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Cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists in the prevention of domestic violence

Współpraca nauczyciela religii z psychologiem policyjnym w zakresie profilaktyki przemocy w rodzinie

Abstract

This article aims to show the importance of cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists in preventing domestic violence. The method of analysis of the literature and state documents (e.g. the law of education) is used. The conclusions were presented in a synthetic way. It has been noted that the cooperation of religion teachers with police psychologists serves to eliminate risk factors that can lead to domestic violence. The parties must therefore remain open towards one another, be ready to engage in dialogue and share knowledge and experience in the area of the prevention of domestic violence.

Keywords: religion teacher, family, parents, cooperation, religious education, police psychologist, prevention, pedagogy.

Abstrakt

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu ukazanie znaczenia współpracy pomiędzy nauczycielami religii i psychologami policyjnymi w zapobieganiu przemocy domowej. Zastosowano metodę analizy literatury i dokumentów państwowych (np. prawa oświaty). Wnioski zostały przedstawione w sposób syntetyczny. Zauważono, że współpraca nauczycieli religii z psychologami policyjnymi służy eliminacji czynników ryzyka, które mogą prowadzić do przemocy domowej.

Strony muszą zatem pozostać otwarte na siebie nawzajem, być gotowe do dialogu oraz dzielić się wiedzą i doświadczeniem w zakresie zapobiegania przemoc domowej.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel religii, rodzina, rodzice, współpraca, edukacja religijna, psycholog policyjny, prewencja, pedagogika.

Introduction

The social, economic, cultural and civilisation changes in contemporary Poland present new challenges, increase risks and aggravate complex social problems. One example of the latter is domestic violence. According to various statistical data (*Statystyka. Przemoc w rodzinie*, 2019) and research (Nycz, 2018, pp. 441–465; Wirkus, Kozłowski 2017) domestic violence is an increasing phenomenon which remains at the centre of attention among legislators and scholars, but also among those engaged in educational and preventive activities (Adamowska-Kałwa, 2018; Makarczuk-Kłos, 2018). Theorists and practitioners alike often raise the question of effective ways of preventing domestic violence (Jarosz, 2014; Makarczuk-Kłos, 2018). Seeking an answer, they stress the need for cooperation between various entities that are engaged in the implementation of preventive programmes and helping victims of domestic violence (Borys, Frankowiak and Willan-Horla, 2017; Grzelak, 2015; Jarosz, 2014; Michalska and Jaszczak-Kuźmińska, 2014). The cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists in the prevention of domestic violence is consistent with the theoretical debate and practical actions in this regard. It constitutes an important area of research which is clearly practical in nature. This issue has not been discussed in any papers by Polish catechists published so far. It is therefore a current issue that is still to be analysed and, from the perspective of catechism studies, it is a new problem. Furthermore, in an age of widespread debate on the role of Polish schools, it takes on a new significance. The educational and preventive activities undertaken by teaching staff call for cooperation with external institutions, such as the police. It should be noted that the cooperation between schools and the police has recently become the focus of attention of both institutions (Celuch, Winczewska and Zaleśny, 2017; Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2011; Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017). That has led to implementation of concrete educational and preventive measures, e.g. theme meetings, lectures, talks, workshops aimed at students, teachers and parents (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 114–127). The main topic at such events is usually safety, alcohol or substance dependence or demoralisation of minors (Kusztal, 2016, pp. 97–110; Sobieszuk, 2015, pp. 149–164).

The mission of the teacher of religion in the Polish school is linked with teaching the contents of faith and upbringing. The teacher of religion is obliged to actively participate in the implementation of the educational and preventive program of the Polish school. Therefore, it is to carry out educational and preventive tasks like other teachers in the Polish school. The teacher of religion has been appointed by Christ to preach the Gospels in communion with the whole missionary activities of the Church. In response to this gift, the teacher of religion preaches the Gospels. In their work, they refer to Christian values and the teaching of the Church, including marriage and the family. They bear a testimony of faith.

This paper views cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists as interaction in the interest of the safety and wellbeing of children and teenagers (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 114–115). Through their cooperation, they fulfil educational, pedagogical and preventive tasks in the pursuit of a common goal, which is to prevent domestic violence and increase the effectiveness of assistance given to families which struggle with this problem (Zellma and Wiszowaty, pp. 114–118). The religion teacher is obliged to accompany wounded students in the family. He/she is supposed to restore trust and hope (Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, no. 234). The religion teacher is obliged to provide information where and how victims of domestic violence can benefit from the help of the Church community. The Church helps families in various forms of voluntary activity. Often times, a religion teacher is the only person through whom students can discover the commitment of the Church community to helping victims of violence (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski 2001, no. 82–83, 90–91; Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji 2020, no. 313–318). The joint action of religion teachers and police psychologists in the interest of safety and wellbeing of children and teenagers is based on mutual trust, dialogue and care for improving the social awareness of the causes and implications of domestic violence. The engagement of these entities in the distribution of reliable information about institutions and organisations that offer support to victims and increasing the safety of children and teenagers is equally important. This includes supporting students in learning how to cope in difficult family situations. The aim of these actions is to ensure that young people have adequate conditions to live and develop. The joint action of religion teachers and police psychologists involves joint educational and preventive initiatives undertaken by those entities. Furthermore, they should remain open towards one another, be ready to engage in dialogue and share knowledge and experience in the area of prevention of domestic violence.

The term “police psychologist” refers to a police officer who holds at least a Master’s degree in Psychology and is a member of a team, section or division

of psychologists at a provincial police headquarters, Warsaw police headquarters or the Central Police Headquarters¹. As part of their job, police psychologists provide psychological support which includes counselling, prevention and crisis intervention (Engelhardt, 2019, pp. 1–2; *Policja Śląska. Wydział Psychologów*, 2019; Sandecka-Pultowicz, 2019, pp. 1–2). Increasingly often they are engaged in informative, educational and preventive programmes addressed to children and teenagers. In such capacity, police psychologists cooperate with the staff of preschools, schools and psychological and pedagogical counselling centres.

At this point, the term “prevention” needs to be further clarified as reference literature offers a number of different meanings and angles that draw on different theoretical concepts (Borucka, 2019; Cichosz and Tyburska, 2014; Cudak, 2015; Gaś, 2006; Grzelak, 2015; Kania, 2016; Porzak, 2019). For the purposes of this paper, prevention will refer to multifaceted educational and pedagogical activities aimed primarily at: 1) helping children and teenagers recognise and overcome difficulties which jeopardise their healthy development; 2) eliminating risk factors that compromise harmonious development of human beings and may lead to domestic violence; 3) initiating and reinforcing the protection of harmonious development of every student (Borucka, 2019; Cichosz and Tyburska, 2014; Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017). In the context of domestic violence, prevention viewed as above is anticipatory in nature. It does not apply to situations in which intervention and special procedures are required because a child is abused in a domestic setting.

The purpose of this paper is to try and answer the following questions: what are the objectives, i.e. aims and substance, of the cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists in terms of preventing domestic violence? In what ways can they cooperate? What should be done to make it more dynamic? These questions help to set a direction for the analyses carried out in this paper. In the search for answers to these questions, the method of secondary analysis of the available pedagogical, psychological and catechetical literature will be used. We will analyze Polish literature. We are interested in cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists in Poland. We will not describe the detailed strategies of a religion teacher’s action in practice. It goes beyond scientific analysis. Due to formal limitations, many aspects of the cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists for the prevention of domestic violence will be mentioned briefly only. In the future, it would be prudent to initiate an open discussion and consider good practices related to the

¹ The scope of duties of police psychologists is outlined in Order no. 53 of the Chief Police Officer of 6 October 2014 on the methods and forms of performance of certain professional duties by psychologists in the service of or employed within organisational units of the Police, Official Journal of the Central Police Headquarters of 2014, item 118.

cooperation between religion teachers and the police and to carry out empirical research on the subject.

Objectives of cooperation

As a member of school staff who are jointly responsible for the fulfilment of tasks assigned to their job and the performance of basic functions of school: to teach, educate, prevent and provide care, a religion teacher is obligated to liaise with external entities whose work is concerned with various aspects of education and prevention (Act on Education System of 1991, as amended; Education Law of 2016, as amended). Having regard for the wellbeing of students, their holistic development and formation of social attitudes, religion teachers must react whenever they suspect that a student is being abused at home, but they must also act in the interest of preventing this phenomenon. In order to fulfil this task they must cooperate with others, e.g. the police. Preventing domestic violence is a duty common to school staff (including religion teachers) and police officers (Act of 29 July 2005 on the prevention of domestic abuse, uniform text 2019). It provides an important platform for cooperation between schools and the police. Every school is required to outline specific goals, substance and forms of prevention appropriate to the needs of its students. The responsibility for their performance rests with the teaching staff (Act on Education System of 1991, as amended; Education Law of 2016, as amended).

What matters in the cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists are the cognitive and educational aims. They set a direction for such cooperation and place a specific educational, pedagogical and preventive value on it. Another noteworthy consideration in addition to the instruction on the phenomenon, mechanisms and standard forms of domestic violence (physical, psychological, sexual and economic abuse) is the demonstration of the reactions of victims and means of seeking help (Łukawska 2015, pp. 189–203; Szymański, 2015, pp. 215–230). The latter cognitive objective is directly associated with the educational aims. It concerns the support which must be offered to children and teenagers to help them cope with factors and situations that have an adverse effect on their health and life, especially domestic abuse, which is traumatic and compromises their healthy development and normal life. It helps to develop the ability to recognise factors that have an adverse impact on healthy development and to react appropriately in the face of being a victim or witness of domestic abuse. Having acquired an understanding of these aspects, students will better understand that remaining silent or concealing domestic abuse will have short-

term and long-term physical, emotional and cognitive implications, even if they are only witnesses to the abuse (Cichosz and Tyburska, 2014). Even with the systematic cooperation between a religion teacher and a qualified police psychologist (e.g. the teacher may invite a police officer to take part in a class or organise debates and talks with a police psychologist) convincing children and teenagers to react in the face of domestic violence is not easy. It is not uncommon that members of families in which abuse occurs effectively prevent any sort of interference from the outside. Addressing the subject of domestic abuse in religion classes requires a deep understanding of the complexity of family life and special care and prudence even when the talk or discussion is attended by a police psychologist. If we want to teach children and teenagers to recognise the symptoms of domestic violence, we must do so with prudence in keeping with their intellectual, emotional and social development level. One important aspect here is to educate them gradually, individualise the content and create a safe space among peers, at home and at school in order to promote the physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of every student (Fenik-Gaberle and Kałucka, 2016). These actions are directly associated with teaching and educational duties imposed on religion teachers, not only by the education system, but also by the Church (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, 2001, no. 82–83).

One cannot reduce the scale of domestic violence or improve the effectiveness of protection of abuse victims through occasional meetings, talks, lectures and discussions. What is needed are systematic long-term actions, where the appropriate choice of contents and methods of presentation play an important role. The above aims can be accomplished through the choice of appropriate topics and application of a systematic and individualised approach and gradation of content difficulty level (Zellma and Wiszowaty 2017, pp. 237–286). The above-mentioned topics include aspects of recognising domestic violence and reacting to its various forms (Cichosz and Tyburska, 2014). As already mentioned, these issues are not exhaustive. A greater educational and preventive value is presented by topics that reinforce a students' sense of internal and external safety. It is extremely important to show them a healthy and safe family setting that promotes overall development of each family member. This can be done by a religion teacher during religious education classes or classes attended by a police psychologist. Both the humanities and the social sciences are of key importance. For this reason, the teacher of religion should be inspired by the experiences of a police psychologist. The activity of a teacher of religion in the field of counteracting domestic violence is characterized by a holistic vision of Christian life (Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, no. 146–147).

The aim of cooperation between a religion teacher and police psychologist for the prevention of domestic violence is to discuss the phenomenon, conditions, forms and implications of domestic violence, but even more so to support students in discovering their own worth, dignity and subjectivity and give them an opportunity to gain positive experience. The key is to help children and teenagers learn how to think and act reasonably and react with courage to domestic violence, whether they are the victims or witnesses (Szymańska, 2019). The overriding goal of the cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists for the prevention of domestic violence is to foster healthy development of pupils and create a safe space for education. The purpose is to help pupils better understand their rights and needs and teach them how to properly take care of them. A police psychologist can support a religion teacher in working with students and their parents. The support provided by a religion teacher in cooperation with a police psychologist is informative, educational and pedagogical in nature. The key is to help every student – and to the extent possible and where necessary – student’s parents, to grow stronger and develop skills which are essential to proper functioning within the family, peer group and the school environment. This involves supporting pupils and their parents in resolving difficult situations and coping with problems that lead to the suffering of another human being. This support should take the form of keeping company, being present, holding a dialogue with respect for the dignity of every student and their parents and in the atmosphere of trust (Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, no. 315). This is a manifestation of the Catholic love of one’s neighbour.

Guidelines for cooperation

The cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists for the prevention of domestic violence calls for diverse and frequent informative, educational and pedagogical initiatives.

In practical terms, the course of such cooperation depends on the abilities, creativity, openness and dialogue skills of the religion teacher and the setting (e.g. school or town where the teacher is employed). The cooperation should be initiated by teaching staff or, in the case of religion teachers, the religion teachers themselves. Nevertheless, any decisions regarding the cooperation with a police psychologist taken by a religion teacher need to be consulted with the head of the school beforehand. Furthermore, they must comply with the education law and the applicable school policy governing cooperation with external entities (Act on Education System of 1991, as amended; Education Law

of 2016, as amended; Teacher's Charter of 1982, as amended). The objectives outlined in the school educational and preventive programme are also important (Pakulniewicz, 2019). From the school year 2019/2020, all actions planned under the programme must be preceded by an annual assessment of the developmental needs of students within the school environment, including protective measures and risk factors (Education Law of 2016, as amended). The range of duties, rights and responsibilities of religion teachers requires that the cooperation with a police psychologist be adjusted to the work organisation plan formulated for a particular school year. However, a religion teacher and a police psychologist should always respect the autonomy of their work. The teacher of religion is obliged to reliably discern various psychological, sociological and pedagogical theories (Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, no. 146–147). Proposals of a police psychologist should be accepted taking into account Christian anthropology (Papieska Rada ds. Krzewienia Nowej Ewangelizacji, no. 147).

After preliminary review and identification of the educational and preventive needs, it is advisable that a series of meetings with a police psychologist for children and teenagers is planned (e.g. during religion classes, retreat days or Education Week). This form of cooperation should not be limited to conventional talks and lectures where students are told what they should do and think in a particular situation. Trying to directly influence children and teenagers through verbal persuasion or moralisation is rarely effective, whether it is attempted by a religion teacher or a police psychologist. The outcome may be just the opposite. It is important to have a dialogue that respects each person.

The cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists for the prevention of domestic violence should be aimed at creating adequate conditions for students to: 1) share their experience (e.g. through various forms of plastic art or drama); 2) talk openly about motives and values that guide people's behaviour; 3) discover the meaning of appropriate and inappropriate reactions to various life situations (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 330–398). Other important forms of education, especially among teenagers, include event analyses and case studies, including sociodrama and psychodrama (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 330–398). It is worth referring to the experiences of individual people (e.g. presented in the media). These experiences should be approached with openness and respect.

In practice, the forms of cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists for the prevention of domestic violence and the applied methods of student activation are subject to the agreement between the parties. Schools

are required to work with the police only in the case of discovery of a crime, suspicion of a wrongful act or evident demoralisation of a minor (Act on juvenile delinquency proceedings of 1982, as amended; Act on Education System of 1991, as amended; Education Law of 2016, as amended). Any other actions of schools or the police, including such undertaken by a religion teacher in cooperation with a police psychologist, are voluntary. The substance and form of such cooperation will differ depending on the stage of education, student needs, the setting, objectives outlined in the educational and preventive programme adopted by the school, the head of the school and teaching staff. In view of the mentality of children and teenagers, it is advisable to incorporate the latest teaching aids (e.g. multimedia presentations, educational films, games and quizzes) into interactive forms and activating methods to add extra value. Even the most activating methods that improve the quality of cooperation with a police psychologist will not replace an authentic and empathetic religion teacher (Chalupniak, 2015, pp. 61–63).

Careful planning to the extent allowed in the school setting is a prerequisite for the success of cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists. In the planning process, a religion teacher must respect the school policy and comply with the instructions of the head teacher and tips of more experienced educators. Crucially, the cooperation with a police psychologist should be linked to the statutory responsibilities of school and the objectives of religious education. The religion teacher stands, among others, in view of the necessity to combine counteracting domestic violence with the formation of conscience, education to community life, introduction to the mission. The suggestions included in the core curriculum of catechesis and in the religion curriculum may be an inspiration (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski, 2018; Komisja Wychowania Katolickiego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski 2019).

This will not only facilitate effective prevention of domestic violence, but also foster the creation of adequate conditions for holistic development of children and teenagers.

Proposals for making the cooperation more dynamic

All of the above issues primarily concern the actions associated with various forms of cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists. They are very general in nature and they are not exhaustive in terms of the possible methods of prevention of domestic violence. They outline the general scope and course of cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists.

In practice, more concrete solutions and new proposals need to be developed. They should draw on the preliminary assessment of educational and preventive needs and potential. It is, however, always the religion teacher who must try and make the cooperation more dynamic. To this end, the scope of actions should be gradually extended both in terms of substance and form, and the group of entities interested or engaged in that cooperation should be expanded. Domestic violence is obviously not the only problem that needs to be addressed. Other equally important issues include peer violence, cyber violence, online safety, alcohol and drug dependence and road traffic safety. Parents need support too, hence religion teachers should engage in increasing knowledge and awareness among parents. This will require cooperation from other members of the teaching staff, especially the school counsellor, and involvement of a police psychologist (where possible) in the implementation of the educational and preventive programme formulated by the school. School counsellors play a special role in the communication between school and the police. Their role is to coordinate such cooperation and support the parties involved (teachers, police officers) in the preventive actions (Łoskot, 2017, pp. 4–8; Bobik, 2018, pp. 11–24). With their professional background, they are expected to provide professional and effective support (Łoskot, 2018, pp. 48–52).

In order to make the cooperation between religion teachers and police psychologists more dynamic, it is crucial that the atmosphere is congenial and the parties remain open to dialogue. This often requires overcoming internal obstacles and stereotypes and changing mutual perceptions. The parties need to make an effort to learn and understand the specific nature of the other's job. Effective communication and real dialogue will come in useful in that regard (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 114–128, 154–165).

At this point, it should be noted that the group of people involved, including police officers, could go beyond religion teachers and police psychologists. In addition to religion teachers and police psychologists, the primary participants should include head teachers, form teachers, parents (e.g. members of the parents' committee), school counsellors and police officers in charge of preventive actions in the province, county, town and municipality. Social workers and family assistants could also play a part. With such participation, the cooperation aimed at prevention of domestic violence could cover a larger number of more effective and comprehensive actions of an educational and preventive nature (Zellma and Wiszowaty, 2017, pp. 114–128).

The suggested forms of cooperation require each party to adopt a professional attitude. The tertiary education of religion teachers and psychologists should therefore allow for the development of competences that facilitate mutual coop-

eration. This refers primarily to the development of communication, pedagogical, methodological and psychological skills. The people engaged in universal prevention should demonstrate a high level of preparation in terms of knowledge, methodology and skills. Besides the above competences, effective cooperation between a religion teacher and a police psychologist will always require reformulation of the objectives and methods of both parties. As already stated, this requirement is rooted in law and is reasonable for practical reasons. Its aim is to protect the wellbeing of children and teenagers. It is consistent with both the educational and preventive actions of schools, the mission of religion teachers and the statutory responsibilities of the police.

As the prevention of domestic violence is very dynamic, it requires instant reactions to changing circumstances. All parties involved should engage in constant reflection and debate in order to perfect their cooperation. The use of such an approach to the prevention of domestic violence will increase the chances of changing the work methodology adopted by schools and the police. It will facilitate the adjustment of applied solutions to contemporary challenges and conditions.

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