involved in sexting than girls, when it comes to the sending and receiving of sexual messages and pictures, as well as when asking for such messages.

Victims of sexual violence: The girls in this survey are significantly more often victims of sexual violence than the boys. In particular, a high number of Austrian girls stated having been affected by sexual violence and also more frequently named strangers to be the offenders compared to boys. Girls were also more likely to be victims several times, boys mostly only once. The contact persons for talking about their experiences with sexual violence were most commonly friends, especially for girls they are important contact persons. Even though the majority of adolescents affected by sexual violence did receive help, a third of adolescents affected in all countries did not get any help.

5 Conclusions

The results of this survey confirm the importance of sexual educational work in schools/companies or out of school. It can and should incite the questioning of traditional concepts of gender roles, e.g. regarding making the first step when flirting. Girls should be encouraged to question predetermined thinking patterns and not simply accept their 'passive' role. Further topics could revolve around the issue of responsibility for contraception and the question, how the first sexual intercourse can be a pleasant experience for both sexes. For educational work in practice, offers from external contact persons for sexual education and answering questions are generally useful, because family and other persons do not always cover these topics.

The results of this survey show that more such services would be particularly desirable and necessary in Poland and Romania. Gender-specific services are also useful, because girls and boys have different kinds of questions and should be supported according to their specific needs in their development towards becoming a woman or man. The results also confirm that for boys anti-homophobic and anti-discriminative work should be a focal point. Boys often have even less contact persons for questions on sexuality than girls.

With regard to the results it should be noted that the present situation is already relatively good. This can surely be in part attributed to the contribution of sexual education and preventive work in the course of workshops or carried out by highly committed information centres: the adolescents and young adults who participated in the survey behave very responsibly when it comes to contraception and sexting.

With regard to sexual violence, further sexual education, the raising of awareness and implementation of suitable preventive measures are necessary. Since girls are affected more strongly, they need added protected spaces and support. Part of the work with adolescents and young adults must be to strengthen their ability to recognize and respect their own limits as well as those of others, in order to prevent sexual violence among adolescents. Adolescents need to learn how to have sexual relations in a responsible and consensual way. The high rate of experiences with sexual violence shows that greater investment is necessary in this area.

In general, all countries have a need for stronger networks, more contact points and adequate support measures for victims of sexual violence, as to reduce the number of adolescents and young adults who do not receive help upon experiencing sexual violence in the future.

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