SITUATION OF CHILDREN FROM PLACEMENT CENTERS (CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA)

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Abstract

The article presents the analysis of some results regarding the research of the situation of children from placement centers based on the study carried out by the PRODOCS Association. A considerable part of the children in risk situations grow up and are educated in the 26 functional placement centers in the Republic of Moldova. The profile of the beneficiaries from placement centers consists of children with disabilities, children with traumas, abused, children with difficult behaviour, aged 4-18. The separation of the child from the family of origin, even if it is not functional, brings a series of negative emotional, cognitive, social, and physical consequences. The most relevant problems faced by children from placement centers are: lack of parental affection, learning difficulties, insufficiently developed social skills, limited vocational orientation, discrimination. The situation of children from 11 placement centers was analysed and studied by applying quantitative and qualitative research methods. Research results show that children lack developed social skills manifests through fits of anger, apathy or passivity, aggression, and dismissive attitudes. One of the conclusions is that the children's learning difficulties are not the result of mental retardation or sensory deficiencies, but are the result of the environmental and cultural factors.

Keywords: children at risk, children in difficulty, marginalization, discrimination, difficult behavior, child placement.

Résumé

L'article présente une analyse de certains résultats de recherche sur la situation des enfants dans les foyers d'accueil, sur la base d'une étude menée par l'association PRODOCS. Certains enfants à risque sont éduqués dans les 26 centres de placement de la République de Moldavie. Le profil des bénéficiaires des centres de placement est composé d'enfants handicapés, traumatisés et abusés, au comportement difficile, âgés de 4 à 18 ans. La séparation d'un enfant de sa famille d'origine, même si celle-ci n'est pas fonctionnelle, a un certain nombre de conséquences émotionnelles, cognitives, sociales et physiques négatives. Les problèmes les plus importants auxquels sont confrontés les enfants placés sont : le manque d'affection parentale, les difficultés d'apprentissage, le sous-développement des compétences sociales, l'orientation professionnelle limitée et la discrimination. La situation des enfants dans 11 centres de placement a été analysée et étudiée à l'aide de méthodes de

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recherche quantitatives et qualitatives. Les résultats de la recherche montrent que le manque de développement des compétences sociales des enfants se manifeste par des accès de colère, de l'apathie ou de la passivité, de l'agressivité et des attitudes dédaigneuses. L'une des conclusions est que les difficultés d'apprentissage des enfants ne sont pas le résultat d'un retard mental ou d'une déficience sensorielle, mais qu'elles sont le résultat d'un manque d'aptitudes sociales.

Mots clés: enfants à risque, enfants dans le besoin, marginalisation, discrimination, comportement difficile, placement d'enfants.

Rezumat
Articolul prezintă analiza unor rezultate privind cercetarea situaţiei copiilor din centrele de plasament în baza studiului realizat de Asociaţia PRODOCS. Unii copii aflaţi în situaţii de risc cresc în 26 de centre de plasament din Republica Moldova. Profilul beneficiarilor centrelor de plasament îl constituie copii cu dizabilităţi severe, copii cu traume, copii cu comportament dificil, cu vârsta cuprinsă între patru şi optsprezece ani. Separarea copilului de familia de origine, chiar dacă această nu este funcţională declanşează un şir de consecinţe negative pe plan emoţional, cognitiv, social şi fizic. Cele mai relevante probleme cu care se confruntă copiii din centrele de plasament sunt: lipsa afecţiunii părinteşti, dificultăţi de învăţare, deprinderi de viaţă insuficient dezvoltate, orientare vocaţională limitată, subiecţi ai discriminării şi marginalizării, stimă de sine scăzută. Situaţiile copiilor din 11 centre de plasament a fost analizată şi studiată prin aplicarea metodelor de cercetare cantitative şi calitative. Rezultatele cercetărilor arată faptul că abilităţile de comunicare, negociere şi soluţionarea de probleme le lipsesc copiilor, manifestându-se prin crize de furie, apatie sau pasivitate, agresivitate şi atitudini dispreţuitoare. Una din concluzii este că dificultăţile de învăţare ale copiilor nu sunt rezultatul întârzierii mintale sau deficienţelor senzoriale, ci sunt rezultatul factorilor de mediu şi culturali.

Cuvinte cheie: copii în situaţii de risc, copii aflaţi în dificultate, marginalizare, discriminare, comportament dificil, plasamentul copilului.

1. Introduction

According to the edition from 2021of the *Report of the National Bureau of Statistics Situation of children in the Republic of Moldova* show that at the end of 2022, about 13.2 thousand children were in various risk situations, 334 of which were children with disabilities. Boys predominated in the number of children at risk, constituting percent. The highest risk situations were in rural areas, accounting for 67.2 percent. At the same time, every fourth child (23.9 percent) was aged 3-6 years, 64.0 percent were aged 7-15 years, 13.1 percent - aged 16-17 years and 12.0 percent - aged 0-2 years. According to *UNICEF's Situation Analysis of Children and Adolescents in Moldova 2022*, the absolute poverty rate among rural children was 40.5%, compared to 13.9% for urban children (Unicef, 2022). *The statistical report on children at risk and children separated from their parents for 2021* shows that at the beginning of the year 539 children were beneficiaries of temporary placement centres (PC), of which 252 girls and 287 boys.

According to statistical data in 2022 in the 26 operational placement centres, 712 children aged 0-18 years were registered, of which 52.8 percent girls

and 47.2 percent boys. According to recent data presented in this figure also include 51 beneficiaries from the Temporary Centre for Children with Disabilities Hincesti and Orhei. The management of temporary PC for children is carried out in 2 ways: centres financed from the state budget (15 centres) and centres financed from the resources of civil society organisations (11 centres). The number of children at risk growing and developing in alternative care services is increasing in Moldova, mainly due to the deteriorated socio-economic context and new vulnerabilities accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic and limited access to economic resources.

2. Profile of children in placement centres

The fundamental rights of children in Moldova are protected by the Moldovan Constitution and national laws and decrees. Protection and promotion of the rights of children and adolescents are ensured by the country's legislation, the most relevant of which are Law No. 338 of 15-12-1994 on the rights of the child published: 02-03-1995 in the Official Gazette No. 13 art. 127 and Family Code No. 1316 of 26-10-2000 published : 26-04-2001 in the Official Gazette No. 47-48 art. 210 and *Government Decision No.591/2017 for the approval of the Framework Regulation on the organization and functioning of the Social Service* Placement Centre for children separated from their parents and the Minimum Standards. The best interests of the child shall prevail and be ensured when establishing an alternative form of care for the child, when the family is no more a reliable resource for the child's development.

Child placement can be defined as a measure of protection of the child separated from his or her parents by providing conditions for the child's upbringing and care in social placement services. Currently, there is a dual system of placement of children in foster care, with some children placed in large residential institutions and others in family-type care. Despite progress in developing alternative social care, some vulnerable children are unable to access family-type services because of their special needs (e.g. children with severe disabilities, babies, children with trauma, children with challenging behaviour, street children or children who have experienced more than one form of care). The biggest challenge in the development of family social work services is the lack of human capacity at the local level, as well as the low motivation to become a professional parental assistant. Additionally, it is necessary to point out that the development of family-type social care services is uneven across the country.

In the context of Law No. 140 of on special protection of children at risk and children separated from parents, published: 02-08-2013 in the Official Monitor No. 167-172 art. 534 several situations are defined when a child may be separated from parents and for which a temporary alternative form of care is identified, these are:

− *children effectively deprived of parental/sole parental care* in situations determined by their justified stay in another part of the country or abroad for a period of more than 2 consecutive months,

− *children taken away from his or her parents* because of imminent danger to his or her life or health,

– *children who have been granted the status of a child temporarily left without parental* care or a child left without parental care,

– *abandoned children*, a children identified as being without parents or other legal guardian where the identity of neither the child nor his/her parents can be established.

Temporary placement centre for children is a residential care institution run by the Social Welfare and Family Protection Department or by private providers, established by decision of the District Council, which provides temporary assistance to a maximum of 24 children at risk aged 0-18 years for a maximum of 12 months, during which time the authorities and staff of the centre must find the best solution in the best interests of the child.

Centre - the child separated from parents, including the child victim of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking and, where appropriate, the child with severe and average disabilities, aged between 4 and 18 years, and who cannot be placed in the Extended Family, the Family-type Children's Home Service, the Professional Parental Assistance Service or the Community Home Service for Children at Risk;

The categories of children who can be admitted to placement centres are:

a) children are subjected to violence.

b) children are neglected.

c) children are involved in begging, prostitution.

d) children are deprived of parental care and supervision due to their absence from home for unknown reasons.

e) the children's parents are deceased.

f) the children are living on the street, have run away or have been driven away from home.

(g) the parents of the children refuse to exercise their parental obligations relating to the upbringing and care of the child.

h) the children have been abandoned by their parents.

(i) one of the child's parents is the subject of a legal guardianship measure (provisional guardianship, curatorship, or guardianship)

j) the children are victims of an act of crime.

Effectively, by decision of the local authority or at the request of the parents, without consulting the children's opinion even if they meet the age criteria, children end up being placed in temporary placement centres from the biological family, family-type children's home, guardianship, professional parental assistance or transferred from another residential institution.

At national level, the categories of children currently in placement centres are children temporarily left without parental care, children left without parental care, children with adoptable status, children without established status, including children who are vagrants, beggars and prostitutes, children deprived of parental care and supervision due to their absence from home for unknown reasons, children who have run away from home or have been chased away, children abandoned by their parents, children who are victims of crime and children for

whom a legal guardianship measure has been imposed on their parents/single parent.

Commissions for the protection of children in need are set up at local level and focus on preventing unjustified placement of children in residential institutions. The placement decision will be preceded by an assessment of the child's physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs, and will determine whether the placement can meet the child's needs in accordance with their needs. The local guardianship authority shall implement clear criteria that support the best interests of the child and shall NOT focus on separating the child from the family in situations where the child's development is not endangered in the family and the parents have the desire and potential to educate and care for their children in a secure environment.

Admitted to a placement centre, children experience one of the greatest psychological stresses or traumas - separation from their family environment. Dumitrana (1998) claims that separation leads to a range of negative emotional, cognitive, social, and physical consequences. The child's first social contact in the early years of life is with an attachment person, usually the mother/parents and family, and is the most important factor and setting for formation, development, and socialisation.

The British psychologist Bowlby (1951) states that everything that happens to the person in childhood and adolescence is closely linked to their subsequent development and evolution, with the parent-child relationship being a keystone that will mark the child's entire life. The fundamental emotional connection formed in the parent-child relationship is the cornerstone of the future adult's life and the best predictor of future skills and abilities. At the same time, Bowlby (1997) considers that there are 4 main characteristics of attachment:
- maintaining physical proximity in the relationship (the desire to be close to the people to whom we are attached).
- safety (returning to a particular person out of comfort or safety, so that we do not face fear or threat).
- a different kind of safety (the person we are attached to is a source of safety, allowing us to explore our environment).
- separation stress (the anxiety that arises in the absence of the person to whom we are attached).

The parent-child emotional connection has a dynamic structure, it is formed, evolves, matures, may lose intensity, deteriorate or even disappear when the attachment relationship is severed, or the attachment person disappears. The basic mission and role of attachment relationships is to protect the child from external or internal factors that could have destabilising consequences for the child. The basic indicator of good and healthy functioning is the person's ability to provide and seek protection. Attachment is formed in childhood, initially to the parent and then developing throughout life from interaction and relationships with other people.

The child develops a tendency to become attached to the caregiver, no matter how the caregiver treats the child, and any separation, whether temporary or permanent, from the caregiver is perceived as tragic by the child and can manifest itself in various ways depending on the age of the child (Dumbrăveanu, et, al., 2016). Young children perceive that they have made a mistake and are punished for it; adolescents will show hostile behaviour towards their new environment. Lack of validation of the reason for separation and estrangement from the attachment can have long-term or even lifelong negative consequences. Some children display contradictory behaviour, disharmonious, awkward movements, strange postures, sudden mood swings, nervousness, lack of concentration. Understanding attachment problems is imperative because children with insecure attachments are heading down a path full of problems and conflicts in their own relationships both in childhood and in adulthood (PRODOCS, 2022).

In the placement centres, children have their basic physiological needs met: they receive food, medical treatment, spend time in adequate conditions, take baths, stay warm. At the same time, we find that they are often emotionally and educationally neglected. Caregivers either do not have enough time or perhaps emotional resources to comfort them, talk to them, encourage them, or play with them. Most often children feel isolated in placement centres and survive on the edge of the basic needs of Maslow's pyramid. Therefore, by relating children's situation to Maslow's pyramid of general human needs, we find that it is impossible to satisfy needs at all levels. Most often children remain stuck at the first level, that of physiological needs, which inevitably, according to the author, leads to feelings of frustration. Thus, if placement services are meeting physiological needs, children experience deep feelings of frustration at the level of safety/protection needs, which necessarily makes other aspirations related to the upper rungs of the pyramid, such as social needs, being accepted in a group, belonging or the need for respect, and self-fulfilment, impossible.

The schooling of children in placement centers in various forms of education is firstly compulsory, secondly it is important for their social integration and adaptation and for obtaining a professional qualification that would help them earn a living in the future. Unfortunately, due to the lack of family/parents as the first responsible for the children's school performance, growth and development, this task is taken over by the placement centre. As a result, children are often guided to vocational schools that are close to the centre, some of which may be less competitive on the labour market.

During the period of the child's stay in the placement centre, the child-parent contact is often inconsistent, a situation which sometimes encourages neglect and abandonment of these children over time. Due to poverty, long distances, poor parenting skills, lack of specialist involvement and lack of support, parents leave their children in care and then do not visit them for long or at all. If no one in their community intervenes to mobilise and support them to resume their parenting functions, then in the meantime their skills decline, at some point they

get used to the new lifestyle without children that demands time and care, and change is much harder or impossible.

The psycho-intellectual and behavioural retardation of children in placement centres can be explained by the monotony of the living regime, the absence of individualised approach in care and education, the insufficient development of emotional and social contact, the lack of warmth from care staff, the lack of contact between children who play next to each other, „not with each other". Children also face difficulties in communication, self-care, self-serving, poor social skills and competences, low self-control and are often labelled and marginalised in the school and social environment (Chiperi, 2015). Thus, over time, children develop a strong sense of inferiority and very low self-esteem. In terms of social relationships, the biggest difficulties are reflected in the behavioural problems of some children, acts of violence and physical and emotional aggression in the child-child, child-adult relationship, their behaviour being the result of a lack of parental affection and love.

Children in placement centres who have experienced failure and unsuccess in the home environment often also experience school failure, learning disabilities, lack of individualised approach stemming from family history, truancy and dropping out of school. At the same time, the staff of the placement centres have difficulties in supporting children to achieve certain performances, the most frequently encountered are: lack of motivation and interest in learning, difficulty in working with a large number of children from different classes, little experience of working with children with special educational needs, difficulties in helping children in secondary classes VII-IX, less cooperative relationships with the school.

As a priority, the work of educators and staff of the placement centres focuses mainly on providing support for the social and school integration of children and young people and less on the development of knowledge and skills that they do not learn at school. In this context, the specialists in the placement centres need to give more time and/or find new methods of support and interaction for the children, so as to motivate and support them more to ensure school attendance and avoid dropping out.

3. Research premise

The background for the analysis of the situation of children in foster care emerged in 2015 when the PRODOCS Association launched the pilot project „From Vulnerability to Inclusion", financially supported by the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation in Switzerland. The pilot project was carried out in Chisinau municipality working with 3 temporary placement centres for children. Subsequently in 2017 the project activities spread to other 9 placement centers in the districts: Anenii Noi, Drochia, Calaraşi, Făleşti, Glodeni, Hănceşti, Teleneşti and Ştefan Vodă.

The objectives of the project are outlined by carrying out activities on 3 levels:

– at the level of placement centres through school support and social skills development activities for children.

– at the level of educational institutions through training and mentoring activities for teachers and opportunities for children to participate in the decision-making process of the school/centre.

– at the levsel of local public authorities through workshops, advocacy and adjustment of the regulatory framework concerning the foster care service.

From 2015 to 2022, PRODOCS carried out various research and interventions for and with 445 children placed in 11 foster homes. The beneficiaries of the monitored placement centres are aged between 4 and 18 years old, of which 52 percent are boys and 48 percent girls. The research methods applied in the study are quantitative (opinion poll) and qualitative (focus group and in-depth individual interview).

– Centre for Childhood, Adolescence and Family, Chişinău;

– Temporary placement Centre, Chişinău;

– Placement centre for children separated from their parents „Casa Gavroche";

– Centre for Rehabilitation and Social Integration from Anenii Noi;

– Multifunctional Centre for Social Assistance „Nufărul Alb", Glinjeni village, Făleşti district;

- Multifunctional Community Centre for Social Assistance „Încredere", Glodeni town;

– Placement center „Brânduşa", Hincesti town;

– Specialized Assistance and Temporary Placement Centre „Încredere", Ştefan Vodă town;

– Placement centre, „Aproape de Tine" Teleneşti town;

– Centre for children separated from their parents „Căldura Casei", Drochia town;

– Social assistance centre for mother-child couple and for children at risk in Olanesti village, Stefan Voda district.

This allowed to outline the realities faced by children in placement centres in Moldova, the most relevant being: lack of parental affection, learning difficulties, poor personal/interpersonal development, insufficiently developed life skills, limited vocational orientation, subjects of discrimination and marginalization, low self-esteem.

Coming from incomplete or frequently abused families, children in placement suffer from lack of parental affection. But one aspect that significantly affects children is poor communication and lack of affection from those around them. Despite the fact that it is well known that the staff of the centres cannot replace the family, they feel the need for greater closeness to the staff and would like to see greater involvement of the staff in working with the young people. In addition, they are aware that the number of educators is usually insufficient and this does not allow them to give quality time to each child and according to his/her individual needs. In order to obtain qualitative data, 20 in-depth interviews were

carried out with 10–17-year-old children in the named centres, for which we obtained the consent of the children's legal representatives. In the opinion of the children who participated in the in-depth interviews, the lack of parental affection generates the following states and statements:

     – *hurts the most*
     – *maybe I'm to blame for that*
     – *my family is the center*
     – *the hardest part is sometimes when I don't know who to tell*
     – *my mom doesn't know how long I'll be here*
     – *even if at home, they beat me I want to be there*
     – *here we have food, clothes, and bathroom, but it's not my mother*
     – *either grandma doesn't come to visit me*
     – *I got a holy icon from home; I know I'll be back.*

A part of the children from placement centres have learning difficulties that refer to a delay or disorder, a reduced emotional or behavioural development. Children's learning difficulties are not the result of mental retardation or sensory deficiencies but are largely the result of the environmental and cultural factors in which children have grown and developed up to a certain stage when they arrived in care. Stress, trauma and neglect from an early age led to specific learning difficulties in children manifested by difficulties in understanding the use of written or oral language and poor listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Once in the placement centres, the children are enrolled in new educational institutions and are evaluated by the teams of the Psycho-pedagogical Assistance Service. The aim of the evaluation is to monitor the progress of each child in order to facilitate, improve or develop certain skills or to act on specific behaviours. At the same time, assessment helps teachers monitor how children are developing, their learning difficulties and the success or lack of progress of certain strategies used. Since many children need to tailor the curriculum so that it is flexible and responds to pupils' different learning styles and abilities, ensuring that it is accessible to all (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009).

The dynamics of the children in the placement centres who have learning difficulties and have studied at least one school year on the basis of an individualised educational plan (children with special educational needs) in relation to the number of children in the placement centres can be analysed in Figure 1.

Children living in placement centres highlight problems related to personal and interpersonal development. Children often find themselves searching for their own identity, concerns about their family of origin if it is not related to them or when paternity is not confirmed, the need for protection, etc. The most common finding among adolescents in placement centers is a low level of interrelationship, often inhibited in children who come from abusive family environments. In the centres, children may show a specific way of relating to each of their careers and peers: affection and attraction towards one, indifference, coldness or even apathy towards the other.
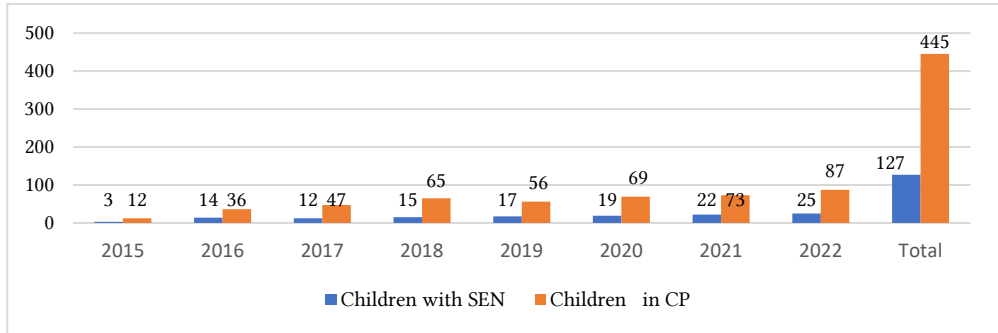
Source: Figure developed by the author as part of the research conducted by PRODOCS, 2015-2020.

Figure 1. Ratio of children in placement centres
to children with special educational needs

These relationships induce in the child certain tensions and confusion that can degenerate into conflicts, to remedy these problems children often need personal development as an alternative education program (Golu & Ionita, 2009). In the interviews, children mentioned that they experience problems related to personal and interpersonal development for the following reasons:

- I often ask myself: who am I?
- what is my family doing, why don't they look for me?
- I find it hard to talk easily to someone, they didn't teach me at home.
- here the world is good, but I don't know if it is true.
- some teachers have more time for us, others make us do homework.
- I wish I knew how to tell a girl she's nice, but I think she'll laugh at me.
- I don't feel good at school, other kids talk more. Even if I study, at school I forget and I don't want my classmates to laugh at me again.
- don't have friends only with one child I talk more with the cook.

Among children from placement centers it is evident that independent living skills are insufficiently developed. Children lack communication, negotiation, and problem-solving skills. In these circumstances, children often resolve their conflicts through rebellious attitudes, arguments with others or fits of anger, because they have not known effective communication techniques and some of them have a lower level of emotional and social maturity (USAID, 2014). Emotional reactions manifested by children ranging from crises of anger, apathy or passivity, aggression or self-aggression, contemptuous attitudes, fear, possessiveness, can generate behavioural regression over time. One of the reasons for this is low self-esteem, insufficient knowledge of one's own skills and qualities, and a tendency to undervalue oneself, which in the future could result in difficult socio-professional integration of young people from placement centres.

In order to study this aspect, an online survey was conducted and filled in by the educators of the centre with reference to children aged 10-18. The sample included 78 children, of which: children aged 9-11 years - 35, children aged 12-14 years - 27, children aged 15-18 years - 16. The research sample is a stratified multi-

stage stratified sample, representative of children aged 10-18 years in residential care centres, being the total number of children registered in 2020 (the study was conducted in 7 residential care centres). In order to ensure a sample, proportionate to the population size, geographically, the data were balanced. In Figure 2, we detail that 26 children out of 78 respondents say they have harmonious relationships and get along well with other children, 16 children say they have harmonious relationships but may have difficulties in some situations, 24 children have good relationships but sometimes need support to cope and 9 children say they have significant difficulties.

Source: Figure developed by the author as part of the research conducted by PRODOCS, June, December 2022.

Figure 2. Relationships among children from placement centres

As a result of the above difficulties, children in placement centres have complexes towards others, have difficulty accepting change and are unlikely to learn so they hardly develop and maintain positive relationships with others.

The professional orientation of children from placement centres is done by the centre staff on the basis of the children's academic achievements and potential, being mostly lacking motivation to learn and guided by the family model of not working. In this regard, there is a considerable effort to get young people to enrol and graduate even from vocational schools near the placement centres. Unfortunately, not all young people attach enough importance to school, nor do they fully realise its importance in ensuring their future autonomy and independence. On the opposite, some are determined to earn their own money as soon as possible, after 9 grades, tend to drop out of school and work some continue their studies at colleges and plan to get a decent job in order to get guardianship over younger siblings.

Children in placement centres are still sometimes subject to discrimination. The children are most seriously affected by the bad behaviour of school teachers, schoolmates, other children and young people in the placement centre. For this reason, in some cases children ask their teachers not to inform the school that they come from a placement centre, which cannot be avoided because a set of documents is presented, but the centre staff works closely with the school administration to prevent discrimination and marginalisation of children on the

basis of their origin. Frequently, children in placement centres do not report cases of discrimination in schools because they are either oblivious to it, do not want to show their pain or do not have enough confidence that someone can protect them.

Low self-esteem is primarily caused by the deprivation of a family environment based on protection, affection, listening, respect, and the existence of a permanent stable bond with family members, social isolation and exclusion. Stigmatising children at risk can lead to their social exclusion (Badea & Mitrofan, 2004). Self-esteem is lower the longer the duration of stay in a PC. Because of low self-esteem, children in PC tend not to take on any responsibilities, believing that they are not able to cope with them, because someone is always managing situations for them, and they become dependent on assistance and support. In this situation, their social adaptability may be reduced because of the closed social environment in which they live, the rigidity of social relationships and the absence of social feeling. Children have experienced various traumas, which make adapting to new situations difficult, especially for young people leaving foster care it is very challenging as they do not have sufficient financial resources, skills, and competences for individual living.

With reference to the ability of self-knowledge and self-acceptance it was found that half of the respondents, 38 children have difficulties in accepting and knowing themselves, 17 understand and accept to a large extent who they are, 16 know and accept themselves but may have some doubts and only 7 children know and accept themselves fully.
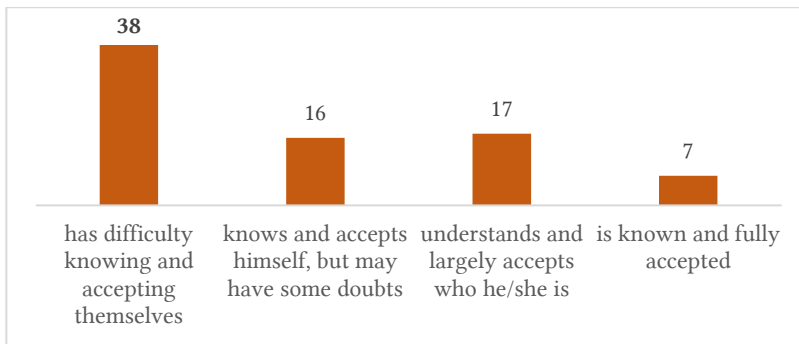
Source: Figure developed by the author as part of the research conducted by PRODOCS, December 2022.

Figure 3. Self-knowledge and self-acceptance skills

A positive self-image makes it easier for children to communicate with others, but in the case of children from PC low self-image makes them easily discouraged by failures, pessimistic and often inactive, and unaware of their possibilities and limitations.

Based on the study, there is a weak capacity to make decisions, including facing difficulties in solving their own problems. Usually, in order to be able to

make decisions, children must be given this opportunity on their own by being involved in every step of the process and being given the opportunity to choose, to assume the consequences of their choices and to draw conclusions. Children from PC often experience a strong sense of powerlessness both in terms of themselves and in solving certain crisis situations, because they have not had the opportunity to experience their own decisions and because they have not developed the ability to cope with their own decisions, whether they are successes or failures.

Conclusions

The analysis of the situation of children in placement centres revealed that the social background of the children directly influences their ability to create functional social relationships with other children and adults in their lives. Establishing and maintaining contact with biological or extended family and establishing trusting relationships with a reference person in the placement can support a child's harmonious development. Knowing the age specificities, the consequences of traumas or stress experienced by each individual child, can create the prerequisites for a harmonious emotional and behavioural adaptation in accordance with the specific needs of the child. The development by teachers of a school programme adapted to the child's abilities and potential and the close cooperation between the centre's staff and teachers can ensure modest but very important and motivating school performances for children. At the same time, the development of a day programme for each child, including entertainment activities, games, leisure activities, which could be a motivating factor for improving the social skills of each child. Tolerant behaviour and acceptance of the child by adults at school and at the placement centre can contribute to a considerable reduction in discrimination and marginalisation of children.

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