

**ANALELE ȘTIINȚIFICE
ALE
UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IAȘI
(SERIE NOUĂ)**

**SCIENTIFIC ANNALS
OF
„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY OF IAȘI
(NEW SERIES)**

**SOCIOLOGIE
ȘI ASISTENȚĂ SOCIALĂ
SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK**

Tom XV / Nr. 2

December, 2022



Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași

ANALELE ȘTIINȚIFICE ALE UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IASI
(SERIE NOUĂ) SOCIOLOGIE ȘI ASISTENȚĂ SOCIALĂ

ISSN: 2065-3131 (print) / ISSN: 2066-8961 (online)

The journal is edited by the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences and is published by the Publishing House of „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași.

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All submissions will undergo a double-blind peer-review process.

The journal is published bi-annually. Number of copies/issue: 200 copies.

Web page: <http://anale.fssp.uaic.ro/index.php/asas>

Aims: *Analele Științifice ale Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași. (Seria nouă) Sociologie și Asistență Socială* aims to promote the remarkable results of scientific and empiric researches of professorates, researchers, students, and practitioners in the field of humanist sciences in order to stimulate the optimal functioning of academic and social fields. Analyses and theoretical-methodological sociological explanations as well as the exemplification of their values at the political and social work strategies and interventions level are welcome.

Abstracting and indexing services: Scientific Annals of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Iasi (New Series) Sociology and Social Work Section are covered by several major indexing services including: **ERIH PLUS**, **EBSCO**, **PROQUEST CSA-Sociological Abstract**, **PROQUEST-Social Services Abstracts**, **PROQUEST-Worldwide Political Science Abstracts**, **CEEOL**, **Ulrich**, **IBSS**, **INDEX COPERNICUS**, **SCIPIO** and **CNCIS** (2008-2011: **B+** category).

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MINORS AND DEVIANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Lavinia-Elena OLĂNESCU¹

Abstract

The present research aims to analyze the phenomenon of deviance among minors from the perspective of specialists who work with them. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic represented a good opportunity to analyze the dynamics of the phenomenon of juvenile deviance, as many aspects of daily life have acquired other nuances through isolation, distancing, etc. Following the research, it was found that there are multiple causes of the propagation of this phenomenon, namely the deficient family environment due to the lack of parental supervision, the influence of social media, the influence of the entourage, etc. Through this research, some characteristics of minors who commit acts of deviance were proposed, as well as a profile of those who are at risk of becoming deviant. The results of the research show that an inter-institutional collaboration between the town hall, school, church and police could facilitate the reduction of deviance among minors.

Keywords: teenagers, juvenile delinquency, isolation, institutions, cyberbullying, entourage, poor family climate

Sommaire

La présente recherche vise à analyser le phénomène de la déviance chez les mineurs du point de vue des spécialistes qui travaillent avec eux. Le contexte de la pandémie de Covid-19 a représenté une bonne occasion d'analyser la dynamique du phénomène de la déviance juvénile, car de nombreux aspects de la vie quotidienne ont acquis d'autres nuances par l'isolement, la distanciation, etc. Suite aux recherches, il a été constaté qu'il existe de multiples causes à la propagation de ce phénomène, à savoir l'environnement familial déficient dû au manque d'encadrement parental, l'influence des réseaux sociaux, l'influence de l'entourage, etc. À travers cette recherche, certaines caractéristiques des mineurs qui commettent des actes de déviance ont été proposées, ainsi qu'un profil de ceux qui risquent de devenir déviants. Les résultats de la recherche montrent qu'une collaboration interinstitutionnelle entre la mairie, l'école, l'église et la police pourrait faciliter la réduction des déviances chez les mineurs.

Mots clés: adolescents, délinquance juvénile, isolement, établissements, cyberharcèlement, entourage, mauvais climat familial

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Rezumat

Cercetarea de față își propune analiza fenomenului de devianță în rândul minorilor din perspectiva specialiștilor care lucrează cu aceștia. Contextul pandemiei de Covid-19 a reprezentat un bun prilej de analiză a dinamicii fenomenului de devianță juvenilă, întrucât multe aspecte ale vieții cotidiene au căpătat alte nuanțe prin izolare, distanțare, etc. În urma cercetării, s-a constatat că există multiple cauze ale propagării acestui fenomen, respectiv mediul familial deficitar prin lipsa supravegherii părintești, influența social media, influența anturajelor etc. Prin intermediul acestei cercetări au fost propuse câteva caracteristici ale minorilor care săvârșesc acte de devianță, precum și un profil al celor care se află în riscul de a deveni devianți. Rezultatele cercetării arată că o colaborare interinstituțională dintre primărie, școală, biserică și poliție ar putea facilita diminuarea devianței din rândul minorilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: adolescenți, delincvență juvenilă, izolare, instituții, cyberbullying, anturaj, climat familial deficitar

1. Introduction

The present research considers the analysis of the specialist's perspective on juvenile deviance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, referring to the importance of collaboration between the institutions that prevent and manage juvenile deviance and the family of the deviant minor. Also, the new socio-economic context, namely the Covid-19 pandemic, brought a multitude of changes at the social level, thus, the phenomenon of juvenile deviance could have new determining factors.

Numerous post-pandemic research by universities and research centers have confirmed behavioral changes in the population due to isolation for long periods of time. These changes refer to the stress accumulated within the family through the limitation of social space, the role overload of the parents as well as the overcontrol over the children. These situations have contributed to increasing the risks of domestic violence, intra-family abuse as well as creating new forms of juvenile deviance (Mihalache, 2021, pp. 42-43).

The choice of this topic starts from the existence of numerous cases of juvenile deviance in Romania. This theme is topical, as the pandemic period has brought new forms of manifestation of the phenomenon of juvenile deviance, changing its dynamics, due to the restrictions imposed. Therefore, the present research presents the new forms and causes of juvenile deviance from the perspective of the institutions that monitor this phenomenon.

Within this research, three objectives were proposed, such as defining the profile of the deviant minor from the perspective of the specialists involved, identifying the causes of juvenile deviance during the pandemic and describing the methods of preventing this phenomenon during the pandemic.

Through this research, it was proposed to identify the difficulties of specialists in working with minors who commit criminal acts or misdemeanors, as well as their opinion about the phenomenon of minor deviance in the context of the pandemic. The research was carried out in 2021 on a group of professionals working with vulnerable minors.

Through the present research, it was possible to identify some aspects regarding possible cases of discrimination against minors in Romanian schools.

Discrimination manifested in the school space can be considered a form of deviance, as it represents a deviation from the social norm. For example, in the present research, aspects related to the theory of social labeling, marginalization or bullying were highlighted, these being part of the universe of the discriminated children.

2. Theoretical aspects

The term deviance appeared for the first time in the American specialty literature, in the last period of the 50s, when its definition changed, representing until then „pathology” or „social disorganization”, later giving it the meaning known today, respectively deviation from the norms (Ibiş, 2001, p. 7).

Deviance is defined in *the Dictionary of Sociology* „as any act, conduct or manifestation that violates or violates the written or unwritten norms of society or of a particular social group” (Zamfir, Vlăscenu, 1998, p. 165).

The first mention of the concept of deviance appeared in the writings of Emile Durkheim, in which it is specified its representation as a violation of social norms, however, noting that it can also be a regulatory phenomenon of society, having a positive meaning. From his perspective, deviance is a result of confirming the existence of inappropriate norms, not the absence of norms. This type of situation was defined by Durkheim as „anomie”, a phenomenon encountered when referring to „fundamental social changes, representing a crisis manifested in the individual's relationship with the system of values that normalizes his behavior” (Banciu et al., 1995, p. 65).

Also, there is a certain vulnerability of children who can become easy targets of delinquent adults by the fact that they present to them an imaginary world apparently without rules and libertine in which they will benefit from protection. (Mihalache, 2013, p. 135)

3. The methodological design of the research

3.1. The universe of research

This research has as its source the deviant acts from the social environment committed by minors during the pandemic period. Deviance is a phenomenon that will always be encountered, because society without deviance is unbalanced. There will always be two options regarding the behavioral pattern, the idea of good and the idea of evil. In the present case we can talk about deviance and non-deviance. The research started from this idea, because it is talking about a phenomenon that must be kept under control in order not to have a social imbalance.

In the framework of the research, the institutional perspective is taken into account, as it collaborated with the Iasi County Police Inspectorate, the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Iasi, the Iasi School Inspectorate, the St. Mary's Children's Emergency Clinical Hospital and the

„Assumption of the Virgin Mary” Church. The target group of this research is made up of specialists in working with minors from the city of Iași.

3.2. Research sample

The research sample consists of ten people, including three police officers, three social workers, two psychologists, a school inspector and a priest. They were chosen according to a well-determined criterion, namely the degree of involvement in cases of deviance/juvenile delinquency. To begin with, it is proposed to identify the causes that lead young people to commit deviant acts and what was the dynamics of this phenomenon during the pandemic period. Also, this research can identify proposals for the prevention of deviance among minors. With the help of the opinions of the representatives of these institutions, an overview of the deviant phenomenon among minors is obtained. The perspective of specialists in working with minors is important for the present research, because they have an overall view, they do not look only at the level of the individual, but at the level of society, also presenting the consequences of the pandemic on the dynamics of the phenomenon of juvenile deviance.

3.3. The purpose and objectives of the research

The purpose of the research:

The purpose of the research is to analyze the institutional perspective on juvenile deviance in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research objectives:

1. Defining the profile of minors who commit deviant acts from the perspective of the specialists involved.
2. Identifying the causes that lead to committing deviant acts by minors during the pandemic.
3. Description of the prevention methods of juvenile delinquency in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

3.4. Research questions

Q1. Can the family environment and standard of living influence the growth of juvenile deviance?

Q2. Can institutional involvement prevent juvenile deviance in a pandemic context?

Q3. Can the Covid-19 pandemic bring consequences on juvenile deviance?

3.5. Research methods and techniques

The methodology represents a theoretical analysis of the entire research by describing the techniques used within it, the purpose and objectives it pursues, the research questions and, of course, specifying the target group. To carry out the research, the method of bibliographic documentation, official documentation and statistical documentation was used in the first part of the research. Also, the sociological survey was used as a research method, with the semi-directive

interview applied individually, in order to obtain the most elaborate answers. This research technique was used because the institutional perspective on the phenomenon of deviance among minors was followed, and qualitative research is necessary for a more precise analysis. Interviewees were assigned a code consisting of numbers and the abbreviated name of the profession. Social workers will be identified by the codes Sw1, Sw2 and Sw3, police officers by the codes Pol1, Pol2 and Pol3, psychologists will be assigned the codes Psh1 and Psh2, the school inspector will be identified by the code SchInps1, and the priest will be assigned the code Pr1. The interview guide was applied between May 14 and June 14, 2021 and contains 14 questions directed at three central themes, as follows: the perception of specialists on the phenomenon, the causes and determining factors and the institutional role in the prevention and management of the phenomenon. This interview guide has been pre-tested for possible improvements. Pre-testing was carried out on a single person, also a specialist in working with minors, who provided information suitable for the present research, but not sufficiently detailed. Following the conduct of that interview, one of the questions regarding the influence of the minor's material situation on committing deviant acts was modified. Before the pretest, the question referred only to those with a precarious situation, but the interviewee believes that children from wealthy families can also be deviant. Thus, taking into account his opinion, the respective changes were made.

The themes pursued in the interviews are:

T1: *Specialists perception of juvenile deviance*

Q.1.1 An increase in juvenile deviance/delinquency has been observed in recent years. Can you tell me your opinion about this phenomenon?

Q.1.2. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, how do you personally think the number of crimes committed by minors has evolved? Did the torts manifest themselves in the usual forms or did they take other forms?

Q.1.3. Could you provide us with a portrait of the deviant minor?

Q.1.4. How would you call a deviant minor in one sentence?

Q.1.5. Can a deviant/delinquent child be brought on a straight path or will he be a delinquent later?

T2: *Delineation of the causes and determinants of juvenile deviance*

Q.2.1. What do you think are the causes of juvenile delinquency/deviance, both in general and in the context of the pandemic?

Q.2.2. Can the material situation of the family from which the minor comes influence his behavior in a negative sense?

Q.2.3. To what extent can the material situation of the family influence the deviant behavior of the minor?

Q.2.4. What do you think about the role of education in deviant behavior?

Q.2.5. What do you think is the role of the Internet in deviant behavior, both normally and in the context of the pandemic?

Q.2.6. Do you think that lack of socialization can be a contributing factor to deviance among minors? How do you assess the role of the group in the development of behaviors in children and young people?

T3: *Institutional intervention in the prevention of juvenile deviance*

Q.3.1. In your experience, how can we prevent deviance/delinquency among minors?

Q.3.2. How can we help minors to overcome this situation, or deviant behavior?

Q.3.3. Can the church have a role in prevention and intervention in the case of deviant children? Which?

3.6. Presentation and analysis of results

As part of this research, ten interviews were conducted with specialists in working with minors. Thus, in the following, the data obtained from the interviews are presented and analyzed, according to the previously proposed themes.

T.1. Specialists perceptions of juvenile deviance

The opinion of the interviewed people about the phenomenon of juvenile deviance is predominantly the same, namely all ten specialists interviewed believe that deviance among minors has increased in recent years, but it is not necessarily a consequence of the pandemic. Juvenile deviance has existed and will always exist, according to one of the psychologists interviewed. Also, juvenile delinquency is currently one of the most serious social problems facing our country, because, regardless of whether we are talking about crimes or misdemeanors, the involvement of children or adolescents in committing them represents a much greater responsibility on the part of the state, through its institutions.

Regarding juvenile deviance during the Covid-19 pandemic, there are different opinions, as some of the specialists believe that it has decreased, as educational institutions were closed, classes were held online, and freedom of movement was restricted, while others are of the opinion that the phenomenon has increased in 2020. According to the statistics mentioned by Sw1 „for 100 defendants sent to court in 2020, six are minors”. However, six out of the ten specialists believe that criminality has transferred to the online environment, as cyberbullying has gained momentum. Teenagers receive threats through social networks, children access pornographic websites and post statements inciting hatred or with suicidal tendencies, according to the psychologists interviewed. On the other hand, four of the ten specialists say that the crimes committed by minors fell into the same criminal segment, namely thefts, robberies, assaults. Thus, it can be mentioned that 60 percent of those interviewed claim that juvenile deviance has undergone transformations, while 40 percent of them believe that the phenomenon has not undergone major changes.

Regarding the portrait of the deviant/delinquent minor, the interviewees have a common point of view, more precisely, they believe that the deviant minor is a child or teenager who deviates from the norm by committing various antisocial

acts, such as the consumption of alcohol or hallucinogenic substances, use of vulgar language, aggression, poor material situation, school absenteeism or school dropout. However, depending on the category of specialists interviewed, differences in the characteristics provided can be observed. Thus, the police believe that deviant minors are „*young people who have emotional deficiencies and can be easily manipulated by those around them*”, terrible, lacking parental supervision and control, with communication deficiencies, more precisely with parents, teachers or other people who they can help correct inappropriate attitudes and behaviors. The emotional baggage of deviant/delinquent minors can be characterized by emotional or material needs, frustrations, traumas or we can talk about a „*genetic predisposition*” to commit deviant acts. Minors are subjective in making decisions, due to the lack of life experience and the correct information package. They „*often do not understand the consequences of his actions, they try to minimize them*”.

The perspective of the social workers, regarding the portrayal of the deviant minor, emphasizes his abnormal biopsychosocial development, considering him socially maladjusted, as he has no affection and attention in the family environment.

From a psychological point of view, the deviant minor is characterized by social immaturity, emotional-behavioral instability with difficulties in adapting to society, being introverted. He has „*an unfinished, unpolished behavior, traits that lead him to not shy away from anything, referring to the commission of crimes*”.

Following this detailed portrayal of the deviant minor, the experts were asked to state what they would call such a minor in one sentence. The expressions used by them are similar or even identical. Thus, four of the ten specialists consider the deviant minor a „*victim*”, two others say that he is „*lost*”, and the opinions of the other four specialists are as follows: „*unhappy*”, „*in need*”, „*adrift*” and „*vulnerable*”. According to these data, it is observed that 40 percent of the specialists characterize the minor as a victim, 20 percent consider him lost, and 40 percent of the total is distributed equally to each of the four opinions of the specialists, thus representing ten percent of the total number of the interviewed people.

Regarding the delinquent future of this category of minors, all the specialists interviewed are of the opinion that a minor with deviant behavior can be reformed, but only under certain circumstances. Thus, the risk of recidivism can be reduced with the help of specialized programs, through psychological counseling, closer supervision by parents and teachers, as they notice the child's or adolescent's deviant tendencies from the early stages. However, in the applied interview, Pol1 supports the existence of two categories of deviant minors, the classification criterion being the types of crimes or misdemeanors they have committed. There were situations in which the children realized the mistakes they made and corrected their behavior, of course, benefiting from the support of the family, the school, etc. In this category are those who usually commit out of fear, under the influence of their entourage, certain crimes with a lower degree of social danger. For them, „*the experience they went through, namely the visits to the police,*

represented a life lesson from which they learned". We can also discuss a category, smaller in quantity, who adopted delinquent behavior from an early age, minors who did not benefit from prevention or intervention services at the appropriate time or for whom the services did not prove to be effective. For them, *„inappropriate behavior has become a way of life, since the social and family environment in which they lived did not offer them other alternatives „*. According to the data provided by Psh2, *„the internal statistics of the National Penitentiary Administration show us that a considerable percentage of children admitted to educational centers are later found in prisons for adults”*.

So, in most of the cases, a deviant minor can correct his behavior or his deviant behavior can get worse. In order not to become a criminal later, family support and acceptance of specialist help is very important.

T.2. Delineating the causes and determinants of juvenile deviance

The causes of juvenile deviance/delinquency are multiple, more precisely, genetic or biological, psychological, social, family, educational. All the people interviewed believe that these are the main causes of juvenile deviance. However, it could be observed that in all the discussions held with the specialists in working with minors, the emphasis was placed on two more common causes, namely those of a family nature, implicitly educational and those of a social nature.

Dysfunctions in the family environment, such as single-parent families, blended families, the existence of domestic violence, represent a major influence in the behavior and personality of the minor, since this is the model provided by the parents, and the child considers it to be suitable and will take it over. This situation can also be possible when we are discussing parents with a criminal history. Although this parental model is not worthy of following, the minor may consider it suitable, since it is his only educational landmark. Another cause is represented by the child's entourage, which, in turn, can offer a way of negative socialization, through his involvement in activities that violate the law, not necessarily of great gravity. In general, *„minors end up committing such acts out of fear or to avoid being laughed at in front of their friends”*, according to Pol1.

The lack of connection between family and school is an important cause of juvenile deviance, since the child carefully monitored and directed towards appropriate behavior will not be as prone to deviant behavior as a child neglected by both family and school. Thus, there are cases where parents denigrate the school in front of their children, as their educational level is precarious. Also, three of the ten specialists believe that the mass media can have a great influence in the formation of an opinion, regarding the school environment in Romania. In the news bulletins, we hear how teachers often commit misdemeanors or crimes in schools, how students bully each other, or there are discussions about the school curriculum, which is considered outdated or too busy. Unfortunately, the mass media does not support the school environment or education as much as it should, and this can be seen at a social level, by conducting opinion polls regarding the

school satisfaction of students. These factors definitely influence in making a decision about school absenteeism or school dropout.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, school units were closed, and classes were held online. This caused changes in the daily life of a family, influencing the child's behavior as well. The interviewed specialists support a common point of view regarding this aspect, namely, the restriction of the movement of people, both during the day and at night, led to spending a much longer time within the family. When discussing dysfunctional families, time spent within such a family can be a prime determinant of a minor's deviant behavior. Also, the closure of playgrounds and malls delimited the social environment of the child or teenager, which is limited to the family or the street. These restrictions favored the emergence of inappropriate or deviant behaviors, as minors lacked an important component of life, namely socialization.

Regarding the material situation from which the minor comes, specialists believe that this can influence the conduct of the minor in a negative sense. Thus, according to what was mentioned by Pr1, *„there can certainly be this influence, both in the poor environment and in the wealthiest, if there is a body-soul imbalance in the family”*. When a child is raised with only materialistic ideas, he will always try to find opportunities to earn easily and quickly, but if he has financial education from the family or school, he will not act inappropriately. During the pandemic period, in addition to the imposed restrictions, it can be mentioned that many activities were blocked and went bankrupt, and many parents became unemployed. This fact can be a determining factor of criminality, since the lack of necessary resources can change a person's thinking, especially when we talk about minors, who have no life experience. The sudden change these children/adolescents may go through may lead them to commit acts against the law in order to obtain food or other necessities.

However, *„a precarious situation is not a preamble to a criminal career, just as a good material situation is not an insurance for a lifestyle free of delinquent behaviors”*, according to what Pol3 said. Regarding this fact, all ten specialists interviewed confirmed that a good material condition does not guarantee success in life, but money can help support a child's education. The well-to-do family, who wants to correct their child, will have an additional asset to facilitate the correction of the minor. Thus, he will have the opportunity to ask for specialized help, he will be able to travel more with the deviant minor in order to distance him from the negative influence coming from the environment and he will be able to encourage him to perfect certain artistic or intellectual qualities, occupying the minor's time with constructive activities.

After analyzing the answers provided by the specialists, it can be said that both children from financially disadvantaged families can look for sources of income through illegal activities, and those from families with good and very good material possibilities can look, under the influence of their surroundings, to supplement their income for entertainment (consumption of substances with psychoactive effects, company material goods, such as telephones, clothes, etc.).

The common factor in both situations is the lack of permanent supervision by the parents, the lack of knowledge of the surroundings, the places and environments frequented by minors and the lack of a permanent connection between the family and the school.

Looking at the role of education in deviant behavior, it represents „*the basic pillar of a person's psycho-social development, influencing his development and the outcome composed of personality and character traits, when he becomes an adult*”, according to the information provided by Pol2. Seven of the ten specialists interviewed believe that the role of education is very important in influencing deviant behavior, whether we are talking about education in the family, education in the school environment or education in other informal environments. Three other specialists believe that other factors are more important, such as the family, more precisely the affection in the family environment. Thus, 70 percent of the studied sample considers the role of education to be essential in the behavior of minors. An educated young person will have the ability to respond to complex needs and situations. Education takes place in the family, which is the environment in which a huge influence is exerted on minors, both directly and indirectly. The power of example is very great, because children will adopt the behavior of their parents, the family environment being the first factor that forms a person. Psh1 believes that „*from a certain age it is more difficult to educate a child, so the education of the seven years at home must be effective in order not to have a child with behavioral disorders later on*”.

By analyzing the responses of the interviewed specialists, it was found that the role of education is important in the formation of minors, but the difference is made by how the child receives the education. There must be continuity between the education received in the family and that received in the academic environment, these being complemented by the affective factor, mentioned by three of the ten specialists in working with minors.

Regarding the role of the Internet in deviant behavior, the interviewees mentioned some important aspects, such as the beneficial part of its use by minors, since the information on the Internet can be helpful for the intellectual development of minors, but there is also a harmful part of its use, accessing sites with inappropriate content for minors, excessive use of social networks and some purposes for which minors use them, namely for threatening, inciting or sexually explicit messages and for connecting with toxic entourages . Thus, all ten specialists believe that the Internet has an important role in the manifestation of deviant behavior. Next, their perspectives are presented, depending on the field in which they operate.

With its appearance, „*the Internet became a real Pandora's box for society*”, bringing, in addition to countless benefits, a lot of possibilities for breaking the rules. Pol3 mentioned in the interview information regarding criminality in the online environment, namely its very fast development and diversification, representing a field/being in constant innovation. Thus, the expansion of the types of devices that make it possible to access the mobile Internet has led to a major and

continuous increase in the number of users, most of whom are children or teenagers, and in recent years there has been a decrease in the age from which minors start using the internet. Considering this fact, the victim risk potential is much higher, also taking into account the psycho-social characteristics of children/adolescents, namely curiosity, fearlessness, naivety, the need for socialization and affection.

Starting with the period of the state of emergency generated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the young people had to conduct online courses. In this context, they had the opportunity to surf the Internet unsupervised, where they could access age-inappropriate audio-video information, this fact increasing the curiosity to try new things or to follow the challenges launched by social networks.

From the perspective of psychologists, during the pandemic period there was an increase in the number of children and adolescents suffering from various ailments due to models promoted on the Internet or messages on social networks. Thus, Psh1 believes that „*the Internet is a model for young people, and they, not being totally defined, are easily influenced and do not have a filter to absorb information, so they take inappropriate information*”. Also, many children and adolescents have been found to have anxious predispositions caused by the Internet, and in extreme cases to suicide attempts.

Another important aspect observed after data collection, would be the common point of view of three of the ten specialists regarding mandatory control filters for minors in the virtual environment. Thus, they believe that their lack combined with poor parental supervision favors the minor's deviant behavior.

So, according to Pr1, „*the internet, like a knife, can have a beneficial role, but also an evil role, it depends on who uses it and how*”. On the one hand, it is an infinite source of information, on the other hand, it creates addiction and leads to the development of deviant behaviors.

Socialization is a very important factor in the manifestation of deviant behavior, since socializing with inappropriate people or entourages with concerns outside the norm encourages deviant behavior, and its lack, following the creation of the pandemic context, causes personality disorders, anxiety, depression, etc. All ten specialists interviewed agree on this statement. Also, Sw1 believes that „*when we talk about socialization we think of a process that takes place from the individual to society, but also vice versa; each needs the other*”. Thus, the lack or deficiency of one of these processes disrupts the balance and favors the phenomenon of deviance, especially among minors. Being personalities in the making, minors put a lot of emphasis on group opinion.

During adolescence, socialization is very important, because minors in this category believe that they have enough experience and can make decisions on their own in borderline situations. Adolescents' tendency to choose reference persons from their surroundings, generally of the same age, can lead them to make not the best choices and to have informal, often deviant, behavioral benchmarks.

Lack of socialization can have several effects, such as increasing the risk of victimization, referring to „*a withdrawn, introverted child who does not know how*

to relate to those around him and who can easily become the target of mean jokes from others or even the victim of a criminal". Also, the lack of socialization can also cause the appearance of inappropriate behaviors among minors. For example, due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, socialization suffered, the ways of spending free time were reduced, and for this reason, „against the background of fear and the desire to stand out, *they appeared inappropriate behavior of some groups of children in the public space, such as disturbances of order and public peace, aggression, destruction, robberies, etc.*, according to the information provided by Pol1. In this context, of the lack of socialization, Sw2 believes that „*parents should pay more attention to minors so they don't feel alone or abandoned*".

Following the presentation of these data, we believe that each of the causes and determining factors of deviance contributes to the same extent to its manifestation among minors.

T.3. Institutional intervention in the prevention of juvenile deviance

Within this theme, the specialists answered questions regarding prevention and intervention regarding juvenile deviance, as well as the role of institutions in these actions. Thus, the specialists included in the research sample believe that the prevention of deviance among minors is a long-term process involving several social and family factors. Pol3 believes that the prevention of deviant behavior among minors can only be achieved with „*the sustained involvement of the family-school-police-NGO partnership through participation in informative-preventive, mediation, debate and counseling activities*".

The prevention of the adoption of inappropriate or deviant behaviors among minors is achieved by intervening on the causes, conditions and circumstances that can generate or favor criminal acts, acting both on minors and on the environment to which they belong. This way of approaching the problem involves a collaboration of the Police with other institutions or organizations with attributions or concerns in the field of child protection. The prevention activity of the police is directed, above all, to children in risk situations.

First of all, it is necessary for parents to be attentive to the behavioral changes of children, not to treat them superficially, and if they cannot manage them by themselves, to request support, either from the extended family, or from teachers, social services, the police, NGOs, etc. Also, Sw1 considers „*knowing the dynamics of the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency and researching the field*" an important part of prevention, as information facilitates this process.

The deviance shown among minors can be prevented by „*education adapted to the normal principles of the functioning of a society, the development of the child's empathic instinct and emotional intelligence*", according to the information provided by Pol2. At the same time, „*ensuring a harmonious family climate can represent the best method of preventing juvenile deviance*", since a healthy environment does not stimulate deviant behavior, but a compliant one, says SchInsp1.

Regarding the institutional intervention, respectively the help offered in cases of juvenile deviance, the specialists emphasize institutional collaboration with the family of the deviant minor. Thus, we are talking about awareness and prevention programs that are carried out in all the institutions involved in combating this phenomenon, namely school, police, constabulary, public social assistance services, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and the Center for Resources and Educational Assistance. Also, supporting the families from which the deviant minors come can help to reduce the phenomenon, especially when it comes to families with limited financial possibilities.

The school environment can help minors with deviant behavior by offering support services, such as adapted programs, differentiated work methods or the allocation of a support teacher. SchInsp1 claims that „*training and stimulating involvement in extracurricular activities adapted to individual passions*” helps minors to overcome the difficult situation in which they find themselves.

Sw2 mentioned in the interview, the importance of the community in terms of interventions aimed at deviant minors. Thus, the community contributes to the reduction of juvenile deviance through referrals made to institutions specialized in such cases. Community support complements family and institutional efforts in its involvement in reducing juvenile deviance. In this context, we are talking about a much more complex collaboration than the one previously mentioned, namely that between family and institutions. The frequenting of day centers in the community by minors can help them to know their environment better, to understand from the stories of other minors that deviating from society's norms or breaking the law are not suitable options.

The intervention of doctors in cases of juvenile deviance consists of counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy or occupational therapy. Juveniles are encouraged to practice work therapy because it distracts them from committing deviant acts, gives them responsibility and gives them a purpose in the community they belong to. Regular visits to a psychologist can help deviant minors understand the mistakes they have made and change their attitude in a positive way. However, the therapy cannot have an effect as long as the minor is not receptive and aware of his actions that do not conform to society.

The role of the church, with regard to minors with deviant conduct, can be an important one for the purification of soul and body. All specialists support the importance of the church in correcting the behavior of deviant minors. Thus, attending places of worship can be a good practice for those children whose parents are familiar with the church or for those who refuse, due to fear, the interventions of specialized institutions. Pr1 believes that sometimes, „*the church has a more important role than the school or even the family of the deviant child*”, probably not having the necessary support from the two environments, some minors turn to the church with the hope that they will find some answers. Also, Pr1 mentions the existence of many associations generated by the church, among which are mentioned, „Provita”, „Glasul Vieții”, Placement centers for freckled people, Homes for abandoned children, Addiction centers, etc. Seminars, conferences, courses on

children with inappropriate behavior are permanently organized in the Church. On a smaller level, meetings are held periodically with young people, on various topics, in order to spend quality time with people who can truly represent a model for these minors.

Considering the analysis of these data, it can be established that prevention and institutional intervention regarding minors with deviant behavior require long-term collaboration with the family and the community from which the minor comes. The more means of supervision there are, the less misdemeanors or criminal acts committed by minors.

Conclusions

Following the collection and analysis of all the data obtained in this research, through bibliographic and statistical documentation, and with the help of semi-structured interviews, some conclusions of the research can be formulated.

The dynamics of the phenomenon of juvenile deviance changed with the emergence of the pandemic context. Changes were found in the form of its manifestation, namely the accelerated evolution of deviance in the online environment through social networks. The conduct of online courses led to spending a much longer time in front of the computer or other internet access devices, thus, the students being much more concerned with the virtual environment than they were before the Covid-19 pandemic. Also, the imposed restrictions caused an increase in the time spent at home, which created frustrations among minors, who did not have the opportunity to interact with friends, to spend free time in another environment. Reducing the recreational possibilities of minors favors the emergence of deviant behaviors, as they may feel trapped and accuse depressive states.

The purpose of this research was to analyze the institutional perspective on juvenile deviance during the Covid-19 pandemic. By performing this analysis, several ideas can be outlined regarding the dynamics of the phenomenon.

The objectives of this research were achieved. Thus, within this, a profile of minors who commit deviant acts was drawn with the help of specialists, it was possible to identify the main causes of the appearance of the phenomenon of deviance among minors and a series of methods were presented by which contraventions can be prevented or reduced / crimes committed by minors in the pandemic context.

Through this research, the three research questions were validated, demonstrating the influence of the family environment and the standard of living in increasing the phenomenon of juvenile deviance, the effectiveness of institutional help and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on this phenomenon. Thus, in the following, some defining aspects of the research are briefly presented.

The family environment from which the minor comes has a major influence on deviant behavior (Medeleanu, Moron, 2022a), through the lack of essential factors in his life, namely education, affection or provision of daily

necessities. The material situation of the family from which the minor comes is a determining factor in the growth of juvenile delinquency, since a precarious situation can lead the minor to commit some contraventions in order to procure food or other necessary objects that are not provided to him in the family environment. Also, a good or very good material situation is a determining factor of deviance among minors, because the lack of financial education or the desire to assert themselves in front of the environment can lead them to purchase alcohol, hallucinogenic substances, etc.

Institutional involvement can help prevent the phenomenon of deviance, both in general and in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, but only with good collaboration with the minor and his family (Medeleanu, Moron, 2022b). During the interviews, the specialists in working with minors mentioned the existence of cases in which the family refuses specialized help, and the juvenile delinquent becomes an adult criminal later.

The consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic certainly exist at the level of the phenomenon of juvenile deviance (Pîrju, 2019), both at the social level and at the mental and emotional level. The restrictions have led minors to spend most of their time indoors, surfing the Internet excessively. Online courses made many of the minors absent from them or even abandon their studies, not adapting to the new way of teaching. However, they preferred to spend time destructively on the Internet, taking on some negative or deviant patterns. This situation favored the emergence of stress, anxiety, depressive states, as they lacked face-to-face interaction, diversification of activities, etc.

So, the phenomenon of juvenile deviance during the Covid-19 pandemic has enriched its form of manifestation, existing both in the real and virtual environments. The prevention of deviance among minors may be possible, but it requires a collaboration between several environments, namely institutional ones, such as the school, the police, the town hall, the church and the family environment of the minor. The receptivity and cooperation of the minor and his family are very important in preventing and combating juvenile deviance.

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THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS

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Abstract

The migration phenomenon affects the population globally. The most affected by this phenomenon are the children and teenagers left at home, without the support and presence of the parent or parents who have gone to work abroad. The objective of the research is to identify the impact of the migration phenomenon on the relationship between young people and their parents during childhood and adolescence. A semi-structured individual interview was applied to a number of 8 participants aged between 19 and 23 from Timișoara. The results showed that the impact of the absence of parents in the relationship with young people has negative effects in the affective and emotional sphere.

Keywords: migration, absence of parents, teens-parent relationship, communication

Résumé

Le phénomène de la migration affecte la population à l'échelle mondiale. Les plus touchés par ce phénomène sont les enfants et adolescents laissés à la maison, sans le soutien et la présence des parents partis travailler à l'étranger. L'objectif de la recherche est d'identifier l'impact que le phénomène de la migration a eu sur la relation entre les jeunes et leurs parents pendant l'enfance et l'adolescence. Dans cette approche, la méthode de l'entretien individuel semi-structuré a été utilisée, appliquée à un nombre de 8 participants âgés de 19 à 23 ans de Timișoara. Les résultats ont montré que l'impact de l'absence des parents dans la relation avec les jeunes a des effets négatifs dans la sphère affective et émotionnelle.

Mots clés: migration, manque de parents, relation jeunes-parents, communication

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Rezumat

Fenomenul migrației afectează populația la nivel global. Cei mai afectați de acest fenomen sunt copiii și adolescenții rămași acasă, lipsiți de sprijinul și prezența părintelui sau a părinților plecați la muncă în străinătate. Obiectivul cercetării este de a identifica impactul pe care l-a avut fenomenul migrației asupra relației dintre tineri și părinți în perioada copilăriei și adolescenței. În acest demers, s-a utilizat metoda interviului individual semi-structurat, aplicat unui număr de 8 participanți cu vârsta cuprinsă între 19 și 23 de ani din Timișoara. Rezultatele au arătat că impactul absenței părinților în relația cu tinerii are efecte negative în sfera afectivă și emoțională.

Cuvinte cheie: migrație, lipsa părinților, relația tânăr-părinte, comunicare

1. Introduction

Migration represents one of the most widespread and important problems of today's society. This phenomenon means leaving the place of residence and moving to another region of the same country or to a foreign country, temporarily or permanently, for various reasons. The most common of these are the desire to satisfy certain financial or social needs, poverty and the lack of a decent living (Vadean, Piracha, 2009, apud Bulgaru, 2020).

Migration has a beneficial purpose, parents go to work abroad to ensure financial stability and better living conditions, but in addition to these, migration also has some negative effects. The absence of parents in the child's life, especially during the most important periods, such as childhood and adolescence, in which physical, psychological, and social changes are part of a long and complex process, can lead to problems in development and the social, emotional, and psychological progress of the child.

Tomescu-Dumitrescu (2019) states that with the fall of communism, Romania faced an alarming increase in the migrant population. After the opening of the borders and the introduction of visas and work permits, the number of permanent emigrations decreased, but the number of temporary ones increased spectacularly, having serious repercussions in the economic, social, and psychological fields.

Although some of those who went to work abroad achieved their goals (to provide the family with better financial stability, a better life or succeeded professionally), all of these being beneficial effects, there are also negative implications of this phenomenon, mostly affecting the family and its members. In these cases, the most disadvantaged are the children, whose emotional support is suddenly interrupted (Bulgaru, 2020).

2. Psychosocial effects of parental migration on children

Currently, the temporarily separated family is becoming a widespread phenomenon, which brings several problems in the sphere of interactions between family members. Normally, in families where both parents are present, the responsibilities are shared, complementing each other, but when there is only one parent, the responsibilities increase with frustration and strain, especially when

the child lacks the support of both parents and is left to assume obligations and tasks by himself or with the help of grandparents or other relatives (Lupaş, 2018). This phenomenon, by which the child is forced to give up his own needs in favor of siblings or other family members, can have consequences that are reflected in adult life, as well as in the social life: friends, life partners, co-workers (Hoper, 2007, apud Bulgaru, 2020).

Most of those who migrate, do so for the well-being of the family, which usually remains in the country. Research on the phenomenon shows that the situation of those who remain is quite optimistic, from a financial point of view, but it is notable that there is significant loss in other areas, which cannot be equated with the satisfaction of a better financial situation (Hendricks, Bartram, 2019). Gherasim (2016) claims that the effects of migration are varied depending on the aspects of the separation, such as the time spent in the absence of the parents, the way of communication between parents and the child and the gender of the emigrant parent. Longer separation from parents leads to an increase in children's anxious and depressed states, feelings of abandonment and dissatisfaction with their own lives, although contact is maintained through technology, even with parents returning home, this process of separation and reunification is psychologically difficult for children.

As Gorbunov (2020) states in his study, the quality of life of children with migrant parents is significantly lower than that of children unaffected by migration, the first group showing low values in the sphere of psycho-social and emotional health. The child's need to receive affection from the parents is reduced by the increase in the period spent in their absence.

Staying at home, children and teenagers found different coping methods, more or less beneficial, depending on each person's personality and how they viewed the experience of separation from the parents. Seeking the support of friends, family members or teachers is one of the most beneficial ways to cope with the emotions and stressful situations caused by the absence of a parental figure (Muller et al., 2020). Iurchevici and Toşa (2021) observed that social support, especially in the lives of children and adolescents whose parents are abroad, represents an „essential protective factor” increasing the level of resilience. However, it should be noted that the relationship with the parents remains an important part of the child's social and emotional life, being defining in the development process. On the other hand, the lack of control over the child can push them towards deviant behaviors. Children may start using alcohol, tobacco, drugs, be violent, drop out of school, steal, all out of a desire for revenge and to show their dissatisfaction with the situation they are in, being deprived of the presence of the parent (Lazariuc, 2012).

Despite the fact that they understand the reason for their parents' departure, children face a rather difficult time from an emotional point of view, experiencing emotions such as longing, loneliness, sadness, anxiety, fear and even depression. These feelings are mostly due to the separation from parents, reduced communication, the imbalance of the parent-child relationship, as well as the

awareness of the parents' sacrifice (Lobos *et al.*, 2019). But there is also the less positive side of things, caused by neglect and lack of supervision on the part of parents or those in whose care the children are left. The difficulty of maintaining the parent-child bond, as well as the lack of communication and the impossibility of the parent to supervise the child can be observed during the child's school period, through the child's low results, lack of motivation and desire to learn (Antia *et al.*, 2020).

3. The purpose of the research

The purpose of the research is to identify the relationship difficulties between the young person and the parent caused by their migration abroad during childhood and adolescence.

4. Research objectives

1. Identifying the difficulties faced by young people in the relationship with their parents following their migration during childhood.
2. Identifying the differences between the effects of one parent being absent and both parents being absent.
3. Identifying young people's perception of the phenomenon of parents' migration abroad.

5. Research questions

1. What are the relationship difficulties between young people and their parents who were abroad during their childhood?
2. What are the differences between the effects of single-parent migration and the effects of both-parent migration?
3. What is the young people's perception of the phenomenon of parents' migration abroad?

6. Participants

The study participants were young people/students from Timișoara whose parents were abroad for more than three months, especially during their childhood. The research group is made up of eight young people aged between 19-23, who were identified and selected via the snowball method. The data was collected between May and June 2022. Out of the eight participants in the study, four of them experienced the departure of the father abroad, three felt the absence of both parents and only one, the departure of the mother (Table 1).

Table 1. Age, gender, and occupation of study participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Occupation
AS	21	female	student
CC	20	female	student
GB	20	female	student
CM	22	female	student
DI	21	male	student
EA	22	female	student
LH	23	female	student
AH	19	female	student

7. Procedure

This research is based on a qualitative method. The instrument was the semi-structured interview, with the aim of collecting data on the effects and perceptions of young people on the migration of their parents, thus serving to understand the problem from the perspective of the respondents. The topics addressed in the interview are related to the relationship and communication between parents and respondents, as well as those with the rest of the members, the experiences in the absence of parents, the changes felt with the departure of parents, as well as the perception of young people towards the effects of migration on the family.

The young people's participation in the study was voluntary, the interviews took place on the Google Meet platform. Before starting the actual interview, the subjects gave their consent, and were that their identification data will remain confidential. They had the right to choose whether they wanted the interview to be recorded, though three of the participants rejecting this. Interview scheduling was done at a convenient date and time.

8. Results

8.1. Difficulties

In this first section, we wanted to present the difficulties faced by young people in the absence of their parents during childhood/adolescence and the experience of the absence of parents from an affective point of view. The results differ depending on the age at which the young person first experienced the departure of the parent and the length of time spent in the absence of the parent. In the case of the respondents, the youngest age at which the parents went abroad was four years old, respectively the oldest was sixteen years old, and the longest period in the absence of the parent was three years, the shortest being four months.

Separation from a parent was not easy for any of the study participants, with the impact being felt on an emotional level mostly through longing, frustration, anxiety, and confusion. One of the participants stated that „The absence of the father figure was felt (...) the grandfather fulfilled the role very well.”

(DI), and another claimed that - „I didn't necessarily feel safe.” (AH). Regarding the difficulties they faced in the absence of their parents, half of them stated that it led to poor communication and that they felt a lack of support - „You also need support. (The boyfriend) is making up for dad.” (CM), especially in household chores, but also the physical presence of the parents: „Communicating with him, because I was used to his presence at home daily.” (AH). There were also respondents who said that they did not feel any difficulty in the absence of their parents „I encountered no difficulties. I knew how to manage my father's absence very well (...) through phone conversations, through the awareness that he is doing this for me.”(DI).

When asked if they considered that they were given additional responsibilities during the absence of their parents, three young people claimed that in the absence of their mother they had to learn how to manage their own household „When I was left alone, I had to make my own food and pay the bills” (EA), only two of the other participants stated that they did not feel that extra tasks were added to them „Nothing more was added to what was already a responsibility for me.” (LH)

Six of the eight participants in the study answered that they did not feel that they lacked anything in childhood, but two of them confessed that they lacked the presence and emotional support of their parents „I saw children going to kindergarten or school with their fathers (...) I wanted my father to take me to school too”(CM).

8.2. The parent-youth relationship before and after going abroad

In the second section, the relationship between the young people and their parents was described, both before and after going to work abroad. The focus was on identifying the changes in the relationship and communication patterns.

Regarding communication between parents and young people, they stated that it was not a problem, it was mostly done daily or every other day, the answer being the same now, communication being facilitated by technology and various social networks. All participants also stated that their current relationship with their parents is much better and closer as they grow „(Dad) is my best friend.” (CM), „My mother is my best friend” (EA), „I always had a good relationship with my parents.” (DI) and that the experience of their parents leaving made them more responsible, more mature „It increased my level of resistance in more difficult situations; helped me see this side of the world too, with harder things to do.”(AS). One of the participants stated that he felt more motivated after realizing that his parents left to provide him with a better life „I was motivated because I realized that they work for me and I had to repay them, and this year I did it, finally. (...) They are very proud of me.” (DI).

Regarding the changes in the relations with the parents produced by the migration, three of the young people claimed that there were no changes, two of them felt some distance from them „I was much more open with them before they left (...) I didn't really know what to say.” (GB), and the other three confessed that

they started to communicate more often with the parents „we started talking more than we did before he (father) left.” (AH)

8.3. Differences between one parent leaving and both parents leaving

The third theme had the purpose of identifying the differences between the migration of one of the parents and the departure of both parents and the way in which their absence was felt by the young people. It should be noted that three out of eight participants come from single-parent families following divorce.

Two of the three young people with both parents gone abroad declared that the situation would not change at all if only one of the parents left: „No (there was no difference). Even though they were gone, I always felt both of them close.” (DI), „The departure of both parents does not have much relevance for me” (CC). There were also affirmative answers, with two of the respondents saying that the mother's departure would have brought them even more responsibilities: „It would have been more difficult, I don't think I would have coped.” (AH), „The responsibility would have fallen on my shoulders, and it would not have been easy at all (...) we were too young to miss our mother.” (LH). One of the respondents affected by the divorce of his parents stated that „It would have been different. (...) it would have suited me better if my father was the one who left (...) It would have been much easier for me from an emotional point of view to have my mother by my side.”(EA)

8.4. Relationship with family members

In the fourth theme, we wanted to present the relationship of young people with the rest of the family members, considering the change of roles in the family and the effects produced by the absence of one or both parents. It is important to state that five of the young people mentioned that during that period they remained in the care of their grandparents, while the other three remained with their mother. The majority of those who were in the care of their grandparents mentioned that during adolescence they stayed alone at home, taking on various duties and responsibilities, the level of dependence on their grandparents decreasing considerably.

Both those who remained in the care of their grandparents and those who stayed with their mother stated that they have a good relationship with them, one of the participants saying that „My grandfather compensated for my father's presence since I was little, and I see them as friends (on grandparents)” (CC). Regarding the relationship with siblings, four of the young people claimed that it has improved, that the departure of their parents has made them more responsible and understanding towards each other „He (the brother) is more understanding and helps me with household chores” (CC), „We were more united”(LH).

Asked if they feel comfortable talking to their parents about everyday issues, most said they are open and can talk anytime, anything with their parents „For me their opinion is very important. I don't really do things without them knowing, and I consult with them often. They support me in everything.”(AH).

There were also reserved answers, young people claiming that they turn to their parents depending on the problems „It depends on the problems. If there are more love problems, I come to my friends because it's more comfortable for me (...) We've never had this close relationship to talk about relationships and how we feel and feelings.” (EA).

To the question „What makes you feel safe in your family?”, the most common answers were the care they receive from their parents and the fact that they feel accepted and supported „I know they are always there for me. They are there every time, ready to listen and help me.” (EA). All respondents confessed that, as far as conflicts between themselves and family members are concerned, they are very rare and that they rather identify them as contradictions, which are easily resolved through communication „We don't really have conflicts, it happens quite rarely that we have misunderstandings (...) It's nothing serious, we communicate, and everything is resolved.” (AH)

8.5. Young people's perception of migration

The last section's goal was the identification of young people's perception of the effects of migration on the family. Each young person responded by referring to their own family, indicating the existence of a positive side as well as a negative side. The unanimous answer regarding the benefits brought by migration was financial well-being, moreover, some of the participants stated that the period helped them to become more responsible and independent: „For me, for example, it had a more positive impact, I am a stronger, more independent person”(CM).

As a general response, the participants highlighted the negative impact the phenomenon has on the family, especially the children, who are deprived of emotional support and parental affection. One of the young men confessed that „I put the relationship with my parents on the back burner, especially in adolescence. Friendships have replaced family for me.” (CC), indicating another negative impact that parents being abroad was poor communication. The young people highlighted the importance of communication in the family, its lack being the trigger factor in all the problems a child can face in the absence of parents „There are children who take up vices, such as drugs or alcohol. These, from my point of view, should also be managed by the family (...) through communication.” (DI). A participant also stated that the impact of migration on children is also influenced by the child's personality, how he sees the situation „It also depends on the children, on their personality. In my case there was a lot of accumulated frustrations, rebellion that at some point erupts. I don't think it's normal for a parent to be gone for more than two months, say, especially if they're both going.” (LH).

9. Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to present the difficulties caused by migration that young people and their parents faced in their relationship during childhood. The results led to the identification of difficulties in the affective and emotional part of young people, in communication, as well as regarding changing

roles in the family. From the answers of the participants, it was found that the number of cases in which the father goes to work abroad is higher compared to the number of cases in which both parents or only the mother migrates abroad. It is also a known fact at the global level, fathers migrate more frequently and in greater numbers compared to cases where both parents or the mother decide to go to work abroad (National Institute of Statistics, 2021).

Regarding the difficulties encountered in the absence of parents, the most important were those felt on an emotional level through feelings of longing and frustration (Botezat, Pfeiffer, 2014). It was noted that young people substituted the absence of parents with grandparents or friends, depending on the needs, due to the fact that parents could not be contacted every time. Insecurity, lack of physical presence and lack of emotional support led to states of anxiety and confusion, even feelings of abandonment.

Regarding communication, balanced results were observed, half of the participants answered that they felt an improvement regarding communication between them and their parents when they were abroad, being open to any subject. The other half mentioned that they experienced a cooling of relations with the departed parent, communication being less frequent. Communication is one of the essential elements in relationships of any kind. This involves active listening, empathy, attentiveness, and clarity. Regardless of how the communication is done, whether through a phone call or face-to-face, the communication between the child and the parent should be based on the principles mentioned above.

Regarding the current relationship between young people and parents, it was found that as the children grow, the relationships are closer and better. However, the results indicated that the young people felt some compulsion towards early maturation and responsibility, especially in the case of young people whose mother was absent. In response to the existence of differences between the departure of one or the departure of both parents, the answers also considered the family situation of the respondents, therefore they showed that the absence of the mother would have been much more devastating in the case of young people with absent fathers. Those with both parents gone did not express the existence of a difference, considering that their situation would not have changed much if only one parent was missing, his absence would have felt the same.

From the young people's way of looking, one can identify an acceptance of the positive side of the migration phenomenon, namely the improvement of the financial situation.

Considering the results of the study, it can be concluded that the impact that migration had on the family, especially on the relationship between parents and young people, had mostly negative effects, of an affective, emotional, and communicational nature. Feelings of longing, sadness, and anxiety, as well as the lack of physical presence, cannot be reduced by a phone or video call, just as material well-being does not replace children's need for emotional and affective support from their parents.

However, the quality of the current relationship between young people and their parents, as well as the way of communication between them, has improved compared to the childhood period, when the parents went abroad. It is noteworthy that the departure of the parents motivated the young people to repay their parents for their sacrifice. Even so, the young people are not satisfied with the material benefit brought by their parents going abroad, but highlight the states of anxiety, confusion, the feeling of abandonment and the lack of affection they faced during that period and which they tried to improve with the support of grandparents and the social group. According to young people, the absence of their mother had a greater impact on their emotional state as well as an increased number of responsibilities.

Although the time when the parents were away from the young people can no longer be recovered, it is essential to make conscious positive actions daily for building a strong relationship where emotional support is felt bilaterally.

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DISCRIMINATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN EDUCATIONAL UNITS

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Abstract

Discrimination is a social phenomenon with a negative impact not only on the people to whom this treatment is applied, but on the whole community that will have to advise the victims of this antisocial behavior. It is quite possible that all persons, at least once in their lives, have been discriminated against, socially, medically, ethnically, racially, spiritually, culturally or for other reasons that are not the subject of this study. Young people, most of the time, represent the category most often discriminated against, especially in school. Cyberbullying is the most widespread form of discrimination among young people, having some of the most unfortunate consequences, such as depression, low self-esteem, uselessness, marginalization and social exclusion, inability to become a leader, anxiety, and even suicide. How can we limit this social phenomenon? Realizing that, at some point, any aggressor or discriminator can become a victim. The present study presents the results of an anti-discrimination campaign implemented by the Association „Sf. Voievod Ștefan cel Mare – Hârja”, Bacău County, through an activity within the Human Capital Operational Program (POCU), a campaign addressed to a number of almost 500 young people from pre-university education from Bacău County.

Keywords: discrimination, bullying, cyberbullying, counselling, disability, education, victim.

Resumé

La discrimination est un phénomène social avec un impact négatif non seulement sur les personnes à qui ce traitement est appliqué, mais sur toute la communauté qui devra informer les victimes de ce comportement antisocial. Il est fort possible que toutes les personnes, au moins une fois dans leur vie, aient été discriminées, socialement, médicalement, ethniquement, racialement, spirituellement, culturellement ou pour d'autres raisons qui ne font pas l'objet de cette étude. Les jeunes, la plupart du temps, représentent la catégorie la plus souvent discriminée, notamment à l'école. La cyberintimidation est la forme de discrimination la plus répandue chez les jeunes, ayant certaines des conséquences les plus malheureuses, telles que la dépression, la faible estime de soi, l'inutilité, la marginalisation et l'exclusion sociale, l'incapacité à devenir un leader, l'anxiété et même le suicide. Comment limiter ce phénomène social ? Se rendre compte qu'à un moment donné,

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tout agresseur ou discriminateur peut devenir une victime. La présente étude présente les résultats d'une campagne anti-discrimination mise en œuvre par l'Association de Saint-Voïvode Ștefan cel Mare – Hârja, département de Bacău, à travers une activité dans le cadre du Programme opérationnel de capital humain (POCU), une campagne adressée à un nombre de 501 jeunes de l'enseignement pré-universitaire du département de Bacău.

Mots clés: discrimination, harcèlement, cyber-harcèlement, conseil, handicap, éducation, victime.

Rezumat

Discriminarea reprezintă un fenomen social cu impact negativ nu doar asupra persoanelor cărora li se aplică aceste tratament, ci față de întreaga comunitate care va fi nevoită să consilieze victimele acestui comportament antisocial. Este foarte posibil ca toate persoanele, cel puțin o dată în viață, să fi fost discriminate, din punct de vedere social, medical, etnic, rasial, spiritual, cultural sau din alte motive care nu fac obiectul acestui studiu.

Tinerii, de cele mai multe ori, reprezintă categoria cea mai des discriminată, mai ales în școală. Cyberbullyng-ul este cea mai răspândită formă de discriminare în rândul tinerilor, având consecințe dintre cele mai nefericite, precum depresia, scăderea stimei de sine, inutilitatea, marginalizarea și excluziunea socială, incapacitatea de a deveni leader, anxietatea, și chiar suicidul. Cum putem limita acest fenomen social? Conștientizând că, la o un moment dat, orice agresor sau discriminator, poate deveni o victimă. Studiul de față prezintă rezultatele unei campanii antidiscriminare implementată de Asociația Sf. Voievod Ștefan cel Mare – Hârja, județul Bacău, prin intermediul unui activități din cadrul Programului Operațional Capital Uman (POCU), campanie adresată unui număr de 501 tineri din învățământul preuniversitar din județul Bacău.

Cuvinte cheie: discriminare, bullying, cyberbullying, consiliere, dizabilitatea, educație, victimă.

1. What is discrimination?

Discrimination is unequal treatment of individuals or groups in relation to some categorical traits such as ethnic, racial, religious or class membership (Gavriliuță, 2015; Andronache, 2011). The term is commonly used to describe the action of a dominant majority in relation to a dominated minority and implies harm to a person or group. The United Nations includes in the category of discrimination „any conduct based on the distinction made in relation to certain natural and social categories and which is not related to the individual capacities and merits or to the concrete behavior of a person” (Zamfir, Vlăsceanu, 1998, p. 174). Discrimination is favored by the following situations: ethnocentrism, insufficient knowledge of others, generalization of one's own life experience (issuing judgments regarding an entire group starting from the experience they had with a single member or with few members of this group), selecting stereotypes consistent with previous beliefs and impressions and developing prejudices regarding the people with whom they compete. Unequal treatment of people who are essentially equal is practised in all societies.

The assessment of this treatment as discrimination is made in relation to the social norms and values dominant in society. Egalitarian movements, of religious or utopian origin, which have pursued the complete elimination of discrimination, they have been partially successful. It should be noted that in all democratic societies, from a formal legal point of view, any form of discrimination is prohibited, in relation to sex, race, ethnic and religious affiliation. This does not mean that in concrete social action the constitutional provisions are fully respected. „Discrimination is practiced not only by individuals but also by institutions: companies, schools, hospitals, government organizations. In this case, there is an institutional discrimination” (Zamfir, Vlăsceanu, 1998, pp. 174-175).

Discrimination is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social category, beliefs, sex, sexual orientation, age, disability, chronic non-contagious disease, HIV infection or membership of a disadvantaged category, and the purpose or effect of restricting or removing the recognition, use or exercise, on an equal basis, of human rights and fundamental freedoms or rights recognised by law, in the political, economic, social and cultural fields or in any other areas of public life. Discrimination involves: you differentiate between people, groups and communities, to the disadvantage of some of them; exclude certain individuals, groups and communities from activities, benefits and rights conferred by law; restrict to individuals, groups and communities the rights and freedoms conferred by law; you preferentially treat certain people, groups, communities, compared to others, granting privileges to the former and disadvantaging the latter (Association Training, Development, Assistance - FORDA Buzău, 2010, p. 12).

2. Effects of discrimination on children

In the guide „Multicultural Education. Roma Children in School” edited by save the children, psychologist Diana Ureche, dedicates a chapter to the long-term effects of discrimination on children. Without envisioning the effects, discrimination may be perceived as an act of lesser or lesser significance. Thus, the guide (Alexandrescu, 2005) mentions some of the immediate, medium-term and lasting effects:

The decrease of self-esteem / self-image - is an accumulation of feelings of inferiority, which the child internalizes, when he hears that he is not able, that he is not good, when he is shown that he is extra in class. The child begins to perceive himself lower than the others and no longer appreciates his progress. Depending on how frequently he is subject to discrimination, he may end up in group isolation and even dropping out of school.

Aggressiveness - discrimination is, under all conditions, an act of aggression against the discriminated one. It is quite possible that a child will respond aggressively, in turn, in an attempt to defend himself. Aggression can extend, as a response reaction, to any type of interaction with teachers or colleagues, but also in other contexts.

Depression - subjected to the stigma, the child may develop a state of deep sadness. He can become apathetic („what sense does it make to learn”), disinterested in whatever happens around him, pessimistic, exaggeratedly self-critical („I don't know how to do anything good”), he can ignore any success and, in the end, without receiving assistance, he will self-isolate himself from the rest of the group.

Addiction to substances (alcohol, tobacco, drugs) - in the case of middle school or high school students, the lack of recognition of efforts, progress and their continuous labeling can cause them to satisfy their emotional needs through substance use and abuse, especially in the conditions in which he becomes cool, acquires new friends, may seem more „mature” in the eyes of colleagues.

Eating disorders (bulimia, anorexia); another effect that may occur is *anxiety* - is the installation of a state of restlessness, diffuse fear, without a well-determined reason, which fuels states of fear related to various topics. There may be a fear of large spaces, getting out of the house, using public transport, etc. A guide of good practice for teachers (ISJ et al., 2013) mentioned that sometimes these fears, called phobias, become so intense that the person develops blockages in acting, in exams, in front of people or in various difficult periods.

3. Discrimination of young people on medical grounds: Disability

Disability is a generic term for impairments, limitations on activity and restrictions on participation. International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, World Health Organization mentioned that it denotes the negative aspects of the interaction between the individual (who has a health problem) and the context factors in which he finds himself (environmental and personal factors).

Disabilities can be of a sensory type (visual or hearing impairment), of a motor type (inability to partially or totally use the limbs), neurological, mental, intellectual, or can be determined by certain genetic disorders or syndromes whose causes of occurrence are not yet determined. Many disabilities are invisible, so sometimes we interact, in everyday life with people we do not know have a disability.

Given that in Romania the start for the normalization of the lives of people with disabilities took place later in relation to most of the European Union countries, the involvement of the school environment becomes fundamental in their integration into social life. If, in addition to the condition they already have, stigma is also added, then children with disabilities are subjected to double suffering, which will make their academic advances, adaptation and living infinitely more difficult.

What is a disabled child? First of all, it's a child. When the fact that his progress is slower, when he does not understand as quickly, when he refuses or he cannot do certain things that typical peers easily achieve, we must remember that he is a child. Like others, children with disabilities are differentiated by the needs, capabilities and interests they have. Therefore, if we look at them and approach

them in this way, we will naturally discover the ways of working effectively with them so that they can overcome certain limits or difficulties. The child with disabilities in society

Disability attracts the attention of those around you, but the correct information of the local and school community can turn this attention into a positive one, which serves as a starting point for social and school inclusion actions for the child. Adapting the disabled child to the environment is all the easier as those around him maintain attention on his needs and there is a joint effort to increase his comfort. The effort is all the less, as it is shared by as many members of the community as possible: family, friends, children, teachers, specialists and the local community in general.

4. Equal opportunities for those with disabilities

People with disabilities have more difficult access to education and as a result a greater number of them have a lower level of schooling with implications for employment.

According to a study by the Romanian Academic Society, Obstacles in the employment of people with disabilities in Romania, the percentage of people with disabilities in school is 7 times higher than the national average. Dropping out of school after the first 4 classes is twice as common among people with disabilities. Only 17.5 percent of people with disabilities manage to complete their high school studies compared to the national average of about 31 percent. Only 8.3 percent of people with disabilities who have a job are graduates of higher education.

A child with disabilities who is institutionalized, who does not receive adequate education and does not socialize, will never reach his full potential so that he can have a job, according to his powers and skill.

5. Discrimination of young people in schools

School violence is a complex phenomenon due to the multitude of forms, causes and other specific aspects that have been the subject of several specialized studies in various fields: psychology, pedagogy, sociology, medicine etc. „Bullying behavior can be classified in the sphere of the general concept of school violence as a specific form of it” (Beldean-Galea et al., 2016, p. 32).

Bullying can be defined as a specific type of aggression in which: a) the behavior is intended to harm or disturb; b) the behavior is repeated repeatedly over time; c) there is an imbalance of power, with a strong person or group attacking a less powerful one. Aggression behaviors are intended to cause harm, but these definitions do not indicate specific types of behaviors to recognize that there are many different forms of aggression. The most commonly identified forms of harassment are physical harassment, verbal harassment, property damage, social harassment, and cyberbullying. Physical harassment refers to the use of force by the aggressor/aggressors and includes behaviors such as hitting the victim. Verbal harassment refers to contemptuous, oral or written communication directed at the

victim and includes taunts, insults, and the sending of mischievous notes. Social bullying is aimed at affecting one's social status or relationships. Common examples of socially aggressive behaviour include social exclusion, malicious gossip and manipulation of friendship. Relational harassment and indirect harassment are terms that have been used to refer to similar constructs. Of all the terms exposed, social harassment is the broadest in recognizing aggressive behaviors that are both verbal and nonverbal and of a direct and indirect nature (Rosen et al., 2017, p.3).

Bullying is serious. It is intentional, unprovoked, aggressive, repeated physical or mental attacks on another student who is perceived as powerless and defenseless against abuse. Bullying can be perpetrated by a single student or by a group of students against a student or group of students. Sometimes bullying is sporadic and may even be directed at friends, but in its worst form, it is chronic and endless for the victim. This chronic form of aggression is taken into account antisocial behavior, leading to short- and long-term negative consequences for victims and perpetrators: the development of conduct disorders in bullies, which leads to antisocial problems in adulthood; and lasting trauma to victims, with the most severe reactions culminating in suicide or homicide, as seen in the wave of shootings in schools by people assaulted by students.

U.S. government research groups, as well as other global organizations studying bullying, report that more than 70 percent of all schoolchildren report that they have been the victim of an incident of bullying. Some research shows that as children enter middle school, open attacks are peak, but decrease in high school, although verbal insults and isolation seem to remain constant in all grades. Other studies indicate that in elementary school, where everything begins, children are more likely to be harassed direct forms, such as pushing and shouting, than in the upper classes (Mayer, 2008, pp. 113-114).

Bullying at school and at the playground can include a child ridiculing a classmate who is taking good grades; a classmate in an inclusion class blocking a special needs the child to descend on a sliding plank; or a group of students excluding a child from a game. „Harassing in the cafeteria includes throwing food at another student or telling another child can't sit at a certain table. Neighborhood harassment can include ignoring other children or not inviting them to participate in group activities” (Depino, 2011, p. 3).

The pandemic period brought an amelioration of the bullying phenomenon through isolation but developed other forms of harassment and abuse in the virtual space which could lead to mental disorders and behavioral changes (Mihalache, 2021, p. 45).

Harassing others through electronic channels is a relatively new phenomenon, and many terms have been used to refer to this type of behavior, including cyberbullying, electronic harassment, online harassment, cyberbullying, and social cruelty. The term cyberbullying is becoming widely adopted and has been defined as „malicious and repeated caused by the use of computers, mobile phones, and other electronic devices.

Going beyond the focus on bullies and victims, research began to examine the association between simply witnessing harassment and unjustifiability. In a daily journal study, 42 percent of middle school students reported witnessing at least one incident of peer-to-peer harassment at school. These bystanders may be at risk, as are bullies and victims, as the findings suggest that „bullying is associated with several forms of misadaptation, including substance use, anxiety, somatic complaints, and depressive symptoms” (Rosen et al., 2017, p. 13).

An important concept underlying a functional vision of bullying is the idea that any behavior serves a particular purpose. The theory of applied behavior analysis holds that organisms engage in behavior in order to have access to hardening or to avoid punishment. Behaviors that result in hardening are more likely to occur in the future in similar circumstances, while behaviors that are not strengthened or that lead to punishment are less likely to occur in the future in similar circumstances. For example, „a student can give a correct answer to a question during math classes and receive praise from the teacher. If adult praise works as a hardener for that student, it is more likely that she will answer questions in the future. Instead, a student may give an incorrect answer and be teased because they do not know the correct answer. Teasing can serve as punishment for future answers, which makes the student less likely to answer questions in the future. This principle applies to any behavior and can be conceptualized into a three-step contingency, Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence (ABC), where the antecedent is a trigger for a particular behavior and the consequence is the result of the behavior” (Rosen et al., 2017, p. 24).

While social reinforcement fuels the behavior of perpetrators, it also has implications for victims. In every bullying incident, a victim's behavior can be reinforced or punished by the behavior of the perpetrators and those around them. Physical, verbal, relational, and cyber aggression are often harmful and punitive to the victim, resulting in the victim's avoidance of the perpetrator, the environment, or the school. However, bullying incidents can also provide a form of peer attention to the victim. Some victims of bullying are unpopular and have few friends. Peer attention from bullying incidents, despite being negative and hurtful, can still reinforce the triggering behavior of victims. If the reinforcing effects of peer attention from perpetrators and bystanders outweigh the punishing effects of bullying, the victim may learn that victimization is an effective means of gaining peer attention. In the future, that individual may seek similar interactions, even when those interactions result in some harm. They may also learn to instigate aggression (ie, bully/victim) if they have poor social skills or cannot access peer attention more adequately. Unfortunately, „this is usually the case for students with disabilities, especially those with emotional disturbances, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, autism spectrum disorder, or orthopedic impairments” (Rosen *et al.*, 2017, p. 27).

Children and parents see teachers as educators, decision makers and protectors of students in the classroom. When children report to their parents about difficulties with other students at school, parents tend to refer their children

to the teacher as a source of help and support. Society has traditionally viewed teachers as the first line of defense in identifying and intervening against student bullying; however, teachers may unintentionally play a passive and/or active role in contributing to school bullying. Today, teachers have a wide set of responsibilities that involve more than just teaching students. While teachers focus on these additional tasks, they may inadvertently overlook serious behavioral issues, such as peer bullying, that do not directly affect the learning environment. This can be especially true when teachers are under pressure to get their students to perform well during high-stakes tests. The emphasis on high-stakes test scores has led to „a narrowed curriculum, increased stress on teachers and students, and reduced teacher attention to other aspects of student development.” The resulting classroom is likely to be less inclusive and feel less comfortable for students. In this stressful environment, teachers may not be aware that bullying is occurring in their classroom context, thus inadvertently contributing to the bullying situation.

How much does bullying really matter? One can still come across the view that bullying is training for „real life” and a necessary part of growing up. However, the more serious forms of bullying, at least, can have very serious consequences; „real life” would no doubt seem like a welcome escape for the victimized. For children who are bullied, their lives often become miserable for a considerable period of time. „They probably already lack close friends at school, they are likely to lose even more confidence and self-esteem” (Smith, Thompson, 2018, p. 6).

6. Cyberbullying

The development of the Internet and the generalization of access to the „network” from the youngest ages has given rise to extensive discussions regarding the risks it brings with it. Especially for child users, „easy access to pornography, meeting strangers as a result of online contact, receiving and/or sending messages (text, audio, video) with sexual content or harassment and bullying on the Internet are considered to be risks of the internet from which the child must, as far as possible, be protected” (Velicu, 2014, p. 2).

Cyberbullying is the intentional act of online/digital intimidation, embarrassment or harassment and is operationalized to directly include verbal and non-verbal behaviour, including mean messages; violent, intimate and unpleasant images; and silent phone calls. „There is debate as to whether cyberbullying is an extension of face-to-face bullying” (Betts *et al.*, 2019, pp. 1-2).

There is compelling evidence that being cyberbullied can lead to serious psychosomatic and psychosocial health problems. Several studies have found that victims of cyberbullying feel depressed, confused, guilty, fearful, lonely, embarrassed, angry, sad, and experience low self-esteem and more interpersonal problems than non-victims. Other studies have found clear evidence for negative behavioral and physical consequences associated with cyberbullying, such as offline interpersonal victimization, drug and alcohol use, problems at school and with peers, physical or sexual abuse, delinquency and aggressive behavior. Some researchers suggest that the effects of cyberbullying are more severe than the

effects of traditional bullying due to the anonymity of the bully and the continuity of the messages. Researching the literature mentioned above reveals that cyberbullying is a serious problem with serious consequences. Very little is known about the role of the parent in cyberbullying. „Parents are often excluded from children's Internet activities” (Dehue *et al.*, 2012, p. 7).

Three other criteria specifically distinguish bullying. The pain done is unprovoked, at least by any action that would normally be considered provocation. (Being clumsy, for example, might invite some aggression, but wouldn't normally be considered legitimate provocation). Bullying is thought of as a repeated action; something that only happens once or twice would not be called bullying. Finally, the child who commits aggression is generally considered stronger, or perceived as stronger; at least, the victim is not (or does not feel he/she is) able to fight back very effectively. These latter characteristics mean that bullying behavior can be extremely distressing for the recipient and, in particular, have unfortunate long-term effects (Smith, Thompson, 2018, p. 2).

Although participants believed that cyberbullying could occur among elementary school students, they believed that it was likely to become more common during adolescence. Among high school students there appears to be a peak in cyberbullying involvement at around age 15. This peaks in middle childhood. Cyberbullying among teenagers is said to be more severe than cyberbullying experienced by younger students, although some have felt that younger children may be more negatively affected by cyberbullying, by age and that children can „overcome certain types of cyberbullying when that mode of contact was no longer used by that age group”. This may have implications for intervention/prevention work, as it may be possible when discussing cyberbullying with younger children to use examples that are more resonant with their experiences. Other researchers have pointed out that ICT is „constantly changing and trends in the use of different forms of online communication are also changing, which by extension means that the types of cyberbullying are evolving” (Monks *et al.*, 2016, p. 42).

7. The main forms of discrimination

Discrimination can be direct or indirect. Direct discrimination occurs when an employer refuses to hire a person because of race, color or national origin. Intent is easy to establish when the employer has expressly or impliedly stated that he does not want to hire members of a particular race. Intent, however, can also be inferred from the employer's conduct. Such an inference might be drawn where an employer refuses to hire a qualified person who is a member of a particular race and the position remains open to similarly qualified candidates of a different race. Unless the employer can justify that decision on legitimate grounds, such behavior would constitute direct discrimination.

Discrimination can also be indirect, as when institutional policies or practices have the effect of systematically excluding members of certain groups from employment opportunities. This form of discrimination is perhaps the most

widespread and also the most difficult to eradicate. It occurs when seemingly neutral job requirements consistently exclude members of a particular racial or ethnic background. Such requirements include height or weight restrictions and degree or other formal requirements unrelated to the specific position. The United States Supreme Court declared this type of discrimination illegal in 1971 in its famous *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* decision. In that case, "the employer required a high school diploma and a minimum intelligence test score for a job that objectively did not require those qualifications. The Court found that although the employer did not intend to discriminate, the conduct was unlawful" (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2005, p. 42).

It is said that an equal opportunity system guarantees equal treatment, not equal results. In this system, all participants are considered to have the same basic means to achieve the desired goal, but not all succeed in achieving it. Only the most skilled do it, as not all competitors perform their skills in the same way. Equality of opportunity is thus consistent with the model of a market system in which unequal outcomes are seen as the engine that motivates people to compete. Because in an ideal market system competition is a continuous process, those who do not reach their goal today know that they will always have another chance.

This reasonable justification for unequal outcomes faces a major difficulty when it is used to explain inequalities arising from a historical pattern of racial discrimination. Why do blacks, or other members of minority or economically disadvantaged groups, never seem able to catch up with members of economically or socially dominant groups? In the United States, for example, despite enormous efforts to ensure equal opportunity, racial and ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented at higher levels of employment and continue to be overrepresented among the unemployed. This is partly because members of groups that have been victims of racial discrimination in the past cannot compete in the labor market on equal terms today. The unequal distribution of the means to compete is often a direct consequence of an unequal distribution in previous rounds of asset allocation. This leads to the development of a vicious circle of discrimination. „Today's unequal outcomes are the consequence of yesterday's unequal outcomes and in turn will become a factor in determining tomorrow's unequal outcomes" (OHCHR, 2005, p. 64).

Stereotyping is one of the reasons why discrimination persists and why, despite individual efforts, victims of discrimination find it so difficult to overcome barriers to employment. In the context of employment, the most familiar and depressing illustration of stereotyping is when equally qualified people compete for the same job and the only difference between them is that one belongs to a minority race or ethnic group. In these situations, employers will usually refuse to hire a member of the minority group because of the assumptions they make about their character and other attributes. Such assumptions include the idea that they are lazy, dishonest, unstable, prone to alcoholism or violent. The European Court of Justice has recently recognized, in the context of gender discrimination, that

stereotyping can have illegal consequences in the field of employment and therefore special preventive measures are warranted.

Employment decisions based on such stereotypes have the effect of sustaining and perpetuating prevailing patterns of discrimination. Stereotyping is particularly insidious because those who rely on it are often unaware of their own biases. Stereotyping as a factor in hiring decisions also contradicts the view held by some economists that market forces left alone can end discrimination. This particular economic interpretation of discrimination deserves careful consideration because it is very influential and, on the surface, quite persuasive. The argument, albeit in sketchy form, is that employment discrimination exists because some employers who have a taste for discrimination might be willing to bear the costs of refusing to hire people with whom they do not wish to associate. Since allowing discrimination is costly, employers „will only do so if there are conditions” (OUNHCHR, 2005, p. 65).

Ethnic conflict produces many refugees and internally displaced persons. In addition to the conditions faced by male refugees, women who are refugees or internally displaced also face increased vulnerability to sexual violence, domestic violence and limitations on their freedom of movement. For example, Burundian women in refugee camps in the United Republic of Tanzania were regularly attacked while carrying out daily tasks. In fact, 80% of the world's refugees are women and children 15, although these groups have traditionally been marginalized in asylum law. This is exemplified by the failure of many countries to recognize gender-based violence as a ground for asylum, and can be seen in the absence of culturally and gender-sensitive procedures for refugee determination, which are essential to enable women to and describes the experiences of those making a decision about their asylum claim. In addition, an increasing number of women are victims of human trafficking who suffer serious harm at the hands of traffickers. „There is little recognition that the experience of trafficking can itself give grounds for refugee status under the 1951 Refugee Convention” (OUNHCHR, p. 184).

8. The anti-discrimination campaign in pre-university education units in Bacău County²

Between September 19 and 22, 2022, the Association „Sf. Voivod Ștefan cel Mare-Hârja” organized the anti-discrimination campaign „Stop discrimination! Acceptance begins with you!”, which involved the dissemination of information in high school and secondary schools, the organization of a conference and a workshop at the association's headquarters. The campaign is aimed at a minimum number of 1000 young people, the association from Hârja is currently completing the first stage of the campaign, and will reach another 500 students in September next year.

² <https://eprb.ro/campanie-antidiscriminare-unitati-de-invatamant-preuniversitar>, accessed at 05.10.2022.

The campaign was carried out in collaboration with the Bacău County School Inspectorate and had the role of informing and making young people aware of the risks faced by students discriminated from a medical, religious, social, ethnic and racial point of view.

The educational units where the campaign was carried out were: Gheorghe Asachi Onești Technical College, „Grigore Moisil” Onești National College, Carol Davila Post-Lice Health School, Oituz High School, No. 1 Oituz High School, Tg Ocna Technological High School.

During the meetings with middle school and high school students, experts from the project spoke to them about discrimination, its forms, prevention and intervention methods. Leaflets, flyers with information about discrimination and bullying, t-shirts and caps with the message of the campaign were also distributed to the students, to encourage them to become promoters of anti-discrimination. During the 3 days of the school campaign, we talked to over 500 students, who were receptive to the message of our campaign, and we hope that in the future they will be even more tolerant and sensitive to this issue.

On the last day of the campaign - September 22, a conference was organized at the Onești Municipal Library with the theme „Discrimination in schools and public institutions - approach and prevention methods!” which was attended by over 50 people: teachers, school principals and representatives of the Valea Trotușului Bacău LAG. During the conference, the following were presented: the POCU project and its objectives and activities, the activity of the „Sfântul Voivode Ștefan cel Mare – Hârja” Association, as well as the topics of main interest: Discrimination of children with autism and other disorders from the perspective of the therapist - lecture given by Mrs. Psych. Țuțianu Marilena, Discrimination of children at risk of poverty from the pedagogical perspective - lecture given by Mrs. Prof. Buță Dorica, Discrimination from the perspective of the parent of a child diagnosed with autism - lecture given by Mrs. Negoita Bianca.

We hope that the message of our campaign has reached as many people and vulnerable people as possible: children at risk of poverty, children diagnosed with autism, adults and young people at risk of poverty will no longer be discriminated against, especially in spaces that should to give them safety and the chance for a better future: schools and public institutions!

People who wish to receive information about this campaign can visit the project website (<https://asociatiaharja.ro/despre-proiect/>) and ask questions on the Facebook page: Association „Sfântul Voievod Ștefan cel Mare Hârja” or by phone : +40 752 270 375 and email: parohiaharja@yahoo.com.

After applying the questionnaire, the results from the 10 questions of the test instrument can be captured in the 3 figures below.

Research results

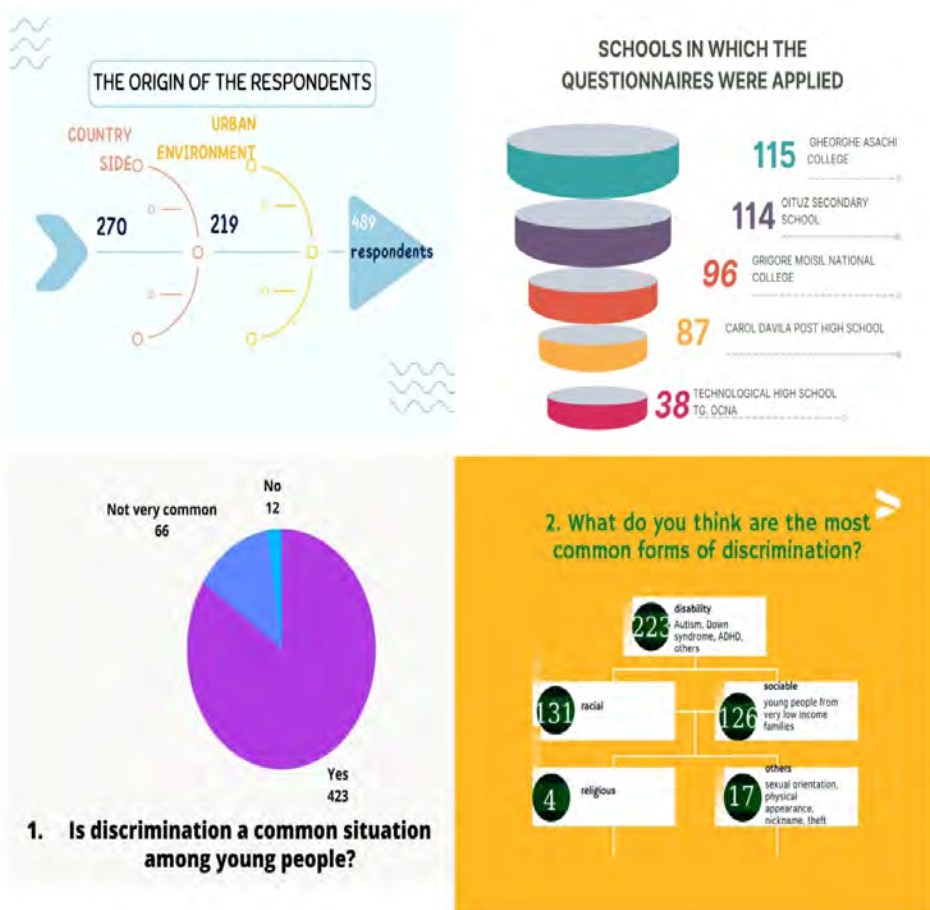


Figure no 1. The group campaign target and the first two questions in the questionnaire

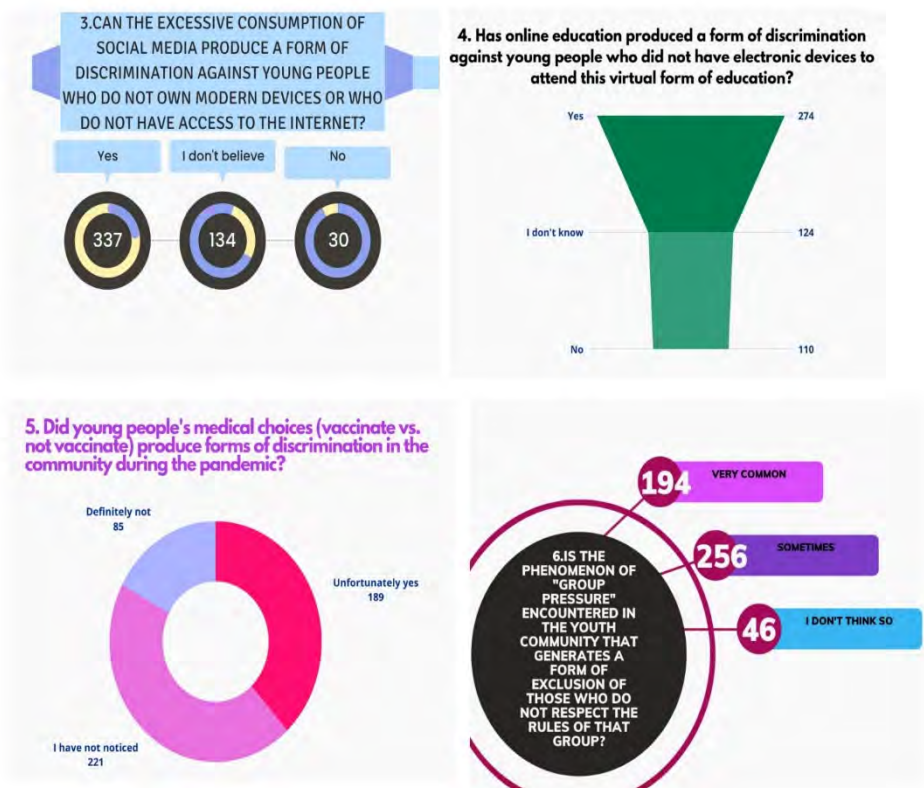


Figure no. 2. The following 4 questions and answers from the survey

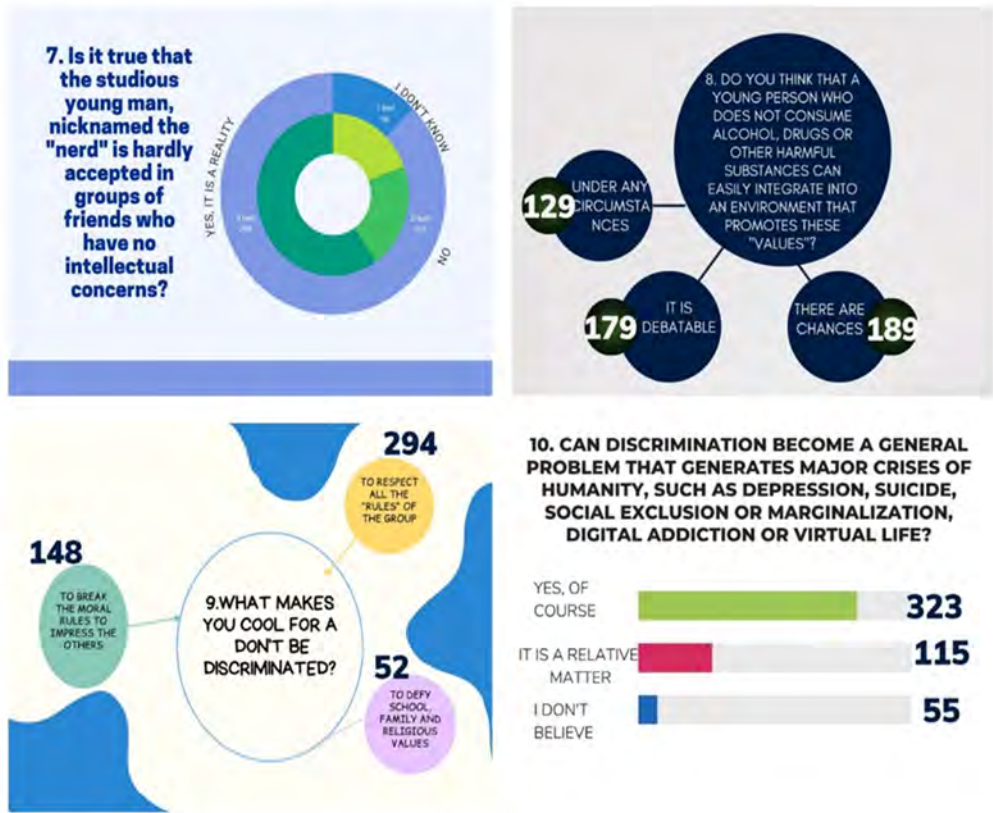


Figure no 3. The last 4 questions and answers of the anti-discrimination campaign questionnaire

9. Conclusion

Young people are exposed to a multitude of forms of discrimination. Every day we meet discriminated people, especially young people, who cannot face discrimination. These interventions in the community through information and awareness campaigns have the role of signaling a social problem faced by a person or a group of people. In one way or another, it is unlikely that a person has not been discriminated against in their lifetime.

Children and young people feel discrimination harder. In schools and high schools, bullying is common, daily in all groups of students.

Discrimination, regardless of its form, medical, racial, ethnic, gender and social, even if it does not take an aggressive form, it produces states of frustration, anxiety, depression and isolation.

The newest and most harmful form of discrimination is cyberbullying, very common among young people, with an extraordinarily high psychological burden, which can even lead to suicide.

The results of the qualitative analysis of the questionnaire applied to a number of 489 young people from the pre-university education system in Bacău county, demonstrate the fact that discrimination is found in school, regardless of the young person's background and level of education. Unfortunately, we find at the same time, in the same group of students, several forms of discrimination. This reality is confirmed by the young people's answers to the question about the forms of discrimination and the frequency with which we find it in school.

The solution is to constantly discuss this topic with young people, to be open and to find together with them optimal solutions to successfully overcome these unpleasant moments in their lives. It is certain that, at some point, an aggressor who uses any form of discrimination against a colleague or another young person, may himself become a victim of another aggressor, perhaps even of one of the young people previously assaulted by him. Therefore, the purpose of this campaign „Stop discrimination! Acceptance starts with you!” had the main purpose of showing that often abnormality becomes normality and that tolerance or acceptance of those around us as they are, is a natural way of being and living in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and pluri-religious society.

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THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER IN THE ADOPTION

Laura Rodica GIURGIU¹, Floricica Mariana CALIN²

Abstract

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has caused feelings of fear and an unprecedented state of uncertainty especially for children or adults at risk. The effects of isolation and the risk of infection can be particularly severe for those who are part of vulnerable groups, people who lack their families, and emotional or financial support. The social distancing and quarantine caused anxiety, depression, and a deterioration in physical health. A considerable number of institutionalized people do not have digital knowledge or devices to maintain virtual contact with outside world or with social services providers. In our paper we studied the effects of the interruptions or delays in the processing of application files for adoption, which occurred as a result of stopping activity of specialized social workers and institutions. Our research focused on the adoption process after the pandemic, when the procedures could be re-opened, and the children who had to wait so long, were able to meet their families again.

Our sample included a group of 30 social workers, experimented in the adoption field. A survey and an Interview Guide have been used, in order to achieve the goals and to validate the hypotheses of the research.

Keywords: coronavirus pandemic, adoption, social worker

Abstract

La pandémie de coronavirus (COVID-19) a suscité des sentiments de peur et un état d'incertitude sans précédent, en particulier pour les enfants ou les adultes à risque. Les effets de l'isolement et d'infection peuvent être particulièrement graves pour les personnes qui viennent de groupes vulnérables, les personnes qui n'ont pas de famille. La distanciation sociale et la quarantaine ont causé de l'anxiété, de la dépression et une détérioration de la santé physique. Un nombre considérable de personnes institutionnalisées n'ont pas les connaissances ou la technologie nécessaire pour maintenir un contact virtuel avec le monde extérieur, ou avec les fournisseurs de services sociaux. Dans notre article, nous avons étudié les effets des interruptions, ou retards dans le processus d'adoption, qui se sont produits à la suite de l'arrêt des activités des travailleurs sociaux spécialisés et des institutions. Nos recherches ont porté sur le processus d'adoption après la pandémie, le moment où les

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procédures pourraient être rouvertes, et les enfants qui ont dû attendre si longtemps ont pu retrouver leur famille. Notre échantillon comprenait 30 travailleurs sociaux, expérimentés dans le domaine de l'adoption. Un sondage et un guide d'entrevue ont été utilisés pour atteindre les objectifs et valider les hypothèses.

Mots clés: Coronavirus pandémie, adoption, travailleur social

Abstract

Pandemia de coronavirus (COVID-19) a creat sentimente fără precedent de teamă și incertitudine, în special pentru copiii sau adulții la risc. Efectele izolării și riscul de infecție pot fi deosebit de severe pentru persoanele provenite din grupuri vulnerabile, persoanele fără familii, lipsiti de sprijin emotional, ori financiar. Distanțarea socială și carantina au provocat anxietate, depresie și deteriorarea sănătății fizice. Un număr considerabil de persoane instituționalizate nu au dispus de cunoștințele sau de tehnologia necesară pentru a menține contactul virtual cu lumea exterioară, sau cu furnizorii de servicii sociale. În articolul nostru, am studiat efectele întreruperilor sau întâzierilor în procesul de adopție a copiilor, care au apărut ca urmare a încetării activităților asistenților sociali și instituțiilor specializate. Cercetarea noastră s-a concentrat pe procesul de adopție în perioada post-pandemică, atunci când procedurile au putut fi redeschise, iar copiii care au trebuit să aștepte atât de mult timp au fost reuniți cu familiile adoptatoare. Eșantionul nostru a inclus un grup de 30 de asistenți sociali, cu experiență în domeniul adopției. Un sondaj și un ghid de interviu au fost utilizate pentru a îndeplini obiectivele lucrării și pentru a valida ipotezele.

Cuvinte cheie: Coronavirus, pandemie, adopție, asistent social

1. Introduction

Obviously, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly amplified the existing psychosocial concerns and imposed an entirely new set of challenges for communities and specialists, affecting millions of children and adults around the world. The health and social crisis among 2019-2021, has undoubtedly generated a new era of interprofessional practice dedicated to a fuller understanding of the issues faced by the vulnerable people, and the development of responses that address their contextualized needs. One of the most affected categories was represented by adoptable children and adoptive couples whose steps in the process were delayed and discouraged, by suspending the adoption stages. The coronavirus pandemic made the adoption in Romania even more difficult, which was anyway obstructed by the bureaucracy. During the state of emergency, and the restrictions imposed by the authorities, no child could reach the adoptive family. Before the pandemic, the number of the adopted children was approximately 1286 for a year, but then, we are talking about a much lower number (729 children) who reached the new families. According to figures presented by the national Authority for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Children and Adoptions (ARPDCA), the number of adoptable children doubled to almost 8.000 after the pandemic.

The main measures took by the National Authorities, in the context of the worrying evolution of the COVID-19 virus epidemic, comes with some clarifications related to the adoption process, regarding why a suspension of the

process was needed, and how adoptive families will be notified to receive information during this time. On 12.03.2020, ARPDCA elaborated the Methodology nr. 6912 through which it recommends to the General Directorates of Social Work and Child Protection from all the districts, the application of special measures, in order to ensure protection during this period, as follows:

- The suspension of practical matching activities between the child and the adoptive family. The matching procedure of the adoption is defined as: „practical activities, aiming to prepare the child, the adopter/adoptive family and other reference persons for the child, by organizing meetings between the child and the adopter/adoptive family, in order to facilitate their accommodation.”

In other words, during the Covid limitations, there are no more meetings allowed between children and adopters for a period of time, with the statement that the resumption of activities will be announced by the central authority. Contacting adoptive families by phone to explain the reasons for temporarily suspending matching procedures, with the express statement that the adoption process will resume immediately after the situation regarding the coronavirus infection has stabilized will be put into practice by the responsible institution, explaining in the same time, the circumstances of the interruption.

- Providing information to children regarding the reason for the suspension, if there were meetings of adoptive families with the children in the past. Every child will get explanations depending on age and maturity. During this time, the children to be adopted are carefully protected by the persons who care for them (maternal assistants or staff, in the family apartments or placement centers).
- Restricting family access to information about the child and his/her photos on the Child Profile page, during the restrictions. Normally, the criteria for initial match between the child and the family, are age, gender, number of children, and the health of the child. On average, at national level, adoption process lasts one year. During the pandemic, the adopter can visit him/her where he/she lives or in another place, such as in the mall, in the park, for example, and they can host the child, visiting him in environment, without him knowing the purpose of the visit. Following the adjustment procedures, the adoption specialists will make a report in which they will write their conclusions. If the match went well, they would make a request to the court, for the family to have the child at home, for 90 days for adoption. If everything went normal, based on a final report, the specialists of the authority propose to the court the adoption consent.

In 2021, ARPDCA continued its activity of monitoring the adoption process and case management, following the internal adoption procedure changes. In August 2021, the Government approved the methodological norms for the application of the adoption Law, which makes the adoption procedure more flexible and increases the state support for adoptive families.

The document sets out a series of amendments and additions to the adoption procedure, aimed at increasing the number of adopted children. During 2021, 1563 adoptions were concluded, of which 1413 national and 150 internationals, this being a record number of adoptions since 1999. In 2020, the number of adoptions was 1042. (Activity Report of the National Authority for the Rights of Persons with disabilities, Children and Adoptions, 2021 p. 4).

General rules for adoption. A family that has decided to adopt a child in Romania should also be prepared for the bureaucratic aspect that adoption entails, and which must be overcome in order to meet legal forms requests. The adoption process is a long and complicated one, in which adoptive parents have to go through numerous stages, to prove first of all that the child's interest is above their own, and that their motivation for adoption is stable.

Adoption is concluded only if it is in the best interests of the child, and any child can be adopted only until the age of the civil maturity (18 years old). By way of exception, a major person can be adopted if the adopter or adoptive family raised him during the childhood. When there are several brothers to be adopted, the competent adoption service will take the necessary measures to confer them together and only if it is in the best interests of the children, they will be conferred separately.

Another rule is that the adopter or adoptive family must fulfill the moral guarantees, and material conditions necessary for the full and harmonious development of the child's personality, conditions that are attested by the competent authorities.

The Justice Court also has the possibility to request the consent to adoption of the natural parents again, when there are indications that after the date on which the consent became irrevocable new elements arose, such as to lead to the return of the original consent. In this regard, the General Directorate of Child Protection who requested the opening of the internal adoption procedure is obliged to inform the court, about the existence of any new elements regarding the situation of the natural parent or extended family, which could lead to a change in the finalization of the individualized child protection plan.

2. The skills of a social worker in charge of adoption

The social workers are the „turntable” of the interinstitutional and interpersonal interactions (Corman, 2010), and of the relational dynamics that develop in the adoption process. They facilitate the access of the candidate couples to information about the stages of adoption, provide support based on professional skills, as well as emotional counseling to future adoptive parents. The social worker coordinates the stages of the adoption process and monitors the matching between parents and adopted children.

Also, the social worker will establish a relationship of trust with the adoptable child, so that he can explain them in his own terms and in relation to his capacity for understanding (depending on age and degree of maturity), the elements that can ensure the fit and compatibility with the adoptive family and

thus, a successful adoption. The social worker will also monitor the post-adoption process to ensure that any disagreements between the child and the parents are overcome. The main characteristics of the social worker are, as follows: a good listening capacity, but also adequate communication of messages to the beneficiaries, attentive, reflective and patient in relation with the children, skills of negotiation and mediation for the participants in the process, social diagnosis and problem-solving skills, critical and objective thinking, ethical behavior with respect to the principles and values of social work.

3. Reasons for parents to give up a child

Studies identified some categories of natural parents who are at risk of abandoning their children and giving them for adoption, such as:

- young and/or single women who believe they are not ready to raise a child, or do not have the resources, women with long-standing histories of disadvantage who hold fragile and restricted social statuses (Broadhurst, Mason, 2020, pp. 15–37);

- single or married parents who have more children and cannot financially and emotionally support them. The existing research showed that 'single parents are likely to experience higher levels of depression, anxiety, and general stress, despite making extensive efforts to meet their financial obligations in order to raise a child' (Stack, Meredith, 2017). Furthermore, more consideration needs to be given to the geographical location of single parents, highlighting the difficulties faced by parents in rural locations versus inner city locations (Simmons *et al.* 2007, apud Stack, Meredith);

- teenage mothers who offer their child up for adoption because at that point in their lives they do not see how to cope. 'Adolescent parenthood reduces the opportunities and optimal outcomes for both mother and child, yet pregnant teenagers rarely consider adoption. Four phenomena were found to be pivotal to the teenage moms' willingness to consider adoption: (1) societal sanctions, (2) low level of knowledge, (3) anticipated psychological discomfort, and (4) lack of support from helping professionals'. (Custer, 1993, pp. 891-902);

- women who are in a less pleasant situation, and thus give up their child in order not grow up in different environment than theirs. Many women who choose adoption for their baby express the desire to offer to him/her, the opportunities they didn't have in the childhood. The opportunity to choose the family that raises their baby can be an empowering experience during an emotional and stressful time. Finding an adoptive family with certain values, educational resources, housing or financial resources is a positive part of the adoption experience. (e.g women from violent environment; immigrants who no social support etc.). (<https://www.adoptionstogether.org>).

An adoption social worker, sometimes called an adoption agent or adoption specialist, is a certified and licensed professional who provides emotional support and counseling and facilitates the adoption process for the adoption triad: the birth parents; the adoptive parents; the child.

Because this professional provides counseling, case management and general oversight throughout the process, you might think of your adoption worker as an „adoption coordinator.” An adoption social worker plays a vital role in a successful placement and can specialize in many types of adoption, such as: private family adoption; foster care adoption; national adoption; international adoption.

These specialists give their all so that prospective birth parents, families and children can experience the life-changing process of adoption in a safe, ethical and legal way. Their support should always be valued and encouraged.

Adoption itself is an emotional process for all people who are involved in the process. Counseling is necessary and has proven to be important for future mothers who are about to give birth and who choose to place the baby in for adoption. These women make a courageous choice, and it is completely normal to have doubts or questions during the adoption. Social workers specialized in adoption, thanks to their education, training and experience are able to provide the support to the mothers in need, in order to clarify the doubts and questions that arise. (<https://www.americanadoptions.com>).

In Romania, The Law of adoption (nr. 273/2004) regarding the adoption procedure, provides: during the adoption the child is encouraged and supported in expressing his opinion, this being recorded and taken into account, depending on his age and degree of maturity; all the steps aimed at the adoption of the child take into consideration to ensure:

(a) the continuity in the child's life, maintaining his personal relations, if this does not contradict his best interest and preserving significant personal objects;
(b) facilitate the separation of the child from the important persons and ensure a smooth transition in the adopter's family; (c) during the adoption the child is provided with clear and concrete information and explanations, according to his age and maturity, regarding the duration and stages of the adoption process. In this process, the case manager is obliged to collaborate with the child reference person(s), as well as with the child case officer” (art. 2-3).

There is no age limitation for people who want to adopt, but there is mandatory a social and psychological assessment that is carried out by specialists in which it will be noticed if future adopters have parental skills for raising a child and if they can offer to the child a place where he or she can grow as well as possible. Adoption between relatives can take place, but adoption between two or more brothers is not an option according to the law.

4. Profile of the adoptive parents

Research shows that the adoption process is likely to succeed if adoptive parents fit into a certain profile. The elements that define this profile are, as follows: the desire to adopt and an intrinsic motivation, age, ethnicity, financial level, educational level, especially women. Studies show that the majority of adopters are married (95 percent for most Western countries). The length of the marriage and its stability are also important factors for a decision taken by the two

spouses regarding the adoption, which strongly correlates with a successful adoption. As for „hard-to-adopt” children, it is necessary that adoptive parents have a higher level of involvement, than for typical children. The figures show that in the US, the age of adopters is about 10 years older than those who give up their children, giving them up for adoption, and in Canada, this difference is even bigger.

In Romania, the candidates for adoption are younger than in other countries, having access only to Romanian children, while on other continents, international adoption is favored, the options being multiple. Older families are less likely to adopt very young and healthy children from their own country. From an educational perspective, studies show that adoptive parents often have a higher level of education than the biological parents of the child they want to adopt (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 146-151).

5. Profile of the adoptable child

It is known that most people or couples who wish to adopt are considering a certain type of child, which the social workers responsible for adoption must take into consideration in matching the parent-child. The characteristics that the candidates for the adoption usually refer to, are the health of the child, age, gender, ethnicity, school situation and data about the natural family. In terms of gender, the results are equal, both girls and boys being desirable for adoption. As for age, research shows that most couples want to adopt children younger than 4 years old. The Romanian adoption Office (ORA) also indicates that the majority of adopted children are healthy children aged between zero and four years old (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 151-154).

As for hard-to-adopt children, the legislation describes them as: children with health problems, children from a certain ethnicity, children for whom the adoption process has not been completed within 9 months of its initiation, children for whom the legal procedure of matching with parents has failed, children from families with many brothers and who cannot be adopted individually etc.

In the case of these children, other potential adopters will be sought, resuming the procedure with all its legal stages. Thus, the social worker creates a profile of the `hard-to-adopt child` and will look for a family that takes into account his or her specific needs. The list of children and potential parents, made by case managers in the field of adoptions will be updated every month, according to a Methodological Norm 579/2016 of implementing the Law of Adoption).

Studies found that institutionalization of children represents a risk factor for their development and, at the same time, represents a negative element in view of their adoption, despite the efforts made by the specialists with attributions in the field, toward rehabilitation. Some institutionalized children have experienced abuse in their pre-adoption history, a risk factor that is frequently reflected in the interruption or even dissolution of adoption. This is due to psychological disorders that can occur due to trauma experienced by the child.

In the stage called „entrusting for adoption”, the child goes to the parents who want to adopt him for a 90-day probation period. After the trial period, the

judge decides whether the child is compatible with the family that wants to adopt him and whether or not he consents to the adoption. „After 90 days, parents don't always want the baby anymore. The most easily adoptable are very young children, and the most difficult to adopt are disabled children” said Andreea-Doris Tomescu, judge of the Bucharest Court of Justice. (<https://acasa.ro/social>).

However, in the case of the adoption of a disabled child or a child with chronic diseases, studies show that this is not a factor in interrupting or discontinuing adoption, instead it is shown that the adoption of a disabled child is associated with a positive evolution (Bejenaru, 2011, pp. 164-166).

6. Research methodology

The general objective of the research is to establish and describe the role of the social worker in adoption, starting from his attributions revealed in the job description, ending with their stories related to the expertise acquired in the field. Our main research goals, were:

- Identification and ranking of the main reasons for adoption from the couple's perspective
- Describing the adoptable child profile from the perception of the adoptive couples
- Identification of the level of knowledge and information of the candidates, regarding adoption
- Identification of the stereotypes and bias concerning the `hard to adopt children
- Highlighting the difficulties of a social worker as expert in the adoption field
- Emphasis of the emotional involvement of the social worker in the adoption process

6.1. Hypotheses

1. We presume that, in the perception of the social workers, more than a half of couples (husbands and wives) are motivated in the same extent for the adoption.
2. We presume that, a majority of potential parents wants to adopt children among zero and four years old.
3. We presume that over 50 percent of parents willing to adopt, do not have realistic expectation towards the children.

6.2. Sample

Our survey was attended by 30 social workers in the field of adoption, with a seniority in the profession between 5 and 15 years, of which 18 women and 12 men, coming from urban (73 percent) and rural area (27 percent). The data collection was carried out using a questionnaire that we developed and disseminated using the Google forms platform.

Research instruments

A survey named `The role of the Social Worker in the Adoption`, and an interview Guide for specialists were used in order to gather the data for our study. Our questionnaire contains 25 items, closed questions, with the answers being distributed on a 5-step Likert scale. The items refer to: the role of the social worker in the adoption procedure; obstacles encountered in the career; elements of counseling of the adoptive parents and professional relationship; motivation for adoption; the level of information and knowledge of the candidates for adoption. We also used an Interview Guide made of five items, which enabled us to conduct a qualitative analysis of the issues being considered.

7. Results and discussion

By analyzing the answers of the subjects regarding the measure of the involvement of parents in the decision to adopt, we see that, in the social workers perception, in most cases (54 percent) husbands and wives willing to adopt are `often` involved in the same extent, while 33,3 percent `always` agree, and 10 percent only `sometimes` (Diagram nr. 1). We believe that this aspect of the agreement between spouses regarding adoption is particularly important for its long-term success. Dissensions between spouses, who may have different views on family expansion, could have negative effects on the development of the adopted child, especially since he/she comes from the protective system and could already have some emotional disorders. Hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

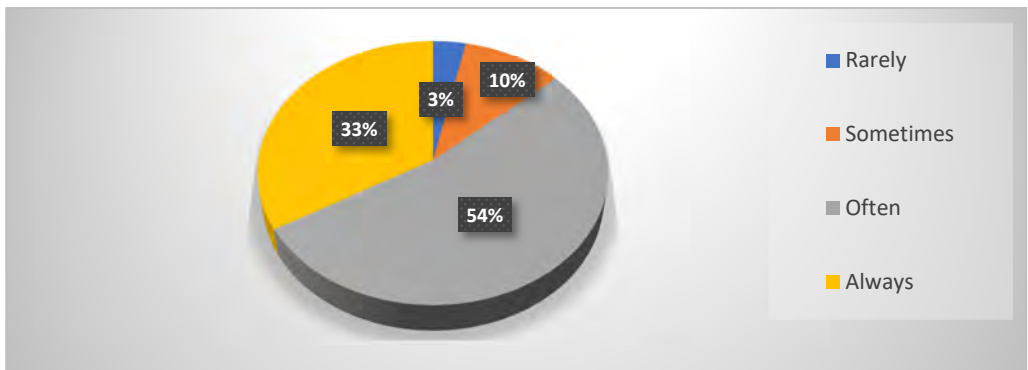


Diagram 1. In your opinion is the level of motivation for both adoptive parents the same? (N=30)

One of the objectives of our study was to identify the main reasons that lead couples or single people to adopt, as we believe that in not all situations, they are in favor of children available for adoption. Unconscious reasons of the candidates for adoption, can strike this process of necessary objectivity.

We argue our statement, by quoting research carried out in 2016 by Ana Baciu (a social worker in the adoption office in Constanta), on a sample of 60 couples willing to adopt. The author found that each adoptive couple presents a constellation of reasons that they were aware of, in the time of the adoption

application, most of the reasons being personal, followed by social motivation, and altruism. Thus, most couples adopt in order to fill the lack of their own capacity to have a biological child. There is a fierce battle with their own biological limits, and when it becomes apparent that only a miracle would make it possible to become biological parents, they turn toward adoption. The feelings of helplessness, despair, and hopelessness generated by the impossibility of having children, leave room for hope that they will adopt the ideal child, the child they mentally designed at the beginning of their marriage.

Personal motivation to adopt

Being a parent represents a desire of every person who has reached sexual and emotional maturity, and has entered into a married, or cohabiting relationship. The appearance of the child is a natural and pleasant consequence of marriage, when he is desired and expected. In the first years of marriage the couple is centered on accommodating to marital status, and strengthening the relationship, regulating relations between spouses. For most married couples this is the sequence of events. For other couples, however, the pregnancy event is delayed.

Anxiety about the absence of pregnancy arises and begins a journey through the specialized medical offices, countless analyzes and complicated medical procedures, which increases the stress of partners. The stressors accompanying the investigations create feelings of guilt in the affected person, insecurity, anxiety and affect the self-image as a whole person. Relationships can suffer from stress, guilt, anxiety etc. Infertility it's causing damage to the institution of marriage, and many couples fall apart due to their partner's desire to have biological children. But couples in whom partners value each other, resist after all the medical procedures of assisted reproduction, and begin to think about the alternative of adoption.

Most of the subjects of the study (93 percent out of 60 participant couples) cited infertility as a main reason to adopt, but besides this objective reason, the following have been formulated: the desire to enjoy the presence of the child; the wish to have the opportunity to manifest the set of parental behaviors that they have learned in their family; feeling the need to be loved as a parent; wanting a bigger family and therefore happiness; achieving the ideal family with children; wanting company for their biological children: having more than average financial conditions and feeling able to raise one or more kids. Very few of them want to adopt a child that they have really attached themselves to.

The altruism as reason for adoption is implicit. The subjects refrained from writing this reason in their written statements, but the interview clearly shows the altruistic component of the motivational system. The need to help, to support, to protect a child without parental protection, giving love, education, material resources, and sharing personal values with their adopted child, comes secondly as motivation.

Social motivation to adopt

The most well-represented social reason invoked by the subjects was the need for social comparison, `to be like their other congeners`. The subjects in the situation of adopting are adult persons, mature couples on the threshold of the stage of seeking stability on the long-term, having more than 7 years of marriage. The couple stopped evolving because the baby is missing. Most of the time, they are the only ones in their group who do not have a child yet. Group activities also involve the socialization of children and they do not have one. Compared to others they are „poorer”, in discussing about children, so they are not involved in some activities. They want to be `with others, like the others` (62 percent of respondents cited this reason). Another social reason is to have `a depository of the material and spiritual values they have accumulated`. Other reasons were `initiating a line of heirs`, `the social and moral duty`, `compliance with the partner's expectations`, `compliance with extended family expectations`, `following the example of their friends`.

In the perception of the social workers involve in our study, the main reason a couple wants to adopt, as seen in the diagram nr. 2, is infertility (54 percent). The second reason is for starting a family (18 percent), also „to have someone to rely on, in old age” (14 percent), „the replacement of a lost child” (eight percent); „substitute for children who have left home” (four percent); „developed attachment to one child” (two percent).

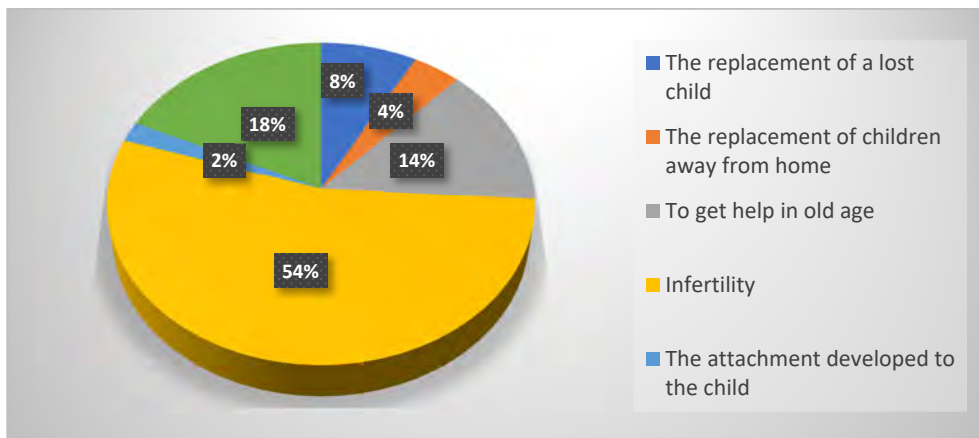


Diagram 2. The main reasons to adopt in the perception of practitioners (N=30)

The opposition of the extended family

Analysis of the results from the diagram 3 highlighted the fact that less than 50 percent of couples who wanted to adopt a child, had encountered opposition from one of their extended families, or both.

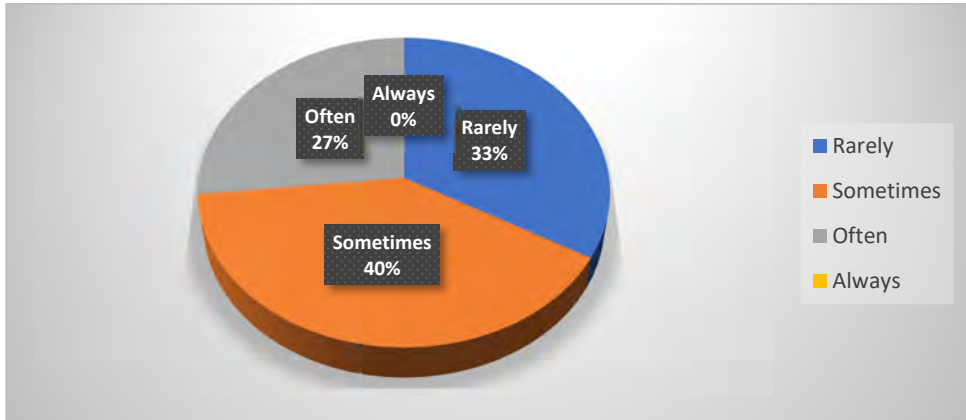


Diagram 3. The frequency of the opposition of the relatives towards adoption

The desire of couples to adopt children between zero to four years old, is reflected in the responses of social workers attending our study, as follows: 27 percent of the respondents consider that couples `exclusively` accept a very young child, while 66 percent from the participants thinks that `most of time`, a small child is desirable. The perception is that only seven percent of the perspective couples have the flexibility to receive an older child. Hypothesis nr. 2 was confirmed.

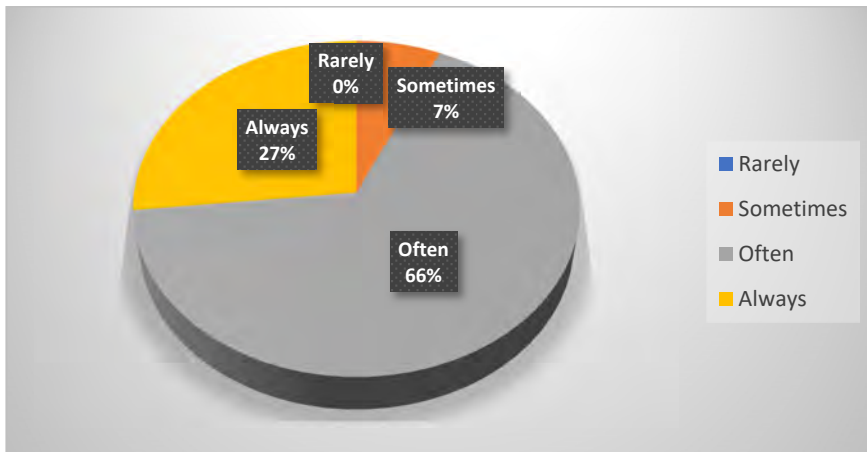


Diagram 4. Frequency of the desire to adopt very small children

The objection to adopt older children is related to the fear that they might not fit into the family, because `they already manifest dysfunctional behavioral patterns`, caused by the abandonment of natural parents and subsequently accentuated by the institutional environment. Bowlby's studies (1951) showed at the time that children who suffered maternal deprivation encounter negative and irreversible effects as a result so, they frequently exhibited behavioral disorders. Bowlby also pointed out that proper maternal care is essential during the first two

and a half years of a child's life and almost useless after that time frame, conclusions that were later invalidated.

Recent research (Rutter, 1991, apud Neamtu, 2003, pp. 810-813) proves that in many cases, the possibility of recovering and compensating physical and cognitive deficits exists, as soon as the child changes the existing environment with a more favorable one. Paternal deprivation can also occur in the context of partial or total absence of the father from the child's life, which leads to the impossibility of training a secure attachment to him. Without absolutizing, we can recall a number of risks to which some abandoned children are exposed, depending on the duration, severity of deprivation and the stage of development at which it occurred, such as: food deficiency or malnutrition, intellectual deficiency, antisocial behavior and even juvenile delinquency. This makes it difficult for pretender parents to decide in favor of adopting an older child.

Rejection of disabled children from the adoption

Most of the adopters tend to refuse disabled children who have been offered for adoption. Generally, the refusal is generated by doubts about their ability to care for children with special needs. In our study there are few parents who accept the idea of adopting a child with disabilities, the percentage being less than 10 percent.

Motivation to adopt siblings

Taking into account the respondents' answers, 33 percent, of the participants in the study consider that „rarely” adoptive parents embrace the idea of adopting siblings. A percentage of 27 percent of social workers thinks that siblings may be adopted together `often`, seven percent choose the `always` version, and 33 percent `rarely` (diagram 5).

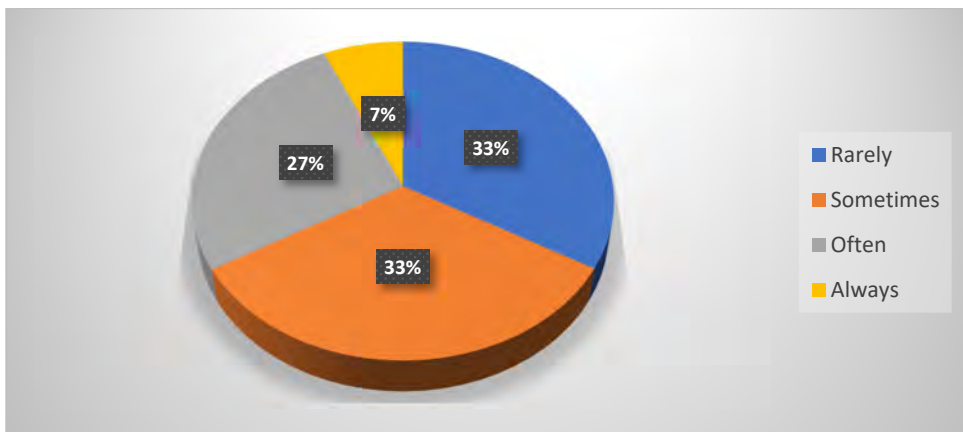


Diagram 5. The frequency of sibling's adoption in the perception of the practitioners (N=30)

Parents' expectations toward adopted children

There are a lot of parents who, once the adoption process starts, have a lot of expectations toward the child. This may be related to gender, ethnicity, age, health and academic achievements for older children.

These expectations may change along the way, depending on each adoptive family and their lifestyle or status, but the practitioners included in the study believe that most parents do not have realistic expectations toward adopted children.

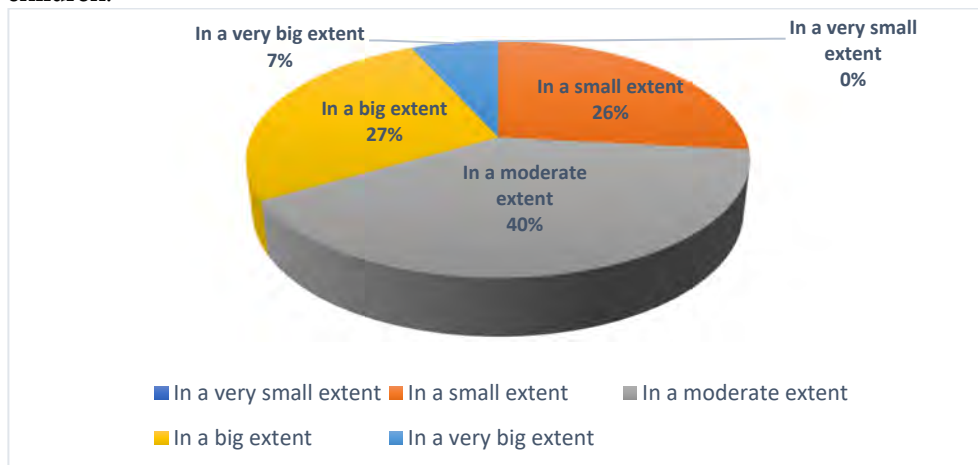


Diagram 6. Do you believe that adoptive parents have realistic expectations from their children?

For this item (according to Diagram nr. 6), seven percent of the practitioners consider that the adoptive parents have no realistic expectation towards the child, or have 'in a very small extent', 27 percent consider that they are realistic 'in a big extent', while 40 percent appreciated 'in a moderate extent', and 26 percent responded 'in a small extent', regarding this issue. Our third hypotheses were confirmed. One of the practitioners related briefly about the case of a eight-year-old girl who was adopted, the parents investing a lot of effort and money in her school training. After two years, finding that the girl was unable to achieve satisfactory school results, a conflict occurred between them, so the parents threatened to send her back.

It was the role and the success of the adoption counselor to settle the situation and restore the harmony in the family. Another issue that respondents were asked to answer was advising the family to speak openly with the child about what it means to have biological parents and adoptive parents at the same time, in order to create with time a correct perception of the child on the mental level and not to affect his self-esteem. In our paper 46,7 percent of the social workers believe that during counseling sessions with adoptive parents, it is necessary to advise them to tell children that they are adopted, and 13,4 percent of them believe that this is not necessary.

However, research which explored intercountry and domestic adoption from the child's point of view (Beckett, C., & Sonuga-Barke, E. (2008) - *The Experience of Adoption*, 32/1, pp. 29–39) showed that parents underestimate the challenge for their children to talk about adoption. Children who found this harder, showed lower self-esteem at age 11 and were also more likely to feel different from their adoptive families, and both factors were related to the child's individual level of development (cognitive and behavioral).

For the children adopted from Romania, together with a sibling, seemed easier to talk about their adoption. In short, the ease with which children can talk about adoption seems to be associated with higher self-esteem and individual difficulties of the child, as well as with the composition of the family.

The awareness level of the candidates for adoption

Practitioners, as a result of their professional experience, believe that generally 47 percent of candidates for adoption are informed „to a big extent” about the procedures, and only three percent are informed `In a very big extent` what is going to happen in this long and difficult process. 40 percent of the applicants are „in a moderate extent” informed, rather waiting for the meetings with the specialist, who will handle their case.

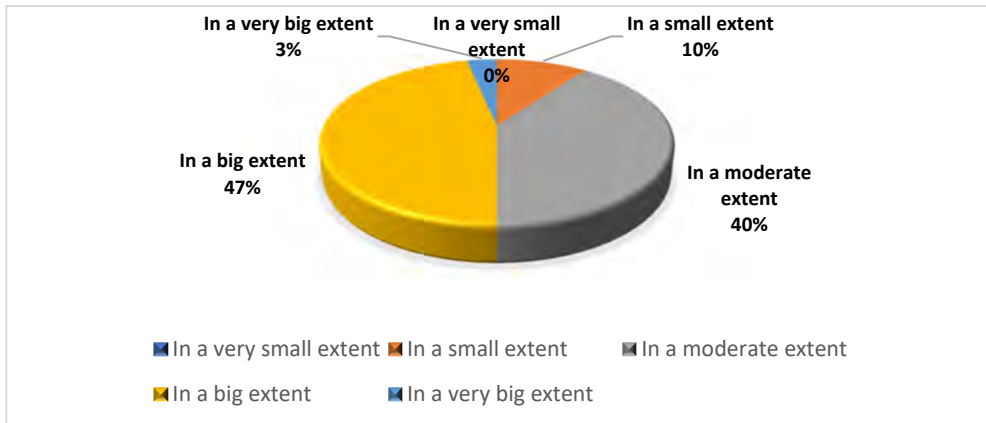


Diagram 7. The awareness level of the candidates regarding the adoption process

Counseling the family for adoption has a particularly important role in its success, the social workers considering that the results are „always” favorable (43,3 percent), and „often favorable” in a proportion of 56,7 percent. Also, when asked about the ability of parents to respond to the needs of the adopted child/children, specialists believe that following repeated meetings and the compatibility process, 80percent of parents begin to understand the profile, the desires and needs of the child and manage to address them properly (diagram nr. 8).

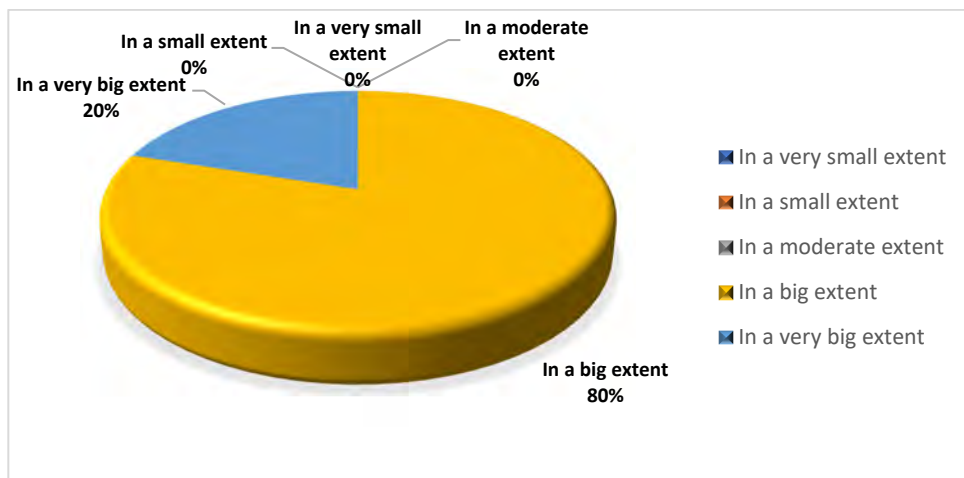


Diagram 8. Do you believe that adoptive parents have the abilities to meet the needs of their children?

Monitoring the relationship between parents and adopted children in the post-adoption phase, specialists are able to say that „largely` (70percent), and `very largely` (30 percent), the accommodation of children in the family occurs in very good conditions (diagram nr. 9).

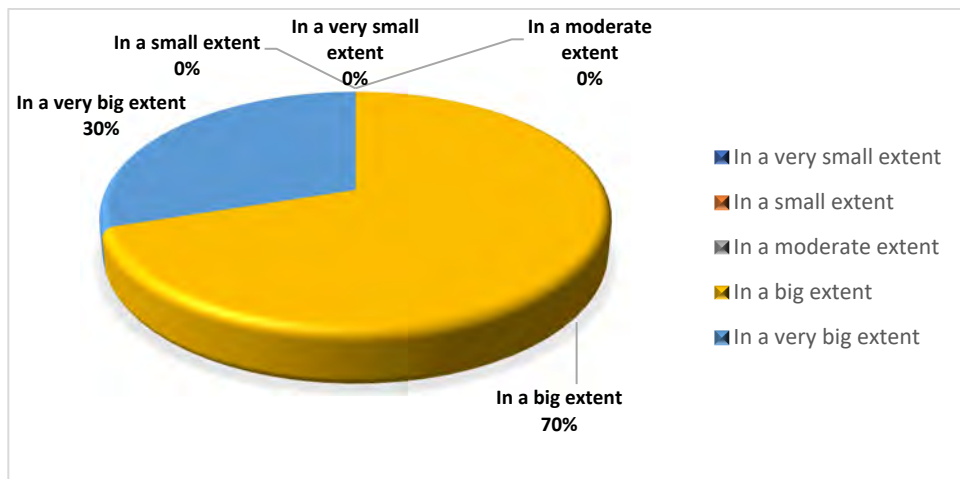


Diagram 9. By monitoring the adoption, can you tell if the child has settled in?

Regarding this issue, Boswell, S., & Cudmore, L. (2014, pp. 5–21) found that, when children move from foster care into adoption, there is no more interaction between the child and the foster parent. Very little attention, or research has been aimed at understanding these procedures. Together with social workers involved in monitoring the child and the family, researchers found that the emotional experience of the child, particularly their experience of losing their foster career,

became less prominent in people's minds during this transition. The way the child adapts to the new family structure, the multitude of novelties that occur in his life and the lack of obvious emotions when separated from the previous caregiver can be interpreted as signs that the child is „well”. However, he may experience intense loss of connection with the attachment person and may set in motion defense mechanisms against the pain felt. Specialists believe that this would be a field for further investigation, with implications in practical work.

During the adoption, a relationship of trust is created between the social worker and the family and also with the child, without which it would not be possible to have open discussions and resolve problems or doubts that arise from both sides. 77 percent of the social workers surveyed say `often` the information about the child and the adoption can only be properly transmitted and understood in a safe and cautious context, while 23 percent consider this `always` necessary (Diagram nr. 10).

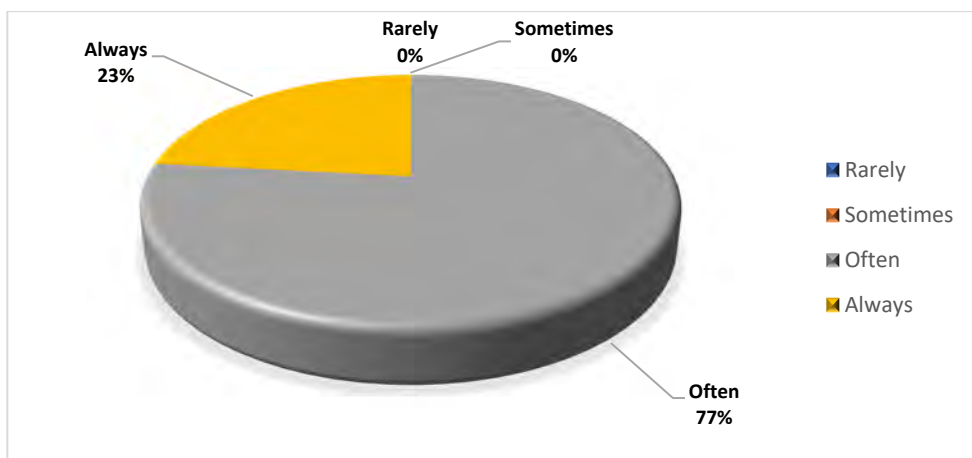


Diagram 10. Frequency of a trustful relationship between the practitioner and the family

A successful adoption

For 67 percent of the participants working on an adoption case, `always` manage to have the satisfaction of a successful adoption, while 33 percent „often” feel this way. Monitoring the process, the social worker notes that: `parents and children are compatible`; `a bond of trust has been established between them`; `the child begins to have a favorable development, thanks to the parents responding properly to his needs`.

All this gives the practitioner, professional satisfaction and personal fulfillment (Diagram nr. 11).

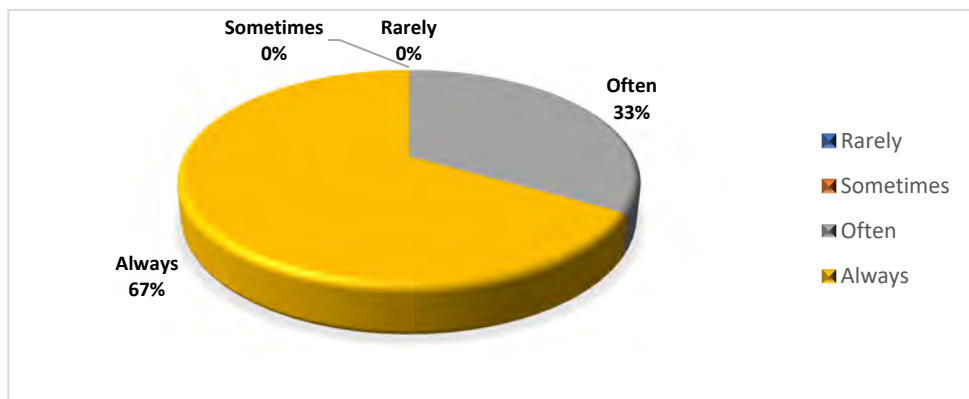


Diagram 11. The satisfaction level of the practitioner working in the adoption field

Failure of adoption

The item nr. 18 of our questionnaires provides free answers from the participants, so we had the opportunity to make a qualitative analysis on the reasons of failure. `Despite the counseling of child and family, have you encountered cases where the adoption was canceled? Please relate`.

From the experience of the respondents, it is apparent that few of them have encountered cases of annulment, the main reasons being: „the child could not adjust to the adoptive family”; „the child did not integrate”; „the child was abused in the adoptive family”, „the parents neglected the child”; „the parents did not care for the child or protected him`.

The practitioners also said that in some cases (where is no abuse), by raising the awareness during the counseling, the annulment can be prevented (Diagram nr. 12). Thus, 17 percent of the participants strongly believe that counseling can always prevent the failure, while 40 percent thinks, in a big extent”, and 40 percent `in a moderate extent`.

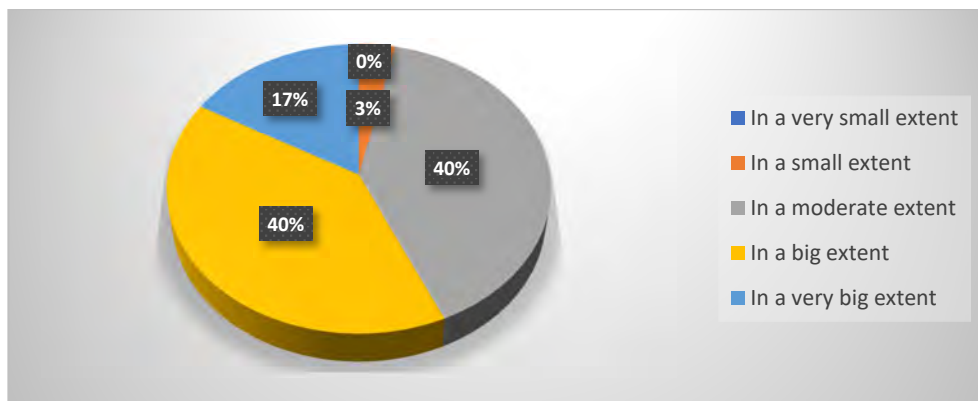


Diagram 12. Can post-adoption counseling and monitoring help prevent annulment? (N=30)

Regarding the improvements that can be done in the adoption legislation (item nr. 28), almost 80 percent of the respondents thinks that the legislation is better now than a few years before, and only some of them consider that there is still room for the improvement. The practitioner recommendations are, as follows: `the process should be faster, so the child should not wait too long`, `the legislation should be less rigid, since the cases are so diverse`. Generally, the participants believe that international adoptions should be facilitated. They agree that `every child deserve to have a family no matter the country`, and `every child deserves love and protection, because is in his best interests, for a proper development`.

The item nr 30 refers to `the biggest obstructions` that the specialists met in the field of adoption, and the answers shows that the respondents encountered situations that limited their professional options, such as: `the extended family disagreed with the adoption`; `unforeseen events such as the death of one of the adoptive parents interfere with the adoption`; `the appearance of misunderstandings between partners, which led to serious conflicts`; `misunderstandings between adoptive and biological parents` etc.

The emotional involvement of the practitioner

In the diagram nr. 13, we can see that 10 percent of the social workers consider that they are `in a great extent` emotionally involved in the adoption process, while 76 percent of them are exposed `in a big extent` to various emotions. So, 86 percent of the respondents believe that their experiences are quite unique, every family and every child being special. Thus, involvement in each case brings with it diversified and intense experiences for the workers in the field. Just 14 percent, of the participants do not agree with the emotional involvement during the adoption process, regarding the child or the parents.

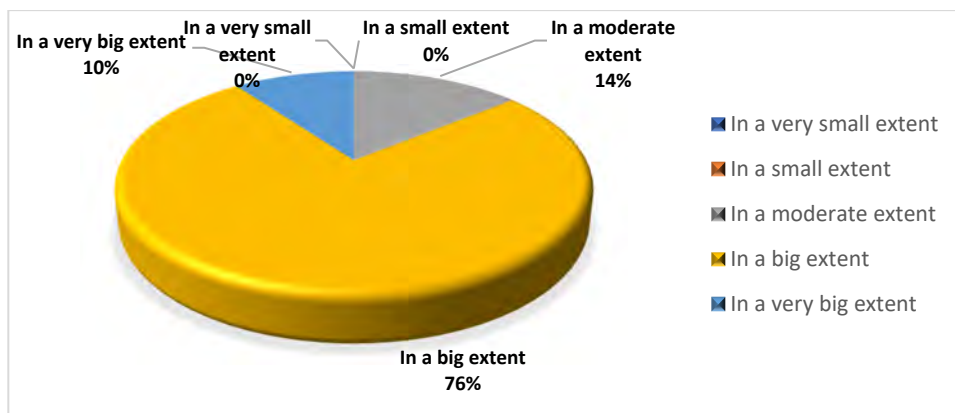


Diagram 13. `As a specialist, do you consider yourself emotionally involved during adoption?`

8. Conclusion

In our paper we wanted to present, in a complete manner, the aspects related to the role of the social worker in the adoption procedure, with emphasis on his evaluations, opinions, experiences and perceptions trained in his career, based on the deep analysis of the phenomenon. We highlighted the difficulties and interruptions of ongoing adoptions caused by pandemic restrictions as well as the unfulfilled parents, or the frustrations of children who were on the brink of finding a family. Importantly, the procedures have been resumed and a record number of national adoptions have been recorded in the post-pandemic period. The main objectives of the research were achieved, and the assumptions were confirmed.

Thus, by relying on the opinions of professional social workers with experience in the field and who manage dozens of adoption cases every year, we were able to identify the main motivations of the candidates for adoption as personal and social, accompanied by a manifest altruism. In the category of personal reasons, the first is infertility, the biological inability to procreate, but also less aware aspects of the suitors, such as feelings of helpfulness, separation, and hopelessness that make room for the desire to adopt 'the ideal child', they mentally designed from the beginning of their marriage. The participants in our study also noticed that some adopters manifest: the desire to enjoy the presence of a child in the couple's life; the need to practice a set of parental skills with which they were endowed; the need to be loved as parents and to devote their efforts to raising a child to whom to pass on their concepts, beliefs and ideals of life.

Very few of them want to adopt a child to which they have attached themselves in a genuine and truly manner, and whose interest is put on the first place.

The social pressure of childless couples is reflected in the social reason for adoption, meaning the comparison with people of the same age and social status, of mature couples with over 5 - 7 years of marriage. Those couples are usually the only ones in their group who do not yet have children. In this way, they are excluded from group activities, from discussions about children, or from events dedicated to families with children. Other couples are eager to make the adopted child their heirs and depositaries of personal assets and values, to fulfill a social and moral duty in order to meet the expectations of their partner or extended family, or, enjoying a high financial status, they want to give the adopted child what they did / or did not have in their childhood.

At the same time, we reaffirmed that parents who want to adopt are mostly oriented toward very young children (between zero and four years old), while older children are less desirable, as they are considered to have some dysfunctional behaviors, acquired either in a disorganized family, in foster care or in residential system. Children with special needs, or those with more siblings, are also less desired by couples, being considered as 'hard-to-adopt'.

From the results of the interview with specialists, we highlighted their views on the legislation, most of them agreeing that adoption procedures should

be facilitated, in order to give the opportunity to both children, and families to meet in the least possible time.

The biggest obstructions encountered by the practitioners in their work are related to the extended family disagreement with the adoption, the unexpected death of one of the parents who want to adopt, the misunderstandings that may arise in the couple, or between the adoptive and biological parents.

Practitioners are aware of the degree to which they are emotionally involved in the adoption procedure, over 83 percent of them considering that emotional consumption is high, in efforts to make the child compatible with the family, to create a relationship of trust with each of them, to speak to the child according to his/her understanding capacities, to inform parents about the course of adoption and unforeseen problems. Counseling and post-adoption monitoring activities prove to be particularly useful in avoiding adoption failure, but also in preventing child neglect, which can lead to inadaptation.

Our research had its limits caused by the pandemic restrictions, which led to the application of the Survey through Google forms, another limiting factor being the distance from the city where the respondents live (Constanta, Braila, Galati, Tulcea, Slobozia and Calarasi), the interviews being conducted online. We bring special thanks to the Social Work student Gabriela Rotaru, who supported us in data collection.

Our conclusion is that the adoption process is a very complex one, which, once completed, will change the life of the couple and the child for the rest of their lives. The practitioner's work is extremely delicate and subtle in the compatibility of the parties, requiring special skills and emotional involvement without which, the adoption would not have the desired success.

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EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE, LIFE SKILLS AND SELF-ESTEEM OF YOUTH LEAVING THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

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Abstract

The youth who leave the child protection system face multiple challenges, some of them due to insufficiently developed life skills, as well as some psychological peculiarities related to them. The particular context in which they grew up leaves its mark on the confidence they have in a good future. The present study aims to explore to what extent the future expectations of these young people are positive or negative, as well as the relationship of these expectations with the level of development of their life skills, with the young people's perception of self-efficacy, as well as with the level of their self-esteem, being used for the first time on the Romanian population, the Casey Life Skills Assessment scale, short form. The research had an exploratory, quantitative design, and involved the application of an online questionnaire to a number of 92 young people, aged 18-26, who benefit from a special child protection measure in Romania. The results of the study show that the optimistic perception of the future of young people who are about to leave the child protection system correlates positively with an increased level of self-esteem, perceived self-efficacy, as well as with the self-estimated level of development of life skills.

In conclusion, the preparation for independent life of the young people raised in the child protection system requires attention both for the formation of life skills and for the development of self-esteem and problem-solving skills, so that they can look with hope to their own future.

Keywords: young people, child protection system, life skills, self-efficacy, self-esteem, expectations from the future

Résumé

Les jeunes qui quittent le système de protection de l'enfance font face à de multiples défis, dont certains sont dus à des compétences de vie insuffisamment développées, ainsi qu'à certaines particularités psychologiques qui leur sont liées. Le contexte particulier dans lequel ils ont grandi marque de leur empreinte la confiance qu'ils ont en un bel avenir. Cette étude vise à explorer dans quelle mesure les attentes futures de ces jeunes sont positives ou négatives, ainsi que la relation de ces attentes avec le niveau de développement des compétences de vie, avec la perception des jeunes de l'auto-efficacité, ainsi que comme pour

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le niveau d'estime de soi, l'échelle Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment 3.0, forme abrégée, est utilisée pour la première fois sur la population roumaine. La recherche a eu conception exploratoire et quantitative et impliquait l'application d'un questionnaire en ligne à un certain nombre de 92 jeunes, âgés de 18 à 26 ans, qui bénéficient d'une mesure de protection spéciale en Roumanie. Les résultats de l'étude montrent que la perception optimiste de l'avenir des jeunes qui s'apprentent à quitter le système de protection de l'enfance est corrélée positivement avec un niveau accru d'estime de soi, d'auto-efficacité perçue, ainsi qu'avec le niveau auto-estimé de développement des compétences de vie. En conclusion, la préparation à la vie indépendante des jeunes élevés dans le système de protection de l'enfance nécessite une attention à la fois à la formation des compétences de vie et au développement de l'estime de soi et des capacités de résolution de problèmes, afin qu'ils puissent envisager avec espoir leur propre avenir.

Mots clés: jeunes, système de protection de l'enfance, compétences de vie, efficacité personnelle, estime de soi, attentes face à l'avenir

Rezumat

Tinerii care părăsesc sistemul de protecție a copilului se confruntă cu multiple provocări, parte dintre ele datorate abilităților de viață insuficient dezvoltate, precum și unor particularități psihologice aflate în legătură cu acestea. Contextul particular în care ei au crescut își pune amprenta asupra încrederii pe care ei o au într-un viitor bun.

Prezentul studiu își propune să exploreze în ce măsură așteptările de la viitor ale acestor tineri sunt pozitive sau negative, precum și relația acestor așteptări cu nivelul de dezvoltare al abilităților de viață, cu percepția tinerilor cu privire la propria eficacitate, precum și cu nivelul stimei de sine, fiind utilizată pentru prima dată pe populație românească scala Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment 3.0, forma scurtă. Cercetarea a avut un design exploratoriu, cantitativ, și a presupus aplicarea unui chestionar online la un număr de 92 de tineri, cu vârste între 18 și 26 de ani care beneficiază de măsură de protecție specială în România.

Rezultatele studiului arată că percepția optimistă asupra propriului viitor a tinerilor care urmează să părăsească sistemul de protecție a copilului corelează pozitiv cu un nivel crescut al stimei de sine, al autoeficienței percepute, precum și cu al nivelului autoestimat de dezvoltare al abilităților de viață. În concluzie, pregătirea pentru viața independentă a tinerilor crescuți în sistemul de protecție a copilului necesită atenție atât pentru formarea abilităților de viață, cât și pe dezvoltare stimei de sine și a abilităților de rezolvare de probleme, astfel încât aceștia să privească cu speranță către propriul viitor.

Cuvinte cheie: tineri, sistem de protecție a copilului, abilități de viață, auto-efficacitate, stimă de sine, așteptări de la viitor

1. Introduction

The moment when they start their independent adult life is a challenge for any young person, most often it is a time as expected as it is full of uncertainties (Anton et al., 2020). In contrast to the youth who have a stable and supportive family, the youth who leave the child protection system may face more uncertainty, more challenges, and less support when they encounter difficulties (Irimescu, 2017). Actually, „youth who age out of care are often expected to live independently well before their peers” (University of Hawai'i, Center of the Family,

2012). Part of the difficulties they encounter is due to explosion at a lot of risk factors, but an important part is due to the insufficient acquisition of life skills (Kerman, 2009; Nollan, 2002). Moreover, as the research suggests, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviours and face difficulties across domains like: education (a higher part of them finished their studies, school failure), economic security (homelessness, unemployment, receiving social benefits), health (especially mental health issues caused by trauma, losses and lack of permanency, as PTSD, depression, anxiety, addictions), safety and risk behaviours (early parenthood, abandonment of their children, substance use, delinquency) (Courtney, 2009; Dworsky, 2009; Courtney, 2001; Freundlich, 2006; Leve, 2012; Medeleanu, Moron, 2022). In addition to these disadvantages, the young people lack often the interpersonal and life-success skills, so they have issues in connecting and relating to other people (Courtney, 2001; Dworsky, 2009; Courtney, 2009).

At the end of 2021, a number of 45212 children were cared in the Romanian child protection system. From the 12890 children from residential care, 2131 children are 18 years old and over (ANPDCA, 2022), and annually approximative 5000 young people are leaving the care. The statistics are incomplete, but in order to know the extent of the phenomenon, to estimate the costs of intervention and non-intervention, it would be very useful to develop statistics that include the number of children entering and leaving the system annually, their distribution by age, gender, ethnicity, the types of placements he is in, as well as the number of successive placements. In Romania, according the Law no. 272 on 2004 about the child rights protection, the vulnerable children can benefit from the special child protection measure until the age of 18, and if they continue their studies until the age of 26 (Parlamentul României, 2014). Also, even if they do not continue their studies, the law provides for the possibility for them to benefit from a period of transition to independent life. The child protection departments at county level have the obligation to support them to find a job and a place to stay in the last 6 months of staying, and also to monitor them during the first 2 years after they leave the system. On leaving care, these young people are given an allowance equal to three gross minimum wages per country (Guvernul României, 2022). These measures are necessary, but not sufficient. A research report of the World Bank affirms that if the institutional route not provide them with social housing or protected housing (supervised independent living arrangements) when these young people leave the protection system, they have no real chance to integrate and have a sustainable life (Stănculescu, 2017, p. 44).

To prepare the children for independent adult life is an important mission of the child protection system, and the minimum quality standards of social services intended for children and young people also include provisions on independent living skills (Corman, 2010; Ministerul Muncii și Justiției Sociale, 2019). The problem is that in Romania, in addition to being an understudied subject, there are no standardized tools for the assessment of these life skills, nor coherent and exhaustive programs and curricula to be implemented uniformly throughout

the system. In fact, curricula exist, but is very general, without concrete contents that would allow similar teaching to all young people in the care.

Based on our own empirical observations and experiences in the evaluation of the social services, we found that at the level of some child protection departments, the young people are just waiting to start their lives as autonomous adults and feel ready for this, while in others, they remain as much possible under the special child protection measure, even if they have no interest in the study. As long as the legislation and the administrative organization are the same, in my opinion, what makes the difference in this case is the human resources involved and the organizational culture, but also the level of economic development and the local culture.

The importance of developing life skills is essential, but to define them is more complex. According to the World Health Organization (1994, p. 3) the life skills are „abilities for adaptive positive behaviour. that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life". The same report proposed five basic areas of life skills: decision making and problem solving, creative thinking and critical thinking, communication and interpersonal skills, self-awareness and empathy, and coping with emotions and stress. In defining sport-based life skills, Gould and Carson (2008, p. 60) include „those internal personal assets, characteristics and skills such as goal setting, emotional control, self-esteem, and hard work ethic that can be facilitated or developed in sport and are transferred for use in non-sport settings". So the self-esteem is an important component of the life skills, or at least a concept related with them.

The positive expectations about future, the hope, as well as the self-efficacy, are corelated with the academic and professional success (Tomás, 2019; Snyder, 2000; Ciarrochi, 2007). Snyder and colleagues (1991, p. 580) found that the students with a higher level of hope set and attained higher grade goals, that their peers with a lower hope, and underline the tole of the hope in the self-regulation, that is an important prerequisite of the life skills. The same author considers hope as „emotions follow from one's causal analyses of goal pursuits (...) positive emotions reflecting perceived success in the pursuit of goals, and negative emotions reflecting perceived failures" (Snyder, 2000).

Self-esteem refers at an individual's assessment of his global self-worth. It is a controversial concept, there are no evidence that the self-esteem contributes at higher grades, or the good academic performances raised the self-esteem (Baumeister, 2003). There are studies that shows that it is positive corelate with the happiness, and negative with the sadness and depression (Ciarrochi, 2007).

According to Albert Bandura, „the perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." (1997, p. 3). Jerusalem and Mittag (1995, p. 178), based on literature, underline that „in the context of stressful life transitions, general beliefs of efficacy may serve as a personal resource or vulnerability factor". A high level of perceived efficacy generates trust in their own capabilities to master different types of environmental demands and enables them to face stressful

demands with confidence. In the light of these theory, the youth who are living care will be helped in this transition by having this skill, and this is the reason for including the concept of self-efficacy in the present research. The children raised in child protection system can meet most of the conditions that lead to weak self-efficacy expectancies, as a history of failures, lack of supportive feedback, and an unfavourable attributional style of one's successes and failures by parents, teachers, and peers, which „may lead to the development of a tendency to scan the environment for potential dangers, to appraise demands as threatening, and to cope with problems in dysfunctional ways” (Jerusalem, 1995, p. 179). The authors mentioned that although general self-efficacy is conceived of as a trait, it is changeable, especially in response to critical life events by young adults whose sense of efficacy is not yet as elaborated and stabilized as in older persons.

Nollan and his colleagues underlined the influence of some protective factors in developing a higher level of self-sufficiency skill: the relative placement the relationship with the foster mother (as well as a good relationship with a significant adult), relationship with peers, relative placements, self-esteem, and vision for the future, but also employment opportunities, group involvement, cultural identification and volunteer experience (2002). Pecora et al. (2009) are listing no less than seven outcomes that are considered important for the youth in long-term care, among which the life skills development. The other outcomes are the reduction in the emotional trauma of child maltreatment, the healthy physical development through regular check-ups and adequate medical, dental, and vision care, the avoidance of teen pregnancy, the high school graduation, a healthy socialization and healthy adult relationships. Some studies confirm the connection between life-skills preparation and later adult success in two areas: educational attainment and employment, the impact of incomplete life skills preparation being underlined (Kessler, 2009; Pecora, 2009)

Based on these considerations, this study intends to bring a modest contribution to the vision about what needs youths to leave more prepared the foster care, paying attention to the life skills concept as well as some psychological aspects: self-esteem, perceived self-efficacy.

So, we asked ourself: To what extent the trust in the own future (optimism towards the future) is based on a high level of life skills, problem-solving ability (perceived self-efficacy) and self-esteem. Which one is a better predictor of the confidence in a good future? How does the level of development of life skills, hope for a positive future, problem-solving ability and self-esteem vary according to gender? Have the girls more developed life skills than the boys? Is ACLSA 3.0 a good tool for research and assessment for Romanian youth? To what extent high level of the life and problem-solving skills predict high self-esteem?

2. Methodology

The research has a quantitative, exploratory, non-experimental, and correlational design, aiming to investigate the future expectations of the young people who leave the child protection system, more precisely to what extent their

future expectations are optimistic or pessimistic and to explore their relationship with the level of their life skills, problem-solving skills, and self-esteem. We would expect a high level of confidence in a good future to correlate positively with a high level of life skills, perceived self-efficacy, as well as self-esteem. Having in mind the differences between genders in developing life skills, we want to verify the hypothesis that the girls obtain higher scores at all the applied scales. Also, we want to see if the short form of the ACLSA 3.0 and the Looking Forward subscale of the ACLSA 3.0 standard form have internal consistency and construct validity, so that they can be used on the Romanian population as assessment and research tools.

The research sample consisted of 92 young people aged between 18 and 26 (50 female and 40 male), benefiting from a special protection measure such as family placement with relatives up to the fourth degree, placement with a maternal assistant (foster parent) or residential placement, in one of the counties of Dolj, Iasi, Botoşani and Olt.

All participants gave their voluntary consent to participate in this study. As a research procedure, after the translation of the unvalidated tools and the construction of the questionnaire, the link to the Google form was distributed to the management of some child protection services in five counties of Romania, with the request to distribute it to young people over 18 years old, in order to answer voluntarily. Answers were received only from four counties

We created a questionnaire with 63 items, which included socio-demographic data (age, gender, educational level, type of special child protection measure), questions about mental health status, the „Looking forward” subscale of Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA), Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment short form, General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer, 1995) and Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1991)

We chose to measure the level of confidence in a good future or the optimistic outlook on one's own future with the „Looking forward” subscale of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, because we were interested not in optimism as a trait, but as state in the front of their concrete life situation. The subscale includes seven items of the Likert scale type, with five response steps, which we ordered in ascending order (1=No, 2 = Mostly no, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Mostly yes, 5 = Yes), unlike the instrumental original, in order not to confuse the respondents by alternating in the questionnaire the ascending and descending order of the answers to the different subscales. The score for the assessment will range from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating high skill strength, the total scores can vary between 7 and 35. There are no standard scores, the instrument aims at the participatory evaluation of young people and constitutes a starting point for discussing what they feel and think about the areas in which they obtained higher or lower scores.

First built in 1998, Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) have now a third version (ACLSA 3.0), and, after our knowledge is first time used on Romanian population. This tool was created as a self-reporting instrument that gives youth and their caregivers the opportunity to assess their strengths and

challenges (Casey Family Programs, 2022, p. 4), and it is very appreciate (Nollan KA, 2000). Despite the fact that the authors did not create it as a test, it is used in research (Bressani, 2002), sometimes in a modified form (Wittevrongel, et al., 2022), even for disabled teenagers (Ihara, 2012). ACLSA 3.0 assess 8 functional areas or categories of life skills: daily living, self-care, housing and money management, relationships and communication, work and study, career and education planning, civic engagement, navigating the child welfare system, and looking forward. The ACLSA 3.0 standard form is a 126-items assessment measuring the nine categories mentioned above, but has and a short form, which is a 20-item assessment to be used for brief screenings or when youth, staff, or caregiver's time is limited, which we used in the present study. Being developed in USA, where the children can stay in foster care until the age of 21, the CLS assessment was designed for all youth ages 14 to 21 years old regardless of living circumstances (e.g., youth is living in foster care, with biological parents, in a group home, or other places), but we consider it an appropriate for Romanian children until the age of 25, when they leave the care. The Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment short form was included in our questionnaire to measure the general level of life skills.

To measure the self-esteem, we used the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. The 10 items of the RES scale are answered using a four-point Likert scale format ranging from „Strongly disagree” to „Strongly agree”. Originally published in 1965 (Rosenberg, 1965) and designed to measure the self-esteem in teenagers, now the scale is also used for adults, becoming the most well-known tool of its kind. It was also validated on the Romanian population (Robu, 2013).

Based on Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) was elaborated by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1986 (Schwarzer, 1995) to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. This is a self-administered scale having 10 Likert scale items, with four choices from 1 = „Not at all true”, to 4 = „Exactly true”, respondents having to indicate the extent to which each statement applies to them. The scale GSE was translated and validated for Romanian population (Vasiliu & Pascal-Marinescu, 2015).

The mentioned self-report instruments were included in a Google forms questionnaire, with a completion time of 20 minutes.

The form was distributed online, in the period September – October 2022, collecting a number of N=92 respondents aged between 18 and 26 years, the average age being 19.2 years (SE=.2), median age of 19 years (SD=1.5), 42 percent being 18 years old. Regarding gender distribution, male was 44.6 percent and female, 55.4 percent. Respondents are living almost equal in rural (52.2 percent) and urban areas (47.8 percent), but the majority is living in Dolj county (n=57, 62 percent). 92.4 percent are declaring their Romanian ethnicity, and 7.6 percent are of Rroma ethnicity. As for education level, n=19 people graduated from general school (20.7 percent), n=53 subjects have high school studies (57.6 percent), n=4, bachelor studies (4.3 percent), n=16 graduated a professional school (17.4 percent).

A small part of them (15.1 percent) affirm they had psychiatric diagnosis: n=8 have learning disabilities or mental retardation, n=1 sleep disturbance, n=1 has behavioural disorders, n=1 has ADHD, n=2 don't know their diagnosis. A consistent part of these young people is living in residential care (n=42, 45.7 percent), n=36 children (39.1 percent) are in foster care (at maternal assistant) and n=14 (15.2 percent) in relative placement.

The data was anonymized, every participant having a code, and the data processing was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics, version 26, 64-bit.

3. Results

Simple descriptive analyse of demographic data were performed to describe the group of respondents, as well as of the total scores.

The total score at „Looking Forward” (LF) subscale of the ACLSA could be in the interval 7 and 35, but for our sample were between minimum of 10 and maximum of 35 and, with a mean $M=30.5$ ($SE=.5$). The scores at ACLSA 3.0 were between 36 and 100 (the possible interval: 20-100), with mean $M=92.18$ ($SE = 1.08$). GSE total scores are situated between 17 and 40, with mean $M=35.4$ ($SE=.5$). At Rosenberg scale, the obtained scores are in the interval 22-40, the mean $M=33.38$ ($SE=.5$), as is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for study variables

	Gender	M	SD	SE	95% CI	
					LL	UL
LF	Female	31.5	4.1	0.6	30.3	32.6
	Male	29.2	5.4	0.8	27.5	30.9
	N	30.5	4.8	0.5	29.5	31.5
ACLSA	Female	94.0	7.4	1.0	91.9	96.1
	Male	90.0	12.8	2.0	85.9	94.0
	N	92.2	10.3	1.1	90.1	94.3
GSE	Female	36.5	4.3	0.6	35.3	37.7
	Male	34.1	5.5	0.9	32.3	35.8
	N	35.4	5.0	0.5	34.4	36.5
RES	Female	33.3	4.9	0.7	31.9	34.6
	Male	33.5	4.5	0.7	32.1	35.0
	N	33	4.7	0.5	32.4	34.4

Note: N = 92, n1 = 51, n2 = 41, M = mean; SD = standard deviation; SE = standard error; CI – confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit; LF=Looking Forwards scale, ACLSA=Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, GSE= General Self-Efficacy Scale, RES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Skewness and Kurtosis indices of the total scores at the four scales was calculated. Like the histograms, these indices show a non-homogenous and asymmetric distribution for the scores. For LF subscale, the skewness was -1.5 (SE = .3) showing that the distribution was left skewed, and Kurtosis was 3.0 (SE = .5), indicating that the distribution was more heavy-tailed than the normal distribution.

Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis

	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	SE	Statistic	SE
LF	-1.5	0.3	3.0	0.5
ACLSA	-2.9	0.3	11.2	0.5
GSE	-1.3	0.3	1.8	0.5
RES	-0.6	0.3	-0.9	0.5

Note: N=92; LF=Looking Forward scale; ACLSA=Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment; GSE= General Self-Efficacy Scale; RES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The skewness of the ACLSA was -2.9 (SE=0.1), also left skewed, and the kurtosis was 11.2 (SE = .5). The skewness of the GES scores was -1.3 (SE = .3), left skewed distribution, and the kurtosis 1.8 (SE = .5) indicating a light-tailed distribution. The RES scores have a skewness of -.6 (SE = .3) and a kurtosis of -.9 (SE = .5), that shows to be a normal distribution (See Table 2). The same result indicates the Shapiro-Wilk's normality test, for LF: W (92) =.9, p=.0, p<.001, for ANCLSA: W (92) =.7, p=.0, p<.001, for GES: W (92) =.8, p=.0, p<.001, and for RES: W (92) =.0, p=.0, p<.001, that indicating neither for RES the distribution is not normal (See Table 3). For these reasons was preferred nonparametric tests.

Table 3. Test of normality Shapiro-Wilk

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
LF	0.846	92	0.000
ACLSA	0.700	92	0.000
GES	0.843	92	0.000
RES	0.896	92	0.000

Note: p<.001, N=92; LF=Looking Forward scale, ACLSA=Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, GSE= General Self-Efficacy Scale, RES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

For verifying the hypothesis that girls obtain higher scores than the boys at the all the scales, we perform the non-parametric test Mann-Whitney (Table 4) and obtained the next values for every scale: for Looking Forward, $U = 760.5$, $n_1=51$, $n_2=41$, $Z=-2.3$, $p < .02$ (2-tailed), for ACLSA, $U = 831.5$, $n_1=51$, $n_2=41$, $Z=-1.7$, $p < .1$ (2-tailed), for GSE, $U = 768.5$, $n_1=51$, $n_2=41$, $Z=-2.2$, $p < .03$ (2-tailed), and for RES, $U = 1003.5$, $n_1=51$, $n_2=41$, $Z=-0.3$, $p < .07$ (2-tailed). These results reject the null hypothesis both for Looking Forward and GSE (There are no differences between the female and the male subjects scores at the scale LF / GSE.), indicating the existing of significant differences between girls and boys at these scales, but the null hypothesis is kept for the other two scales: ACLSA and RES.

Table 4. Test Statistics Mann-Whitney U^a

	LF	ACLSA	GSE	RES
Mann-Whitney U	760.5	831.5	768.5	1003.5
Wilcoxon W	1621.5	1692.5	1629.5	2329.5
Z	-2.3	-1.7	-2.2	-0.3
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02	0.1	0.03	0.7

Note: a. Grouping Variable: Gender

$p < .05$, $n_1=51$, $n_2=41$

LF=Looking Forward scale, ACLSA=Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, GSE= General Self-Efficacy Scale, RES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

In order to highlight how big are the differences between girls and boys in the scores obtained for the confidence with which they look to the future and the perceived self-efficacy, we calculated the Cohen effect size: $d = .5$ for Looking Forward scale, $d = .5$ for GSE, that is a medium effect, meaning that 50 percent of the girls have higher scores than the boys at these traits.

Because the ACLSA 3.0 is not yet validated on Romanian population, Cronbach's Alpha indices was calculated and indicates a very good internal consistency both for the ACLSA short form ($\alpha=.92$), and Looking Forward subscale ($\alpha=.88$).

Spearman's Correlations was perform to illustrate the relationship between the study variables (Table 5). We found that the scores of the subjects at the subscale Looking Forward is positive and significant correlated with the scores at the other three scales, stronger with the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA 3.0): $r_s(90) = .6$, $p < .001$, and with the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE): $r_s(90) = .7$, $p < .001$, and fewer, but also significant with Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RES): $r_s(90) = .4$, $p < .001$. A strong significant positive correlation we found between ACLSA 3.0 and GSE: $r_s(90) = .7$, $p < .001$, and a medium positive significant correlation between ACLSA 3.0 and RES: $r_s(90) = .3$, $p < .001$, and GSE and RES: $r_s(90) = .3$, $p < .001$.

Table 5. Correlations for study variables

	LF	ACLSA	GSE	RES
LF	—			
ACLSA	.6**	—		
GSE	.7**	.7**	—	
RES	.4**	.3**	.3**	—

Note: LF=Looking Forward scale, ACLSA=Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment, GSE= General Self-Efficacy Scale, RES = Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
p<.05*; *p*<.001**. N=92

Inferential statistics were performed to explore if there are a relationship between the age of the participants and their scores, between the type of placement and the same scores at the tests, but no significant correlations were obtained.

4. Discussion

The main aim of the research was to investigate the trust in a good future of the young people who leave the child protection system, and to explore its relationship with the level of their life skills, perceived self-efficacy, and self-esteem, to explore the proprieties of the ACLSA short form on Romanian population and to explore the gender differences of the scores at the four applied scale: Looking Forward (subscale of ACLSA), ACLSA short form, GSE and RES, chosen for measuring the mentioned variable.

Applying ACLSA for the first time on a Romanian sample of young people being in care, our intention was to validate an instrument for measuring the life skill of this category of population. My professional background and experience as a social worker, as well as the higher level of vulnerability of this group motivated this choice. The ACLSA 3.0 is a validated tool for assessing American youth being in the care of the state, which has a good internal consistency, both for the standard form, Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients ranged 0.83 to 0.91 (Nollan KA, 2000, p. 169), and for the short form, $\alpha=0.86$ (Nollan, 2002, p. 47) , and all the subscales have good reliability coefficients (Nollan KA, 2000; Nollan, 2002). We used the short form of ACLSA 3.0 and the scale showed an excellent internal consistency on our Romanian sample: $\alpha=0.92$, even higher than in the original study. The significant correlation between the scores at the ACLSA short form and the scores at GSE obtained by this sample ($r_s(90) = .7, p<.001$) suggests a good validity of construct, having in mind that they are measuring two related concepts: the life skills and perceived self-efficiency.

According to the self-efficacy theory, the past mastery experiences are powerful determinants of self-efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1997), but the alternative interpretation would be that pre-existing self-efficacy expectations led to the successes, is also consistent with this theory (Sherer, 1982). So the social child protection services should offer a secure environment, with sufficient opportunities for children to have significant relationships with adults and peer,

with adults capable to give them supportive feedback, as well as a role model of favourable attributional style of one's successes and failure, to provide conditions for the development of a good perception of self-efficacy, reversing the risk factors mentioned by Jerusalem and Mittag (1995, p. 179). In other words, it is necessary to offer simultaneous safety, stimulation for the development of skills, as well as a style of thinking that highlights the role of effort and assuming responsibility in success.

Starting from the assumption that the independent life is in the same time exciting and frightening for a child who cannot rely on a family and support system to help him effectively, and who lacks an acceptable level of life skills, we looked at the construct of expectations from future synonymous with hope for a good future, with the confidence that he will manage when he leaves the care. This construct is seen rather as a state, similar with the hope, than as a personality trait like the optimism. We were interested first in having an adapted instrument to the need to assess children and young people who are in special child protection, and this was the reason for choosing the Looking Forward subscale for this objective. The obtained data suggest that the positive expectations of the own future after exiting from the child protection system are significant correlated with the level of the life skill, the perceived self-efficacy and, although somewhat less, but still significant, with the level of the self-esteem.

The correlation of the variables of the trust in own future, the perceived self-efficacy and the life skills with the self-esteem were not so strong ($r_s(90) = .3$, $p < .001$, for ACLSA and RES, and $r_s(90) = .3$, $p < .001$, for GSE and RES), so maybe other personality traits will be more adequate to analyse in link with the life skills and the confidence in a good future. Some contemporaneous authors (Neff, 2009; Donald, 2017) argues for focusing assessments, research and education on the self-compassion rather than the self-esteem, for being associated with more stable feelings of self-worth that were less contingent on particular outcomes, than the self-esteem. Sometimes, a high level of Self-esteem may lead at narcissism and antisocial behaviour. For these reasons, we consider that will be useful to validate on Romanian population instruments for assessing this personality trait, and move the focus in the preparing the children for the independent adult life from raising the self-esteem to boost the self-compassion, from growing the self-evaluation to cultivate the self-acceptance.

The Mann-Whitney's test pointed out that exist significant differences between girls and boys at the score of the confidence in their future after leaving the care, and at the scores at the GES scale, the perceived self-efficiency. In both cases exists a medium effect size, suggested by Cohen's d index of .5, that means in 50 percent of cases, girls are more confident in their future after leaving child protection system, and have a better perceived self-efficacy, confirming the results of other research. According the literature, the girls often score higher in terms of social, moral and educational development (knowledge and behaviours) (Bressani, 2002, p. 461), decision making, critical thinking, communication, goal setting, problem solving (Haas, 2015), as well as self-esteem, self-efficacy and

optimism towards the future (Bartoszuk, 2011). However, the level of the life skills measured with ACLSA short form didn't indicate significant differences between girls and boys. It worth to further investigate with the standard form of assessment of ACLSA and see if there are differences. In the social services, the tool is used in a combined way, both as self-reported instrument, and as a questionnaire for the carers about the children.

Our study is limited by the small size (N=92) and lack of representativeness of the sample. The sample was small, statistically unrepresentative neither from the point of view of the counties, nor of the type of protection measure, nor of the ages of the subjects. Regarding the age, we preferred only children who are 18 years old and over, for the reason that they could express their consent for participating in the research. One other limitation of the research could be the use of few instruments to observe the construct validity of the ACSLA short form and Looking Forward subscale.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the level of trust in their own future are significant correlated with the level of perceived self-efficacy, as well as with the level of the life skills, but fewer with the level of the self-esteem. The girls from our sample obtained higher scores at trust in the future and perceived self-efficacy, than the boys. Remain to observe in a longitudinal study if these differences will have an impact on their integration. The ACLSA 3.0 short form proved an excellent internal consistency on Romanian sample.

As future perspectives, ACLSA 3.0 standard form should be validated on the Romanian population and the research replicated using the long form of this instrument, on a representative sample of adolescents from the protection system, keeping between the instruments and the GES scale and adding other validated measurements for related concepts with the level of development of the life skills of young people who leave the protection system, such as the empathy, the self-compassion or the optimism as a trait. It would be interesting to explore to what extent the Looking Forward subscale has convergent validity with some instruments measuring hope.

Despite that our study is focused on psychological concepts, the practical, educational, developmental, health, economical and political aspects are in the same measure important when we talk about the children who are living the care, such that only an integrative, holist approach could be efficient. The things are complex and needs attention for a lot of details.

We think that the programs for life skills will have success only if they will be based on clear definitions and good operationalization of the concept and on standardized assessment tools. In this sense, we hope that ACLSA 3.0 form will be used in Romanian child protection services. For having the expecting outcomes, it is need to have an integrative approach of the preparation of the youth for independent living, combining the good policy and practical support, with a scientific perspective on development of the life skills, paying attention to the

increase of protective factors and the elimination of risk factors that can influence the level of equipping of these young people for adult life.

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SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN SUPPORTING THE UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

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Summary

The article presents the analysis of a part of results of the sociological study „Mapping the efforts of Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection members and other NGOs supporting Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova”, the purpose of which was to map the efforts of civil society organizations, especially those members of the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection in providing support to Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova. The data collection took place between June and July 2022, by applying a methodology in a combined design through quantitative research methods (survey by questionnaire administered online and by telephone) and qualitative research methods (individual interview, focus group, documentary analysis). The quantitative research sample comprised 100 civil society organizations selected from a total of 204 organizations. The qualitative research involved 11 individual interviews and two focus group discussions with representatives of the national civil society from different areas of the country. The study highlighted a special involvement of civil society in the management of the refugee crisis, with a variety of services being provided, both at the border crossing points and at the place of residence in the Republic of Moldova. The development and provision of services by the vast majority of civil society organizations has been based on the needs of refugees. The need for a

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minimum package of services for refugees is one of the conclusions of the sociological study.

Keywords: refugee assistance, refugee crisis, services

Sommaire

L'article présente l'analyse de certains résultats de l'étude sociologique „*Cartographie des efforts des membres de l'Alliance des ONG actives dans le Domaine de la Protection Sociale de l'enfant et de la Famille et d'autres organisations non gouvernementales soutenant les réfugiés ukrainiens en République de Moldova*”, dont le but était de cartographier les efforts des organisations de la société civile, en particulier celles des membres de l'Alliance des ONG actives dans le domaine de la protection sociale de l'enfant et de la famille, pour apporter un soutien aux réfugiés ukrainiens en République de Moldova. La collecte des données s'est déroulée entre juin et juillet 2022, en appliquant une méthodologie en design combiné à travers des méthodes de recherche quantitatives (enquête par questionnaire administré online et par téléphone) et des méthodes de recherche qualitatives (entretien individuel, focus group, analyse documentaire). L'échantillon de recherche quantitative comprenait 100 organisations de la société civile sélectionnées parmi un total de 204 organisations. La recherche qualitative a consisté à mener 11 entretiens individuels et deux discussions de groupe avec des représentants de la société civile nationale de différentes régions du pays. L'étude a mis en évidence une implication particulière de la société civile dans la gestion de la crise des réfugiés, avec une variété de services fournis, tant aux points de passage frontaliers qu'au lieu de résidence en République de Moldova. Le développement et la fourniture de services par la grande majorité des organisations de la société civile ont été basés sur les besoins des réfugiés. La nécessité d'un paquet minimum de services pour les réfugiés est l'une des conclusions de l'étude sociologique.

Mots clés: assistance aux réfugiés, crise des réfugiés, services

Rezumat

Articolul prezintă analiza unor rezultate ale studiului sociologic „*Cartografierea eforturilor membrilor Alianței ONG-urilor active în domeniul Protecției Sociale a Copilului și Familiei și ale altor organizații neguvernamentale de sprijinire a refugiaților ucraineni în Republica Moldova*”⁵, scopul căruia a fost maparea eforturilor organizațiilor societății civile, în special a celor membre ale Alianței ONG-urilor active în domeniul Protecției Sociale a Copilului și Familiei în oferirea suportului refugiaților ucraineni în Republica Moldova. Colectarea datelor s-a desfășurat în perioada iunie-iulie 2022, prin aplicarea unei metodologii în design combinat prin metode cantitative de cercetare (ancheta prin chestionar administrat online și telefonic) și metode calitative de cercetare (interviu individual, focus grup, analiza documentară). Eșantionul cercetării cantitative a cuprins 100 de organizații a societății civile selectate dintr-un număr de 204 organizații. Cercetarea calitativă a cuprins desfășurarea a 11 interviuri individuale și două discuții de grup cu reprezentanți ai societății civile naționale din diferite zone ale țării. Studiul a evidențiat o implicare deosebită a societății civile în gestionarea crizei refugiaților, fiind prestate o diversitate de servicii, atât la punctele de trecere a frontierei, cât și la locul de reședință în Republica Moldova. Dezvoltarea și prestarea serviciilor de marea majoritate a organizațiilor societății civile s-a

⁵ Study carried out within the project „Increasing the Visibility of Civil Society in Providing Response to Emergencies”, implemented by the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection with the financial support of Caritas Austria

realizat în baza nevoilor refugiaților. Nevoia unui pachet minim de servicii pentru refugiați este una din concluzia studiului sociologic.

Cuvinte cheie: asistarea refugiaților, criza refugiaților, servicii

1. Introduction

The start of the war in Ukraine represented the beginning of a crisis for the whole world, with the countries bordering the conflict being especially affected. One of the challenges of the conflict is providing assistance to people who have fled the war. The Republic of Moldova was fully involved in supporting Ukrainian refugees, which required a massive mobilization of both the authorities and civil society.

The data presented by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) reveal that in the period 24.02.2022-08.11.2022, more than 15 million people crossed the borders of Ukraine. 7.824.400 Ukrainian refugees are settled in European countries, of which 60.1 percent (4.699.333 people) are registered for temporary protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. According to the same source, the number of Ukrainians who crossed the border with the Republic of Moldova, during the reference period, was 685.088 persons. Of these, 95.928 were registered as refugees.

The flow of Ukrainians entering the Republic of Moldova has generated an unprecedented situation for the national authorities. A special contribution to supporting Ukrainian refugees was made by civil society organizations. In order to understand and assess the involvement of local civil society in assisting refugees, the sociological study „*Mapping the efforts of the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection members and other NGOs supporting Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova*” was carried out.

2. Research methodology

The sociological study focused on mapping the efforts of civil society organizations, especially those members of the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection, in providing support to Ukrainian refugees in the Republic of Moldova, analyzing and describing these efforts, highlighting best practices and success stories, and identifying the needs of these organizations. The research design consisted of the application of the following research methods:

a) the survey method, the data were collected online and via telephone by applying the questionnaire to a sample of 100 civil society organizations, both members (34 organizations) and non-members (66 organizations) of the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection, which provided services to Ukrainian refugees. The research sample was selected as a result of contacting 204 civil society organizations in the Republic of Moldova. The data collection period was June 1-24, 2022;

b) documentary analysis of information published on official web pages and social networks of civil society organizations, reflecting the activities carried out in supporting refugees;

c) the in-depth individual interview with 11 representatives of civil society organizations, members and non-members of the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection;

d) focus group, two group discussions were held with representatives of civil society organizations both from Chisinau and from the regions of the country.

Qualitative data were collected between June 27 and July 8, 2022.

3. Profile of refugees supported by civil society organizations

According to the data collected in the study, by the beginning of June 2022, the civil society organizations participating in the study provided support for around 240.000 refugees. About a fourth of the organizations could not provide a concrete number of refugees assisted. In this context, at the time of the study, it was difficult to estimate the total number of refugees who were assisted by the participating organizations.

The largest number of refugees assisted by an organization participating in the study was 56.000, and the smallest number was nine persons. In total, each of the organizations assisted/provided services during the reference period, on average, to around 3.200 refugees (see Table 1).

Table 1. Number of refugees from Ukraine assisted by organizations participating in the study

Category	Total	Minim	Maximum	Average
Adults	121.833	2	48.000	2.256
Children	51.498	1	10.000	919
Elderly	13.585	1	5.000	388
Persons with disabilities	3.169	1	1.000	75
Total number of refugees assisted	239.781	9	56.000	3.197

The data can be corroborated with those presented by the National Social Assistance Agency (July 15, 2022), which reveals a significant presence of adult women (18-65 years) in placement centers (1191 people or 39.0 percent of the total number of people placed in 68 placement centers) and children (1283 people or 42,0 percent). The share of elderly people (over 65) was 4,6 percent (140 people), and of persons with disabilities – 3,5 percent (107 people). Also, 334 adult men were accommodated in the placement centers, which constituted 10,9 percent.

About 3/4 of the organizations participating in the study supported both refugees housed in people's households/rents (79.0 percent) and those housed in placement centers (77,0 percent). About one-third of the organizations provided services to refugees without a stable place to live (31,0 percent), and more than a quarter supported refugees staying in hostels (28,0 percent).

According to the qualitative study, Ukrainian refugees were categorized based on the period of time since they left Ukraine. *The first category of refugees*, less numerous, was of persons with a high level of well-being, who especially required informational support regarding accommodation and the possibility of

emigrating to a European country. *The second category* was represented by people from the middle class, who were documented (most of them having identity documents) and with experience traveling outside the country (Ukraine). *The third category* was the category of persons without travel documents, without any migratory experience, economically vulnerable, and with certain health problems, especially the elderly.

„Initially the first to come were the people who had money, who had other needs. They simply needed clear information regarding, firstly how to get settled and secondly how to go on to Europe and who would meet them there. In addition, they wanted to know if there was anything for refugees. Then the next wave started to come, the people in the middle class. These people were somehow prepared and had some documents, maybe they didn't have all the documents in order, but they had some documents. These people had already left the country, but they still knew certain rules. Some of them, for example, even if we are talking about very sick people, they did not need medical assistance, because they know how to handle themselves. And when the third category started coming, the very poor people, that's when the most serious problems started, because some of them didn't have foreign documents, they didn't have biometric passports and they only had internal documents. In some, the internal documents are expired. Some of them have not gone further than the district center and for them going so far away from home is a stress they will always stay here and wait for the end of the war, they will not go further. Among them are the elderly” (IA_8⁶).

4. Reasons for the involvement of civil society organizations in assisting refugees

The sociological study highlighted the prompt involvement of civil society in assisting the refugees, even from the first days after the outbreak of the war. Most of the civil society organizations participating in the study – 66,0 percent - made the decision to get involved in providing support for refugees in February (as soon as the war broke out). In March 2022, about 1/3 of them got involved in refugee activities, and the rest (3,0 percent) in April. Actions aimed at supporting refugees were carried out on their own initiative – 92,0 percent, especially in the first days or weeks after the beginning of the conflict (see Figure 1). More than half of the research sample (53,0 percent) carried out refugee assistance activities following the request of partner donors. It is relevant to note that the funding available for refugee projects was an impetus for involvement in the refugee crisis. This is for about a third of the civil society organizations participating in the study. For more than a quarter (26,0 percent) of the organizations participating in the study, involvement was due to requests from citizens in the community/donations from the community. To a lesser extent, organizations were involved in providing refugee support at the request of local public authorities (17,0 percent) and at the request of the government (11,0 percent).

⁶ IA – individual interview

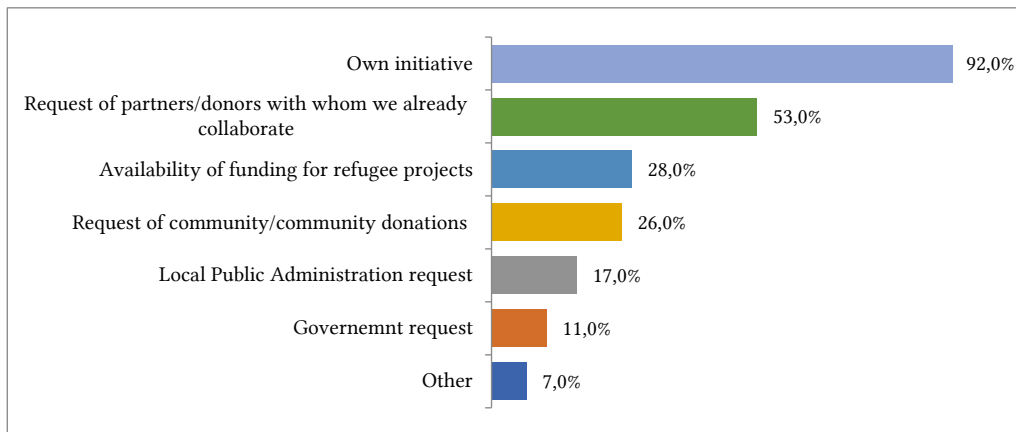


Figure 1. Reasons for the involvement of civil society organizations to assist Ukrainian refugees

The analysis of the reasons for involvement in the provision of refugee support services according to the number of refugees assisted reveals that the organizations that assisted a number of up to 200 refugees got involved especially at the request of the community, instead, the organizations that assisted more of 1.000 refugees became involved in a larger share following requests from donors. Also, civil society organizations that operate in various regions of the country to a greater extent were requested by the local public authorities to get involved in assisting refugees compared to those that operate in Chisinau.

5. Types of services provided to refugees

The refugees' crisis involved the provision of a wide range of services. As part of the research, it was proposed to evaluate the services provided in two reference moments: at the beginning of the crisis (end of February - beginning of March 2022) and at the time of the study (June 2022). Thus, at the beginning of the crisis, the civil society organizations participating in the study provided an average of 9 types of services to refugees, out of the total of 21 types of services presented in the questionnaire. At the time of conducting the research (June 2022), their number decreased to 7,6 types of services. The data presented in Figure 2 highlight that 6,0 percent of organizations at the time of data collection (June 2022) did not provide any services to refugees. The share of those providing up to 5 services increased by about 7 percentage points. The share of those providing 6-10 services also increased by 2 percentage points. Instead, the share of organizations providing between 11 and 15 services decreased considerably - by 11 percentage points, and by 4 percentage points of those providing more than 16 services.

SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

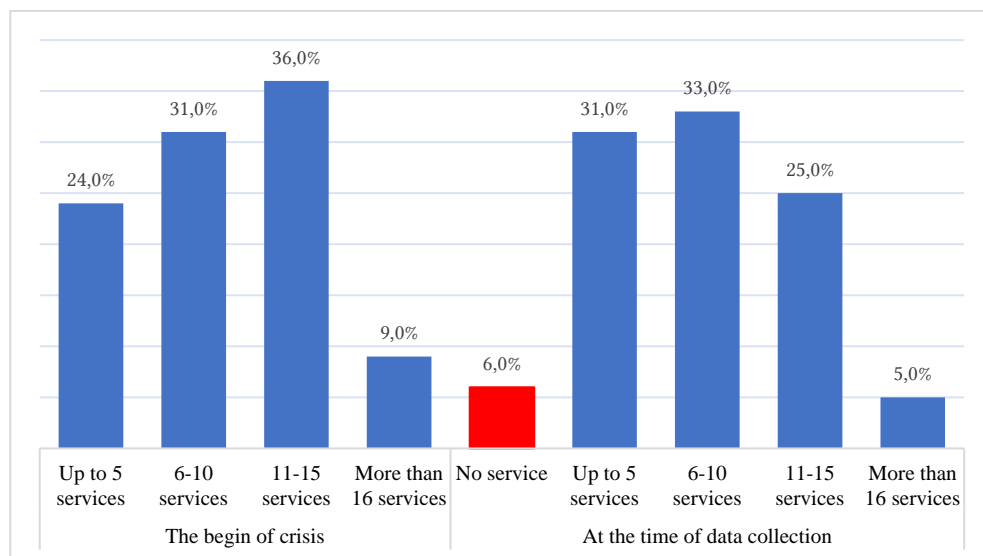


Figure 2. Number of services provided to refugees at the beginning of the crisis and at the time of data collection

A study conducted in the Republic of Moldova revealed that services are provided to refugees both at the moment of crossing the border and at the point of residence. The main role of civil society organizations was to meet the refugees' primary needs, but later the services were diversified to suit the refugees' needs.

„If from the beginning everyone was working on alert, let's feed and house them, now the spectrum is much wider and it concerns all the needs of the people, not just the primary ones, and this seems to me to be a very positive evolution.” (FG_17)

The provision of **hygiene products** was carried out at the beginning of the crisis by 78,0 percent of the organizations, but in June 2022 (at the time of data collection) this service was carried out by 62,0 percent of them (see Figure 3). *„We gave hygiene packages for them (refugees).” (IA_1)*

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization HelpAge provided two types of hygiene products packages: an institutional package that contained products used to sanitize common spaces, and individual packages for each refugee.

„Hygiene products and these could be... we used to call them institutional, for example a center needs liquid soap for bathroom, right? So it is institutional. In addition, we paid for each person separately. That is, for the person, for example, to have their shampoo.”

There were 76,0 percent of organizations **providing food services** in June 2022; however, this number had decreased by 18 percentage points to 58,0 percent.

⁷ FG – focus group discussion

As part of establishing social peace, food packages were offered to refugees and the vulnerable local population.

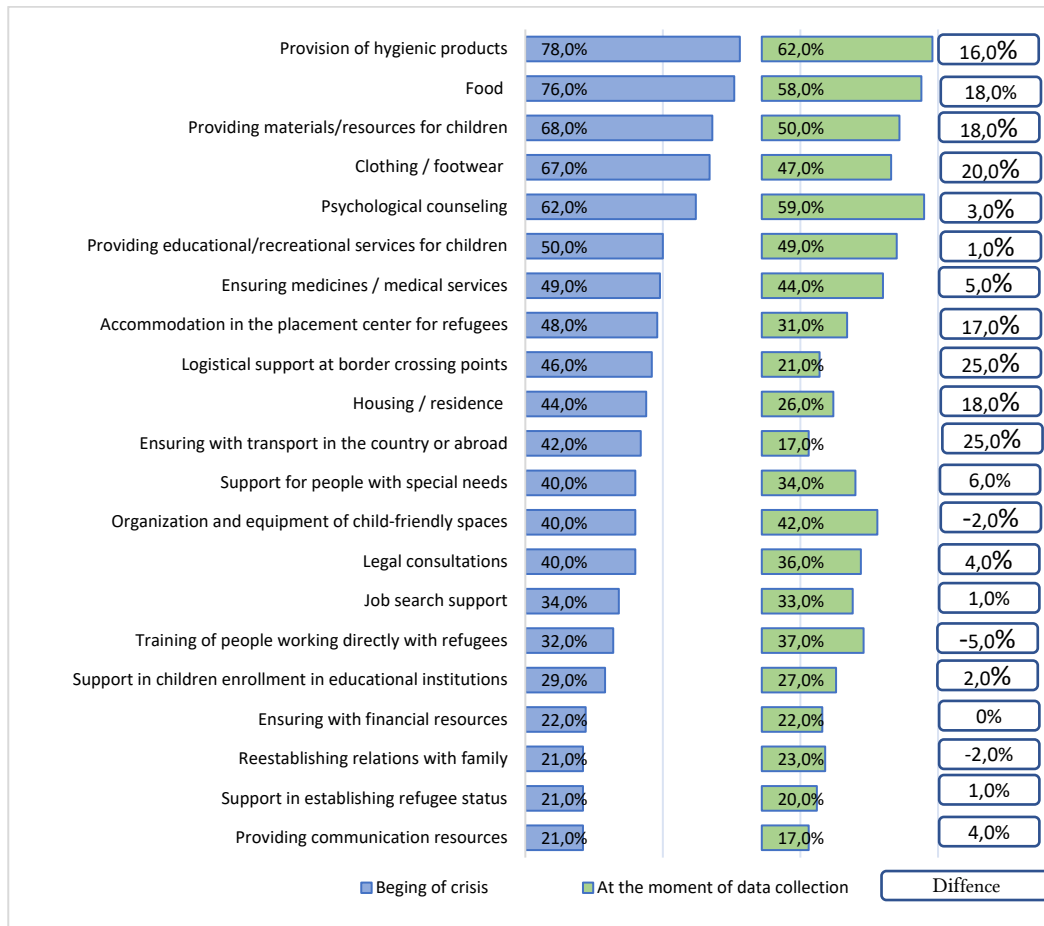


Figure 3. Types of services provided to refugees at the beginning of the crisis and at the time of data collection

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization Concordia. Proiecte Sociale mobilized the team to provide both refugees and Ukrainian customs workers with food products, given that in the first days there was no shift change. Thus, about 27 thousand pies were cooked and distributed.

„We made pies... at Tudora the refugees were standing in columns, it started to rain with snow, they were frozen for 2-3 days until they reached Tudora and they didn't eat for 2 days. There was something dramatic there. As humans, we instinctively went and cooked 300-350 pies every day. The pies did not reach the refugees for the first 2 days. Because the first 2 days we fed only the customs workers - Ukrainian citizens because they had no change at all for 3 consecutive days. No one changed them, they

had no water and no food. When we brought pies, the refugee children cried and said that it was okay to give to the customs workers, because they had nothing to eat. Then obviously, we fed customs workers) first and then moved on to the refugees. So far, we have cooked 27.000 pies according to our statistics.”

The non-governmental organization Ave Copiii provided water to the refugees directly at the Palanca border, on both sides of the border.

„We stood out, primarily with water at the border. The biggest thing is when you don't have water. People stood in line at the beginning. It was cold, it's true. It was on the other side of the border, at Palanca. Sometimes, there was a queue 3-5 km or 6 km long. People needed food, but they also desperately needed water. And then we did what we did: we transported the water and we transported it to the Ukrainian side.”

A new practice was implemented to ensure the ability to access food products in the second period of the crisis, especially in the summer months, by distributing vouchers that could be used in stores.

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization Children. Community. Family Moldova started offering food vouchers on July 1, 2022, to vulnerable categories, both refugees and locals, based on an assessment of the level of vulnerability. Using best practices from other countries, the program „Protection Food Voucher” was developed to ensure better access to food. The voucher is available in addition to the food packages distributed to refugees.

„We start from July 1 and in refugee centers, in refugee communities but also in local communities we start a food voucher program - Protection Food Voucher.”

Clothing and footwear were provided by 67,0 percent of the organizations. The distribution was 47,0 percent at the time of the research (June 2022).

The need for clothing was felt especially in the warm period (spring-summer), as most refugees were equipped only with winter clothes.

„A lady, for example, did not wear thin, light clothes, she wore thick clothes. This was because it was winter and it was cold, in March it was cold and in April it was cold and she had no clothes. We only appeal to people with a big heart.”(FG_1)

To facilitate the purchase of clothing according to individual needs, some organizations have distributed special vouchers for the purchase of clothes.

„One voucher was for food products, one for clothes, and one for the pharmacy. In May we gave food and hygiene products, but in July we already started the distribution of vouchers.”(IA_1)

The war and the need to take refuge in another country emotionally affected the refugees, a context in which the civil society organizations participating in the study organized **the provision of psychological counseling services** (62 percent). This type of service has helped to ensure the emotional well-

being and strengthen the mental health of refugees. So, a series of activities were carried out, including therapy through art, dance, textiles, music, etc.

„We provide psychological counseling in the placement center. We have a community mediator who helps migrants and communicates with them to identify any problems.”
(IA_2)

„We also offer the psychological side, the psychological support of the children.”
(FG_2)

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization „Each Contribute for Change” from Criuleni applies music therapy to refugee children.

„We provide music therapy, we have a very talented teacher, a musician, who is also a composer and a very talented vocalist. We try to create this positive and confident atmosphere so that they can more easily overcome the state of crisis they are experiencing.”

The non-governmental organization Amici dei Bambini launched a free phone line for psychological counseling.

During the refugee crisis, special attention was paid to children's needs. The contribution of civil society organizations consisted of ensuring children's access to education services. This was done by enrolling them in the local kindergarten/school or facilitating their participation in the online education process. Thus, 68,0 percent of the organizations participating in the study provided children with materials/resources, 50,0 percent carried out educational and recreational activities, and 40,0 percent contributed to the organization and provision of child-friendly spaces. Furthermore, 29,0 percent supported children's enrollment in educational institutions. These services were provided throughout the period (February-June 2022), with insignificant differences.

„We enrolled 26 Ukrainian children in school, 17 in kindergarten.” (FG_1)

„At Basarabeasca, we integrated a lot of children into kindergarten.” (FG_1)

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization Partnerships for Every Child initiated a program to support students in crisis situations called the „Program for Better Learning” (BLP). In this program, trainers, particularly from the psycho-pedagogical assistance services, were trained. This is a psychosocial support program that can be integrated into education programs in crisis contexts, including humanitarian ones. The program has a holistic approach to supporting children's recovery from traumatic events experienced during conflict or the impact of displacement on both displaced and host communities. This approach improves learning conditions. It mobilizes a child's support network to restore a sense of normalcy and hope. This program is implemented in 26 countries.

„We have a program for schools and we have already trained the first group of trainers. Better Learning Program – a psycho-social support program focused on

refugee children who are enrolled in schools. An evidence-based program that launched in June. A group of trainers has been trained. A larger group will be trained, after which we will visit the schools.”

Learning the language of the local community (Romanian, Gagauz, etc.) is an activity carried out by some organizations, which contributes to better integration into the community. Courses were offered in both online and offline formats, depending on the availability of beneficiaries and trainers.

„They already know many words in the Gagauz language and use them in communication.” (FG_1)

„We offer Romanian language course to those who wish to learn it. It seems to me that within the limit of 30-40 people participate online, offline in these courses.” (IA_2)

Best practice example

Psycho-social Center from Vulcanesti - to facilitate communication and activities with children, they employed two Ukrainian language teachers. At the same time, the knowledge of Ukrainian by some of the center's employees facilitated the interaction with the refugees.

„Two are Ukrainian language teachers and when the children had problems in school with the language, they helped with the translation.”

In order to facilitate the participation of Ukrainian children in the online educational process, efforts were made to equip the refugee centers with IT equipment. Thus, with the support of donors, laptops and tablets were purchased.

„We understood that we had to help the children to go on to continue their studies. The majority, 60 percent were children who were in our services. What to do? They have a phone in a family with three children, what do we do? They can't connect and continue their studies via phone, they don't have activities and that was depressing for them. Then we looked for sponsors to buy laptops, and tablets to provide one or two in each center and for them to do homework.” (IA_10)

The problem of participation in the educational process of refugee children is acutely felt by representatives of civil society organizations. They consider it necessary to make efforts to solve this problem. The need for the authorities to be concerned about enrollment in the education process of Ukrainian children was revealed. This took into account the peculiarities of the study program in the country of origin.

„There is a huge flow of children. We need to think in perspective about what we are planning to do with them. We do not know when it will end, we do not know how it will end, and we do not know the way. I understood that in Ukraine, now the structure of the school year is generally changed, plus the program there differs from ours, and we have to think from now on.” (FG_1)

Another problem that concerns civil society is the difficulty of enrolling young children in kindergarten or nursery, taking into account the lack of available

places or the lack of nurseries in general, especially in rural areas. The lack of childcare opportunities creates a barrier to the employment of Ukrainian women. „The problem is with kindergartens, mothers can't work, because we generally don't have nurseries.” (IA_10)

Best practice example

The Caritas Charity Foundation created kindergarten groups to facilitate the educational integration of refugee children.

„In addition, our centers have a „Kids Corner” and we have also assisted in other parts of the country. We have also created a temporary kindergarten. We are doing everything we can.”

A contribution of civil society organizations was **the organization of free time (recreation) activities for children**. A variety of activities were organized, such as trips, various games, shows, activities organized by art schools, etc.

„The director of the art school gave us the whole list of activities: piano, drawing, English courses, painting, dances. I made a timetable. The kids came when they were supposed to, but they still keep coming. They don't work during the summer, but the specialists offer services at the moment” (IA_11).

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization Amici dei Bambini organized recreational activities for refugee children from various placement centers, but also for those from local communities, through the Ludobus service.

„We intervened with free time activities for children. We reactivated the Ludobus, which provides services to communities with refugees. But not only there, we were lucky to have wise sponsors who understood that the communities in Moldova have exactly the same needs as the children in Ukraine.”

The non-governmental organization Children. Community. Family Moldova ensured the creation of child-friendly spaces, offering two types of programs. One of the programs is unstructured, short-term, provided in refugee centers with a small number of children, consisting of creating an accessible playground and informing refugees about documentation, employment, schooling, and identifying their needs. The second program, developed based on the Teams UP model, includes structured activities for children and their caregivers. The program includes the activities from the first program and other activities, such as game-based intervention for children under 5 years old, movements and gestures for children 6-17 years old, who have only one language of communication (Russian or Ukrainian), continuous needs assessment and communication to overcome stressful situations for caregivers.

„Child-Friendly Space is the main service offered. In areas where there are fewer refugee children, we offer the reduced model. There is a children's game center open all the time, unstructured. Children usually come with their parents or older siblings.” The provision of playgrounds was carried out also by the Pestalozzi Foundation.

„The second part of the support was equipment, the children's room.”

The non-governmental organization Casmed organized a series of socio-cultural activities for refugee children in the localities of the Northern part of the country, employing animators. Cultural activities were carried out according to the age of the children: animation activities were organized for the younger ones and social theater for teenagers.

„I have also done socio-cultural activities for children. I contacted animators who go once a week or once every two weeks to centers or towns and organize events. One-and-a-half-hour or two-hour events, including theatrical aspects. A kind of social theater. The social theater is more for teenagers, but animation activities are more for small children.”

Less than half of the organizations were involved in **providing housing for refugees**. Thus, 49,0 percent offered accommodation services in refugee centers and 44,0 percent secured a place to live. Providing housing has been a challenge for civil society. One solution identified in the first period of the crisis was to reallocate beneficiaries within the placement center from one room to another to create accommodation for refugees.

„At the same time, we also have services for young people, through which we still offer them assisted social housing. On that night (the first night of the war) the young people that we had accommodated, we reorganized them and put together in the rooms, to make room for the refugees who needed accommodation.” (FG_1)

One concern of the organizations is to reduce refugees' dependence on placement services by supporting them to identify housing. This fact would facilitate better social integration of refugees. While the national standards require a short period for placement (6 months), for refugees it is difficult to meet the requirements.

„We also want to help them to find hosts, we cannot always keep them in the center. Placement centers are good, but you have to see what needs to be done. A person should not stay in a center, in a small room, for a long time” (FG_2).

Best practice example

The government of Poland is in the process of developing a strategy for the integration of Ukrainian refugees into local communities. One of the proposed actions is to establish more public housing and to renovate vacant properties to make them habitable.

One effort of the national civil society organizations was **to mobilize local communities to provide support in sheltering and feeding refugees**.

„Many of my students agreed to receive two-three refugees a night, especially the first month and a half when they came intensively. My students and our fellow citizens collected some clothes.” (FG_1)

One way of supporting refugees who were renting living space was **to cover a part of the rent payment** by civil society organizations. This was in order to reduce the costs sustained by refugees.

„We found financial resources, we helped people pay for some of the accommodation.” (FG_1)

In order to ensure decent living conditions, civil society organizations were involved in providing various goods, such as pillows, duvets, electrical appliances, etc., especially to the placement centers.

„Student dormitory became refugees camps overnight. It has nothing, especially since it was not functional. Then we provided some equipment or household techniques that was needed.” (IA_3)

„We bought a lot of pillows, duvets, pans, spoons, forks, toiletries, washing machine, stove.” (IA_2)

Logistics support services at border crossing points were provided by 46,0 percent of the organizations participating in the study. They also informed refugees about the national procedures for establishing refugee status, applying for asylum, and obtaining other services.

„We reorient them where to go, to the Migration Office, to the doctor, to school. We communicated about how and where they can get financial help, how to register, how to get the card.” (IA_2)

Ensuring access to medicines or medical services was provided by approximately half of the organizations participating in the study (49,0 percent), their share decreasing by 5 percentage points by June 2022. In this sense, two mechanisms were applied:

- the purchase of medicines by the organizations, being distributed to the refugees directly or through the family doctors' centers.

„The medicines were purchased here. They are simple medicines that are issued without a doctor's prescription, but we did not want to distribute them directly, and we sent them to the medical centers in the villages.” (IA_2)

- distribution of vouchers, with which the refugees purchased their necessary medicines.

„We distributed Food and Non-Food vouchers and for pharmacies to refugees in Telenești and Fălești.” (IA_1)

During the crisis, some organizations provided medical recovery services, targeting both refugees and the local population. Also, in the case of disabled and immobilized persons, medical services were provided at home, through mobile teams.

„We work in mobile teams. We have our cars in the field every day” (IA_1).

Best practice example

The non-governmental organization Casmed offers a package of psycho-medical-social services to refugees in the Northern area of the country. The services have been developed and improved based on the experience gained while assisting the beneficiaries in the given area, as well as the refugees.

The non-governmental organization „Life Without Leukemia” offered assistance to children with oncological diseases, ensuring in cooperation with partners the transfer of patients to hospitals in other countries. In this process, the organization cooperated with partners from Poland, and the coordination of the actions was carried out by the Saint John Hospital (United States of America). Easier cases were treated in the Republic of Moldova.

Another service provided by local civil society organizations, identified in the qualitative study, is **the coverage of the costs of funeral services** for refugees who died on the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

„Several cases of payment of funeral services for people who died in Moldova.” (IA_3)

42,0 percent of the organizations provided support for Ukrainian refugees by **organizing transport services** within the country or abroad. Refugees were transported both within the Republic of Moldova and to the border crossing points with Romania. Some organizations organized such transport routes, others paid for the services provided. Travel ticketing practices were identified to support people who wanted to go to another country.

„In the first period, they needed transportation, and in the next two weeks, free routes were established outside of the country as well. Initially there were none. Someone found us, we bought tickets either to Germany or wherever they wanted to go.” (IA_10)

The employment of refugees is still a concern of civil society organizations. Given that part of the refugees remained in the Republic of Moldova, the need arose to identify ways to employ them in the labor field. Refugees' basic needs were met during the first months they lived in the Republic of Moldova; then, during the following period, they asked to be involved in the labor market, both as volunteers and as employees. Thus, more than a third of the organizations (34,0 percent) **offered support in employment**, cooperating in this aspect with the National Employment Agency and local employers. The data presented on November 15, 2022, by the National Employment Agency highlight a number of 884 Ukrainian refugees employed in the labor market, with a higher proportion (74 percent) of women.

In the qualitative study was established that the employment of refugees was carried out based on relationships between representatives of civil society organizations and employers, who are generally reluctant to employ refugees.

„We arranged seven persons at work, two of whom are Ukrainian language teachers and when the children had problems in school with the language, they helped with the translation. Today, these seven persons have a job and are very grateful.” (FG_1)

An aspect identified in the research is **the informal employment of refugees** for the provision of services within the refugee community or the local population, including agricultural activities. Refugees sometimes provide services unofficially, which are encouraged by the local population due to attractive prices and their willingness to support them. At the same time, the need to formalize their activity requires refugees to provide informal services.

„There are some who managed to be employed, but unofficially. They work unofficially. A lot of them provide services unofficially to each other or to our population, that is, they don't want to work officially. I know many people who go to them to support them. Even if it is unofficial, it is some money that brings them an income and a lot of people access their services. Because they are unofficial, they have quite attractive prices. It's not official, because you have to pay taxes and so on. You have to accredit the activity and many other things to get an activity license.” (IA_1)

Financial support was provided by more than a fifth of civil society organizations (22,0 percent), as the vast majority of refugees had exhausted their reserves. Monetary support was also offered to the host families. This was because the need was established to reduce the pressure on the budgets of the host families. *„3500 lei, we paid approximately to 200 persons, citizens of the Republic of Moldova who stayed with them for more than a week or more than two Ukrainian citizens.” (IA_2)*

Other services for refugees provided by civil society organizations were:

- **strengthening the capacities of professionals involved in assisting refugees**, by organizing training sessions, developing methodical materials, etc., and supervising them. Of all the organizations participating in the study, 32,0 percent carried out training activities for staff involved in assisting refugees.

„We have developed a training program for professionals working with refugees, which involves topics such as minimum child protection standards in the humanitarian context, psychological first aid, and management. We have developed a guide with recommendations for volunteers on what is appropriate to do and what is prohibited and a guide for professionals working with young refugees. We are now in the process of finalizing the concept of professional supervision and will provide supervision for professionals.” (IA_6)

- **strengthening relations with the local community**, by carrying out joint activities, such as cooking. Engaging in activities with the locals facilitates the social integration of refugees.

„At the moment, we are already starting different activities, integrating these people into society and doing more activities together with our Moldovans, so that they can interact, and make friends, both children, and adults.” (FG_1)

The experience of the last months has proven the need to establish and regulate a minimum package of services for refugees. Some civil society organizations have tried to develop programs/packages of services that cover all the needs of refugees.

Best practice example

Three civil society organizations: Children. Community. Family Moldova, Terre des Hommes and Partnerships for Every Child, with the financial support of UNICEF, organized transit centers at the Otaci, Sculeni and Leușeni border crossing points, called „Blue Dot”. They provide services for children and their families. The Blue Dot is accessible 24/24 hours, offering a complex range of services such as

short-term accommodation (four-five hours), hygiene services, including baby diapers, nursing space for babies, food services (tea, biscuits, baby food, etc.), space for children, counseling, information, offering phone cards and telephones, documentation of unaccompanied or separated children. Services can be expanded according to the needs of refugees. The experience of establishing Blue Dots was also identified in Poland, where UNICEF created 12 such centers.

The National Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse developed the „PIDRIMKA” program, which includes the organization of three regional mobile teams (North, Center and South) that offer social, legal and psychological support services to refugees. The program is structured. The refugees were informed by local public authorities, staff of the placement centers and public information. The team includes six specialists, including social workers, psychologists and teachers.

The non-governmental organization Casmed developed and implemented an assistance program for refugees: the duration for children – six days and five days for adults. The program includes skills training activities and psychological support provided by professionals. The program is provided both at the placement center level and at the community level.

Depending on the activities and services provided, the following typology of civil society organizations involved in the management of the refugee crisis can be made:

- organizations that directly assisted refugees at the border crossing points or at the place of accommodation, by organizing food, accommodation, psychological counseling,
- organizations that offer support to host families,
- organizations that have provided support to other organizations in identifying resources for the provision of services for refugees
-

Best practice example

The Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection, as an umbrella organization, provided support to both member and non-member organizations, including refugee crisis management. Thus, since the beginning of the crisis, the Alliance has offered grants in the amount of Euro 1.000 to Euro 62.000. These grants were given to 21 organizations that work with Ukrainian refugees, but also with the vulnerable local population. In addition to channeling financial resources, during the crisis period, the Alliance carried out information campaigns on ethical communication with and about refugees. In addition, the Alliance implemented activities aimed at increasing the visibility of civil society in responding to crisis situations.

The organization „People in Need” did not provide services directly to refugees. People in Need's contribution consisted of providing grants to about 20 civil society organizations involved in assisting refugees at the local level.

The organization „Interaction”, a member organization of the Coalition „Life without violence in the family”, which operates on both banks of the Dniester river,

managed to attract external funds both for direct assistance to refugees and for providing grants in the amount of USD 2.500 for civil society organizations, including from the left side of the Dniester river. A total of 54 grants were distributed.

- organizations that support local initiatives to strengthen solidarity at the community level, through socio-cultural activities (sports, cultural activities, etc.),
- organizations that have provided support to communities to organize accommodation, recreational and educational spaces for refugees,
- organizations that contributed to strengthening the capacities of public institutions, including the Border Police, the Migration and Asylum Office, the People's Advocate Office and territorial social assistance structures. The contribution consisted in: the organization of training sessions (the topics addressed were the documentation of people, migration, asylum, etc.); delegation of qualified specialists from civil society organizations to provide support in crisis management, especially in the first period; donating goods (care products) to be distributed to refugees; covering costs for professional training courses for refugees, conducted through the National Employment Agency.

The study conducted among civil society organizations highlights that services were provided based on the needs of refugees (79,0 percent), in a higher proportion among organizations that assisted more than 1.000 refugees and those that benefited from support in assisting refugees. At the same time, the third part of the organizations provided services to refugees emerging from the organization's profile: the services provided were part of the organizations' portfolio. In the given category of organizations are those that assisted a small number of refugees (up to 200 refugees). Every fifth organization (21,0 percent) provided services to refugees at the request of the donor, and every tenth (11,0 percent) – at the request of central or local public authorities.

6. Conclusions

The sociological study carried out highlighted the full involvement of civil society in the management of the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The diversity of services provided between February and June 2022 revealed the broad spectrum of refugee needs. In addition, it revealed the adaptation of civil society organizations to the needs of beneficiaries assisted during the crisis. Civil society interventions were similarly driven by poorly developed national resilience/contingency mechanisms, especially in the first period of the crisis. The experience of the organizations participating in the study demonstrated their adaptability to crisis situations. However, consolidated efforts are needed in establishing a minimum package of services for refugees/people affected by crises. This includes strengthening the capacities of organizations, establishing a coordinating structure at the national level, improving cooperation between civil society organizations in order to avoid duplication of support, etc.

Acknowledgments

The authors express their thanks to the organization Caritas Austria, for financing the sociological study carried out in the framework of the project „Increasing the Visibility of Civil Society in Providing Response to Emergencies”, implemented by the Alliance of Active NGOs in the field of Child and Family Social Protection. They also express their thanks to all civil society organizations representatives that participated in the study.

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SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN FLEEING FROM WAR IN UKRAINE (CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA)

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Summary

The article presents an analysis of the actions taken by the authorities of the Republic of Moldova to ensure the safety and protection of unaccompanied children and children taken by third parties from Ukraine as a result of the war. It is based on assessing existing services in Moldova for refugee children from Ukraine and highlighting the strengths and weaknesses in ensuring their protection. The research program included: (i) desk analysis of statistical data and recent reports regarding the situation of people displaced from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova, with an emphasis on knowing the situation of unaccompanied children and those accompanied by third parties; (ii) carrying out eight in-depth individual interviews with representatives of international organizations, different social service providers, representatives of central and local authorities. The research data presents the involvement of government authorities in the development of the legal framework for the protection of unaccompanied or accompanied children by third parties in Ukraine, following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, along with the contribution of central and local authorities, international organizations and civil society to the development of services for children-refugees at border crossing points, in refugee placement centers and communities.

Keywords: unaccompanied children, separated children, children accompanied by third parties, safety, protection

Sommaire

L'article présente une analyse des mesures prises par les autorités de la République de Moldova pour assurer la sécurité et la protection des enfants non accompagnés et des enfants emportés par des tiers depuis l'Ukraine à la suite de la guerre. Il est basé sur l'évaluation des services existants en Moldavie pour les enfants réfugiés d'Ukraine et sur la mise en évidence des forces et des faiblesses pour assurer leur protection. Le programme de recherche fourni : (i) une analyse documentaire des données statistiques et des rapports récents concernant la situation des personnes déplacées d'Ukraine en République de Moldova, en mettant l'accent sur la connaissance de la situation des enfants non

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accompagnés et de ceux accompagnés par des tiers ; (ii) la réalisation de huit entretiens individuels approfondis avec des représentants d'organisations internationales, différents prestataires de services sociaux, des représentants des autorités centrales et locales. Les données de recherche montrent l'implication des autorités gouvernementales dans l'élaboration d'un cadre juridique pour la protection des enfants non accompagnés ou accompagnés par des tiers en Ukraine, conformément à la Convention des Nations Unies relative aux droits de l'enfant, ainsi que la contribution des autorités centrales et locales, des organisations internationales et de la société civile au développement de services pour les enfants réfugiés aux points de passage frontaliers, dans les centres de placement de réfugiés et dans les communautés.

Mots clés: enfants non accompagnés, enfants séparés, enfants accompagnés de tiers, sécurité, protection.

Rezumat

Articolul prezintă analiza acțiunilor întreprinse de autoritățile din Republica Moldova pentru asigurarea siguranței și protecției copiilor neînsoțiți și însoțiți de persoane terțe din Ucraina în rezultatul războiului. Acesta se bazează pe evaluarea serviciilor existente în Moldova pentru copiii refugiați din Ucraina, precum și evidențierea punctelor forte și a celor slabe în asigurarea protecției acestora. Programul de cercetare a inclus: (i) analiza de birou a datelor statistice și a rapoartelor recente, privind situația persoanelor strămutate din Ucraina în Republica Moldova, cu accent pe cunoașterea situației copiilor neînsoțiți și a celor însoțiți de persoane terțe; (ii) realizarea a 8 interviuri individuale aprofundate cu reprezentanții organizațiilor internaționale, diferiți prestatori de servicii sociale, reprezentanți ai autorităților centrale și locale. Datele cercetării prezintă implicarea autorităților guvernamentale în dezvoltarea cadrului legal pentru protecția copiilor neînsoțiți sau însoțiți de persoane terțe din Ucraina, în conformitate cu Convenția ONU privind Drepturile Copilului, alături de contribuția autorităților centrale și locale, organizațiilor internaționale și a societății civile la dezvoltarea serviciilor pentru copiii-refugiați la punctele de trecere a frontierei, în centrele de plasament pentru refugiați și în comunități.

Cuvinte cheie: copii neînsoțiți, copii separați, copii însoțiți de persoane terțe, siguranță, protecție

1. Introduction

The war in Ukraine has caused a high level of forced displacement of the civil population in Europe, with a significant impact on neighboring countries in particular. According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, November 2022), around 7.8 million people were displaced. Children make up an essential part of all refugees from the war in Ukraine, according to EuroChild, Child Circle, and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, May 2022).

Since February 24, 2022, until now, the borders of the Republic of Moldova have been crossed by more than 650 thousand displaced people (90% Ukrainian citizens and 10% third-country nationals). The large majority of displaced people were transiting the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The flow of displaced people varied in intensity. Within February-March, about 10-15 thousand daily

entries and exits have been recorded; in April – about 5 thousand, while within May-August – 3 thousand, September –December – around 2.5 thousand.

More than 98 500 people have remained in Moldova. The *Gender-Based Violence Safety Audit Report* (UNHCR and others, August 2022) reveals that the Republic of Moldova hosts the highest displaced people per capita. Women (64% of the total number of adult refugees from Ukraine) and children (49% of the total number of refugees) represent the large majority of displaced people (UNHCR, November 2022). Among refugee children from Ukraine, there are also unaccompanied children and those accompanied by third parties.

Moldovan authorities have immediately responded to challenges triggered by the war in Ukraine, creating a Single Crisis Management Center to coordinate the assistance and protection provided by various stakeholders (government and private). More than 90 external development partners supported the Republic of Moldova authorities: UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, OIM, UN Women, OHCHR, USAID, UNAIDS, OSCE, World Vision, Terre des Hommes, ACTED, ADRA, Caritas, CLEAR Global, Keystone, Palladium, Help Age, OXFAM, Medical Corps, etc.

The purpose of the paper is to analyze how the Republic of Moldova authorities responded to the needs of unaccompanied and separated children fleeing Ukraine and assess the strengths and weaknesses of the services provided.

2. Research framework

According to General Comment nr.6 (UN, 2005) of the Committee of the Rights of the Child, the **unaccompanied children** (also so called **unaccompanied minors**) are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, *who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so*. This definition was taken as a basis in art. 2 (f) of the Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55 of the European Union Council. European Union law does not contain a legal definition of **separated children**, but the notion is also defined in General Comment nr.6 (2005). *Separated children are children, as defined in article 1 of the Convention, who have been separated from both parents or their previous legal or customary primary caregiver but not necessarily from other relatives*. These may, therefore, include children accompanied by other adult family members. In this paper, the term 'unaccompanied children' was used, as defined by General Comment nr.6 and Temporary Protection Directive 2001/55. However, by separated child, we will understand a child who arrives on the territory of the Republic of Moldova accompanied by relatives, known (non-related) adults, or other adults (third parties).

The **research methodology** of the paper was focused on the analysis of the existing services for displaced people from Ukraine, especially unaccompanied and separated children, as well as on the experience of representatives from various public institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and international agencies engaged in the protection and assistance of displaced people, especially of children.

The research plan comprised: (i) a desk review of statistics and recent reports about the situation of displaced people from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova, focusing on the situation of unaccompanied and separated children; (ii) the conduction of 8 individual in-depth interviews (III) with representatives of the international organization, social service providers, representatives of central and local authorities (district). Field data collection was carried out between 20.11.2022-30.11.2022. The reference moment for the data presented is 30.11.2022.

3. Stages and peculiarities of the response of Moldovan authorities to the needs of displaced people from Ukraine

Managing refugee flows from Ukraine in the Republic of Moldova is essential to differentiate three stages. First stage „*chaotic*”, when the authorities were trying to find ways to meet the urgent needs of displaced people from Ukraine, establish a refugee crisis management system, identify and remove specific gaps in this process, to establish partnerships with international agencies and CSOs. The massive flow of displaced people characterizes this stage, most of the refugees being in transit on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The displaced persons, at this stage, were women with children and men „*wealthy, with very expensive cars not requiring support from Moldovan authorities,*” also children accompanied by relatives or other adults. The period refers to February-April 2022.

In the second stage, the refugees’ management system became more functional, but the flow of displaced people decreased. Many of those who crossed the state border were staying in the Republic of Moldova. At this stage, the flow of displaced people had a high level of vulnerability „*people who have nothing... really in need, especially women and children, we did not see men anymore.*” Mainly, the most vulnerable people have remained in the Republic of Moldova: mothers with small children, older people, including those with serious health issues unable to travel or travel with difficulty, people without ID, people that do not speak other foreign languages (except Russian), people who have left behind close relatives in Ukraine (spouses, parents) and those who wanted to turn back home as soon as possible. The period refers to May-September 2022.

The third stage is the „*autumn-winter period.*” At this stage, the flow of displaced people could increase due to weather conditions and damage to Ukraine's energy system. In the 3ed stage, the flow of displaced people „*calmed down,*” and people crossing the border are more informed and come with an established destination: relatives, acquaintances, temporary placement centers for refugees, and other placement centers.

Refugees who are staying in the Republic of Moldova are: (i) people that have relatives/kinship with Moldovan citizens, (ii) people who do not speak foreign languages, (iii) people with limited financial resources, (iv) elderly people or with many children, (v) Roma people or other categories of Ukrainians, without identity documents, (vi) unaccompanied and separated children etc.

4. The protection provided to displaced people from Ukraine

Moldovan authorities have responded promptly to challenges caused by the war in Ukraine, creating a Single Crisis Management Center. The dopomoga.gov.md site was created to meet the information needs of displaced people as well as a *Green line* (0 800 800 11), and the *Helpline* of the Bureau of Migration and Asylum (BMA) (0 800 015 27), were established to provide information support 24/7 on all issues.

Measures taken by Moldovan authorities in providing protection to displaced people from Ukraine were supported by development partners (UN agencies in Moldova, international organizations, etc.). All the activities carried out by the UN agencies in Moldova comply with objectives set by Moldovan authorities, while certain agencies also have separate memorandums with several structures. Working groups were created, including representatives of public authorities, international organizations, and CSOs, with the support of development partners to ensure the effective coordination of activities. CSOs have also been included in providing services to displaced people alongside the international stakeholders: International Center „La Strada”, Tdh Moldova, Diaconia, Casmed, Caritas Moldova, Help Age Moldova, Keystone Moldova, Women's Law Center, Child, Community, Family PA, Home Care, National Center for Preventing Child Abuse, Association for Child and Family Empowerment „AVE Copiii” etc. A special role in providing social services at the local level is played by Social Assistance Territorial Structures (SATS). Engagement of SATS by international and local organizations streamlined assistance to displaced people, avoidance of conflict situations, disappointment, etc.

National legislation regulates in detail the entry, stay, and exit of foreigners on/from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, granting and prolonging the right of residence, etc. Following the international obligations, Moldova established four forms of protection for foreigners, according to *Law on asylum*, no.270/2008: (i) *refugee status*; (ii) *humanitarian protection*; (iii) *temporary protection*; (iv) *political asylum*. Taking into account the massive flow of refugees from Ukraine, Moldovan authorities have established for them a **special visa-free regime**. Consequently, the displaced citizens of Ukraine can enter and remain legally on the territory of the Republic of Moldova with different types of documents (birth certificates, delegated authority documents, electronic documents, expired documents, etc.). Protection for displaced persons from Ukraine, used in the Republic of Moldova under the state emergency, goes beyond what can provide temporary protection.

The BMA has registered 11430 asylum applications since the beginning of the armed conflict in Ukraine. Men fleeing war from Ukraine, especially those who crossed the state border illegally, apply for asylum more often. Claiming asylum allows them to avoid punishment for illegal entry or stay on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. However, of the 11430 asylum applications, only 3626 are

active. In other cases, the examination of the asylum request was stopped because the refugees have left or later refused this form of protection.²

The needs of displaced women from Ukraine, including children, are diverse. However, the most important refer to accommodation, medical aid, psychological support and assistance, inclusion of children in pre-school and school systems, vocational training and employment, etc. Moldovan authorities have met the needs for accommodation services of refugees in a record time. Besides housing provided by volunteers, the authorities have made the activity of existing places more efficient by setting up new spaces (dormitories that were not used, former residential institutions, etc.). Certain placement centers and student dormitories were closed but reopened to accommodate displaced people from Ukraine, making the necessary renovation and adjustments quickly. Several summer camps, monasteries, and military units have also provided support during the massive flow of displaced people. 132 temporary placement centers for refugees were authorized by National Social Assistance Agency (NSAA)³ to provide housing to displaced people beginning on February 24, 2022.

5. Challenges related to the protection of unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine

A challenge faced by Moldovan authorities was that a parent/legal representative accompanied not all children from Ukraine. The flows of refugees also included: (i) unaccompanied children; (ii) children accompanied by third parties, including foreign nationals (Table 1). These circumstances prompted representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (MLSP)⁴ and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) to take immediate action to develop the legal framework for the protection of unaccompanied children or accompanied by third parties, from Ukraine, following the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Therefore, the *Regulations establishing the intersectoral cooperation mechanism for identifying, assisting and monitoring children at risk coming from Ukraine during the state of war in Ukraine (Intersectoral mechanism)* were developed and approved by Commission for Emergency Situations (CES) Decision no. 14 of 14.04.2022. In this way, Intersectoral cooperation mechanism was established for the identification, evaluation, assistance, referral, and monitoring of children at risk, coming from

² In-depth individual interview with the head of BMA (III_2).

³ NSAA is the administrative authority subordinated to the MLSP empowered to improve the quality of social assistance provided to people by implementing field-related policies, and among the duties are the management of financial resources to subsidize social welfare programs and the minimum package of social services. In the context of the refugee crisis in Ukraine, NSAA is responsible for issuing orders regarding the creation of temporary placement centers for refugees and their monitoring.

⁴ MLSP is the specialized body of central public administration responsible for developing policies related to child protection and families with children, policies to ensure equal opportunities between women and men, and policies for developing social services etc. in collaboration with the National Social Assistance Agency.

Ukraine during the war in Ukraine and establishing conditions for their return to Ukraine. According to this document, the following categories of children at risk from Ukraine were delimited as requiring the immediate intervention of guardianship authorities: (i) unaccompanied children, (ii) children accompanied by unauthorized people, (iii) children accompanied by legal representatives who raise suspicion regarding their identity (both, children and legal representatives), (iv) children declared at risk or the presumption of imminent danger, (v) children without identity documents, expired or damaged documents, (vi) other categories of children at risk.

Table 1. Information about unaccompanied children and children accompanied by third parties

Category of children	Number of children
Unaccompanied children	591
Children accompanied by third parties	1152
Authorizations to cross the border of the Republic of Moldova for children (exit)	461

Source: Data presented by the head of the Department for protection policies on child rights and families with children, within 24.02.2022-02.12.2022. In-depth individual interview (III_1).

The regulations established the key stakeholders to be engaged in the identification, referral and assistance of children from Ukraine, as well as their responsibilities. Control was established at the Republic of Moldova borders due to the development and approval of the Intersectoral mechanism in order to prevent potential risk situations in children's refugees from Ukraine, including child trafficking. If a child was identified in a risk situation at the Republic of Moldova border by the border guard/other specialists, the child protection specialist from SATS was called ensuring child's transportation and establishment of form of child protection „our colleagues, development partners, helped us a lot in taking the children to placement centers or host families” (III_1).

Moldovan authorities tried not to limit the rights of Ukrainian children to free movement, including children aged 16-18 who, according to Ukrainian laws, have the right to freedom of movement without being accompanied by an adult. On the other hand, they did not intend to institutionalize children in placement centers when, outside the Republic of Moldova borders, extended family members and relatives wanted to take care of these children. Therefore, MIA and MLSP via the joint Order no. 169/34 of 22.04.2022, have established certain implementation measures of the Decision no. 14 of 14.02.2022 of the CES from the Republic of Moldova, regarding the approval of the form of the document authorizing the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Moldova, on the exit direction, of unaccompanied children or accompanied by unauthorized people. Subsequently, by the MLSP Order no.36 of 05.05.2022, *The form of the document of rapid assessment of the best interests of the child at risk coming from Ukraine during the declaration of the state of war in Ukraine and The sheet for observing the behavior, actions, statements and condition of the child and the adult accompanying the child.* This additional order established two additional methods of control: (i) authorization to

cross the state border of the Republic of Moldova, the exit direction, of unaccompanied children or accompanied by an unauthorized person (ii) assessment of children's interests taking into account child's desire to continue the journey with that person without being influenced from outside and signs to call attention to „we focused on preventing any risk situation, via questions to which everyone who identifies the child at risk has to answer before taking the decision” (III_1).

In this way, the Intersectoral mechanism and the additional documents contributed significantly to preventing risks, including trafficking and exploitation of unaccompanied and separated children accompanied by third parties. The representative of the Department for protection policies on child rights and families with children of the MLSP pointed out that there were cases when they issued the decision to separate the child from the accompanying person „there were many cases when the children were very young, up to a year old. Consequently, it was impossible to ask the child where he/she was from, and there was no document proving who is the person accompanying the child. We could not risk allowing them to cross because this child could have been stolen from Ukraine and then sold abroad” (III_1).

6. Services provided to displaced people, especially unaccompanied and separated children

Children from Ukraine are treated the same as children from the Republic of Moldova. It was agreed that they should benefit from all forms of protection and all services that are designed to children from the Republic of Moldova (except the allowances and payments). Thus, the child protection legal framework in Moldova ensures child protection without discrimination.

The unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine are entitled to the following forms of protection existing on the territory of the Republic of Moldova: guardianship/trusteeship, custody. These forms of protection were established on relatives (aunt, uncle, elder brother/sister, etc.). For example, on 30.11.2022, 45 unaccompanied children were living in custody; five were living with relatives that have been given guardianship of these children. Reporting on these forms of protection is done regularly to the MLSP.

Unaccompanied and separated children also benefit from the support of local guardianship authorities (Box 1). Meantime, Moldovan authorities take efforts to develop new services: safe places for pre-teens and teenagers and professional parental assistance focused on refugees. Not least important are the information campaigns carried out for parents/caregivers fleeing the war from Ukraine about services provided in the Republic of Moldova: (i) available medical aid and service access, (ii) available educational services (formal and non-formal) and service access, (iii) available social services and service access, (iv) rehabilitation services for children with disabilities, etc. In this way, the child's parent//caregiver is informed about services in the Republic of Moldova for children.

Box 1. Support provided by guardianship authorities to unaccompanied and separated children

- Immediate best interests assessment of the child,
- Providing placement,
- Providing assistance according to the Law no. 140/2013,
- Assistance in getting identity documents,
- Assistance in applying for asylum,
- Representation of child's interests and rights,
- Use of child support tools (report forms, initial assessment, visiting the child, etc.);
- Assistance in issuing the documents for the authorization to cross the state border of the Republic of Moldova, on the exit,
- Providing information to children/caregivers appointed by territorial guardianship authorities about the international protection terms,
- Providing information to children/caregivers appointed by territorial guardianship authorities about the Child Helpline to report presumed cases of violence, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking (VNET),
- Providing basic family support,
- Monitoring the child's situation until getting to the destination.

Among the temporary placement centers for refugees open and authorized by NSAA, one was open for unaccompanied and separated children fleeing war from Ukraine (in Carpineni, Hincesti) with a capacity of 150 places. The number of children in this center is very low (one child). Assuming the right of every child to a family and the observance of his best interest, but also taking into account the deinstitutionalization reform from the Republic of Moldova, alternative solutions have been identified for unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine: services of professional parental assistance and Family-Type Children's Home „*at the moment we are ready to open, during the year, 20-30 professional parental assistance services where we could place about 100 children*” (III_1). Still, the demand for such services is deficient. Seven children were placed in the Family-Type Children's Home and one child in professional parental assistance at 02.12.2022.

In providing protection and support to refugee children from Ukraine, the Moldovan authorities received significant support from UNICEF. The intervention of UNICEF in Moldova during the refugee crisis is focused on two directions: (i) strengthening the child protection system to meet the needs of more than 42 thousand children's refugees, including unaccompanied and separated children, (ii) providing services to children. UNICEF's work is focused on coordinating services provided by BlueDots centers near the border, representing the first emergency response to the needs of displaced people from Ukraine (in collaboration with UNHCR and CSOs). Due to the collaboration with authorities, the child protection specialists from the local guardianship authorities have been delegated to work within BlueDots, enabling the documentation and quick intervention in situations when there are unaccompanied children or children separated from their parents. UNICEF is trying to extend the activities of BlueDots, through mobile teams

consisting of entertainers, psychologists, and social workers, who travel to localities and carry out activities with children and their parents.

UNICEF, together with local partner organizations, in October 2022, started to pilot the *open-source software platform PRIMERO*, which will ensure more effective monitoring so that refugee children can receive the protection and services required. PRIMERO is an electronic system of case management that also enables the early identification of potential situations of VNET, as well as taking all necessary measures to ensure and protect children's rights. Identification and registration of children are carried out only on the basis of consent. After the initial evaluation and assessment of the risk level, each child is referred to institutions that can provide the necessary services. UNICEF intends that all information collected in PRIMERO be transmitted to the central authorities of the Republic of Moldova and be included in the national electronic system.

Amongst the most important strengths in providing services to children from Ukraine, mentioned by the interviewed specialists, are:

- Development and approval of the *Intersectoral mechanism*, enabling the Border Police representatives, but also other specialists, to notify the representatives of guardianship authorities if there is any suspicion regarding the child's situation. Afterward, they assess the child's situation.
- Approval of the Order 169/34, Order 36, which provide for the rapid assessment of the best interests of the child at risk and the issue, if necessary, of the document authorizing the crossing of the border of the Republic of Moldova, on the exit, of unaccompanied children or children accompanied by an unauthorized person „*I think it is a drastic but necessary measure. We are obliged to provide child protection and guarantee the quality and well-being of the child*” (III_1).
- Engagement of child protection specialists from the district level (II level), sometimes for twenty-four hours, seven days a week (24/7).
- A form of protection for unaccompanied children or accompanied by third parties: guardianship/trusteeship, custody, etc. „*All children hosted in our center have been appointed legal representatives as their aunt, and siblings. They all have supporting documents. We collaborate with SATS in cases of expired power of attorney*” (III_4).
- Certain services have been developed in the context of the refugee crisis (*mobile teams for children and youth*), while others have diversified their target groups, including refugee children (Youth Centers, creative centers, public libraries, summer camps, etc.).
- Creation of safe places for activities within the temporary placement centers for refugees and other special centers.
- Children's integration into kindergarten or school at parent/caregiver's request, including school supplies „*we provided school bags for children who have to go to school*” (III_5).
- Engagement of CSOs psychologists to provide counseling for children, including therapy for war trauma.

- Establishment of the program of activities and services for children hosted in the temporary placement centers for refugees and other special centers with their managers but also parents/caregivers *„parents are acquainted with activities we are going to implement next week, and those who are interested are coming and sometimes have their own suggestions”*(III_6).
- Gift cards for children (500 lei) at LIBRARIUS bookstore were given to children refugees and some children from vulnerable families from the Republic of Moldova.
- Organization of various recreational activities: holidays, concerts, quilting bees, trips all over the Republic of Moldova.

The main gap identified in Moldova regarding children was the lack of a legal framework to protect the child's best interests in cases of unaccompanied children or accompanied by unauthorized people. This gap was removed due to the development and approval on 14.04.2022 of the *Intersectoral mechanism* and Orders 169/34 and 36. The war in Ukraine allowed the identification of the lack of specific services for children, which encouraged Moldovan authorities to develop the current protection system and services for all children, including children refugees.

As weaknesses of the services offered to refugee children in Ukraine:

- Lack of child protection specialists at the community level (I level). The lack of specialists has increased the workload of community social workers and their overload, leading to professional burnout and high staff turnover.
- The small number of pre-school children enrolled in educational institutions, and the small number of children enrolled in the educational system *„only 1766 are integrated into our educational system”* (III_8). The lack of monitoring children studying online was also mentioned *„how can we check if the child is sitting in front of the computer and not on the street, at risk. We are responsible for their well-being because they are on the territory of our country”*(III_4).
- Lack of specialized services for specific categories of children (children victims/witnesses of crimes) and rehabilitation services for children.
- It is sometimes unclear how the documents should be compiled so children can benefit from services in the Republic of Moldova. For example, disabled children refugees are entitled to personal assistance services, but SATS employees do not know how to compile the file (what documents, what diagnosis, etc.). *„The ministry should issue a directive with explanations”* (III_5).
- Lack of data regarding the distribution of displaced children by administrative-territorial units *„we do not have any information about the number of children and their geographical distribution to be able to create services where they are needed”* (III_7). Dissimilarity in the data, about the number of children, provided by central authorities and data collected by CSOs *„Data given by MIA shows that more than 40 thousand children are in the country. Our partner, which collaborates with SATS from the 25 districts via social workers, identifies the children-refugees, and said that the latter*

had identified about 3 thousand children in the 25 districts. Where are the other 37 thousand?" (III_7).

7. Vulnerability of unaccompanied children and separated children and risk of trafficking and exploitation

Research data reveal the following categories of displaced children **vulnerable to child trafficking**:

- Unaccompanied and separated children, including children aged 16-18 years, *„are naive and believe what it is told or written,”* children accompanied by third parties and groups of children, primarily until the approval of the Intersectoral mechanism. A few respondents underlined that at the beginning, *„it was not clear what a green corridor means or if the groups of children are accompanied or not, who are they, where are they going, whom they are going with”* (III_7).
- Roma children *„not all are registered”*. There were situations when the first documentation of the child was done when the child was 14-15 years old, based on a document certifying the birth.

The representative of the Department for protection policies on child rights and families with children of the MLSP mentioned that until 14.04.2022, he was regularly receiving calls on various supposed cases of child trafficking, however, after the approval of the *Intersectoral mechanism* and Orders 169/34 and 36, the number of these cases decreased *„there were suspicious cases until we introduced that filter. I was the contact person for all the border checkpoints, for all border guards, 24/7”* (III_1). A few interviewees have also pointed out a gap in protection, including preventing and combating child trafficking, from February 24, 2022 to April 14, 2022. Consequently, the assumption that cases of child trafficking were possible until the signing of the Intersectoral mechanism and Orders no. 169/34 and 36 is proper. Certain unauthorized persons could have used the Republic of Moldova as a transit country, but there is no empirical data to confirm this hypothesis.

Now, the Republic of Moldova has different filters to identify suspicious cases of children accompanied by third parties when crossing the border: (i) Border Police representatives; (ii) child protection specialists from BlueDots centers; (iii) social workers from communities and specialists from temporary placement centers for refugees. Even if they managed to pass through the first filter, if the specialists from BlueDots, communities and refugees placement centers find the relationship between a child and an adult suspicious, they take action using tools developed to guarantee the child's best interests. The new documents developed and approved, together with Border Police and other specialists training, prevented the exit from the territory of the Republic of Moldova of children unaccompanied or accompanied by third parties from Ukraine without the assessment and authorization of guardianship authorities *„there are no such cases anymore”*.

The research data shows that after the amendment of the legal framework of the Republic of Moldova to ensure the best interests of the child from Ukraine, there were only a few cases of supposed risk identified most often at the border by specialists who notified competent authorities that coped with them immediately. However, none of the reported cases has been confirmed.

8. Conclusions

Children from Ukraine are treated the same as children from the Republic of Moldova. They benefit from all forms of protection and all services designed for children from the Republic of Moldova (except the allowances and payments). The unaccompanied and separated children from Ukraine are entitled to the following forms of protection existing on the territory of the Republic of Moldova: guardianship/trusteeship and custody. These forms of protection were established on relatives (aunt, uncle, elder brother/sister, etc.).

The research data attests that the Moldovan authorities developed the legal framework for the protection of unaccompanied children or accompanied by third parties from Ukraine to provide safety and protection in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The *Intersectoral cooperation mechanism* was established for identifying, evaluating, assisting, referring, and monitoring children at risk, coming from Ukraine during the war in Ukraine and establishing conditions for their return to Ukraine. Also, the authorities developed regulations regarding the approval of the form of the document authorizing the crossing of the state border of the Republic of Moldova, on the exit direction, of unaccompanied children or accompanied by unauthorized people.

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Măsurile de implementare a Dispoziției CSE a RM nr. 14 din 14.04.2022 (Measures to implement the Decision of CES of RM no. 14 of 14.04.2022) approved by Joint Order no. 169/34 of 22.04.2022 of MIA and MLSP.

Modelul actului de evaluare rapidă a interesului superior al copilului aflat în situație de risc, venit de pe teritoriul Ucrainei în perioada declarării stării de război în Ucraina (The model of the rapid assessment of the best interests of the child at risk from Ukraine during the declaration of the state of war in Ukraine), approved by Order no.36 of 05.05.2022 of MLSP.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SEXUAL EDUCATION FOR YOUNG GENERATIONS

Nina Mihaela MIHALACHE¹

Abstract

As a phrase, sexual education oscillates between taboo and disinhibition, between values and social risks, between traditional generations and current generations, generating multiple challenges to the educational field. The semantics of this phrase creates serious inhibitions for educational institutions that promote ethics and human dignity in the educational process. To these are added the social and cultural values that delegate the role of sexual education to the family alone. The present analysis wants to argue the understanding and the role of sexual education for the young generations. In the last decades, democracy, human rights with an emphasis on the emancipation of women, have definitely influenced the mentality and sexual behavior of the young generations. This behavior also brought with it medico-social risks, generating new social phenomena, such as accidental pregnancies, teenage pregnancies, abortion, single-parent families, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. These behaviors also existed before modernity, but as exceptions. The new social phenomena that appeared as a result of the lack of correct sexual education and the overcoming of the family's situation in communicating with young people stimulated the creation of social services to help them. However, the statistics show that the socio+medical risks due to the lack of correct sexual education of young people, have registered an increase in the number of cases as well as the appearance of new social phenomena: human trafficking now also associated with the digital environment, sexual abuse, child pornography, mothers teenage girls under the age of 14 etc. The concern of the professionals of the social environment for the reduction of these phenomena determined the highlighting of the necessity of the involvement of educational institutions in the training and informed information of young people, taking into account the particularities of age, development and psycho-social maturation, but also through the use of specific learning method.

Keywords: Sexual education, socio-medical risks, mentality, young generations.

Résumé

En tant que phrase, l'éducation sexuelle oscille entre tabou et désinhibition entre valeurs et risques sociaux, entre générations traditionnelles et générations actuelles, générant de

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multples défis au champ éducatif. La sémantique de cette phrase crée de sérieuses inhibitions pour les établissements d'enseignement qui promeuvent l'éthique et la dignité humaine dans le processus éducatif. A celles-ci s'ajoutent les valeurs sociales et culturelles qui délèguent le rôle de l'éducation sexuelle à la seule famille. La présente analyse veut argumenter la compréhension et le rôle l'éducation sexuelle pour les jeunes générations. Au cours des dernières décennies, la démocratie, les droits de l'homme avec un accent sur l'émancipation des femmes, ont définitivement influencé la mentalité et le comportement sexuel des jeunes générations. Ce comportement entraînait également des risques médico-sociaux, générant de nouveaux phénomènes sociaux, tels que les grossesses accidentelles, les grossesses d'adolescentes, l'avortement, les familles monoparentales, les maladies sexuellement transmissibles, etc. Ces comportements existaient aussi avant la modernité, mais à titre d'exceptions. Les nouveaux phénomènes sociaux apparus à la suite du manque d'éducation sexuelle correcte et du dépassement de la situation familiale dans la communication avec les jeunes ont stimulé la création de services sociaux pour les aider. Cependant, les statistiques montrent que les risques socio-médicaux dus au manque d'éducation sexuelle correcte des jeunes, ont enregistré une augmentation du nombre de cas ainsi que l'apparition de nouveaux phénomènes sociaux : la traite des êtres humains désormais également associée au numérique l'environnement, les abus sexuels, la pédopornographie, les mères adolescents moins de 14 ans etc. Le souci des professionnels du milieu social de réduire ces phénomènes a déterminé la nécessité d'impliquer les institutions éducatives dans la formation et l'information éclairée des jeunes, en tenant compte des particularités d'âge, de développement psychosocial et de maturation, mais aussi par l'utilisation de méthodes d'apprentissage spécifiques.

Mots clés : Education sexuelle, risques socio-médicaux, mentalité, jeunes générations

Rezumat

Ca sintagmă, educația sexuală, oscilează între tabu și dezinhibiție între valori și riscuri sociale, între generații tradiționale și generații actuale, generând multiple provocări domeniului educațional. Semantica acestei sintagme crează serioase inhibiții instituțiilor de educație care promovează etica și demnitatea umană în procesul educațional. Acestora li se adaugă valorile sociale și culturale care delegă doar familiei rolul educației sexuale. Analiza de față dorește a argumenta înțelegerea și rolul educației sexuale pentru tinerele generații. În ultimele decenii, democrația, drepturile omului cu accent pe emanciparea femeii, au influențat cu certitudine mentalitatea și comportamentul sexual al tinerelor generații. Acest comportament a adus cu sine și riscuri medico sociale generând fenomene sociale noi, ca sarcini întâmplătoare, sarcini la adolescente, avort, familie monoparentală, boli cu transmitere sexuala etc. Aceste comportamente existau și înainte de modernitate dar cu titlu de excepții. Fenomenele sociale noi apărute ca urmare a lipsei de educație sexuală corectă și a depășirii de situație a familiei în comunicarea cu tinerii au stimulat crearea de servicii sociale care să vină în ajutorul lor. Cu toate acestea, statisticile arată că riscurile socio-medice datorate lipsei educației sexuale corecte a tinerilor, au înregistrat creșterea numărului de cazuri precum și apariția unor fenomene sociale noi: trafic de persoane acum asociat și cu mediul digital, abuz sexual, pornografie infantilă, mame adolescente cu vârste sub 14 ani etc..Preocuparea profesioniștilor mediului social pentru diminuarea acestor fenomene a determinat evidențierea necesității implicării instituțiilor educaționale în formarea și informarea avizată a tinerilor, ținând cont de particularitățile de vârstă, de dezvoltare și maturizare psiho-socială dar și prin utilizarea de metode specifice învățării.

Cuvinte cheie: Educație sexuală, riscuri socio-medice, mentalitate, tinere generații

1. Introduction

Sexuality education is a controversial topic for many cultures. The natural questions related to the necessity of this type of education confirm the difficulty of approaching this subject, a difficulty invoked by adults and not by children or young people² (www.edupedu.ro).

Sexual education is not only an element of modernity but a necessity of the current times. Statistics show that in recent decades the risks of social phenomena associated with the lack of sex education have greatly increased: teenage mothers, accidental early pregnancies, abandoned children, school dropouts, etc. Today's modern society offers the young generation multiple opportunities and conditions for personal and social development. In this context, the social phenomena derived from the lack of sex education should remain only as exceptions.

2. Analysis directions

As the title suggests, the present analysis proposes a foray into the controversial history of sexuality education. Over time, sexual education has oscillated between taboo and disinhibition, between traditional and modern, between privacy and freedom, which has been a permanent source of challenges for family and society. In this context, it is desired to clarify the theoretical concepts specific to sexual education, as well as to analyze and argue the need for sexual education for the younger generations. Two directions of analysis will be considered, one to identify the main contexts and causes generating risks for the young generations that claim the need for sex education, and another to refer to the influence of sex education on the mentality and behavior of the young generation.

For this analysis, data from research and reports as well as specific legislation from the period 2004 to November 2022 were selected, which will also form part of the bibliographic base of this work.

² <https://www.edupedu.ro/elevii-studentii-si-consiliul-tineretului-ii-solicita-lui-klaus-iohannis-sa-retrimita-in-parlament-legea-privind-educatia-sexuala-care-conditioneaza-parent-consent-hours/>, the National Student Council (CNE), the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) and the Romanian Youth Council (CTR) request the introduction of sex education in schools in the proper sense of the term, as a result of the fact that Romania is at the bottom of the ranking in terms of the sexual health of young people and there is a large number of teenage mothers. The same communiqué states that „In many families in Romania, reproductive health is not a subject of free discussion, and many students do not have parents who can answer them with information regarding sex education that should be delivered by specialists in the field, thus that the information that students receive on this topic in the educational unit represents the only opportunity to understand basic aspects adjacent to sex education, such as contraception, family planning, etc.” Available online on 08/02/2022.

3. Argument regarding the necessity of sexual education for the young generations

The alarming figures presented by the national and European statistics clearly highlight an alarming increase in the number of teenage mothers. The latest EUROSTAT and UNICEF statistics place Romania at the top of the ranking for this indicator, our country providing a percentage of 23% of teenage mothers and a worrying increase in the rate of abortions up to 18 years of age, as stated by a research carried out by Save the Children in 2021³. The same research, according to the data of the National Institute of Statistics, states that out of almost 200,000 children born, 750 were born to minors under the age of 15, and 18,000 to mothers between 15-19 years of age. In October 2022, the Save the Children Organization is also carrying out an Analysis on the situation of mothers and pregnant women under 18 in rural and disadvantaged areas in Romania. This research, although carried out on a limited sample of underage mothers, highlights the depth of the problem of this vulnerable group. The results of the study confirm the theories that support the relationship between school and family education, the majority of teenage girls with children dropping out of school during middle school, and some of them even in primary school. The justification for giving up education is on the one hand argued by the appearance of pregnancy but also by the fact that they were abandoned by their parents and left in the care of other people, without a placement measure, which greatly complicated the access to medical investigations and contraceptive methods of pregnant teenagers. Some of these minor pregnant women stated that they had no or little knowledge about sex education, with reference to the beginning of sexual life, sexually transmitted diseases and contraception, but that this information from school would have been useful to them because in their family there are these discussions are shameful. The study also highlights the fact that it is worrying that 12 percent of fathers are also minors, which greatly complicates the legal and administrative situations, of recognizing children implicitly receiving allowances and allowances with repercussions on the care of children, without a measure of social protection. The conclusions of the study show the same causes identified until 2022 in studies in this field for which minor mothers can become pregnant, the difference being in the opinions and suggestions made by specialists who support a more serious involvement of the authorities in identifying these risk situations but also the importance of introducing education sexual education in school, education that could, in addition

³ Argumentative text from the Report of the legal and labor and social protection commission regarding the need to amend and supplement Law 272/2004 - „taking into account the fact that Romania has a large number of abortions and pregnancies among minors, the need for health education is recognized, in order to prevent minor pregnancies and contracting sexually transmitted diseases. However, this must be done in accordance with international treaties on the matter, to which Romania is a party, only with the consent of the parents or legal representatives of the children, according to their values and moral criteria” (<https://www.edupedu.ro/>).

to the correct information, distance children from the model of teenage mothers that they have in the family, a model that has been identified as a risk factor for the pregnancy of teenage mothers (Save the Children, 2022).

The professionals' concern for analyzing this phenomenon stems from the research carried out over 15 years ago, but also from the projects carried out with the aim of reducing the number of teenage mothers, abortions and child abandonment, as well as sexually transmitted diseases.

The concern is also evident at the level of our political decision-makers who proposed sex education in school, but who ran into the opposition of some colleagues, which delayed the promulgation of the law and demonstrated the fact that cultural values represent a strong landmark for some societies. The statements in the mass media show that most adults feel uncomfortable discussing sexuality, considering it an affront to the privacy and innocence of childhood⁴. The same thing was stated by the World Health Organization through its partner, the German Federal Center for Health Education, which created in 2009 the first European Standards regarding sex education in schools⁵ (www.bzgaw-hocc.de).

Due to the increase in the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV-AIDS, the increase in concerns regarding the trafficking and exploitation of children, the change in the attitude and sexual behavior of the young generation, constituted a starting point in the proposal and development of standards regarding sexual education in schools since 2008.

In Romania, since 2004, there has been an optional subject entitled Health Education, for grades I-XII. This discipline was structured on six modules and included for each module a chapter on reproductive and family health. The first modules focused on hygiene, health and diseases caused by lack of hygiene, notions related to personal development and puberty, and the first notions related to reproduction appeared at the end of fourth grade, that is, around 11 years old (Order of the Minister No. 4496 / 11.08.2004). Being optional, this discipline was attended by only 6% of the students.

On June 21, 2022, the law on sexual education was voted, by Law 191/June 28, 2022, by amending Law 272/2004, on the protection and promotion of children's rights, to Art. 46, paragraph (3), letter i), which provides „ the systematic running of health education programs in school units, starting from the 8th grade with the written consent of the parents or legal representatives of the children, in order to prevent the contracting of sexually transmitted diseases and the pregnancy of minors” ([https:// legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/256905](https://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocumentAfis/256905), available online on November 28, 2022).

⁴ In 2017, a draft law entitled „Innocence of childhood” was proposed, which proposed the prohibition of sex education courses in preschool, primary and secondary education without parental consent. (www.cdep.ro).

⁵ https://www.bzgaw-hocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/BZgA_Standards_Romanian.pdf, official website of the German Federal Center for Health Education and link to the document Standards for sexuality education in Europe, available online 2.08.2022.

As early as 2005, Cristina Neamțu emphasized the main arguments regarding the need for sexual education in schools, stating that „the family cannot provide sexual education to the young generation”, that „the purpose of school education is to prepare students for life”, that „there is an increasingly early sexualization of the young generation” corroborated with the „assault of eroticism and pornography in the mass media” (Neamțu, 2005, pp. 58-60).

4. Definitions and concepts regarding the field of sexual and reproductive health

In order to argue the importance of sexual education for the young generation, it is appropriate to clarify a suite of terms that cause confusion at a semantic and comprehensive level. These confusions can underlie the resistance and taboo of communication in the field of sexuality education. Moreover, the lack of information and the superficiality of the correct information on the terms can lead to a misunderstanding of the field and directions of analysis.

For a correct sexual education, the authors of the Standards for sexual education in Europe propose a segregation and a definition of the terminology used in the construction of the instructive-educational process. So, to begin with, it is proposed to define some terms suspected of pleonasm at the level of mentality and cognition. Thus, for most people, terms like sex, sexuality and sexual health have a connotation associated with intercourse or reproduction. The analysis of these terms demonstrated that there are many institutional and research concerns on these topics. Also, confronted earlier with the problem of the risks of sexually transmitted diseases but also with a more open approach to sexuality and human freedoms, they were able to analyze the importance of sexual education. In addition, they built models of good institutional and legislative practice as well as the creation of information and education tools for the population.

Of course, since ancient times, sexuality as a whole has been associated with privacy, shame, and its public expression with punishment. Not a few have bent on the research of sexuality since ancient times, with historical events emphasizing the priorities of the courts and politics of the time. According to the writings of Michel Foucault (1976), in ancient society sexuality was translated only through eroticism, in the medieval period, the emphasis was on matrimonial relationships in which the Church establishes norms and rules for the manifestation of sexuality, and in the modern era, its field expands, proliferating multiple forms of sexuality that will require the approach of several domains (Ferroul, 2005, pp. 571-574).

Cristina Neamțu approaches sexuality as a new sexual culture, moving from prejudices, anxieties and myths to a multifaceted scientific approach, generated by a true sexual revolution (Neamțu, 2016, pp. 265-266).

The World Health Organization states that „sexuality is a central aspect of human nature throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. [...]Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological factors, psychological, social, economic,

political, ethical, legal, historical, religious and spiritual"(https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/BZgA_Standards_Romanian.pdf, 2010, p.17, available online on September 12, 2022)

This definition was developed from an older text, i.e. from 1999, the authors felt that it no longer met the complexity of the current term.

The term *sex* is defined as the main biological characteristics that define people as female or male, being closer to gender. Most often, the term is used to refer to sexual activity.

Regarding the term sexual health, the Dictionary of human sexuality (2005) presents a brief history of the emergence and definition of the term. So, Abraham, Pasini (1974), stated that, starting from the concepts of reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases, in 1972 the concept of sexual health appeared for the first time. It aims at three levels: the satisfaction of sexual behavior in relation to personal and social ethics, a disinhibition of fear and shame that inhibited sexual response and an absence of sexual diseases and dysfunctions. The 1975 definition emphasizes the enrichment and emancipation of the human personality, communication and love, erotic becoming the main purpose of sexual activity but also an individual right. Since the year 2000, sexual health is associated with new terms aimed at responsible sexual behavior, sexually healthy society as well as sexual rights (Chevret-Measson, 2005, p. 543).

With the invocation of sexual rights, attention is drawn to the complexity of approaching sexuality, and not only from a medical perspective. In this context, the European Parliament adopts on 24 June 2021 a Resolution on the situation of sexual and reproductive health and related rights in the European Union in the context of women's health. The rather extensive text of the Resolution invokes and refers to no less than 65 sources represented by laws, conventions, treaties, declarations, decisions, regulations, reports, strategies, action plans, argumentative studies in the sense of highlighting and supporting the right to sexual health and reproductive.

The Resolution clarifies a set of terms regarding sexual and reproductive health and related rights, establishing the European Union's direct competence in promoting sexual and reproductive health rights. At the same time, the Resolution defines and clarifies terms specific to modern society, such as: the right to procreation of trans men and nonbinary people, rights and freedoms of homosexual people regarding non-discriminatory care for sexual and reproductive health and the impact of climate change on fertility.

All these elements lead to the main recommendation of the Resolution regarding the importance and necessity of sexual and reproductive information and education of children and young people. The arguments aim, in addition to knowledge and familiarization with the specific notions of sexual and reproductive health, to the fact that it would contribute significantly to the reduction of risks regarding sexual violence and harassment, genital mutilation, rape, as well as to the reduction of stereotypes and taboos regarding gender identity and

discrimination, but also of contraception. (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0314_RO.pdf, available online on November 14, 2022)

5. Relationships and challenges in couples in the young generations

The current society comes with a fast and accessible technological development for the population. The new, digital generations were born and grew up connected to new technologies, which also entailed changes in perception, mentality and behavior. In addition to the merits given to technological development and the Internet, we are recently facing dangers and risks that could disrupt the good development of future generations.

If in ancient times the dangers were related to the attack of predatory animals, wars, precarious social status, today we add the dangers and traps of virtual space.

Democracy and freedoms have brought with them an awareness of the individual, of individuality but also of identity. We are concerned with the development of children towards educated generations, with positive attitudes and negotiations through dialogue. In this dialogue formula, it is expected that the mentality and behavior of young people will be different compared to previous generations.

Despite all these changes, the issue of personality development remains among the most important aspects for each individual as well as for professionals.

5.1. Parents migration, as a promoter of family changes

Among the first challenges of the new generations was the migration of parents to work outside the country and the emergence of the „home alone” phenomenon. In addition to all the negative effects of the phenomenon itself, the children who stayed at home matured faster because of the responsibilities assumed for their own care but also for that of their siblings, for which they take on the role of parents. The lack of parental models, family splits and accumulated stress contributed to changes in the mentality and values regarding married life and the family for young people who were part of this vulnerable group (<https://www.salvaticopiii.ro/> 2007, pp. 15- 24). The same study highlights the main risks to which children left alone at home were exposed: school dropout, poor participation in school, isolation and poor communication, association with deviant or criminal vulnerable groups, drug use. A study by the Alternative Social Association cites an analysis by the University of East Anglia, which specifies various situations when children can manifest post-traumatic stress disorders and even suicide, these effects taking part after experiencing a traumatic situation. (<https://copiisinguriacasa.ro/>, 2016, available online on November 02, 2022).

5.2. The influence of pornography on the mentality and development of adolescents and young people

Cătălin Dârțu brings some additions regarding the vulnerabilities of adolescence in the face of the progress of technology and virtual space. These vulnerabilities are given by the freedom of information combined with the exposure of privacy, which would lead to risks such as child pornography, violence, a diversity of couple models, sexual abuse, human trafficking, etc. The same author describes some ideas regarding the presence of pornography in the life of teenagers but also its implications in married life. Ybara and Mitchell (2005), argue that adolescent pornography is often associated with alcohol or drug use, and Maltz and Maltz (2009), draw attention to the influence of the mindset of adolescents who watch pornographic sites, in that they learn to give up the right to privacy, self-respect and the idea of a stable couple in the name of sexual pleasure (Dârțu, 2016, pp. 358-361).

Also, gender identity in personality formation or psychosexual identity represents a challenge for the younger generations. Psychosexual identity includes several variables, from genetic, hormonal to psycho-social and cultural ones (Neamțu, 2016, pp. 267; Godeanu, 2015, pp. 212-213). The abundance of models regarding the mediated exposure of the gender role expressed in the name of equality, rights and human freedom, as social and cultural variables can influence adolescents and young people in the construction of psychosexual identity.

Other studies state that there are vulnerabilities for young people as well, not only for teenagers who consume pornography, only that they take other forms. For young people, the frequent consumption of pornography can activate some imitations in sexual behavior but also changes in perception of the image of the partner and also on its unconscious activation. Paradoxically, these people are much more open in promoting women in the labor market as well as supporting their equal opportunities. However, studies show that a negative effect similar to the period of adolescence in the consumption of pornography is represented by violence, in the sense that the systematic watching of scenes in which the image of the dominant man and the humiliated woman in various poses is involved, decreases compassion in the face of possible violence, abuse and even rape. (Dârțu, 2016, pp. 358-361).

5.3. Pandemic isolation and the digitization of relationships

Another challenge for families and couples of the younger generation was the economic crisis and isolation from the pandemic period. It is well known that the pandemic period came with many worries, fears, losses, stress, isolation and many other limits for the population. The multiple restrictions and especially social isolation have facilitated changes at the family level as well, they are facing burnout through family and professional role overload, states of anxiety and mental instability as well as a reconfiguration of family values (Fegert et al., 2020).

Other authors complete the series of effects produced by the pandemic at the family level with the increase in alcohol and drug consumption, the rate of

domestic violence and the separation of couples. These effects are due to the limitation of individuals' experiences with the environment, which can create disturbances at the level of family microsystems (Pereda, Diaz-Faez, 2020).

Moreover, several studies attest to the fact that stress, separation or divorce and difficulties in the family or couple relationships are reflected both on adult partners and on children. These situations can alter the mental comfort of children and can produce changes in their perception of their own self-esteem or that of others, as well as the development of mechanisms to avoid involvement in subsequent couple relationships (Sava, 2022, p. 35).

Moreover, relationships and socialization have been moved to virtual space. There was even up to the period of pandemic isolation a tendency to switch life and relationships in the virtual space but against the background of the development of social network technology as well as freedom of movement and migration. The pandemic period did not bring anything new by moving life and profession into the virtual space, but contributed to the precipitation of this situation which was expected. Pre-pandemic research that looked at the impact of technology on relationships in the digital age drew attention to changes in mindset and behaviour. Thus, Ciprian Ceobanu, to begin with, refers to the mediated nature of interpersonal relationships by the author D. Chambers, who specifies that they are transferred in a multitude of virtual communication channels. There was the idea that this technologically mediated interaction was inferior to complex physical communication. The author dismantles this idea, by dissociating audio-video mediated communication from that of social networks. Along with Chambers, Broadbent notes an important distinction between discontinuous communication channels, also called asynchronous for social networks, and continuously open or synchronous communication channels for instant messaging or mobile telephony. It is precisely this continuity offered by technology through the personal mobile phone that brings some changes in terms of tolerance in communication. If once the sound of the landline phone had a real importance in communication, today, the sound of the mobile phone no longer brings the same satisfaction (Ceobanu *et al.*, 2016, pp. 59-67).

Cindy Pierce asserted that the tolerance of young generations extends to virtual space and to intimate sexual life as well as casual relationships (Pierce, 2019, p. 31).

Regarding the changes that occurred following the transfer of romantic relationships into the virtual space, the authors highlighted the fact that there is a certain normative perspective in the initiation of relationships. These relationships start through social networks, then move on to instant messaging so that finally the communication takes place directly, through the telephone. Any change in this route of virtual communication in building a relationship could harm the foundation of the relationship. A pronounced informal and casual character of the language in the construction of interpersonal relationships is observed. But what is important in the recent period when computer technology has developed particularly complex social media platforms, is to highlight a high degree of

versatility of social networks by the fact that personal actions, camouflage, self-disclosure and even fake social interactions are allowed. All these elements are likely to constitute various risks associated with mediated interpersonal communication and last but not least, in building romantic and intimate relationships.

Other risks associated with the transfer of romantic and intimate relationships into the virtual space refer to behaviors similar to those in the physical space, specifying that the main change is related to the production of situations and the management of effects. In the virtual space, we find infidelity and jealousy precisely through the private nature that the networks in the media space offer, and as a response, we can have surveillance, tracking, false identity as well as the rejection/blocking of some partners, situations that do not require communication strategies and physical exposure and direct in regulating relationships. Also, the daily ritual of presence and navigation in virtual space is a way of life for the young digital generations (Ceobanu *et al.*, 2016, pp. 68-69).

As early as 2012-2014, some American colleges had some virtual confession pages, where you could post messages that were published on the page without providing any information about the sender. These messages could be read and commented on by others. A study for such a network, UAICCrush, was carried out at the Alexandu Ioan Cuza University in Iasi, a page designed both for communication and for establishing affective relationships between students. The study that analyzed the exposure of romantic relationships in virtual space, showed some particularities related to this type of relationship, namely that they are episodic, of very short duration and can take the form of a game, developing a pseudo-community, strengthening what said Bauman in 2003, that there are more connections than relationships. The research even identified a certain typology of young people present on this type of networks. After coding and interpreting certain particularities, the research describes the dreamy type, the reluctant type, the bohemian type, the sarcastic type and the pragmatic type (Gavriliuță, Bortoș, 2020, pp. 64-68)

The transfer of life into the virtual space is associated with the risk of creating imaginary identities through avatars living in „the virtual worlds of the metaverse where we can exercise our freedom unhindered, and who actually access this inner symbolic universe and exploit it to the maximum” (Gavriliuță, 2021, p. 6).

Conclusions

The current topic focused on arguing the need for sexual education of the young generation and the implications on the mentality and behaviors of the young generations. Considering the figures provided by national and European statistics showing a worrying increase in the number of teenage mothers as well as the analysis of research, reports and specific legislation from 2004 to November 2022, it is confirmed that there has been a concern for a long time of professionals for this area of sexuality education.

Beyond the clarification of the theoretical and conceptual aspects, the analysis highlighted a suite of contexts and risks that claim the need for sexual education, contexts related to the economic and social changes of the last period but also to the implications of digitization on the life and mentality of the young generation.

Due to the development of digital technology, digitization has been co-opted into everyday life for the facilitation of communication but also for the novelty of the challenges of social networks. Migration has promoted the need and demands for the development of digitization for long-distance communication between working parents and children staying at home. In addition to these benefits of virtual communication, some vulnerabilities and risks associated with the exposure of romantic relationships, intimate life, with the exposure of the role of gender but also with child pornography, which led to changes in the mentality and behavior of the young generation, did not take long to appear. These changes translate into tolerance towards the exposure and tracking of private life in the virtual space and towards passenger relationships, avoiding negotiation through physical communication as well as imitations in sexual behavior through exposure and consumption of pornography. These changes in behavior and mentality are complemented by the expression of violence, abuse and even rape through the systematic watching of scenes with the image of the dominant man.

The analysis also shows other contexts that claim the need for sex education. Thus, research has identified the fact that there is a very large number of teenage mothers in Romania recently, and for the most part the risks associated with this social phenomenon were the same as those theoretically specified. Contextually, for the last period, the researches were able to highlight the role of family education but also of the school in reducing this phenomenon. Thus, most minors with children dropped out of school in the gymnasium and even in the primary cycle, and the migration and abandonment of children both contributed to the development of the phenomenon. In addition, the model of teenage mothers, psychosexual identity and the lack of parental models are added to them.

Other contexts and risks identified by this analysis were given by the pandemic isolation and the development of digitalization of relationships that contributed to changes in the behaviors of the young generation by increasing the level of stress, limiting relationships, violence and abuse in the family space, separation and divorce as well as development of avoidance mechanisms in the relationship of the couple which can lead to the modification of the picture and image of the family or the couple.

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SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE CURRENTLY IN RESIDENTIAL CENTRES – CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The purpose of the research was to analyse the quality of social services provided to people with institutionalised disabilities in relation to their socio-professional integration. The research is based on a qualitative methodology based on interviews conducted: with staff (specialists and caregivers) working in a residential centre in Romania; with employers of people with institutionalised disabilities and with disabled people integrated into work, located in the residential centre where the research was conducted. The research analysed disabled people's behavioural patterns and the environmental conditions where they live in order to find out the potential for social and professional integration of disabled people and how this potential can be maximised through social services provided in the residential centre.

Keywords: disabled people, social services, socio-professional integration, social exclusion

Résumé

L'objectif de la recherche était d'analyser la qualité des services sociaux offerts aux personnes handicapées institutionnalisées en relation avec leur insertion socioprofessionnelle. La recherche est basée sur une méthodologie qualitative basée sur des entretiens menés : avec du personnel (spécialistes et soignants) travaillant dans un centre résidentiel en Roumanie ; avec des employeurs de personnes handicapées institutionnalisées et de personnes handicapées insérées dans le travail, situés dans le centre résidentiel où la recherche a été menée. La recherche a analysé les modèles de comportement des personnes handicapées et les conditions environnementales dans lesquelles elles vivent afin de déterminer le potentiel d'intégration sociale et professionnelle des personnes handicapées et comment ce potentiel peut être maximisé grâce aux services sociaux fournis dans le centre résidentiel.

Mots clés: personnes handicapées, services sociaux, insertion socioprofessionnelle, exclusion sociale

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Rezumat

Scopul cercetării a fost acela de a analiza calitatea serviciilor sociale oferite persoanelor cu dizabilități instituționalizate în raport cu integrarea lor socio-profesională. Cercetarea se bazează pe o metodologie calitativă bazată pe interviuri realizate: cu personal (specialiști și îngrijitori) care lucrează într-un centru rezidențial din România; cu angajatori ai persoanelor cu dizabilități instituționalizate și cu persoane cu dizabilități integrate în muncă, situate în centrul rezidențial în care s-a efectuat cercetarea. Cercetarea a analizat modelele comportamentale ale persoanelor cu dizabilități și condițiile de mediu în care trăiesc pentru a afla potențialul de integrare socială și profesională a persoanelor cu dizabilități și modul în care acest potențial poate fi maximizat prin serviciile sociale oferite în centrul rezidențial.

Cuvinte cheie: persoane cu dizabilități, servicii sociale, integrare socio-profesională, excluziune socială

1. Introduction

In this article we aim to highlight the way in which the services provided in residential centres for disabled people can stop/diminish the trend in social exclusion and can contribute to the socio-professional integration of disabled beneficiaries.

“The integration into society of a disabled person ... means giving him/her the right and the opportunity to have access to education and training, to find a job, to benefit from public services. Integration means not only the creation of policies, legislative frameworks and programs aimed at removing barriers, but also the promotion of attitudes, conditions and resources required for equality and non-discrimination”. (Baquer and Sharma, 2003). People with disabilities „encounter several challenges in the face of society” (Hjorthold, 2017, p. 109), which is a social vulnerability. Șoitu and Johansen (2017, p. 7) mentioned that „the challenge of employing peer workers as a new approach that could lead to significant changes in the social care system, in education and in the roles of social workers and health care providers, and this will create innovation in the health and welfare system”. These necessary conditions and resources are to be identified and analysed in the case study presented in this article.

The results shown here are obtained after a research – case study – which aimed to analyse the quality of services provided to people with institutionalised disabilities in relation to their socio-professional integration. Aspects regarding the personnel employed (specialists and caregivers) and the activities carried out with the beneficiaries, within the residential centre (allocation of tasks to enable them to reach their full potential) were taken into account.

“The social exclusion of disabled people is increasing when people face a disadvantaged situation due to the problems that arise, due to the deficiency they suffer from. Human by nature is a social being and feels fulfilled when he has the opportunity to participate and be actively involved in the life of the community, without being viewed differently by those around him, without being excluded.

Disabled people are marginalised and deprived of this possibility, thus being discriminated against on the grounds of disability” (Preda, 2002, p. 98).

The research hypothesis is that physical, social and cultural barriers to their socio-professional integration can be overcome/ diminished if quality individualised social services are provided to disabled people in the residential centre.

“Integration involves, in a broad sense, the placement/ transfer of a person from a more or less separate environment to an ordinary one aimed at a set of measures that apply to various categories of population, and seeks to eliminate segregation in all its forms” (Gherguț, 2006, p. 17).

Whether we are referring to an individual, a group or a community, integration should be the normalcy. Integration implies recognition of universal values and rights but it also involves exchanges of information and capabilities. If we consider professional integration, then we refer to the employee’s skills, aspirations and expectations and job defining lines (Stanciu, 2001).

The research analysed disabled people’s behavioural patterns and the environmental conditions where they live in order to find out the potential for social and professional integration of disabled people and how this potential can be maximised through social services provided in the residential centre.

“Social integration in the community is important for an individual. Communities are social environments facilitating coordination and cooperation for the mutual benefit of their members; including security, freedom, economy, health, and affiliation.” (Ware *et al.*, 2007).

“Specialized social services aim to maintain, restore or develop individual skills to overcome a situation of social need.” (art. 3.4, paragraph 1, Ordinance 68/2003 on social services subsequently amended and supplemented).

Gherguț (2001, p. 34) who considers that integration „represents all the social relations established between individuals and other members of the community”.

Work has always been a means of development of the individual, groups, communities and at the same time of society, human shaping himself, perfecting his skills and developing his creative force (Bălașa, 2005).

“The purpose of human activity, regardless of the level at which it is expressed or researched (individual, group, society), is to meet the demand for material goods and services” (Cojocaru and Rădoi, 2016, p. 664) and „the institutional response to this point should be learning and empowerment” (Medeleanu, 2013, p. 46). The most important point in meeting this goal is the labour market in the contemporary economy (Cace, 2006), and it influences the elements of society. Currently, it is important to adapt and understand the changing environment of the workplace and work environment (Anton *et al.*, 2020, p. 29). In fact, „the labor market and the fields associated with the economy have made important efforts and changes in their strategies. Formerly niche fields have developed surprisingly during the pandemic period. This has also changed the mentality of the population who have found a kind of freedom in emerging

industries: online purchases and orders, online schedule, filling out and sending documents, visits, working from home, meetings and conferences, individualized services and all in the virtual space", which would make life easier and significantly facilitate the insertion of disabled people into the labor market (Mihalache, 2021, p. 50). Work also brings important macroeconomic and socio-political regulations. Integration into work or integration into the labour market as it is more often defined, brings a sense of fulfilment to the individual and as Giddens (2000) says a strong sense of social identity.

To help disabled people become and remain contributing members of society, essential services (i.e., rehabilitation, training, job setting assistance) can be provided through state-issued vocational rehabilitation strategies.

"The state is bound to ensure the right of disabled persons to work, not only by recognising the fundamental right to work, but also by creating conditions for accessibility and reasonable adaptation of space, by ensuring their full exercise capacity and promoting the employment of disabled persons in public and private sector." (UNO Convention art. 27).

"Social exclusion of disabled people means not only a low level of material resources, but, above all, their difficulties or inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life; in some respects, it also means alienation and distancing from ordinary society. Social exclusion is defined in terms of lack of access or limited access to civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, reflecting, in a sense, living standards and opportunities" (Manea, 2000, p. 44). The contexts regarding the association of these characteristics in any matrix can constitute risk factors for the families that experience them and social exclusion can be associated with the risk of poverty (Mihalache, 2013, pp. 94-95). If chances and the potential for social inclusion for disabled people increases then the risk of social exclusion decreases and implicitly fundamental rights and freedoms are respected.

2. Methodology

The purpose of the research was to analyse the quality of social services provided to people with institutionalised disabilities in relation to their socio-professional integration.

The objectives having facilitated the achievement of the research goal were: Identification and analysis of the conditions offered by the residential centre influencing socio-professional integration of disabled people; Identification and analysis of the activities carried out with the beneficiaries within the residential centre in order to integrate them socio-professionally; Inventory of human resources available in the residential centre involved in social integration activities of people with institutionalised disabilities.

The research questions on which the case study was based were: What are the conditions offered to disabled people in the centre that facilitate their socio-professional integration? What are the activities carried out with the beneficiaries within the residential centre in order to integrate them socio-professionally? What

is the staff structure that facilitates the socio-professional integration of people with institutionalised disabilities?

Population universe is represented by the beneficiaries of the social services provided in a residential centre for disabled people of Romania.

The sample used is unlikely, of availability; it is represented by 8 people with locomotor disabilities aged between 20 and 30 years, of which five females, and three males, 3 employers, and 5 employees of the residential centre (2 specialists, 3 caregivers).

3. Results

The results that will be shown below cannot be extrapolated beyond the population universe. These results must be analysed from the perspective of the case study.

For the data collection, the document analysis sheet and the semi-structured interviews/ interview guides with indicators aimed at:

The conditions offered in the residential centre (accommodation in comfort, safety and hygiene conditions, if the locations are clean, adapted to their needs, comfortable and safe; access to means of transport, if there are adaptations required for disabled people, access to means of communication, proper diet, medical treatment, partnership with potential employers);

Activities and services corresponding to beneficiaries' specific needs: information and social counselling, psychological counselling, social empowerment/rehabilitation (ensuring the conditions for beneficiaries' development/maintenance of autonomy and potential, speech therapy, massage, kinetherapy, physiotherapy, art therapy, hydrotherapy); independent living skills (development/ maintenance of cognitive skills, daily skills, communication skills, mobility, self-care, self-management skills, interaction skills; job training; decision support and assistance; integration and social participation; observance of beneficiaries' rights; socialising and leisure activities.

Human resources involved in the operation of the residential centre (number, staff structure, participation in training, training, etc.).

4. Discussion

Conditions offered to disabled people in the residential centre, which can facilitate their socio-professional integration.

From the data analysis we managed to configure a profile of the residential centre that highlights the importance of the conditions offered by the centre and their impact on disabled people's quality of life.

In the first place, some characteristics of organising and operating the centre were highlighted. The residential centre is a social welfare institution of public interest, with legal personality, established under the subordination of the County Council and under the structure of the General Directorate of Social Welfare and Child Protection.

The centre is located near the centre of the town, so beneficiaries can easily participate in community activities (cultural, religious, leisure). There are also public transport in the town (bus station, train station), necessary for families and relatives wishing to visit the beneficiaries.

The residential centre has a two-story building (ground floor and first floor), accommodation is done in 6 flats and a studio. A flat consists of a living room, 3 rooms, each room with 2 to 3 beds, a balcony and a sanitary area. The studio offers living space for 2 beneficiaries and it is equipped with its own restroom. The building has also got a 2-bed insulator. Each beneficiary has two lockers where they can keep their personal belongings and a bedside table.

In the centre there is also a medical office equipped with everything needed to provide medical care by specialised personnel.

The occupational therapy office and the occupational therapy workshop serve the beneficiaries by participating in recovery and rehabilitation activities,

The interviewed specialists say that 38 out of the 49 beneficiaries participate in activities for acquiring knowledge and for developing self-management skills.

Activities carried out with the beneficiaries within the residential centre in order to integrate them socio-professionally

The analysis of the interviews shows that, in the residential centre, the functional recovery/ rehabilitation activities focused on complementary recovery therapies, occupational therapy and psychological counselling depending on beneficiaries' particularities and needs. These focused on support activities for everyday and instrumental activities, such as improving personal hygiene and room care, assisting with banking and using cards, in the case of salaried beneficiaries.

Among the functional recovery/ rehabilitation activities mentioned by the disabled persons interviewed there were: activities for developing practical and manual skills (sewing, knitting, ironing), activities specific to the beneficiary's educational level such as: writing, reading, learning the basics of mathematics, geography, civics, drawing by model, free drawing, painting, practicing the graphic elements of writing, reading texts of their choice, learning the etiquette, learning poems and songs, producing sketches for holidays, name days as well as dance therapy, game therapy both individually and in groups, game with rules; game using various objects; game for knowing and being aware of the body scheme; making collages, model cuts, browsing through books and illustrated magazines and commenting on them, art activities in the club to make masks used at the Spring Carnival, making decorative objects specific to Easter and Christmas, decorating Christmas trees both in the festivities hall as well as in the courtyard.

From the interviews with the specialists, the psychological counselling was highlighted. „The fundamental objective of psychological services is to maintain, restore and develop the individual capacities of the beneficiaries in order to solve some difficult situations that the beneficiary could not solve alone, developing

behaviours appropriate to social situations, self-control education, development of cognitive processes, providing psycho-affective support.

We set out below a synthetic inventory of the activities carried out during 2020 and the number of beneficiaries participating in these activities:

Table no.1. Inventory of activities performed in 2020 in residential centres for disabled adults and participants

No. of participating beneficiaries/ total beneficiaries of the centre	Activities carried out within the centre according to the report on the activity in this residential centre for disabled adults
40/49	Knowledge consolidation activities through educational games/ game therapy;
10/49	Specific occupational recovery activities;
40/49	Activities specific to complementary recovery therapies (music therapy, expression and graphics therapy, relaxation therapy, learning therapy, behaviour organisation);
46/49	Muscle tone maintenance activities;
15/49	New skills training activities or strengthening current acquisitions;
45/49	Skills training activities to orient and move correctly;
30/49	Visual Arts
50/49	Individual and group psychological counselling, psycho-affective counselling and emotional support

Regarding professional integration services, the report on the activities carried out in the centre shows that the activities were focused on: self-knowledge, self-awareness (aggressive behaviour and its consequences, behaviour in public places, types/ kinds of behaviour and types of attitudes); resolving a communication crisis situation; reducing emotional or behavioural problems; improving adaptation to workplace; increasing self-esteem.

In 2020, the number of 6 beneficiaries employed at a local company was maintained. The specialists supported the beneficiaries to know and use the community services (mail and communications) accompanying them to personally pick up their packages and postal orders received, provided the beneficiaries with conditions for socialising and leisure activities on the premises of the centre, carried out various social integration activities (knowledge through observation and practical actions of the elements regarding the group to which they belong, housing, street, city, main types of human relations, sports activities, hiking, etc.). During the weekend, the beneficiaries have a relaxation – recreation program (walk in the park, music auditions, games, watching TV).

On the occasion of religious holidays of the year as well as on Sundays, the beneficiaries took part in the religious services at the local church. The beneficiaries also participated in various cultural activities in the locality.

On the occasion of January 24, Union Day, the beneficiaries played the Union Hora, in the courtyard of the centre. At the beginning of March, the Spring Carnival was organised where the beneficiaries were involved in various activities that ended with a fun evening. On the occasion of March 8 - „World Women's Day”, in the action „United for disabled women!” 8 beneficiaries prepared and performed an artistic program – sketch at the Municipal Theatre.

Also on the occasion of March 8, the beneficiaries were prepared and held a celebration on the theme „I love you mother”, a festive day when the beneficiaries were involved in various activities: celebration/ recitation of poems/ distribution of *mărțișoare* (March amulets) made by them to all employees.

On the occasion of Easter holidays, all the beneficiaries were involved in various specific activities in the community: cultural - religious activities, free discussions on the customs and traditions of Easter holidays, Confession/ Communion/ Participation of the beneficiaries in religious services. There was also an exhibition with figurines made of plaster, wood and crepe paper, collages made of paper with a specific theme, receiving the gifts offered by the Bunny during the celebration.

8 beneficiaries participated in the Special Olympics sports competition – a competition held at county level in partnership with the NGO sector.

Every month, within the centre, the birthdays of the beneficiaries born in that month were celebrated, as well as the name day of the beneficiaries named after saints, and a party was organised in the dining room.

Also, the beautification of the yard was done together with 10 beneficiaries who, under the supervision and guidance of the employees, participated in works for fitting-out and maintenance of green spaces and the flower rounds, in the planting of ornamental shrubs, fir trees.

Within the Health Education Program, in order to develop and consolidate healthy living behaviours of the 49 beneficiaries in the centre, the following objectives were considered to be achieved: involving beneficiaries in programs to prevent the use of drugs, beverages, cigarettes, in order to reduce life-threatening risk factors; educating the beneficiaries to avoid the consumption of drugs, drinks, cigarettes; development of healthy attitudes and healthy practices of life and personal hygiene through daily programs and counselling as well as knowledge of planning methods, to have a healthy lifestyle and the development of healthy behavioural patterns with a protective role on health.

In interviews, they stated that in the residential centre they participated in recreational, cultural and social activities, including cultural-artistic days, fun evenings, birthday celebrations in a festive setting.

Staff structure facilitating the socio-professional integration of people with institutionalised disabilities.

Within the Residential Centre, a number of 50 employees work: 1 director, 1 chief accountant, 1 economist, 1 administrator, 1 social worker, 1 psychologist, 6 nurses, 4 education instructors, 1 occupational therapist, 25 nursemaids, 3 cooks, 2

laundresses, 2 stokers and 1 maintenance worker, the staff structure of the Centre ensuring the provision of social services. The ratio of employee to beneficiary is 1 to 1.

At the centre level, meetings were organised with the centre's specialists and manager and the problems encountered in carrying out the specific activity of the centre were discussed.

Based on the Annual Training Plan, in 2020 the staff of the interviewed centre stated that they were trained on topics such as abuse, equal opportunities, implementation of regulations and procedures of the centre, etc. and working meetings were held with all employees where the centre's operating procedures and legislative developments were disseminated.

5. Conclusions

The objectives of the research have been achieved. The conditions offered by the residential centre were identified and analysed and the analysis of the data revealed their role in the socio-professional integration of disabled people. The activities carried out with the beneficiaries within the residential centre in order to integrate them socio-professionally were also identified and the major role that these activities have in the socio-professional integration of the beneficiaries of the residential centre emerged. An inventory of human resources operating in the residential centre was also made and following the data analysis, the role of each employee in the life of the beneficiaries was established and implicitly in their socio-professional integration.

Through the data obtained, we answered the research questions that substantiated the case study, highlighting the major role of environmental conditions, activities and staff in achieving a major objective of quality of life: socio-professional integration.

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„BUCURIA” – A NEW HOME, A NEW CHANCE – FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
WHO LEAVE THE SPECIAL PROTECTION SYSTEM
IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF IAȘI

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Abstract

At the level of the Municipality of Iași, the „Bucuria” Multifunctional Destination Social Center of the Directorate of Social Assistance Iasi constitutes a viable solution for the protection and for the preparing for independent living and for prevention and combat the risk of the young people which is in need not to becoming homeless or socially marginalized persons.

Officially opened on September 26, 2014, the center operates with a capacity of 26 places in residential mode and 49 places in day mode. Residential services are provided free of charge, at demand, for a fixed period, depending on the particular situation of each beneficiary and in relation to his individual needs, in accordance with minimum quality standards for the social services centers with accommodation, organized as residential centers for young people who leave the child protection system applicable to this social center. Young people are encouraged and supported to participate in daily activities and get involved in household activities. At the same time, they are guaranteed access to the programs of social integration/reintegration, are supported to restore/strengthen the link with family of origin and extended family, with friends, as well as for (re)integration into community, they are guided on the labor market and their access to courses is facilitated.

Keywords: Social center, residential services, social integration

Résumé

Au niveau de la Municipalité de Iași, le Centre Social Destination Multifonctionnel „Bucuria” de la Direction de l'Assistance Sociale de Iași est une solution viable pour la protection et la préparation à la vie indépendante et pour la prévention et la lutte contre le

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risque des jeunes qui veulent et n'ont pas besoin devenir des sans-abri ou des personnes socialement marginalisées.

Inauguré officiellement le 26 septembre 2014, le centre fonctionne avec une capacité de 26 places en mode résidentiel et 49 places en mode jour. Les services résidentiels sont fournis gratuitement, sur demande, pendant une période déterminée, en fonction de la situation particulière de chaque bénéficiaire et en fonction de ses besoins individuels, conformément aux normes minimales de qualité pour les centres de services sociaux avec hébergement, organisés en centres résidentiels. pour les jeunes qui sortent du dispositif de protection de l'enfance applicable à ce centre social. Les jeunes sont encouragés et soutenus pour participer aux activités quotidiennes et s'impliquer dans les activités ménagères. En même temps, on leur garantit l'accès aux programmes d'intégration/réintégration sociale, ils sont soutenus pour rétablir/renforcer le lien avec la famille d'origine et la famille élargie, avec les amis, ainsi que pour la (ré)intégration dans la communauté, ils sont guidés sur le marché du travail et leur accès aux cours est facilité.

Mots clés: Centre social, services résidentiels, insertion sociale

Rezumat

La nivelul Municipiului Iași, Centrul Social Destinație Multifuncțional „Bucuria” al Direcției de Asistență Socială Iași constituie o soluție viabilă pentru protecția și pregătirea pentru viață independentă și pentru prevenirea și combaterea riscului tinerilor care doresc are nevoie să nu devină persoane fără adăpost sau marginalizate social. Deschis oficial pe 26 septembrie 2014, centrul funcționează cu o capacitate de 26 de locuri în regim rezidențial și 49 de locuri în regim de zi. Serviciile rezidențiale se prestează gratuit, la cerere, pe o perioadă determinată, în funcție de situația particulară a fiecărui beneficiar și în raport cu nevoile individuale ale acestuia, în conformitate cu standardele minime de calitate pentru centrele de servicii sociale cu cazare, organizate ca centre rezidențiale. pentru tinerii care părăsesc sistemul de protecție a copilului aplicabil acestui centru social. Tinerii sunt încurajați și sprijiniți să participe la activitățile zilnice și să se implice în activitățile casnice. În același timp, li se garantează accesul la programele de integrare/reintegrare socială, sunt sprijiniți pentru restabilirea/întărirea legăturii cu familia de origine și familia extinsă, cu prietenii, precum și pentru (re)integrare în comunitate, sunt îndrumat pe piața muncii și accesul acestora la cursuri este facilitat.

Cuvinte cheie: Centru social, servicii rezidențiale, integrare socială

1. Introduction

After the communist period, the children in the foster care centers grew up and turned into another vulnerable group defined as young people who leave the social protection system. Research shows that there have been early concerns of institutional actors for their reintegration and socio-professional insertion in an attempt to reduce other possible social risks, as a result of the lack of support for this category of beneficiaries from the social protection system, through the development of some special services (Mihalache, 2013, pp. 138-139).

The manual of procedures regarding the socio-professional insertion of young people who leave the child protection system states that „The young people reaching the age of leaving the protection system are one from the most problematic and vulnerable groups in Romania. [...] The group has a great rate of

failure in terms of social insertion. Because of this, the group generates increasing social problems, providing clients to the adult care system, prisons, trafficking and prostitution networks”. (Hope and Homes for Children Romania, *Salvați copiii*, 2006). According to the Strategy for the protection and promotion of children's rights 2014-2020, „ the young people who leave the special protection system after reaching the age of 18 represents a vulnerable category, exposed to the risk of social exclusion due to low availability of development services for an independent living skills. Lacking family support and without skills necessary for socio-professional integration, these young people do not even benefit from services social counseling and assistance in finding a job or securing one social housing”(Source: <http://www.mmuncii.ro>). At the level of the Municipality of Iași, a viable solution for the protection and for their preparing for independent living and for prevention and combat the risk of them becoming homeless or socially marginalized persons constitutes the „Bucuria” Multifunctional Destination Social Center of the Directorate of Social Assistance Iasi.

2. Center capacity

Officially opened on September 26, 2014, the center operates with a capacity of 26 places in residential mode and 49 places in day mode. Residential services are provided free of charge, at demand, for a fixed period, depending on the particular situation of each beneficiary and in relation to his individual needs, in accordance with minimum quality standards for the social services centers with accommodation, organized as residential centers for young people who leave the child protection system applicable to the social center, code 8970 CRT-I, from the Order no. 29/2019, Annex no. 3.

3. Conditions of access/admission

To be admitted, a few conditions must be met, respectively: the young person must come from a center placement; minimum age, 18 years old / maximum age, 26 years; domicile within the municipality of Iași; to be without family support and/or housing; to be autonomous and have a state of physical and mental health to enable him to live in collectivity; not to have registered disciplinary violations which would have caused the termination of the contract for the provision of social services in another period of time.

4. Equipment and accommodation facilities

„Even if the way of organizing life in a placement center has improved, it still does not allow the realization of structured, constant and coherent activities training of independent life skills. Children and young people do not have access in the kitchen, they are not involved in the supply, they have no way to get an idea about managing a budget, about elements of managing a home. Young people don't develop knowledge of social services in the community, orientation skills general in the social environment. Many of them don't know what they have to do to get

their identity documents, they don't know how to fill out simple forms, or what to do in various situations such as looking for a job, registering with a doctor family, calling service providers. Most of these steps are carried out by a social worker or an educator.” (Good practice guide for social and professional integration of young people (post)institutionalized, COTE Foundation, 2009). The residential center „Bucuria” ensures everyone beneficiary housing and household conditions, a safe and comfortable living environment, with respect the quality standards provided by the acts in force. The building consists of ground floor and 3 floors, respectively 1 apartment for people with disabilities, located on the ground floor and compound from 1 room with 2 beds, 1 kitchen and 1 group sanitary; 3 apartments with 4 rooms (2 places/each room), 1 kitchen, 1 group bathroom and 1 living room; 2 office spaces. The rooms are customized, furnished accordingly and have dual functionality; the kitchens are equipped with furniture, crockery and stove, ensuring the necessary conditions for food preparation and preservation; the living rooms are equipped with a table for serving food and with TV; sanitary groups are organized and equipped with shower, sink, toilet and washing machine for each of them. Beneficiaries live in an environment of life that promotes one's own initiative and responds to everyone's wishes and expectations.

5. Preparation for independent and active living - services and activities

„For young people who are going to leave the protection system, intervention is necessary to several specialists, social workers, psychologists, educators, to support them and guides”. (Manual of procedures regarding the socio-professional insertion of young people who leave the child protection system, Hope and Homes for Children Romania, *Salvați copiii*, Romania, 2006). „In the process of transition to an independent life young people coming from the protection system face a complex of vulnerabilities: level reduced adaptation in the community [...], limited access to the labor market and counseling professional [...], limited access to vocational training programs and skills reduced digital [...], poor housing or lack of a home after leaving the system [...], low level of expectations and self-esteem and dependence on the protection system [...]” (Methodology for supporting young people who have left the institutionalized system of child protection, 2021). After leaving the special protection system, intervention is continued, through counseling services (social, primary psychological, vocational) and through information, extracurricular education, respectively training, development and improvement the skills and habits of independent living, socialization, cultural activities, of entertainment and leisure (concerts, theater, opera, museums, cinema etc). Young people are encouraged and supported to participate in daily activities and get involved in household activities. At the same time, they are guaranteed access to the programs of social integration/reintegration, are supported to restore/strengthen the link with family of origin and extended family, with friends, as well as for (re)integration into community, they are guided on the labor market and their access to courses is facilitated.

6. Diversity through collaboration

An important role in ensuring the continuity of support measures for young people in situations of risk is the collaboration of the Social Assistance Directorate and the Social Center with Destination Multifunctional „Bucuria” with various partners. Among them, we mention the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection Iași (for the referral of young people aged between 18-26 years old, domiciled in the municipality of Iași, which no longer appears with special protection measure within the D.G.A.S.P.C.), County Agency for Employment (for insertion on the labor market and transmission of the list with vacant jobs at the level of Iași county, weekly), the County Library „Mr. Asachi” Iași (for the provision of library, cultural and recreational services in the book lending point of the Library „Gh. Asachi” established in the premises of the Center Social with Multifunctional Destination „Bucuria”), Emmaus Foundation (for accommodation after ending the period of residence in the center, if no solutions were found for housing), *Omenia* Humanitarian Foundation (for accommodation after the end of the period of residence in the center, if no housing solutions were found), professional training/reconversion.

7. Concrete achievements

Measures by which young people are supported to develop skills for life independent and active is reflected in a number of results, such as: improvement self-image and increasing self-respect, acquiring skills and personal abilities, improving educational and social status, increasing the degree of professional integration.

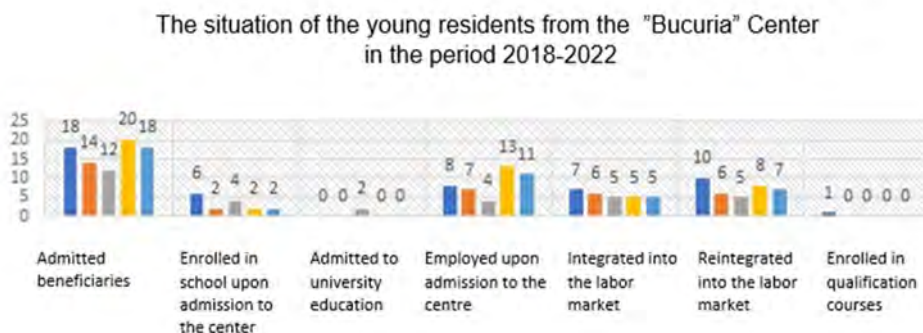


Figure 1. The situation of young residents in the center of Bucuria

Source: Iași Social Work Directorate, 2022

8. Events and activities

Within the Center, activities and information sessions are permanently organized which include topics such as: knowledge of legal rights and obligations,

drawing up a Curriculum Vitae and presenting it at a job interview, planning and managing the personal budget, maintaining an active and healthy lifestyle, sexual and contraceptive education, education against smoking and consumption of alcoholic beverages, drugs, communication and relationship and the types of abuse, the way to identify and report potential abuses or others forms of degrading treatment.

9. Examples of activities carried out:

The year 2022

- activities to stimulate the creativity of young people from center frame ("Thinking Hats");
- working visit of representatives from the Republic Moldova within the project „Center of social (re)integration – integrated approach to needs young people with limited opportunities“;
- activity to protect young people from actions manipulatives regarding the promotion of products that contain tobacco ("World No Tobacco Day").

The year 2021

- self-knowledge activity ("Who am I?");
- information on increasing the motivation of the beneficiaries to preserve jobs and prevent the risk of social exclusion ("Evolution of the labor market in the context of Covid-19");
- activity to support the beneficiaries they had the festive course organized by the educational units with the opportunity to complete the studies high school ("Important steps in life");
- activity about the environment and ways to protect it („International Day Without Plastic Bags”);
- information about the danger of hepatitis, the modalities of prevention, local medical testing network, available treatments, but also promoting a style of healthy life ("World Day to fight against hepatitis");
- information about the traffic phenomenon people ("Don't fall victim to them").

The year 2020

- activities carried out on the occasion of international and national days:
- International Day for Non-Violence in Schools (January 30), Small Union Day (January 24, 2020);
- information and debates about the coronavirus (eg: „Covid-19 - psychological impact on daily life");
- interactive debate about food;
- recreational activities ("The puzzle, a complete activity", „Spring in colors").

The year 2019

- medical-themed activities (about flu, seasonal allergies, food poisoning, dental hygiene, the effects of the heatwave, etc.), social/psychological (about vulnerabilities, family, bullying, anger, gambling addiction, etc.);
- activities on the occasion of national and international days (“Union Day”, „International Women's Day”, the Easter holidays, „Children's Day”, „World Day without Cars”);
- information activities regarding the selective collection of household waste, cleaning and space care green around the center;
- celebrating the beneficiaries' birthdays;
- sports competitions, trips and spiritual journeys.

The year 2018

- civic greening action within the „I want a country like outside” project;
- „Primary prevention of delinquency” information, carried out by the specialists in the framework of The psychosocial assistance service of the Iași Maximum Security Penitentiary;
- information on the risks of social networks with free access to personal data and on ways to restrict potential cybercriminals (“Securing of personal data in social networks”).

10. Legislative milestones that regulate the activity with young people coming from the centers placement:

- Law no. 292/2011 of social assistance, with subsequent amendments and additions;
- H. G. no. 440/2022 for the approval of the Strategy regarding social inclusion and reduction of poverty for the period 2022-2027;
- Order no. 29/2019 for the approval of minimum quality standards for services social centers with accommodation, organized as residential centers for young people who leave the system of child protection, applicable to residential centers for young people in difficulty, code 8790 CRT-I and 8790 CR-II (Annex No. 3);
- The methodological norms for the application of Law no. 116/2002 on the prevention and combating social marginalization, approved by H.G. no. 1149/2002 – instruments of support for young people leaving placement centers and who are a target group priority, but also for other disadvantaged groups;
- Law 76/2002 regarding the unemployment insurance system and employment stimulation work, with subsequent amendments and additions.

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BOOK REVIEW

Ciprian IFTIMOAEI¹

Cătălin Augustin Stoica, *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility: Theories, Measures and Models of Analysis (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale: teorii, măsuri și modele de analiză)*, Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022.

Cătălin Augustin Stoica holds a PhD in Sociology from Stanford University (USA) since 2005, with consistent and long-standing national and international research experience, expertise in social research methodology, advanced statistical analysis methods, sociological surveys and opinion polls, sociology of transition, stratification and social inequalities. In 2000, he was awarded *The LaPierre Award for Best Third Year Paper (i.e., Qualifying Exam Paper)* by the Department of Sociology, Stanford University.

Between 2007-2015, the sociologist Cătălin Augustin Stoica was general director of the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology (CURS), where he coordinated more than 10 specialists in social, political and marketing research and more than 300 collaborators. Currently, Professor Stoica teaches courses in Sociological Survey Methodology, Research Methods and Techniques in Sociology and Psychology, Social Stratification, Economic Anthropology (Master), Social Stratification and Inequality (Master) in the Department of Sociology at the National University of Political Science and Public Administration (SNSPA) - Bucharest. His research findings have been presented at numerous national and international conferences and published in volumes in Romania, USA, Germany and Poland. He was vice-president of the *Romanian Sociologists Society*, member of the *Romanian Society of Cultural Anthropology*, member of the *American Sociological Association (ASA)*, founding member and former vice-president of the *Romanian Students Association at Stanford University*.

For my younger sociological colleagues, I would like to remind that CURS was established in the 70s and 80s by bringing together young social research

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enthusiasts from the Urban Sociology Laboratory of the Capital City and the Sociological Research and Studies Laboratory of the IPCT (Institute of Design for Standard Constructions). In the years before the collapse of communism, researchers from the CURS precursor carried out studies on urban sociology, industrial sociology, quality of life and labour migration. Among the researchers of that period, we mention Dorel Abraham, Cezara Nicolau, Dumitru Sandu, Ana Bălașa, Vladimir Tismăneanu, Alin Teodorescu, Radu Ioanid, Mircea Kivu and many others who became after 1990 reference names in the field of social sciences, both in Romania and abroad. Over three decades of operation, CURS has carried out a wide range of research, studies and opinion polls commissioned by government agencies, non-governmental organisations, embassies, local and multinational companies, political parties and the media.

Sociologist Cătălin Augustin Stoica is the author of the volume *Continuous Romania: Change and Adaptation in Communism and Postcommunism (România continuă: Schimbare și adaptare în comunism și postcomunism)*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest 2018. Together with sociologist and anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu he coordinated the volume *The Winter of Our Discontent: The Romanian Protests from January-February 2012 (Iarna vrajbei noastre: Protestele din Romania, ianuarie-februarie 2012)*, Paideia Publishing House, Bucharest. 2012. He is co-author (with Professors Alfred Bulai and Doina Olga Ștefănescu) of *Sociology - Handbook for the 11th Grade (Sociologie. Manual pentru Clasa a XI-a)*, Humanitas Educational Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006. Recently, Professor Stoica published the book *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility: Theories, Measures and Models of Analysis (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale: teorii, măsuri și modele de analiză)*, Tritonic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2022, 310 pages, which I will discuss in this article.

First and foremost, the work of the SNSPA professor is a premiere in the sociological literature in Romania, providing a consistent „introduction” to theoretical and empirical approaches on social stratification and mobility. On this topic, sociologists Cătălin Zamfir, Dumitru Sandu, Liviu Chelcea, Paula Tuفیș, Mihai-Dinu Gheorghiu, Traian Rotariu, Norbert Petrovici, Cristina Raț and Cristian Pop have also written articles in volumes and scientific journals. An outstanding contribution to the study of social stratification is represented by Cristi Pop's book – *Social classes in Romania: Methodology of Inequality (Clase sociale în România: Metodologia inegalităților)*, published in 2016, in whose footsteps Professor Stoica his own work on stratification and social mobility.

A starting point in the study of social stratification was the annual research on cultural consumption practices the *Barometer of cultural consumption (Barometrul de consum cultural)* initiated by sociologist Liviu Chelcea within the Centre for Cultural Studies and Research of the Ministry of Culture, established in 2005. The *Barometer* surveys provided information outlining the relationship between cultural consumption and social class membership, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's now classic researches. During Cătălin Augustin Stoica's leadership at CURS, a sociological research was conducted on *Class Structure and Social*

Stratification in Contemporary Romania (Structură de Clasă și Stratificare Socială în România Contemporană), which contributed to the in-depth study on social stratification and social mobility, the results of this project being highlighted in the pages of his book.

The volume *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale)* is structured in four main chapters: (1) Social stratification: introductory notions; (2) Theories of social stratification; (3) Social stratification schemes; (4) Social mobility measures. The first two chapters contain theoretical approaches, at times scholastic, but also examples provided for teaching purposes, which familiarise the reader with the subject of social stratification and mobility. The author starts by defining the concept of *social stratification*, invoking the correlated concepts of *social inequality*, *social hierarchy*, *social structure*, *social capital*, *social status* and *social class*, insisting on a sociological approach to this issue.

From the very beginning, social stratification is defined as a situation or condition in which people have unequal access to resources ("highly valued things") in society. The inequality of capital (economical, social, cultural) held by individuals differentiates, hierarchises and places individuals in a vertically ordered structure, which can be spatially represented as a social pyramid. Individuals at the top of the social pyramid benefit from power and privilege, whereas those at the bottom are the consequence of the exercise of power and the distribution of resources within society. To make this concept explicit and operational, the author refers to the theoretical contributions of sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Pierre Bourdieu, Gerhard Lenski, Max Weber, Traian Rotariu, Petre Iluț, but especially follows in the footsteps of Martin Marger. The author defines social stratification as „a vertical ordering of individuals or groups within a society according to their forms of capital, social influence and life chances. Both social influence and life chances are ultimately determined by the forms of capital people have, both directly and indirectly through their family/social origins.”

The theoretical construction of social stratification is supported by references from Marxist sociology of social classes (K. Marx, Fr. Engels), Erik Olin Wright's neo-Marxist perspective, Max Weber's contribution on social classes, domination and power, Ralf Dahrendorf's theory of conflict, the functionalist paradigm in sociology, G. Lenski's synthesis of conflict theory and functionalist theory, sociology of elites (Vf. Pareto, G. Mosca, R. Michels, Ch. Wright Mills, W.G. Domhoff).

Inspired by the Marxist sociology of social classes, the author defines the elite as a class (minority) that controls the means of production, benefits from power and privileges, in opposition to the rest of society (the majority/mass/population) that has to sell its labour force. In essence, Marxist sociology insists that the economic determines the configurations of social, political, and legal institutions and the relations between individuals, groups, social classes, the „superstructure” (Marx). Those who own the resources (capital) command and impose their ideas. According to classical elite theories, society is

inevitably led by an elite (governmental elite, ruling class, oligarchy) made up of those individuals who, by virtue of inherited or acquired qualities ("resources", *cf.* Stoica), position themselves at the top of the social pyramid, exercising and/or influencing power, making strategic decisions, controlling the distribution of wealth that accumulates in society.

In my view, the concept of *elite* can be operationalised in two dimensions: (1) the qualitative dimension referring to the best individuals in their field and (2) the quantitative dimension in the sense that the best in a field are also the fewest, they constitute a minority in relation to the rest. The sociology of the elite includes within its scope of interest those who belong to the elite and who are distinguished from others by their power, influence and capital (economic, social, cultural). By these attributes members of the elite recognise each other and at the same time distinguish themselves from what is considered non-elite. The term *elite* can have positive connotations when it is associated with the idea of merit, value, excellence, but it can also have negative connotations when it refers to the idea of exclusivity, conspiracy, privilege. Members of the elite are not always selected, recruited and promoted on the basis of merit, effort, professional achievements, social value recognised and appreciated by society. In fact, more often than not, those who represent the power elite (Wright Mills) are the result of how inequality operates within society. Social and economic inequality generates hierarchy, organisation and social stratification. I would also point out that, in agreement with Mills and in disagreement with Marx, Domhoff believes that the domination of the power elite does not mean total control over society. On the contrary, there are a multitude of social, economic, cultural or religious issues within society that do not enter into the area of the power elite's interest. It is particularly interested in big businesses, that are considered „strategic” and that consolidate power and influence in society.

In the section on recent approaches on social stratification and social inequality, the author brings together neo-Durkheimian contributions, modern world system theory (Wallerstein) and Thomas Piketty's recent contribution on the role of *Capital in the 21st Century* in the increase of wealth inequality. In agreement with economist Th. Piketty, sociologist Cătălin A. Stoica notes that if Karl Marx had had statistical data (time series) on the income and expenditure of the population, his predictions on the imminent collapse of capitalism would have been somewhat more reserved. With advanced databases and statistical analysis tools at his disposal, Piketty shows that, since 1960, we are witnessing a widening of socio-economic inequality, which is attributed to the fact that the return on capital ("patrimonial capitalism" based on accumulations from rents and investments) significantly exceeds the rate of economic growth. Moreover, and rightly so, economic growth does not mean prosperity for all. Romania can always be an example of a country where economic growth coexists with poverty. According to the National Institute of Statistics, the estimated gross domestic product (GDP) for 2021 increased by 5.9% compared to 2020 while 34.4% of the Romanian population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE indicator, *cf.* Eurostat, 2021).

Chapters 3 and 4 of the SNSPA professor's book introduce the reader to the empirical approach on social stratification. The first stratification scheme described is the *International Standard Classification of Occupation* - ISCO developed by the International Labour Office (ILO) of the United Nations (UN). One of the premises underlying this stratification scheme - argues Cătălin A. Stoica - is the fact that, in most contemporary societies, there is a statistically significant correlation between educational attainment, qualifications, skills and occupation. The application of this scheme in statistical research on the labour force structures occupations into major groups, minor groups and sub-groups of occupations. Even the National Statistical Institute uses this scheme in its surveys to collect, process and analyse data on occupations and job vacancies.

Taking up Erik Olin Wright's conceptual apparatus presented in Chapter 2, the author shows how Romania's class structure can be represented, using data from *The European Social Survey* - ESS, a survey conducted every two years at the initiative of the *European Science Foundation*. The presentation of social stratification research methodology also includes aspects related to measuring the prestige of occupations: surveys or the prestige scale technique, Goldthorpe's social class schemes and their updates, and the measurement of (subjective) perceptions of individuals' positions in the hierarchy of society or social classes.

In exploring social mobility, Cătălin A. Stoica resorts somewhat scholastically (didactically) to the bivariate statistical analyses used since the middle of the last century to get an intuitive picture of the processes in question. The bivariate analysis uses data from population and housing censuses, selective statistical surveys, administrative sources and sociological research data. Mainly, the constructed variables are the following: education or schooling level, parents' occupation or social class, the occupation of children or respondents. The data obtained are centralised in double entry tables with the help of which the social mobility of the children (respondents) is described. Cătălin A. Stoica presents such tables with the „school destiny structure” (*outflow table*) with data including from a research carried out by CURS in 1999. This section of the book abounds in mathematical formulas, statistical processing and calculations that are sure to arouse the interest of quantitative sociologists and beyond.

Last but not least, the sociological approach to social stratification and social mobility shows that even in the case of the careers of tycoons like Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk and other rich people of this world, we have to take into account the fact that the equation of personal success also includes elements related to the social class of origin or a combination of social, economic, cultural resources of their parents/family/social environment. In short, in today's society, shaken by all kinds of crises (pandemic, economic, wars), in which the rich become even richer, „socio-economic status is acquired rather than inherited (in the sense of reproducing advantages from previous generations)” - says sociologist Cătălin A. Stoica.

In a conversation with the author, I found out that, in his next book, he will also address issues of gender inequality based on ethnicity, racial group or

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other disadvantaged, marginalized, socially excluded groups. *Introduction to the Study of Stratification and Social Mobility (Introducere în studiul stratificării și mobilității sociale)* is a must-read for students, teachers and researchers in the social and political sciences, but also for any reader who is passionate about understanding the complexity of the society, the world we live in, with all its joys and sorrows.

Dennis-Theodor PÂRJU²

Cristina Gavriluță, *Negativul cotidianului*, [*The Everyday Negative*], Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2017.

Cristina Gavriluță is the author of the work entitled „Negativul Cotidianului” (The Everyday Negative) published in Iași at the end of 2017, being structured in four chapters and with a total of 256 pages. Currently, the author holds the position of Full Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences - Department of Sociology and Social Assistance at „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași. „Negativul Cotidianului” joins other specialist works from the „Social Observatory” collection, a collection coordinated by Prof. Univ. Dr. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu at the Publishing House of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University in Iași.

From the very beginning of the book, the author invites us to reflect by quoting the French sociologist, Georges Balandier (1920-2016): „the sociology of everyday is better seen in the negative...it is better specified by what it avoids considering than by what it considers”.

The introductory part of the paper clarifies the essence of the paper, that is about making a reading of the social in the negative light, in the less visible or located in the half-light or even shadow areas of the social. The author shows that „the idea appeared with the reading of Mosche Idel's book, *Perfections that absorb. Kabbalah and interpretation*. The profound interpretations made by Moshe Idel, one of the world's best specialists in Jewish mysticism (...). Thus, the thinking of Moshe Idel but also a series of anthropological and sociological readings in the company of which the professor from Iasi, Cristina Gavriluță, was intellectually formed, represent the sources of inspiration that guided her towards the conception of a sociological approach that privileges the sign, symbol, interpretation and understanding of the social.

Moreover, the first chapter, *Epistemological Landmarks in Social Research*, brings a series of epistemological clarifications regarding the perspective proposed by the author. Placing sociological research under the sign of plural truths and of an assumed subjectivity, the author clearly opts for a qualitative approach in which she invites the researcher to use a series of techniques and methods such as: observation, interview, storytelling and narrative techniques. Applying them carefully to study some social phenomena less demanded by the public agenda, located somehow in the area of marginal phenomena in sociological study, can provide extremely valuable material. The hermeneutic approach could reveal, according to the author, unsuspected facets of the social, unaltered by the noise of

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refectories, media coverage or everyday overload. Therefore, the negative of the everyday has two meanings for the author: on the one hand, the exploitation of the unseen, less accessible side of the social, present in minor, marginal phenomena, and on the other hand, a hermeneutic of facticity in which the sign, the symbol and what lies behind the actions, our gestures, opinions or representations is valued.

Chapter II, *Beyond the Wall of Air. Mentalities and cultural landmarks in social life*, is for the reader an illustration of the epistemic and research options of Prof. Cristina Gavriluță. As mentioned in the work, „the themes that constitute the pillars of this endeavor are Romanian capitalism, tradition and social modernity, the global world in the image and imaginary”. These phenomena constitute a seen/unseen part of the way in which social reality is controlled and directed from the shadows „beyond reasonings, norms and rules”.

The third chapter, *The Sacred and its social expressions*, completes the negative reading of the social with other studies. This time the author opts for the study of contemporary phenomena in which the core is a religious one. Thus, the issue of alterity is brought back into the sociological discourse, as it results from some phenomena such as the *Holocaust* or *Charlie Hebdo*. Also here, a series of facts and social practices from the non-conventional area are brought to attention and interpreted, such as: magical-religious rituals, divination, satanism.

The body in the register of normality and deviance is the fourth chapter of the work and follows a series of social representations of the body but also a number of its instances in the register of normality and deviance. Capitalizing on a number of sources from Greek philosophy, the theological perspective and a series of socio-anthropological approaches along the lines of Marcel Mauss, David le Breton, Alain Corbin, Cristina Gavriluță analyzes the body as a main interface of social interaction. Agent, but also object of power games, the body reveals its strong social importance. It becomes a veritable symbolic reservoir in the entire mechanism of social interaction, especially when it bears the mark of deviance. For example, the trafficking of human beings which is presented by the author as „a form of domination and subjugation of the body”. According to the analyzes presented in the paper, in the study of the trafficking of human beings there can be present „a series of practices and strategies that, finally, shape the representations, but also their relationship with the body.” We can record that, to a large extent, this chapter marks the erudition, talent and finesse of the sociologist in researching the phenomena and practices that are found in the blender of contemporary social pathologies.

Broadly speaking, having as a source of inspiration elements from the researches and studies of renowned sociologists and philosophers, such as: M. Weber, V. Pareto, G. Balandier, Mircea Eliade, Ioan Petru Culianu, Moshe Idel, M. Foucault, U. Eco, etc., through this work, the sociologist Cristina Gavriluță sets out to create a „hermeneutic of the everyday seen as a hermeneutic of the negative of social existence.”

The work is addressed to specialists in the social field, anthropologists, ethnologists, but also to the general public, passionate about knowing and

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deciphering the social, finding it a source of inspiration for new studies and researches that want to go beyond the visible barrier of everyday life.

The Everyday Negative places Cristina Gavrilită in a particular register of sociologists who combine sociological and anthropological knowledge in a novel, original way, relying on the valorization of qualitative methods and the quality of the hermeneutic approach. And these, along with the exciting writing, are enough reasons to pay more attention to his works and articles.

Brian Krebs, *Națiunea spam. Din culisele criminalității informatice* [*Spam nation: The inside story of organized cybercrime*], translation from English by Dan Drumur, Bucharest, Romania, Preface by Eugen Glăvan, Corint Books Publisher, 2019

The book *Spam nation: The inside story of organized cybercrime* written by Brian Kerbs is translated from English by Dan Drumur and published at Corint Books Publisher in 2019. The original book is written in English and issued by the same author in 2014 under the title *Spam nation: The Inside Story of Organized Cybercrime – from Global Epidemic to Your Front Door* published in the United States by Sourcebook Inc.

As we can see from its own website <https://krebsonsecurity.com> the author worked as reporter on cybercrime during 1995 to 2009 at The Washington Post. And he was the author of more than 1,300 articles on Security Fix blog, washingtonpost.com and The Washington Post newspaper. As he mentions in his book the blog was a result after he decided to leave the newspaper and to write on its own about the cybercrime on the internet that affects all of us, including the younger generation.

Even though he is not a computer expert as he declares, in 1994 graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from George Mason University and he documented by his own regarding the computer and internet security during his work as reporter and continuing after opening his own website. Meanwhile he published his book and participated in different presentations regarding cybercrime and elements connected to it.

Brian Krebs as reporter and author received different nominees and in 2013, together with security expert Bruce Schneier, was included in the Hall of Fame of authors of specialized blogs. In 2015 he won the Prose Award. His blog was voted three consecutive years (2011, 2012, 2013) by the RSA Conference, the biggest assembly on this domain, to be *the blog that best represents the cybercrime security industry*. The information presented on the blog is very well documented and has a proper presentation suitable for our current global and continuing adaptation to internet challenges for people. This can be considered a proper instrument for researchers, students, stakeholders that have their focus on cybersecurity and the spam issues that are all the time on the internet and even on our personal computers.

The book is structured on twelve chapters with and epilogue at the end, very useful for us as permanent current users of the internet. For the Romanian edition there is a preface written by Eugen Glăvan and a note regarding the

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Romanian edition made by the Corint Books Publisher which refers to clarification of the translated word from English so that the reader would not mislead their interpretation. Also, in this edition there is included a glossary at the end of the book for helping the reader with specialized words in the domain.

We must mention that there is also included a section, at the beginning of the book, titled `WHO'S WHO IN THE CYBERWORLD` and contains data regarding the main names of the characters presented in the book who played a significant role in the cyber world during the different stages of evolution and events related in the book. There are fourteen characters from Russia or former states of the Soviet Union that are mentioned and for each of them there is a short description presenting their nickname known online and the cyber area that they act. For example, it is mentioned `*Pavel Vrublevski, a.k.a „RedEye”—Cofounder of ChronoPay, a high-risk card processor and payment service provider that was closely tied to the rogue antivirus industry*`. Similarly, are presented all the others famous characters from cyberspace.

Due to the fact that we also managed to access a part of the book`s version in English, until the publication of this paper, at the preface written by the author we are able to find his explanation regarding the usage of `spam` word in the title of the book. Because when all of us think about `spam` we associate it with the junk emails that we receive. And, sometimes we put it immediately in the trash or we access it and are able to infect our PS, laptop, phone, table etc. He mentions that from his point of view `*spam is the primary vehicle for most cybercrime*`, even though we are not aware of that and all of us, mostly the young generation, do not give it the importance that it may have on our electronic devices we constantly use.

In the first chapter entitled *Parasite* are reported methods used by cybercrime actors to send `spams` to our personal computers and ways that they remotely used `*to manipulate millions of PCs scattered around the globe into becoming spam-spewing zombies*` (Krebs, 2014:19). Even though, until now we did not perceive `spam` to be dangerous after reading this chapter we are able to find out that even once we had a `spam as parasite` in our PC and we did not even notice or take it into consideration. Maybe because of the fact that we probably didn't even know about the cyber world or because we trusted our antivirus producer and felt protected enough or maybe, as a young generation, we did not care enough and seem important to our daily life. We must take into consideration that people in specialized security institutions work to improve the antiviruses and create better firewalls to protect our system from this type of cyber attacks. But, we must not forget that `*the spam ecosystem is a constantly evolving technological and sociological crime machine that feeds on itself*` (Krebs, 2014:19). This is a permanent ping-pong between the actors involved in this system. Unfortunately, we are simply consumers and players due to the fact that we do not have the entire information and we are specialists on other domains.

Next chapters, titled `*Bulletproof*`, `*The Pharma Wars*`, `*Meet the Buyers*`, `*Russian Roulette*`, `*Partner(ka)s in (Dis)Organized Crime*`, `*Meet the Spammers*`,

'*Old Friends, Bitter Enemies*', '*Meeting in Moscow*', '*The Antis*', '*Takedown*' and '*Endgame*' present ways that different hackers using trusted companies names with their server host in Russia managed to send 'spams' to individuals from the network and used their computers as 'zombies' to access personal information (birth date, phone number, bank account, life insurance details etc.) and collect them for selling online on black market sites for huge amounts of money. There are also presented the means they use for sending ad links to influence us to buy cheaper medication from an online market that confused us with similar names with the original ones. For example, buyers of Viagra pills want to keep their confidentiality and frequently use online websites to buy the medicine but they do not verify if it is original. And we do not have the means nor the security that corresponds with international or national regulations and that is safe for our health.

We are able to find that people who bought medication via online websites listed their main reasons to be: lower price than the ones from usual pharmacies, accessibility, confidentiality, comfort, self-medication, recreation or addiction. As a portrait of these persons we may consider that they are single and the internet is their own information source. Some of them consider that they saved money and made a profitable business. Even though they risk their health due to the fact that they had no guarantee that those medications were real are possible to threaten their lives. As it happened to one consumer presented in the book.

Different types of cons are presented also, and ways that the specialists from cybercrime intervened '*complying with laws or regulations and preventing fraud or theft are the main reasons for investing in cyber security*' (Timofeyev and Dremova, 2022) and tried to prevent other similar situations. We must keep in mind that we can be without knowing users that can sustain online fraud or we can fight with this by updating our antiviruses and do not answer to unknown email addresses or links.

The author focuses on different types of attacks and mentions that:

'Ultimately, spam and all of its attendant ills will diminish very little without a more concerted, cooperative push from some of the richest and most powerful interests in the world, including the pharmaceutical industry; the credit card and banking sectors; lawmakers and law enforcers around the globe; and people like you and me, most of whom are the unsuspecting targets and victims of these spammers and hackers every day. It's time to do something about this global epidemic, to protect our identities, our bank accounts, our families, and our lives before it's too late' (Krebs, 2014).

At the end of the book, we should focus our attention to '*Epilogue: A Spam-Free World: How You Can Protect Yourself from Cybercrime*' where the author presents solutions that we may use to protect ourselves from cybercrime. As possible solutions may be the usage of a secure password manager to keep all our passwords safe; as recommendations from the author are KeyPass, Saword Safe, Robo Form, LastPass. I believe that until present many more providers come on the

market and offer similar secure services, I must make sure they are trustworthy. Another solution is to use complex passwords from combinations of words, letters and special signs or even combinations of letters that do not form a known word from the dictionary. This strategy is used to make it difficult for hackers to obtain our information. We should download the apps from their official source and not from obscure websites. They use very similar names of the sites, so that we are misled and give them access to our data. And, the last possible solution to make frequent updates of the programs that we currently use. Because the owner includes new elements that fight against hackers.

In our global world and with permanent access to the internet we are exposed to new threats that we do not consider as dangerous as they are in reality. Even though the internet brought new useful features to our daily life, at the same time brought the spam or malware elements that put in danger our private lives and even our reliability. This book enlightens us regarding the dangers and risks that we are exposed to and offers us some possible solutions. All of us have the ability to *'guide the design of technical tools that improve the scientific community's ability to generate a safer and more secure cyber-environment'* (Maimon and Louderback, 2019) by adopting an informed online behavior and be aware of the permanent dangerous that we are exposed.

This book can be considered as a starting point for common internet consumers to help them to better understand the ways that internet and hackers can access our personal data and use it. The style used by the author is a friendly one and is easy to read even by inexperienced persons with IT specific terms. Personally, after reading this book I changed my online behavior and I am more cautious regarding what type of data I put online about myself or the type of passwords I used until now.

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Cristina Otovescu, *Social Realities and Public Policies in România*, Romanian Academy Publishing House, Bucharest, 2021

The book written by Cristina Otovescu, *Social Realities and Public Policies in Romania*, published by the Romanian Academy Publishing House in 2021, presents the medical and social problems caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with major economic and political effects on the population worldwide.

Even if the title does not explicitly mention the word *pandemic*, the information presented in the 280 pages of the book focuses on the SARS-CoV-2 flu virus, with the author concentrating particularly on the medical effects, linked to the social and political ones, manifested in societies around the world as a result of the rapid spread of the virus in the population, leading the World Health Organization to establish a general pandemic state and therefore a major public health emergency. Six of the book's seven chapters make explicit reference to this situation, presenting the economic, political-administrative, social and cultural framework with reference to the general health situation and the ability of the world's countries to mobilise to deal with the situations that have arisen and to find appropriate, widely applicable solutions to the problem.

In the introduction Cristina Otovescu (2021) brings the reader into the atmosphere of the book by presenting an analysis of the public policies applied in Romania after 1990. The author divides the period of their elaboration and implementation into two stages: the first, between 1990 and 2006, and the second, after 2007 until now, corresponding to the period of integration into the European community.

In order to understand the importance of public policies, the social problems of our country in the last 30 years are also presented, highlighting the fact that they have been linked to poverty, unemployment, crime, violence in the family and in schools, discrimination against the Roma population, emigration of Romanians to various countries of the world and, more recently, the study of the social-economic and educational consequences of the pandemic phenomenon. The presentation of all this information is made by quoting, by the author, works belonging to several contemporary authors and various materials produced by public institutions with legislative role in Romania.

The first chapter, entitled *The General State of Romanian Society*, presents a journey through the history of our country, starting from the 20th century to the present, with the emphasis on the political changes that occurred with the fall of the communist regime in 1989. Like a didactic course, we are presented with the

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main areas of social activity, the defining periods and the radical changes that have occurred over time, more specifically the historical events generated by the course of our becoming a state and the political, economic, social and cultural influences, the regulatory framework for the organisation and functioning of social life, the restructuring of the political framework and the extent of the privatisation process with political and economic effects, the legislative reform and administrative-territorial reorganisation of Romania, detailing here the 8 developmental regions, nominated on geographical and ethnographic grounds, used as a benchmark for allocating the resources needed for territorial development, and how they are grouped into 4 macro-regions, the new variant of administrative-territorial reorganisation (pp. 39-40). The text of the chapter is interspersed with maps, helping the reader to integrate the information presented more easily.

Chapter two, *National processes and benchmarks in the context of global developments*, begins with a diagnosis of the economic process and living standards in Romania, outlining wage, pension and child benefit policy in the period 1990-2020 (p. 43). Here it is specified that there is a suggestive correlation between the political factor in government and the state of the national economy, specifying that Romania has had both periods of economic growth and therefore an improvement in national social life, especially in the periods 1993-1996, 2000-2008, 2011-2019 and periods of negative economic development between 1990 and 1992, 1997 and 1999, 2009 and 2010. Since 2020, the negative growth of the Romanian economy has manifested itself as a result of the crisis caused by the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, with the government having to take out a series of loans, thus increasing public debt, while at the same time a large part of industry has been paralysed by the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. However, the population has seen an increase in living standards, with wages, pensions and child allowances doubling between March 2020 and March 2021. Thus, even though there has been an increase in the construction sector, the automotive industry, agriculture and tourism, an increase in income through higher wages, pensions and child allowances, Romania continues to have a low standard of living compared to the other EU-27 countries, ahead of only Bulgaria.

Chapter two also talks about political governance and the quality of the human condition, referring to the life expectancy of Romanians established by the World Health Organization and based on a synthetic indicator: *life expectancy at birth*. The graphical images and statistical data mentioned by the author are taken from the National Institute of Statistics, while also presenting a comparative analysis with other countries on the European continent or other continents. The major impact of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic on Romanians is also specified here: the increase in the number of illnesses related to the virus and the number of deaths among the population, the overcrowding of hospitals and, above all, of intensive care units, the restrictions imposed by the authorities on the general population, the difficulties encountered in the purchase of specific and strictly necessary equipment for medical institutions and medical staff who were at the forefront of the fight against the pandemic.

Chapter two also specifies Romania's place in the European hierarchy and in the world ranking from an economic and social point of view (pp. 61-66), the top of the countries most affected by the pandemic, more specifically statistical data on infection rates and mortality rates.

Chapter three: *Population structure and dynamics. Types of demographic policies*, comprises five sub-chapters which present, following a fluid course, the structure of the Romanian population and its territorial organisation over the last 160 years, while also specifying the changes that have occurred over time and the events that have contributed to these changes, an analysis of the population of the European Union, starting in 2019, with a demographic projection up to 2050, the distribution of the population by gender and age group and details of the specific elements of the school population, with information on the national strategy for education. Chapter three concludes with the presentation of the Romanian state's demographic policy, mentioning the importance of human capital for any society. Indicators such as birth rate/mortality, illness, marriage, divorce, internal and external migration are benchmarks for societies around the world, including Romania, when they wish to analyse the evolution of the population in a given territory.

Cristina Otovescu details, in chapter four of her book, entitled *Public Health and Health Systems Diagnosis in Romania and the European Union: Health Protection Policy for Citizens*, the public health policies that European countries, including Romania, are adopting, taking into account the economic situation and especially the pandemic crisis. The specific legislative framework and the actors directly involved in the development of research on the basis of which concrete steps for the implementation of measures to protect the population against harmful environmental factors are established are captured here. Of course, any solutions found will have to respect citizens' rights and the principle of responsibility for the solutions applied. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has led some countries to adopt restrictive measures, some of which are in conflict with the principles of ethics and morality. The chapter presents a *top 10 of the healthiest nations in the world*, a *top 10 of the unhealthiest countries in the world*, a *world happiness ranking*, conducted and published under the auspices of the UN in 2019, based on research conducted in 156 countries around the world over 3 years, starting in 2016. It also mentions the health policy that the European Union envisages for its citizens, highlighting, in sub-chapter 5, the objectives of the health promotion policy in Romania, with statistical data resulting from the implementation of studies in the period 2018-2020, the negative influence of the COVID-19 pandemic that has extremely vulnerable health systems around the world, with major effects especially on countries that were already facing problems at this level, here also referring to the Romanian health system. (pp. 99-135)

Chapter five entitled *Public Policies in Crisis Situations* defines the notion of *emergency* and *crisis situations* by reference to both the legislative and administrative framework and exemplifies the types of crisis situations that have required emergency and that Romania has faced from 1977 to 2021. The pandemic

crisis is presented at length and continued in the next chapter entitled: *The manifestation of the pandemic in various countries around the world and the reactions of public authorities*. Here, China's strategy to combat the virus is illustrated with statistical data and photographs, South Korea's strategy is also illustrated with graphs and photographs, the humanitarian catastrophe in Italy and Spain, Germany and Israel's strategy to combat the new coronavirus, the pandemic situation in the USA and, at the end of the book, in the last chapter entitled: *Recurrence of SARS-CoV-2 infections and mobilisation of the international community*, the author Cristina Otovescu summarises the responses of the European Union and the World Health Organisation to the major challenges generated by the pandemic crisis. Here, the economic measures to support European states, the medical solutions, i.e. testing the population and implicitly the emergence of a concrete solution, i.e. immunisation of the population with a specific serum produced in record time by several pharmaceutical companies in the world, thus increasing resilience to the virus, are highlighted.

In the end, the book refers to a substantial bibliography, mentioning books and specialized articles as well as online resources, legislation and annexes with development strategies and public policies of the ministries under the Romanian Government.