

Sexuality education course books in Poland

Analysis by Ponton
Group of Sex Educators

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Federation for Women and Family Planning and Ponton Group of Sex Educators are currently conducting the project 'Control of the realization of the right of youth to sexuality education', with the support of EEA Funds. The first stage of the project was the analysis of core curriculum and course books approved by the Ministry of National Education to use during the lessons of Preparation for Family Life from primary to secondary school. The course books and core curriculum were assessed with attention to their content and accordance with international standards of sexuality education. It is worth noting that the Ministry approved only four course books, from among which three were written by one author (the series "Walking Towards Adulthood", edited by Teresa Król). The fourth book "Preparation for Family Life" by Felicja Kalinowska is addressed at middle school). Therefore, **Polish teachers don't have sufficient selection of course books available.**

Ponton's sexuality educators, Maria Pawłowska, PhD (lecturer at the Polish Academy of Sciences) and Alina Synakiewicz (pedagogue and anti-discrimination trainer) have conducted an in-depth expert analysis of the course books' content, focusing on:

- ✓ adequacy to youth developmental needs
- ✓ adequacy to contemporary times
- ✓ assertiveness, first relationships, prevention of sexual violence
- ✓ gender roles and stereotypes
- ✓ knowledge on the body and sexuality
- ✓ contraception, pregnancy and abortion.

The analysis has demonstrated that course books for PFL (Preparation for Family Life) are unscientific. **The authors either ignore twenty years of research on sexuality and health, or deny the facts and disseminate the myths and stereotypes concerning human sexuality.**

Course books assume that sexual intercourse takes place, or should only take place within a heterosexual marriage.

Course books lack scientific objectivity and are grounded in the Catholic dogma as they present theological concepts as sexological knowledge and quote religious authorities to prove their point. Women are depicted primarily as mothers, whereas men are not presented in a way highlighting their father role. Course books marginalize preventive healthcare. Adolescent girls receive misleading information about regular gynecological checkups.

One of the course books includes outrageous misinformation: 'if a girl feels healthy (...) the visit isn't necessary',

'gynecologist isn't a dentist – regular visits at your age aren't necessary'.

It's particularly alarming as Poland has the highest cervical cancer mortality rate in Europe. Moreover, the authors completely ignore the topic of breast cancer prevention. None of the books involves information on urological visits or testicular cancer (which occurs most often among young men) addressed to boys.

Additionally, the books' content is outdated, what is evident in the approach to divorce and the existence of family models different than nuclear.

What young people can read about divorce is that 'lack of a father in the family has a destructive impact on a child's development, (...) and consequentially, coming into collision with the law' and it is argued that anorexic girls had a weak bond with their fathers.

Books do not cover sufficiently the topics of cyber violence and threats related to Internet use. The authors do not provide any advice on how to avoid sexting or child grooming. **The manner of presenting sexual orientation might strengthen homophobic attitudes among students.** One of the course books mentions the definition of homosexuality under the subsection dedicated to problems with sexuality and sex crimes. Another book includes unscientific argumentation that 'What underlies homosexuality might be also the experience of emotional injury that boys have experienced, e.g. as a result of failed sexual intercourse'. Non-heterosexual youth don't obtain information, which could ease the tension and anxiety related to feeling alienated from their peers. Meanwhile, according to American studies, 60% of youth suicide attempts result from the experience of homophobia and lack of acceptance for one's sexual orientation.

The approach of books' authors to sexual violence is particularly worrying. There is no sufficient information for violence survivors. The responsibility for rape is put mostly on girls, who dress or act in an inappropriate way.

From one of the books students may find out about the existence of two categories of girls ' – first behaves modestly and boys respect her, the other 'encourages boys with 'behaviour or provocative outfit' what may result in sexual exploitation.

None of the books contain messages addressed at boys and young men on the need for respecting another person's boundaries, that 'no means no', and short skirt or deep neckline is not the invitation to sexual contact. On the other hand, there is also no information that a boy can also be a victim of sexual violence, or might not want to have sex.

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