

Lili's Fortitude - A tale helping the prevention of sexual abuse against children

As a project of three individuals, the pictured storybook was written by sociologists Móni Paulik and Zsuzsi Vince, and illustrated by Pál Varsányi graphic artist.

Their aim was to reflect on the fact that there's no social awareness regarding sexual abuse against children in Hungary.

It seems to be a widely held view that this kind of sexual abuse is very rare, rather hidden problem, 'definitely not mine, not ours'. Except for a few, actually not more than a couple of articles we couldn't trace any informational material helping parents how to save their kids from sexual abuse.

The silence around the topic is palpable on different levels. Apart from one or two scandals, it's not discussed in the media. As we found, there's no adequate, systematic protection; the issue is not a part of the education of social workers, teachers or psychologists. While, according to statistics, one in every ten kid is sexually abused while growing up.

This results that raising awareness about children's right to own their bodies, and set their boundaries is absent from parenting. In most of the families, **the parents do not know how to tackle a sensitive and complex problem like this.**

Children in contemporary Hungary usually grow up

- without knowing the Underwear Rule
- that she/he has the right to her/his body
- that she/he can say no, and in specific cases, she/he has to say no to adults' requests.

With the help of the book our aim not only is to draw attention to this important but at the moment tabooed problem but to give parents a useful tool to initiate conversations about the topic.

A tale, a story can serve as an inductor of discussion and creates a possibility to ask questions.

Sexual abuse, but sexuality in itself is a rather sensitive topic, and many parents lack the know-how how to tackle it.

Through the tale of Lili children, and parents can talk about important and till this point silenced topics like

- rules regarding intimate body parts
- how to say no to inappropriate touches
- that children do have the right to own their bodies
- children can say even to an adult
- the difference between good and harmful secrets.

An 'instruction manual' is part of the book to help parents how to use it effectively. We also complemented the material with a 'Where can I look for help?' section, listing all the organizations, their addresses and phone numbers they can be reached at. We also added the informational booklet of NANE Association about the topic.

How the book came into being...

The story was written by two sociologists and reviewed by six children's psychologist, and a children's right expert.

It took eight months to write the book, find competent expert-reviewers. Everyone worked on the project as a volunteer.

After finalizing the book, the creators decided (instead of looking for a publisher) to crowdfund the print costs, to see if the public found the topic important enough to donate money.

Website of the crowdfunding campaign:

<https://www.generosity.com/education-fundraising/lili-es-a-batorsag-previncios-mesekonyv>

The campaign goal was collecting 1.2 million HUF. We reached this amount only in five days. This amount was enough for editing and print costs.

About the story:

Lili's an ordinary little girl living in an extraordinary place: the circus. She has a lot of friends, like the clown or the animal trainer, but she likes the most the magician. Lili has a dream. One day, she wants to be the Queen of the Circus, just like her mom is now. To reach her goal, she not only has to practice a lot but needs more courage. And it seems that the magician can help her to gain that bravery. Then when meeting him in his caravan, instead of providing her with the adequate spell, the magician abuses Lili. The heavy burden of the secret of abuse makes Lili want to run away. Is Lili going to find the countermagic against that traumatic secret? Does she have to fight on her own or will she be brave enough to ask for help?

The main topics of the tale are manipulation, and what to do when an adult, a child trusts, crosses boundaries.

From reviews of the book:

It is challenging to write about sexuality without sexualizing the reader. And it's even more challenging to write about sexual abuse against children in a way which instead of alienating, disgusting or frightening parents, gives the opportunity to understanding, resolution, and forgiveness. This book took on this task and fulfilled it. It leads parents, and children, listening to the tale through the story, providing words for later discussions. It also teaches important things, like there're not only good secrets, we can giggle about, but harmful ones as well. Secrets, torturing us, not allowing us to sleep.

<https://wmn.hu/ugy/47482-a-szexualis-eroszak-soha-nem-a-gyerek-hibaja--lili-es-a-batorsag-egy-gy-erekkonyv-aminek-mar-reg-meg-kellett-volna-szuletnie->

Deep respect for the authors for this book, high quality both in its content and style, well thought through, and beautifully designed. It summarizes all the relevant questions and essential messages of its topic.

http://hintafa.blog.hu/2017/10/10/paulik_moni_-vincze_zsuzsi_lili_es_a_batorsag

The most important reviews are collected here: www.liliesabatorsag.com

Project Results:

From its publication in September 2017, there were 1000 copies sold, and there're 500 more in stock. It's available in 12 bookshops across the country and can be ordered online.

We made a webpage for the Indiegogo campaign (www.liliesabatorsag.com). We collected all the materials available in Hungarian to help parents to navigate in the topic of sexual abuse against children. From Spring 2017 the page had several thousand visitors.

It's also important that the topic of sexual abuse got publicity in the media because of a picture storybook, and not another scandal. This means that finally this, otherwise tabooed problem can be tackled in a clear and more in-depth manner.

It is an important message that sexual abuse against children does exist, and it can happen to anyone. And that in the majority of the cases the perpetrator is someone the child knows and trusts – and that the abuse is never the child's fault. It is unfortunate that these claims cannot be regarded as trivial in contemporary Hungary.

Future Prospects:

We got inquiries from the police, schools, and kindergartens, not having any meaningful information and material on the issue previously, asking for leaflets. We're trying to find resources for making those flyers.

We also plan a second edition of the book, aiming to get into the offer of national publishers (like Libri). This would be important since there's no chance to keep the topic and the book constantly in the media. By making it available in almost every bigger bookshop all across the country, there's a way to draw parents' attention to this rather silenced issue.

We endeavor to provide publicity to the topic by different actions as well. Spring 2018 we organize a campaign with the participation of children's musician standing by the cause. They'll read parts of the tale in one minute long videos, and share these on their social media platforms to raise parents' awareness.

Since the story is much more than an illustration of the Underwear Rule, we ambition to translate it into English, and German, and make it available for international organizations working on the problem.