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## Health education at the university: needs and current challenges

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### Abstract

At the University we consider that it is essential to provide a satisfying quality education in order to boost the development of health education and promotion. Such education demands the acquisition of knowledge, skills and practice from the social sciences university graduates, particularly those closely related to health and education, with a global biopsychosocial approach. The purposes we set out for this study are, in general, to analyze the situation of the Spanish universities regarding Health Education and, particularly, to know the Health Education teaching received by the students from the School of Social Sciences at Pablo de Olavide University and to establish the connection between the Health Education teaching received, the need to extend this education and its future relevance. The methodology followed is quantitative, with a questionnaire completed by a sample of 455 students. The results from this study show that 76.7% of students have received information and/or education in Health Education related subjects, and 73.4% of these students believe they need more education. With regard to the relevance of this knowledge, 92.3% of students believe that acquiring knowledge on Health Education will be useful for their future careers. We consider that these are relevant facts, as they imply students see this subject necessary for their subsequent careers.

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### 1. Introduction

The role that Health Education plays in Spain – and, in a greater length, in Europe – is subject to numerous discussions according to García Martínez (1998). It is a fact that Health Education can be considered firstly as a hybrid body of knowledge (like every other scientific discipline) in a consolidation stage and, secondly, as a way to focus on

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and contribute to health. Due to the assumption of health as prevention and promotion, this topic faces the consolidated idea of disease management and confidence on fixing its effects. According to Pedrero & Morón (2012), the interests of Health Education lie particularly on the determining factors that generate health risks and on the living conditions and behaviours conditioning health recovery.

From the beginning, Health Education has been considered as a young, dynamic discipline with a strong social impact. However, and unlike other disciplines, Health Education is not fully integrated in how advanced societies act (García Martínez et al., 2000).

At pre-university education levels, Health Education appears as a cross curricular topic and its inclusion in school institution projects depends on teachers' ideology and willingness. But – what happens with the education at university or with the continuous learning received by schoolteachers, teaching staff or educators? The education received by these professionals is a main issue since, if health as a value does not take root among them, they will hardly take it into consideration.

The lack of university recognition and the late curricular implementation have contributed to this situation, which has caused an underdevelopment in the research field. As indicated in the bibliometric research conducted during 1993-2013 by Jiménez-Torres, Guerrero-Ramos & López-Sánchez (2013), universities have the leading role of spreading health promotion. Therefore, the sphere of universities will be the focus here in order to analyse the Health Education situation at these institutions in Spain.

## 2. Objectives

The general and specific objectives set out in this research are:

1. To gain a better insight of the current teaching of Health Education at the Schools of Education and the Schools of Social Sciences of Spanish universities.
  - 1.1. To identify the specific courses on Health Education included in the curricula.
  - 1.2. To analyse if these courses are basic, mandatory or optional.
2. To gain a better insight of the education received by the students from the School of Social Sciences at the Pablo de Olavide University (Seville, Spain) in the field of Health Education.
  - 2.1. To know the education received by the students in the field of Health Education.
  - 2.2. To establish the connection between the teaching of Health Education received by students, the need to extend this learning and its future relevance.

## 3. Methodology

A multimethod approach has been used for this research. On the one hand, an analysis of the content of teaching guides was performed. These guides belong to the curricula of the Schools of Education and the Schools of Social Sciences degrees from every Spanish university during the academic year 2015/2016. The goal was to identify the specific courses on Health Education and those with Health Education as cross curricular content. The search parameters established were the words “education, health”.

On the other hand, a questionnaire was created with 13 questions aimed at students in any year of the degrees in Social Education and Social Work or the double degree in Social Education – Social Work from the Pablo de Olavide University. The aim of this questionnaire was to know the opinion of the students about the education received on Health Education at the University. This questionnaire collected socio-demographic information – namely university, sex, age, degree, course year, education context, learning method, content, Health Education assessment from students, need, demand and relevance.

### 3.1. Sampling

This research was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2015/2016. The teaching guides were collected from the curricula of the degrees in which the course Health Education or any other with a different name but equivalent content exists: Pre-School Education, Primary Education, Social Education, Pedagogy,

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