

# A Study of the Irish Objective Sex Education Bill using the Walt-Gilson Policy Analysis Framework

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# Walt-Gilson Policy Analysis Framework

- ▶ Analysis of established governmental health policy
- ▶ Planning of effective implementation of new policy (Walt-Gilson 1994)
  - ▶ **Content** of Health Policy
  - ▶ **Actors** influencing Policy
  - ▶ **Process** by which Policy is implemented
  - ▶ **Context** (political, societal etc.) surrounding this change
- ▶ And, the ways in which each of these **interact**

# The Irish Objective Sex Education Bill: Historical Context

- ▶ Influence of Colonialism, War, **Religion**
- ▶ Irish Constitution drafted in 1916, written in 1922, rewritten in 1937
  - ▶ Catholic Church given “special position”
  - ▶ Removed in 1970s, but remnants remained in all facets of Irish society
- ▶ All Irish Schools with a religious, Catholic ethos
- ▶ Both divorce and homosexuality were illegal, and contraception became widely available only in the 1980’s (Inglis 1998)

# Context (Recent decades)

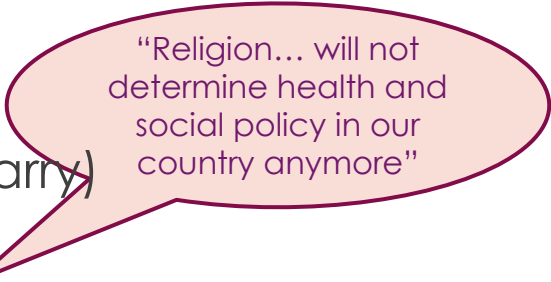
- ▶ **Focusing Events 1980s/90s:** Several sex-related scandals
  - ▶ The murder of Declan Flynn [1982]
  - ▶ The death of Ann Lovett [1984]
  - ▶ Case of the Kerry Babies [1984]
  - ▶ Abuses in the Catholic Church revealed [80s and 90s, *States of Fear*, Documentary 1999]
- ▶ Relationship/Sexual Education programme created under Education Act of 1998
- ▶ More recently, global impression of Ireland beginning to shift
  - ▶ Same-sex Marriage Referendum [2015]
  - ▶ Exogenous factors e.g. Pressure from EU - Drive to repeal the Eighth Amendment [2018]
  - ▶ Situational/Social factors: #MeToo movement [2017], Belfast Rape Trial [2018]

# Content

- ▶ Over 90% of Irish public schools are state-funded and denominational, even if not explicitly defined as religious.
- ▶ Current sex education curriculum set as part of the Education Act of 1998
- ▶ The Irish Objective Sex Education Bill proposes changes:
  - ▶ Prevent religious or spiritual affiliation influencing RSE
  - ▶ Outlines Minister for Education's ability, in consultation with relevant bodies e.g. school administrators, to prescribe the curriculum for relationships and sexuality:
    - ▶ “factual and objective, age appropriate, and not gender normative”
    - ▶ Includes consent, sexuality, gender, contraception, termination of pregnancy, “regardless of the characteristic spirit of the school” (Coppinger et. al. 2018)

# Actors

- ▶ International Actors:
  - ▶ European Union
  - ▶ UN Committee on Rights of the Child's specific recommendation for Ireland
- ▶ Citizens' Assembly on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, subsequent Oireachtas Committee report: both emphasised the need for reform
- ▶ Government parties:
  - ▶ People Before Profit (Ruth Coppinger), Solidarity (Paul Murphy, Mick Barry)
  - ▶ Minister for Education Richard Bruton, Minister for Health Simon Harris
  - ▶ Fianna Fáil: agreed to need for reform, felt recommendations went too far
- ▶ People's movements/Citizens Groups: Act Up, Shout Out, Rape Crisis Network Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland, IFPA, Atheists Ireland, Ladybirds Ireland (Girl Guides)



"Religion... will not determine health and social policy in our country anymore"

# Process (ongoing, Dáil Éireann)

- ▶ Issue recognition, Formation of proposed Bill, Debate Process in Government
  - ▶ Problems in current curriculum identified
    - ▶ Recommendations of Oireachtas Committee
    - ▶ PBP conducted country-wide survey/ online campaign: Irish young people asked for experiences of RSE school
  - ▶ Solidarity-PBP drafted Bill, proposed to Dáil Éireann in March 2018
  - ▶ **Private Members Bill:** Bill not presented by Minister, by member of Opposition
    - ▶ Government opposes such Bills in practice: this can allow for delayed movement of the legislation, and advocates have argued that this has indeed taken place – use of “Money message”

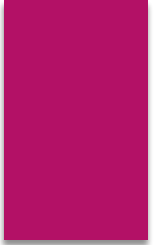
# Process (continued)

- ▶ **1<sup>st</sup>: Initiation Stage** - House may/may not grant leave - provided it complies with Standing Orders, it is added to the Order Paper. Irish Objective Sex Education Bill granted leave
- ▶ **2<sup>nd</sup>: General principles of Bill debated** - House may/ may not agree to Bill proceeding to Committee Stage. Member may call for a vote if there is division, 10 TDs must call for vote for vote to be held
  - ▶ While Dáil did not express unanimous support for the bill, very few TDs called for a vote
- ▶ **3<sup>rd</sup>: Committee Stage** – Bill is subject to review by Oireachtas Education Committee, examined section by section, and amendments proposed
  - ▶ Review by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment requested
- ▶ Minister states approval/disapproval of each amendment: a vote can contest decisions
- ▶ A lengthy process, as Member may speak on amendment as many times as they wish



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Thank you

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