

Need for and evaluation of a manual on sexual diversity and cultural differences in education and counselling: main study findings.

Introduction

Systematic research was carried out at two moments in time during the course of the project TRIANGLE. Firstly, at the beginning of the project, the needs of the target group in relation to the envisioned product were investigated, the so-called “needs assessment”. The target group of this project were psychosocial counsellors and teachers working with young people. More specifically, they were counsellors and teachers who, in principle, support anti-gay-discrimination work but who do not (yet) consider themselves equipped enough to actually perform such interventions themselves, systematically and effectively, in their own professional fields. Secondly, after the dummy-version of the manual was ready, an evaluation of the manual took place. Generally speaking, the goal of the manual is to enhance and improve subjects’ relevant knowledge, self-efficacy and behavioural intention in doing anti-gay-discrimination work and putting anti-gay-discrimination interventions into practice, in particular in multicultural or multi-ethnic contexts. The aim of the evaluation was to assess the qualities of the dummy-version of the manual in this respect.

Methods

Data were gathered by means of pre-structured, written questionnaires in all four different languages concerned. Respondents were recruited through the members of the linkage board and the networks of the project partners. Questionnaire 1, concerning the needs assessment, addressed subjects’ experiences with educating on homosexuality or counselling of gays and lesbians, the confidence in one’s own skills, and their needs in terms of areas they need support on. Questions explicitly focussed on respondents’ needs in relation to working in multicultural contexts and in counselling/educating various ethnic groups. Questionnaire 2, concerning the evaluation of the manual, addressed the changes in relevant knowledge, confidence in their own skills, and behavioural intentions brought about by reading or using the manual, and the subjective evaluation of the dummy-version in terms of attractiveness, applicability and usability.

Study group

The number of respondents for the needs assessment was 377 (Italy 146, Germany 75, Austria 116, Netherlands 40). Mean age of the respondents was 42 years (range, 16-75 years). Two-third of the respondents were female. Almost none of the respondents originated from ethnic minority groups. Sexual orientation was heterosexual in 83%, homosexual in 15%, and bisexual in 2% of the respondents. Two-third of the respondents worked in the educational sector (as a teacher or a psychosocial counsellor), and one-third worked in the health sector (as a psychosocial counsellor or a doctor/nurse).

The number of respondents for the evaluation of the manual was 224 (Italy 102, Germany 43, Austria 31, France 39, Netherlands 9). Mean age of the respondents was 41 years (range, 18-70 years). Two-third of the respondents were female. Almost none of the respondents originated from ethnic minority groups. Sexual orientation was heterosexual in 73%, homosexual in 22%, and bisexual in 1% of the respondents. Three-fourth of the respondents worked in the educational sector (as a teacher or a psychosocial counsellor), and one-fourth worked in the health sector (as a psychosocial counsellor or a doctor/nurse).

The findings are corrected for the differences in number of respondents between the countries (with the exception of the findings on the subgroup of doctors/nurses, due to small numbers).

Results for respondents working in the educational sector

Needs assessment

The main problems encountered when educating on homosexuality were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that had encountered this problem)

- the students are not willing to talk about it open-heartedly (65%)
- the parents of the target group are averse to educating on homosexuality (59%)
- the students have a hostile or indifferent attitude during the education (53%)
- the students behave offensively or aggressively towards homosexual teenagers in the group (48%)
- I was not confident about how to take good care of homosexual teenagers in the group (47%)
- I lacked a teaching packet on homosexuality (42%)

The skills in which the respondents had the least self-confidence were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that were not self-confident on this aspect)

- adequately handling differences between students from different cultural-ethnic backgrounds (52%)
- connecting to the students' experiences (40%)
- creating an atmosphere in which teenagers dare to talk open-heartedly about sexuality and relationships (39%)
- adequately handling (religious) anti-gay attitudes or convictions (39%)
- speaking freely about differences and similarities in sexuality of heterosexuals and homosexuals (36%)
- adequately handling a coming-out of a youngster during the lesson (34%)

The themes about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this theme as most relevant for the manual)

- the coming-out process (52%)
- aspects of health and (psychological) problems associated with homosexuality (37%)
- sexuality of gays and lesbians (36%)
- homosexuality in relation to religion and culture (32%)
- ways in which gays and lesbians are discriminated against (31%)
- social map of relevant organisations in their country (26%)

The methods about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this method as most relevant for the manual)

- how to teach on homosexuality in a classroom or other group of young people (65%)
- how to deal with homophobic attitudes in a classroom (53%)
- how to empower gay and lesbian pupils or clients (46%)
- general guidelines for anti-discrimination interventions (theory, standards) (34%)

The contexts about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this context as most relevant for the manual)

- working with groups of mixed gender and sexual preference (72%)
- working with groups of mixed ethnic background (46%)
- working with gay or lesbian individuals (44%)

Evaluation of the dummy version of the manual

- Knowledge increase

The informative value of the manual was rated as (very) high by 59% of the teachers and 76% of the psychosocial workers. The majority of respondents indicated that their knowledge had increased on various themes, after reading the manual. Knowledge on differences between homosexuals according to cultural-ethnic background improved for relatively many respondents.

- Evaluation of tools

The practical value of the manual for educating and counselling was rated as (very) high by almost 60% of the teachers and 70% of the psychosocial workers. The tools and various aspects thereof (time of preparation, time of execution, attractiveness for pupils/students, usability for pupils/students of mixed ethnic background) were rated as fairly positive by the majority of the respondents.

- Changes in self-efficacy, thanks to the manual

Self-perceived confidence when educating on homosexuality increased in more than half of the teachers. Confidence about their knowledge on homosexuality and how to give meaning or shape to the education improved most. Self-perceived confidence in counselling gays and lesbians increased in half of the teachers, and 40% of the psychosocial workers of the educational sector.

- Changes in behavioural intention, thanks to the manual

The intention to educate on homosexuality increased in almost half of the teachers. The intention to counsel individual gays and lesbians increased in almost half of the teachers and more than half of the psychosocial workers. The intention to counsel groups of gays and lesbians improved mainly for psychosocial workers, but also for one-fourth of the teachers.

- Evaluation of the attention to ethnic origin in the manual

Eighty percent of the respondents considered that the subjects of ethnicity and the multicultural society are (more or less) sufficiently represented in the manual.

- Evaluation of separate chapters

Specific aspects (such as style of writing) and sections (such as the stories) of each chapter were evaluated by the respondents. Overall, the chapters were rated as fairly positively by the majority of respondents. Respondents' comments on or suggestions for improvement of the chapters have been used to improve the manual.

Results for respondents working in the health sector

Needs assessment

The main problems encountered when counselling gays and lesbians were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that had encountered this problem)

- I was not confident about my knowledge on homosexuality in cultural-ethnic minority groups (91%)
- I was not confident about how to take good care of the homosexual teenager (63%)
- I was not confident about my knowledge on homosexuality (56%)
- I lacked a handbook or manual for counselling gays and lesbians (53%)
- I was not confident about how to take homospecific aspects into account during the counselling (51%)

The skills in which the respondents have the least self-confidence were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that were not self-confident on this aspect)

- adequately recognize problems related to homosexual preference (44%)
- adequately judge whether his or her homosexual preference should be a theme in the counselling (35%)
- adequately judge whether his or her cultural-ethnic background should be a theme in the counselling (35%)

The themes about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this theme as most relevant for the manual)

- the coming-out process (61%)
- aspects of health and (psychological) problems associated with homosexuality (49%)
- homosexuality in relation to religion and culture (31%)
- sexuality of gays and lesbians (31%)
- homo-specific counselling in general (30%)

The methods about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this method as most relevant for the manual)

- how to adequately address homosexuality in a counselling situation (46%)
- how to empower gay and lesbian pupils or clients (41%)
- how to teach on homosexuality in a classroom or other group of teenagers (39%)
- homo-specific counselling methodology (38%)

The contexts about which the respondents needed the most information were:

(in brackets: percent respondents that considered this context as most relevant for the manual)

- working with groups of mixed gender and sexual preference (60%)
- working with individual gay/lesbians (46%)
- working with groups of mixed ethnic background (44%)
- working with ethnic minority groups (43%)

Evaluation of the dummy version of the manual

- Knowledge increase

The informative value of the manual was rated as (very) high by 48% of the psychosocial workers and 46% of the doctors/nurses. Around one-third of respondents indicated that their knowledge had increased on various themes, after reading the manual. Knowledge on differences between homosexuals according to cultural-ethnic background improved for relatively many respondents.

- Evaluation of tools

The practical value of the manual for counselling was rated as (very) high by 52% of the psychosocial workers and 50% of the doctors/nurses. The tools and various aspects thereof (time of preparation, time of execution, attractiveness for youngsters, usability for youngsters from an ethnic minority group) were rated as fairly positive by half of the respondents.

- Changes in self-efficacy, thanks to the manual

Self-perceived confidence when counselling gays and lesbians increased in 29% of the psychosocial workers and 54% of the doctors/nurses. Confidence about their knowledge on homosexuality in ethnic minority groups and how to take good care of a homosexual teenager from an ethnic minority group improved most.

- Changes in behavioural intention, thanks to the manual

The intention to counsel individual gays and lesbians increased in 25% of the psychosocial workers and 39% of the doctors/nurses. However, the intention decreased for almost the same percent of respondents (psychosocial workers 17%, doctors/nurses 31%). The intention to counsel groups of gays and lesbians improved for 21% of the psychosocial workers and 31% of the doctors/nurses. Again, the intention decreased for the same or even a higher percent of respondents (psychosocial workers 21%, doctors/nurses 46%). Perhaps, this intention decrease is a consequence of a stronger intention to refer the teenagers to one of the relief organisations we mentioned in the manual.

- Evaluation of attention for ethnic origin in the manual

Seventy-two percent of the respondents considered that the subjects of ethnicity and the multicultural society are (more or less) sufficiently represented in the manual.

- Evaluation of separate chapters

Specific aspects (such as style of writing) and sections (such as the stories) of each chapter were evaluated by the respondents. Overall, the chapters were rated as positively by half of the respondents. Respondents' comments on or suggestions for improvement of the chapters have been used to improve the manual.

Conclusion

This study showed the large need of teachers and counsellors for support in doing anti-gay-discrimination work in their professional fields. The manual as developed in the TRIANGLE project fulfills this need at least partly, as appears from the positive evaluation of the manual by the target group. Both teachers and counsellors endorse the informative and practical value of the manual. Thanks to the manual, the intention to educate on homosexuality improved, as well as the self-confidence when educating on homosexuality or counselling gay and lesbian people.