

ABSTRACT OF PhD THESIS:

**THE EVALUATION OF TEENAGERS' AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDE
AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES**

PhD STUDENT: MD.NISTOR CLAUDIA ANDREEA

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR: PROF. MD.PHD. SABĂU MONICA

INTRODUCTION: Sexually transmitted diseases (STD), also known under their older name *venereal diseases* are defined as contagious illnesses whose transmission is predominantly or almost exclusively done by way of sexual contact. These diseases are significant not only due to their frequency but mainly to the considerable repercussions to public health. Undetected and untreated, these diseases frequently lead to severe complications, sometimes with fatal consequences.

The author's own contribution is divided into two chapters:

CHAPTER 1: The evaluation of teenagers' and young people's knowledge, attitude and risky behavior towards sexually transmitted diseases, in which we aimed to evaluate the knowledge, attitude and risky behavior in inducing STD with teenagers and young people. We employed a cross-sectional study by means of a questionnaire applied on a systematic representative (200 people), the subjects having been recruited from Mures County high schools of various specialties. The questionnaire consisted of three parts with different parameters each: the first part featured anonymous-type general information about the subjects (sex, age, parents' education, socioeconomic status); the second part had questions related to sexual behavior (first sexual contact, number of partners, utilization of contraceptive methods, a history of pregnancy or abortion, presence of an STD); the third part contained questions regarding knowledge in the domain of sexual education (contraceptive methods, ways of transmitting STD, STD prevention, sources of information in the field).

Boys were more open towards sex, their sex lives had begun earlier than those of the girls. Approximately 24% of the boys of 15-16 had had sexual contact as opposed to only 14% of the girls. For the age 17-18, the percentage of people who had begun their sex lives was higher with girls. Among the teenagers questioned who had had sexual contact, between 42.8 and 44.8% had safe sex. From those who had had sexual contact, 19.4% had their first partner when they were less than 14 years old, while 44% had their first partner at the age of 15-17. A fifth of the boys had had sexual relations before they were 14 as opposed to only 7% of the girls. 10% of the boys and 7% of the girls admitted to having contracted an STD, and among the more frequently contracted diseases we can remark candidiasis, gonorrhea and venereal vegetation. Almost two thirds of all subjects declared that they had received sexual information and education. From all teenagers who had had sexual contact, over 60% had received sexual information

and education. Most boys had turned to their friends for information while the second source of information was medical specialists. Girls preferred doctors as their primary source of information while friends and family came second. Our data show that girls were more interested in discussing with their partners the risks of getting pregnant or in discussing before the sexual act about methods of contraception, especially the use of a condom. We also found that syphilis (95.2%), gonorrhea (79.1%) and genital herpes (75.2%) are the best known STDs. The most frequent STDs for which the subjects had received treatment were gonorrhea for the boys and candidiasis and trichomoniasis for the girls.

CHAPTER 2: The assessment of the magnitude and tendency of development of sexually transmitted diseases in Mures County, in which we monitored some STDs (syphilis and gonococcal infections) determining the dynamics of morbidity of these two diseases in two Transylvanian counties (Mures and Harghita) as compared to the national average, between 2005 and 2012, in connection with risk factors resulting from lifestyle.

In the development of gonococcal infections and of syphilis between 2005 and 2012 we ascertained the following: the decline of syphilis occurrence in said counties, in parallel with the national tendency; continuous evolution, below the national average, of gonorrhea incidence in Mures County; oscillating development, above national level, of gonorrhea incidence in Harghita County; the cases of syphilis appeared mostly in people from the age group of 25-34, followed by those from the age group of 35-44; the gonorrhea cases occurred predominantly among young, sexually active people in their twenties and thirties; syphilis cases appeared in similar percentage in both sexes, mostly from urban areas; gonococcal infections occurred mainly in men, also from urban environment.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: With the analyses contained in the two chapters our goal was to establish a link between the incidence of syphilis and gonococcal infections and the degree of knowledge of teenagers on these conditions. From the total of gonococcal infections reported in Mures County, 22.8% were found to occur in people between 15 and 19 years of age (the second group in frequency from all age groups), while syphilis was reported at one tenth of the total. Over 95% of the teenagers questioned have heard of syphilis and almost 80% of gonococcal infections. Starting from this and the fact that 43.8% of the subjects who had had sexual contact used protection (wearing a condom), none of the subjects had been treated for syphilis, whereas 11.5% received treatment for gonococcal infections. This leads us to believe that gonococcal infections are less well known but appear more frequently in teenage pathology.

CONCLUSION: Correlating studies with the development of STD in recent years (especially those with mandatory reporting), it is important to sustain and promote, especially among teenagers and young people, a precocious sexual education and as low a number of sex partners as possible. To fulfill these a number of requirements should be met: a change in health policies; an increase in the allocation of financial resources for the organization of community sexual health services; diversifying mass information methods; enhancing the familiarity and use of contraceptive methods; and last but not least educational programs on sexual health which should help families, health professionals and also be implemented in schools.

KEYWORDS: sexually transmitted diseases, syphilis, gonorrhea, teenager, Mures County