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Attitude of People in Their Emerging Adulthood Towards Selected Moral Norms Related to Sexual Activity

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Abstract

Nowadays, we witness a principal change in the normative order referring to human sexuality, and a change of the role of individual factors of sexual socialisation. This paper presents selected findings of the research on sexual morals of people at their emerging adulthood, aged 18–25, carried out in Poland on a representative sample in 2017. The research focused on the respondents' attitude to the social norms related to sexual activity. Two thirds of the respondents had established sexual relations. There is a clear trend among women to stabilise the intimate relations, and the respondents tend to postpone their matrimonial and procreative plans. The respondents support the norms which may be defined as components of the “golden mean” sexual ethics. Greater liberalism of young men shows in their attitude to the norms related with risky sexual behaviour, widening the repertoire of the forms of sexual intercourse, and sexual activity on the internet. Women significantly more often support the norms which refer to functioning in a relationship. The views of the people who had their sexual initiation are the expression of support for permissive ethics. Religious people and those who regularly practice religion more often present views characteristic of restrictive ethics. It was not proved that the respondents who had attended school family planning

classes more often supported restrictive norms referring to sexual activity, which might be expected taking into consideration the abstinence model of the classes.

Key words: sexual morals, sexual activity, emerging adulthood.

Moral norms, morals and sexual ethics

The notion of social norms is very complex and defined in various ways. According to Zimbardo and Gerrig, a social norm means “expectations of a group referring to the acceptable, appropriate attitudes and behaviours of its members” (2016, p. 726). Theoretical grounds of research related to norms arise from the ecological model of human development which was subject to some modifications in years (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The social learning theory (Bandura, 2007) is also used as well as the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 2011). Norms allow us to regulate functioning in the society and, together with its transformation, they may change (Muniruzzaman, 2017). It may be assumed that the subject of the research presented here was an important component of sexual morality which is a set of socially approved norms and patterns (models) of behaviour referring to sexual behaviours (manifestation and realisation of sexual needs) evinced by sexual partners or by an individual downright (in the case of autoerotic behaviours) (Wąż, 2010).

The changes of the modern world (the interplay of cultures, chaos of values, moral relativism, hedonism, etc.) influence the moral development of the youth and specificity of the behaviours they assume (Oleszkiewicz & Senejko, 2013). New theories, formulated in opposition to the classic theories of moral development, deal downrightly with plasticity of ethic behaviours (Krebs & Denton, 2005). On the one hand, globalisation offers more opportunities than hazards to the youth (Arnett, 2002), and on the other hand, it limits the range of life choices via the life style imposed by the popular culture and by the internet in particular. These dynamic processes refer particularly to sexuality. We currently witness an essential change in the normative order relating to the human sexuality. It includes a process of individualisation, breaking individuals free from the ties imposed by the tradition and group, privatisation of sex. The human being stops thoughtlessly repeating the behaviour patterns observed in their surroundings, and they themselves rather give shape to their lives and to what they consider “a norm” (Glanc, 2011). The sphere of sexual behaviours characterised by moral relativism is more and more accepted (Simon, 2002). Democratisation of intimacy (Giddens, 2007) and democratisation of desire

(McNair, 2004) take place. We observe departing from the traditional, based upon religious norms, behaviour patterns, instrumentalisation of the partner of sexual relations, liberalisation and weakening of social control, including parental control (Szlendak, 2004). The age of sexual initiation decreases (Izdebski et al., 2017) although the scale of sexual experience of young people in Poland is limited as compared to other countries (Wellings et al., 2006; Ramiro et al., 2015). Convergence of male and female roles takes place (Słaboń, 2001), and we observe the so-called “sexualisation of girlhood” (Zurbriggen et al., 2007; Stadnik & Wójtewicz, 2009) which is manifested, among other things, in taking by girls the initiative in establishing intimate relations. The patterns of gender roles which prevail nowadays do not, however, replace the ones which prevailed before, but they exist in parallel, which causes a sort of ambivalence between the strongly rooted traditional patterns and the egalitarian ones that arise from the requirements of the present day (Paprzycka, 2010).

The changes in sexual morality results in a remarkable diversification of attitudes towards involvement in sexual activity (Środa, 2006). Based on the analysis of the present moral assessments of the phenomena relating to sexual life, Mikołaj Kozakiewicz distinguished three types of sexual ethics. In the restrictive ethics, sex as a component of love is approved only in marriages, it shall be foremost aimed at procreation. Among other things, pre- and extramarital sexual intercourse is condemned as well as contraception methods, masturbation, oral and anal sex, sexual activity of homosexual people. Abortion equates crime. In the permissive ethics, sex constitutes a very important value in human life; pre- and extramarital intercourse is principally accepted; sex is detached from procreation, all contraceptives are accepted as are abortion and various forms of sexual activity unless they are coerced. In the ethics of “golden mean”, sex is important in human life but it is related to other values. Love, maturity and responsibility allow pre- and extramarital sex, the institution of marriage is considered important but not a sole form of a relationship. All contraceptives and masturbation are accepted. Homosexuality is approached with tolerance; abortion is evil here, but due to sexual education deficits, it is considered as necessary evil (Kozakiewicz, 1984).

This is the context in which sexual morals of young people should be situated, and, in the empirical dimension, the attitude to the norms relating to sexuality should be examined. Quantitative research of sexual morals, attitudes towards sex, sexual morals of youth has been carried out in Poland (Mariański, 1983; Wróblewska et al., 2003; Kultys, 2005; Gola, 2008; Baniak, 2010; Izdebski, 2012; Komorowska-Pudło, 2013; Wąż, 2018).

Sexual socialisation

Among the numerous conditions of sexual initiation, taking too risky sexual behaviours and the nature of relations with a partner, it is the very attitude towards the moral norms relating to sexuality which may be shaped on the basis of intentional actions of the adult. In the process of sexual socialisation, the social surrounding takes intensive actions aimed at restricting the sex drive with a very strong cultural “muzzle” which includes a set of norms and patterns of behaviour as well as sanctions for disrespecting of same. It is assumed that, while appreciating the significance of peers for the life of the adolescents, a great influence will be wielded by adults and institutions, especially family, school and the Church. At present, however, we observe a very distinct change of the role of the individual agendas (factors) of the sexual socialisation. The most important sources of sexuality for young people - underestimated by parents, however – are peers and media message (Bulkowski et al., 2015). This affects the process of sexual socialisation not only due to the uncontrolled by the responsible adults (parents, teachers) contents, but also due to the specificity of the impact of the media. A new paradigm may be even distinguished in the social frame of culture, i.e. cyberculture in which the recipient becomes its active co-creator, and the virtual community does not fulfil the function of social control as it is in the case of traditional communities coerced which were controlling and conformising communities (Sułkowski, 2011).

In this situation, it is the school that should play a very important role in the process of sex education, that is in inculcating the ethic norms, shaping attitudes, teaching the ability to value attitudes and behaviours of others within the scope of sexuality (Obuchowska & Jaczewski, 2003, p. 201). Meanwhile, there is no climate in Poland conducive to a reliable sex education adapted to the stage of development of a child and teenager. The obligatory model of sex education in schools is of the type A which is of pro-abstinence and pro-family nature. Every few years, projects of acts are filed at the parliament which aim at intimidating sex educators and teachers. An ideological crusade is on the way – “a combat with the LGBT / gender ideology” (Wąż, 2017). Officially, the activities arise from fears of the impact of educational activities of a more open nature to be taken by subjects other than school, e.g. non-governmental organisations, upon precipitation of sexual initiation and taking too risky sexual behaviour. However, the research findings do not confirm such an impact, and they show that the abstinence education is ineffective (Yarber & Sayad, 2010). Moreover, the abstinence education, detached from the problems the youth face, and the absence of dialogue with stu-

dents, causes the sex education to lose its potential opportunity to play a control role within various socialisation influences, particularly within the impact of the media and peers (Chomczyńska-Miliskiewicz, 2002, p. 267).

Emerging adulthood

This paper presents the findings of research among people aged 18–25. This is justified as defining the limit between the youth and adulthood is becoming more and more difficult. At present, young people postpone their decisions they should make at the threshold of their adult life, or they even consciously resign of realisation of the roles and life tasks clearly defined for them. The limits of youth are being moved in time. There is a visible trend to knowingly avoid making commitments characteristic of adult people (Côté, 2000). The period of studies becomes longer, the moment of starting permanent employment is postponed, on the average young people get married, and women have their first babies 10 years later, many people consciously give up procreation and formal relationships, others choose to remain single (Szlendak, 2011). The boundary between adolescence and early adulthood has become very unclear. That is why the term of emerging adulthood has been introduced. This period of human life may be defined as “entering” into adulthood. Jeffrey J. Arnett (2007) considered it even as a new period of development which begins about the age of eighteen and lasts for the entire third decade, in particular until about 25th–26th year of life. The quarter-life crisis is also discussed as one which appears at the age of about 25 (Ginsberg, 2009). It causes symptoms which might once be considered as characteristic for late adolescence, i.e. problems with self-identification, who one wants to become, what one wants to do in life.

Subject, method and research sample

The research “Sexual Morals” was carried out within the frame of the project “Sexuality of Poles 2017”. The following research issues were formulated:

- What is the respondents’ attitude to selected moral norms related to sexual activity?
- Do the respondents’ gender, attitude to religion, sexual initiation and attendance to school classes of family planning diversify the attitude towards moral norms related to sexual activity?

This article presents the findings of research on the respondents’ attitude to the norms relating with taking particular forms of sexual activity, specificity of

extramarital sexual activity / sexual activity out of a regular relationship, use of contraception, abortion, *in vitro* fertilisation, use of sex services and taking to various forms of sex-related activity on the internet.

The respondents were asked to refer to descriptions of moral norms related to sexual activity by indicating one of five categories of response (the scale was: definitely agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, definitely disagree). The results of the survey were re-coded in the tables included in the article by reducing them to four types of the attitude towards the moral norm. Since in some cases (e.g. those concerning masturbation, abortion and adultery), the respondents were provided with two descriptions of moral norms to be evaluated, the tables include also the category of ambivalent attitude (responses of people who differently evaluated descriptions of a given norm were qualified to this category).

For percentage distribution, tests based on Z-test (two-tailed test). The differences between the frequency of answers of the respondents of separate categories were defined in the article as significant for the significance level $p < 0.05$.

The research carried out in Poland on a representative, random-quota sample of people aged 18+, N=2500. The duration of the project: December 2016 – January 2017. Contractor: IQS sp. z o.o. The research used the diagnostic poll method, and two techniques within its frame, i.e. face-to-face interview and a questionnaire filled out by the respondents themselves.

This paper presents results for people aged 18–25. 557 people were surveyed; 273 women and 284 men. Residents of rural areas were 46.1% of the sample, 30.3% of the respondents were residents of towns of the population up to 100,000, and 23.5% of the respondents lived in town of the population more than 100,000. Only few respondents had children (10.9% of the women and 5.8% of the men). 20.0% of the respondents were deeply religious and, religious and regularly practicing constituted 38.1% of the sample, and 32.7% of the respondents were non-believers and believers but non-practicing (the remaining respondents were not able to define their attitude to religion or refused to reply). The vast majority of the respondents (73.8%) used to attend family planning classes at school.

Findings

Characteristics of the respondents' sexual activity

Most of the respondents (73.4%), both women and men (73.7% vs. 73.3%) have had their first, pre-initiation sexual experience. More than two thirds of

the respondents (69.3%) have had their sexual initiation (defined in the question as having the first vaginal intercourse). In this case, the declarations of the women and men were convergent (69.2% vs. 69.3%). Younger respondents (18–21) have their sexual debut much more seldom than those at the age of 22–25 (55.0% vs. 81.3% respectively). Women, significantly more often than man, declare that they were bound with the feeling of love to the partner of their sexual initiation (70.3% vs. 60.5%). people who have begun their sexual life have their experience of sexual relations with four partners (men – 5.41; women 3.22). 40.7% of the surveyed declare that they are currently staying in a regular relationship. Women declare so more often than men (44.2% vs. 37.4%). More seldom than men do women declare that the current relationship is their first regular relationship in life (27.5% vs. 31.8%). 11.6% of women and 4.2% of men remain in their formal relationship. Among the surveyed, there are relatively few people (18.2% of women and 18.4% of men) who used to dwell or still dwell together with the husband / wife or their partner.

Attitude to moral norms relating with taking to sexual activity

Norms related to taking particular forms of sexual activity are an important component of sexual morality. The respondents were asked to refer to the norms concerning masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, and the use of sex gadgets. An attempt was also made to diagnose the attitude of the respondents to the absolute prohibition of violence towards the sexual partner.

Table 1. Attitude towards taking various forms of sexual activity, data in [%], N – men 284, women 273

	Negative		Neutral		Ambivalent		Positive	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Attitude to masturbation	7.3	13.9	32.5	31.8	7.6	7.2	52.6	47.1
Attitude to oral sex	4.1	11.4	16.7	32.8	0.0	0.0	79.1	55.8
Attitude to anal sex	20.7	37.7	28.0	34.6	0.0	0.0	51.3	27.7
Attitude to use of sex gadgets	5.1	10.3	22.6	31.6	0.0	0.0	72.3	58.1
Attitude to sexual violence	70.0	68.8	21.9	19.7	0.0	0.0	8.1	11.5

Source: Authors' research.

In order to define the respondents' attitude to masturbation, they were asked to refer to two opinions on this subject. One of them – “masturbation (onanism)

may lead to mental disorders and health problems” – was based upon the false beliefs that have been disseminated for a few hundred years. The other opinion – “masturbation may help to better know your body, and enjoy to a larger extent, to experience satisfaction of your sexual needs” – was in line with the modern findings within this scope, applicable in sexology. Most of the respondents (57.9%) did not agree with the first opinion, and they considered the other one true (57.3%). However, relatively many respondents presented an ambivalent attitude to the two opinions (24.2% and 31.2% respectively). Thus, it appeared that nearly half of the number of the respondents shows a positive attitude towards masturbation. Such an attitude was presented more often by men, people who had had their sexual initiation and those who had attended family planning classes at school. The negative attitude to masturbation was significantly more often presented by deeply believing and practicing respondents. The surveyed present different attitude to oral and anal sex. Whereas oral sex is approved by the vast majority of the respondents (67.7%), anal sex is accepted by mere one third of them (39.7%), and a relatively large group (29.0%) disapproves of this form of sexual activity. The consenting attitude to oral sex is presented much more often by men, believers who practice religion irregularly, non-believers, those who attended family planning classes, and respondents who had their sexual initiation. Two thirds of the respondents (65.3%) agree that there is nothing wrong with the use of sex gadgets because they increase the partners’ feelings. Positive opinions are formulated rather more seldom by non-believers, the respondents who have not had sexual initiation yet, and people who did not attend family planning classes. The respondents were also asked to express their opinions on an unambiguously formulated norm related to non-acceptance of sexual violence (“people should not take to any sexual behaviour towards the partner without explicitly expressed will of the latter”). It seems that this very description of the behaviour was decisive in the respondents’ answers – the norm was supported by 69.7% of them. Answers did not differ between women and men to a statistically significant extent. People who attended family planning classes more often presented their negative attitude towards sexual violence.

At present, the virtual world has become for people, young ones in particular, as important as the real world. This concerns all the areas of human activities, including intimate relations. Thus, the diagnosis covers also moral norms which pertain to activity related to sexuality on the internet.

Table 2. Attitude towards norms related to sexual activity on the internet, [%], N – men 284, women 273

	Negative		Neutral		Ambivalent		Positive	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Attitude to talking to a person found on the internet about subjects related to sex	12.3	26.7	26.7	28.1	0.0	0.0	61.0	45.1
Attitude to pornography	15.7	43.0	25.7	19.0	0.0	0.0	58.5	37.9
Attitude to sex chats	42.6	60.6	30.6	26.2	0.0	0.0	25.1	12.4
Attitude to virtual sex	25.1	43.6	42.2	33.3	0.0	0.0	32.7	23.0
Attitude to sexual cyber violence	77.6	84.6	11.2	8.4	5.2	3.0	6.0	4.0

Source: Authors' research.

To the greatest extent, the respondents approve talking to a person found on the internet about subjects related to sex. Approval of this type of activity was expressed by 53.2% of the respondent. Men and non-believers presented this opinion significantly more often. The respondents show a diversified attitude to pornography, however, nearly half of them present a permissive attitude (48.4%), significantly more often they were men, believers and non-practicing people, and non-believers. Other norms related to activity on the net did not gain this scale of approval. As for virtual sex, the number of positive, neutral and negative opinions was almost equal. A positive attitude to cybersex was significantly more often presented by men, non-believers, people who had had their sexual initiation, and people who had not attended family planning classes. More rigorous opinions were presented by the respondents with relation to sex chats (51.4% of negative indications) and to sex cyber violence (81.0% of such indications). In the case of cyber violence, the respondents expressed their attitude to two norms, i.e. "it is reprehensible to send materials with sexual content to others without their consent" and "publishing someone's intimate photos and films on the internet is a reprehensible thing although more and more people do this". A negative attitude to participation in sex chats and to cyber violence was much more often presented by people who had had their sexual initiation. In the case of cyber violence, such an attitude was presented also by people who had attended family planning classes.

In the case of sexual activity, the context of taking to it is important, in particular the state of awareness of the sexual partners. The respondents were

asked to define their attitude to the norms which include a ban on having sex under the influence of substances which limit the awareness.

Table 3. Attitude to norms related to sexual activity after having drunk alcohol or taken drugs, [%], N – men 284, women 273

	Negative		Neutral		Ambivalent		Positive	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Attitude to experiences related with sexual activity after having drunk alcohol	21.8	17.1	30.3	27.3	8.5	12.3	39.3	43.3
Attitude to experiences related with sexual activity under the influence of alcohol consumption which distorted control of one's behaviour	63.6	60.4	16.0	25.3	0.0	0.0	20.4	14.3
Attitude to sexual activity after having taken drugs	65.1	70.1	19.8	22.8	0.0	0.0	15.0	7.0

Source: Authors' research.

The respondents present a diversified attitude towards the experiences relating with sexual activity following alcohol consumption but, in this case, they relatively more often show approval of such behaviour (41.3%). Significantly more often, such opinions are expressed by non-believers, people who had their sexual initiation and those who attended family planning classes. A different distribution of results appeared in the case of the respondents' attitude to the norm: "one should avoid having sex under the influence of alcohol in situations where alcohol distorts control of one's behaviour". The majority of the respondents (62.0%) supported the principle. Significantly more often, a negative attitude to taking sexual activity in such condition was presented by deeply believing people and those who believe and regularly practice religion, people who had not had their sexual initiation and those who had attended family planning classes. The respondents' opinion on having sex following the use of drugs was even more restrictive (67.6% of negative indications). Disapproval of such behaviour was significantly more often stated by people who attended family planning classes and the respondents who had not had sexual initiation.

All the moral codes pay a lot of attention to the prohibition of taking to sexual activity beyond the regular relationship. The respondents were asked to refer to a few norms within this scope.

Table 4. Attitude to norms related with sexual activity beyond marriage / regular relationship, [%] N – men 284, women 273

	Negative		Neutral		Ambivalent		Positive	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Attitude to having sex with a newly-met person	42.3	62.5	29.1	27.0	0.0	0.0	28.6	10.5
Attitude to a large number of sex partners	32.6	51.1	29.0	24.2	0.0	0.0	38.4	24.7
Attitude to pre-marital sex	3.3	4.5	15.2	20.4	7.8	7.0	73.7	68.1
Attitude to adultery	53.6	64.8	25.1	27.1	10.1	4.0	11.3	4.0
Attitude to the use of commercial sex	17.7	44.1	30.0	27.8	10.8	12.5	41.5	15.6

Source: Authors' research.

Most of the respondents (52.2%) accept the principle “one should not have sexual intercourse with a newly-met person”. Such opinions are significantly more often formulated by women, deeply believing and regularly practicing people, people who have had their sexual initiation and those who attended family planning classes. Less critically did the respondents refer to taking sexual activity with a large number of partners – 41.6% considers such a life style negatively. Significantly more often such an opinion was expressed by women and people who attended family planning classes. A different distribution of responses was obtained in the case of the attitude to pre-marital sex (The respondents were asked to refer to two norms: “remaining a virgin until wedding is an out-of-date requirement” and “pre-marital sex is an important test for engaged couples”). A definite majority of the respondents (71.0%) have a positive attitude to the opportunity to have sexual experience before marriage. Significantly more often such opinions were presented by people who had had their sexual initiation and those who had attended family planning classes. A negative attitude was significantly more often expressed by deeply believing people and those who believe and regularly practice religion.

The respondents differently evaluate adultery (they were presented with two norms: “one should not have sex beyond the regular relationship, i.e. have sexual intercourse with a person other than wife or regular partner” and “while remaining in a regular relationship, one may, at the same time, be in another long-term relationship, have a love affair”). Most of the respondents (59.1%) presented a restrictive standpoint in this case. Significantly more often such

a standpoint was expressed by women, people who have not had sexual initiation and those who attended family planning classes. The respondents were also asked to express their attitude towards commercial sex (they were asked about their opinion on using sex services and about sponsoring). In this case, the results were diversified. Whereas women more often presented a restrictive attitude, men were more permissive. A negative attitude to commercial sex was also more often presented by deeply believing people and those who believe and practice religion regularly.

The attitude towards contraception, abortion and *in vitro* fertilisation is a very important element of sexual morals as this area of behaviour is specifically embroiled in the religious, worldview (and political) dispute.

In this context, explicit acceptance of the statement that “the use of contraception is something normal, and it proves a conscious attitude to procreation” both by men and women (80.0% vs. 86.9%) may be interpreted as an indicator of the rationality of the respondents’ views. The statement was significantly more often accepted by people who had had their sexual initiation and those who had attended family planning classes. The majority of the respondents considered also post-coital contraception a good solution in emergency situations (62.8%). A negative attitude was more often presented by deeply religious and regularly practicing people and by those who had not had their sexual initiations. The respondents were also asked about their attitude to the natural family planning methods which are promoted by the Catholic Church. Here, the opinions appeared very diversified. A positive attitude was more often presented by deeply religious and regularly practicing people, those who had had their sexual initiation and people who had not attended family planning classes.

Table 5. Attitude to the use of contraception, abortion and *in vitro* fertilisation, [%], N – men 284, women 273

	Negative		Neutral		Ambivalent		Positive	
	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman
Attitude to contraception	8.4	2.0	11.2	8.9	0.0	0.0	80.0	86.9
Attitude to natural methods of family planning	33.8	32.4	26.9	29.6	0.0	0.0	37.3	34.7
Attitude to post-coital contraception	14.9	16.8	17.5	15.8	0.0	0.0	62.4	63.3
Attitude to abortion	8.6	10.0	25.3	21.9	12.6	11.8	53.6	56.3
Attitude to <i>in vitro</i> fertilisation	6.2	4.9	26.9	18.6	0.0	0.0	66.9	76.5

Source: Authors’ research.

Disputes on abortion raise particularly strong emotions. The respondents were asked to refer to two norms contrary to each other: “abortion is a medical procedure which should be available in necessary situations, e.g. due to a threat to woman’s health and life, serious defects of the foetus” and “abortion should not be performed in any case; it is a morally evil act and leads to death of an unborn child”. The majority of the respondents (54.9%) present a positive attitude to the opportunity to have abortion performed. A negative attitude is presented significantly more often by religious and regularly practicing people and by those who did not have sexual initiation.

Still wider approval is expressed by the respondents for applying the procedure of *in vitro* fertilisation in those who have problems with procreation / having a child. In this case, a positive attitude is presented by 71.6% of the respondents. Such a response was significantly more often indicated by women, people who had had their sexual initiation and those who had attended family planning classes. A negative attitude to the *in vitro* fertilisation procedure was more often expressed by religious people and those who practiced regularly.

Summary

The image of sexual activity of the respondents complies with the developmental standards of people at this age (Izdebski, 2010). Two thirds of the respondents have engaged in sexual relations. The extent of sexual experience declared by the respondents confirms the trend to equalise the scale of sexual experiences of young women and men, which may be considered as one of the proofs for existence of changes in morals. The women who participated in the survey had had their pre-initiation sexual experience and sexual initiation as often as men did. However, it is worth indicating that women, more often than men, that they had been in love with their partner during sexual initiation. There is also a visible trend among women to stabilise intimate relations – they more often stay in a regular relationship (also a formal one). They also seek a regular partner more actively – more seldom than men do, they declare that the current relationship is the first regular one in their life. Another trend proved by the obtained data is to postpone matrimonial and procreative plans by people in their emerging adulthood.

The research enabled defining a few trends concerning the respondents’ opinions on their attitudes towards sexual activity. It seems that their description may be facilitated by the aforementioned typology of sexual ethics proposed by Mikołaj Kozakiewicz.

The respondents support the norms which may be defined as components of the ethics of the “golden mean”. Majority of the respondents do not approve sex with a newly-met person, adultery, maintaining virginity until marriage, sexual violence, including cyber violence, participation in sex chats, taking sexual activity following consumption of alcohol which distorts one’s own behaviour, sexual activity after one has used drugs, anal sex. On the other hand, the same majority approves pre-marital sex, masturbation, oral sex, use of sex gadgets, talking about sex with a person met on the internet, use of contraception, including post-coital contraception, in emergency situations, and availability of *in vitro* fertilisation.

The respondents’ gender is an important factor which differentiates their views. Despite of the few cases in which quite a compatibility of opinions was found (e.g. with reference to the norms related to sexual activity before marriage, use of contraception, and abortion), indications of men and women were similar to one another, anyway the attitude of the respondents to most of the subject norms differed in the scale of approval. More liberal attitude of young men refers, e.g. to the norms related to risk behaviours and those which pertain to widening the repertoire of the forms of sexual relations and sexual activity on the internet. Women accept significantly more often the norms which concern relationships and behaviours which affect their durability, and women are more positively inclined toward the *in vitro* procedure.

Views of the people who have had their sexual initiation are an expression of support for permissive ethics. This shows particularly in the attitude towards norms referring to sexual health, including use of various contraceptives. Liberalism of sexually active people shows also in the fact that they more often present a positive attitude to enriching sexual activity (various forms of sexual activity, cybersex, use of sex gadgets), and sexual activity under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The restrictive nature of the views of people who have had their sexual initiation refers only to participation in erotic chats, cyber violence and sex with a newly-met person.

The respondents’ views are also differentiated by their attitude to religion. People who deeply believe and those who believe and regularly practice religion more often present a restrictive attitude to sexual activity which does not comply with religious norms (e.g. abortion, pre-marital sex, post-coital contraception). Non-religious people and people who believe but do not practice religion have liberal views, characteristic of permissive ethics.

The respondents’ attitude to moral norms was also juxtaposed with their attendance in family planning classes at school. The findings to this end did

not form a basis for formulation of conclusions pertaining to a relation of the respondents' views with their experience. The persons who declare that they attended those classes usually present both restrictive views (e.g. on adultery) and liberal ones (e.g. on sexual activity following consumption of alcohol). In some cases, attendance in family planning classes is directly related to supporting the norms which are not promoted in the abstinence education (as for pre-marital sex and use of contraceptives). This needs to be discussed. The respondents' attitude to social norms concerning sexual activity is a resultant of the sum of very complex socialisation influences in which school does not play a dominant role. Other socialisation agendas play the main role in the respondents' awareness. Here, 33.4% of the respondents indicated the family, 10.2% indicated the family planning teacher; 8.5% – other teacher, school counsellor, psychologist; 6.7% – physician, another medical specialist; 6.5% – the Church, priests. Peers played much more important a role – 41.7%, and sexual partner, boyfriend/girlfriend – 44.4%. An equally strong influence was ascribed also to the mass culture, in particular the electronic media: the internet – 40.9%, other media – 25.9%, books, guidebooks – 23.3%. Besides, in quantitative surveys, it is difficult to operationalise the variable concerning attendance in classes. It is so because the classes are taught by different teachers at a few education stages (namely three stages in the case of the surveyed, i.e. final years of primary school, junior high school and senior high school). The results of quantitative research (Bulkowski et al., 2015) and qualitative research (Bieńko et. al., 2016) carried out in recent years in Poland show that the image of family planning classes is extremely diversified, and implementation of syllabus standards cannot be discussed or the existence of any methodological standard cannot be assumed.

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