

# THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT METHODS OF FERTILITY RECOGNITION IN LIGHT OF EXPERIENCE FROM POLAND

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**Key words:** *natural family planning, student training, responsible parenthood.*

## Summary

*The beginnings of the training in the field of methods of fertility recognition in Poland are owed to community workers engaged in the activity of Catholic Church. On Teresa Strzembosz's initiative, sympto-thermal method was introduced to groups of engaged couples as soon as in 1956/7. Education in the range of responsible parenthood was the only way of countermeasures against abortion [1]. Thanks to the Centre in Birmingham, the possibility of obtaining international certificates by teachers of natural family planning entitling to transmitting down the knowledge of natural family planning has been opened since 1989. When a new field of study defined as family studies appeared in Catholic University of Lublin, family planning method exercises were indispensable in its program. Students taking classes may content themselves with the course credit by obtaining an entry in student's record; they may also decide to sit additional exams leading to obtaining a certificate issued by Main Board of Polish Association of Natural Family Planning Teachers. The participating students voice their opinions on the knowledge and ability to recognize fertile and infertile days in the cycle which they had got by participating in the classes.*

## INTRODUCTION

Both in education and medicine, Poland owes much to the people of the Church. Their work was full of dedication to both the glory of God and the human good. The Church has always gathered people who wanted to serve others and allowed that activity even when all over the country piled up numerous difficulties due to

communist rule. In the second half of the forties of the 20th century a sociologist Valentine Majdański began his efforts to spread the attitude of responsible parenthood [2]. When on 27 April 1956, the Polish parliament passed a law authorizing Polish abortion for medical, legal and social reasons, paramedic Teresa Strzembosz decided to extend the educational and preventive actions. She went to the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in order to prevent abortion under the Ministry of Healthcare by teaching fertility recognition. The result of this meeting was the establishment of the Catholic Family Life Counselling conducting fertility recognition courses for those preparing for marriage.

Implementation of the undertaken actions was justified by the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI which presented moral principles in the field of transmission of human life [3]. In 1973, the Polish monk Jan Mucharski under a pseudonym Paul Thyma published in England a symptothermal method. In the late 70s of the 20th century Polish gynecologist Teresa Kramarek developed her own symptothermal method. Further methods that came to Poland (Billings, Kippley, Rötzer) began to be taught by associations formed in this purpose.

In 1988, father Kazimierz Kurek Ph.D., a doctor and a priest at the same time, invited to Poland doctors from Birmingham (Lichtarowicz Alina, Anna Flynn) to carry out the first course of Multiple-Index method [4].

Graduates of the course after passing the required examinations received international certificates. A year later Polish Association of Teachers of Natural Family Planning training teachers and instructors was founded. In 1999 at the Catholic University of Lublin, the Institute of Family Studies was created. It trains future teachers of family life education to conduct classes for school students and family life consultants to work in the counsellings for the engaged. The course of Family planning methods has been introduced in the programme. Details of its implementation will be presented in this article and

surveys conducted among the youth will demonstrate the need for that education.

**The aim of the article:** presenting the history of natural family planning in Poland and the way and results of training the students of Family Studies in John Paul 2nd Catholic University of Lublin in the mentioned field.

#### SOURCES AND WORK METHODS

The introduced issue was worked out on the basis of my own experience and especially training carried out for family studies students in John Paul 2nd Catholic University of Lublin while family planning method exercises. Additionally, anonymous diagnostic survey was carried out in 2 groups of students attending classes. The survey was conducted in March 2011.

**Description of the classes.** Family planning method classes were included in the field of family studies in the form of 60 hours of exercises carried out in an academic year for 2 semesters. At first, they were non-compulsory. Because of almost 100% attendance and usefulness of introduced content for the realization of practice within courses preparing engaged couples for marriages, however, were converted from non-compulsory into compulsory. Description of the subject, including essential content and the forms of presenting it and requirements.

**Institute/Faculty:** Institute of Family Studies /Faculty of Theology

**Subject:** Family Studies **Name of the course:** Methods of family planning

**Objective of course:** Presentation of the known methods of family planning and the differences between them. Orientation of students in theoretical principles of methods of diagnosing infertility. Learning to identify fertile and infertile days in the cycle through the proper interpretation of the indicators and to provide education associations in this area

**Knowing:** When finite class Student is able to

- identify the main concepts related to family planning,
- identify fertile and infertile days in the cycle
- compare the diagnostic methods of contraception, fertility and the effect of abortifacient

**Knowledge:** The student knows the skills plot graphs as indicated by the MULTIPLE-INDEX method

- card read cycle by setting days fertile and infertile
- show others their knowledge of family planning methods

**Other competencies (attitudes)** Student attitude reveals:

- sensitivity to the effects of different types of family planning methods and their effects on physical, mental and spiritual health of human

- concern for compliance with the standards of conduct governing the behavior of fertility

- openness to people seeking consultation in the field of family planning methods

Form of teaching: exercises in solving tests in knowledge of family planning methods, the interpretation of the card cycle exercises, exercises in presenting the themes developed using multimedia presentations

Requirements for teaching aids: overhead projector for transparencies, overhead projector, video.

How to confirm achievement of outcomes measured: attendance and participation in exercises - 20%, test of the theory of 25% of the test card from the interpretation of the cycle - 25%, a multimedia presentation - 30%.

Content course: - Division and types of the methods of family planning.

- The differences between the methods.
- The history of the methods of family planning.
- Reproductive system anatomy.
- Physiology of fertility.
- The interpretation of fertility cycle cards according to Multiple-Index methods.
- The technologies supporting fertility recognition.
- Teaching the methods by teachers from Natural Family Planning Society and Catholic Family Life Counseling Service.

Certificates of Family Planning Methods teachers and instructors: requirements and qualifications

Teaching aids: Films with the cards cycle epidiascope, Powerpoint presentations, laptop, multimedia projector

#### Basic literature:

- *Rozpoznawanie płodności. Materiały edukacyjne dla nauczycieli NPR, pracowników służby zdrowia oraz zainteresowanych zdrowiem prokreacyjnym. Podręcznik.* Red. M. Troszyński, Warszawa 2009.

- *Płodność i planowanie rodziny. Kompendium dla pracowników służby zdrowia oraz dla instruktorów poradnictwa rodzinnego,* Red. Z. Szymański. Szczecin 2004.

- *Naturalne planowanie rodziny,* Red. A. Samoć, Gdańsk 1991.

- *Naturalne planowanie rodziny – zeszyt ćwiczeń,* Lublin 2003.

- Encyclicals: *Humanae vitae, Evangelium vitae, Veritatis splendor* and Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*.

**Additional literature:**

Dudziak U., *Naturalne planowanie rodziny integralną częścią nauk o rodzinie*. W: *Nauki o Rodzinie. Tradycje i perspektywy edukacyjne*. Red. G. Koszałka, M. Stopikowska. Gdańsk 2007 s. 197-215.

*Katolik a planowanie rodziny*, Kraków 1984.

Kramarek T., *Rozpoznawanie okresowej płodności małżeństwa. Metoda objawowo-termiczna*, 2003.

*Naturalne planowanie rodziny w ujęciu wybranych dyscyplin naukowych*. Red. W. Wieczorek i in. Lublin 2008.

*Naturalne planowanie rodziny – wybrane zagadnienia*, Red. U. Dudziak, A. Deluga, Szczecinek 2006.

**Teaching aids:** Films with the cards cycle epidiascope, Powerpoint presentations, laptop, multimedia projector

Institute of Family Sciences within which the above mentioned classes are realized has existed since 1999 and there are 70-100 students in each year. This means that there have been a few hundred students trained in the range of methods of family planning (with particular emphasis on MULTIPLE-INDEX method). Each of the students is assessed according to both his/her theoretical knowledge including the rudiments of physiology of fertility and its neurohormonal conditioning and his/her skills at interpretations of fertility symptoms enabling to predict fertile and infertile days in the cycle. The students also prepare multimedia displays on a chosen topic concerning family planning, and by this, they demonstrate that they are able to convey accessibly prepare issues to others. Drilling skills in teaching is especially meaningful for natural family planning teachers-to-be. Obtained credits are entered in student's records after the first and the second semester. Each year, there are additional examinations organized for the students interested in, thanks to cooperation with Polish Association of Natural Family Planning Teachers. Passing the examinations, students obtain international certificates. The First Degree Examination is passed if the sitting student gets 80% points in test and 80% points in cards interpretations. A half a year later, after working out 9 menstrual cycle cards (3 cards with observation of fertility symptoms of 3 women), the student may sit the Second Degree Examination [5]. Such an intensive preparation is exceptionally valuable out of consideration for his/her future work at school as a teacher of family life education or as a marriage counsellor in a marriage counselling service. The teacher certificate also entitles to run private natural family planning counselling service all over the world. Once a few years, the Main Board of

Polish Association of Natural Family Planning Teachers organizes courses and examinations for instructors of natural family planning who may teach not only the users of the methods but also carry out training and examinations for future teachers.

**Results of the diagnostic survey.** In March 2011, an anonymous survey was carried out among 30 students who had got credit for natural planning method exercises in 1st semester and started classes in 2nd semester. The aim of the research was determination of the results of 30-hour exercises on the basis of the students' individual assessment of attitudes and knowledge within the scope of natural family planning and contraception before beginning exercises and after finishing the first semester. It was noted from students' open written statements whether their attitude had changed into more positive or more negative or it had remained the same. After analyzing data, it appeared that, after the first semester, the students' attitude towards natural family planning at 93% of students had changed into more positive and at 7% of students approving the method beforehand the attitude remained the same. The increase of the knowledge on the subject was noticed by 100% of the respondents. The attitude towards use of contraceptives and abortifacients changed to more negative at 60% of students who earlier had not known the adverse effects of using them. The attitude towards contraception was not changed at 37% of respondents. One person approving of premarital, passing sexual intercourse changed his/her attitude towards use of contraceptives into more positive. He/she realized that in the case of lack of birth control there is a possibility of an unexpected conception of a child. He/she admitted that the methods of natural family planning 'require patience and perseverance'. When assessing their knowledge on contraception, 70% of the surveyed students recognized that their knowledge had increased during classes in the first semester. At the same time, 30% of the students admitted that their knowledge remained the same.

The students also described what they achieved thanks to the exercises. Most frequently, they mentioned the following:

- ability to recognize fertile and infertile days in the menstrual cycle,
- better knowledge of her own organism,
- improved skill at diagnosing disorders of some functions connected with fertility physiology on the basis of the interpretation of its symptoms,
- better knowledge of hormones conditioning human fertility,

- debunking previously accepted stereotypes regarding natural family planning (NFP),
- elimination of misguided opinions about NFP thanks to gaining detailed information,
- wider knowledge on various gynaecological diseases, health prophylaxis, effects of contraceptives, pre-conception and prenatal care,
- wider knowledge on the mechanism of effect and consequences of contraception,
- change of student's previous opinion on contraception,
- suitable preparation for raising family,
- knowledge on how responsibly approach parenthood.

I have chosen the following statements to cite out of literal statements: 'My awareness of the value of every human being has increased. Those classes have aroused yearning for serving life and human dignity in me'; 'I see that NFP is not an obstacle but help in living according to my own conscience, nature and religion'; 'I have more proper attitude towards love and sexual life, respect for dignity of man and woman who cannot be seen as <<machines>> for sating his/her own sexual needs'; 'Before I started the classes my knowledge on the subject was practically nil, On the subject of contraception, I knew as much as I had read in <<the tabloids>> or the Internet. Now, I talk much on the subject to my friends (women) and make them aware'; 'Before first classes, I was sceptical of natural family planning, I thought the method was little effective. After the first semester, I got to know that the method is effective and it does not have negative effects and what is more, it strengthens marital love'; 'But not for the classes, I guess I wouldn't know so much of NFP, 'cause only contraception is promoted all around. They talk about it a great deal but it is not said that it brings some harm. Now, I will use the NFP methods (after wedding) and I will recommend them with a clean conscience'; 'I like NFP very much because woman gets to know biological activity of her organism, she knows more of herself (functions of her organism)'; Before the classes started, I was biased in favour of contraception because it was promoted in the media as healthy and natural, and there was no information about its dangerous effects, that's why it seemed to be right. I even did not know what the term contraception means precisely. Now, my attitude changed. I don't consider contraceptives something normal, just the opposite, I consider them bad. NFP helped me to understand better my physiology. NFP should be more promoted because there is not much about it in the media and people may not know'.

The average mark obtained by the students receiving credits from Methods of Family Planning in autumn semester of the academic year 2010/2011 (in the scale 2-5 amounting over 4) shows good acquaintance with provided content. The components influencing the mark were theoretical and practical skills at determining fertile and infertile days in typical menstrual cycles. The knowledge may appear useful in both private life, i.e. in care of student's own life, correct marital relationships and parental responsibility and working life: in providing help concerning preparing for marriage and life in family.

### CONCLUSION

Great achievements of those who contributed to acquiring the knowledge of human fertility require continuation in the present days. Lack of knowledge, often based on stereotypes - mistakes in encapsulating human knowledge on fertility presented by students starting the classes of Methods of Family Planning, persuade us to such an activity. Carrying out such classes is the more needed the more negative attitude towards natural family planning is disseminated by contraception supporters in the media. Eliminating tendentiousness imprinted under the influence of manipulating commercial is also valuable effect of carried out exercises, like increase of knowledge about the psychophysiology of the human procreation and obtaining the skills at recognising fertile and infertile days in the menstrual cycle. Further arguments substantiating rightness of teaching natural family planning are following: care of physical and moral health of society, laying grounds for building proper ties of marriage and shaping the attitude of responsible parenthood characterized in papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The experiences of introducing and realisation the subject of Methods of Family Planning in Institute of Family Sciences of John Paul 2nd Catholic University of Lublin are worth exploiting at other subjects and universities in Poland and all over the world.

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ŽINIŲ APIE VAISINGUMO PAŽINIMO METODUS SKLAIDA:  
LENKIJOS PATIRTIS

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Santrauka

Raktažodžiai: natūralus šeimos planavimas, studentų mokymas, atsakinga tėvystė.

Vaisingumo pažinimo metodų mokymai Lenkijoje prasidėjo dėka Katalikų Bažnyčios bendruomenės aktyviausių narių. Teresos Strzembosz iniciatyva 1956-1957 m. mokymas apie NŠP simptomatinį metodą buvo integruotas į sužadėtinių rengimo programą parapijose. Mokymas apie atsakingą tėvystę ir motinystę buvo vienintelė atsakomoji priemonė abortams. Nuo 1989 metų, dėka Birmingham'o centro,

atsirado galimybė parengti kvalifikuotus NŠP mokytojus Lenkijoje. Kai Katalikiškame Liublino universitete buvo pradėta nauja šeimos studijų programa, šeimos planavimo mokymas tapo neatsiejama jos dalimi. Šios programos studentai taip pat turi papildomą galimybę įsigyti NŠP mokytojo kvalifikaciją, kurią teikia Lenkijos NŠP mokytojų asociacija.

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