

Editorial: Sexual favors as merchandise among very young Danish teenagers

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Date of publication: 23. February 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56182/kk1r7796>

The findings of Ravn et al. in the article published in this issue of DJOG, “Exchanging intimacy for favors and nude photos among ninth graders” (1), are quite shocking to an experienced worker in sexual and reproductive health and rights, such as myself.

In our sexual education and contraceptive guidance used in Denmark we have moved far from the evidence-based and factual deliverance of knowledge on the body, on puberty, development of eggs and sperm, fertilization, menstrual cycles, the appearance and function of the sexual organs, to the emotional issues concerning sexuality. We have emphasized the importance of being ready, not giving in to external pressures, for example when it comes to starting sexual experiences, or having your first partnership time with whatever sexual practice you encounter.

We have also pointed out how the undertaking of any sexual action must be preceded by the private consideration: “Am I ready for this?”, “Do I want this?”, “Do I consent to this?”, “Is this my desire or do I feel an outside pressure to do this?”. This pertains to oral sex, touching and manual stimulation, vaginal and rectal intercourse. No matter what kind of sexual activity it might be, it always calls for the individual to make up his or her own mind as to “Where are my boundaries here?” What

do I want?” “What do I consent to?”, “What am I doing?”.

The article by Ravn et al. describes scenarios where the taking of nude pictures and the selling of sexual services are part of the sexual activities for quite a few of young Danish teenagers to an extent that means that we have to take that into account when dealing with sexual health and rights education at a young age and even later in life.

We have entered into a life situation where it is common to continuously take pictures of everything with our smartphones. That apparently includes pictures of our private parts with the article showing that 53% of the ninth’s graders had received and 12% had sent nude pictures on their phones. But the study does not tell us why. Are the youngsters showing off? Are they being pressured by their peers or by someone else? Are they thinking of the consequences?

As the authors are pointing out, nude pictures, once they are on the internet, can be used for purposes they were never intended for, which can turn out to be horrible and dangerous for the youngsters.

Another important message from this article is that 10%, - one out of ten of the teenagers, had been selling sexual favors in exchange for gifts or other favors (entry to events or parties). They had been selling oral sex, so-called

“hand jobs” or even intercourse, and they were between 14 and 16 years old when they first did this. These 10% had more often than the other teenagers interviewed both received and sent nude photos.

The mean age of sexual debut has for many years been, and still is, a little less than 16 years. That corresponds well with the findings in this article that 19% of the 74% answering the questionnaire had already had sexual intercourse in the ninth school grade.

Sexual debut is one thing. However, knowledge of the kind that this article provides is of much importance. This also includes knowledge about many other things on how young people manage all the private and personal aspects that concern the development

of their physical and mental health, where their sexual life is a central element.

The information from this article merits much wider public knowledge and open debate, so that education on sexual health and rights can be improved and made even more focused towards the specific needs of young people.

References

1. Exchanging intimacy for favors and nude photos among ninth graders. (2023). *Danish Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 2(1), 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.56182/djog.v2i1.35>