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Protection of Minors Against Sexual Abuse on the Example of the Document *Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Students in a Catholic School*

Ochrona osób małoletnich przed wykorzystaniem seksualnym na przykładzie dokumentu *Profilaktyka przemocy seksualnej wobec uczniów w szkole katolickiej*

ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a social problem that requires a strong response. Therefore, action is needed to prevent harm. Information materials, procedures and training should be provided to strengthen safety in places where children and youth are present. The purpose of this article is to present the document *Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Students in a Catholic School*. Its creation stems from the demand to prepare prevention materials adapted to the context of educational institutions. The document is primarily aimed at Catholic schools, as it takes into account the prevention system of the Catholic Church in Poland. However, it can also be useful in other types of schools as most of the provisions are universal. The article describes the origins of the

Rezenzje



KEYWORDS

child sexual abuse, safeguarding, protection of minors, comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention strategy, safety in schools, Catholic schools, Catholic Church in Poland

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci, profilaktyka, ochrona małoletnich, zintegrowany model profilaktyki wykorzystywania seksualnego dzieci, bezpieczeństwo w szkołach, szkoły katolickie, Kościół w Polsce
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document and the theoretical assumptions lying behind it. It is mainly based on the comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention strategy developed by Stephen Smallbone, William L. Marshall and Richard Wortley. This concept postulates preventive action at three levels: universal, selective and interventional. Not only does the article summarize the key provisions of the publication in question but also it shows how the document applies the comprehensive prevention model in a school setting.

ABSTRAKT

Wykorzystywanie seksualne osób małoletnich jest problemem społecznym, który wymaga zdecydowanej reakcji. Konieczne jest podjęcie działań mających na celu zapobieganie krzywdzie. Potrzebne są materiały informacyjne, procedury i szkolenia wzmacniające bezpieczeństwo w miejscach, gdzie przebywają dzieci i młodzież. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zaprezentowanie dokumentu *Profilaktyka przemocy seksualnej wobec uczniów w szkole katolickiej*. Jego powstanie wynika z potrzeby przygotowania materiałów profilaktycznych dostosowanych do kontekstu instytucji edukacyjnych. Dokument ten jest kierowany przede wszystkim do szkół katolickich, gdyż uwzględnia system prewencji obowiązujący w Kościele w Polsce. Może on jednak być przydatny również w innych typach szkół, ponieważ większość zapisów jest uniwersalna. Artykuł opisuje genezę powstania dokumentu i założenia teoretyczne stojące u jego podstaw. Opiera się on głównie na zintegrowanym modelu profilaktyki wykorzystywania seksualnego dzieci, który opracowali Stephen Smallbone, William L. Marshall i Richard Wortley. Ta koncepcja postuluje podejmowanie działań profilaktycznych na trzech poziomach: uniwersalnym, selektywnym i interwencyjnym. Artykuł ukazuje, w jaki sposób w omawianym dokumencie stosuje się ten model w warunkach szkolnych oraz streszcza najważniejsze zapisy tejże publikacji.

Introduction

In recent years, the issue of sexual abuse of minors has become the subject of research and commentary by both specialists and the public. There is a growing awareness in society of the serious effects of sexual violence experienced in childhood and adolescence. Research shows that the consequences may appear immediately after the harm is suffered, as well as later, and may be somatic, mental, sexual and

social (Izdebska 2009; Beisert, Izdebska 2012). Sexual abuse therefore poses a serious threat to the health and development of a child.

The challenge for the researchers is to define the scale of this problem. One of the sources of data on the subject is police and justice statistics. However, it should be noted that the figures from these sources are underestimated and do not reflect the actual scale, as a relatively small percentage of events are reported (Sajkowska 2018). Another source is retrospective studies. Due to problems of definition and methodology, they do not provide clear answers and one may come across different numbers. However, they indicate that the problem affects a large part of the population, even a dozen or so percent (Sajkowska 2011). Research conducted by the Empowering Children Foundation shows that the scale of sexual abuse in Poland also remains at this level. A 2012 survey of adolescents aged 11 to 17 showed that 12.4% of respondents had experienced some form of sexual abuse (Sajkowska 2017). Of this group, nearly half of the adolescents reported having experienced various forms of sexual abuse. 6.4% of respondents had been harmed by sexual violence with physical contact, and 8.9% without physical contact. Girls (15.7%) were harmed more often than boys (9.2%).

The study was repeated in 2018 (Włodarczyk, Makaruk, Michalski, Sajkowska 2018). Teenagers aged 13 to 17 answered questions about sexual abuse. Sexual abuse with physical contact was experienced by 7% of respondents. On the other hand, 20% of respondents indicated that they had experienced non-physical sexual abuse. In the publication cited, this category included verbal sexual violence, recruitment for sexual purposes, and exhibitionism. Thus, compared to the 2012 survey, there was a significant increase in the scale of sexual abuse without physical contact. These studies indicate that sexual violence is a serious social problem, whose extent is not reflected in the official statistics of state authorities. In addition, it should be noted that the above data comes from before the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed to the increase in harmful sexual harassment on the Internet. Research of the Empowering Children Foundation conducted in September 2020 (Makaruk, Włodarczyk, Szredzińska 2020) among young people aged 13 to 17 showed that in the first period of the pandemic, when schools were closed, one in ten respondents experienced sexual abuse. In just these few months, 9.2%

of respondents were harmed by sexual violence without physical contact, often via the Internet. More research is needed to show the impact of the pandemic on the scale of this phenomenon.

These two above-mentioned aspects of sexual violence against children, namely its negative consequences and the scale of its occurrence, indicate the need for a strong social response and counteraction to this problem. Appropriate, multi-faceted preventive measures can contribute to reducing the scale of sexual violence and saving many children from harm (Jarosz 2011). The school environment plays an important role in this respect, as it can become a place where students and their parents receive the support they need, and where prevention programs reach a wide audience. This article will discuss the document *Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Students in a Catholic School* (Bojanowski, Bremer, Gromada, Kusz, Moskal, Musiał, Pałacki, Seredyńska, Wolff, Wyzina 2022), which is one of the elements of building a sexual violence prevention system by the Catholic Church in Poland.

The background of the document

The problem of sexual abuse also occurs in the Catholic Church. In recent decades, many crimes committed by people working in the structures of the Church have been revealed in various countries, including Poland. This caused public outcry and a crisis in the community of believers. It also contributed to the increase of social awareness and intervention. The analysis of these cases of sexual abuse of minors reveals the similarities in the responses of the Holy See and local churches (Kusz 2020). In the first place, a legal intervention is undertaken with the aim of creating a system for detecting and punishing perpetrators and helping sexually abused people. Only later does attention turn to pre-emptive prevention, i.e. preventing harm and protecting children.

The Church in Poland attaches more and more importance to preventive measures, as evidenced by the new structures, institutions and initiatives (Przeczyszewski 2022). Some examples include the nationwide structures, which are based on the work of the delegate of the Polish Bishops' Conference (hereinafter: PBC) for the protection of children and youth and his office, the coordinator of the PBC

for the protection of children and youth, as well as the Saint Joseph Foundation of PBC and the Child Protection Center at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. At the local level—including dioceses and religious provinces—the functions of delegates for the protection of children and young people, chaplains of wounded people, persons responsible for prevention and clergy probation officers for accused and/or convicted persons have been created (Studnicki 2021). Documents that define the principles of prevention are important elements of the system of preventing sexual violence against minors in the Church. At the national level, this is a document of the Polish Bishops' Conference (2014) *Prevention of Sexual Abuse against Children, Youth and People With a Disability in the Pastoral and Educational Work of the Church in Poland*. It defines the general principles and goals of preventive actions. The detailed guidelines, on the other hand, are created by dioceses and religious congregations. These local documents define the rules for adults in working with minors and create a framework for a safe environment for children and young people in parishes, communities and institutions run by dioceses and religious congregations (Przeciszewski 2022). According to Ewa Kusz (2020), the Church in Poland still has a lot of work to do in building a system to counter sexual violence, as not only structures and documents are needed, but also a change of mentality and in-depth activities involving theoretical research and analysis of institutional risk factors in places where minors are present, as well as the preparation of materials and training for the various groups of adults who have contact with children and youth in the Church.

This last point is addressed in the publication *Prevention ...* (2014), which is intended specifically for the community of principals, teachers, educators and all employees of Catholic schools in Poland. This document was created on the assumption that building a prevention system requires materials tailored to the specific conditions and peculiarities of work in institutions where minors are present. Until now, most Catholic schools have used the above-mentioned documents that were developed by dioceses or religious congregations, which are often the governing bodies of the school. The principles contained therein are of course useful, but it should be noted that they do not take into account the unique characteristics of the education system, as they are addressed to many different church communities. It is

worth mentioning that grassroots efforts have been made in response to the need for more detailed regulations, which resulted in the development of a policy for the protection of students by a network of schools (e.g., in Salesian schools) or a particular institution (e.g., in the Jesuit School Complex in Gdynia). The publication in question is addressed to all Catholic schools affiliated in the Council of Catholic Schools (hereinafter: CCS), of which there are currently 493 (Council of Catholic Schools 2022a).

The initiative to create such a publication was born at the Child Protection Center (CPC). It is an interdepartmental unit of the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. Its task is to serve the Church in Poland, although it does not report directly to the Polish Bishops' Conference, but is an independent academic center. Its mission is to prepare training and preventive programs in the field of creating safe environments for children and adolescents (Kusz 2020; Biel 2022). The CPC entered into cooperation with the CCS, which coordinates cooperation between Catholic schools in Poland, organizes professional training of principals, teachers and educators who work in these institutions, and also provides legal assistance (Catholic Schools Council 2022b). We should also emphasize the role of the Saint Joseph Foundation of the Polish Bishops' Conference (hereinafter: SJF), which co-financed the creation of the document *Prevention ...* as part of the project "Building a Sexual Abuse Prevention System in Catholic Schools." One of the statutory tasks of the SJF is to support the building of a system of counteracting sexual abuse of minors by providing grants for preventive activities (Studnicki 2021). CPC and CCS jointly created a working team that consists of specialists from these two institutions. The graduates of the postgraduate studies "Prevention of Sexual Violence against Children and Youth" at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, who make up the majority of the team, were also invited to join the project. It is worth mentioning that these are people who work in schools on a daily basis as school principals and teachers, including religion teachers, and therefore have practical experience. The involvement of the graduates confirms the usefulness of this postgraduate course. The aim of the course is to reach people who work in various sectors of the Church and provide them with knowledge and skills in prevention of sexual violence (Biel 2022).

Objectives and recipients of the document

The purpose of the publication in question is to indicate how to build a sexual violence prevention system in Catholic schools. Its scope has been narrowed down to the institutions run by the Catholic Church in Poland as its provisions take into account the preventive system described above, i.e. the structures created by the Church. It should be remembered that schools are subordinate to dioceses, religious congregations or other entities within the church structures. The governing bodies of schools are church legal entities or other legal or natural persons who have obtained the decree recognizing the school as Catholic from the diocesan bishop (Council of Catholic Schools 2022b). Thus, these institutions must adhere to the regulations introduced by the Church. Nevertheless, most of the provisions of the document are universal and can also be used in other types of schools.

In the introduction, the authors note that the publication is intended as an instruction for school principals. It is they who are primarily responsible for the safety of the students. Therefore, *Prevention ...* is to show them what actions should be taken to build an effective system of preventing sexual violence in the facility. School educators and psychologists are another target audience. Due to their role and tasks in the school community, as well as their competences, they can become a support for the school principle in creating prevention structures. Moreover, they can be involved in many preventive and intervention activities. The document is also addressed to teachers and all school employees, who should also have knowledge in the field of prevention of sexual abuse of minors. Some of the provisions in particular can be useful to all staff, so the role of the principle is to choose what knowledge and how to convey to the employees.

The introduction defines three goals of the document. First, it is to identify measures that will contribute to creating a safe environment at school, with a particular focus on protection against sexual violence. Second, it is to provide members of the school community with basic psychological and legal knowledge on the subject of sexual abuse of minors and the prevention of this problem. Third, the goal is to provide laws that can be incorporated into in-school policies and procedures, or become an inspiration and basis for schools to create

similar policies. This is because the document is not binding on the school premises, if it is not accepted, adapted and incorporated into school documents in accordance with applicable legal regulations. Summarizing these three goals, it can be stated that *Prevention ...* is indicative (it indicates actions that should be taken), informative (it provides relevant knowledge) and normative (it proposes provisions for internal school documents). On this basis, it can be seen how this publication differs from other existing documents on the protection of minors in the Church in Poland. It does not only provide the standards and regulations that must be followed, but also takes a broader approach to the subject of prevention, by trying to support those responsible for the safety of students in building a safe environment. Therefore, it takes the form of a guide rather than a regulation.

Theoretical foundations of the document

Preventive activities and all the compiled materials should be based on scholarly theories that describe the problem of child abuse and its determinants (Jarosz 2011). By referring to the knowledge at hand, it is possible to prepare effective programs for the protection of minors. *Prevention ...* is based on the comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention strategy developed by Stephen Smallbone, William L. Marshall and Richard Wortley (2008). Due to its comprehensive and practical approach, scholarly basis and specific goals, this model can become the basis for action also in Poland (Sajkowska, Skierkowska 2020).

This concept draws on the public health model and research on sexual abuse of minors. It proposes taking action on three levels. Primary prevention, otherwise known as universal prevention, targets a wide audience and is undertaken before a problem occurs. Its goal is to prevent abuse of minors, which is made possible by eliminating risk factors and strengthening protective factors. Secondary prevention, known as selective prevention, identifies people, groups and places of increased risk and focuses prevention efforts on them. These may be more effective than primary prevention measures, but they require proper diagnosis. Therefore, we need not only general and theoretical in-depth research, but also local research in the setting where the preventive measures are taken. Tertiary prevention, known

as indicated or interventional prevention, is applied in the case of sexual abuse of a minor. The objectives at this level are primarily to detect the act, help the sexually abused person and prevent the perpetrator from causing further harm. According to the authors of the model described above, effective measures to prevent sexual abuse should be based on the use of measures from all three levels, with particular emphasis on universal prevention. Meanwhile, the focus is now on interventional prevention (Smallbone et al. 2008).

Prevention ... focuses primarily on the first and third levels. The first chapter describes how universal prevention can be applied in the school environment in Poland, especially in Catholic institutions. The second chapter deals primarily with the subject of interventional prevention, describing the procedures of action in the event of suspicion of sexual violence. However, it also includes theoretical content on the subject of sexual abuse, the knowledge of which among school staff is important from the perspective of all three levels of prevention.

The document devotes the least space to selective prevention. Risk groups, i.e. potential perpetrators or students who are at higher risk of harm, are not defined. This was a conscious decision of the authors due to the nature of the publication, which is addressed to several hundred schools. These are Catholic institutions, which function in various conditions. Moreover, as mentioned above, selective prevention requires in-depth research and greater caution, as it is associated with the risk of stigmatizing certain groups or communities (Smallbone et al. 2008), which the authors of the document wanted to avoid. Nevertheless, this aspect is also gently hinted at when it comes to the need to provide help to students with social, health or family problems. It can be said that effectively used psychological and pedagogical (and in Catholic schools also pastoral) help in various difficult situations faced by students and their families, is also an element of secondary prevention of sexual abuse. This is because, statistically speaking, children suffering problems and traumatic experiences, such as physical abuse, domestic neglect or the loss of a loved one through sudden death, are more likely to suffer sexual abuse (Beisert, Izdebska 2012).

The comprehensive model also distinguishes four areas of preventive actions that should be taken at each of the above-mentioned

levels (Smallbone et al. 2008; Sajkowska, Skierkowska 2020). These are the perpetrators or potential perpetrators; victims or those at risk of harm; situations where harm has already occurred or poses a higher risk of occurrence; as well as communities and local communities. *Prevention ...* describes ways to create a safe environment in schools, which is predominantly part the third area, namely situations where abuse may occur. Smallbone et al. (2008) define the type of situational prevention activities that are most applicable in various types of institutions where minors are present. It focuses on creating a safe environment with transparent operating procedures, adherence to established rules of adult behavior towards children, and detection and elimination of risk factors for sexual violence. Nevertheless, the document under discussion also shows how the school can become a place for developing other areas of prevention, e.g. by raising awareness among minors, parents and school employees.

Universal prevention, or how to make the school safer?

Prevention ... consists of two parts. The first one, entitled “How to make the school safer?” mainly describes the elements of universal prevention, and also takes up some topics that can be classified as selective prevention, which was already mentioned above. According to the authors of the comprehensive model (Smallbone et al. 2008), the theoretical distinction between primary and secondary prevention is of little importance. What is more important, instead, is a comprehensive approach that will encompass various activities to increase the safety of minors. Hence, the first part of the document—which consists of two chapters: “Shared concern for the protection of students” and “A safe environment”—identifies a variety of actions that school management should take to increase student protection in order to prevent sexual violence.

The chapter “Shared concern for the protection of students” outlines the roles and responsibilities of each community member in building a safe school. An important premise here is the notion that every person involved in the life of an educational institution can contribute to the prevention of sexual violence. The first element is the verification of the employees. This is the task of the school principle, who, in this case, is legally obliged to take strictly defined

steps. He or she must check whether the person being hired is on the Registry of Sexual Offenders (The Act 2016). As for teaching staff, it is also necessary to check whether a person is listed in the Central Register of Disciplinary Rulings and for the candidates to provide a certificate of good conduct (The Act 1982). These steps result from legal regulations and are obligatory. When hiring employees, the principle may also take other measures that will contribute to building a safe environment. First of all, the newly hired employee should be familiarized with the code of behavior of adults and the rules of prevention of violence, including sexual violence, in force at school.

The next two points in Chapter One focus on school staff. The document stresses the importance of regular training and professional development, which should include aspects that increase the safety of students. Specific training topics are suggested in the field of sexual violence prevention (e.g., sexual abuse and its symptoms, conversations with the sexually abused persons and their parents) and others that contribute to building a safe school environment (e.g., interpersonal communication, conflict resolution). It is also important to provide adequate support to teachers in their work. On a daily basis, they face various challenges related to, for example, students' problems. They should be able to get advice on how to deal with difficult situations and how best to help students. Supervision is a special tool that should be introduced in various institutions where adults work with minors. It may become an important element of child abuse prevention (Kalita, Chrzan-Dętkoś 2019). It should be acknowledged that schools have limited financial capacity to provide teachers with a professional supervisor from outside the institution, but the document suggests other forms of support that may be useful. This can be individual help provided by a school employee (e.g., a school counselor or psychologist) or team help in the form of peer supervision, provided as part of regular meetings of teachers, during which they share their experiences and discuss various difficult situations requiring the intervention of adults (Seredyńska 2013).

The publication postulates that each school should appoint a person of trust, i.e. a school delegate for the protection of children and youth. The next section of chapter one is devoted to this. This is a response to the recommendations of the Polish Bishops' Conference (2014), which requires that in every Catholic institution

serving children and adolescents there should be a designated person responsible for the prevention of sexual abuse. The person's mandate may be extended to include the prevention of all forms of violence on the school premises. The document describes what a person of trust should do. He or she has a role to play both at the level of universal prevention by helping to organize training in the protection of students or supporting the school principal in the implementation of appropriate procedures and regulations, and at the level of interventional prevention by accepting reports and cooperating with the principal and other persons involved in intervening in cases of suspected sexual abuse of a student.

The last two points in the chapter "Working together to protect students" concern involving students and parents (or legal guardians) in creating a safe school. It is important to involve these groups in creating or at least evaluating the school's prevention system. It is particularly important to regularly communicate the applicable rules and procedures. Communication about safety and openness to taking up difficult topics builds a sense of mutual trust in the school environment. Cooperation with parents is a key element in achieving both didactic and educational goals. Even more so, when it comes to the sensitive issues of sexual violence prevention, parents should feel heard and be informed about the actions taken. When it comes to involving students in creating a safe environment, their age should of course be taken into account. The older the students are, the more actively they can participate in the decision-making process through the work of the school council, discussions during weekly class meetings and school-wide surveys. The school should also provide students and parents with appropriate training. The document indicates useful topics both directly related to the prevention of sexual violence and other topics of how to increase the safety of minors (e.g. rules of safe use of the Internet). It should be remembered that any preventive measures addressed to students must make it clear that ultimately it is adults who are responsible for protecting minors from violence (Smallbone et al. 2008; Izdebska, Ruchel 2011). It is therefore important not to put the responsibility for children's safety on them. We should select content that will help the child recognize that someone is crossing their limits, react appropriately in such a situation and seek support from adults whom they trust. Training

addressed to students should be coordinated with training addressed to parents, because the consistency of the content provided to children at school and at home strongly increases the effectiveness of preventive measures (Izdebska, Ruchel 2011).

The “Safe environment” section outlines the various elements of school life and administration that need to be addressed in order to eliminate risk factors and strengthen protective factors in the institution. The issues covered by this chapter can be classified as a situational universal prevention. First of all, it is important to look at the rooms in which the students spend time on a daily basis. The document provides several solutions to strengthen their protection. These include monitoring, limiting access to isolated spaces where it is difficult for adults to control students, adequate security of entrances, designating and adapting places for individual meetings with students, as well as installing glass doors in classrooms and other rooms. Secondly, it is also necessary to ensure the safety of students on the Internet. This involves both adequately preparing the school’s IT infrastructure, and sensitizing students and parents to the proper use of the network and avoiding the threats lurking online. Thirdly, the topic of school trips is mentioned, especially when it comes to overnight stays. These are situations in which inappropriate or even harmful behavior is more likely to occur. This issue is regulated by law and schools should have tour regulations. The document highlights some basic principles that should be followed in order to enhance the safety of students. These include, e.g., proper communication with parents, clear definition and communication of the principles of safe interactions between adults and students, and appropriate arrangement of beds, with particular emphasis on the separation of caretakers’ beds.

The last two points of this chapter focus on guidelines for adults’ behavior towards students. It is one of the basic measures currently used in creating policies for the protection of children and adolescents, as it allows a quick response to inappropriate behavior of an adult before sexual abuse occurs (Applewhite 2016). The Polish Bishops’ Conference (2014) recommends that a code of conduct be created in every Catholic institution in Poland that works with children and youth. *Prevention ...* first proposes a code of safe behavior, that is, the rules of proper interactions between adults and minors at school. In particular, it cites the need for equal treatment of all students,

respect for their bodily integrity and right to privacy, and provides guidelines on the proper way to communicate with students. The next section outlines risky and immoral behaviors that are unacceptable and should be completely eliminated in the school environment. All school staff should be aware of these provisions in order not only to comply with them, but also to react when they perceive such behavior in other adults. Introducing such rules and incorporating them into internal school documents makes it easier for the principal to react quickly and discipline employees who behave in an inappropriate manner. Among such inappropriate ways of interacting with students, the document mentions examples of physical contact violating the students' boundaries (e.g., touching intimate parts, tickling, massaging, kissing) and improper communication with the students (e.g., sexual jokes and comments, bonding). Emotional transgression, on the other hand, is the form of contact which goes beyond the teacher-student relationship, such as favoring certain people, and communicating with the use of modern technologies in a manner inconsistent with school rules. The rules of being alone with a minor have also been defined. Finally, immoral behaviors, which are also prohibited by law (e.g., working under the influence of alcohol, drugs or other stimulants) are unacceptable at school. It should be noted that the provisions of the code of safe behavior and of risky and immoral behavior are suggestions. Each institution should undertake the work of developing its own rules adapted to its context and include them in internal school documents. The publication *Prevention ...* may become the basis for their development.

Interventional prevention, or what to do in the event of harm?

The second part of the publication under discussion, entitled "What to do when harm has occurred?" addresses the topic of interventional prevention in the school environment. The first chapter of this section provides readers with theoretical knowledge on sexual abuse of minors. First, a definition is given, as well as possible types and forms of sexual abuse. This is important because there are different explanations of what constitutes such abuse. Beisert and Izdebska (2012) divide the definitions into three groups: clinical, legal and social. The latter category describes the common understanding of

sexual abuse which is shaped more by media coverage than by science. Addressed to school principals and employees, *Prevention ...* is designed to provide reliable knowledge that is required when taking any preventive measures. Among the various clinical definitions, the one proposed by the World Health Organization was selected. According to it, “sexual abuse of a child is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to:

- The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity.
- The exploitative use of child in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices.
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.” (World Health Organization 1999: 15–16).

Note that this definition is comprehensive and gives examples of behaviors that are considered sexual abuse, but this is not an exhaustive list. It also takes into account the situation when a child experiences sexual abuse from another child. This is important in the context of the school, as peer abuse may also occur in this environment. The document also deals with this topic in further provisions on intervention. Then, two types of sexual abuse are cited—without physical contact and with physical contact—along with examples (Zmarzlik 2011) in order for school staff to be alert to various behaviors that are considered sexual violence against minors.

The second point of this chapter deals with the applicable provisions of Polish law and describes how minors are protected against various forms of sexual violence. These provisions are included in Chapter XXV of the Criminal Code, which pertains to sexual offenses. The age of consent, which is the age below which engaging in any sexual activity with a child is prohibited is an important distinction in the law. In Polish law, it has been defined as reaching the age of 15 (Skórzewska–Amberg 2021). Therefore, the document

Prevention ... discusses separately the regulations concerning the sexual abuse of people under 15 years of age and people over 15 years of age. The latter covers, e.g. the case of abuse of the relationship of dependency to undertake sexual activities. This is important due to the fact that the relationship between the teacher and the student involves such a dependency. Peer sexual abuse is also described separately.

The last point of the chapter on various aspects of sexual violence describes symptoms suggesting that a minor may be experiencing abuse. Detecting this crime is extremely difficult, therefore, parents and teachers who have direct and frequent contact with children in particular should be familiar with the possible symptoms of sexual abuse so as not to ignore them (Zmarzlik 2011). It should be noted, however, that most symptoms can be caused by a variety of factors and one should not draw too hasty conclusions. Hence, knowledge of the student's situation is crucial here. The document lists many possible symptoms that have been divided into the following categories: school problems, social and behavioral problems, emotional problems, overconcentration on eroticism, self-destructive behavior, psychosomatic complaints and neurotic symptoms. The more different symptoms from the list occur, the more consideration should be given to whether sexual violence is the cause. On the other hand, the symptoms most indicative of sexual abuse of a child under 15 are venereal disease, pregnancy or the presence of sperm in the vagina or anus (Zmarzlik 2011; Czub 2015).

The second chapter of this part of the document deals directly with the intervention that should be taken in the event of a report or suspicion of sexual abuse of a student—regardless of where the child has suffered the harm. School is a place where sexual violence can come to light, not only that which occurred on its premises, but also at home, in the neighborhood, in after-school activities, on a vacation trip or elsewhere. It is at school that the symptoms of sexual abuse can be diagnosed, or the abused child can confide in a teacher, educator or another trusted person. Therefore, all school staff must know how to respond in such situations.

First, there are basic principles of intervention that every school employee must remember. It is absolutely necessary to react immediately, apply the existing legal regulations and school procedures, and

listen carefully to the reporting person without making judgments. Then, the rules to be followed during the interview with the reporting person are described. The subject of talking to a child who reveals the harm was discussed separately, because special care should be taken in this case to ensure the child's sense of safety and the proper atmosphere of conversation (Czub 2015). It is necessary to reassure the child that they did the right thing by talking about the harm, and inform them how the interviewer will try to help them. There can be no promise that the matter will be kept secret (Zmarzlik 2011).

The course of the intervention is presented in more detail in the next section. It describes the steps to be taken at school when it is suspected that a student is experiencing sexual violence. Legal provisions were also taken into account, especially art. 240 of the Criminal Code, which indicates in which cases the law imposes a criminal obligation to immediately notify the relevant state authorities. This includes, for example, sexual intercourse or any other sexual activity with a minor under the age of 15. However, the teacher should remember to notify the relevant services also if the suspicion concerns another sexual offense not listed in Art. 240. This results from Art. 304 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, which imposes a social obligation to notify the prosecutor's office or the police about an offense prosecuted *ex officio*.

At the end of this chapter, the tasks of those involved in the intervention are described in detail, depending on their function in the school. It should be stressed that all school employees are responsible for the safety of students and if they perceive symptoms that a child is being harmed or receive notification of this, they must take appropriate actions as indicated in Polish law and school procedures. When undertaking intervention, teamwork is helpful, but due to the need for discretion, the number of people involved should be limited (Kita 2011). The document cites the tasks that the school principal, person of trust, educator, psychologist and tutor should carry out when a crime is suspected. Guidelines are also provided for the school nurse, teachers, and non-teaching staff who may be involved in an intervention if they have received reports of abuse or noticed symptoms.

The third chapter of the second part, which concludes the document, describes the basic principles of providing support to people directly or indirectly affected by sexual abuse. The most important person to help is the person that suffered sexual abuse. Any intervention

must always put the affected child at the center. The school should become involved in the treatment process, but it should be remembered that its role is limited. If psychological therapy is needed, it takes place outside of school with external specialists. School staff should keep in touch with them and follow their instructions. The family and, above all, the parents of the student who suffered harm should also be supported. For them, the school is often the first place where they can get advice and information. It should also not be forgotten that the witnesses of the harm are also affected by the crime of sexual abuse. These people also need to be looked after. If the news of sexual violence is known in the school, appropriate action should be taken with the remaining students and parents. Each situation is different and requires from those involved in the intervention to deeply discern and reflect on the measures taken to provide support to the person that suffered sexual abuse, their family and witnesses of the harm.

Conclusion

A comprehensive approach is necessary to ensure that minors are effectively protected from sexual violence. The comprehensive child sexual abuse prevention strategy provides a scholarly basis and indicates many aspects that should be taken into account when planning preventive actions. All three levels of prevention should be considered: universal, selective and interventional; as well as four areas: harmed or at risk of harm, perpetrators or potential perpetrators, situations where abuse may occur, as well as local communities. This concept can be adapted to many different contexts. The above article shows how the document *Prevention of Sexual Violence against Students in Catholic School* applies the comprehensive model to the school setting, and also highlights the role of educational institutions in building a comprehensive system of preventing sexual abuse. On the one hand, it is necessary to ensure the safety of children and young people where they spend a lot of time, and the school is a place that becomes the second most important environment for children and adolescents on a daily basis after home. On the other hand, it is a space where harm occurring outside of it can be revealed. This is where students interact with adults whom they can trust and confide in about the harm they have suffered. Hence, teachers and other school staff should be adequately

prepared not only to create a safe environment in the school, but also to be able to intervene appropriately in the event that a student experiences any violence, including sexual violence.

The document *Prevention of Sexual Violence against Students in a Catholic School* is an element of a broader system of protecting minors in the Church in Poland. It responds to the need for materials aimed at specific sectors of the Church's work, where adults have contact with children and youth. Narrowing down the addressees allows for more specific content. The publication in question may become the basis for work in Catholic schools, which should, by adapting the provisions of the document, create their own policy of protecting students. Training is also needed for principals, persons of trust established in institutions, teachers and all school employees. Although the document is addressed primarily to Catholic schools, it can also be useful in the work of other types of schools. Its authors hope that it will inspire the creation of similar materials for public schools, for example. In Poland, there is still low awareness of the protection of minors, and sexual abuse is a social problem that requires the involvement of various communities in order to increase the safety of children and adolescents. The publication is available for download on the websites of the Child Protection Center, the Council of Catholic Schools and the Saint Joseph Foundation.

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