

EduSexAge – EDUcation for healthy SEXuality in older AGE

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Background

Myths and taboos that are deeply embedded as socio-cultural norms can be difficult to overcome. One taboo that has confronted older people is fuelled by the myth that older people are predominately asexual. This can be related to the general dominance of reproduction in thinking about issues of sex, sexuality and sexual health and can perhaps also be related to ageism and the view of older people as no longer economically active. The extent to which this myth is prevalent is frequently reflected in a lack of information and services to cater for older people and a reluctance among both older people and health and social care professionals to raise or discuss such issues. While problematic in the past, the increasing proportions of older people across European populations makes tackling such myths increasingly important.

Aim and Objectives

- To raise awareness and challenge the myth of older people as asexual.
- To develop education materials for older people to support them in engaging with the topics of sex, sexuality, and sexual health.
- To develop education and training materials for health and social care professionals to support them in engaging with older people on the topics of sex, sexuality, and sexual health.

Design and Methods

A survey with older people was conducted in each of the partner countries to examine how older people felt the topics of sexual activity, sexuality and sexual health were perceived, both in general terms and specifically by health and social care professionals. Focus groups and/or individual interviews with older people in each of the partner's countries were conducted to provide further depth of understanding.

Findings

The myth of older people as largely asexual has not diminished and older people often encounter challenges both in terms of having the confidence to raise issues of concern with health and social care professionals and in engaging in such discussions when issues are raised. Concerns over creating embarrassment or discomfort between older people and their health and social care professional can be a particular barrier, especially where there are age, gender or cultural differences between the older person and the health and social care professional. Indeed, this reluctance to discuss such issues appears deeply embedded at societal levels. This became especially obvious to the project partners when trying to recruit older people to input into the users' requirement element of the project. While recruitment to the survey was largely unproblematic in most partner countries, recruitment to focus groups proved extremely difficult in many of the partner countries and individual interviews were conducted as an alternative to meet the project's objectives. This suggests the extent to which older people have internalised the societal taboo surrounding the topics of sex, sexuality and sexual health for older people.

Dissemination

The Edusexage project partners have been active in each of their nations in disseminating the findings of the users' requirement report and highlighting the project. In addition, a poster presentation on the project was made at the 2022 annual Health Promotion conference at NUI Galway.

Patient Public Involvement

This project engaged with older people in the development of the user needs report, which informed the development of the education and training materials for both older people and for health and social care professionals.

Knowledge Translation

The education and training materials can contribute to not just the raising of awareness of the challenges that older people can face from the continuance of this taboo, but can also directly support older people and health and social care professionals in addressing these challenges and breaking down this taboo.



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