

Armenian daughters' lived experiences and perspectives on their mother's involvement in
teaching them sex education

by

Anahit Bagiryan

Presented to the
Department of English & Communications
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

American University of Armenia

Yerevan, Armenia

May 2022

Table of contents

Abstract	2
Armenian daughters' lived experiences and perspectives on their mother's involvement in teaching them sex education	2
Literature Review	4
Research Questions	10
Methodology	10
Research Findings and Analysis	13
Limitations and Avenues for Further Research	21
Conclusion	23
References	26
Appendices	27
Appendix A - The Generic Consent Form	27
Appendix B - Interview guideline	31

Abstract

This qualitative research study explores Armenian daughters' lived experiences and perspectives on their mother's involvement in teaching them sex education-related topics. Five women aged twenty-one to twenty-five were interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed that mothers were not actively involved in teaching their daughters sex education-related topics. Moreover, daughters were not very comfortable engaging in such conversations with their mothers, and thus sex education-related topics remain a taboo subject in Armenia. Although all the participants expressed a positive attitude towards breaking the pattern, they were also severely concerned about the existing challenges that make the process even harder.

Armenian daughters' lived experiences and perspectives on their mother's involvement in teaching them sex education

Parents' involvement in sex education of their children and adolescents plays a fundamental role in youth's mental, physical, and sexual wellbeing. Parents can be an essential factor in bringing sex education closer to their children and adolescents in their everyday lives. Often, children cannot fully comprehend the exposure of the risks of getting pregnant, abortion, or contracting sexually transmitted infections (STI). Societies also often compound young adolescents' risks by making it difficult to learn about sex education and reproductive health, as the topic remains a taboo in many places. The growing concern among people regarding the exposure of sex education to children and young adolescents suggest that knowledge and understanding of sex education give them ideas and encourage them to have early sexual experimentations. However, learning about sex education does not encourage children and young people to have early sex, but rather it strengthens their ability and knowledge to make conscious,

healthy, and respectful choices regarding their sexual health. Many young children often turn to the internet or their peers while seeking answers to their questions about reproductive health, which increases the possibility of receiving inaccurate information. Hence, the parents need to address sexual topics with their young adolescents and children to increase the spread of accurate information about sex education and prevent them from turning to their peers or the internet for the answers. It is vital for parents to inform and educate their children on healthy sexual relationships, effective communication and responsible decision-making. Sexual health awareness reduces the risks of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancies and unhealthy and unsafe decisions regarding their reproductive health, responsible sexual activity and relationships. However, parents' engagement in providing sex education to their children cannot be assumed to happen in each household. The conducted literature review shows the contradicting opinions of parents regarding their role in their children's and young adolescents' understanding of sex education. We lack the data on what occurs in conversations between Armenian parents and their children and how they make meaning of their communication or its absence. This qualitative research study investigates how Armenian daughters reflect on their lived experiences, as well as their mothers' involvement in teaching them sex education. Through a phenomenological approach, the study unravels daughters' beliefs and experiences regarding receiving or not receiving sex education. The research focuses on an in-depth thematic analysis of communication about sex education among a sample of daughters to help understand why some parents neglect or comply with the phenomenon. The research method used is audiotaped interviews with Armenian daughters to identify the patterns of their lived experiences and perspectives on the extent of their mother's engagement in teaching them sex education.

In the current era of ruling patriarchal values dominating Armenian society, sexual health knowledge and open conversations are essential in helping the liberation efforts of growing Armenian women and promoting their mental, physical, and sexual health. Often sex and sexual health are associated with shame and “սասնիվ” (virtue) that is heavily oppressing, especially on Armenian girls and women. Their periods are shamed or taught to be something to hide. Their virginity is praised for defining their virtue before marriage in most traditional families. Sex education in schools lacks proper training and resources to create a safe environment for adolescents to receive answers to their questions. Thus, the role of mothers carries a heavier weight in defining and helping their daughters' sex education walking into adulthood. The gap in the Armenian literature is quite evident, and further qualitative research is essential especially moving forward with new educational policies regarding sex education in the curriculum.

Literature review

Parents’ contradicting perspectives on teaching sex education to their children and young adolescents

One of the essential challenges for educators and parents is teaching sex education to their children and adolescents. Through education, parents and educators try to assist children and youth in gaining knowledge, skills, and understanding around the topic to optimise their sexual health. Providing sex education to children and adolescents is vital to help them make informed, positive and safe choices regarding their sexual activity, reproductive health and healthy relationships. Sex education is defined as “teaching about human sexuality, including intimate relationships, human sexual anatomy, sexual reproduction, sexually transmitted infections, sexual activity, sexual orientation, gender identity, abstinence, contraception, and reproductive rights and responsibilities” (Breuner, 2016, p. 1). It aims to prevent and reduce the

risks of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancies and is meant to assist children and adolescents in being more informed about their safe and positive choices of future relationships, reproductive health and responsible sexual activity. Research shows that there is a division of agreement between parents regarding their role being a critical factor in raising children's and young adolescents' understanding of sex education. In some societies, the topic still remains a taboo and leads people to think that sex education knowledge and children are two incompatible entities. The main gap of relevant research in the field is the absence of any research done in the Armenian academia regarding daughters' or parental views on sex education in the Armenian society, which shows the necessity of filling the gap by further qualitative research on young women's lived experiences and perspective on receiving sex education from their mothers. This literature review will concentrate on two raised questions about sex education that will highlight two perspectives of parents. It will show the two sides of the parents' views on teaching their children and adolescents about sex education: one perspective that accepts the importance of sex education and the other perspective that rejects the notion. In the following review, the synthesis of two contradicting questions will be analysed and compared: "Why do parents think sex education should be part of a normal childhood development?" and "Why do parents refuse to teach sex education to their children and young adolescents?"

"Why do parents think sex education should be part of a normal childhood development?"

The findings of research highlight the central triggers of parents to provide an effective sex education to their children and adolescents. According to Modise, positive parental views regarding sex education are based on the belief of developing fundamental knowledge and necessary skills for healthy relationships and responsible decision making, which will protect them from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and optimize their health (Modise,

2019). In this regard, family and school involvement will create positive reproductive health beliefs and behaviour for children and adolescents. Breuner elaborates more on the importance of establishing a foundation for young children to interpret relationships around them correctly. He states that starting from the age of three, kids start observing and asking questions about life and relationships, such as where babies come from or wonder about their body parts (Breuner, 2016). Addressing these questions is critically important as communication and openness protect young children from future harm, allow them to make informed decisions and create an open and healthy relationship between them and their parents. By talking openly with children about sexual matters, parents encourage young children to ask for help and support from them if needed.

In agreement to create a safe space for children to talk about their questions regarding sex education, a thematic analysis conducted in London shows that the parents support to addressing sexual topics with their children prevents them from turning to the internet for answers (Stone, 2017). Open and safe discussions between parents and children enable a room for questions, vulnerability and support, which can reduce the possibilities of future sexual abuse, misinformed decisions and their negative consequences. For example, children should be aware of the difference between a “good touch” and a “bad touch.” According to Manisha, research in India showed that children are targets of sexual abuse because of their inability to differentiate between the right and wrong touches. A survey was conducted in India with a sample of 45 000 children between the ages of twelve to eighteen, which showed that one in every two children in India was a victim of sexual abuse (Manisha, 2018). Similar but broader worldwide research was conducted among girls by The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), which provides statistics of one in ten girls under the age of eighteen (approx. 120 mln) experience forced sexual

acts (Guedes et al., 2016). Unfortunately, being knowledgeable about sex education will not eliminate such horrific actions; however, the awareness of sex education and having a safe space to turn to can prevent sexual abuse, unwanted pregnancies, STIs and enhance children's understanding to self-advocate by recognizing actions that are harmful to them. To raise awareness about sex education among children and young adolescents should be a part of normal childhood development, which will promote a healthy relationship between parents and children. Sex education discussions between parents and their children help children to better understand their sexuality and sexual health, which promotes responsible decision-making and potentially prevents harm.

“Why do parents refuse to teach sex education to their children and young adolescents?”

In contrary to the abovementioned perspective of the importance of the sex education, in the same societies many parents hold a strong taboo regarding sex education, which results in a lack of accurate knowledge about sexual health among children and adolescents. One reason behind resistance to sharing information is the belief of harming children's “innocence” by exposing them to sexual matters. In confirmation of prolonging childhood innocence, all the 110 UK parents and carers of children participating in the parental “Interpretations of ‘Childhood Innocence’” research expressed their concern to openly talk about sex education, which can harm their children's innocence (McGinn et al., 2016). There is little firm agreement in the UK and beyond as to what knowledge is considered risky and dangerous that will destroy the children's innocence. Exposure to sex education is believed to lead to early sexual maturity and give ideas to children for early sexual experimentation. Ruby Grant revisits the same subject and further discusses parents' concerns about their children's sex education. She highlights the growing concern that sex education encourages early sexual experimentation among young people,

particularly in the United States (Grant, 2019). Matson further discussed the situation by stating that although the US emphasizes sex education at schools, it continues leading the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies among industrialized countries. Eighty-eight percent of pregnancies between the age of fifteen and seventeen years are unwanted and mistimed cases in the US (Mattson et al., 2016). On the contrary to the growing belief of the need to limit children's knowledge about sex education, Charteris claims that attempts to restrict their knowledge for preserving their innocence can lead to children's secretive nature of finding inaccurate answers on the internet, which is a downside of the adults' desire to protect their children (Charteris et al., 2018). Besides, some parents choose to take a passive role in discussing sex education since they are poorly equipped with skills to communicate on sexual and reproductive health matters. Thematic analysis in South Africa revealed that parents were not comfortable engaging in sex education discussions with their children due to the awkwardness around the taboo topic. They believed that talking about sex education was not for them, and teachers should cover such topics during the class (Modise, 2019). While also pinpointing parents' barrier of the discomfort to discuss sex education, Malacane adds another two types of communication barriers between the parents and their children. He suggests that parents' limited knowledge of sex education and concern that children are not ready to discuss sex education are other barriers preventing the talk (Malacane et al., 2016). Overall, the barriers that stand in the way of having a healthy conversation between the parents and the children, strengthen the taboo and further explain why some parents refuse or avoid sex education talks with their children.

Many parents believe that sex education should be part of the child's normal development as it will establish a healthy relationship between parents and their children to discuss sexual relationships, responsible decision-making and ensure their educated

understanding of sex-related topics. On the contrary, other parents believe that sex education is a danger to the children's innocence, giving them ideas for early sexual experimentations. Additionally, parents limited knowledge about sex education, their limited communication skills and their concern regarding children's readiness to discuss sexuality topics are concerning barriers that hold some parents back from teaching their children about sexual health. Although the research shows the existing two perspectives in different countries, they are general findings that cannot give a comprehensive understanding to explain parents' perception about sex education on a global or a local scale. They were merely used to highlight the parents' two existing positive and negative approaches to sex education. Research done in a narrow scope will be more accurate and will depict a more concrete picture of the parents' beliefs in a certain country.

Armenia being a very conservative country holds a huge fear and misconception about teaching sex education to children. Although, according to the Armenian law, Article 5.1, adolescents have the right to receive sex education and reproductive health care, be aware of menstruation, sexual and reproductive health, abortions and STIs (Khocharyan, 2002), not all public schools or households provide comprehensive sex education. In 2008, the "Healthy Lifestyle" course was introduced by the Armenian Ministry of Education, which devoted fourteen hours of the academic year to teaching sex education and included topics such as healthy eating and living, risky habits, human trafficking, gender and sex, reproductive health, gender violence, and etc. (UNESCO, 2019). Although Armenia adopted the law and integrated the "Healthy Lifestyle" class into the curriculum, adolescents still do not receive the proper education due to the absence of properly trained professionals at schools. Besides the neglect from the schools, many children also do not receive proper education from their parents either.

There is a huge gap in the literature evaluating the schools' performance level in providing sex education to adolescents and the role that parents have in their children's sex education. Therefore, the conducted qualitative research further explores the reasons behind not receiving the proper sex education and analyzes daughters' lived experiences and the extent to which their mothers were involved in teaching them sex education.

Research questions

Broad research did not include any findings from Armenia due to its absence. Further qualitative research will do a narrow investigation to find out the extent that Armenian mothers involve in teaching sex education to their daughters. There are many patriarchal values that dictate people's beliefs, behaviour and judgement in the Armenian society regarding sex and sexual health, that can lead to misinformed decisions, sexual and mental health problems among youth and adults. Growing up in Armenia myself in quite a traditional family, based on my lived experiences in our society, it is crucial to note that Armenia is a very tightly knit community that holds a very strong cultural identity that often dictates strong views about sex and sexual health. It is important to understand the trends and beliefs in the Armenian society tied to sexual education, in order to ensure well informed decisions that will lead to healthy behaviour in the society. Lastly, as a young female scholar myself, I advocate for the liberation of people's minds from the oppressive notion of patriarchy in the Armenian society, strongly believing that sex education is an integral part of the liberation efforts to ensure a safe and accepting place for people to explore their sexuality and achieve physical, mental, and sexual wellness in Armenia. Hence, my research focuses on the following question: How do Armenian daughters reflect on their lived experiences and perspectives on their mother's involvement in teaching them sex

education? A sub question of this is: What are the changes that they would make to break the pattern?

Methodology

The design for this capstone research is an investigative method exploring the Armenian daughters' lived experiences and their mothers' involvement in teaching them sex education by conducting one-on-one interviews with them. The most effective way to understand the themes' conception is through the exploration of lived experiences by conducting interviews. In taking an interest in daughters' answers, the research attempts to create a safe space for dialogue and collaboration, moving away from the traditional "researcher/subject" method towards a space of mutual partnership and curiosity.

Interviews were held with five girls aged twenty-one to twenty-five. Participants are from a close circle as sex education remains a taboo topic in an Armenian context, and having the initial trust to open up during the interviews is essential. Participation choice is based on aiming to enforce trust to have comfortable and honest conversations, and due to the awkwardness around the topic, it would have been challenging to find participants in any other way. It would be nearly impossible to find people in the streets who would genuinely share their opinion and be willing to participate in the interviews. Finding participants through the internet would also be incredibly hard as many people would not feel comfortable sharing their experiences and stories on such a sensitive topic with a stranger. People would reject sharing their thoughts or objective opinion about the research, and the whole process would lose its credibility. Thus, my five closest friends are part of my research to avoid such situations. Although I have known them for many years, it remains a revelation for my readers and myself to uncover stories from their lives, because of the sensitive topic that is not suited to talk about in daily conversations.

The instrument for the research is a well-structured questionnaire designed by me to use during one-on-one interviews with the daughters. Interviews allowed to do a thematic analysis that identified patterns in the daughters' perspectives on their mother's participatory role in teaching them sex education. Through these interviews, the research uplifted and affirmed daughters as the experts of their own realities, using their lived experiences to guide the research and formation of thematic patterns.

The respondents were approached and informed about the purpose of the research before being asked to participate in it. The participation also emphasized its confidentiality and anonymity beforehand to increase the willingness of the daughters to participate. Thus, instead of their real names, I use pseudonyms to keep their identities hidden.

Due to one-on-one interviews and open-ended questions, new insights and concepts derived from the process that are not co-dependent on other participants' answers and do not create artificial patterns, as can be the case during the focus groups or close-ended questions. Each question was formulated in an open way to avoid biased opinions. Answers can be biased if the question is prompted into a particular response or is written in a complicated way, which can be a disturbing factor while collecting the data. It is vital to mention that although there was a structured questionnaire for the interviews, the conversation was not merely based on the script. It also went beyond it to explore and go deep into each participant's lived experiences. In turn, this transformed the interview into a more informal conversation and allowed the participant to open up even more.

Conducted interviews are audiotaped to allow observing the existing patterns among the interviews. Audio recordings and their transcriptions also help keep the data organized. Audiotapes were chosen instead of videotapes to make the participants feel as comfortable as

possible, as videotapes cannot ensure the interviewee's anonymity and add extra pressure while answering some questions that might be taboo in society. After completing all the interviews, the research findings were coded into themes that seemed particularly popular, impactful, or insightful among the participants' answers.

After coding and finding the themes, writing the narrative was the final analysis step which highlights the existing patterns among the daughters' lived experiences and their mother's participatory role in teaching them sex education. The narration also goes beyond describing the identified themes and includes interpretive analysis to understand the patterns. The research looks for similarities and differences in the interviews to identify patterns in the data.

Research findings and analysis

To be able to understand whether or not mothers engage in educating their daughters about sex education-related topics, I have conducted five in-depth face-to-face interviews with my five close friends. The age range of the participants was from 21-25, and the interviews ranged from thirty minutes to one hour. Four major themes have emerged out of the five interviews, which will be thoroughly analyzed one by one.

Before moving forward with the thematic analysis, I will give short introductions of each participant and some background on how they formed their perspectives regarding gender inequalities and societal injustices. Such details will allow us to picture the participants' life experiences and reveal their journeys to understand their character. It is essential to mention that pseudonyms are used for all the participants to protect their identity and encourage them to freely express themselves in such a sensitive topic.

Anna is 25 years old and comes from a small village in the Lori region. A shifting point in her life was being accepted to United World College. Going to the Netherlands from a very conservative community was shocking for her and, at the same time, eye-opening, as it taught her about toxic masculinity and gender issues that are so normalized in her hometown (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). Until now, she has never engaged in a single conversation about sex education with her mother. All her information comes from people's conversations with each other.

Marine is 21 years old and comes from Vanadzor. She had a shifting point in her life when she entered the American University of Armenia and started learning about equal rights and social issues. That is when she started questioning her life choices and thought to herself that "my childhood maybe wasn't that perfect" and it is ridiculous to be restricted by her family to going to brewpubs because of her gender (Marine, interview, April 4, 2022). Regarding sex education, Marine's mother only provided her information about periods. As for STIs, preventive measures, virginity and many other topics she has discovered from brochures that she found at their house.

Mane is 21 years old and grew up in Yerevan. Her paradigm shift occurred when she started working as a waitress and met open-minded people who did not differentiate between men and women. Till these days, she does not understand why her sixteen-year-old brother can come home after midnight without receiving any objections from her parents, but for her, it remains an issue (Mane, interview, April 5, 2022). Mane has never been close to her mother, and the only sex education-related topic she discussed with her mother has been periods. Later, she learned more through her friends and the internet.

Narine is 25 years old and comes from Yerevan. She had a different experience while growing up and was not restricted by her parents from going to places or engaging in activities because of her gender. According to her, the reason behind it is that her mother grew up in Russia and has a different mentality than the majority of Armenian mothers (Narine, interview, April 5, 2022). Narine has been very close with her mother and received education about periods, pregnancies, abortions, virginity, and STIs from her mother. Although she believes that, for example, virginity talk could have been earlier than when she was eighteen, she has always been confident that she can approach her mother with any concerning question.

Elizaveta is 25 years old and comes from Yerevan. She started questioning and forming her own opinions due to her involvement in volunteering activities, where her ideas were being validated and encouraged (Elizaveta, interview, April 13). Although her mother is a pediatrician, they have never engaged in sex education-related discussions. Her grandmother explained to her about the periods; the rest she learned from the conferences that the UN organized for teens. The only time when her mother tried having a sex talk with her, she told her that she was already aware of everything and did not need further explanations.

Theme 1: How do participants reflect on their experiences of learning about sex education related topics with their mothers? How comfortable do they feel talking to their mothers? What are the obstacles that might prevent the talk?

The crucial part of learning sex education is creating a safe space for children and adolescents to feel comfortable enough to share their concerns and issues and receive appropriate answers to their questions. As a young woman growing up in Armenia, who did not receive her sex education from her mother and discovered preventive measures, STIs, sexual reproduction

and many other topics through trainings organized by various organizations, I found myself in a role of an educator for many of my friends who were also deprived of such information from their mother. The following theme highlights participants' experiences and reflections on their lived experiences.

Anna was very confident that she can not ever talk to her mother and discuss sex education-related topics because it would be very awkward. She said, "There are things that she will no longer get, you know. I come from a different generation, I study at a place that is very different from other universities, with people that are quite different from others" (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). Generation difference always plays a major role in the way people approach some topics, and sex education is not an exception. Society and the environment also have a huge impact on changing people's perspectives. In Anna's case, her experience of studying at UWC was the turning point for her that brought change into her life. However, her mother did not have the privilege of experiencing another reality, which explains Anna's concern of not being understood by her and feeling awkward due to the discomfort surrounding the sex education topic.

Similarly, Marine also feels uncomfortable and does not prefer to discuss any sex education-related topics with her mother (Marine, interview, April 4, 2022). One important factor that she mentioned was that she believes that her mother is not very knowledgeable about sex education. Illiteracy or not sufficient information can be a great obstacle for parents and result in neglecting the talk or providing false information. Although it is encouraged and essential to involve mothers in the children's sex education, it cannot assure that each mother can provide sufficient and accurate information to their child. Thus, sex education of the child should

be a shared responsibility between the state and the parents, as mothers cannot be the only bearers of such an essential process.

Elizaveta's and Mane's lived experiences are similar in a way that they both have never been close to their mothers at all. Not only did they not discuss any sex education-related topics, but they did not spend much time with their mothers. Elizaveta mentioned that she is happy with her experience and added, "I wasn't close with my mom about anything; maybe it would traumatize me to hear about sex right from her" (Elizaveta, interview, April 13). Just like Elizaveta, Mane also said that she had not shared anything with her mother since childhood and sex education is not an exception.

Narine had a completely different experience with her mother, who managed to create such a safe zone for her to approach her with any questions and concerning issues. While reflecting, she highlighted that she was never afraid to be judged or misunderstood by her mother because she always was there for her as a friend.

Theme 2: Menstruation: period talk and feelings associated with it

Menstruation can be a challenging topic to discuss with a child; however, it is much-needed information for kids to help them to make good decisions about their health and hygiene. Having the first period without being aware of why and what is happening with your body can be an incredibly scary and disturbing experience. It is crucial that girls have support and much-needed information about menstruation to help them in this new transition of their life. Sadly, not everyone receives appropriate education on this matter. Three out of five interview participants were taught about menstruation by their mothers, her grandmother informed one, and one participant was informed through her friends.

Mane, Marine and Narine learned about menstruation from their mothers. Narine mentioned that she felt very comfortable with her first period, and it was a normal phenomenon for her, as several times she had a pre-talk with her mom and aunt (Narine, interview, April 5, 2022). Marine does not remember the exact period talk; however, she was confident that before getting her first period, she was expecting it and was not shocked by the situation. The main highlight of the conversation in Marine's case was put on the positive aspect of the period. Her mother said, "this means that you can have children, and it's a good thing" (Marine, interview, April 4, 2022).

In contrast, Anna was left in ambiguity and distress as nobody prepared her for her first period (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). She never had a period talk with her mother, and her only source of information was her classmates, who discussed it with each other. She stressed that she was afraid to get her first period and did not want to have it, as bleeding sounded intimidating and scary. At the same time, her friends told her, "But if you don't have it, you won't have children," and she was left alone with her thoughts and fears before her first period. She also mentioned that she was feeling intimidated to talk about it as she thought it is "something dirty, something you should be ashamed of, something males should never notice, otherwise they would make fun of you." Moreover, she experienced a "feeling of inferiority" as she thought she was missing out on something when her friends already had periods, and she did not. A flashback to her classmates' lived experiences came to her mind immediately after discussing illiteracy and shame around the menstruation topic. Her classmate's mother did not allow her to wear pads claiming that she is yet not old enough for that. Anna remembers how everyone made fun of her when she would come to school without wearing a pad while being on her period (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). Anna's story was surprising and, at the same time,

eye-opening for me. Shame and awkwardness around the taboo topic never allowed me to talk to many people about their menstruation, and I assumed everyone was ready and felt comfortable before getting their period. However, her story once again reminded the necessity of making sure each person gets open access to accurate and satisfactory information about sex education.

Theme 3: Shame and awkwardness around sex education related topics

Sex education has been controversial and taboo for many people, which resulted in the formation of embarrassment and shame around the topic. Participants' answers to various questions touched upon these feelings, which will be discussed under this theme.

Elizaveta shared an example of her lived experience, which made her feel ashamed because of her periods and having pads in her purse. While her school teacher explained to the class that usually, girls of bigger sizes get their periods early, the whole class turned and looked at her, causing her to feel embarrassed because she thought as she was bigger in size, everyone would think that her periods had already started. This situation bothered Elizaveta, but it was not the only story associated with school that made her feel ashamed. During the long class break, her male classmates would go inside her purse, get her pads and sing the commercial song of the “Always” pads. She never told this story to her teachers or parents; however, it made her feel awful and embarrassed. If she was educated enough to know that it is totally okay to have periods and there is nothing shameful about having pads with you, this awful encounter would never happen again. Unfortunately, she said that it happened to her many times because she stayed silent (Elizaveta, interview, April 13, 2022). Society is also playing its role in enforcing shame and awkwardness around period talk and pads. One such example is putting pads in black shopping bags to hide them from everyone. While discussing with Elizaveta this phenomenon of

black shopping bags, we also remembered that we both would avoid buying pads if the seller was a man or if a man walked into the store. Looking back to my teen years, many times, I left the store without buying pads, because of that reason. Narine also felt ashamed in her teen years when her first period started. She asked her mom not to tell her brother and father (Narine, interview, April 5, 2022).

Anna also shared her feelings about the first conversation about sex with her friend. She said, “I remember our first discussion was like sort of weird, cause like oh my god we are talking about sex, oh god what is happening.” She remembers that it was awkward for her as talking about sex never was normalized in her head: it was associated with something gross, shameful and inappropriate (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). Now when she reflects on her experience, she believes that it was rather late for her to start talking about sex only at the age of 23. However, she is glad that she had the opportunity to open up and become more comfortable with talking about sex and sexuality-related topics without feeling ashamed of it.

Theme 4: Challenges: What are the changes that participants will make to break the patterns of their lived experiences? What are the potential challenges that they would encounter while doing so?

All the participants mentioned the importance of participating in teaching sex education to their daughters if they decide to have children. Elizaveta even said that if she decides one day to have kids, then she thinks she will be a “cool mom” and will “avoid having awkward situations of not discussing it” (Elizaveta, interview, April 13, 2022). Although all of them were positive about the importance of informing children and adolescents about sex education, they also were concerned about many challenges that mothers encounter throughout the process.

Marine was worried that her kids might also think that sex education is an awkward topic to discuss and would wish to avoid her (Marine, interview, April 4, 2022). However, the source of awkwardness comes from the ignorance of people, which results in the topic remaining taboo in society. As it does not get discussed enough, the pattern continues to exist, and people continue feeling ashamed to share their opinion and ideas openly.

Mane thinks that another great challenge that our society faces is the fact that maybe she and some other people think that it is important to be open about sex education and provide the necessary information to their children; however, the phenomenon is not widespread, and people continue treating their children the way their mothers have treated them. Unfortunately, it does not sound reasonable to think that the pattern will break in the coming years (Mane, interview, April 5, 2022). While mentioning the challenge of not many people being concerned about the issue, Anna also was worried about the dissonance among children, who judge those who are educated about sex education (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). This brought back my memories from secondary school, where all the guys were super troubled with the fact that during the “Healthy Lifestyle” class, I was openly talking and discussing topics such as periods, STIs, “Երսագլխափուլթյուն” (wet dreaming), etc. I remember being shamed and called out for knowing too much information, and afterwards, everyone was discussing my reputation.

Anna believes that a challenge for her and many other mothers remains their ignorance and not knowing how to approach and deliver such sensitive topics. Willingness and understanding of the significance of teaching sex education are not merely enough, as people need guidance to not “scare them (their kids) in any way” (Anna, interview, March 31, 2022). Similarly, Elizaveta believes that she would also be hesitant about what are the right ways to approach delivering information to her kids, which is why she mentioned that there is a necessity

to get in touch with a therapist and read more books and information in that regard (Elizaveta, interview, April 13, 2022).

Limitations and avenues for future research

The most significant limitation of the research is the number of conducted interviews. I interviewed a small number of people that gave me limited information on how daughters reflect on their lived experiences. Thus, further research is required to have a more comprehensive understanding that will reflect to what extent mothers involve in teaching sex education to their daughters. My research can be a base for further qualitative research that will include mothers' perspectives on their participatory role as well. Some of the answers given by the participants were mere conclusions and their interpretations. For example, to the question, “Why do you think your mother did not provide you with necessary information about sex education?” Marine and Anna answered that their mothers assumed they knew all the answers. Thus, conducting a thorough investigation that will include mothers is necessary to be precise in the final findings.

Another limitation of the findings is the scope of the research question that requires understanding how daughters reflect their lived experiences of sex education given by their mothers and how they picture the changing pattern. There should also be a thorough analysis of how both parents teach their daughters and sons about sex education and how they themselves reflect on the importance of their involvement.

The interviews also produced other themes that were not discussed in the findings as they did not fall under the larger themes that reflected the research question. Further research can be done on revealing how expressions play a role in enforcing gender roles in Armenia (such as “Քեզ աղջկա պէս պահի” - “Act like a girl” “Տղամարդ կիմ” - “Manly woman,” “Տուն տանելու աղջիկ” - “Girl that you can take home,” etc.). Further research is also required to

understand how school and society can play a role in teaching sex education to children and adolescents. Parents can have a great role in the process; however, cooperation between parents, community and school can be more successful in providing positive and desirable results.

Another interesting but not thoroughly investigated pattern was the use of language, which can be further researched. Participants avoided using Armenian vocabulary while talking about sex education; the shift to English was not unnoticed as it was a common pattern among all the participants. Further qualitative research can also concentrate on participants' body language, pauses, facial expressions, neglect and bypassing of some topics, etc.

Conclusion

To sum up, this research study aimed to find out how daughters themselves reflect on receiving or not receiving sex education from their mothers. Talking about sex education is essential; however, not every parent talks openly with their children. Indeed, children and adolescents need suitable sources to get accurate and sufficient information about sex education, as the absence of it can put a child's health at risk. Unfortunately, not every child is lucky enough to have access to such information from their mothers, and the research shows children in Armenia are not an exception.

One of the findings of the research is the lack of information about sex education coming from the mothers to daughters. Most of the participants only had a very limited talk with their mothers, which included mainly period talks. It shows the existing gap in communication among mothers and daughters and suggests the necessity of fighting to break the pattern. Research also revealed that all the participants find mothers' roles in teaching sex education to their children to be very significant, which alludes to thinking that the pattern is already being tackled. However, the task is not an easy one as there are multiple challenges that daughters identified throughout

the research. One such challenge is the awkwardness and the shame around the topic, which remains in society as many people continue considering sex education a taboo topic. The number of people who are worried about the phenomenon and are willing to teach their children and adolescents about sex education is not widespread, which also leads to another identified challenge - the dissonance among children. Knowing too much about sex education is yet considered to be another issue that participants raised. According to them, children who are educated can experience mockery by society, which can also be an obstacle for mothers to try and keep them away from the necessary information. Moreover, the ignorance and mimicking of their lived experiences is yet another identified issue, as many mothers do not know how to approach teaching sex education to their children as a response to not being taught by their mothers.

Another key takeaway from the conducted research is that the remaining ice between the mothers and their daughters is so strong that grown-up women aged 21-25 still do not feel comfortable talking to their mothers about sex education-related topics. Although they are at the point in their lives when they are aware of the discourse, they do not picture themselves having such conversations with their mothers. Research findings pointed out some obstacles which, according to daughters, prevent their conversations with their mothers: mothers live in a conservative environment and do not have access to other perspectives, are ignorant on the matter and do not have sufficient knowledge about sex education, and are not close to their daughters. Although three obstacles came out of the interviews, the list can be longer as each child can experience various reasons that can interfere with creating safe and comfortable communication between the mother and the child.

As a response to the findings, I continue to believe that mothers should fulfill an important role as socializing agents by providing essential information to their daughters. Children and adolescents should have the chance to explore and receive effective sexuality education and feel comfortable enough to approach their mothers with their concerns and issues regarding sex education. Although cultural norms and the awkwardness around the topic do not yet allow some mothers to talk to their children about sex-related issues and topics, as it remains a taboo, it is essential to break the pattern and promote positive health practices in the community.

References

Breuner, C. and Mattson, G. and et al., 2016. Sexuality Education for Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 138:2, retrieved from <https://publications.aap.org/pediatrics/article/138/2/e20161348/52508/Sexuality-Education-for-Children-and-Adolescents?autologincheck=redirected>

Charteris, J. Gregory, S. & Masters, Y. (2018). ‘Snapchat’, youth subjectivities and sexuality: disappearing media and the discourse of youth innocence, *Gender and Education*, 30:2, pp. 205-221, DOI: [10.1080/09540253.2016.1188198](https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1188198)

Guedes, A. Bott, S, Garcia-Moreno, C. & Colombini, M. (2016). Bridging the gaps: a global review of intersections of violence against women and violence against children, *Global Health Action*, 9:1, DOI: [10.3402/gha.v9.31516](https://doi.org/10.3402/gha.v9.31516)

Khocharyan R. (2002). Republic of Armenia the Law: on Human Reproductive Health and Reproductive Rights. Retrieved from <http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=1339&lang=arm>

Malacane M. & Jonathon, J. (2016). A Review of Parent-Based Barriers to Parent–Adolescent Communication about Sex and Sexuality: Implications for Sex and Family Educators, *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 11:1, 27-40, DOI: [10.1080/15546128.2016.1146187](https://doi.org/10.1080/15546128.2016.1146187)

Manisha. P. (2018). Awareness of Good and Bad Touch Among Children. *i-Manager's Journal on Nursing; Nagercoil* 8:2. pp. 1-6

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/23df7b451da32b1731feed2983eb642a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=2030615>

McGinn, L., N. Stone, R. Ingham, and A. Bengry-Howell. (2016). Parental Interpretations of “Childhood Innocence.” *Health Education* 116:6. pp. 580–594.

Modise, A. (2019). Parent Sex Education Beliefs in a Rural South African Setting, *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. 29:1. pp. 358-361

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14330237.2019.1568047?scroll=top&needAccess=true>.

Ruby Grant & Meredith Nash (2019) Educating queer sexual citizens? A feminist exploration of bisexual and queer young women’s sex education in Tasmania, Australia, *Sex Education*, 19:3, 313-328, DOI: [10.1080/14681811.2018.1548348](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2018.1548348)

Stone, N, & Ingham, R. et al. (2017). Talking Relationships, Babies and Bodies with Young Children: the Experiences of Parents in England, Sex Education. *Sexuality, Society and Learning*. 588-603, DOI: [10.1080/14681811.2017.1332988](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2017.1332988)

UNESCO. (2019). Armenian teachers received new guidelines on healthy lifestyle lessons in the framework of UNESCO IITE supported project. Retrieved from <https://iite.unesco.org/news/unesco-healthy-lifestyle-armenia/>

Appendices

Appendix A:

CONSENT FORM

Consent to participate in a capstone project conducted at the American University of Armenia (AUA). This is to state that I agree to participate in the capstone project conducted by Anahit Bagiryan. The capstone director is Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: hourig.attarian@aua.am).

PURPOSE: I have been informed that the purpose of the project to identify patterns among Armenian daughters' lived experiences and their mothers' approaches to having or not having open and healthy discussions about sex education with their daughters. Within the bigger context of the project, the interview conducted by Anahit Bagiryan is meant to focus on identifying patterns to understand why and how Armenian mothers neglect or engage in conversations about sex education with their daughters.

PROCEDURES: I understand that the interview will be conducted in participants' homes or another appropriate place, and will be recorded on audio. Alternatively, the interview may be conducted on Zoom or another online platform. As a participant, I will be asked to explore my experience with interacting with my mother about sex education related topics. The interview will last from one to two hours, however, as a participant I am free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the interview for more than two hours, I will be provided that opportunity.

RISKS AND BENEFITS: I understand that the interview involves the sharing of my personal views and opinions, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration. I have been informed that I am free to stop, take a break or discontinue at any time. There are no risks involved in partaking in this interview.

CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION: As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded material for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my participation:

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

I agree to the reproduction of sound and images from this interview by any method and in any media for academic purposes (which may include webpages, documentary clips, etc.)

OR

___ I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential**. My identity will be concealed. I will be given a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview.

___ I agree that while data from my interview may be published, no sound or images from it may be reproduced.

When photographs, artifacts or documents are scanned or photographed

___ I agree to let the student researcher copy family photographs and documents for use in the student project.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT.
I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

INTERVIEWER:

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____ DATE _____

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a capstone project participant, please contact Dr. Hourig Attarian of the College of Humanities & Social Sciences at AUA (tel.: 060 612769, email: hourig.attarian@aua.am).

Համաձայնության հավաստագիր

Համաձայնագիր մասնակցելու դիպլոմային ծրագրի իրականացման Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարանում: Սույնով հավաստում եմ, որ համաձայն եմ մասնակցել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադարեանի (հեռ.՝ 060 612769, էլ. հասցե՝ hourig.attarian@aua.am) ղեկավարությամբ Անահիտ Բագիրյանի կողմից դիպլոմային աշխատանքի նախագծի հարցազրույցին:

Նախագծի նպատակը

Տեղյակ եմ, որ այս նախագծի նպատակն է բացահայտել հայ դուստրերի սպրած փորձառությունների օրինաչափությունները և նրանց մայրերի մոտեցումները՝ իրենց դուստրերի հետ սեռական դաստիարակության վերաբերյալ բաց և առողջ քննարկումներ ունենալու կամ չունենալու վերաբերյալ: Անահիտ Բագիրյանի անցկացրած հարցազրույցի նպատակն է բացահայտել օրինաչափություններ՝ հասկանալու համար, թե ինչո՞ւ և ինչպե՞ս են հայ մայրերը անտեսում կամ զրույցներ վարում իրենց դուստրերի հետ սեռական դաստիարակության մասին:

Ընթացակարգը

Հասկանում եմ, որ հարցազրույցը անցկացվելու է մասնակցի տանը կամ մեկ այլ պատշաճ վայրում, և ձայնագրվելու է: Որպես մասնակից ես պատմելու եմ իմ փորձառությունը՝ կապված մայրիկիս հետ սեռական կրթության հետ կապված թեմաների հետ շփվելու կամ դրա բացակայության մասին: Տեղյակ եմ, որ հարցազրույցները տևելու են մոտ մեկ ժամ, բայց այդուհանդերձ մասնակիցները կարող են որևէ պահի դադարեցնել հարցազրույցը, հրաժարվել պատասխանել որևէ հարցի, կամ որևէ պահի դուրս գալ նախագծից: Հասկանում եմ, որ եթե ցանկանամ հարցազրույցը երկու ժամից ավելի երկարաձգել, ինձ այդ հնարավորությունը կընձեռվի:

Ռիսկեր և օգուտներ

Հասկանում եմ, որ այս հարցազրույցը իր մեջ ներառում է իմ անձնական արժեքների և կարծիքի կիսում, որին կվերաբերվեն առավելագույն խնամքով և հոգատարությամբ: Տեղյակ եմ, որ ազատ եմ կանգնելու, դադար տալու և չչարունակելու ցանկացած պահի: Հարցազրույցին մասնակցելը չի ներառում որևէ ռիսկեր:

Մասնակցության պայմանները

Որպես մասնակից ինձ հասանելի կլինեն ձայնագրված և գրի առնված տվյալները՝ դրանք ստուգելու նպատակով: Նախագծի ամբողջ տևողության ընթացքում, ես հնարավորություն կունենամ վերանայել ու հաստատել անգլերեն թարգմանությունը, եթե նյութը հայերեն է:

___ Հասկանում եմ, որ որևէ պահի կարող եմ հետ վերցնել համաձայնությունս ու հրաժարվել մասնակցել նախագծին՝ առանց բացասական հետևանքների:

___ Հասկանում եմ, որ այս նախագծի տվյալները գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով կարող են հրատարակվել՝ տպագիր կամ թվային տարբերակներով:

Իմ հարցազրույցի ինքնության բացահայտման և վերարտադրման առումով

— համաձայն եմ **բացահայտելու իմ ինքնությունը**: Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը կարող է բացահայտվել այս հարցազրույցի արդյունքում հրատարակված նյութերում կամ ելույթներում:

— Համաձայն եմ գիտաուսումնական նպատակներով այս հարցազրույցի նկարների ու ձայնագրությունների վերարտադրմանը որևէ հաղորդամիջոցով (վեբ կայքեր, վավերագրական ֆիլմեր, և այլն):

ԿԱՄ

___ Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ մասնակցությունն այս ուսումնասիրությանը **գաղտնի** է: Հասկանում եմ, որ իմ ինքնությունը չի բացահայտվի, այլ ցանկացած հրապարակման կամ ներկայացման մեջ, կօգտագործվի ծածկանուն:

___ Համաձայն եմ, որ չնայած իմ հարցազրույցից որոշ նյութեր կարող են հրատարակվել, սակայն ոչ մի ձայնագրություն կամ պատկեր չի կարող վերարտադրվել:

Այն դեպքում, երբ ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ կամ փաստաթղթեր են նկարվել կամ սկանավորվել

___ Համաձայն եմ, որ ուսումնասիրություն անող ուսանողը պատճենահանի ընտանեկան լուսանկարներ ու փաստաթղթեր նախագծի շրջանակներում օգտագործելու համար:

ՈՒՇԱԴԻՐ ԿԱՐԴԱՑԵԼ ԵՄ ՎԵՐԸ ՇԱՐԱԴՐՎԱԾԸ և ՀԱՍԿԱՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ԱՅՍ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆԱԳՐԻ ԿԵՏԵՐԸ: ՀՈԺԱՐԱԿԱՄ ՀԱՄԱՁԱՅՆՈՒՄ ԵՄ ՄԱՍՆԱԿՑԵԼ ԱՅՍ ՈՒՍՈՒՄՆԱՍԻՐՈՒԹՅԱՆԸ:

Մասնակից՝
Անուն ազգանուն (Խնդրում ենք գրել տպատառ) _____

Ստորագրություն _____ Ամսաթիվ _____

Հարցազրույց վարող՝
Անուն ազգանուն (Խնդրում ենք գրել տպատառ) _____

Ստորագրություն _____ Ամսաթիվ _____

Եթե որևէ պահի հարցեր կունենաք ձեր իրավունքների վերաբերյալ, որպես դիպլոմային ծրագրի մասնակից, կարող եք կապվել ՀԱՀ Հումանիտար և հասարակական գիտությունների ֆակուլտետի դասախոս դոկտոր Հուրիկ Ադդարեանի հետ (հեռ.՝ 060 612769, էլ.հասցե՝ hourig.attarian@aua.am):

Appendix B:

Interview guideline:

1. Introduction of the research question and the purpose of the research analysis.
2. Childhood/ schooling - Please tell us a little bit about yourself: Any siblings? Family members? Where were you born and grew up? Where did you go to school?
3. Are there certain things that society has told you to do in a certain way since childhood based on your sex? Any memories? At school? At home? Who enforced them on you?
4. Did you have a shifting point in your life when you started thinking about gender differences? When was it, and how did it happen?

5. What are your general thoughts on gender equality in Armenia? Any personal stories and experiences that you can share while growing up in Armenia? How did your mother enforce or break the patterns of inequality?
6. Overall, has it been easy for you to share your personal experiences with your mother? Are there any taboo topics that you never felt comfortable discussing with her?
7. Relationships - How did your lived experience lead you to perceive what is a healthy relationship and how to build it? What does it mean? How do we build healthy relationships?
8. Virginity - Did you have a conversation with your mother about Virginity? When was the first conversation? How did you know about it? Where? From who? At what age? What did you discuss? What was highlighted in the conversation?
9. Pregnancies and abortion - Did you have a conversation with your mother about this? How did you know about it? Where? From who? At what age? What did you discuss?
10. Did you ever learn about Preventive measures for STI? Did you have a conversation with your mother about this? How did you know about it? Where? From whom? At what age? What did you discuss?
11. Now that you have answered these questions. What are your thoughts on your experience with discussing or not discussing sex education-related topics with your mother?
12. What would you do in your mother's case? Would you change anything about how she handled the situation?
13. Why is it important to have a conversation with children? What age should you start talking to your children? How ? Should you talk only once?

14. Do you see yourself teaching your kid, a cousin or a younger sibling about the above-mentioned topics? What would be the challenges that you think you will face? How would you handle them?
15. Anything that you would like to add?
16. How comfortable do you feel with the consent forms? Is there anything you would like to change? Disclosing identity?