

Life-Planning with the Infant-Simulator – Concepts, Aims and Intentions of Disseminators in a Sexual Health-Related Prevention Program

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Since their introduction to the German market in 2000, the use of infant simulators (IS) in simulating parenthood has steadily increased in popularity. The IS a computerized-scale replica of an infant employed to simulate parenthood with adolescents. Response times to crying, episodes of neglect and incorrect handling are recorded. Research regarding outcomes of IS projects in the US and UK showed inconsistent results. A key element of the first systematic evaluation of the use of IS in Germany – along with quantitative assessments and group discussions with participants – aimed at assessing and evaluating concepts, aims and intentions of disseminators. 28 problem-centred interviews have been conducted, coded with MaxQDA and assessed. Even though it is commendable that issues concerning adolescent motherhood and life-planning are addressed in the context of job and career options of disadvantaged, marginalised young people, instead of allowing girls to drop out of educational processes and vocational orientation by virtue of impending motherhood, the interview analysis displayed a lack of professionalism in contrast to high professional standards concerning gender, diversity and intersectional status, creating imbalances. Also, the percentage of births by teenage mothers in total births has stayed unchanged at 0, 6%-0, 7% in the last 10 years; nevertheless, a strong preventive emphasis has been placed here. The data showed that disseminators often did not distinguish between contraception failure leading to pregnancies and planned/desired pregnancies of young mothers. Concepts need to look at motherhood as a life-choice, which offers disadvantaged young women escape from socio-economic, and educational pressures and a gain of governmental alimentation and recognition in their role as mothers. A large number of students of the primarily targeted school forms (basic vocational training and special needs schools – doing class) have migrant backgrounds, disseminators however mostly failed to address ethnic diversity within the target group. Gender-specific aspects and LGBT youths were not addressed sufficiently; rather, traditional role models were reproduced. Violence against children is a global issue with serious consequences. However Germany's relatively low ranking of the UNICEF Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries study reflects societal attitude towards children. Child protection issues and prevention of neglect and abuse have not been central in disseminator approaches and even, in some cases, completely omitted. Traumatizing experiences of the young people have not been suitably addressed. Pregnancies and abortion experiences within the target group – with its ethical and emotional consequences – have not been attended to. IS projects seemed to produce a return to concepts of 'fallen girls' inducing 'shame' via forced public exposure with a 'baby'. Implicitly, disseminators transported expectations as to the inability of young people to be a parent instead of empowerment; a trend towards acceptance of impending failure and self-stigmatisation could be observed. This research should be seen as a contribution to the discourse on professionalism of educators. Here, an intersectional approach to diversity and gender issues needs to be taken. Research concerning teenage pregnancies and young motherhood highlights an area, whose emergence – in a globalise world – is to be expected in future, especially in highly industrialised regions of Asia or in societies with strongly emerging middle classes, along with increased pressures in education systems.

Keywords: Marginalised life-choice, gender-specific self-stigmatisation

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