



### **How Dr Sex counsels Albania Muslims.**

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A jolly grey-haired grandfather who dispenses frank advice about sex is Albania's unlikeliest celebrity. Dr Adem Harxhi hosts the country's first television show dedicated to open discussion of intimate etiquette, and is now a cult figure.

In *Sex and Sexuality*, his hour-long programme every Thursday on the private channel "Gjeli Vision" Dr Harxhi breaks long-standing taboos about discussions of sexual matters in the mainly-Muslim Balkan country. Callers ring in anonymously to ask about everything from orgasms to oral sex.

Dr Harxhi, 65, originally trained as an eye doctor, but found that his patients were more concerned about discussing their intimate lives. He lived in the United States for several years before returning to Tirana.

Albanian society is still very traditional and conservative, in part a legacy of its heritage as Europe's only Muslim-majority country. However, Dr Harxhi's grandfatherly image, and patriarchal demeanour allows him to discuss topics previously considered closed, sometimes in a surprisingly frank manner.

The most frequent obstacle to sexual fulfilment, he says, is anxiety. Many Albanians are too frightened to experiment with ways to improve their sex lives. There is little sex education in schools.

One hapless caller telephoned Dr Harxhi to confess that he was too shy even to make love to his wife. The caller was a miner, which prompted a rare sarcastic remark. "How could this happen to you? You use your drill deep inside rocks and mountains, but you can't drill your wife? Are you a miner or what?"

Under the former Communist regime, Albania was the most isolated country in Europe. Enver Hoxha, the Stalinist dictator, promoted a North Korean-style personality cult, banning beards, private cars and kissing on television.

Censorship is no more, but the easy availability of satellite and cable foreign television stations, and the globalisation of commercial culture, with ready portrayals of semi-nudity and

sexuality, clash with Albania's traditionally conservative mores, in contrast with its more sexually liberal neighbours, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Sex and Sexuality is especially popular with the younger generation, who are more exposed to foreign films and advertising.

Alma Cupi, an Albanian journalist and correspondent for the IWPR website, said: "**Dr Sex** meets a need here. You can't imagine how many young people phone him to ask for advice about everything. People don't know much about sex education.

"People here cannot speak openly about sexual matters. This kind of discussion usually takes place in all-male or all-female groups. Many parents will not speak about sexual matters with their children because they are too ashamed."  
"If they see a film with a couple kissing or making love, they will turn off the television."

Analysts believe that Dr Sex's formula could transfer to more Conservative Islamic countries, such as in the Middle East.

John Nadler, a correspondent for Variety newspaper, said: "He is a grey-haired avuncular figure, who commands respect in a patriarchal society, and that's why he can communicate with such frankness about these matters."

Dr Harxhi is a local celebrity, greeted on the streets of Tirana by his viewers. But not everyone welcomes his open discussions. Callers to the show Occasionally become abusive. But nothing disturbs Dr Sex. "Tune your television set to a different channel if you don't like me," he tells viewers. "And make love as much as possible, so that you can relax, rid yourself of stress and regenerate."

## **THE TOP FIVE QUESTIONS FOR DR SEX**

**Question:** Is it OK to masturbate?

**Answer:** Yes, of course, it relieves stress and makes you feel better

**Question:** Can I prevent my wife getting pregnant if I use a condom?

**Answer:** Yes

**Question:** Is it OK to make love in another position, not in the Standard position?

**Answer:** Yes, all sex is wonderful and good

**Question:** I am 15 and I have a boyfriend. I am not sure if I should have sex or not

**Answer:** No, you are too young and there is a danger of infection or pregnancy

**Question:** I am too embarrassed to see my doctor, where should I go to For treatment for a venereal disease?

**Answer:** Your doctor, or a clinic

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