

Standards of sex education in Poland and other European countries



The programs of sex education in schools are currently present in most European countries, but the axiological basis of these programs is not the same.

Since 1998 in Polish schools the program titled *Family Life Education* has been implemented for all students from 11 to 18 years of age. **The main goal of this program is to prepare young people for marriage and family life and for premarital sex abstinence.** Instead of promoting contraception the ecological approach to fertility and the natural methods of family planning are promoted. Students receive also a basic knowledge about recognizing fertile and infertile phase in a woman's menstrual cycle.

In most countries a different version of sex education is implemented: marriage and pre-marital sexual abstinence are viewed as valuable, but optional. It is emphasized that a human being has the right to fulfill his or her sexual needs even without being married. To make sex safe, the school provides knowledge about

contraceptives and sexually-transmitted diseases (STD). The experts representing WHO Regional Office for Europe and Federal Centre of Health Education (BZgA), who in 2010 published *Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe*, propose to introduce this model in all European countries.

The sexual attitudes of young people are influenced by many social environments and factors like peers, family or media, but the role of school is really very significant in this respect.

Here we try to answer the question: what are the sexual behaviors of young people in countries with sex education programs based on different axiological principles: **does the sexual education promoting „safe sex” based on contraceptives (type B) really reduce adolescents' fertility rates and abortion rates?**

The answer may be provided by the following comparative analysis of four countries : Poland with „abstinence only until marriage” and pro-family character (type A) and Sweden, United Kingdom and Germany with "permissive" education (type B). Official statistical sources were used in this analysis.

Several aspects of adolescents' sexual behaviors in selected European countries (2015)

| L.p. | Specification | Poland | Sweden | United Kingdom | Germany |
|------|---|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| 1. | Percent of adolescents with sexual initiation at age 15* Boys Girls | 19 13 | 31 32 | 26 32 | 20 24 |
| 2. | The number of live births per 1000 girls aged 15–19 | 12,1 | 4,4 | 14,3 | 7,8 |
| 3. | The number of legally induced abortions per 1000 girls aged 15–19 | 0,05 | 14,4 | 13,7 | 2,4 |
| 4. | Percent of abortions among girls aged 15–19 in the total number of abortions | 5,4 | 9,6 | 13,8 | 4,7 |
| 5. | The number of legally induced abortions among girls aged 15–19 per 1000 live births | 4,6 | 3250,0 | 960,4 | 303,1 |

*2010 data

Source: Row No. 1: Currie C. et al. (eds.), *Social Determinants of Health and Well-being among Young People. Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) Study: International Report from the 2009/2010 Survey*, Copenhagen, WHO Regional Office for Europe, 2012 (Health Policy for Children and Adolescents, No. 6, s. 174). Rows No. 2-5: Eurostat http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_data. Calculations done by the authors

The data (see table) clearly shows that a frequency of risky behaviors (very early sexual initiation, abortion) is substantially lower among Polish teenagers than among their age-mates in compared countries.

It should be explain that a reason of relatively high adolescent fertility rate in Poland is the fact that most of these mothers are 18-19 years old¹ (i.e.at legally adult age) and some of them are married². Young-age parenthood is not always a synonymous of "lonely" parenthood ,although it can not be denied that it is very common. The illegitimate birth rate is also lower in Poland³.

We should also note differences in the level of adolescent abortion rate: the difference between Poland and other European countries is striking. The abortion rate for 15-19 years old girls and young women as well as the percent of teenagers' abortions in the total number of legally induced abortions is significantly lower in Poland than in other European countries⁴.

There are also substantial differences in rates of sexual activity of the youngest teenagers between Poland and compared countries. **The data also demonstrates that in countries with type B sex education teenagers aged 13-18 have higher rates of sexual activity** and girls often have earlier sexual initiation age than boys.

This analysis shows clearly that sexual education type B does not eliminate the problem of unplanned pregnancies and abortion among adolescents and does not protect effectively against sexually transmitted diseases . Sexual education type A provided in Poland achieves substantially better results in this field.

References:

¹ In 2015, 76.4% of mothers aged 15-19 were women aged 18-19.

² In 2015,16.8% of women giving birth under the age of 19, were married .

³ In 2015, the percentage of illegitimate births was as follows: Poland – 24.6%, Germany – 35%, United Kingdom – 47.9%, Sweden – 54.7%.

⁴ In 2015, Poland ranked first in Europe in this regard.

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