

## INTIMATE RELATIONS BETWEEN YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN: INDICATORS OF DISHARMONY

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**Abstract.** *The article presents a theoretical and empirical analysis of the characteristics of sexual behavior and indicators of disharmony of intimate relationships of young men and women of student age. The purpose of the study is to identify the correlations of the manifestations of intimate relationships and sexual behavior among young people. The content will consider various approaches to the analysis of intimate and sexual relations from the standpoint of sexology and psychology. The main problems and contradictions will be explained on the basis of which the strategy of empirical research is based are substantiated. The respondents were 62 people (32 young women and 30 young men aged 18 - 23 years) studying at different faculties of the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in bachelor's and master's degrees. To diagnose the parameters of disharmony of intimate relationships, the author's modification of the methodology «Subjective assessment of interpersonal relationships» by S.V. Dukhnovsky and the methodology «Experience of close relationships» by K. Brennan and R.K. Fraley in the adaptation of T.V. Kazantseva were used, to assess the characteristics of sexual behavior – «Eysenk inventory of attitudes to sex» by H.J. Eysenck and «Assessment of the sexual profile» by O.F. Potemkina. In general, in sexual behavior, the subjects show favorable sexual attitudes, note sexual satisfaction and fulfillment, as well as sexual neuroticism, indicating the difficulties in young people in creating intimate relationships. As a result of the correlation analysis, the study revealed indicators of sexual behavior characterizing disharmony in intimate relationships of young men and women, which indicate insufficient psychological readiness for intimate relationships of young people. The characteristics of disharmony in intimate relationships presented in the study allowed the authors to formulate conclusions and recommendations to specialists in the field of education on the organization of psychological and pedagogical technologies for the formation of sexual culture among modern youth.*

**Keywords:** *disharmony in intimate relationships, sexual behavior, students*

### Introduction

Intimate-sexual relations are an important marker of psychological health and well-being in the modern society. However, the study of these relations' formation and development remains outside the framework of cultural-historical and activity approaches in psychology. The periods of general mental development and personality development developed in Russian psychology do not take into account the peculiarities of gender identity manifestations, their development in ontogenesis.

In fact, until now, the intimate relations of the sexes have been studied from the point of view and under the influence of orthodox archaisms of psychoanalysis in sexology, gender psychology, and

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family relations psychology. There are very few studies devoted to the cultural and psychological analysis of sexual behavior and intimate relationships (Goicolea et al. 2012; Hensel & Fortenberry, 2013; Konina, 2018).

In modern Russian psychological science, intimate-personal relationships are defined as the highest manifestations of a person's psychological life that arise and develop in the process of personal genesis. Intimate-personal relationships are considered in the context of the psychology of personal development and self-realization, but not in the contexts defined by sexology and psychoanalysis (Ioffe, 2020).

Currently, there are separate studies in psychological science on the classification of psychosexual personality development stages and the influence of cultural, ethnic, religious and socio-political factors of the social system on them. It's rather the representatives of medical sciences who mostly write about the peculiarities of sexual behavior, with an emphasis on the trends of this behavior and the deviations analysis (Eysenck & Wilson, 2000; Gidycz, et al. 2011; Galinsky & Waite, 2014; Tetley et al. 2016; De Meyer S. et al. 2017). As P.V. Shcheglov rightly notes, it is important to study sexuality through the integration of medical, psychological, cultural and social sciences. The culture of human relations is conditioned by the boundaries of norms and values, and there is currently a deformation of the forbidden sphere boundaries, the transformation of values and gender roles (Shcheglov, 2019).

Sexual relations include not only attitudes implemented on the basis of their behavior patterns and emotional experiences accompanying them, but also the partners' actual communication (O'Sullivan & Byers, 1992; Medvedev & Sivishkina, 2013). The features of the sexual relations components, where sexual behavior can act as a factor of harmony, while the indicators of emotional tension present in the relationship, reflecting the partners' interaction peculiarities, can affect the quality of the relationship. The study of sexuality, through relationship indicators, helps to better and more accurately understand how the mutual influence of the intimate sphere is actually arranged.

Many researchers note that the current situation of gender relations is characterized by a bipolar system of norms of male and female behavior. On the one hand, it is a traditional system of relations built up by culture for thousands of years. On the other, it is modernized models of androgyny and equality of men and women in the freedom of sexual behavior choice. This dualism occurred, among other things, against the background of the lack of a competent culture of sexual education, as well as the formation and development of sexual behavior among young people (Rosenova & Kalaeva, 2021).

According to Yu.P. Prokopenko et al. the authors' current trends of young people in changing partners, variability in interpersonal relationships, testing of diverse behavior in paired and multipartner relationships are aimed at choosing sexual and reproductive behavior in the future (Prokopenko, 2021; Khlomov. & Bochaver, 2021). An important result of the variability of intimate relationships is the choice of a sexual behavior strategy, which depends on biological, psychological, social factors and individual experience of sexual relations that effect on development of personality.

The more positive and harmonious experience in interpersonal relationships, including sexual ones, young people have, the more effectively their sexual behavior strategy will develop. Conversely, negative experiences, disharmony experienced by young people in relationships, can lead to deformation of interpersonal and sexual relations with the opposite sex, a change in gender identity and life prospects of young people in a situation of significant intimate and personal relationship's loss.

## **METHODS AND METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of our study is to identify disharmony in intimate relationships and their correlation with the peculiarities of sexual behavior of youth of student age. Based on this, we assume that there are correlations of indicators of disharmony in intimate relationships of young men and women with the peculiarities of their sexual behavior.

We conducted a study in which 62 Russian respondents (32 young women and 30 young men) aged 18 - 23 years, studying on different faculties in Peoples' Friendship University of Russia in bachelor's and master's degrees, and having experience of sexual relations, but not married, took part.

Under the indicators of disharmony of intimate relationships, we take the lack of consent and reciprocity between partners, the predominance of negative emotions and the experience of emotional distancing or excessive dependence feelings ( ). Based on the methodological and theoretical analysis, the following methods were chosen for the research organization: 1) the author's modification of the methodology "Subjective assessment of interpersonal relations" by S.V. Dukhnovsky (Dukhnovsky, 2015), which allows assessing the degree of tension, alienation, conflict and aggressiveness in relationships; 2) the methodology "Experience of close relationships" by K. Brennan and R.K. Fraley in the adaptation of T.V. Kazantseva (Kazantseva, 2008), used to determine the level of anxiety and avoidance of intimacy in close relationships; 3) The "Eysenk Inventory of Attitudes to Sex " by H.J. Eysenck (Ajzenk & Vil'son, 2000); 4) the methodology "Assessment of the sexual profile" by O.F. Potemkina (Potemkina, 1993), which allows identifying of sexual representations of young people, which determinate their behavior.

## RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

Diagnostics of intimate relationships allowed us to identify some features of the respondents studied. The relations of boys and girls are characterized by weakly expressed indicators of anxiety, avoidance of intimacy and feelings of alienation, and at the same time an average degree of tension, conflict and aggression. Young people have a sense of reliability and support from partners, they are comfortably experiencing rapprochement with them, possibly with a tendency to excessive attachment and a demonstration of dependence. Moderate tension in relations is accompanied by constructive resolution of emerging conflicts and the desire to take an equal position.

The correlation analysis with usage of the coefficient of Spearman's rank correlation showed the following results.

The analysis of correlations of the scales of the methodology "Experience of close relationships" with the scales of the methods "Eysenk inventory of attitudes to sex" and "Assessment of the sexual profile" reflected the following significant correlations.

**In the female group** the scale of *Anxiety in relationships* correlates with the scales of *Neurotic sex* ( $r = ,368; p \leq 0,05$ ) and *Sexual shyness* ( $r = ,353; p \leq 0,05$ ). Girls experiencing insecurity in intimate relationships are often puzzled by issues of sexual interaction and feel discomfort in this area. It can be assumed that the fear of interaction with a partner and distrust of him becomes the reason for avoiding sexual intimacy. The scale of *Avoidance of intimacy in relationships* correlates with the scales of *Responsibility* ( $r = -,377; p \leq 0,05$ ), which indicates the unwillingness of girls who are uncomfortable with the feeling of attachment to take responsibility for sexual relations and, perhaps, it is the fear of a sense of duty that explains this pattern.

**In the male group** the scale of *Anxiety in relationships* correlates with scales such as *Neurotic sex* ( $r = ,487; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = ,393; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Pornography* ( $r = ,706; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = ,428; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual excitement* ( $r = ,364; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Physical sex* ( $r = ,670; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual libido* ( $r = ,544; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Masculinity - Femininity* ( $r = ,431; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Expressiveness* ( $r = ,457; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Hypersexuality* ( $r = ,581; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sacrifice* ( $r = ,388; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Love as the highest value* ( $r = ,392; p \leq 0,05$ ). The results show that young men who are anxious in intimate relationships, against the background of understanding love as the highest value, experience distrust of their partner and uncertainty in them. Against the background of interest in issues of sexual interaction and sexual subjects, young respondents show either excessive sexual activity and orientation to the physical side of sexual relations, or avoidance of intimate contacts despite indicators of sexual attraction and sexual excitability, as well as the severity of masculine traits. At the same time, anxiety in relationships is experienced by young men who are quite emotional in sexual interaction, often motivated by love experiences and ready to sacrifice a lot for the sake of maintaining intimacy with the partner. Probably, distrust of the partner becomes the cause of unfavorable sexual attitudes that complicate the process of forming close relationships, and a high orientation on one's feelings for the partner, in turn, generates a feeling of insecurity in them when communication in a couple is disrupted. The scale of *Avoidance of intimacy in relationships* correlates with scales such as *Permissiveness* ( $r = -,565; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = ,555; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual disgust* ( $r = ,548; p \leq 0,01$ ), *Expressiveness* ( $r = -,457; p \leq 0,05$ ), *Courage* ( $r = -,644; p \leq 0,01$ ) and *Responsibility* ( $r = -,453; p \leq 0,05$ ). Young men experiencing discomfort when entering into a close relationship face fears, worries and a large number

of restrictions in the field of sexual interaction, rarely showing emotional expressiveness and responsibility in intimate relationships. Perhaps fears in the sphere of communication with the opposite sex prevent such young men from creating harmonious intimate sexual relations.

The analysis of correlations of the scales of the methodology "Subjective assessment of interpersonal relationships" with the scales of the methods "Eysenk inventory of attitudes to sex" and "Assessment of the sexual profile" reflected the following significant correlations.

**In the female group** the scale of *Tension of relationship* correlates with the scales of *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,350$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ). This reflects the disharmony of relationships in which young women experience difficulties in the field of sexual interaction. At the same time, the scale of *Alienation of relationships* correlates with scales such as *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,375$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = -,366$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,352$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ) and *Ingenuity* ( $r = -,359$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ) showed that young women experiencing emotional distance from their partner tend not to pay much attention to their personality and often enter into unfavorable sexual relationships. Therefore, selectivity and psychological readiness for intimate partner relationships should create conditions for harmonious relationships characterized by an atmosphere of trust, understanding, and intimacy. The scale of *Conflict of relationships* correlates with scales such as *Impersonal sex* ( $r = -,464$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Pornography* ( $r = -,514$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = -,400$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual libido* ( $r = -,377$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,406$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Masculinity - Femininity* ( $r = -,353$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Ingenuity* ( $r = -,481$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ). The results reflect the inconsistency of the structure of the psychosexual identity of young women and reveal the presence of difficulties in interacting with a partner, which gives rise to general difficulties in creating harmonious relationships, as well as their aspects related to the manifestation of sexuality. The scale of *Aggression of relationships* correlates with scales such as *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,358$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = -,438$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Pornography* ( $r = -,469$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual libido* ( $r = -,365$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,404$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Masculinity - Femininity* ( $r = -,351$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Ingenuity* ( $r = -,461$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Responsibility* ( $r = -,372$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), which also reflects the presence of women in relationships where they strive for control and dominance, strong sexual attraction, and interest in sexual subjects. Such them often show masculine traits, do not pay much attention to their partner's personality, and rarely show responsibility in sexual relationships. Perhaps this pattern reflects the appeal of women to male sexual plots, where aggression acts as a tool for asserting a position, and this in turn can both disrupt the harmony of close relationships and become an obstacle to sexual well-being. The indicator of the *General level of disharmony in relationships* correlates with the scales of *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,393$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,399$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = -,399$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Pornography* ( $r = -,423$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Ingenuity* ( $r = -,437$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ). The results obtained allow us to assert that women experiencing disharmony in close relationships are sexual unrealized, have expressed a fascination with sexual plots, as well as a weak interest in the partner's personality against the background of the absence of clear criteria for their choice. Probably, understanding oneself, the importance of intimate relationships, and attentiveness when choosing a partner leads to the possibility of creating more trusting and reliable relationships, as well as correcting sexual attitudes that make it difficult to develop harmonious intimate relationships.

**In the male group** the scale of *Tension of relationship* correlates with the scales of *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,449$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = -,618$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Pornography* ( $r = -,388$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = -,444$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual libido* ( $r = -,475$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,480$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Masculinity - Femininity* ( $r = -,423$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Ingenuity* ( $r = -,404$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Variety* ( $r = -,513$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ). The results showed that anxiety and discomfort in relationships are characteristic of young men who pay little attention to the personality in the sexual behavior of their chosen one. At the same time, they are more interested in sexual scenarios and tend to be diverse in the field of sexual interaction. Young men have a fear of entering into sexual contacts, and with a high level of sexual desire, they remain unfulfilled in this area. Such respondents more often demonstrate masculine traits, and perhaps it is their orientation to stereotypes about male sexuality and their incompetence in interacting with representatives of the opposite sex that prevent them from establishing harmonious relationships. The scale of *Alienation of relationships* correlates with scales such as *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,422$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = -,557$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,404$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ) and *Courage* ( $r = -,588$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ). The results obtained reflect the characteristics of young men experiencing detachment in intimate relationships, fears in sexual interaction, and are unrealized in the



sexual sphere. With a high probability, it should be argued that this is due to the difficulties of interpersonal communication that prevent entry into a close relationship. The scale of **Conflict of relationships** correlates with scales such as *Prudishness* ( $r = ,594$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Aggressive sex* ( $r = ,408$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ) and *Courage* ( $r = -,383$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), which indicates that young men who show aggression in sexual behavior demonstrate fears and avoid manifestations of sexuality. It is possible that unresolved conflicts in the relationship are the cause of sexual problems in the relationship with the girl, or that the peculiarities of sexual interaction affect the overall level of conflict in the couple. The scale of **Aggression of relationships** correlates with scales such as *Sexual shyness* ( $r = ,369$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ) and *Prudishness* ( $r = ,522$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), which reflect the tendency to avoid sexual intimacy in young men, in whose sexual behavior there is a desire for control and dominance. Perhaps this is caused by compensatory mechanisms and distorted ideas about the sphere of sexual interaction with a partner. The indicator of the **General level of disharmony in relationships** correlates with the scales of *Satisfaction* ( $r = -,398$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Impersonal sex* ( $r = ,475$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual shyness* ( $r = ,498$ ;  $p \leq 0,01$ ), *Sexual libido* ( $r = ,392$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Sexual satisfaction* ( $r = -,390$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Courage* ( $r = -,425$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ), *Variety* ( $r = ,382$ ;  $p \leq 0,05$ ). The studied results allow us to state that young men experiencing disharmony in intimate relationships simultaneously demonstrated low sexual fulfillment, a high level of sexual attraction, a tendency to diversity in sexual relationships, an inattentive attitude toward the partner's personality, as well as fears in the field of sexual interaction. Probably, disharmony in the sphere of intimate relations becomes a condition for the formation of unfavorable sexual attitudes that make it difficult to create harmonious relationships in the future.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summarizing the results obtained, it should be noted that indicators of disharmony in the relationships of the respondents studied, such as tension, conflict, alienation, and aggression, as well as anxiety and avoidance of intimacy, are associated with both realized sexual behavior and satisfaction with it. It should be noted that most often, young people with high ratings of disharmony in their close relationships are passionate about sexual subjects and strive for sexual diversity, but have fears in the field of sexual interaction and communication with the opposite sex, are aggressive and irresponsible towards the partner, and pay little attention to their personal qualities when choosing. They have high level of sexual libido but they are sexual unrealized and often show masculine traits regardless of their biological sex. Moreover, in the male group the correlation analysis showed a significantly greater number of connections according to the scales of methods.

In order to form a sexual culture, prevent risks, and develop harmonious intimate relationships among them through practical pedagogy and psychology, it is necessary to develop the following areas:

- Education on issues of psychosexual development and the specifics of the sphere of sexual relations in order to form awareness, responsibility, and readiness for intimate relationships
- Developing diagnostic tools and conducting diagnostics among the youth in order to identify psychological readiness to establish close relationships and determine the degree of traumatic experience in these relationships, followed by counseling on the correction of identified risk zones
- Development, implementation into the educational environment, and conducting training programs for young people are aimed at developing social personal qualities that create opportunities for more successful building of interpersonal relationships.
- Interaction with the family and consultations with parents on issues of psychosexual development and the specifics of the sphere of sexual relations in adolescence in order to create a trusting relationship between children and parents, as well as the delicate accompaniment of sexual education of children, which decreases risks of adverse consequences in early sexual relations.

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**ИНТИМНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ ЮНОШЕЙ И ДЕВУШЕК: ПОКАЗАТЕЛИ ДИСГАРМОНИИ**

**Аннотация.** В статье представлен теоретический и эмпирический анализ характеристик сексуального поведения и показателей дисгармонии интимных отношений юношей и девушек студенческого возраста. Цель исследования - выявление взаимосвязей в проявлениях интимных отношений и сексуальном поведении у молодежи. В содержании рассмотрены различные подходы к анализу интимных и сексуальных отношений с позиции сексологии и психологии. Обоснованы основные проблемы и противоречия, на основе которых построена стратегия эмпирического исследования. В качестве респондентов были выбраны 62 человека (32 девушки и 30 юношей в возрасте от 18 до 23 лет), обучающихся на разных факультетах Российского университета дружбы народов в бакалавриате и магистратуре. Для диагностики параметров дисгармонии интимных отношений использовалась авторская модификация методики «Субъективная оценка межличностных отношений» С.В. Духновского и методика "Опыт близких отношений" К. Бреннан и Р.К. Фрейли в адаптации Т.В. Казанцевой; для оценки особенностей сексуального поведения - «Опросник установок к сексу» Г. Айзенка и «Оценка сексуального профиля» О.Ф. Потемкиной. В целом, в сексуальном поведении испытуемые проявляют благоприятные сексуальные установки, отмечают сексуальную удовлетворенность и Satisfaction, а также сексуальную невротичность, указывающую на сложности у молодых людей в создании близких отношений. В результате проведенного корреляционного анализа в исследовании были выявлены показатели сексуального поведения, характеризующие дисгармонию в интимных отношениях юношей и девушек, которые свидетельствуют о недостаточной психологической готовности к интимным отношениям молодых людей. Представленные в исследовании характеристики дисгармонии в интимных отношениях позволили авторам сформулировать выводы и рекомендации специалистам в области образования по организации психолого-педагогических технологий формирования сексуальной культуры у современной молодежи.

**Ключевые слова:** дисгармония в интимных отношениях, сексуальное поведение, студенты.

**INTIMNI ODNOSI IZMEĐU MLADIĆA I ŽENA: POKAZATELJI DISHARMONIJE**

**Sažetak:** U članku je prikazana teorijska i empirijska analiza karakteristika seksualnog ponašanja i pokazatelja disharmoničnosti intimnih odnosa mladića i djevojaka studentske dobi. Svrha istraživanja je utvrditi korelacije manifestacija intimnih odnosa i seksualnog ponašanja među mladima. Sadržaj će razmatrati različite pristupe analizi intimnih i seksualnih odnosa sa stajališta seksologije i psihologije. Objasniti će se glavni problemi i proturječja na kojima se temelji strategija empirijskog istraživanja i obrazložiti. Ispitanici su bili 62 osobe (32 mlade žene i 30 mladića u dobi od 18 do 23 godine) koji su studirali na različitim fakultetima Ruskog sveučilišta prijateljstva naroda na diplomama prvostupnika i magisterija. Za dijagnosticanje parametara disharmonije intimnih odnosa korištena je autorova modifikacija metodologije «Subjektivna procjena međuljudskih odnosa» S.V. Dukhnovsky i metodologija «Iskustvo bliskih odnosa» K. Brennana i R.K. Fraley u adaptaciji T.V. Kazantseva korišteni su za procjenu karakteristika seksualnog ponašanja – «Eysenkov inventar stavova prema seksu» H.J.Eysencka i «Procjena seksualnog profila» O.F. Potemkina. Općenito, u seksualnom ponašanju ispitanici pokazuju povoljne seksualne stavove, bilježe seksualno zadovoljstvo i ispunjenost, kao i seksualni neuroticizam, što ukazuje na poteškoće mladih u stvaranju intimnih odnosa. Kao rezultat korelacijske analize istraživanjem su otkriveni pokazatelji seksualnog ponašanja koji karakteriziraju nesklad u intimnim odnosima mladića i djevojaka, a koji ukazuju na nedovoljnu psihičku spremnost za intimne odnose mladih. Obilježja nesklada u intimnim odnosima predstavljena u studiji omogućila su autorima da formuliraju zaključke i preporuke stručnjacima u području obrazovanja o organizaciji psiholoških i pedagoških tehnologija za formiranje seksualne kulture među suvremenom omladinom.

**Ključne riječi:** nesklad u intimnim odnosima, seksualno ponašanje, studenti