

**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 XVI / Nr. 2, December, 2023



Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași

ANALELE ȘTIINȚIFICE ALE UNIVERSITĂȚII „ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” DIN IAȘI
(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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Desktop publisher: Florentina Crucescu

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 **CNCISIS** (2008-2011: **B+** category). Any views expressed in this publication are the views of the authors and are not the views of the editors or publishing house.

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THE INFLUENCE OF MENTORING AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS ON GOOD PRACTICE MODELS AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING IN SOCIAL WORK

Nina Mihaela MIHALACHE¹

Abstract

The relationship with social institutions and the business environment is an essential component both in terms of the employability of graduates of the Social Work specialization and the adaptation of educational plans, of the contents taught to the existing changes in the economic and social environment by consulting employers and professional associations. Beyond the institutional, administrative, and legislative aspects regarding the training of professionals in the field of social assistance, the usefulness of mentors and models of good practice is considered. The practical research from the social assistance specialization of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași regarding the importance and usefulness of students' practice in their professional training, had as its objectives the identification of difficulties in training professional skills for obtaining skills, the collaboration between professionals and practising students, the importance practices for social assistance specialization, identifying the perception of professionals towards practising students as well as identifying the professional's image as a mentor and model for them. The questionnaire was used for the practice coordinators and the undergraduate students from the social assistance specialization, and reports of the practical activity, structured thematically, were used. The conclusions of the research highlighted their perceptions on the role and training of social workers through practice activity as well as the practical implications and benefits of inter-institutional collaboration in professional training.

Keywords: professional training in social assistance, professional skills, institutional partnerships, practice in social assistance, mentor, models of good practice.

Résumé

La relation avec les institutions sociales et le milieu des affaires est une composante essentielle tant en termes d'employabilité des diplômés de la spécialisation Travail Social que d'adaptation des projets pédagogiques, des contenus enseignés aux changements existants de l'environnement économique et social en consultant les employeurs et les associations professionnelles. Au-delà des aspects institutionnels, administratifs et législatifs concernant la formation des professionnels dans le domaine de l'assistance sociale, l'utilité des mentors et des modèles de bonnes pratiques est considérée. La

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recherche pratique de la spécialisation en assistance sociale de l'Université „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” de Iași concernant l'importance et l'utilité de la pratique des étudiants dans leur formation professionnelle, avait pour objectifs l'identification des difficultés de formation des compétences professionnelles pour l'acquisition de compétences, la collaboration entre professionnels et étudiants en exercice, l'importance des pratiques pour la spécialisation en assistance sociale, en identifiant la perception des professionnels envers les étudiants en exercice ainsi qu'en identifiant l'image du professionnel en tant que mentor et modèle pour eux. Le questionnaire a été utilisé pour les coordinateurs de pratique, et pour les étudiants de premier cycle de la spécialisation en assistance sociale, des rapports d'activité pratique, structurés thématiquement, ont été utilisés. Les conclusions de la recherche ont mis en évidence leurs perceptions sur le rôle et la formation des travailleurs sociaux à travers l'activité pratique ainsi que les implications pratiques et les avantages de la collaboration interinstitutionnelle dans la formation professionnelle.

Mots clés : formation professionnelle en assistance sociale, compétences professionnelles, partenariats institutionnels, pratique en assistance sociale, mentor, modèles de bonnes pratiques.

Abstract

Relația cu instituțiile sociale și mediul de afaceri reprezintă o componentă esențială atât în ceea ce privește angajabilitatea absolvenților specializării Asistența socială cât și adaptarea planurilor de învățământ, a conținuturilor predate la schimbările existente în mediul economic și în cel social prin consultarea angajatorilor și a asociațiilor profesionale. Dincolo de aspectele instituționale, administrative și legislative privind formarea profesioniștilor în domeniul asistenței sociale, se are în vedere utilitatea unor mentori și modele de buna practică. Cercetarea practică de la specializarea asistență socială a Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași privind importanța și utilitatea practicii studenților în formarea lor profesională, a avut ca obiective identificarea dificultăților în formarea abilităților profesionale pentru obținerea de competențe, colaborarea dintre profesioniști și studenții practicanți, importanța practicii pentru specializarea asistență socială, identificarea percepției profesioniștilor față de studenții practicanți precum și identificarea imaginii de mentor și model a profesionistului pentru aceștia. A fost utilizat chestionarul pentru coordonatorii de practică, iar pentru studenții ciclului de licența de la specializarea asistență socială, au fost utilizate rapoarte ale activității practice, structurate tematic. Concluziile cercetării au evidențiat percepții ale acestora asupra rolului și a formării asistenților sociali prin activitatea de practică precum și implicațiile practice și beneficiile colaborării interinstituționale în formarea profesională.

Cuvinte-cheie: formare profesională în asistență socială, competențe profesionale, parteneriate instituționale, practica în asistența socială, mentor, modele de bună practică.

1. Introduction

Social work developed a lot in Romania in the post-communist period, requires the training of professionals in the field according to the educational standards established by the National Education Law, no. 1 of 2011 with subsequent amendments and additions, Law no. 258 of 2007, regarding the practice of pupils and students, of Order no. 3955 of 09/05/2008, regarding the approval of the General Framework for the organization of internships within undergraduate and

master's degree programs and the Framework Convention regarding the implementation of internships within undergraduate and master's degree programs. According to these legislative regulations, the professional practice activity in the training institutions complements the didactic activity to learn and practice the skills specific to the social worker profession. In this context, specialized practice becomes a discipline in itself included in the education plan, for which credits are allocated, a required number of hours as well as the evaluation method. The legislative framework also establishes the main concepts and terms used for the practice activity as well as the main elements regarding the organization, conduct and evaluation of the practice activity for students.

2. Concepts necessary in organizing the practice activity

For a good organization of the practice activity, it is necessary to know and use the specific terminology of all practice partners. As stipulated by the legislation stated in the introductory part, the practice activity for students is carried out based on Framework Agreements and Conventions between the training institution as the practice organizer (art 3, paragraph 1 of Law 258/2007), a practice partner (art 3, paragraph 2 of Law 258/2007) and the student (Law 258/2007). The main terms refer to the duration and periods of practice, to the main responsibilities but also to the elements of the analytical program regarding the student's practice portfolio and the assessment method.

3. Institutional partnerships for practice activity

The practical activity of the students from the Social Work specialization within the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences within the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi is carried out based on institutional partnerships with social institutions and the business environment. Using these partnerships, the conditions, and criteria for coordinating and carrying out internships for students are established and ensured. They consider specific responsibilities and obligations for each partner, negotiate conditions depending on the evolution of the labour market, and update specific skills in terms of employability.

Etymologically, the word partner comes from the French *partenaire*, translated as *together*. As a definition, partner means „each of the participants in a common activity considered about the others” (<https://dexonline.net/definitie-partener>).

Law 258/2007 regarding the practice of pupils and students, updated, certifies that the partnerships of training institutions contribute to the training process of students and pupils (art. 3, paragraph (2) of Law 258/2007). The same law establishes the role of the partner institution in the professional training of students and pupils by fulfilling certain obligations and responsibilities. They refer to the institutional resources related to logistics, technology, labour protection and last but not least to the guidance and follow-up of the practice activity in

correlation with the analytical program and the practice portfolio (Chapter III, Section 1, Art. 10-16, Law 258/2007).

Also, the law establishes the obligations of the practitioner, i.e. the student or pupil in the practice activity. These obligations refer to the obligation to carry out the internship, to comply with the contractual terms regarding compliance with the institution's internal order regulation, the activity regarding the analytical program, respectively the practice portfolio, but also the presence or resumption of the practice activity for any reason that would prevent the student's presence (Chapter III, Section 2, Art. 17-20, Law 258/2007). Students from the Social Assistance specialization within the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi carry out the practice activity based on the *Practice Regulation*, visible on the faculty's website https://www.fssp.uaic.ro/images/files/Regulament_practica_2018_FSSP.pdf). The regulation establishes all aspects and methodological norms of this activity. The practice of Social Work students can be done *at the workplace*, especially for distance education students, *on their own*, proposed by the student or master's student, when he will conclude an individual and *organized partnership*, through offers proposed by the Department or the University.

To conclude institutional partnerships, the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Human Resources, the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, carry out specific annual or thematic promotional activities with institutional representatives as guests who can participate in the professional training of students and coordinate practice activities (The fair of practice, volunteering and internship offers in the field of social assistance, 7 editions; The career fair under the auspices of Career development opportunities through internships, internships and volunteering, 3 editions, ROSE; Social Assistance Days).

3.1. The purposes of institutional partnerships in professional training

Institutional partnerships regarding the training of professionals aim to practice skills to obtain specific skills. For social assistance, within the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Human Resources, Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, the exercise of professional skills during the education cycle aims to put theory into practice through activities associated with curricular subjects, of professional practice, volunteering activities, exchange of experience through national and international internships, research activities. A good example is the international conference *Cross-border Perspectives on Social Assistance* organized by the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Human Resources of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, in partnership with the Department of Sociology and Social Assistance within the State University of Moldova, Chisinau and Department of Social Sciences and Social Assistance within the State University „Alecus Russo” from Balti. The general objective of the conference is to facilitate the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and practices in the field of social assistance. The

conference aims to provide a platform for academic discussions and interdisciplinary collaborations between researchers, practitioners and decision-makers in social assistance from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, to identify innovative solutions and promote the sustainable development of this vital field (<https://www.fssp.uaic.ro/departamente/sociologie-si-asistenta-sociala/evenimente/perspective-transfrontaliere-asupra-asistentei-sociale>).

For these activities, partnerships are concluded with governmental and non-governmental institutions and/or organizations, of a central or local nature, with economic agents and representatives of the economic-financial field, with central or local authorities, with health institutions, with trade unions and/or professional organizations as well as with other university centres.

3.2. Standards and competencies in the training and professional development of social workers

The methodology regarding the National Framework of Higher Education Qualifications (CNCSIS) describes the qualifications corresponding to the 3 cycles established by Law 288 of 2004 on the organization of university studies with subsequent amendments and additions: bachelor's, master's and doctorate. According to the same document, the qualification process is a result of learning to certain standards, assessed and validated by a body with attributions in these skills. Therefore, „qualification means the official recognition of the value of individual learning results for the labour market, as well as for continuing professional education and training, through a study document (diploma, certificate, attestation) that confers the legal right to practice a profession/profession” (Methodology for the creation and use of the National Framework of Qualifications in Higher Education from June 29, 2009). So, the qualification is obtained based on the learning results, expressed through knowledge, skills, and competencies. The training process in social assistance considers the learning outcomes expressed through two types of competencies: *professional competencies* and *transversal competencies*. These competencies are visible in the course sheets of the curricular area in higher education of professional training in social assistance. Although theoretical, the professional competencies in social work are translated as the practice of the main professional skills on the theoretical basis specific to the field. To these are added transversal skills concerning communication, teamwork, transdisciplinary, social interaction, personal and professional development (Iovu, Lazar & Cristea, 2020). If these types of skills are the responsibility of the training institutions, the continuous professional training activity of social workers is related to the national standards proposed by the National College of Social Workers in Romania (art. 26 of Law 466/04.11.2004) through the Code of Practice that complements the Code of Ethics of the social worker profession (published in M. Of. 173/6 March 2008). This Code of Practice establishes the main professional standards and its responsibilities according to the main professional steps specific to professional development (The code regarding the practice of the social worker; <https://www.cnasr.ro/>).

3.3. *Guidance in social work practice*

Beyond the institutional, administrative, and legislative aspects regarding the training of professionals in the field of social assistance, the usefulness of mentors and models of good practice is considered. Most of the skills specific to the assistance field are practised through the *Specialized Practice* discipline, which involves simulating the professional's activity under the direct guidance of a social worker. The specialized practice activity starts from the idea of putting theory into practice but also of observing, learning, and practising transversal skills through direct meetings with the beneficiaries, participation in the teamwork activities of the professionals and the direct involvement, gradually, in the specific intervention activities. The social worker designated as a *practice tutor*, (as stipulated in the *Practice Regulation* Practice regulations for students of the Social Assistance specialization of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Sciences, University of Iasi) within the social work institutions has the role of a guide in the training of the student in social work, as stipulated by the Law on the practice of students and pupils, number 258 of 2007, updated in 2015. Through the actions and professional activities in which the students participate, it represents a professional model of what it means to communicate with the beneficiaries and with the members of the multidisciplinary team, the types of reactions and the procedures regarding the intervention and last but not least, the respect of the code of ethics specific to the profession. The code of practice of social workers establishes the main criteria and conditions for the professional advancement of social workers employed in the field. For the professional employed in the social protection system, the training and assessment regarding the transition from one level of competence to another requires the presence of a supervisor.

Therefore, the acquisition of skills in the field of social assistance subscribes to the presence of a guide, with the meaning of a mentor, in all actions and professional activities carried out as well as in the fulfilment of the specific didactic objectives stipulated in the discipline sheet, i.e. to complete the Practice Portfolio.

Mentor, etymological (fr., lat.) = guide, guide would fully satisfy the explanation regarding the responsibilities of the social worker designated as a practical guide or as a supervisor in the exercise of skills for obtaining skills. The mentoring activity can represent a way of ensuring the initial training and facilitating the insertion into the labour market of beginning professionals to build their social and professional identity, as an extrapolation of the definition in the field of education concerning didactic mentoring. The mentor must ensure, through the guidance provided, the beginner's transition from the trial stage to the job stabilization stage as provided by the National Education Law no. 1/2011, in art. 248. (Order 5485, 2011). The mentor familiarizes the beginner with the organizational climate and culture and facilitates relations with professionals but also with the beneficiaries, which are the main responsibilities of the social assistant practice guide for students majoring in social work.

4. Methodological aspects and directions of analysis

In 2023 research was carried out based on the Specialized Practice activity of students from the Social Work specialization within the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Political Sciences of the „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, proposes to identify the skills needs of employers to which they want to respond graduates of this specialization. Other directions of analysis focused on the importance of partnerships for the professional training of social work students, for which objectives were set related to challenges regarding the training of professional skills, the collaboration between professionals and practising students, but also the identification of the professional's image as a mentor and model for them.

The questionnaire was used for the practice tutors, for a group of 28 professionals, and for the undergraduate students from the social work specialization, 365 reports of the practical activity, structured thematically, were used. The activity reports are a mandatory element of the Practice Portfolio for the Specialized Practice discipline from the Social Work specialization of the bachelor's cycle. Based on these Activity Reports, student feedback on the activity is accounted for in practice. This feedback contributes significantly to the annual analysis and adaptation for carrying out the practice activity by establishing, within the partnerships, the conditions, responsibilities, but also objectives and requirements regarding the acquisition of skills required in the labour market.

4.1. Results analysis

The quantitative research had in mind the comparison but also the establishment of correlations between the responses of the students and those of the practice guidance professionals. One of the objectives of the research regarding the practice of social work students was *to identify the difficulties in the training of professional skills for obtaining skills in the practical activity of the social work specialization.*

For the questionnaire, there were preset answers on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 was the most difficult and 10 was the easiest.

For professionals, in order of difficulty from 1 to 10, they were:

1. the ability to relate and identify problems.
2. self-assessment of the need for training.
3. risk assessment.
4. creativity.
5. assertiveness.
6. the ability to relate.
7. communication.
8. empathy.
9. application of work techniques.
10. teamwork.

For students, the answers related to difficulties in:

1. the relationship with the beneficiaries.

2. lack of knowledge of the types of beneficiaries.
3. fear of making decisions regarding the intervention.
4. confusion in the performance of tasks.
5. difficulties in identifying the types of beneficiaries.
6. lack of patience.
7. lack of a professional vocabulary.
8. difficulties in identifying the needs of beneficiaries.

An analysis of the answers regarding the difficulties encountered in the training of the professional skills of practising students from the social specialization, shows a correlation in terms of their ability to relate to the beneficiaries, justified by the lack or limited knowledge of the particularities of the types of beneficiaries, an insufficient training students' theory in terms of professional vocabulary and work techniques. These lacks or insufficiencies lead to difficulties and fears regarding the approach to the beneficiaries, difficulties in communication, fear and stress in communication and decision-making.

For these answers, we find the justification that most of the practice reports used were from the first and second years of undergraduate education, and the practical experience was short, one semester and two respectively. For the first year, the experience was one of familiarization with the assistance field, based only on theories and general knowledge in social work, in the second and third years, the experience will be based on theories and techniques specific to the field.

Another research objective considered *the importance of practice for social work specialization*.

The questionnaire for professionals had questions with predetermined answers, on a scale of one (min) to five (max). Thus, scales 5 and 4 were tied regarding the fact that practice is useful and very useful, followed by supplementation in all semesters, supplementation during the summer and a lot of exercise, a lot of practice. Regarding the students' answers, they identified, in order of importance: personal and professional development, gratitude for this opportunity, acquiring knowledge about different types of beneficiaries, providing information in the student's understanding, observing the social worker in the relationship with the beneficiary, practising skills and putting theory into practice, facilitating direct contact with beneficiaries, a plus for understanding real situations in social work, practice is the key to understanding and perfecting any job.

If the professionals saw the specialized practice activity as a necessity to exercise the skills for longer periods, the students customized the ideas related to their own needs and feelings regarding the necessity of the internships.

Another question related to this objective refers to the *identification of the perception of the professionals facing the practising students*. The question had predetermined answers, and the order was as follows: possible future colleagues, students who have a project to complete good and very good professionals, and I didn't think about it. The last option was not checked by any professional practice guide.

It is understood that professionals understand the importance but also the necessity of internships for students, the argument being the collaboration in the future with well-trained professionals.

The same objective was associated with the question related to *the collaboration of professionals with students in the practice activity*, to which the professionals declared themselves: satisfied and very satisfied, but they requested the stimulation of courage regarding involvement and participation, stating that they are open to any question and any type of guidance such as and that they value negotiation and flexibility. The students again personalized the answers exemplifying satisfaction as availability and understanding of the professionals, their patience, ethical attitude, stimulation of teamwork, experience and organization in the work of the social worker.

Regarding the question that follows *the expectations they have from the practice activity*, both professionals and students emphasized putting theory into practice. Regarding the students' expectations from the practice activity, they identified: direct meetings with beneficiaries, field activities, involvement in the work team, participation in activities and practising skills as well as observing the social worker when working with the beneficiary or when managing situations of crisis. Of course, the practice activity requires all these expectations formulated by the students, but not all practice places can fulfil these requirements, due to the specifics of the social work services. The most requested expectation is directed towards working directly, practically with the beneficiaries and through direct involvement in the intervention process. Professionals understand the expectations of students that fade when they are asked for theoretical knowledge, progressive involvement, individual study of the beneficiary category, dedication and want to participate and personal development.

The question regarding *the challenges and recommendations for the students' practice activity* is related to the previous arguments in that the students identified situations such as too few interactions with the beneficiaries, the reluctance of the beneficiaries, the lack of practical activities, the lack of a professional vocabulary for students, the fear of not mistakes in working with beneficiaries, lack of information on the types of beneficiaries, crises and attacks of some beneficiaries. Beyond the expectations they had from the practical activity, the students identified the particular situations of working directly with the beneficiaries, which requires very good theoretical training aimed at knowledge in communication and particularities of the category of beneficiaries but also in practising the skills in long periods of practical experience.

The professionals identified the challenges and recommendations in the field of resources and organization of the practice activity. The main challenge is the organization of the practical activity itself, due to the very large number of students but also the work schedule. Other challenges relate to the correlation of theoretical information with practice, but also the lack of professional communication skills of the students.

Another objective of the paper was *to identify the image of a mentor or professional model for social work students*. Most of the tutors combine the idea of a role model with that of a mentor, by taking responsibility for training future professionals. If the mentor is seen as a facilitator in the activity of the new employee with attributions in familiarizing and supervising the activity, the idea of a good practice model displays a complex picture to be observed of the professional for the student, who will have to imitate and/or practice attitudes and skills of him in the direct activity with the beneficiaries. The models of good practice stimulate the development of professional skills specific to the field, encourage involvement, critical thinking, and the practice of formulating decisions.

5. Conclusions

The present research focused on the influence of institutional partnerships in the professional training of students through mentoring and the models of good practice of professionals in the field of assistance. The conclusions of the research highlighted their perceptions on the role and training of social workers through practice activity as well as the practical implications and benefits of inter-institutional collaboration in professional training. For better familiarization with the nursing field, it would be useful, in parallel with practice, to involve students in volunteer activities.

The training of professionals in social work requires a lot of practice to acquire the necessary skills in working with beneficiaries. Initial training institutions allocate practical-applicative disciplines in the curriculum through which students practice putting theory into practice. For these disciplines, partnerships are needed with public or private institutions that declare their willingness to be involved in the training of professionals. Permanent contact with partner institutions is particularly important because they provide updated information about the requirements of the labour market. This contributes to training adapted to the requirements of the labour market in the field of assistance, but also to an increased employability rate of graduates.

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PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND DEONTOLOGY IN THE PRACTICE OF SOCIAL WORK

Cristina CRUDU¹

Abstract

The article is focused on the characterization of the main obligations and responsibilities of the social worker, provided by the deontology of social assistance. The author mentions that nowadays each profession has its deontology, an elaborated system of rules and norms that must be respected to ensure the professional success of any specialist. The deontology of social assistance represents a complex of norms, rules, prescriptions and provisions about professional duty and obligations, about all types of responsibilities of the social workers. The author further exposes the social worker's responsibilities in various types of relationships (social worker - beneficiary; social worker - colleague; social worker - employing institution), with ethics in social work as the main support. In this sense, paying special attention to ethical considerations is an important means of affirming the integrity of the profession, the desire and the decision to provide through social assistance better knowledge, as well as an understanding of the human life meaning, highlighting as the first „duty” the service as optimal as possible for the beneficiary, because the mission of the social worker is to help people who are temporarily in difficulty.

Keywords: social assistance, professional deontology, social assistance deontology, code of ethics.

Résumé

L'article se concentre sur la caractérisation des principales obligations et responsabilités du travailleur social, prévues par la déontologie de l'assistance sociale. L'auteur mentionne qu'aujourd'hui chaque profession possède sa propre déontologie, un système élaboré de règles et de normes qui doivent être respectées pour assurer la réussite professionnelle de tout spécialiste. La déontologie de l'assistance sociale représente un ensemble de normes, règles, prescriptions et dispositions concernant les devoirs et obligations professionnels, concernant tous les types de responsabilités du travailleur social. L'auteur expose en outre les responsabilités du travailleur social dans différents types de relations (travailleur social – bénéficiaire; travailleur social - collègue; travailleur social – institution employeur), avec l'éthique du travail social comme principal support. En ce sens, accorder une attention particulière aux considérations éthiques est un moyen important pour affirmer l'intégrité de la profession, le désir et la décision d'offrir, à travers l'assistance sociale, une meilleure connaissance, ainsi qu'une compréhension du sens de la vie humaine, en soulignant comme

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le premier « devoir » rendre le service le plus optimal possible pour le bénéficiaire, parce que la mission du travailleur social est d'aider les personnes qui sont temporairement en difficulté.

Mots clés : assistance sociale, déontologie professionnelle, déontologie de l'assistance sociale, code de déontologie.

Rezumat

Articolul este focusat pe caracterizarea principalelor obligațiuni și responsabilități ale asistentului social, prevăzute de deontologia asistenței sociale. Autorul menționează că astăzi fiecare profesie își are o deontologie proprie, un sistem elaborat de reguli și norme care se cer a fi respectate pentru a asigura succesul profesional al oricărui specialist. Deontologia asistenței sociale reprezintă un complex de norme, reguli, prescripții și dispoziții despre datoria și obligațiunile profesionale, despre toate tipurile de responsabilități ale asistentului social. Autorul expune, în continuare, responsabilitățile asistentului social în diverse genuri de relații (asistent social – beneficiar; asistent social – coleg; asistent social – instituție angajatoare), având ca suport principal etica în asistența socială. În acest sens, acordarea unei atenții speciale considerentelor etice constituie un important mijloc în afirmarea integrității profesiei, a dorinței și deciziei de a oferi prin asistența socială o mai bună cunoaștere, precum și o înțelegere a semnificației vieții umane, evidențiind ca primă „datorie” deservirea cât mai optimă a beneficiarului, căci menirea asistentului social este de ajuta persoanele aflate temporar în dificultate.

Cuvinte-cheie: asistență socială, deontologie profesională, deontologia asistenței sociale, cod deontologic.

1. Introduction

The origin of the term „deontology” belongs to the well-known founder of utilitarianism *Jeremy Bentham*, 1748-1832. Initially, the term was assigned a narrow, religious-moral connotation, referring to the believer's duty and obligations to God, to religion and to the religious community and later the term was used by *J. Bentham* (Bulgaru, 2013) to designate the moral theory as a whole. However, the term „deontology” soon acquired another meaning, referring to the proper conduct, deeds and actions of a particular person, a professional (Bertrand, 2000). Newtonian mechanics led *J. Bentham* to introduce the idea of differential measurement in the context of utilitarian deontology, which was interpreted as the empirical study of moral duties.

Professional deontology is concerned with the moral imperatives of a profession, reflected mainly in terms of the moral duties or obligations imposed by the exercise of the profession in society. Professional deontology gears towards the development of strict rules similar to those of law. It stands between morality and law, between public opinion and written legal law. And yet, duty, as the object of deontology, through its normative-prescriptive content, as Cozma (2009) mentions, resonates concurrently both ethically and legally, whilst deontology appears to us as „the science of what is just and reasonable”, thus involving the sphere of law, but with the interference of the debate of moral conscience. The spectrum of deontology is one „within the limits of the law”, activating a specific „freedom” -

the possibility to choose, to find solutions appropriate to particular situations, having moral benchmarks that can decisively help (Cozma, 2009, p. 321).

2. Professional ethics and deontology of social worker

The overriding values of social work are formulated in the Code of Ethics, also called Professional Ethics, which serves as a guide to practice. The main criterion of professional ethics is „duty”. The theory of duty and the proper conduct of the professional in the process of exercising his profession is called *deontology* (from the Greek *deonthos* - due, as it should, as it ought). Although the origins of the term *deontology* date back to the beginnings of human civilisation, it was coined by Jeremy Bentham, 1748-1832, the famous founder of *utilitarianism* - an ethical doctrine based on the principle of the greatest happiness, according to which human actions are good to the extent that they lead to the greatest happiness, happiness is understood as the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. The discipline that Bentham wanted to build on was called *deontology* or *the science of duty*. As it evolved historically and a wide range of professional occupations emerged, deontology became a true science involving a consistent interrelationship between professional ethics and the values that delimit the axiological system of a profession (Dilon & Priţcan, 2008, p. 43).

The *Code of Deontology* can be seen as a codification of the special obligations resulting from deliberate affiliation to a specific profession, such as social work. The *Code of Deontology* is therefore intended to clarify the moral aspects of professional activity. On this basis, social workers can identify the morally correct manner of action. To regulate relations between social workers and clients in the interests of the latter, all modern professions have drawn up codes of ethics (doctors, lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, etc.). For example, the Hippocratic oath has become a guide to professional ethical conduct for countless generations of doctors for over 2400 years.

The first Code of Deontology for social workers was drafted by Mary Richmond in 1920 under the title „Experimental Code of Ethics for Social Caseworkers”; in 1951, the General Assembly of the American Association of Social Workers adopted the first Code of Ethics for all members of that association; in 1979, the National American Association of Social Workers adopted a new Code of Ethics, which was subsequently revised in 1996 (NASW). In 1994, the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSSW) at a meeting of practitioners in Colombo, Sri Lanka, adopted the „*Ethics of Social Work. Principles and Standards*”. This document, based on the „International Code of Ethics for the Professional Social Worker”, adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers in 1976, contains the basic ethical principles of social work practice and recommended procedures in the social worker's relationships with clients, colleagues and other professionals.

The International Ethical Standards for Social Workers have been established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), and other conventions ensuing therefrom. The International Federation of Social Workers encourages professionals in every country to discuss and clarify the particular

issues relevant to their country. Thus, „Ethics of Social Work. Principles and Standards” is recommended as a general guide upon which professionals in each state can establish their professional ethical principles (Dilon & Pritcan, 2008, p. 44).

Based on these recommendations, the Romanian Association for the Promotion of Social Assistance, a member of IFSW, drafted and approved in 1997 the first *Code of Ethics for Social Workers in Romania*. Taking this code as a model, as well as the Code of Ethics of some countries with advanced experience (UK, USA, Netherlands), the Association for the Promotion of Social Work in the Republic of Moldova drafted in 2005 the *Code of Ethics of the Social Worker in the Republic of Moldova*.

The Code of Ethics of the Social Worker provides a set of values, principles, and professional standards that provide the framework within which the social worker can make decisions regarding their relationship with the assisted person, colleagues and the institution in which they work. Whichever profession it is addressed to, any Code of Ethics is made up of a set of rights and duties, freedoms and responsibilities, which professionals must respect when they practice. These are all essentially a set of ethical and axiological rules, the fundamental purpose of which is to guide practitioners in each profession from a moral point of view, but also from the point of view of the values accepted in the wider context by society.

Nowadays, as social mobility increases, so does occupational mobility; people switch from one profession to another or practise several professions simultaneously. The general principles of a Code (respect for the rights of the individual, competence, responsibility, etc.) also apply to other professions. However, contemporary times are characterised by a shift from *mono-professional* to *inter-professional deontology*, especially when practitioners from different professions are involved in solving a problem. An example of inter-professional deontology was provided in the interwar period by the Bucharest Sociological School, which organised the famous village mapping campaigns involving sociologists, psychologists, teachers, agronomists, doctors, musicologists and other professionals.

Another phenomenon present in our society is that of multi-professionalisation, where the same individual can be a writer, artist, teacher, publicist, public person, etc., which implies the existence of inter-professionalisation at the individual level. Such a person is bound by the moral and value rules of interprofessional deontology and is obliged to comply with requirements specific to each profession or common to them. Deontology refers to the moral imperatives of a profession, to its values, but those who have embraced this profession are not only bound by the deontological code specific to their profession. They must also respect civil and criminal jurisdiction. In his work 'Introduction to the Deontology of Communication', T. Sârbu, in developing a general definition that encompasses all these elements, defines deontology as *a discipline whose object of study is at the confluence of law and morality. Its main task is to establish principles, rules and norms of professional conduct within the various relationships involved in the exercise of a profession: internal relationships, specific to*

each type of professional activity, and external relationships with the direct/indirect beneficiaries of the services/goods provided” (Sârbu, 1999, pp. 21-22).

The Code of Ethics of the profession can be both formal and informal. The *formal code* is the written code to which the specialist formally adheres to be admitted to practice his or her profession (e.g. Hippocratic Oath in medicine, Social Worker's Code, etc.). The *informal code* is unwritten, based on customs, and habits, but sometimes has greater power than the formal one. Some deontological codes (including the Code of Ethics for Social Workers, approved in the Republic of Moldova (Code of Ethics, 2006, p. 7) prescribe not only the rules that professionals must follow but also the sanctions they will face if they do not respect the specific rules of the given profession. In other words, a Code of Ethics attempts to translate professional values into behavioural frameworks.

The functions of codes of ethics that are valid in almost all contemporary professions are:

- to 'guide' practitioners of a particular profession when they are faced with practical dilemmas involving an ethical issue;
- to protect beneficiaries against incompetence and unprofessionalism;
- to regulate the behaviour of practitioners and their relationships with beneficiaries, colleagues and practitioners in other professions, with other employees of the institution in which they work and with the wider community;
- to provide supervision and advice to practitioners to evaluate their work (Dilon & Pritcan, 2008, pp. 40-41).

Thus, codes of ethics are perceived as a commitment of the profession to the community, ensuring its trust in the profession, without which it could not gain authority. Social workers must take responsibility for the consequences of their actions by the fundamental values, and the general ethical principles of social work as reflected in its codes of ethics.

In the context of the above, we would like to point out that the principles of professional ethics are closely related to those of societal ethics, but are not identical. In the same way that social work values are derived from societal values, but are not necessarily identified with them, professional ethics have the same source as societal ethics, but they differ in certain important respects. These are differences in priorities, intensity of action or applications. Such an important difference can be seen, for example, in the case of governing ethical principles.

The Code of Ethics informs the public about the profession, signalling that it has rules of conduct. By enhancing the credibility of the profession, the code of ethics guarantees the loyalty of beneficiaries and protects them. At the same time, the code of ethics creates solidarity within the group of professionals. By imposing certain responsibilities and obligations on their members through the code of ethics, professional groups aim to ensure professional competence and the trust of society in them.

The code of ethics is a moral contract between beneficiaries and organizations, between members of an organization, a means of guiding the

decisions and actions of the professionals concerned in their relations with beneficiaries. The Code of Ethics provides a benchmark, an ideal, setting out values and principles that are unanimously recognized. In doing so, „the code gives everyone a sense of security, of collective strength”, the maintenance of such regulations being „to protect the public interest” (Bertrand, 2000, pp. 66-67). Through such instruments, deontology „upholds the morality of a profession and protects society from inappropriate and undesirable manifestations of its members in specific situations” (Cozma, 2009, pp. 129-130). Thus, codes of ethics stand as a commitment of the profession to the community, ensuring its trust in the profession, without which it could not gain authority.

3. Conclusions and discussions

The Code of Ethics can be considered as a codification of special obligations resulting from deliberate adherence to a particular profession, such as social work (Code of Ethics, 2006). It represents a theoretical framework of reference intended to clarify the rights and duties of the profession, drawn up by the law, and the moral aspects of professional activity. The Code of Ethics of Social Work stipulates general moral standards/imperatives, principles and norms, and values that shape decision-making on the most appropriate action. General moral imperatives usually refer to the protection of fundamental human rights, social justice, protection of health, and welfare, meeting social needs, integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, non-discrimination, confidentiality, self-discipline, etc. Based on the code of ethics, social workers can identify the morally correct way of acting. Thus, the Code of Ethics of the profession of social workers in Romania (published in Official Monitor no. 173, March 2008) „establishes the mandatory rules of professional conduct of social workers, i.e. the members of the National College of Social Workers in Romania”. Its main goal is to regulate the principles and rules of conduct of social workers to prevent the emergence of situations that could affect their reputation and their good practice, the development and consolidation of the College, as well as the image of the professional body of social workers in general (Bulgaru, 2013; Buzducea, 2009).

Codes of social work ethics, developed in different countries, focus on the fundamental values of the social work profession and stipulate the human value, dignity and uniqueness of all people, as well as their rights and responsibilities, asserting the willingness of professionals to always act according to moral principles. However, the Code of Ethics is not intended to provide a detailed set of rules on how social workers should act in specific situations in the complexity of social and professional life. Rather, as mentioned above, by setting out general principles of conduct, the Code aims to encourage social workers to reflect on the challenges and dilemmas they face and to make decisions based on the values of the profession about how to behave in particular cases.

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THE SKILL TO WORK WITH DATA OF SOCIAL WORKERS: REALITIES VERSUS THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN IT

Anastasia OCERETNÎ¹

Abstract

The article analyses the results of the sociological study carried out by the Department of Sociology and Social Work (Moldova State University), in 2022, to determine the particularities of training of the competence of data use among professionals in the field of social work. The study highlighted the weak capacity of professionals in the field of social work to operate with data and use it in decision-making; the use of registers in letter format and poor digitization of the system affects the generation of reliable data and the lack of effective management of human resources and others. The results of the research allowed the identification of the need for interventions in the coming years, which would focus on reducing the gaps in the professional training of social workers and the integration of technological innovations in the system.

Keywords: data, social work, data using, evidence-based policy.

Résumé

L'article analyse les résultats de l'étude sociologique réalisée par le Département de Sociologie et d'assistance sociale (Université d'État de Moldavie), en 2022, dans le but de déterminer les particularités de la formation et de l'apprentissage de la compétence à utiliser les données chez les professionnels du domaine de l'assistance sociale. L'étude a mis en évidence la faible capacité des professionnels du secteur de l'assistance sociale à travailler avec les données et à les utiliser dans la prise de décision ; l'utilisation de registres au format lettre et la mauvaise numérisation du système affectent la génération de données fiables et la gestion non efficace des ressources humaines et autres. Les résultats de la recherche ont permis d'identifier la nécessité d'interventions dans les années à venir, qui se concentreraient sur la réduction des écarts dans la formation professionnelle des travailleurs sociaux et sur l'intégration des innovations technologiques dans le système.

Mots clés : données, travail social, utilisation des données, politique fondée sur des données probantes.

Rezumat

Articolul analizează rezultatele studiului sociologic desfășurat de Departamentul Sociologie și Asistență Socială (Universitatea de Stat din Moldova), în anul 2022, având drept scop

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determinarea particularităților de instruire și formare a competenței de utilizare a datelor în rândul profesioniștilor din domeniul asistenței sociale. Studiul a evidențiat o slabă capacitate a profesioniștilor din domeniul asistenței sociale în lucrul cu datele și utilizarea acestora în luarea deciziei; utilizarea de registre în format letric și slaba digitalizare a sistemului afectează generarea de date fiabile și neadministrarea eficientă a resurselor umane și altele. Rezultatele cercetării au permis identificarea nevoii de intervenții în următorii ani, care să se focuseze pe diminuarea lacunelor în formarea profesională a asistenților sociali și integrarea inovațiilor tehnologice în sistem.

Cuvinte-cheie: date, asistența socială, utilizarea datelor, politici bazate pe evidențe.

1. Introduction

Social work as a field of intervention through public policies, requires an innovative approach, based on evidence. Beneficiaries of social work represent distinct social categories, the profile of which encompasses diverse needs that involve an individualized approach. At the same time, there is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of interventions carried out through social work measures, to identify the laconic aspects and those that contributed to the achievement of the objective pursued. In this context, the approach regarding the use of data in the development of social policies is topical.

The movement around the use of data in policymaking developed in the late 1990s, driven by the application of evidence in medicine in the UK. A contribution to the development of evidence-based policies was made by Tony Blair, who launched the idea of replacing ideologically developed policies with policies developed based on rational decisions, using the conclusions of scientific studies (Sutcliffe & Court, 2005).

At the national level, the need to use data in the development of policy documents is established by Government Decision No. 386/2020 regarding the planning, elaboration, approval, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of public policy documents and in the "Methodological Guide on the Integration of Provisions The national development strategy in planning documents, public policy documents and normative acts at the national level" (2021). In this sense, the need for analysis of the situation to be addressed by the public policy document, through the use of quantitative and qualitative data, is emphasized.

In the case of social work, the data of scientific studies and administrative data can facilitate the identification and understanding of the common factors of different risk situations, the root causes of social problems and the development of effective interventions, including prevention (Griffin, 2020). Thus, practitioners in the field can use data obtained by applying scientific methods to improve performance at different levels (Cariceo et al., 2018). In this way, the data can support decisions, which can also lead to changing the focus of the intervention in a situation where its poor efficiency is attested.

In this context, data literacy is a key professional competency. This fact is also determined by the situation in which the activity of social workers

involves working with various data and information, which need to be thoroughly collected, processed, analysed, and made available to decision-makers (Oceretnii et. al., 2022). The quality of the data collected in the system, but also their use, is influenced by the level of qualification of the professionals. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection data, less than 1/3 of community social workers employed in the public social assistance system have higher education, and among social services employees, only 19% have higher education. At the same time, only approximately 40% of employees have professional training in the field of social work/related fields or have benefited from initial and continuous training in the field of social services in which they are employed (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2023), that problem being a systemic one (Raportul Social Anual, 2019). In this case, the skill to work with data could be affected due to insufficient professional training.

2. Research Methodology

The practices and difficulties in using data in the field of social work were analysed in the sociological study, carried out by the implementation team of the Moldova State University (Department of Sociology and Social Work) within the „Data for Impact” Project (USAID project implemented by Palladium International). The research is argued by a problem reported, including in the Annual Social Report of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection (2019), in which the mismatch of the professional specializations of the staff employed with the specifics of the position, the lack of professional training, etc., is noted, in the conditions of a high fluctuation of professionals in the field of social work. The sociological study included a combined research methodology, an online opinion survey was carried out among 463 people employed in the social work public system from 27 territorial-administrative units and three focus group (FG) meetings were held, with the participation of community social workers, teaching staff, heads of territorial social assistance structures, representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and the associative sector. The study was conducted in April-May 2022. The sample for the online survey was 463 persons, being nationally representative, with $\pm 3,5\%$ survey error. The average age of the respondents was 41.2 years, the youngest respondent being 21 years old and the oldest - 66 years old. The average working experience in the social work field was 7.3 years. The results of the research substantiated the decisions related to the revision of the education plan and the university curriculum in the field of social work training. Research limits: several issues affected the research, including (1) the relatively short period, making it difficult to apply other research methods (individual interview, observations, etc.), to ensure full data triangulation, (2) the involvement of territorial social assistance structures in assisting refugees from Ukraine, (3) the effect of social desirability among teachers.

3. Results

The research data reveal the use by social work staff of a diversity of data. Beneficiary data is used more frequently (93.3%), and more than half use social services data daily.

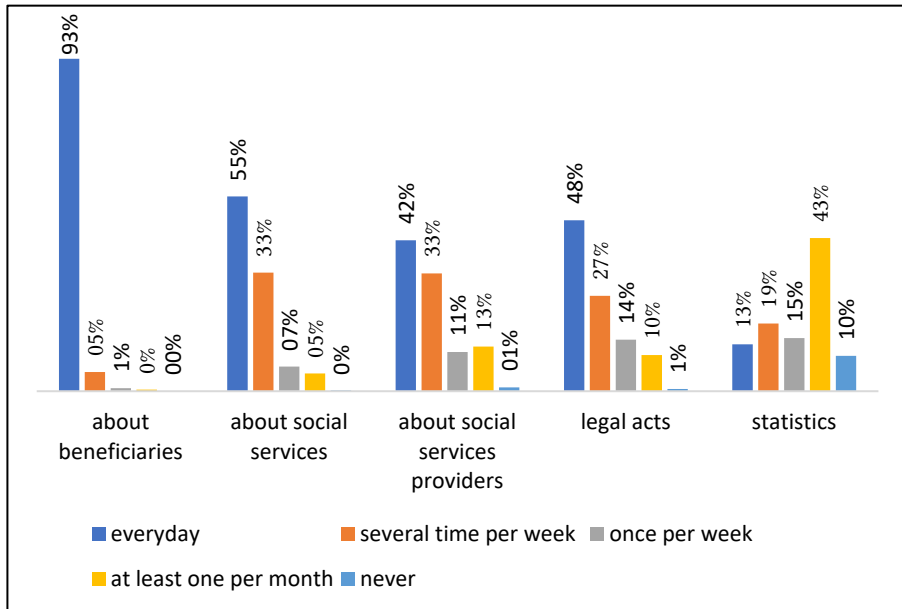


Figure 1. Frequency of use of different types of data/information by social work staff

Statistical data are used to a lesser extent, a fact that can also be explained by the poorly developed skills of working with data and the lack of understanding of their usefulness for social work practice.

The vast majority of the professionals participating in the study (about 90%) use the collected data/information for evaluation, monitoring, and drafting documents and reports. A smaller part uses the data/information for other purposes as well, such as planning services (79.9%), developing presentations (71.2%), calculating indicators (62.3%) and calculating performance gains (42.9%). During the group discussions, areas of data use were highlighted, such as the presentation of the situation at the local level, and information that is requested by various structures at the national (ministry) and local (local public authorities) level.

"We make different reports for the Ministry or the local APL so that they know the situation in the locality: what categories of beneficiaries we have, what services are provided to them." (FG_1)

"At the request of the directorates (n.a. territorial social assistance structures), social workers present reports with the number of cases. We collect, calculate, and pass on the data. There is no possibility of calculations at the territorial level. The situation is vulnerable." (FG_1)

"The data are used according to the management's requests to report, and make different statistics by categories of beneficiaries or services." (FG_1)

Another purpose of the data use is to support the planning of activities for the following year, including the establishment of activity objectives within the territorial social assistance structures.

"To plan our activities for next year based on the data we have." (FG_1)

"We use the data in the reports to qualitatively and quantitatively analyse the evolution of the services or what we set out to do so that later we can see what strategic objectives we need to set." (FG_3)

In the field of social services, the data are used in their evaluation or in planning the development of new social services. Data collected on services is also used in the budget planning process.

"We evaluate the impact of services to see if we need to develop them or see their trends." (FG_3)

„When we want to create new social services, to justify the need for this service." (FG_1)

"To create a statistic per service: increase the number, for which category of beneficiaries - so that in budget planning we draw more attention to this category of beneficiaries, which service is more in demand, where it is necessary to plan more financial resources." (FG_3)

In the same way, practices were established for the use of data in the development of projects to access financial resources, by arguing the need for interventions: *„For different projects and to win them, but also for other statistics." (FG_1)*

The research data establishes the fact that approximately 9 out of 10 respondents process the data/information in Word format, and 81.2% operate in the Social Assistance Automated Information System (SIAAS). Just over half of the sample (52.9%) process the data through Excel files. The high share of those who operate with data in Word format and the low share of those who process data through Excel can be explained by the lack of knowledge and operating skills.

"There is a problem: how many of the social workers know how to use Excel? because their number is very small, I'm talking about simple Excel files...Not every social worker knows the real situation. I noticed that many social workers duplicate data, figures, and indicators" (FG_2)

Worrying is the fact that 67.0% of the respondents process the data manually, which reveals either the lack of skills in using operating systems or high-performance equipment or the different format of the information applied in the system, etc. Additionally, approximately 64% of respondents believe that the social work system in the country is poorly digitized, even if the vast majority (98.1%) agree that information systems make work easier. In this context, we note that in the coming years the automated information system in the field of child protection needs to be developed to centralize and digitize the processes of collecting disaggregated data regarding the situation of children at risk, children separated

from their parents, adopted children, repatriated children and abducted children, to facilitate the registration, recording, assistance, referral, monitoring and reporting of child cases, data quality assurance and the calculation of national indicators useful for decision-making, which is established by the National Program for child protection for the years 2022-2026 (action 16, Specific Objective 1.2.) (Programul național pentru protecția copilului pe anii, 2022-2026). Currently, data on children at risk are collected through two forms approved by the National Bureau of Statistics (CER 103A and CER 103).

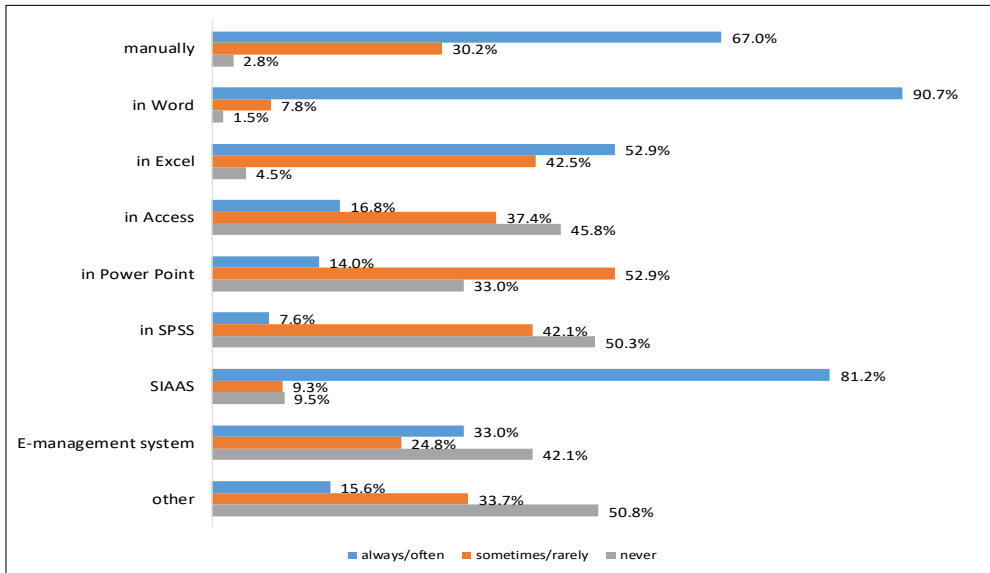


Figure 2. Data processing methods used in the social work system

The objective of digitizing the social work system is a key object of the reform of social work system RESTART (launched in 2023) with the following areas of intervention identified: the unification of current information systems on a single platform for access and data analysis based on the auditing of current information systems from the point of view of compliance the normative framework, technologies, interoperability, human resources; developing an ecosystem governance strategy; implementation of an information register for social services and benefits implemented by territorial social assistance agencies and social assistance territorial subdivisions; modernization of the Social Assistance Automated Information System; the development of a unique platform for access to social aid and compensation for citizens ajutor.gov.md, based on the best practices recorded in the implementation of the compensatii.gov.md platform; implementation of a single register of social assistance beneficiaries (Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, 2023).

The digitization of the domain is also determined by the large volume of data that is operated in the system. The sociological study highlighted that

social workers work with a great diversity of data - 84.0% of respondents agree with this aspect. About half of the respondents believe that the collected data are not processed and analysed, which highlights a faulty management of the activity and a waste of human resources and time, while every third respondent disapproved of this fact.

The activity of data and information processing in the field could also be hampered by the large number of registers completed in written format (84.7% agree with this fact), which influences the large number of respondents who declared that they process data manually: *„Paper registers are also used, but a greater volume of work is received. Beneficiaries are entered in the databases we create, but also in the registers” (FG_3).*

The implementation of information systems would facilitate both data collection and processing, as well as storage. The poor application of information systems would be determined by the lack of equipment, poorly qualified human resources, limited financial resources, etc. In these conditions, pressure is placed on the activity of social workers, by duplicating information (letter and electronic format): *„Manual registers are still used for two reasons: we do not have efficient technology and the human resource does not have the skills to work in the information system. Now we also work with paper registers, but also with electronic ones.” (FG_1)*

The process of using data by social work professionals is influenced by several difficulties. Approximately 62.9% of respondents are not trained to develop a data collection form, especially those who have 6-10 years of work experience (10.6% are not trained at all) and those with a work experience of more than 16 years (9.5% are not trained at all). More than a fourth (26.8%) do not know exactly what kind of data to collect, which explains the data by which 29.0% do not understand their usefulness for professional activity.

More than a third of the respondents (37.5%) fail to identify the data necessary for professional activity, and approximately every tenth (11.3%) faces difficulty understanding the data, especially this being a difficulty for those with less than 2 years of experience or with more than 16 years of experience. Approximately one in ten needed the support of a colleague in working with the data.

In the same vein, more than half of the sample (53.9%) do not apply verification methods to the collected data, which could influence the accuracy of the data.

During the group discussion with professionals in the field, the following difficulties were identified:

- the lack of interoperability of information systems, which creates deficiencies in the collection and use of data.

„There is no interconnectivity at the bases of different institutions, each institution if it needs other data must request it through an interpellation.” (FG_1)

„We do not have access to such bases, and we continue to make requests to the guardianship authority to obtain some details about the case. If there were

some databases with complex data about the beneficiary and we had access, we would identify which services needed to be developed.” (FG_3)

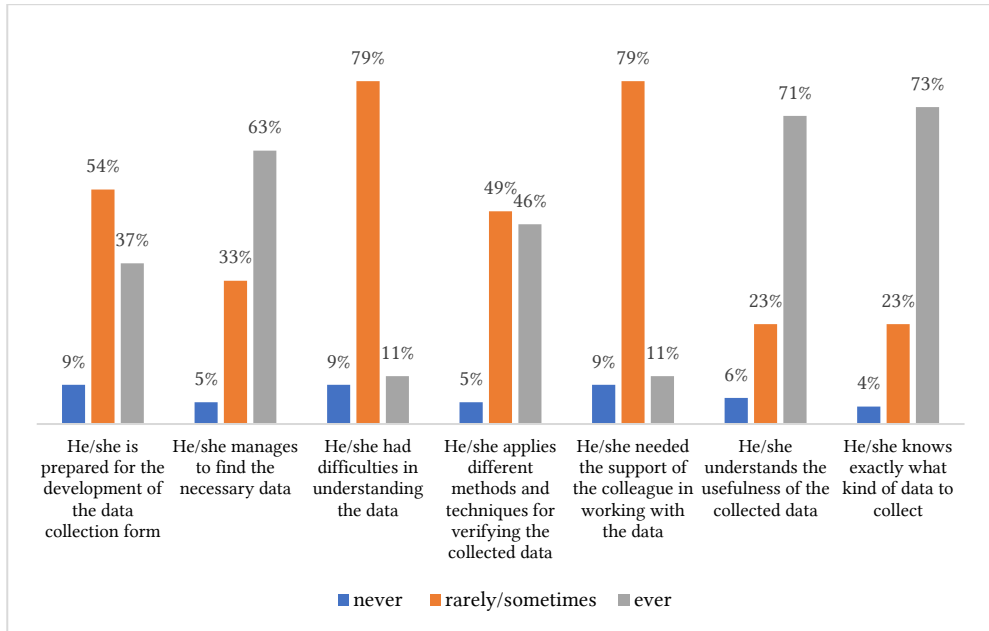


Figure 3. Situations faced by professionals in the social work system when working with data/information

- lack of unique data collection models, approved at the national level

“They are not unique models that would be general throughout the republic. We invent here on the spot, within the directions. In the given chapter, an improvement is required, something that would make our work easier” (FG_3)

- making calculations manually, based on the lists generated by the information system

“The extraction of data on different categories is done manually, the cases are counted from the lists generated by the computer (n.a. from the information system)” (FG_1)

“There are no other programs (n.a. apart from the information system), we work with the old tools.” (FG_1)

4. Conclusions

Social work is a field in which a series of data is collected daily, which needs to be collected in an organized, systematic, and correct way, and through processing and interpretation to be able to help identify the best solutions for social work beneficiaries and the communities they belong to. The poor professional training of professionals in the use of data and the poor digitization of the system lead to the difficult development of evidence-based policies. In

this sense, in the following period in the Republic of Moldova, the need is imposed to be:

- integrated innovative technological solutions in the field of social work,
- expansion of scientific research in the field, the results of which will be used by political decision-makers in decision-making,
- strengthening the capacities of professionals in the field by developing continuous training programs and adjusting the university curriculum, to ensure the training of the competence to use data in decision-making.

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THE ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL WORK NEEDS AND PRIORITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

Khrystyna VELYCHKO¹

Abstract

In the context of the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, the research endeavors to unravel the multifaceted challenges faced by social work practitioners as they navigate the complexities of providing support during conflict. This research is motivated by a deep commitment to understanding the complex interplay between social dynamics and the evolving needs of individuals and communities affected by armed conflict. Drawing on a comprehensive review of existing literature, theoretical frameworks, and empirical data, the study explores the complex dynamics of social work within the challenging landscape of armed conflict. Highlighting the ethical considerations inherent in such contexts, the research examines the evolving needs of conflict-affected individuals and outlines priorities for effective intervention. This study aims to make significant contributions to informing and improving social work practice in the specific context of war in Ukraine. In doing so, the research aims not only to respond to the immediate needs of those affected, but also to contribute to a broader discourse on effective humanitarian interventions and the role of social work in conflict zones.

Keywords: Needs assessment, social services, intervention strategies, social work, conflict in Ukraine, community well-being.

Résumé

Dans le contexte du conflit armé en cours en l'Ukraine, la recherche s'efforce de démêler les défis à multiples facettes auxquels sont confrontés les praticiens du travail social lorsqu'ils naviguent dans les complexités de la fourniture d'un soutien pendant un conflit. Cette recherche est motivée par un engagement profond à comprendre l'interaction complexe entre la dynamique sociale et les besoins changeants des individus et des communautés touchés par le conflit armé. S'appuyant sur un examen approfondi de la littérature existante, des cadres théoriques et des données empiriques, l'étude explore la dynamique complexe de l'assistance sociale dans le contexte difficile des conflits armés. Soulignant les considérations éthiques inhérentes à de tels contextes, la recherche examine l'évolution des besoins des personnes touchées par les conflits et définit les priorités d'une intervention efficace. Cette étude vise à contribuer de manière significative à l'information et à l'amélioration de la pratique du travail social dans le contexte spécifique de la guerre en Ukraine. Ce faisant, la recherche vise non seulement à répondre aux besoins immédiats

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des personnes touchées, mais aussi à contribuer à un discours plus large sur les interventions humanitaires efficaces et le rôle du travail social dans les zones de conflit.

Mots clés : évaluation des besoins, services sociaux, stratégies d'intervention, assistance sociale, guerre en Ukraine, bien-être de la communauté.

Rezumat

În contextul conflictului armat în curs de desfășurare din Ucraina, cercetarea încearcă să descopere provocările cu multiple fațete cu care se confruntă practicienii din domeniul asistenței sociale atunci când navighează prin complexitatea furnizării de sprijin în mijlocul conflictului. Această cercetare este motivată de un angajament profund de a înțelege interacțiunea complexă dintre dinamica socială și nevoile în continuă evoluție ale persoanelor și comunităților afectate de conflictul armat. Bazându-se pe o analiză cuprinzătoare a literaturii existente, a cadrelor teoretice și a datelor empirice, studiul explorează dinamica complexă a asistenței sociale în cadrul peisajului provocator al conflictului armat. Subliniind considerațiile etice inerente în astfel de contexte, cercetarea examinează nevoile în evoluție ale indivizilor afectați de conflict și trasează prioritățile pentru o intervenție eficientă. Acest studiu își propune să aducă contribuții semnificative pentru informarea și îmbunătățirea practicilor de asistență socială în contextul specific al războiului din Ucraina. În acest fel, cercetarea urmărește nu numai să răspundă nevoilor imediate ale celor afectați, ci și să contribuie la un discurs mai larg privind intervențiile umanitare eficiente și rolul asistenței sociale în zonele de conflict.

Cuvinte-cheie: Evaluarea nevoilor, servicii sociale, strategii de intervenție, asistența socială, conflictul din Ucraina, bunăstarea comunității.

1. Introduction

In the wake of contemporary global challenges, the intersection of social work, conflict dynamics, and the imperatives of human well-being stands as a critical focal point. This study delves into the intricate landscape of social work, examining the nuanced dimensions of needs assessment and priority identification within the compelling context of armed conflict in Ukraine. Against the backdrop of geopolitical unrest and humanitarian crises, this scholarly exploration aims to unravel the complexities inherent in the provision of social services, shedding light on the multifaceted responsibilities and ethical considerations that confront social workers amid turbulent circumstances. Through a comprehensive examination, we endeavour to illuminate how social work endeavours to address the diverse and evolving needs of individuals and communities impacted by armed conflict, offering insights that contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective intervention and support in conflict-affected regions.

This scientific paper highlights the process of needs assessment and social work provision in the context of the armed conflict in Ukraine. By understanding the priority needs of the affected population (refugees in Ukraine) and tailoring social work services, social workers can provide effective and appropriate support during this difficult period. As reported by UNHCR (2023), there are 5.9 million individual refugees from Ukraine distributed across Europe. Of these, 3.8 million

have crossed the border into Romania, and there are approximately 96,000 refugees from Ukraine who remain in Romania.

Save the Children International (2023), reports that more than 60% of Ukrainian children have been forced to abandon their homes, schools and communities. And 7.5 million children in Ukraine are at serious risk of physical harm, severe emotional distress and displacement. Of the nearly 18 million people in Ukraine in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, more than 4 million are children. The ongoing conflict is exacerbating children's needs for protection, mental health and psychological support, food, health care, education, clean water, sanitation and hygiene.

The theoretical approach of this study is based on studies by James Lind Alliance (2018), Rostad et al., (2017), Berg-Weger (2019), Denov and Shevell (2019), Seifert (2022), Vintila et al. (2023), Stenner and Taylor (2008). The studies of these authors, associated with the theme of needs and priorities in social work, play an important role in providing an overview of those formative experiences that underlie the foundation of effective social work practice.

In seminal work, Rostad et al., (2017) provide a comprehensive examination of assessment processes within the realm of child welfare. Their research not only emphasizes the critical importance of identifying the unique needs of vulnerable children and families but also highlights the necessity of recognizing and leveraging inherent strengths. Rostad et al., (2017) insights hold significant weight in discussions surrounding Evidence-based practices in child welfare, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in assessing and addressing the multifaceted needs of this vulnerable population. This work serves as a cornerstone reference, providing invaluable contributions to the fields of research and policy, ultimately influencing the development of interventions that are informed, effective, and tailored to the distinctive needs and strengths of children and families in the child welfare system.

'Social work practice with war-affected children and families: the importance of family, culture, arts, and participatory approaches' authored by Denov and Shevell (2019), stands as a seminal contribution to the evolving discourse within the field of social work. Published at the intersection of social work and conflict studies, this work navigates the complexities of providing social services in environments marked by strife, unrest, and upheaval. Their comprehensive analysis encompasses the challenges and opportunities faced by social workers in conflict zones, shedding light on the complex intersections of political, social, and cultural factors that shape the practice of social work in such environments. Denov and Shevell (2019), work delves into the strategies, ethical considerations, and lessons learned from international experiences, providing an essential foundation for understanding the unique demands placed on social work practitioners in conflict-ridden settings. This scholarly exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the potential impact of social work interventions in the context of conflict, making it a pertinent reference for academics, practitioners, and

policymakers seeking to enhance the effectiveness of social work responses in regions grappling with the aftermath of conflict.

In the illuminating article, Vintila et al. (2023) provides valuable perspectives on navigating the psychosocial challenges faced by communities impacted by war. Their insights delve into the specific context of the Ukraine Conflict, offering nuanced understanding and practical strategies for addressing the psychosocial needs of affected populations. This authoritative source contributes essential knowledge to the discourse on social work priorities and needs in the context of conflict, providing a foundation for practitioners and policymakers seeking effective interventions in Ukraine and beyond. The research underscores the significance of incorporating psychosocial considerations into social work practices during periods of armed conflict, emphasizing the broader implications for the well-being and resilience of war-affected communities.

Expanding on the previous point, the article by Stenner and Taylor (2008) provide a comprehensive examination of the ethical challenges faced by social work practitioners in the midst of armed conflicts. One notable sentence from the article is: 'We raise the idea that we have entered an epoch in which the `psycho' resonates as surely as the `social' alongside `welfare', and this perspective suggests a necessity to reevaluate the knowledge approaches within social and psychological disciplines, especially in response to evolving welfare configurations.'

The article by Seifert (2022) highlights a crucial focus on the evolving role of social assistance in the context of globalised armed conflict. This evolution is characterised by changes in social work, impacting on post-conflict social policy and social work practices globally. The complexity of social work and education in the context of grassroots initiatives during post-conflict neoliberal reconstruction highlights the complex nature of their involvement. In addition, it highlights the importance of social work involvement in international politics and navigating the complexities of violent conflict for effective post-conflict interventions. These dynamics pose substantial theoretical, policy and practical challenges, requiring deliberate analysis and strategic responses within the social work field.

As the literature converges on the importance of community-based interventions, a gap becomes apparent in the discussion regarding the sustainability and scalability of these approaches in long-term conflict contexts. While the immediate impact of such interventions is evident in fostering community resilience, there remains a dearth of research exploring the enduring effects and the potential challenges associated with sustaining these initiatives over an extended period. This raises critical questions about the long-term viability of community-based models in addressing evolving needs and dynamics within conflict-affected populations. The need for a more nuanced exploration of the durability of community-based interventions in protracted conflicts becomes particularly pertinent in crafting comprehensive strategies that extend beyond immediate relief efforts to foster enduring positive change.

Moreover, the existing literature, encompassing the diverse insights of various authors, underscores the imperative for ongoing interdisciplinary collaboration in the field of social work during armed conflicts. The intersectionality of challenges necessitates a cohesive approach that integrates perspectives from sociology, psychology, public health, and international relations. Building on the lessons learned from different conflicts, it becomes evident that a holistic and collaborative framework is essential for navigating the complex web of psychosocial, ethical, and practical considerations inherent in providing effective social services during and after armed conflicts.

2. Research methods

The techniques used in data collection were: documentary analysis and focus group and the data were collected in May-June 2023. If the documentary analysis concerned the activity of NGOs specialized in refugee assistance, the focus groups were composed of Ukrainian refugees arrived in Iasi, Romania. The respective focus groups were organized in the same period of May June 2023.

I. Formation of Focus Groups

Three separate focus groups were strategically formed, each comprising a diverse cohort of refugees directly affected by the armed conflict. The aim was to capture a comprehensive range of experiences, ensuring a rich and varied data set for analysis. Group composition considered factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic background, and duration of displacement to ensure a representative sample.

II. Description

The research design incorporated three distinct focus groups to gather nuanced insights and perspectives. The research sample consisted of adolescents aged 11 to 18 and participants aged 37 to 55. Participants were selected based on their relevance to the topic and engaged in open conversations to explore and express their views on the most pressing needs and priorities in social care. This method allowed for a dynamic exchange of ideas and experiences, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities in the field. The data collected from these focus group discussions is analysed to inform and improve the development of effective strategies and interventions in social work practice.

3. Results and discussion

The outcomes of the focus group analysis revealed a spectrum of needs among the refugee population, spanning from immediate necessities such as shelter and healthcare to legal protection and educational opportunities. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by refugees in the context of armed conflict in Ukraine, offering valuable insights for

both academic scholars and practical interventions in the realm of social work and humanitarian aid.

Ukrainian refugees in Romania need support and assistance in several key areas to start a new life in a foreign country. By analysing the answers of the subjects regarding the needs and priorities in social work we obtained these results.

The main areas of need for Ukrainian refugees

These needs may include the following:

1. ***Healthcare*** - many refugees in Ukraine may be traumatized by the events that led to their fleeing the country. Medical and psychological assistance is essential to help them overcome trauma and integrate into the host society.
2. ***Housing*** - Ukrainian refugees need a safe and stable home to start integrating into Romanian society. They often do not have the money to pay rent, so they need support from the authorities and non-governmental organizations to find suitable housing.
3. ***Education*** - Ukrainian refugees need access to education to learn Romanian, integrate into the community - and have a chance at a better future. Educational institutions and non-governmental organizations can provide resources and support to help refugees learn and develop.
4. ***Work opportunities*** - Ukrainian refugees need work opportunities to provide an income and support their families. The government and non-governmental organizations must provide support in finding a job and facilitate access to vocational training programs.
5. ***Legal protection*** - Ukrainian refugees may need legal protection to defend themselves against the authorities or to protect their rights. They need access to lawyers and relevant legal information to defend their interests.
6. ***Promotion of cultural diversity*** - The integration of Ukrainians in Romania can be improved by promoting cultural diversity and tolerance of cultural and ethnic differences. It is important to organize cultural and educational events that encourage interaction between Ukrainians and Romanians and to value their contribution to Romanian culture and economy.

Detailed examples for each area

Table 1: Targets followed by action areas

Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initial medical assessment; • Primary health care; • Mental health services; • Trauma and injury care; • Reproductive health care; • Vaccinations and prevention of infectious diseases; • Access to medicines and medical equipment; • Translation and interpretation for medical services.
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Housing and basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing and safety; • Nutritious and adequate food; • Personal hygiene items; • Sanitation services; • Clothing and footwear; • Communication and information.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education; • Language learning programme; • Adaptation to the education system; • Emotional and social support; • Skills reassessment and recognition programme; • Non-formal education and personal development programs.
Work opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to the labour market; • Recognition of skills and qualifications; • Job search support; • Entrepreneurship and self-employment initiatives; • Protection against exploitation and precarious work; • Socio-professional integration
Legal protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to legal information; • Free legal assistance; • Fair and transparent asylum procedures; • Protection of refugee minors • Legal integration and the right to work
Promotion of cultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural respect and appreciation; • Access to cultural expressions; • Intercultural education; • Community participation and involvement; • Protection and promotion of cultural heritage.

Discussions with focus group participants show that children's basic needs (as identified: housing, food and safety) are largely ensured. We can consider that there has been a shift from meeting basic needs to needs related to the continuation of the educational process, medical services (not emergency medical services, but medical care services for chronic conditions or dental visits), or the need for translators to facilitate access to different services.

By employing focus groups as a research method, this study aimed to amplify the voices of refugees, ensuring their perspectives are central to the discourse surrounding their needs and priorities. The results contribute to a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by this vulnerable population, guiding future endeavours in social work and humanitarian assistance.

4. Priorities in Social Work

Following the study, we concluded that these are the priorities in social assistance that reflect the immediate needs of the conflict-affected population and

aim both to ensure immediate survival and well-being and long-term reconstruction and stabilization:

- a) Safety and security of the population
- b) Protection of children and vulnerable groups
- c) Healthcare and health services
- d) Reintegration and rehabilitation

James Lind Alliance (2018) highlight the crucial role of social workers in providing essential services to individuals, families, and communities. Their primary objective is to assist people in finding effective solutions to both social and practical challenges, ensuring access to appropriate care and support. Social workers actively work towards safeguarding individuals from harm or neglect, advocating for their human rights, and facilitating opportunities for them to live their desired lives to the fullest extent possible. Those specializing in adult care operate across diverse organizations and settings, such as local authorities, hospitals, private residences, and communities. Their expertise is applied to address a wide spectrum of health and care needs, encompassing mental health, physical and learning disabilities, as well as catering to the unique requirements of older individuals and those in end-of-life care.

In the insightful work 'Social Work, Armed Conflict and Postwar Reconstruction' by Seifert (2022) the author provide a comprehensive exploration of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the realm of social work within conflict zones. Grounded in theoretical perspectives and enriched with practical insights, the book delves into the complexities of delivering social services amidst the turmoil of war. The authors navigate the intricate landscape of humanitarian efforts, offering a nuanced understanding of how social work can effectively address the unique needs and priorities that emerge in such contexts. Drawing on global experiences, the book contributes valuable perspectives that may offer resonance and guidance in understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges faced in the specific context of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

'In a time of war, professional social work expands the areas, methods and forms of work, which, on the one hand, are based on many years of experience, including international experience, and the other hand, the phenomenon of social work is formed based on moral duty, mutual support, and commitment of each citizen in combination with the professional activities of social work professionals' as remarked by Kravchenko (2022). Also, she revealed that community-based social work during wartime operated on four distinct levels: social work within local government, social work within the territorial community, social work within social institutions, and social work involving community residents.

In social work, effective prioritization is the compass that guides practitioners to navigate the complex terrain of human needs, ensuring that the most vulnerable are attended to with empathy, equity, and unwavering commitment.

In the context of prioritizing social work, Berg-Weger (2019) emphasize the importance of recognizing and leveraging individual and community strengths. Their insights align with the concept of a strengths-based perspective, encouraging practitioners to focus on the assets and capabilities of individuals and communities rather than solely on deficits. Berg-Weger (2019) work is particularly relevant when discussing the ethical implications of prioritization in social work interventions. Their insights can inform discussions on how practitioners grapple with the ethical complexities inherent in determining priorities, ensuring that interventions align with professional values and ethical standards.

5. Conclusion

The qualitative research highlighted first of all the needs of the refugees and to what extent the civil society represented by NGOs managed to cope with this avalanche of needs. On the other hand, we identified the need for organization from an organizational perspective of all efforts directed towards refugees. We have also observed situations with refugees supported through programs that overlapped, so the consumption of resources doubled.

Continuous needs assessment and monitoring of the effectiveness of social assistance interventions are essential to adapt and adjust strategies and programs to the changing situation and needs of the population. This flexible and responsive approach ensures that social workers can respond efficiently and effectively to the complex and diverse needs of the war-affected population.

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledges the organization „Save the Children” for supporting the sociological study. Appreciation is also extended to colleagues for invaluable feedback and participants whose insights were crucial to the study's depth and validity. The author acknowledges the collective contributions of all involved, emphasizing the indispensable role each played in making this work possible.

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OLDER PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR RIGHTS

Liliana SALCUȚAN¹

Abstract

This article has allowed us to identify the opinions of elderly citizens on their rights, who in this difficult period of life continue to individually face their problems and needs. Poor information about pensioners accentuates the manifestation of discrimination, isolation, and indifference toward this group of population. Although R. Moldova has a rich agenda of normative acts that must work in our society in favour of elderly citizens, social, medical, economic institutions, etc., continues the production of age segregation processes, which is felt by the interviewed seniors. To reduce the daily tensions and worries of the elderly, it is necessary to create institutions (at all levels) that would provide support, protection and insurance with the rights of older citizens, becoming the key solution to their problems.

Keywords: rights of the elderly; problems of the elderly; social inclusion of seniors; discrimination, isolation, social indifference.

Résumé

Cet article a identifié les points de vue des seniors sur leurs droits, qui, dans cette période difficile de la vie, continuent à faire face à leurs problèmes et à leurs besoins de manière individuelle. L'insuffisance de l'information destinée aux retraités accentue les manifestations de discrimination, d'isolement et d'indifférence à l'égard de ce groupe de population. Malgré le fait que la Moldavie dispose d'un riche programme d'actes normatifs qui devraient fonctionner dans notre société en faveur des personnes âgées, dans les institutions sociales, médicales, économiques, etc. Afin de réduire les tensions et les inquiétudes quotidiennes des personnes âgées, il est nécessaire de créer des institutions (à tous les niveaux) qui apporteraient soutien, protection et droits aux personnes âgées, devenant ainsi la solution clé à leurs problèmes.

Mots-clés: droits des personnes âgées; problèmes des personnes âgées; inclusion sociale des personnes âgées; discrimination; isolement; indifférence sociale.

Rezumat

Acest articol a permis identificarea opiniilor cetățenilor vârstnici cu privire la drepturile lor, care în această perioadă a vieții grea continuă să se confrunte individual cu problemele și nevoile lor. Informarea slabă a pensionarilor, accentuează manifestarea discriminării, izolării și indiferenței față de acest grup de populație. Cu toate că R. Moldova are o agendă bogată de acte normative care trebuie să funcționeze în societatea noastră în favoarea cetățenilor vârstnici, în instituțiile sociale, medicale, economice etc., continuă producerea

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proceselor de segregare a vârstelor, lucru resimțit de către seniorii intervievați. Pentru a reduce din tensiunile și grijile cotidiene ale vârstnicilor sunt necesare crearea unor instituții (la toate nivelele) care ar oferi susținere, protecție și asigurare cu drepturi ale cetățenilor vârstnici, devenind soluția cheie ale problemelor lor.

Cuvinte-cheie: drepturi ale persoanelor în vârstă; problemele vârstnicilor; incluziunea socială a seniorilor; discriminare, izolare, indiferență socială.

1. Introduction

The respect, esteem and accepting attitude that has always existed towards older people has disappeared and in today's times, they have become a burden on society. Old age has come to be associated with illness, helplessness, lack of judgment, irritability, and dependence on others (Muntean & Sagebiel, 2007). If in the past the elderly were respected and appreciated because of their social prestige, experience and wisdom, today they are insulted and ignored, which accentuates the violation of their rights.

Around the world, large numbers of older people face challenges such as discrimination, poverty and abuse, which severely limit their human rights and their contribution to society. The world has not reacted quickly: lack of political will and prioritization of the special rights of other disadvantaged groups has often been to the detriment of the case of older people. Although concerns about ageing populations are not new, they have traditionally been seen as problems requiring functional, piecemeal, and reactive solutions.

Population ageing is one of the most significant demographic transformations of the 21st century, as well as a major challenge for all societies, requiring the development of strategies and mechanisms that could protect the rights and freedoms of older people. Regardless of gender, older people enjoy the rights of human society in general because, many believe, „we are all equal and have the same rights,” said IIA woman_87 and others.

As older people have suffered traditional human rights law neglect, older people's rights are becoming an important part of the public policy agenda. National and international non-governmental bodies (NGOs), along with some national governments, have been lobbying for a reinforced human rights instrument to uphold the rights of older people. The issue has received increasing focus in both academic and professional environments.

In the same way, as in the case of childhood and disability, the notion of old age is a socio-constructed concept - meaning that it is not merely a natural process, rather it is a process that is given a particular signification by its social and historical context (Gergen, 2001).

The lack of information on the elderly population on legislative changes, socio-economic problems, their way of life and quality of life, safety, protection and insurance against certain risks, the diversity of social and medical services, etc., which could make them powerless in this area.

Under international law, in some situations, older citizens are treated in the same way as other age groups and have their rights often violated. According to

this view, the presence in our society and not only of socio-economic crises, which are often cyclical, drastically affects the existence of the most vulnerable citizens, such as the elderly. The crisis of unexpected price increases affecting the populations of the world's countries threatens the well-being of the elderly, who, although vulnerable, will demand the provision of quality psychological, social, medical, legal, etc. services that will be insufficient to protect their rights.

2. Methodology applied

To develop this topic, the interview method was applied to older people between May and June 2023, in the town of Strășeni 10 seniors were interviewed. The study aimed to identify the degree of knowledge of seniors with their rights; the institutions they can turn to, what solutions they individually undertake to defend their rights and the recommendations proposed to certain institutions: state, social institutions and population to change this attitude. The opinions obtained are integrated into this paper.

3. Legal protection of the rights of the older persons in the Republic of Moldova.

International and regional Human Rights are defined at the international or regional levels by International Conventions, and at the national levels by Constitution and Law, and are at the basis of the concerns of the institutions that establish these rights, rights that assure the principle of equality of all people, the ability to manifest themselves without restrictions, based on human dignity and liberty, since humans, by their nature, are free and dignified beings.

After Second World War, numerous regulations of a worldwide or even regional nature were promulgated, beginning in 1945 with the UN Chart and in 1948 with the Declaration of Human Rights - the first document with a worldwide character, stating the main human rights principles: Freedom, Equality, Universality and Inalienability, and express clauses on legal basis for the practice of human rights, the right to directly or through representatives participate in the elaboration of laws, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, etc.

Rights are for all humans and they are crucial for older people. Everyone has the right to benefit and enjoy their human rights without any kind of discrimination, including based on age. Several rights and liberties are especially important for older people, among them rights to:

- an adequate living standard, which includes having access to food, clothes and housing;
- the highest standard of physical and mental health;
- to work conditions and equitable conditions of work;
- to work safely and without violence;
- not to be treated in a cruel, inhuman or degrading manner;
- confidentiality;

- family care (Inter-American Convention on the Rights of Older Persons).

In the human rights view, age is not just a figure, but a „social construction” built on habits, social practices and perceptions of the social role a person has in his or her society. The particular weaknesses of ageing people may be a result of their physical and mental health conditions, but can also arise from the barriers faced by society's perception and the interaction of the individual with the surrounding environment.

According to international standards, all policies must take into account the changes that take place in a person's situation throughout their life. They should be designed to facilitate participation in the development of society and to counter social exclusion as a result of reduced functional capacity due to factors related to ageing and disability (Regional Implementation Strategy for The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002).

To implement these provisions, in the context of international commitments, the Republic of Moldova has adopted a package of policies addressing ageing issues.

The rights of the elderly and the provision of their social protection are stipulated in several national documents and legislative acts. Thus, Article 16 Equality of the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova, adopted on 29 July 1994, clearly stipulates: that individual respect and protection is a fundamental responsibility of the state: all citizens of the Republic of Moldova have equality rights under the law and before the public authorities, no matter race, nationality, ethnical origin, language, religion, gender, political belonging, social status or origin (the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova).

The country's fundamental document proclaims the constitutional protection of all citizens, including the elderly.

Another important document for ensuring social protection for the people is the Labor Code of the Republic of Moldova, which in Articles 54-55 ensures the work activity of citizens by concluding individual employment contracts for different periods, from 5 years to temporary work of up to 2 months, which is a real opportunity for older people to work on the labour market even after reaching retirement age. Taking note of the adjustments made to the Labor Code recently, which have been quite controversial, we recommend analyzing these provisions in terms of their impact on older people in concrete contexts.

Also, experienced seniors who have performed tasks in specific areas of activity may, with the agreement of the institutions, temporarily replace persons seconded for service purposes or those who have gone abroad.

At the same time, Contravention Code of the Republic of Moldova no.218 dated 24.10.2008 in article 54 *Violation of equality in employment* and art. 56 *Violation of employment legislation The Law on Employment and Social Protection of Jobseekers* provides for several sanctions for the violations allowed (Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova).

Social policies on ageing deserve a closer and special examination, seen from a broader perspective of life and society as a whole, and the growing process

of global ageing needs to be integrated into development strategies. In this respect, concrete efforts are needed to ensure a fair and comprehensive approach to integration policies, to integrate ageing into economic and social development strategies (Girleanu-Şoitu, 2006).

Starting from the principle that older people are a valuable human resource, the Millennium International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) recommends states parties to adopt national policies and strategies aimed at ensuring the participation of older people in the economic, social and cultural development of their countries, thereby promoting a society for all ages. This plan proposes objectives and strategies for action aimed at changes in attitudes, policies and practices at both micro and macro levels in all sectors: economic, political, and social (Regional Implementation Strategy for The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002).

By Law no. 484 of 28 September 2001 (in force since 01.01.2002), the Republic of Moldova also acceded to the Revised European Social Charter (partially ratified) which became an instrument for ensuring social cohesion and recognition of fundamental democratic principles governing the obligation of Member States to ensure access of citizens, including the elderly, to social rights: the right to protection against poverty and social exclusion, the right to health protection, social and medical security, the right to benefit from social services (LAW no. 484 dated 28.09.2001 on the partial ratification of European Social Charter revised).

Based on the roadmap, Moldova aims to help identify concrete actions relevant to the economic, social, cultural and political specificities of the country concerned, to contribute to the country in fulfilling these internationally agreed commitments following the signing and accession of the country to MIPAA, which will promote the physical and intellectual potential of the elderly (Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in the Republic of Moldova).

Although the theoretical interpretation is reflected in a package of legal acts, however, in the practical conception, seniors feel quite insecure and discriminated against in all the institutions they approach, the results of the pilot research are presented below.

4. Research results

Following an interview survey with 10 elderly people from the town of Străşeni, we can mention, that several of them do not know what rights they have and in fact, what they are. Of the interviewed seniors, only 4 found it difficult to name these rights, the reason being the low information about them for the elderly population.

Although they mentioned a general version that they have rights like other people, it was very difficult for them to mention what they are, which created confusion on this topic. The other 6 elderly referred to IIA women_87 years old „*Every man has rights, the right to pension, to rest, to social protection*”. As IIA men_72 years old specified; IIA women_84 years old „*everyone has them, but I don't even know what they are*”, and IIA men_69 years old „*human rights as for everyone,*

the right to retirement, to create the right conditions to make our life easier". Following the interview, the elderly specified a diversity of opinions, including *„the right to sing, to play, to vote, to all that is good*". This question provoked a reaction from some seniors, which made them remember (life in the past), when society was different, when there was respect for parents, people and elders when education was free, when people worked hard, but life was easier and there was no discrimination, isolation and age segregation. As an IIA women_80 years old said *„Now, I don't have rights, they are not respected at all in society: I didn't even think about this topic once there was: the right to rest, to work, to social security, and at the moment, I don't have any rights, because nobody looks at us because we are old and nobody notices us*". The inability to provide an answer resulted in pauses, also found in the answer IIA women_77 years old *„yes-or no, I have some like the others, but I don't know what they are*". The opinions of the subjects affirm the lack of knowledge of these rights, by the interviewed seniors.

The lack of information about the rights of older people creates fear and insecurity for them. The low level of knowledge of older people about their rights reduces their possibility of achieving a satisfactory and decent life in the community in which they live. Economic and financial deprivation, as well as problems relating to family members, make them even more vulnerable.

Of the 10 elderly interviewed only 3 (1 of whom works occasionally) continue to work, the jobs are very poorly paid because they are old and do not know which institutions they could turn to for justice.

Regarding the compliance of these rights, we obtained a diversity of opinions, because not all interviewees were able to give a clear answer to this question, which for some of them became quite complicated. Therefore, several of the interviewed seniors mentioned the following IIA men_69 years old; IIA women_77 years old; IIA men_72 years old: *„Our rights in our society, they seem to be respected and seem not (being about 50 to 50), about half are respected and half are not*", and IIA women_87 years old *„we cannot fulfil them, we have to walk after them, our elders have many difficulties in life, there are many problems and because of the hard living conditions, even the rights cannot be fulfilled*". The major problems of the elderly at the moment, namely the rising prices of communal services and all products, and the lack of state support for family members, make their lives very expensive and difficult.

The biggest challenge continues to be the provision of wood and coal for the cold season. In this area, all interviewees were unanimous in their response, saying: *„They have given us coal from the association, for which we thank them, but they have not yet given us wood*". The prices for communal services further impoverish the elderly, who, although powerless, are trying to survive in these hard times of life.

The problem of communal services becomes the hardest question to overcome *„Even if we pay all the communal services with our small pensions, we won't even have anything to eat after that*" said IIA women_77 years old; IIA men_72 years old; IIA women_87 years old and others. An IIA women_84 years

old said „If we have to say about the communal services we pay for, for the light I got 25 €, for gas 10 €, life is very expensive, the tax on the house has no exemption for pensioners”, IIA women_77 years old „life is very hard, everything is expensive, but I won't even say about light, I heat with gas, I don't know who will help us”.

At the same time, an IIA man, 72 years old said „I'm not afraid of work, I'm still working, but I'm worried about others, what to do, how to get out of winter. I have worked in many places and some people call me to work, but I can't, I work in shifts”. The elderly have a hard enough lot to deal with in these extremely difficult times of the 21st century.

This is due to the lack of attention from society, and the institutions to which the elderly have access, which allows for unsatisfactory answers. Discrimination, ignorance and indifference are processes that accentuate discomfort for the elderly population, making them more vulnerable in our society. Thus, the accentuation of these problems was mentioned by all interviewees, namely IIA men_69 years old said „Children are not educated, nor do they respect us, and so they speak ugly words, but neither do they take care of their parents, who are younger than me. But what about the old people who live far away, nobody goes to them anymore, although they may have grandchildren living in a garden”. The generation problem was the most complicated enough to solve. Thus, different proposals were offered to re-educate the younger generations, which will at least bring some security from the younger people towards the older ones.

The rights that have been violated for practically all elderly people in the last 12 months were specified by the interviewees, IIA men_71 years old: „that my right to salary has been violated, I get paid less, because I am old”, IIA men_70 years old: „that if I am in a hurry, in transport I can stand up”; IIA women_77 years old: „insecurity in our society comes from the family and if it is not there is no one to give it to them”, „at the hospital I was not given the necessary attention” said IIA men_71 years, and IIA women_70 years old, specified that „at the medical point the nurse always tells us „to look in the passport”.

Elderly people who continue to work are faced with several rights being violated, namely, IIA men_75 years old mentioned: „I went to the DOFM in our town, I got 5 addresses and I went to them and only when they saw me that I am old, they said with not for me this thing”. At the same time, IIA women, 78 years old, said „I have a lot of rights, but if we are old no one even wants to know us, no one is interested in our situation, they only remember us at elections”.

The shortcomings that the whole of the older society has „If it wasn't for our center, I almost died on the road. We are very helplessly destitute and it is very hard for us when we end up with certain problems in social institutions. When I was young, I thought I was going to retire, and rest. But when I reached retirement, and I saw what pension I got and how much life costs, I worked even after retirement for another 13 years”, specified IIA women_78 years old.

The reasons for non-compliance are various, namely - changing values that are not respected because society does not want to accept these rights. Older people interviewed mentioned that society treats them with contempt, that they are mean

to society, and that they only expect benefits, although they could work. But with the advent of social change, there have been changes in the status of senior citizens, which have resulted in the manifestation of their dependent status on social services, giving them the title of „consumers of social services”, which is reflected in developing societies. Hence, a bad and contemptuous attitude towards the elderly develops, which is very hard for the whole population of Moldova.

Other elderly people, who have gone through many problems have specified the same institutions they turn to secure certain rights: To labour protection - to ensure the right to work; to medical institutions - to provide them with medical services; to the first level LPA, which is obliged to hear the problems of the elderly and provide them with support in certain increased situations of disadvantage; to the police stations - which must provide them with protection and safety in their own homes; to non-commercial organizations - which would provide them with support, protection and safety; to the Social Welfare Department/DASPF - to be able to benefit from certain benefits, aid, sanatorium leaves; to the CNAS/ CTAS - to be insured with a pension, but also with balneal-sanatorium treatment leaves (for certain categories of pensioners); to the DOFM/ANOFM - to take up employment, etc.

From interviewing older people: IIA women_87 years old, „*the town hall, social assistance and some organizations that older people go to help the elderly so that they are not alone*”.

But in addition to these institutions, others can also be included „*at the town hall, at organizations that help us to overcome life's difficulties. Every year they give us wood and coal (which are provided by foreigners from the Netherlands), now we have received coal for the winter, but wood not yet. But we got wood from the town hall, a bit expensive with everything brought it cost 270€ (6m3)*” – IIA women_78 years old. Some elderly people still don't have wood at home and they are fragile in terms of getting sick because they live in the cold and there is no one to solve their problem.

5. Conclusions

The subject of the rights of older people continues to be one of the most complicated for this segment of the population, who have worked hard enough in their lives and although they have contributed to the development of today's society, they are faced with several problems, which at the moment they cannot cope with individually and require help from the community in which they live. The population in the neighbourhood is not so open to providing help for the helpless, sick and sometimes even hungry elderly and the first level LPA be able to provide them with a minimum package of services and support to make it easier for them to overcome the problem they face. They need our common support by creating institutions they can turn to at any time to ensure justice for them. The care and support that we can provide would reduce the daily stresses and worries of the elderly, who live a complicated life. Thus, to ensure a safe and prosperous

future for older people, Moldova needs to focus its actions on developing and promoting healthy and active ageing and ensuring its involvement.

As **recommendations** by the seniors interviewed, the following were proposed:

- creating a special attention of society towards the elderly;
- the promotion of institutions at all levels (local councils for the elderly), which would deal with their problems and offer them solutions to overcome certain problems;
- providing the elderly with certain transport facilities (Chisinau, but also for the rest of the country's elderly);
- increasing pensions, which are very low and cannot ensure a satisfactory life;
- the social inclusion in employment of elderly people who can work, benefiting from incentive wages, etc.

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SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Tatiana CERNOMORIT¹

Abstract

The article analyses education and inclusive education from a human rights and human rights-based approach perspective. The analysis of the international legal framework in the field of human rights highlights the interrelatedness of international treaties, and that education was recognized as a human right attributed without discrimination for all, including for children with disabilities, 75 years ago when the „Universal Declaration for Human Rights” was adopted. The Declaration highlights the equality in rights for all persons, including persons with disabilities. Education is a right and not a privilege, thus the state must respect, protect and fulfilment of the right to education in a mainstream and inclusive environment. The article is developed by the author based on the analysis of international legal frameworks in the field.

Keywords: children with disabilities, right to education, human rights, social inclusion, inclusive education, international legal framework.

Résumé

L'article analyse l'éducation et l'éducation inclusive du point de vue des droits de l'homme et de l'approche fondée sur les droits de l'homme. L'analyse du cadre international des droits de l'homme met en évidence l'interdépendance des traités internationaux et le fait que l'éducation a été reconnue comme un droit de l'homme attribué sans discrimination à tous, y compris aux enfants handicapés, il y a 75 ans, lors de l'adoption de la „Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme”. La Déclaration souligne l'égalité des droits pour toutes les personnes, y compris les personnes handicapées. L'éducation est un droit et non un privilège, et l'État a donc l'obligation de respecter, de protéger et de mettre en œuvre le droit à l'éducation dans un environnement ordinaire et inclusif. L'article est basé sur l'analyse de l'auteur du cadre juridique international dans ce domaine.

Mots-clés : enfants handicapés, droit à l'éducation, droits de l'homme, inclusion sociale, éducation inclusive, cadre juridique international.

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Rezumat

Articolul analizează educația și educația incluzivă din perspectiva drepturilor omului și a abordării bazate pe drepturile omului. Analiza cadrului internațional al drepturilor omului evidențiază interdependența dintre tratatele internaționale și faptul că educația a fost recunoscută ca un drept al omului atribuit fără discriminare pentru toți, inclusiv pentru copiii cu dizabilități, în urmă cu 75 de ani, când a fost adoptată „Declarația Universală a Drepturilor Omului”. Declarația subliniază egalitatea în drepturi pentru toate persoanele, inclusiv pentru persoanele cu dizabilități. Educația, este un drept și nu un privilegiu, astfel că statul are obligația de a respecta, proteja și asigura dreptul la educație într-un mediu general și incluziv. Articolul este elaborat de autoare pe baza analizei cadrului juridic internațional în domeniul vizat.

Cuvinte cheie: copii cu dizabilități, dreptul la educație, drepturile omului, incluziune socială, educație incluzivă, cadrul legal internațional.

1. Introduction

Education is not a privilege, it is a human right, that was first recognized 75 years ago when the „Universal Declaration for Human Rights” (UDHR) „was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948” (United Nations, „History of Declaration”). Article 26 of the UDHR (1946) mentions, that „everyone has the right to education” and that „education should be directed to the full development of the human personality and the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms”. The UDHR served as the basis for the series of international human rights treaties. The first binding document that prescribed the right to education as a legal obligation of the state was the „International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights” (ICESCR, 1966), which recognized that: „everyone has the right to education directed towards the full development of the human personality and the sense of dignity and shall strengthen the respect for human rights” (ICESCR, 1966, article 13).

The way of organizing education should create the necessary conditions and opportunities to empower all people, including the most marginalized, such as persons with disabilities, for „full and effective participation” (CRPD, 2018, p. 1) in decisions that affect their lives, in promoting understanding, acceptance and reducing social distance among different groups. Participation is one of the underpinning „principles of the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA)” (ENNHRI, Human Rights Based Approach) and it is the means to ensure that the decisions respond to the needs of affected groups. From the perspective of human rights and HRBA, the states are the duty bearers, thus they have three human rights obligations. As presented by the „Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights” (OHCHR), „the obligation is of three kinds: to respect, to protect and to fulfil human rights” (OHCHR, 2006, p. 2), these obligations refer to the right to education as well. Education as a human right means that „education is legally guaranteed for all without any discrimination” (The Right to Education Initiative), by ethnicity, disability, sex, socio-economic status, and other criteria, based on equity. Thus, all children, including children with disabilities as rights holders, are entitled to exercise their right to education.

2. Inclusive education of children with disabilities through the perspective of international human rights standards

The main international documents, including a legal framework that testify the right to education to education in a mainstream and inclusive environment for children with disabilities, are the ICESCR, 1966, „UN Convention on the Rights of the Child” (UN CRC, 1989), the „World Declaration on Education for All” (1990), the „Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities” (United Nations, 1993), the „Salamanca statement and framework for action” (The Right to Education, 1994), and the „UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (UN CRPD, 2006).

Through the UN CRPD (2006), inclusive education was recognised by the global community as the means for realizing the right to „education on an equal basis with others” (UNESCO, 2015, p. 5). Still, as mentioned by Waddington and Toepke (2014, p. 14): „inclusive education was not always the international baseline goal for education”. The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) defined inclusive education as: „a fundamental human right of all learners” and „a principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and autonomy, and acknowledges individuals’ requirements and their ability to effectively be included in and contribute to society” (CRPD, 2016, p. 4), by this it also highlighted that human rights are interrelated and by exercising their right to education, children with disabilities can get prepared for exercising their right to participation in the decision-making process and ultimately to contribute to the development of the society.

Taking into consideration that „all human rights are indivisible and interrelated” (OHCHR, 2006, p. 2), the right to education is presented by the „Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural” (CESCR) as a „means of realizing other human rights” (CESCR, 1999, p. 1). For example, by exercising their right to education, including professional education, persons with disabilities can get professional skills and knowledge, thus they can exercise their right to work, as well as their right to adequate standard of living. At the same time, the CRPD defined inclusive education as „the primary means of achieving inclusive societies” (CRPD, 2016, p. 3). For the right to inclusive education to be achieved, „a process of continuing and proactive commitment to eliminating barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate and effectively include all students” (CRPD, 2016, p. 3) is required. This would mean that the barriers (structural, infrastructural, attitudinal) that impede the right to education should be identified and further addressed. As the HRBA requires the participation of rights holders in the decision-making process, children with disabilities, their caregivers, as well as their representative organizations should be involved in the identification of those barriers, as well as in the establishment of potential solutions for overcoming those. Thus, the ICESCR (art. 13), the UN CRC (art. 23 and 28) and the UN CRPD (art. 24), as well as the recommendations from the monitoring bodies of these treaties establish the obligations of the states to take measures to implement inclusive education.

The UN CRC, which was ratified by 196 countries (OHCHR, Interactive dashboard), including by the Republic of Moldova in 1990, protects the rights of children, including children with disabilities, with a separate article on them. Article 28 regulates the right to education of all learners, while article 29a foresees that: education should be oriented on „developing the child’s potential, talents and abilities to their fullest potential”, „developing the respect for human rights”, and „preparing the child for life in a society based on understanding and tolerance” (CRC, 1999, art. 29). All the articles and rights foreseen in the Convention should be read in the conjunction with the article 2 that foresees that every right has to be „ensured without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (UN CRC, 1999, art. 2). Moreover, the article 23, obliges the State Parties, including Republic of Moldova, to enable children with disabilities to access their human rights. Thus, with regards to the education of children with disabilities, the Convention highlights two aspects – on the one hand, the right of all children, including children with disabilities to education, that contributes to their development and, on the other hand, the role of education in building understanding and tolerance. The educational institutions are seen as a proper environment for exercising the right to education, but also to contribute to building tolerance and mutual acceptance.

As the right to education is a social right, the principle of „progressive realization” is applied. The CRPD also refers to the progressive realization of inclusive education, by adopting progressive measures, so that children with disabilities access and complete education. A specific accent is pointed out by the Committee with regards to girls and women with disabilities to access all levels of education (including technical, vocational, university and lifelong learning) that is affordable (CRPD, 2016 p. 7). What does progressive realization mean? According to article 2, para 1 of the ICESCR (1966), ratified by the Republic of Moldova in 1998, social rights, along with cultural and economic ones cannot be always realized immediately. According to the CESCR, the „concept of progressive realization constitutes a recognition of the fact that full realization of all economic, social and cultural rights will generally not be able to be achieved in a short period” (CESCR, 2007, page 3). Due to financial implications for the realization of certain rights, but also from the perspective of economic development and potential financial resource constraints that a country can face, this category of rights can be realized progressively, while the state must prove progress. As it is foreseen in Article 13 of the Covenant, the state has the „obligation to progressively realize certain aspects of the right to education” (CESCR, 1999, p. 3), such as free „secondary and higher education, in particular by the progressive introduction of free education” (ICESCR, 1966, articles 13 c and b). However, there are aspects of immediate realization, such as that discrimination in education must be prohibited and ensure primary free and compulsory education for all (ICESCR, 1966, article 13). Still, as the CESCR stated, the principle of „progressive realization” does not

prejudice those obligations of the state that are of immediate implementation and ensure the minimum essential level of each right (CESCR, 1990, p. 30). In the context of article 13 of the ICESCR one of the minimum essentials that should be achieved is the obligation of the state to ensure the right of access on an equality and non-discriminatory basis to public educational institutions (CESCR, 1999, p. 15).

Thus, while some flexibility is accepted, still the progressive realization does not mean that the States can ignore the implementation of rights, on the contrary, they have the „continuing obligation to move as expeditiously and effectively as possible towards the full realization of the right to education” (CESCR, 1999, p. 12). The progressive realization requires State Parties to undertake steps „to the maximum of available resources, to achieve progressively the full realization of the rights recognized... by all appropriate means, including particularly the adoption of legislative measures” (ICESCR, 1966, art. 2.1).

The CESCR described the aspects that must be taken into consideration in the process of determining whether a State „has taken steps to the maximum available resources” (CESCR, 2007, p. 3). Based on CESCR guidance it can be established what are the aspects that can be used in the evaluation if the state has used its maximum available resources for the right to education/inclusive education to be realized:

- Where are the taken measures oriented towards the fulfilment of the specific right?
- In deciding the allocation of public funds, did the state exercise its discretion in a non-discriminatory manner, and by this to avoid limiting the access to quality inclusive education, but also to the necessary support services?
- Did the state follow the international standards in the file of human rights when deciding the sectors to allocate/not allocate the available resources?
- In taking those steps, did the state consider the vulnerability and the needs of the marginalized groups? Were the needs of the most vulnerable groups prioritized?

3. Interrelated elements of the right to education of children with disabilities

The CESCR defined the interrelated elements of education, based on which education should be available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable. Following these interrelated elements, but also the provisions of the UN CRPD, the CRPD explained the „four interrelated features of the right to education” (CRPD, 2016, p. 6), from the perspective of inclusive education. Thus, based on the Committee (CRPD, 2016) inclusive education should be:

- **Available** - the state must ensure that the „educational institutions and programs” are: „available in sufficient quantity and quality” (CRPD, 2016, p. 6) and have places for pupils with disabilities „at all levels, including preschool, primary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational training

and lifelong learning” (CRPD, 2016, p. 2). This refers to public and private educational institutions and programs.

● **Accessible** – in defining this element, the Committee followed the article 9 of the UN CRPD on accessibility – thus, the schools and educational programmes must respect accessibility requirements. When referring to accessibility in education, the CRPD referred to the whole system - its infrastructure, the curriculum, the educational and teaching materials, and methods, but also the evaluation process. Another important element is the accessibility of support services that facilitate the process of inclusive education (CRPD, 2016, p. 7). From the infrastructural point of view, the CRPD referred to all spaces of the educational institutions, including: „water and sanitation facilities (including hygiene and toilet facilities), school cafeterias and recreational spaces” (CRPD, 2016, p. 7). Another important element is the school transportation that should follow the accessibility requirements, for example in the case of children with physical disabilities. From the perspective of educational materials, the Committee highlighted the duty of the state to develop resources and materials in different formats, such as Braille, video materials with sign language interpretation, easy to read, and easy to understand. Also, another important aspect is that there should developed „standards and guidelines for the conversion of printed material into accessible formats and languages and making accessibility a central aspect of education-related procurement” (CRPD, 2016, p. 7). Another element of accessibility is that education is affordable and does not imply additional costs for children with disabilities and their families.

● **Acceptable** – the state should consider the needs and opinions of persons with disabilities in the process of designing and implementing services and goods for education so that those are acceptable. The acceptability element refers also to the quality. Thus, the state should implement positive measures so that „education provided is of good quality for all” (CRPD, 2016, p. 7, citing CESCR 1999). An inclusive approach to education contributes to ensuring quality education.

● **Adaptable** – the Committee encourages the adoption of „the universal learning design” (CRPD, 2016, p. 7). As each student has its unique learning manner, the universal design in education responds to this, as it allows teachers and other educational staff to adapt the educational environment and instructions that respond to the individual needs of pupils, including children with disabilities. Application of universal design in education involves „developing flexible ways to learn, creating and engaging classroom environment”; as well as „empowering teachers to think differently about their teaching; and focusing on educational outcomes for all, including persons with disabilities” (CRPD, 2016, p. 8). The Committee also refers to curricula, that should be adapted to the individual

requirements of every student, while the assessment should be also flexible to facilitate the evaluation of the individual progress of the learner.

The UN CRPD (2016) is the main UN Treaty that has explicit legally binding provisions about inclusive education as a human right and it also protects specifically the rights of children with disabilities. The document requires the States parties „to take all necessary measures to ensure that children with disabilities can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children” (UN CRPD, 2006, article 7 paragraph 1) thus moving from charity or medical approach to HRBA to disability. Children with disabilities are legally empowered and „have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them” (UN CRPD, 2006, article 7, paragraph 3) and the state must give due weight to their views „by their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children” (UN CRPD, article 7, paragraph 3). Also, the accessibility principle should be applied to the participation as well, so that all the necessary adaptations needed to facilitate the expression of view by them are ensured.

As education/inclusive education is a human right, the „states must respect, protect and fulfil” (Right to Education, 2018, p. 2) the right to inclusive education. This is recognized also by the CESCR and the CRPD. To respect the right to education, the state has „to avoid any measures that limit or prevent the exercise of the right” (CESCR, 1999, p. 14), for example, to avoid adopting legislation that through its provision excludes children with disabilities from mainstream education. Through the obligation to protect, it has to undertake the necessary measures that prevent third parties (ex. individuals, and private institutions) from restricting the exercise of the right. For example: „parents refusing to send girls with disabilities to school, or private institutions refusing to enrol persons with disabilities based on their impairment” (CRPD, 2016, p. 11). Through the „obligation to fulfil the state must conduct the necessary positive actions that facilitate the enjoyment of the right” (United Nations, „The Foundation of International Human Rights Law”). This includes the „positive measures” to empower and assist individuals and communities in the exercise and full realization of human rights” (Monitoring Platform), as well as the adoption of „legislative, administrative, budgetary, juridical, promotional and other measures” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2013, p. 9) that facilitate the realization of human rights. A specific example provided by the CRPD, with regards to obligation to fulfil, would be: „ensuring that educational institutions are accessible and that education systems are adapted appropriately with resources and services” (CRPD, 2016, p. 11).

4. Conclusion

The three-fold obligations in the field of human rights of the state and the provisions of the international legal framework, are the basis for ensuring quality education in an inclusive environment for children with disabilities and could be further used to monitor the availability, acceptability, adaptability, and accessibility of inclusive education for children with disabilities.

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

Cristina COROBAN¹

Abstract

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

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

Résumé

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

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

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

Rezumat

Articolul prezintă analiza unor rezultate privind cercetarea situației copiilor din centrele de plasament în baza studiului realizat de Asociația PRODOCS. Unii copii aflați în situații de risc cresc în 26 de centre de plasament din Republica Moldova. Profilul beneficiarilor centrelor de plasament îl constituie copii cu dizabilități severe, copii cu traume, copii cu comportament dificil, cu vârsta cuprinsă între patru și optsprezece ani. Separarea copilului de familia de origine, chiar dacă această nu este funcțională declanșează un șir de consecințe negative pe plan emoțional, cognitiv, social și fizic. Cele mai relevante probleme cu care se confruntă copiii din centrele de plasament sunt: lipsa afecțiunii părintești, dificultăți de învățare, deprinderi de viață insuficient dezvoltate, orientare vocațională limitată, subiecți ai discriminării și marginalizării, stimă de sine scăzută. Situațiile copiilor din 11 centre de plasament a fost analizată și studiată prin aplicarea metodelor de cercetare cantitativă și calitativă. Rezultatele cercetărilor arată faptul că abilitățile de comunicare, negociere și soluționarea de probleme le lipsesc copiilor, manifestându-se prin crize de furie, apatie sau pasivitate, agresivitate și atitudini disprețuitoare. Una din concluzii este că dificultățile de învățare ale copiilor nu sunt rezultatul întârzierii mintale sau deficiențelor senzoriale, ci sunt rezultatul factorilor de mediu și culturali.

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

2. Profile of children in placement centres

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

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

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

- *children effectively deprived of parental/sole parental care* in situations determined by their justified stay in another part of the country or abroad for a period of more than 2 consecutive months,
- *children taken away from his or her parents* because of imminent danger to his or her life or health,

- *children who have been granted the status of a child temporarily left without parental care* or a child left without parental care,
- *abandoned children*, a children identified as being without parents or other legal guardian where the identity of neither the child nor his/her parents can be established.

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

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

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

- a) children are subjected to violence.
- b) children are neglected.
- c) children are involved in begging, prostitution.
- d) children are deprived of parental care and supervision due to their absence from home for unknown reasons.
- e) the children's parents are deceased.
- f) the children are living on the street, have run away or have been driven away from home.
- (g) the parents of the children refuse to exercise their parental obligations relating to the upbringing and care of the child.
- h) the children have been abandoned by their parents.
- (i) one of the child's parents is the subject of a legal guardianship measure (provisional guardianship, curatorship, or guardianship)
- j) the children are victims of an act of crime.

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

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

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

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

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

The British psychologist Bowlby (1951) states that everything that happens to the person in childhood and adolescence is closely linked to their subsequent development and evolution, with the parent-child relationship being a keystone that will mark the child's entire life. The fundamental emotional connection formed in the parent-child relationship is the cornerstone of the future adult's life and the best predictor of future skills and abilities. At the same time, Bowlby (1997) considers that there are 4 main characteristics of attachment:

- maintaining physical proximity in the relationship (the desire to be close to the people to whom we are attached).
- safety (returning to a particular person out of comfort or safety, so that we do not face fear or threat).
- a different kind of safety (the person we are attached to is a source of safety, allowing us to explore our environment).
- separation stress (the anxiety that arises in the absence of the person to whom we are attached).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Research premise

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

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

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

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

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

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

- Centre for Childhood, Adolescence and Family, Chişinău;

- Temporary placement Centre, Chişinău;

- Placement centre for children separated from their parents „Casa Gavroche”;

- Centre for Rehabilitation and Social Integration from Anenii Noi;

- Multifunctional Centre for Social Assistance „Nufărul Alb”, Glinjeni village, Făleşti district;

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

- Placement center „Brânduşa”, Hincesti town;

- Specialized Assistance and Temporary Placement Centre „Încredere”, Ştefan Vodă town;

- Placement centre, „Aproape de Tine” Teleneşti town;

- Centre for children separated from their parents „Căldura Casei”, Drochia town;

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

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

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

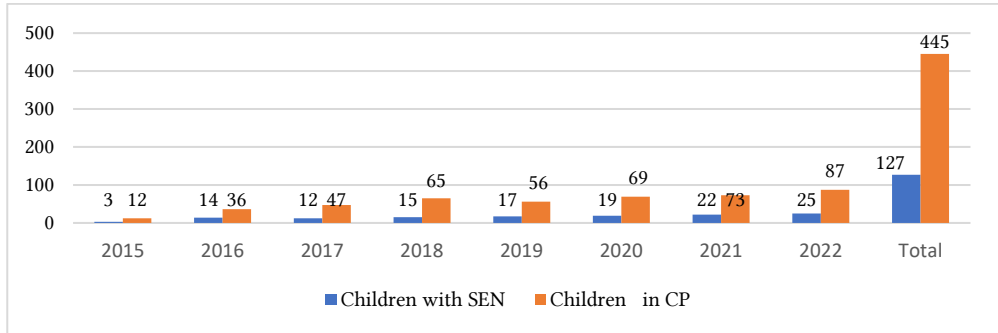
carried out with 10–17-year-old children in the named centres, for which we obtained the consent of the children's legal representatives. In the opinion of the children who participated in the in-depth interviews, the lack of parental affection generates the following states and statements:

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

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

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

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



Source: Figure developed by the author as part of the research conducted by PRODOCS, 2015-2020.

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

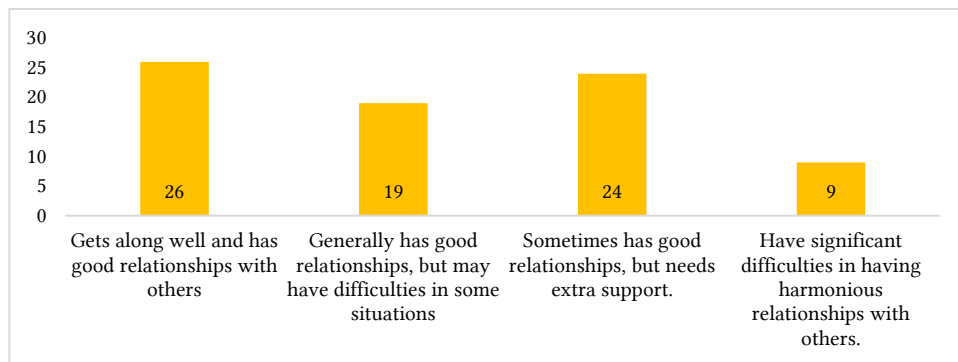
These relationships induce in the child certain tensions and confusion that can degenerate into conflicts, to remedy these problems children often need personal development as an alternative education program (Golu & Ionita, 2009). In the interviews, children mentioned that they experience problems related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

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

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

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

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



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

Figure 2. Relationships among children from placement centres

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

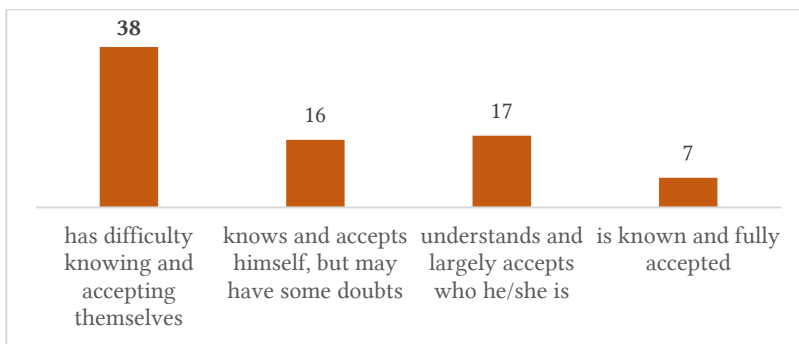
The professional orientation of children from placement centres is done by the centre staff on the basis of the children's academic achievements and potential, being mostly lacking motivation to learn and guided by the family model of not working. In this regard, there is a considerable effort to get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

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

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

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

With reference to the ability of self-knowledge and self-acceptance it was found that half of the respondents, 38 children have difficulties in accepting and knowing themselves, 17 understand and accept to a large extent who they are, 16 know and accept themselves but may have some doubts and only 7 children know and accept themselves fully.



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

Figure 3. Self-knowledge and self-acceptance skills

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

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

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

Conclusions

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

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THE EFFECTS OF PATERNITY LEAVE AND LONG-TERM TRENDS: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Inga CHISTRUGA-SÎNCHEVICI¹

Abstract

The content of the article reflects some results of the sociological study „Implementation of paternity leave in the Republic of Moldova” conducted by the author in 2022. Paternity leave is an important tool that allows for to enhancement of the role of father and husband/partner. Being on paternity leave generated for all fathers participating in the study a positive impact for him, the newborn, the wife and other family members. Although the Moldovan authorities provide suitable conditions for accessing paternity leave, the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave is low. Simply offering paternity leave is not enough, as fathers face many social, professional, financial and cultural difficulties in accessing it. The data from interviews with fathers who took paternity leave and fathers who did not take paternity leave showed that their profiles differed according to socio-demographic characteristics, work situation, level of pay, relationship with the wife and her *professional* status. The article concludes with recommendations to increase the take-up of paternity leave and to increase the number of fathers who are with their mothers and newborn babies after birth to support them and enjoy the full exercise of their role as fathers.

Keywords: paternity leave, paternity allowance, family, child, employer, family policy.

Résumé

Le contenu de l'article reflète certains résultats de l'étude sociologique „Mise en œuvre du congé de paternité en République de Moldavie” menée par l'auteur en 2022. Le congé de paternité est un outil important qui permet de renforcer le rôle du père et du mari/partenaire. Pour tous les pères ayant participé à l'étude, le fait de bénéficier d'un congé de paternité a eu un impact positif sur eux, sur le nouveau-né, sur la femme et sur les autres membres de la famille. Bien que les autorités moldaves offrent des conditions favorables à l'accès au congé de paternité, la proportion de pères qui prennent ce congé est faible. Il ne suffit pas d'offrir un congé de paternité, car les pères sont confrontés à de nombreuses difficultés sociales, professionnelles, financières et culturelles pour y accéder. Les données issues des entretiens avec les pères ayant pris un congé de paternité et les pères n'ayant pas pris de congé de paternité ont montré que leur profil différait en fonction des caractéristiques sociodémographiques, de la situation professionnelle, du niveau de rémunération, de la relation avec l'épouse et du statut professionnel de cette dernière.

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L'article se termine par des recommandations visant à augmenter le recours au congé de paternité et à accroître le nombre de pères présents auprès de leur mère et de leur nouveau-né après la naissance pour les soutenir et exercer pleinement leur rôle de père.

Mots-clés: congé de paternité, allocation de paternité, enfant, employeur, politique familiale.

Rezumat

Conținutul articolului reflectă unele rezultate din studiul sociologic „Implementarea concediului de paternitate în Republica Moldova” realizat de autor în anul 2022. Concediul de paternitate este un instrument important care permite valorificarea rolului de tată și soț/partener. Aflarea în concediu de paternitate a generat pentru toți tații participanți la studiu un impact pozitiv pentru el, pentru nou-născut, pentru soție și ceilalți membri ai familiei. Deși autoritățile din Republica Moldova oferă condiții potrivite pentru accesarea concediului de paternitate, ponderea taților care beneficiază de el este redusă. Simpla oferire a concediului nu este suficientă fiindcă tații în accesarea lui se confruntă cu o mulțime de bariere sociale, profesionale, financiare și culturale. Datele interviurilor realizate cu tații beneficiari de concediu de paternitate și tații care nu l-au utilizat au evidențiat că profilul lor diferă după caracteristicile socio-demografice, situația de la locul de muncă, nivelul de remunerare, relația cu soția și statutul ei profesional. Articolul finalizează cu recomandări pentru sporirea gradului de accesare a concediului de paternitate și creșterea numărului de tați care să se afle alături de mamă și nou-născut după naștere pentru a le oferi suport dar și pentru a se bucura de exercitarea pleneră a rolului de tată.

Cuvinte-cheie: concediu de paternitate, indemnizație de paternitate, copil, angajator, politică familială.

1. Introduction

In today's society of multiple responsibilities and commitments, achieving a balance between work and family life is proving to be a real challenge. Substantial changes in the market and the organization of family life create a context in which parents are finding it increasingly difficult to develop strategies to combine work and family life responsibilities. In this context, paternity leave is a tool that facilitates reconciling work and family life.

In most European countries, the legal framework regarding the introduction and regulation of paternity leaves was developed in the 90s of the last century. By the beginning of 2022, the majority of EU countries provided paternity leave, with the exceptions of Germany, Croatia, Slovakia, and Luxembourg (Table 1), even though it is predominantly non-mandatory. The duration of paternity leave in the EU varies from one week to 16 weeks. In most cases, the paternity allowance is 100% of the previous income.

Since last August, according to Directive 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019, regarding the balance between professional and personal life for parents and carers, the duration of paternity leave (at least 2 weeks) has been standardized at the level EU countries. The new provisions imposed by the directive state that paternity leave is to be taken on the occasion of the child's birth, without being conditioned by the period of work or

length of service, marital status, or family status of the employee. Regulations for granting this leave in flexible formulas (before or after the child's birth) should be possible, as well as the application of requirements for determining the amount of the allowance at a level that ensures at least the income lost by the father in the event of interrupting his activities due to health reasons, within the limits of a ceiling established in domestic law.

Table 1. Granting paternity leave in EU countries (2022-2023)

Country	2022		2023	
	Number of weeks.	Payment	Number of weeks.	Payment
Hungary	1 (non-mandatory)	100%	2	100%
Malta	1 (non-mandatory)	100%	2	100%
Netherland	1 (non-mandatory)	100%	7	100%
Romania	1 (non-mandatory)	80%	2	100%
Latvia	1,4 (non-mandatory)	100%	2	80%
Italy	2 (Mandatory)	78%	2	100%
Bulgaria	2 (non-mandatory)	72%	2	90%
Cyprus	2 (non-mandatory)	70%	2	72%
Czech Republic	2 (non-mandatory)	Variable	2	70%
Denmark	2 (non-mandatory)	100%.	2	Variable
Greece	2 (non-mandatory)	100%	2	100%
Ireland	2 (non-mandatory)	Weekly rate of €245	2	Flate rate
Poland	2 (non-mandatory)	100%	2	100%
Sweden	2 (non-mandatory)	90%	2	78%
Belgium	3 (non-mandatory)	Variable.	4	Variable
Austria	4 (non-mandatory)	Flat rate.	4	Flate rate
Estonia	4 (non-mandatory)	100%	4	100%
France	4 (non-mandatory)	100%	4	100%
Lituania	4 (non-mandatory)	78%	4	78%
Slovenia	4 (non-mandatory)	100%	4	100%
Portugal	5 (4 Mandatory and 1 non-mandatory)	100%	9 There is no maternity or paternity leave, only parental leave	100%
Finland	9 (non-mandatory)	Variable.	19 Paternity leave ceased to exist in its original form	Variable
Germany	0		2	
Croatia	0		2	100
Luxembourg	0		2	Variable

Country	2022		2023	
	Number of weeks.	Payment	Number of weeks.	Payment
Slovakia	0		2.	Flate rate
Spain	16 (5 mandatory and 11 non-mandatory)	100%	16	100%

Source: *Maternity and paternity leave in the EU* (Jurviste & Lecerf, 2022; Kern & Lecerf, 2023).

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/698892/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)698892_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/698892/EPRS_ATA(2022)698892_EN.pdf)

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA\(2023\)739346_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/739346/EPRS_ATA(2023)739346_EN.pdf)

In the family policy of the Republic of Moldova, paternity leave was introduced only at the end of 2016 (Decision No. 1245 approving the Regulation on the conditions for establishing, calculating and paying the paternity allowance). Currently, the duration of paternity leave in the Republic of Moldova is 14 days, which is granted in the first year of the child's life, but until September 2022 it was offered only in the first 56 days (Labor Code, 2003, Article 124¹ Paternity Leave). This change is positive in that it provides more flexibility for fathers who face time and work constraints. The negative aspect of this change refers to the reduction in the number of fathers who will use this leave in the period immediately following the birth which is the most demanding and stressful for the mother.

From the perspective of the mother's level of demand and need for support/assistance, it is noted that this is most needed in the immediate postpartum period. The respective new change in the legal framework leads to a decrease in the use of paternity leave during this period. Furthermore, it is considered imperative for the father to take paternity leave in the first days of the child's life because it is an instrument that allows the building of a lasting father-child bond, the effects of which are felt for a long time. Moreover, the first week after birth is a period in which both the mother and the child are considered particularly vulnerable. Paternity leave enables the enhancement of the health security of both the mother and the child (Gosselin & Lepine, 2018).

During the paternity leave period, the employee is entitled to a paternity allowance. The request for the establishment of the paternity allowance is personally submitted by the father or mother of the child, with the presentation of supporting documents, to the territorial social insurance office or electronically. The amount of the paternity allowance is 100% of the average. Over the period since paternity leave has been implemented in the Republic of Moldova, we see that the amount of paternity allowance has increased from 213 euros in 2017 to 271 euros in 2022. If we relate the last reference year (2022) the amount of paternity allowance to the value of the average salary which was 539.38 euros, then we find that it represented almost half of it.

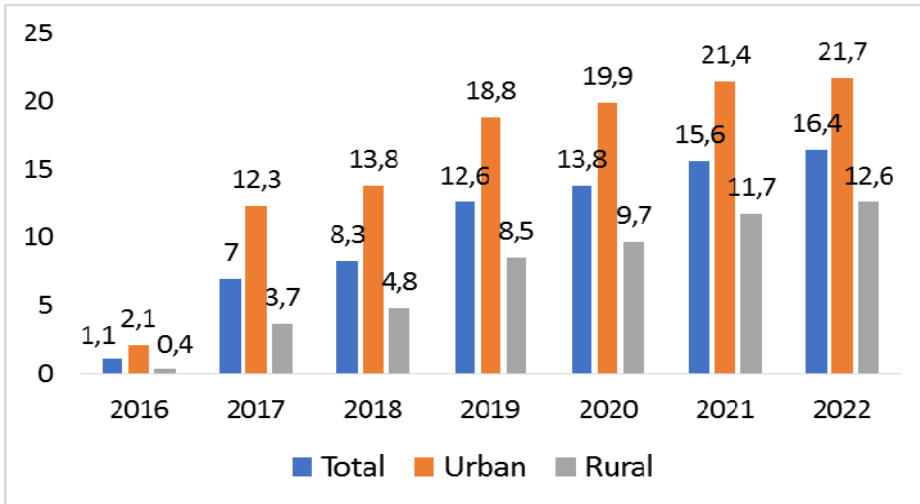
Table 2. Average Amount of Paternity Allowance in the Republic of Moldova

Year	The average amount of the allowance	
01.01.2022	5309,11	271.97
01.01.2021	4947,13	253.43
01.01.2020	4509,68	231.02

Year	The average amount of the allowance	
01.01.2019	4392,61	225,02
01.01.2018	4074,13	208,71
01.01.2017	4162,33	213,23
	Moldovan lei	Euro

Source: National Social Insurance House (2017-2022).

Starting from January 1, 2024, paternity leave in the Republic of Moldova will be extended to 15 calendar days and can be granted either in full or divided into a maximum of 3 fractions, each consisting of 5 days. Additionally, this type of leave can be requested by socially insured fathers who have adopted a newborn child.



Source: National Social Insurance House (2016-2022)

Figure 1. The ratio of the number of fathers taking paternity leave to the total number of newborns (in %).

By the aforementioned provisions, it is evident that the authorities in the Republic of Moldova provide favourable conditions for accessing paternity leave and the associated paternity allowance. Throughout the calendar period 2016-2022, the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave in the Republic of Moldova has been slowly increasing, reaching 16.4% in 2022. The lack of stable employment opportunities and the persistence of informal employment issues among men in rural areas contribute to the fact that the proportion of fathers taking paternity leave in rural areas is nearly half of that in urban areas (Figure 1).

The data from Table 3 reveal that the majority of fathers who have taken paternity leave fall within the age range of 25-34 years, which is also the most fertile age category. Additionally, the data show an increase in the number of fathers aged 35-44 who have taken paternity leave in recent years. In this context, we can presume that this trend is attributed to the phenomenon of delayed childbirth at more advanced ages.

Table 3. The distribution of fathers who have used paternity leave according to their age

	< 24 years	25-34 years	35-44 years	45+
2016	8	310	115	6
2017	100	1740	663	48
2018	128	1855	832	60
2019	186	2661	1170	73
2020	213	2706	1237	107
2021	206	2890	1396	92
2022	189	2686	1456	111

Source: National Social Insurance House

2. Study methodology

The article is based on the results of the sociological study „Implementation of paternity leave in the Republic of Moldova” carried out by the author in 2022 within project 20.80009. 0807.21 „Migration, demographic changes and stabilization policies”, 2020-2023. The qualitative study sample consisted of 24 respondents who had children up to 3 years old. In the study, 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with fathers who were on paternity leave and 14 with fathers who did not request and respectively did not benefit from this measure. The research tool was the in-depth individual interview guide that was specific to the two categories of respondents and included questions regarding the professional and familial situation, the benefits of paternity leave, the difficulties encountered in accessing it and the role of the employer in its implementation. The data collection took place between August and November 2022. The analysis of the collected data was carried out, based on the information matrix collected through in-depth individual interviews.

3. Results

Reasons for fathers taking paternity leave are diverse, ranging from affective to instrumental and personal. Affective reasons are exemplified by situations such as experiencing the joy of childbirth and savouring the first moments of the child's life. These aspects confirm the idea emphasized in other studies that paid paternity leave could be beneficial for the mental health of fathers.

For instrumental reasons, the following situations are included:

- Spending time with the mother and providing necessary support. *„I helped my wife a lot because she had undergone surgery, and it was difficult for her to hold the baby. During those two weeks, at night, I would wake up and rock him when he started crying, allowing my wife to rest after breastfeeding”.*

- Taking care of the other children and allowing the mother to focus solely on the newborn. *„Our third child was born prematurely. My wife, along with the little one, had to stay in the hospital for 3 weeks to gain weight. At home, there was another school-age child and one in kindergarten. The grandparents were far away, and there was no one to help us. Therefore, thanks to this paternity leave, I could take care of the*

other two—prepare their meals, check their homework, and so on.” „The eldest boy was very jealous when the second one was born, so I granted him this paternity leave to make him understand that he is still loved, and we don't ignore him”.

- Providing support to the mother of the newborn when returning to work after the birth of the child. „My wife is the chief accountant, and immediately after giving birth, she was the one who had to do the majority of the work. Her boss encouraged her to return to work quickly, so I had to be the one to support her. This leave helped us a lot because, at that time, the grandmother could no longer help us, so it came in handy until we found someone to take care of the little one. I helped her not to be too stressed. I brought the baby to her for breastfeeding”.

- Taking over household tasks by the father. This is particularly necessary because paternity leave allows men to increase their participation in household activities. Thus, increasing the participation of men in the care and education of children generally contributes to the promotion of responsible fatherhood, and in this way, the father becomes a helper for the mother.

In some studies, the effect of paternity leave is less pronounced in the redistribution of household chores between parents. This reduced effect was to be expected because, primarily, it is desired that fathers be more involved with their children than in other household activities. In addition, housework is generally less enjoyable and less socially valued than parenting (Pailhé et al., 2018). Other studies have shown that although the effects are relatively imprecise, paternity leave causes a shift from maternal to paternal care at home (Cools et al., 2015).

The reasons of a personal nature were mentioned by a very small number of respondents, including taking paternity leave to rest, travel, and engage in other activities. „My job is very demanding, with night shifts, physical, mental, and psychological exhaustion. That's why I took this paternity leave to recover and to be in good shape so I can continue working for my family”.

Based on the results of the interviews, it became clear that the request and use of paternity leave depend on several aspects. First of all, socio-demographic characteristics (level of education and age) were noted, distinguishing that fathers who took paternity leave have a high level of education and are relatively young. Another relevant aspect with implications for the request and use of paternity leave concerns working conditions and salary levels. Thus, fathers who were on paternity leave had skilled jobs, had stable professional positions, predominantly worked in the public sector, earned relatively high incomes and were official. Also, taking paternity leave depended on: the relationship with the wife, and the wife's professional activity. Thus it was determined that fathers take paternity leave when the relationship with the wife is harmonious and she is also integrated in the labour market.

The benefits of using paternity leave are manifold: learning the skills of caring for a newborn; establishing a strong emotional connection between the father and his child; strengthening confidence in one's abilities to care for the child/children by taking responsibility for providing them with appropriate care and managing the challenges of this process; strengthening the mother's trust in

the husband's ability to delegate child care responsibilities according to his needs; modification of the father's attitude towards the care of the child/children through the prism of recognition and positive evaluation. All this shows that the role of fathers in their children's lives is changing and that paternity leave is an opportunity for fathers to build strong relationships with their newborns.

Thus, paternity leave provides fathers with more time, resources and opportunities to learn and hone additional parenting skills. Therefore, paternity leave can reduce the risk of the traditionalization of parental roles by allowing fathers to be involved in the care of the child from birth. Through this leave, fathers can become comfortable with performing tasks traditionally assigned to mothers and identify themselves as competent caregivers (Rehel, 2014). These developments seem to encourage fathers to adopt the parenting qualities of sensitivity and responsiveness, which are two essential traits in child development and the establishment of a harmonious parent-child relationship (Petts et al., 2020). The benefits mentioned above indicate that the implementation of leaves strictly dedicated to fathers is a way to make fathers more involved in childcare and thus promote gender equality (Pailhé et al., 2018).

Some comprehensive studies have shown that fathers who took paternity leave were more involved in their children's lives throughout their lifetimes, compared to fathers who did not take it. Increased father involvement contributed to reduced behavioural problems in adolescents and good education (Barry et al., 2023).

Fathers who did not take paternity leave most frequently justified this by the potential loss of income. This reason is explained, on the one hand, by the prevalence of the practice of dual employment – official and „under the table” – at certain workplaces. On the other hand, there is also a dependence on additional income from the workplace. According to data from the Tax Inspectorate of the Republic of Moldova, in 2022, undeclared work among employees amounted to 6.2%.

Some fathers did not take paternity leave because they were not aware of this opportunity. To inform and encourage men to take advantage of paternity leave, state authorities, in partnership with the associative sector, created a video spot on this topic, broadcast on TV stations and social networks. According to interview data, none of the respondents were informed through promotional materials in the media about the possibility of accessing paternity leave, emphasizing the need for further comprehensive materials on the importance of this leave and how to benefit from it.

Awareness campaigns can increase awareness and encourage fathers to take leave. In Sweden, for example, the use of leave for childcare by fathers increased following awareness campaigns (Belle, 2016). Therefore, ongoing communication campaigns against social stereotypes are needed to encourage fathers to take paternity leave. Another practice could be informing all fathers about this possibility through personalized letters from institutions responsible for its provision (National Social Insurance House).

Very low take-up of paternity leave is recorded in small towns and rural areas of the Republic of Moldova. This is explained by the fact that there are few formal, stable and well-paid jobs here. This indicates that there is a high level of competition between employees and potential employees. Consequently, some fathers, although the legal framework provides for this opportunity do not risk taking paternity leave in order not to create impressions to the employer that he is not devoted to work.

Some participants in the study did not take paternity leave because they did not see its purpose and felt that it was too short to have an essential influence on family life. Indeed, this may be an objective reason. Thus, some fathers who took paternity leave after it was completed also took annual leave. *„It's very short this leave, in 2 weeks you don't achieve much, that's why I took another 14 days of annual leave”*.

Another serious obstacle to using paternity leave is the perception of traditional gender roles in household chores and childcare. Moreover, due to traditional stereotypes, some fathers believe that young children need a mother more than a father. This is also the issue for fathers who do not take paternity leave because they are not encouraged and understood by relatives, friends and acquaintances. *„It's shameful in my family, in my circle of acquaintances to stay at home with my young child while my wife is on childcare leave”*. Some complex studies have shown that after a longer period of implementation of paternity leave, the norms and behaviours related to gender equality change, being less stereotyped (Farre et al., 2023).

The study data highlighted that fathers working in the private sector face more difficulties in taking paternity leave (excessive workload, inability to be replaced, employer discouragement, fear of the employer, unstable professional situation, and specific workplace situations, such as the opportunity for promotion shortly) than those in the public sector (Table 4). At the same time, we emphasize that the salary is higher in the private sector (real) – 10,954.7 lei (2022) – than in the public sector – 8,891.1 lei.

The excessive workload was mentioned by fathers working in both the public and private sectors. Some researchers argue that behind this reason, there may be a form of self-censorship for those who fear the judgment of colleagues and superiors (Gosselin & Lepine, 2018).

Discouragement from the employer and fear of repercussion from it are problems encountered only by fathers active in the private sector of the economy, in the context of a general obligation for employers to support this practice. This reveals that in the opinion of many employers, the ideal employee adheres to a masculine work style, fitting in with full-time work and unburdened by family or other obligations outside of the workplace (Özbilgin et al., 2011).

Cases where the employer creates situations with a disadvantageous effect on employees taking paternity leave are considered instances of discrimination and are subject to sanctions. The reality of the labour market in the Republic of Moldova contributes to the fact that some employers, although they understand and support

the implementation of paternity leave, based on clear reasons (lack of labour force, high workload, etc.) do not accept its use. Moreover, the legal framework in the Republic of Moldova does not establish a necessary period (an approximate estimate, for example, one month) for the father to inform the employer about the need for paternity leave to avoid undesirable situations among employers.

Table 4. The reasons why fathers do not take paternity leave are related to their workplace depending on the sector of activity

	Public	Private
Excessive workload.	+	+
Impossibility of being replaced. „We each do the work for 2-3 employees. No way”. „No replacements, this means colleagues have to take over from me while I am on leave”.	+	+
Discouragement by the employer.	-	+
Fear of the employer. „How could my boss evaluate me during the month I was on leave? My supervisor will say that something is wrong and conclude that I am not interested enough in my work”.	-	+
Unstable professional situation.	-	+
Specific situations at work, such as the opportunity to be promoted shortly. „I am sure that when a situation related to career advancement arises if the boss has to choose between me who was on paternity leave and another who was not, he will choose him”.	+	+

It can be observed that the public sector is more supportive of fathers in providing paternity leave. This may be explained by the fact that large state-owned companies employ a significant number of female workers. In this context, men are more inclined to use leave for child-rearing and paternity because the attitude of the employer and colleagues is more 'friendly'.

However, it is important not to generalize that the private sector is hostile to parents, as some studies have found that employers in the private sector offer more opportunities aimed at reconciling family and professional life than public sector employers (Chistruga-Sîncevici, 2021). Work flexibility is more applied in the private sector, explained by the limitation of public sector flexibility due to objectives set by regulatory acts, laws, and regulations. Public organizations face much stronger legal restrictions in their activities. Private organizations offer more flexibility because they can define their strategic objectives based on their preferences. Public management operates within the context of fragmented authority structures – in the private sector, a manager reports to a clear leadership structure. In the public sector, the manager interacts with a multitude of 'bosses', whether direct superiors or leaders of interest groups, etc. (Şaitan, 2020).

International studies have also highlighted that the use of paternity leave also depends on the decision-makers position towards this measure, the field of activity, the size of the company, the presence of the trade union and the proportion of female employees (Belle, 2016). In another vein, the introduction of paternity leave has been shown to help equalize employment costs for both women and men,

eliminating the need for employers to discriminate against women in this regard (Zhang, 2020). Thus, if more employers were aware of this aspect, the rate of use of paternity leave would increase.

Even if women have a higher level of education than men, they also have a higher proportion of inactivity, mainly due to family responsibilities, such as looking after the child/children. Thus, some authors who have researched the subject in question expect paternity leave to contribute to a more balanced distribution of parental leave to have a greater potential to reduce gender differences in the labour market (Ziegler & Bamieh, 2023).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study data reveal that a father's presence during paternity leave has positive implications for him, the child, his wife/partner, and the family. In this context, the issue of the need to extend its duration arises. On the one hand, some authors advocate for decision-makers to encourage an increase in this leave because the 2-week duration is limited and insufficient to provide mothers with the necessary support. Also, the current duration of paternity leave is insufficient to allow significant progress in balancing household and family responsibilities between women and men. Other researchers believe that extending the duration of paternity leave is not an optimal solution because the longer the leave, the lower the coverage, as some fathers may be reluctant to take a longer leave (Pailhé et al., 2018).

Children are a priority for parents, and they care a lot about their careers, policies to balance work and family life are necessary to ease the burden of pressure experienced in combining work with family life. Therefore, continuous efforts are required to increase the rate of paternity leave utilization.

Another recommendation concerns the introduction of the possibility of postponing paternity leave in case of the child's hospitalization and extending the period for fathers with prematurely born children. Additionally, ongoing efforts are needed to stimulate and encourage equal participation of women and men in family responsibilities through promoting the idea of common responsibility between men and women through education; organizing campaigns to change attitudes regarding the need for a balanced distribution of roles and domestic responsibilities between the two partners; raising society's awareness of parents' equal rights regarding childcare leave.

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WELL-BEING AND VULNERABILITY. ENHANCING SOCIAL INCLUSION AMONG VULNERABLE CHILDREN

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Abstract

The present paper brings into discussion the importance of working together for the well-being of the children. The current and hardest realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, extremely difficult conflicts from certain countries, emphasize and demonstrate that children's rights are violated even in these times of postmodernity. In this line, the paper has an awareness purpose and underlines how can we as individuals and professionals act in promoting and respecting each child's rights. The topics as well-being, vulnerability, empowerment, and resilience are discussed, presenting an overview for understanding the factors that influence and determine the realities that lead towards a social exclusion, rather than a social inclusion. Finally, the paper emphasises the importance of developing socially integrated services for ensuring the well-being of children and enhancing thus the social inclusion of vulnerable children.

Keywords: child protection, vulnerability, social inclusion, well-being.

Résumé

Le présent article met en discussion l'importance de travailler ensemble pour le bien-être des enfants. Les réalités actuelles et les plus dures comme la pandémie de Covid-19, les conflits extrêmement difficiles de certains pays, soulignent et démontrent que les droits des enfants sont violés même en ces temps de postmodernité. Dans cette optique, l'article a un objectif de sensibilisation et souligne comment nous pouvons, en tant qu'individus et professionnels, agir pour promouvoir et respecter les droits de chaque enfant. Les sujets comme le bien-être, la vulnérabilité, l'autonomisation et la résilience sont abordés, présentant une vue d'ensemble pour comprendre les facteurs qui influencent et déterminent les réalités qui conduisent à une exclusion sociale plutôt qu'à une inclusion sociale. Enfin, le document souligne l'importance de développer des services sociaux intégrés pour assurer le bien-être des enfants, favorisant donc l'inclusion sociale des enfants vulnérables.

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Mots-clés : protection de l'enfance, vulnérabilité, inclusion sociale, bien-être.

Rezumat

Prezenta lucrare aduce în discuție importanța eforturilor colective pentru a promova bunăstarea copiilor. Realitățile actuale și dure ale societății în care trăim, de exemplu pandemia Covid-19 și conflictele armate din anumite țări, subliniază și demonstrează încă o dată faptul că drepturile copiilor sunt încălcate chiar și în aceste timpuri ale postmodernității. În acest context, lucrarea are mai mult un scop de conștientizare și subliniază modul cum noi ca indivizi, dar și ca profesioniști putem să acționăm pentru a promova și respecta drepturile fiecărui copil în parte. Subiectele precum bunăstare, vulnerabilitate, autodeterminare și reziliență sunt aduse în prim plan prezentând o imagine de ansamblu pentru a înțelege mai bine factorii care influențează și determină realitățile sociale care conduc și încurajează mai degrabă excluziunea socială, în detrimentul incluziunii sociale. În cele din urmă, lucrarea scoate în evidență importanța serviciilor sociale integrate pentru asigurarea bunăstării copiilor, conducând astfel la o incluziune socială în rândul copiilor vulnerabili.

Cuvinte cheie: protecția copilului, vulnerabilitate, incluziune socială, bunăstare.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected millions of people including children. Considering the international and national context following the economic changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which are being amplified by the armed conflicts from Ukraine and the Near East and with all the efforts made by international organizations, it is obvious that our society needs to work a lot more for a true application of the legislative provisions regarding the protection and promotion of children's rights. To understand children's rights we need to bring into discussion the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations in 1989 and to analyse the obligations and responsibilities that are assigned to the governments. In a society that is centred on adults, children are strongly dependent on adults, and that makes them vulnerable. Children in the most difficult situations are often being marginalized, are those children whose lives are affected by the „violation of their rights, caused by one or more of the following forms of marginalisation: extreme poverty, violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, discrimination and social exclusion, catastrophic events, such as conflict or disaster” (Ray, 2010, p. 64). They experiment with unequal power relations and a large part of children's life is influenced and limited by adults. Thus, the main issues aren't generated by the inabilities of children or the wrong perceptions, but from wrong positions attributed to children (Alderson & Goodey, 1996). Taking into consideration these facts, the paper highlights the challenges faced by vulnerable children with accent on the risk and protective factors that influence their lives. Concepts such as vulnerability, well-being, resilience, and empowerment are discussed, underlying the implications for enhancing the social inclusion of vulnerable children. Promoting child protection and their participation in all aspects of life emphasises the need to develop integrated social services through individual and collective responsibility for children's wellbeing.

2. Well-being and vulnerability of children

Over the last two decades, children's well-being has become a central topic conducted from an international and interdisciplinarity perspective (Stoeklin, 2021; Minkkinen, 2013; Ben-Arieh et al., 2014). The concept of well-being is complex and multi-faced, is a growing field of research, and the question of how it should be defined is still being explored (Dodge et al., 2012). Some authors (Dodge et al., 2012) propose a new definition of well-being, a balance point between the individual resources and the challenges met. The authors (Dodge et al. 2012) sustain that „stable well-being is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need when they meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge” (p. 230). The see-saw dips when individuals have more challenges than resources, affecting their well-being, the process is also vice-versa.



Figure 1. Definition of well-being (Dodge et al., 2012)

To understand the well-being of children, first of all, we need to understand how childhood is constructed. Childhood can be seen as a period of dependency; children are dependent on family income and resources. Closely related to dependency is parental control and ownership. Parents may explain to children the decisions taken, but this doesn't mean that the children's opinions are taken into consideration. Childhood can also be seen as a period of obedience and respect, children must be obedient, do what they are told, and listen to others (Twum-Danso, 2010). Hence, children are dependent on the adults, and on the decisions taken for them, this being the most salient source of vulnerability.

Well-being is considered also to be linked to vulnerability since vulnerability influences the well-being of children. Vulnerability is determined by specific contextual characteristics (Goodin, 1986), it is about ontological and situational aspects (Mackenzie et al. 2014), it depends on the context in which it manifests itself, social, cultural, economic, and political (Gergen, 2015). Vulnerability is also seen as an internal characteristic of a system, the conditions of the community are seen as the main characteristics of vulnerability (Birkmann & Wisner, 2006). A representative view of vulnerability is represented below, vulnerability has to do with internal risk factors up to vulnerability that is related to institutional features.

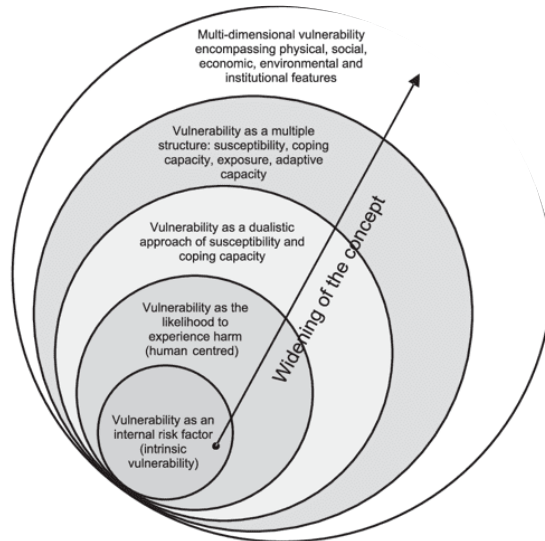


Figure 2. Key spheres of the concept of vulnerability (Birkmann & Wisner, 2006)

Vulnerability impacts the well-being of the children (Bagattini, 2019). Many studies regarding the well-being of children demonstrated the fact that a secure environment is extremely important for the well-being of the children (Rees & Lee, 2005; Rees et al., 2010). Children who are living in poor environments and complicated situations experience hard difficulties in accessing opportunities, or in having access to social, medical, and educational services. Apart from the challenges met in their families, some factors have more to do with infrastructure, poor investment in the marginal areas or a lack of specialists. These children are often left behind, and they are exposed to neglect, emotional abuse, and risk of family abandonment or at risk of dropping out the school. Most vulnerable children are children from rural areas, children who are subject to discrimination and social exclusion (World Vision Romania, 2022a). Children who are in risk situations are more likely to develop deviant behaviours. For example, at the national level, the child welfare report from 2022 developed by World Vision Romania shows that 9% of children from rural areas don't currently attend any educational institution, 2 from 10 children affirm that violence is present in their school a lot, a quarter from children denote the fact that children from poor families are subjects to discriminations (World Vision Romania, 2022a). According to the National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption from Romania, we observe that the most cases encountered in 2022 are neglected children, children who are victims of emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and cases that occurred in children's families, but also in foster care families, residential services, schools, and other locations of institutions.

Table 1. Cases of abuse, neglect, and exploitation (January – December 2022), which occurred in:

Cases of:	Families	Foster care families	Residential services	Schools	Other institutions	Other locations
Physical abuse	1355	30	85	185	9	248
Emotional abuse	1878	5	19	50	7	130
Sexual abuse	656	11	12	28	3	775
Neglect	10774	23	21	66	18	346
Labour exploitation	228	0	0	0	1	39
Sexual exploitation	27	1	0	0	0	19
Exploitation for committing crimes	75	0	0	10	0	41
Total	14993	70	137	339	38	1598

Source: National Authority for Child Protection and Adoption from Romania, Statistical Data Children and Adoption, www.copii.gov.ro

The COVID-19 pandemic influenced a lot the well-being of the vulnerable children. On the psychological side, teachers affirm that 65% of children concentrated harder in class, 33% of the children became more aggressive, and 32% of children are becoming more withdrawn (World Vision, 2022b). Among other effects of the pandemic are the physical disputes families between and adults. Compared to 2020, there is an increase of 10% in quarrels resulting in physical violence, and many parents have issues finding a place to work, either they lost their job, or they didn't have a job before (World Vision Romania, 2022b). These aspects influence and have consequences on children's educational results. For example, PISA results from 2022 show that despite the significant progress registered in Romania during the last years, the coverage rate, of children eligible for PISA testing, remains the lowest from the European level, and school dropouts still demand the attention of political decision-makers, according to PISA data (CNPEE, 2023). Absenteeism tends to be more present in disadvantaged schools as well as in rural schools. PISA results from 2022 took also into consideration the well-being of children from a psychological and social point of view. PISA highlights the aspects that are more related to adolescents' school experience and how they perceive the school environment as being safe and supportive. What happens in school relates to children's satisfaction, including their aspirations. The well-being of children of 15 years is correlated with their previous experiences in health environments, families, schools and community resources. Life satisfaction index is around 2%, exposure to bullying between 3% and 4%, safety in school between 2% and 3%, feeling of belonging towards their school between 3% and 4%, and between 0,5 and 3% is the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils. The index for future expectations is higher, between 25% and 30% (CNPEE, 2023).

The results are correlated with the socioeconomic level, thus the socioeconomically disadvantaged schools are more likely to confront problems such as school dropout, truancy, use of alcohol or illegal drugs, bullying, etc.

Among risk factors, poverty is the most frequently encountered criterion (Barnett, 2002), being one of the most severe problems in the world (Schweiger & Graf, 2015). Besides poverty, other factors lead to social exclusion of children as parental education, poor health or nutrition, lack of social services at the local level, poor infrastructure, and poor educational services (Holmes & Lowe, 2023). In the face of adversity, children react differently. Their reactions can be influenced by factors related to the individual child (coping skills, social skills), the child's environment (parental skills, family relationships, family safety), the community (connection with peers, education, participation), and factors related to society (public policies, legislation, social and cultural values). The next figure shows the complexity of factors that influence children's reactions to adversity (Beyond Blue, 2017).

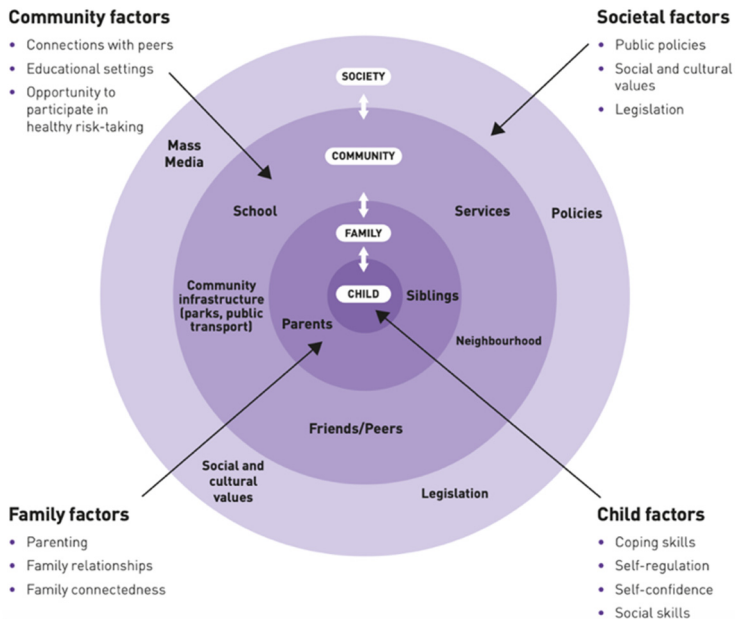


Figure 3. Factors that influence a child's experiences of and reactions to adversity (Beyond Blue, 2017).

In the face of these challenges, the purpose is to teach children to become more resilient and how to empower them to be more confident in their strengths. Alongside vulnerability and well-being, resilience and empowerment are key concepts that can direct the actions of practitioners and institutions to seek solutions for developing integrated services adapted to children's and families' needs. Empowerment is a process by which people gain mastery and control over the events that influence their lives (Woodall, 2010). The objective is how to involve

children in activities that can empower them, other than passive practices. These may include activities that encourage confidence, and self-esteem, developing thus coping mechanisms or enhancing personal skills which will contribute to their development as capable adults of managing their own lives. In the face of some adversities, how children react is important, it depends on how resilient children are. Resilience can be defined as the capacity of a system to be able to adapt successfully to challenges that can threaten its normal function (Masten, 2014). Resilience includes communities, organizations, ecosystems, families, and individuals. The main idea of resilience is the fact that for individuals resilience means the adaptative capacity in a specific time and context in the face of risks and adversities (Masten, 2014). The question is what makes a difference, and how individuals can face the challenges and adapt. Here the protective factors may play an important role and could explain how some individuals can thrive following adversity. For child development, we can list here „some of the factors related also with family factors: caring family, sensitive caregiving; close relationships, emotional security, belonging (family cohesion); parental skill, family management; agency, motivation to adapt, active coping; problem-solving skills; self-efficacy, positive view of the self or identity; hope, faith, optimism; meaning-making, believe life has a meaning, purpose” (Masten & Barnes, 2018, p. 6). In the paper conducted by Mullin (2019), hope appears to be an important resource for children's autonomy and resilience. Hope strengthens the emotional abilities of children and has a significant impact on their self-sufficiency (Mullin, 2019).

3. Strategies for enhancing social inclusion

There is strong evidence from all around the world that social protection intentionally developed reduces poverty, increases access to social services, and increases the resilience of children and families, reducing social exclusion and vulnerability (Holmes & Lowe, 2023). Families, schools, communities, and institutions should share responsibilities in protecting and respecting children's rights. There is a need for an early intervention and to development of specific actions to prevent some behaviours. For example, a practical model that guides early years professionals to create safe and supportive environments is the „MANDELA model for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), a reflective framework of questions that promote reflexivity in work” (Lumsden, 2018, p. 191). The model proposed by the author is based on the MANDELA model of practice learning developed by the author Tadam (2012). The model represents hope, an essential resource that gives courage to people in a world that is put to a hard test. The questions of the MANDELA model explore how we can develop inclusive working environments, engaging in anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices. The following table details the specific acronyms of the model and the questions addressed by each one:

Table 2. *Child Protection in the Early Years: A Practical Guide* (Lumsden, 2018)

Make Time	-	<i>Understand the community that uses the settings, children, and families; use the information to shape different conversations, develop relationships, co-constructing action plans</i>
Acknowledge	-	<i>striving for inclusion in all we do through respecting and appreciating others' needs, differences, education, life experiences</i>
Needs	-	<i>how can you ensure the setting is inclusive of all needs?</i>
Differences	-	<i>recognize all the differences</i>
Educational Experiences	-	<i>support parents and carers to develop their knowledge about child development</i>
	-	<i>how does the organization support families to understand the importance of child development?</i>
Life Experiences	-	<i>how do we value the journey and create safe environments for people to use?</i>
Age	-	<i>how does the setting value people of different ages?</i>

The model proposed by the author (Lumsden, 2018) could be used as a way of connecting children, families, communities, and practitioners for developing and implementing preventive programs starting from the needs of children and their families. Innovative and sustainable strategies are required, to strengthen institutions to protect children from maltreatment or any form of abuse, ensuring that children are raised in healthy circumstances and enable all children to have chances and opportunities for a better life. Percy-Smith & Malone (2001) believe that authentic participation involves inclusion rather than integration. The attention must be on a system that also includes the values of children and appreciates the role of children as being participants, new ways of interaction with children being necessary.

4. Conclusions and further directions

Resilience studies show that there are opportunities to facilitate the resilience of children through preventive interventions (Masten & Barnes, 2018). How leaders lead during hard times has an outside effect on children's protection, collective resilience, and empowerment. It is important to invest in children's future and implicit in their education, but it is equally important to pay attention to children's well-being and to promote the healthy development of children. Child protection is a complex phenomenon and moving forward, a transdisciplinary and interprofessional framework is needed to reduce the risks to which children are exposed and to promote social inclusion. Integrated social services and involving the participation of children in all aspects of life contribute to the well-being of children. Children's rights cannot be implemented and respected without appropriate legislation, policies, and good practices capable of sustaining an

inclusive protection of children, regardless of their socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, gender, or disability.

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EVIDENCE-BASED SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK AND INCREASING PSYCHOSOCIAL RESILIENCE IN PUPILS

Carmen PALAGHIA¹

Abstract

School social work has a long history internationally, being the oldest sub-specialisation in the field, and for over 20 years, emphasis has been placed on Evidence-based practice. The recent events humanity has faced highlight the necessity for students to be prepared for major traumatic situations. In many countries, efforts have been made to facilitate practitioners' access to the latest research to enhance intervention effectiveness. The main purpose of this work is to highlight the most effective Evidence-based intervention methods that school social workers need to use when working with students dealing with depression, age-specific anxieties, phobias, frustration intolerance, the parents' divorce, homelessness, anger, aggression, suicidal thoughts, or attempts. We present the PREPaRE Model, an effective response to school crises, and an effective way to enhance psychosocial resilience in students, *The Window of Empowerment and Resilience* (Șoitu, 2012). Evidence-based school social work is founded on effective research for addressing emotional management, stress, and anger in (pre)adolescent students.

Keywords: school social work, Evidence-based social work, resilience building in students.

Résumé

L'assistance sociale scolaire a une longue histoire à l'échelle internationale, étant la plus ancienne sous-spécialisation dans le domaine, et depuis plus de 20 ans, l'accent a été mis sur la pratique fondée sur des preuves. Les événements récents auxquels l'humanité a été confrontée soulignent la nécessité pour les élèves d'être préparés aux situations traumatiques majeures. Dans de nombreux pays, des efforts ont été déployés pour faciliter l'accès des praticiens aux dernières recherches afin d'améliorer l'efficacité des interventions. Le but principal de ce travail est de mettre en évidence les méthodes d'intervention les plus efficaces, basées sur des preuves, que les travailleurs sociaux scolaires doivent utiliser lorsqu'ils travaillent avec des élèves confrontés à la dépression, à des angoisses spécifiques à leur âge, des phobies, une intolérance à la frustration, de la colère, le divorce des parents, sans-abri, de l'agressivité, des pensées ou des tentatives de suicide. Nous présentons le Modèle PREPaRE, une approche efficace d'intervention en cas de crise dans les écoles, et une manière efficace d'augmenter la résilience psychosociale chez les élèves, *La Fenêtre de l'Autonomisation et de la Résilience* (Șoitu, 2012). Le travail social scolaire basé sur des

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preuves repose sur les recherches éprouvées pour aborder la gestion émotionnelle, le stress et la colère chez les élèves (pré)adolescents.

Mots-clés : travail social scolaire, travail social basé sur des preuves, renforcement de la résilience chez les élèves.

Rezumat

Asistența socială școlară are o istorie îndelungată la nivel internațional, fiind cea mai veche subspecializare a domeniului, iar de mai bine de 20 de ani s-a pus accentul pe o practică bazată pe evidențe. Evenimentele cu care întreaga omenire s-a confruntat în ultima perioadă arată necesitatea ca elevii să fie pregătiți pentru situații major traumatice. În multe state s-a urmărit facilitarea accesului practicienilor domeniului la cele mai recente cercetări pentru eficientizarea intervenției. Scopul principal al lucrării este de a releva cele mai eficiente metode de intervenție, bazate pe dovezi, pe care asistenții sociali școlari trebuie să le utilizeze în lucrul cu elevii care se confruntă cu depresie, anxietăți specifice perioadei copilăriei, fobii, intoleranță la frustrare, divorțul părinților, homelessness, mânie și agresivitate, gânduri sau tentative suicidare. Prezentăm Modelul PREPaRE, o modalitate eficientă de intervenție în situațiile de criză din școli și o modalitate eficientă de creștere a rezilienței psihosociale la elevi *Fereastra împuternicirii și rezilienței* (Șoitu, 2012). Practica asistenței sociale școlare bazată pe dovezi are la bază cercetări cu eficacitate dovedită, pentru lucrul cu managementul emoțiilor, stresului și furiei la elevii (pre)adolescenți..

Cuvinte cheie: asistența socială în școală, asistența socială bazată pe evidențe, creșterea rezilienței la elevi.

1. Introduction

Evidence-based school social work (Palaghia, 2022a) has developed over the past 20 years, aiming for the accuracy of social work practice based on the professional's experience and skills, on the specific features of the ongoing case, but, above all, on the results of the scientific research in the field. „The Evidence-based practice is defined as an assistance practice based on enabling the decision-making processes obtained to improve the efficiency of the offered social services and of the results obtained by the beneficiaries” (Drisko & Grady, 2015, apud Sandu et al., 2021, p. 15). The Evidence-based social work was founded by analogy with medical practice, whereas the professionalization was, from the beginning, based on the social diagnosis, which enables the practising professional social worker to know the beneficiaries and the community, and to intervene efficiently, according to the plan (Palaghia, 2023a). Evidence-based school social work is similar to Evidence-Based Medicine, which focuses its therapeutic strategies on „the best available data”, which are obtained from scientific studies, by the integration of information into the clinical experience of the practitioner and into the responsible and well-informed choice of the beneficiary who makes decisions on previously confirmed results. The ranking of evidence, in the phrase „Evidence-based”, becomes relevant for subsequent recommendations (Palaghia, 2023b).

2. The elements of Evidence-based school social work

The key elements of Evidence-based social work are: first, the conscientious practitioner is the one who uses interventions with efficient evidence useful for the intervention. For this purpose, professional competence becomes crucial for the future of social work. Good practice needs us to explain to the beneficiaries with whom we work what, when and especially why we intervene, by reviewing the options available to the users of social services, and we inform them by a thorough, in-depth assessment of their needs and the good knowledge of the current research and relevant to the efficiency of the intervention (Weber, 2008).

The proofs in health and social work that are considered largely valid and reliable are based on scientific principles. The epistemological paradigm was synthesized by Bolton (2002) and is based on the following elements:

1. The objectivity of observation, which is the categorical opposite of a subjective approach, is based on sensory experience and intuition.
2. The experiment, in which knowledge is not based on observing reality, but mainly represents a process of intervention and observation.
3. Causality, where the purpose of the experiment is to determine a causal process to find explanations of events and also to make predictions.
4. Generality, where causality becomes vital.

The speciality literature (Hillman, 2002; Payne, 2011; Vrasti, 2012) reveals that the field of social work sees the usefulness of the process based on edifying data, where social workers are supported to use all the best available evidence in addressing the critical issues for educational institutions.

Kelly et al. (2010) start with the next hypothesis to point out the practical efficacy of Evidence-based school work:

- A process of Evidence-Informed Practice is useful for collecting, organising and evaluating practice, whereas the choices would improve the ability of school social workers to approach the multitude of problems existing in schools;
- School social work represents a unique speciality that should align the practice choices with contemporary educational models, currently known and appreciated by teachers;
- Although no information should be excluded from taking into consideration, in an Evidence-based process, we must mention the fact that it is necessary to supplement it with academic practices and interventions, based on the current research.

3. Types of reactions to the psychological crisis

There are several types of reactions to the psychological crisis, such as suicide, depression, anxiety disorders, mania and aggression (Palaghia, 2023c). The suicide of a student is a traumatic experience for colleagues, relatives, the teaching and auxiliary staff of the school. The role of the School Social Worker (Dupper,

2003; Lines, 2006; Kelly, 2008; Openshaw, 2008; Sandoval, 2013) is to support the children and adults who stay alive, to deal with the situation, to prevent the contagion of the suicidal phenomenon, by avoiding the valorisation of the lost person or the suicidal act. The School Social Worker must know how to respond effectively to suicide threats, and the first step is to recognize the signs. Sometimes suicidal beneficiaries send direct messages, other times their messages are subtle and require more attention to be found. Suicide messages (Krogsrud Miley et al., 2006) can be of 4 types:

1. A direct verbal message: Example: „I will shoot myself if you leave me alone”;
2. An indirect verbal message: Example: „A life without love is a life without meaning”;
3. Direct behavioural messages which can be shown by storing medicines, in the case of a person suffering from a chronic disease or serious disability;
4. Indirect behavioural messages can be noted by the sale of beloved objects, insomnia, and the loss of appetite. Also, previous events such as a series of attempts, or even an attempt of a close person, can signal an increased suicide risk.

The suicidal tendencies of the preadolescents may be related to community violence (for example, neighbourhood violence), past abuse, the presence of aggressive thoughts against others or oneself, parental ambivalence and family issues, the lack of social support, as well as the psychological and/or sexual abuse in the past. Indicators of the presence of suicidal thoughts can also be represented by sudden changes in appetite and sleep-related habits, personal care, the increased consumption of alcohol or drugs, agitation or tardiness, school failure, and behaviours that involve risk-taking. Also, concerns about ideas related to death are noted. The School Social Worker must know the fact that a sudden change in the mood of a depressed person can reflect the firmness of the decision to end one's own life. Also, in the assessment of the suicide risk, a distinction must be made between the facts and the opinions of the beneficiary, keeping in view that the people who often talk about suicide could go all the way, and, after an unsuccessful attempt, they can try again. The professional who intervenes must talk directly with beneficiaries about suicide prevention since direct discussions do not rush to suicidal behaviour, but on the contrary, they can prevent it. It is a myth that people who attempt suicide either come from wealthy families or have family members who have made this choice. Any person, regardless of their socio-economic status, if „caught in a network of circumstances” could be defeated by suicidal thoughts. In the intervention itself (Krogsrud Miley et al, 2006, p. 244), when a client is considering suicide, social workers can ask direct questions, such as:

1. „Are you thinking of harming yourself?”
2. „Are you telling me you're thinking about killing yourself?”
3. „I heard you mention the possibility of killing yourself. Are you thinking of that?”

4. „I have noticed some changes in the way you behave as if you let everything go. What are you trying to do?“

By asking direct questions, the beneficiary in a suicidal risk situation is offered the possibility to discuss their thoughts openly, during which the seriousness of the beneficiary's threats is evaluated, and the most important factor is the existence of a plan. Important elements of the evaluation are related to the method (Is it a relatively slow method?), to the means (Does the person have the necessary means at their disposal, by which to bring their plan to the end?) and to the plan (Is there a specific plan?). If there is a detailed, specific plan, and the chosen methods are at hand with them, the suicide risk is an increased one. The social worker will immediately involve the support systems and will ask family members and friends to accompany the beneficiary permanently until the self-destructive thoughts have disappeared. Practically, the beneficiary is „under surveillance“, not left alone, with their feelings of despair and suicidal thoughts. The incidence of depression is high among adolescents with suicide attempts, although a small percentage suffer from depression during the attempt. The predictors for the possibility of depressive episodes are cognitive variables such as self-appraisals with negative content, pessimism, and the lack of strategies to adapt to the demands of life. In the prevention and treatment of depressive disorders in adolescents, it is efficient to use techniques specific to cognitive-behavioural therapy (Girleanu, 2002).

4. Interventions of the school social worker in cases of depression

The incidence of depression is high among teenagers with suicide attempts, although a small percentage suffer from depression during the attempt. Predictors for the possibility of depressive episodes are represented by cognitive variables such as self-appraisals with negative content, pessimism and the lack of strategies to adapt to the demands of life. Efficiency in the prevention and treatment of depressive disorders in teenagers is the use of techniques specific to cognitive-behavioural therapy.

Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) used in depression is a short-term therapy. Depression (Holdevici, 2011a) may represent a symptom in the case of conditions such as schizophrenia, diabetes, viral infections, or thyroid gland conditions. Or it may be generated by the drug treatment, in the case of anti-psychotic or anti-hypertensive drugs. It is also a symptom in people addicted to alcohol and drugs. Depression can be explained with the help of the attachment theory. Bowlby's theory (1982) shows that intense human emotions are caused by making, breaking, or resuming interpersonal affective bonds of friendship, love, marriage, divorce, mourning, etc. The breaking of the affective relationship between mother and child generates depression in adulthood. The same author proposes a therapeutic method that leads the beneficiaries to the awareness of the link between early attachment types and current interpersonal solutions. Depressed beneficiaries do not have many friends, they have a low number of pleasant interactions with other people.

There are two defining elements specific to depression:

1. The mood of the beneficiary is irritable or capricious most of the time.
2. The loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities occurs and persists.

There occur insomnia or hypersomnia, fatigue or the lack of energy, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, difficulty in concentration, recurrent thoughts of death and suicide attempts. The diagnosis can be established when the symptoms last for a long time, they show increased frequency and intensity and, last but not least, they affect the person's functionality.

In the school context, depression in children and teenagers is closely related to academic pressure, characterized by unrealistic expectations, which both parents and teachers have. Bullying and cyberbullying aggression also make the child develop depression symptoms. Another cause may be related, especially in girls, to issues about body ideals or obesity (Palaghia, 2022b).

5. Anxiety disorders. Working with fearful pupils and their parents

Nothing exhausts the body more than worries

MAHATMA GANDHI

In the specialized literature, it is revealed that a high number of children and teenagers have an avoidant personality disorder, social phobia and low social skills. School phobia is an effect of social anxiety. Children refuse to go to school because of the assessment fear (Holdevici, 2011b). The anxiety of children is the most frequent type of mental disorder. Children with anxiety disorders suffer in silence, when adults do not provide them with the necessary therapeutic interventions, as they see anxiety as simply part of the child's behaving way. Practically, most of the children who encounter this problem do not receive specialized help. Causative and maintaining anxiety factors are genetic and temperamental; they are correlated with the parenting style (the parents of anxious adults have been reported to be cold, controlling, or overprotective in comparison to the parents of non-anxious adults), cognitive (there are thoughts related to negative outcomes in the social sphere: „I will hurt myself”, „I will not succeed”, „Others will laugh at me”, „My parents will die” etc.) or negative physical consequences. One of the main characteristics of anxiety disorders is avoidance behaviour (the avoidance of eye contact, the avoidance of school, etc.). Among other factors involved in the development of anxiety in children, there are anxious parents, from whom the child takes the behaviour, and who transmits to him/her, intentionally or not, that the world is dangerous, which increases the anxiety of the child. Some anxiety types, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, are caused by severe life events characterized by stressful and traumatic experiences. Therefore, an anxious parent may raise a child with vulnerability to anxiety. In children (Clark & Back, 2012), we talk about anxiety if there is one of the following six symptoms:

1. The feeling of restlessness.
2. The child is easily tired.
3. There is difficulty in concentrating or mental emptiness.
4. There is irritability.
5. There is muscle tension.
6. Sleeping disorder occurs, characterized by the difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep, or when sleep is restless and agitated.

When working with anxious persons, the counsellor uses cognitive intervention strategies. New trends in the school social work are represented by Evidence-based intervention for anxiety and depressive disorders (Levy et al., 2020), which start from the narrow and focused approach of Evidence-based medicine, where treatment decisions rely on explicit evaluations of the evidence. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence in the UK ordered that the development groups for the mental health intervention use a medical model approach based on evidence of different treatments used in the case of mental disorders.

6. Anger and aggression. Working with out-of-control students

Pupils suffering from conduct disorders find it difficult to solve problems, which triggers aggressive behaviours in physical and verbal terms. Hostility and anger trigger aggressive behaviour. Crisis intervention (Palaghia, 2021a) must aim at the immediate risk of an aggressive action. The same with suicidal risk, direct interviews about aggressive thoughts or intentions are still the best strategies.

Diagnosis criteria for conduct disorder, according to DSM-5 (2016) include aggressive behaviour toward people and animals, the destruction of property, theft or fraud, and severe violations of rules. The school social worker can focus his/her intervention in the work with aggressive children and teenagers on anger management, by teaching them activities that make them respond healthily in tense situations (Luca & Pascaru, 2017).

7. The ABCs of Anger

The ABCs specific to the rational emotive and behavioural approach (Ellis & Tafrate, 2017) offer the beneficiary a more effective analysis of the anger management issue, by identifying solutions. The rational and irrational aspects of anger are identified, as well as the deep understandings related to them. These thoughts are then challenged, and the recipient is taught to let go of aggression by thinking differently, feeling differently, and acting differently. The child is taught new strategies to let go of anger by changing thoughts and applying additional anger reduction strategies. Recently, the traditional perspective according to which, in the case of pupils who must adapt to the divorce of their parents (a situation that generates negative effects on children), is replaced by a clearer perspective on the phenomenon, outlined in terms of vulnerability and resilience, which can create adequate methods of prevention and intervention (Visu-Petra et. al., 2016).

The elements identified in children's speech regarding divorce reveal:

1. The lack of meaning, as they do not understand the reasons for their parents' divorce;
2. The child adopts an inflexible position, in which he/she insists that the parents stay together;
3. There is a mixture of anger and confusion;
4. During counselling, the child finds it difficult to talk about the parents' relationship and looks for distractions (for example, screams, games with different objects that take the discussion to other directions, etc.);
5. School can be seen as a safe space that provides the child with continuity in changing times.

8. Effective response to school crises: The PREPaRE Model

Before the 1990s, the literature on the school crisis pointed out that the models and techniques recommended until then consisted of directive, time-limited, goal-oriented procedures designed to support the pupil and the community school in rebalancing after a crisis. However, Brock et al. (2001) made the distinction between response to crisis and intervention in crisis; they made recommendations for a Comprehensive Preparation Plan for School Crisis based on which remains the composition of a responsible team who is trained to act in such situations and who participates in specialized courses and for whom a set of procedure is adopted by the management of the educational institution. Later, in 2006, the National Association of School Psychologists presented the Preparation School Curriculum (Broke et al., 2006). This is „the first scientifically validated educational program for intervention in crisis”. It is also relevant that „one of the fundamental principles of the PREPaRE Model consists in the fact that schools play an essential role in the prevention of crisis” (Smallwood et al., 2016, p. 556). The model draws attention to the fact that young people are extremely vulnerable and can be affected in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural development, after being exposed to a crisis. Mental health practitioners working in schools (Broke, 2006) who have been trained in the PREPaRE Model, can effectively intervene, and mitigate the negative impact of the exposure of children to crises. A brief presentation of the PREPaRE would be:

a. P = Prevention and preparation for psychological trauma;
b. R = Reaffirmation of physical health status and strengthening perceptions of safety and security;
c. E = Evaluation of the risk of psychological trauma;
d. P = Providing the intervention;
e. a = and
f. R = Response to psychological needs;
g. E = Examining the effectiveness of crisis prevention and intervention measures in crises.

Source: Mennuti et al. (2016).

Table 1. The PREPaRE Model

Astor et al. (2003) found that school violence prevention programs have taken a backseat to crisis intervention and individual student counselling. The principles of counselling in crises, with an emphasis on how pre-university education units can prevent and intervene when such situations occur. The specific intervention of specialists in crises focuses on events that can mark the lives of some pupils, such as family violence, parents' divorce, situations of bullying, mistreatment, bereavement, illness, disability, pupils with unemployed or imprisoned parents, acts of violence, homelessness etc. All the previously mentioned situations, as well as any other, which can be perceived by the pupil as extremely stressful and difficult to manage, require the intervention of specialists in schools: psychologists, school counsellors, priests, specialists in paediatric psychiatry (if the situation requires), school safety officers. The activity of the multidisciplinary team made up of the mentioned specialists, is coordinated by the school social worker case manager (Palaghia, 2021b).

9. Increasing psychosocial resilience in pupils

The objective of social workers who intervene in crises has a double impact: to reduce stressors and to use the situation of people in crisis to support them in solving their immediate problems and to control possible similar problems that may occur in the future, using the mechanisms of coping acquired. The activity of the School Social Worker requires flexibility since he is often asked to intervene in situations that are often the result of a crisis or trauma, usually caused by violent acts that take place in schools or the community. Witnesses of family violence can have serious traumas, like those generated by direct physical abuse, they can face behavioural, cognitive, and social problems, such as impulsivity, depression, vandalism, sleep problems, cruelty to animals, tantrums, hyperactivity, delinquency, minor pregnancies, etc. The School Social Worker must, first, create a therapeutic relationship with pupils who are victims of neglect and family violence. The school is the space where children should not feel ashamed or threatened, but the place where they should feel supported and safe. Masten (2001) believes that resilience is considered to be an ordinary process that occurs as a result of specifically human adaptation systems. Resilience is the ability of beneficiaries to develop, despite risk factors or prolonged exposure to stressful situations. We can argue that the main goal of the professional school social worker remains the increase psychological resilience in schools, especially in crisis times. Among the protective factors that contribute to resilience, we find constructive relationships with children of the same age and the presence of caring adults in children's lives. The intervention services in crisis are based on activities designed to meet the needs of all the pupils (for example: to discuss traumatic events in class, to provide them with the opportunity to vent emotionally and to activate positive coping strategies) after restoring the feeling of safety, then teaching activities according to the schedule, as soon as possible after the crisis occurred. The natural reaction is that pupils no longer require further services from mental health professionals. The development of children's skills goes „hand in hand” with the formation of

resilience. Emotional resilience in children and teenagers is still well known in the specialized literature in the field of emotional health. It is the process by which they control or self-regulate their internal reactions to emotions, and emotional regulation represents the development of children's capacities to develop coping strategies to help them regulate the intensity of the negative emotions they experience in the presence of adverse events. In children, differences in coping ability are governed by several factors, including their genetically determined temperament, parenting practices, and each child's emerging belief system (Ellis & Bernard, 2007).

Resilience (Muntean & Munteanu, 2011) is still a phenomenon manifested in young people who develop favourably, although they experience a type of stress, recognized as producing a serious risk of unfavourable consequences. The resilient child shows moderate and acceptable responses in case he is subject in the living environment, to harmful stimuli, having the ability to succeed, despite the situations that involve the serious risk of a negative outcome. Resilience (Mennuti et al., 2016) determines the success of those who adopt the behaviours and think the way that generate it. It is considered to be a common phenomenon that appears in most cases as a result of specifically human adaptation systems. If children and teenagers are given support and the right circumstances to develop harmoniously, then their development path is still a positive one, despite possible adversities. Psychosocial resilience in children and teenagers is the process by which they develop coping strategies to help them regulate the intensity of the negative emotions they experience in the presence of adverse events. In children, differences in coping ability are governed by several factors, including their genetically determined temper, parenting practices, and the emerging belief system of each child. We can argue that the main goal of the professional school social worker is still the increase psychological resilience in educational institutions, especially in crisis times. Crisis intervention services are based on activities designed to meet the needs of all the pupils (for example: to discuss traumatic events in the class, to provide them with the opportunity to vent emotionally and to activate positive coping strategies) following restoring a sense of security. Şoitu (2012) identifies the characteristics that help a person to be stronger or less strong, as well as ways in which we can diminish or, on the contrary, increase our strengths, which we will configure in a window (of empowerment), in the following model:

<p>Stronger:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open to change; - Assertive; - Proactive, action-oriented; - Taking the blame; - Self-oriented; - Needing feelings, using them; - Learning from mistakes; - Facing; - Living more in the present; - Realistic; 	<p>Less powerful:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Resistant to change; - Unassertive or aggressive; - Reactive, with reservations about action; - Blaming others; - Oriented to others; - Does not recognize feelings or fails in trying to recognize them; - Being brought down by mistakes; - Avoiding; - Being oriented to the past and/or future;
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thinking in relative terms; - Searching and seeing alternatives; - Committed to doing new things; - Liking himself; - Valuing others; - Altruistic, considering the others' needs; - Interested in what is happening in the world, improving the lives of others' lives; - Balanced lifestyle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unrealistic; - Thinking in absolute terms; - Seeing things in black or white; - Fulfilling the obligations; - He doesn't like himself; - Denying the others' values; - Being selfish, self-oriented, making other people's lives worse; - Focus on one living area, to the detriment of the others.
<p>We can increase our power when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are clear about what we want to achieve and how; - There are many common points between the way we see ourselves and the way others see us; - We are open to change; - We develop our skills, and competencies so that we can face the change; - We notice the difference between what is and what we think it is, acting appropriately; - Focus on realistic goals and objectives. 	<p>We can diminish our power when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We decide that something cannot be done/we cannot do something without identifying the reasons and possible alternatives; - We look at things only from the inside, closely related to traditions; - We do not develop enough skills/competencies, having to rely on others; - We believe that we cannot change anything about us or the situation we are in; - We try to do too many things, so we will not focus on anything.

Source: Șoitu (2012)

Table 2. The Window of Resilience and Empowerment

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THE PREDICTIVE ROLE OF ACADEMIC IDENTIFICATION AND TRAIT ANXIETY FOR EARLY ACADEMIC DROPOUT INTENTIONS

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Abstract

In this study, we test the association of academic identification (AI) and trait anxiety (TA) with early academic dropout intentions (EADI). Additionally, we test the impact of the interaction between AI and TA, while controlling for socio-demographic covariates specific to the participants, over EADI (i.e., gender, parents' education background, and educational expectancies). Our sample consisted of 439 first-year university students. We used the social identification theoretical background and results show that AI is associated with low scores of EADI. Still, the high trait anxiety context in which students find themselves in their first year is a risk factor, when AI is low or average. Results also show gender differences (i.e., men have a higher risk of EADI, compared to women). Results highlight the need to invest more in the development of AI to counter and thwart the risk of emphasizing AT for young people.

Keywords: trait anxiety, academic identification, early academic dropout intentions, gender, parent's education background, education expectancies.

Résumé

Dans cette étude, nous testons l'association de l'identification académique (IA) et de l'anxiété de trait (AT) avec les intentions précoces d'abandon académique (IPA). De plus, nous évaluons l'impact de l'interaction entre l'IA et l'AT, tout en contrôlant les covariables sociodémographiques spécifiques aux participants sur les IPA (c'est-à-dire le genre, le niveau d'éducation des parents et les attentes éducatives). Notre échantillon était composé

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de 439 étudiants de première année d'université. Nous avons utilisé le contexte théorique de l'identification sociale et les résultats montrent que l'IA est associée à des scores faibles d'IPA. Néanmoins, le contexte élevé d'anxiété de trait dans lequel les étudiants se trouvent au cours de leur première année est un facteur de risque lorsque l'IA est faible ou moyenne. Les résultats montrent également des différences de genre (c'est-à-dire que les hommes ont un risque plus élevé d'IPA par rapport aux femmes). Les résultats soulignent la nécessité d'investir davantage dans le développement de l'IA pour contrer et contrecarrer le risque d'accentuation de l'AT chez les jeunes.

Mots-clés : anxiété de trait, identification académique, intentions précoces d'abandon académique, genre, niveau d'éducation des parents, attentes éducatives.

Rezumat

În această cercetare testăm asocierea dintre identificarea academică (IA) și anxietatea de trăsătură (AT) cu intențiile timpurii de abandon academic (ITAA). În plus, evaluăm impactul interacțiunii dintre IA și AT, controlând covariabilele socio-demografice specifice participanților asupra ITAA (spre exemplu, genul, nivelul de educație al părinților și așteptările educaționale). Eșantionul nostru a inclus 439 de studenți de la universitatea din primul an. Rezultatele arată că IA este asociată cu scoruri scăzute ale ITAA. Cu toate acestea, contextul ridicat de anxietate de trăsătură în care se află studenții în primul an este un factor de risc atunci când IA este scăzută sau medie. Rezultatele arată, de asemenea, diferențe de gen (spre exemplu, bărbații au un risc mai mare de ITAA în comparație cu femeile). Rezultatele subliniază necesitatea de a investi mai mult în dezvoltarea IA pentru a contracara și a împiedica riscul accentuării AT la tineri.

Cuvinte-cheie: anxietate de trăsătură, identificare academică, intenții timpurii de abandon academic, gen, nivel de educație al părinților, așteptări educaționale.

1. Introduction

Academic dropout has become a field of interest in the last half-century, within the context of older theoretical approaches (i.e., Tinto's theory of student departure (1975) and Astin's theory of student involvement (1975) or more recent (i.e., Bean & Eaton's explanatory theory of student retention, 2000; or Kuh & Love's cultural perspective on student departure, 2000). Based on these theories, a multitude of studies have been conducted, which show that students' adjustment to university explains the increased rate of dropout in first-year university students (Blair, 2017; Wilcox & Nordstokke, 2019). Academic dropout is perceived today as a dynamic process of student disengagement with all educational factors (i.e., the courses, teachers, colleagues, and institutions, Heublein, 2014). Dropout intention is the strongest predictor of dropout and causes the decision to drop out (Casanova et al., 2021). This intention is voluntary and consists of forming thoughts about the possibility of changing or leaving higher education. It is affected directly or indirectly by self-efficacy, engagement, and perceived control (Gillet et al., 2017; Respondek et al., 2017), academic results (Gillet et al., 2017; Jenő et al., 2018; Respondek et al., 2017) or study methods and habits (Biasi et al., 2018).

According to Sarra et al. (2019), a key role in the process of students' disengagement is expressed by low levels of resilience traits which revolve around

students' self-efficacy, control, persistence, planning, and anxiety. Anxiety and depression are key predictors of academic failure, often peaking in early adulthood (Khubchandani et al., 2016; Worfel et al., 2016). These conditions can escalate to suicidal thoughts and impairments. Insufficient personal or institutional support can exacerbate negative emotions in students (Araújo et al., 2019; Tinto, 2010).

This study examines dropout intentions among young adults in post-compulsory education in Romania, highlighting its unique educational system where one-third of students leave college after the first year due to limited university financial autonomy. Previous research primarily emphasized stable individual and institutional factors (Eicher et al. 2014). The roles of academic identification (AI) and anxiety trait (AT) in early academic dropout intentions (EADI) remain understudied but crucial for understanding student challenges.

TA and AI have been formerly investigated through similar or related variables in the past, about EADI. For example, a former empirical study relating traits and intention for dropout shows that personality traits account for a high percentage of the variance for dropout intentions (Lounsbury et al., 2004). Specifically, EADI were explained by emotional stability, sense of identity and work drive, meaning that overall level of adjustment and knowing oneself can be used as incremental factors for understanding the early risk of dropout in the academic setting. Identification is a core key in valuing social roles, like academic roles.

We used the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as background because it helps explain how people overcome difficulties (i.e., anxiety) because people engage easily in their tasks and responsibilities due to an overall affective and cognitive engagement with the new social role (i.e., academic identification). Still, identification and anxiety as a trait are a process conditioned by both educational and environmental conditions, but also expectations, so we believe that some of the most important factors should be controlled to have a better understanding of the process of EADI (i.e., gender, family educational background and personal educational expectations).

Summarizing, in the current study we test the associations between TA, AI and EADI while controlling for gender, family educational background and personal educational expectations. Because interpersonal differences exist when investigating traits, we also test the impact of the interaction of TA and AI over EADI, while controlling for family and personal background variables.

2. Trait Anxiety and Early Academic Dropout Intentions

In the academic setting, TA is supported and stimulated through frequent anxiety state situations (i.e., exams, papers, and continuous evaluations) and is often described as the most common type of anxiety in education (Brodersen, 2017; von der Embse et al., 2017). Esch et al. (2014) directly link TA and academic dropout intentions, arguing for a bidirectional relation between them. As Carsley et al. (2017) suggested in their results of a three-year longitudinal study, the risk of dropout is strongly linked with TA since adolescence, higher academic dropout intentions are associated with higher scores of anxiety.

From an emotional perspective, anxious traits are directly related to EADI due to poor performance and lack of competencies development (Roso-Bas et al., 2016). As results show, anxious traits (i.e., lack of emotional clarity, rumination, and dispositional pessimism) are directly linked to forming students' intentions of leaving the university. This study emphasizes that the academic setting is an anxious factor that can stimulate students' intentions to leave the university and a sign that personality traits are nurtured and accentuated over time in this setting.

Testing AT as a risk factor for EADI is relevant to identify also because anxiety is an emotionally vulnerable factor for how students set their goals, including their long-term goals, like for example, finishing academic studies. For example, Respondek et al. (2017) conducted a cross-sectional study that comprised two different cohorts of participants, 597 first-year students and 286 second-year students. The authors have analysed, among other research topics, the relation between anxiety and dropout intentions. In this regard, Respondek et al. (2017) found that anxiety, perceived as a latent variable and component of academic emotions, is strongly correlated with dropout intention. Also, among first-year university students, high levels of anxiety are followed by strong degrees of dropout intentions, even though the Pearson correlation coefficient is slightly lower than the one which analyses the same relation between variables among second-year university students.

3. Academic Identification, Sense of Belonging to University and Dropout

AI is an extended concept from social identification. The theoretical background of this concept is the social identity approach (SIA), based on the twin theories (Greenaway et al, 2015; Postmes et al., 2018), the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). Concordant with this background, AI is a psychological resource for valuing academic identity and helping students overcome EADI. Moreover, identifying academically can help students to be aware of their roles, and tasks, and to value this role.

Drawing from the theoretical background of SIA as argued by Tajfel (1978), Postmes and colleagues (2013) define identification as a positive emotional valuation of the relationship between self and ingroup. Postmes et al. (2018) argue that this approach is subtly but importantly different than the initial one regarding social identity in arguing that the individual's knowledge that they belong to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to them of the group membership is what social identity reflects (Tajfel, 1972). The difference between the two is that social identity refers to the group as a perceived entity and identification refers to the individual member's relationship to that entity. This is more individually determined (Leach et al., 2008).

SIA is a leading model explaining group phenomena like prejudice and discrimination, influencing studies on topics from leadership to health (Postmes & Branscombe, 2010). In academia, the concept of learner identity relates to academic

performance and identity threats (Sherman et al., 2013). Group identification aids mental health by offering psychological resources and countering issues like anxiety and depression (Greenaway et al., 2015; Sani, 2012). Cruwys et al. (2015) highlight identification's benefits, including shared perceptions, social support, influence, and belongingness, emphasizing its role in providing a sense of social belonging.

To prevent dropout, educational units must find proper strategies for developing and stimulating a sense of AI among students. As Finn (1989) argued, dropping out is strongly related to disidentification with academics, making them identify with other domains of interest (Osborne & Jones, 2011). According to Fourie's (2020) study results, among the potential risk factors related to first-year students' intention to drop out of university is maintaining a sense of belonging. By conducting cross-sectional quantitative research on 4596 first-year university students, the study results revealed that a high level of academic belongingness could decrease the intention to drop out.

Theoretical background specific to goal setting and attainment also supports the association between AI and EADI and how students pursue their academic goals. By compiling decision-theoretical models, Bäumle et al. (2022) have recently proposed a theoretical model of the process of EADI. This process consisted of five assumed phases of intentions to quit studies completely or intentions to change a major – non-fit perceptions, thoughts of quitting/ changing, deliberation, information search and decision made. To measure how strongly are intentions to quit studies completely correlated with each of the previously mentioned stages, Bäumle et al. (2022) conducted an online survey on a sample consisting of 1206 student participants. The results showed that the EADI among students is significantly correlated with all five phases, (i.e., r coefficient varying between .42 and .17). Thus, the intention to quit studies is stronger in the early stages – non-fit perceptions, thoughts of quitting/changing and deliberation, while the intensity of correlations is decreasing substantially in last two phases: information search, respectively decision made. These findings emphasize the need to investigate personality traits and EADI from its early stages (i.e., in the first university years and related to their anxious traits).

Also, to describe the relationship between EADI and a sense of belonging to the university, Suhlmann et al. (2018), tested a student-university fit model, following a cross-sectional online survey conducted on a sample of 367 German undergraduate students. The recorded results showed that an increasing sense of belonging to the university is reducing the dropout intention. Still, studies directly testing the association between AI and EADI are scarce and indirect. Our study tests directly the incremental power of AI for EADI by using operational measures of AI related to their social role.

4. Early Academic Dropout Intentions about Personal and Family Background

Spady (1971) ignited interest in dropout phenomena, introducing a model still relevant today for analysing higher education dropout. He emphasized the interaction between students and their academic environment, influenced by various sources and shaped by family background and high school experiences. Tinto (1975) built upon Spady's framework, linking family background, educational expectations, social integration, and dropout decisions. Tinto (1975) indicated that background characteristics, which also encompass parents' education and individual attributes (i.e., gender) are influencing the educational expectations and commitments the individual brings with him into the academic environment. Following Tinto's conceptual framework, Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) conducted a longitudinal study which unveiled the importance of institutional integration measurement related to first-year university students' persistence and voluntary dropout.

Therefore, by the 1970s, the attempts to properly conceptualize student dropout (attrition) failed due to the limitation of research almost exclusively on descriptive analysis, without being based on solid theoretical considerations, along with the contributions of researchers like Spady, Tinto, Pascarella and others, the research field of student attrition has grown and developed significantly in recent decades. Tinto has reported since 1982 that empirical studies focused on dropout and various policies, programs or workshops oriented on the prevention of student attrition have all become commonplace.

5. Gender and Early Academic Dropout Intentions

Gender is an important socio-demographic factor by which the risk of academic dropout can be predicted. According to national reports, in many countries, female students perform better where one gender group is a minority (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). Also, many surveys which encompass such analyses consider the interaction of dropout intention variable with the field of study, so, in this regard, differences were found between males and females. In a mixed-method empirical approach conducted between 2009 and 2012 on 20,159 students from four universities in Finland, Korhonen & Rautopuro (2019) found that female students from the Information Technology field of study are supposed to be at a higher risk of non-completion studies than male students. In contrast, in the education field of study, male students found themselves at a higher risk of dropout than female students.

By studying datasets of a longitudinal national survey which comprised 5383 participants who matriculated at university in various fields of study, Gury (2011) emphasized gender effect on academic dropout. As results suggest, female students are more likely to drop out during the first year of higher education, while attrition among male students is more observable among those in later years of study.

6. Parents' Education and Early Academic Dropout Intentions

Several studies emphasized the empirical relationship between the risk or even the intention of academic dropout and parents' level of education (Ghignoni, 2017; Aina, 2013; Lundetræ, 2011; Lassibille & Navarro-Gómez, 2008). By putting their analyses in various cultural and social contexts, researchers pointed out that parental background and mothers' and fathers' having lower than tertiary educational level predict a higher risk of dropout among upper secondary students or undergraduates.

7. Educational Expectations and Early Academic Dropout Intentions

Heublein (2014) showed that among the main at-risk groups of dropout, we can find the higher-education students who are starting their studies with wrong or false expectations, a fact which might lead to dropout decision caused by motivational reasons or change in vocational direction. Therefore, their decision is marked by uncertainty or possibly even by the certainty that they are not studying in their preferred subject.

Moreover, Kori et al. (2015) conducted research between 2013 and 2014, on a sample of 301 students, which showed that the expectations regarding the curriculum, the lecturers and teaching methods of first-year university students who dropped out were not met in a proper way comparatively with their peers who decided to continue academic studies. Kori et al. (2015) concluded that education expectations are a main factor which supports dropout at the higher education level.

8. Current Study

The current cross-sectional study aimed to test the predictive role of TA and AI over EADI. Furthermore, the moderating role of AI is consistent with previous empirical data and theoretical guidelines that show that AI explains improvements in stimulating people to persist over time in their plans because they are attached and experience positive emotions by exercising their specific academic identity. Consistent with previous analysis strategies and theoretical guidelines, we anticipated that a) TA and EADI are related significantly and b) TA interacts with AI to decrease EADI. We identified several psychosocial factors that determine the difference between students regarding EADI, therefore we controlled for the following factors: gender, education expectancies, fathers' education level and mothers' education level.

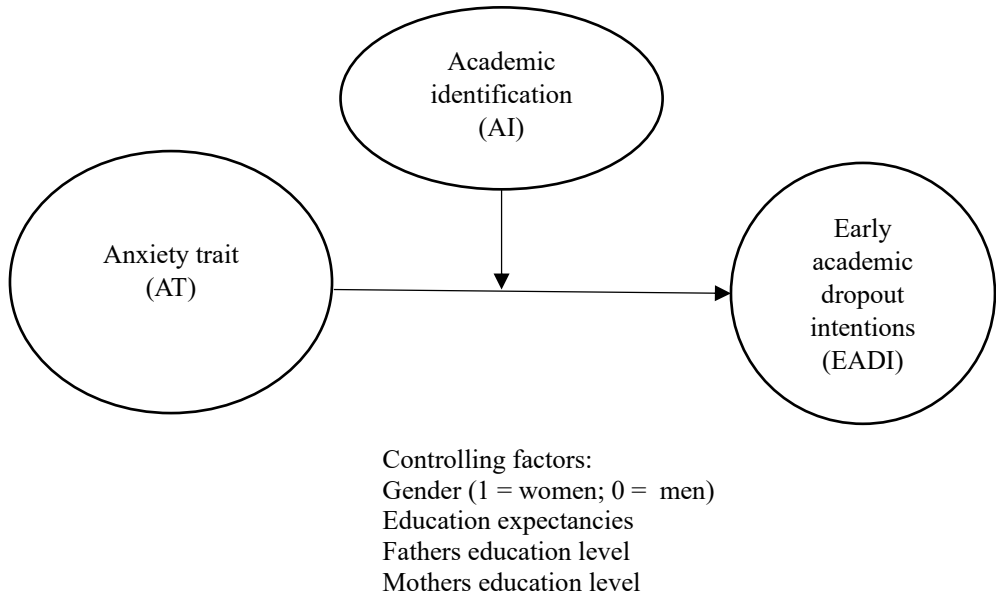


Figure 1. A conceptual model for early academic dropout intentions, explained by trait anxiety and academic identification.

To test our data, we used IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 and the Process macro v.3.1 for a simple moderation model. First, we tested the partial correlation between the main variables of the study by considering gender, education expectancies, the father's education level and the mother's education level. Finally, we tested the interaction model of TA and AI as moderation for EADI and described the effects for each level of AI. To avoid potentially problematic high multicollinearity with the interaction term, the variables were centred and an interaction term between TA and AI was automatically created. We used the following levels for the moderator: the mean of the moderator and one standard deviation above and below the mean.

9. Method

9.1. Participants and procedure

Our sample consisted of 439 first-year university students recruited from a public university, in the north-east part of Romania. All the participants were contacted through their teaching coordinator at several courses and voluntarily offered to participate in the study after finding out the details about the study. All the students received the following types of instruments to evaluate: EADI, academic TA inventory, and AI with their student role and their social and demographic information. Students did not receive compensation for participation. The students completed the questionnaires during the first semester of the academic year, most of them during the third and fourth months of the semester.

Out of all participants, 83% were women 17% were males and aged between 18 years old and 47 years old ($M = 19$, $SD = 5.004$), 60,9% were aged 18 and 19, 33,8% were aged between 20 and 29, and 5,1% are between 30 and 47. Moreover, when reporting the level of education from parents, students reported that 77% of their mothers finished high school 77.7% of their fathers finished high school, 11% of their mothers finished university studies and 11,3% of their fathers finished university studies and almost 1% of their mothers finished master and doctoral studies and almost 3% of their fathers finished master and doctoral studies. When asked about their expected finished educational level, 14,3% of students reported wanting to finish their bachelor studies, 61% reported wanting to have a master's degree and 21,8% reported wanting to finish doctoral studies. All of the students were enrolled in social sciences studies in both studies with intense frequency and reduced frequency (i.e. social work, sociology, psychology, educational sciences).

9.2. Measures

Trait anxiety was assessed using the 10-item subscale from The Academic Anxiety Inventory (Pizzie & Kraemer, 2019) reflecting the broader patterns of anxiety and uneasiness, as well as general and constant feelings of being anxious and discouraged. Participants were asked to choose the rating that best reflects their attitude in general regarding each statement while considering that statements describe different feelings and situations usually encountered in school. A five-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) was used to assess the answers of the participants. The internal consistency for this scale reflects good internal consistency indicators (Cronbach's Alpha = .83).

Academic identification was assessed using the adapted version of the scale by Doosje et al. (1995), used to measure general social identification. The scale consists of 4 items and reflects the way students find themselves attached and identified with their academic role of being students by considering the environment (i.e. the faculty and specific domain of study) they are in and also their enjoyment when considering their specific academic role (i.e. „I identify myself with the faculty that I enrolled“, „I am dedicated to my academic studies“, „I am glad to be a part of this faculty“ and „Being a part of this faculty is an important part of how I see myself“). A five-point Likert scale (from 1 = very low degree to 5 = very high degree) was used to assess each statement. The internal consistency computed reflects good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = .88).

Early academic dropout intentions were evaluated using five items focused on the present academic aspirations following Hardre and Reeve's (2003) model for evaluation to assess future EADI and early persistence for academic schooling intentions (e.g., „I sometimes think to dropout studies“). Cronbach's alpha = .82 and indicates good reliability.

10. Results

We used IBM SPSS Statistics version 21 and the Process macro v.3.1. Table 1 shows the partial correlation that we analysed. The direction and magnitude of

the four-order correlation of EADI with the other main measures showed that TA is positively and significantly associated ($r = .32, p < .001$), while AI is negatively and significantly associated ($r = -.41, p < .001$; see Table 1). TA is associated negatively and significantly with AI ($r = -.22, p < .001$).

Table 1. Partial correlation among measures accounting for gender, education expectancies, fathers' education level and mothers' education level and descriptive data

	M	SD	1	2
1. Anxiety trait	2.76	.76		
2. Early academic drop-out intentions	1.40	.67	.32**	
3. Academic identification	3.77	.81	-.22**	-.41**

** $p < 0.001$

To test whether AI has an impact on the relationship between TA and EADI, we tested AI as a moderator using the Process macro v.3.1. (Hayes) to explore the interaction effects and explore the decrease/increase of the outcome when conditioned at the levels of the moderator. We mean-centred the main independent variables, including the interaction term and used the following levels for the moderator: the mean of the moderator and one standard deviation above and below the mean.

Table 2. Moderation effects of academic identification and anxiety trait on early academic dropout intentions

	B (SD)	t	p
Model 1			
Constant	1.67 (.20)**	8.08	< .001
Anxiety trait	.21 (.05)**	4.15	< .001
Academic identification	-.21 (.04)**	-5.73	< .001
Anxiety trait X Academic identification	-.17 (.05)*	-3.06	.002
Gender	.48 (.10)**	4.49	< .001
Education expectancies	.005 (.008)	.05	.95
Fathers education level	-.03 (.09)	-.35	.72
Mothers education level	-.10 (.06)	-1.70	.08

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.001$

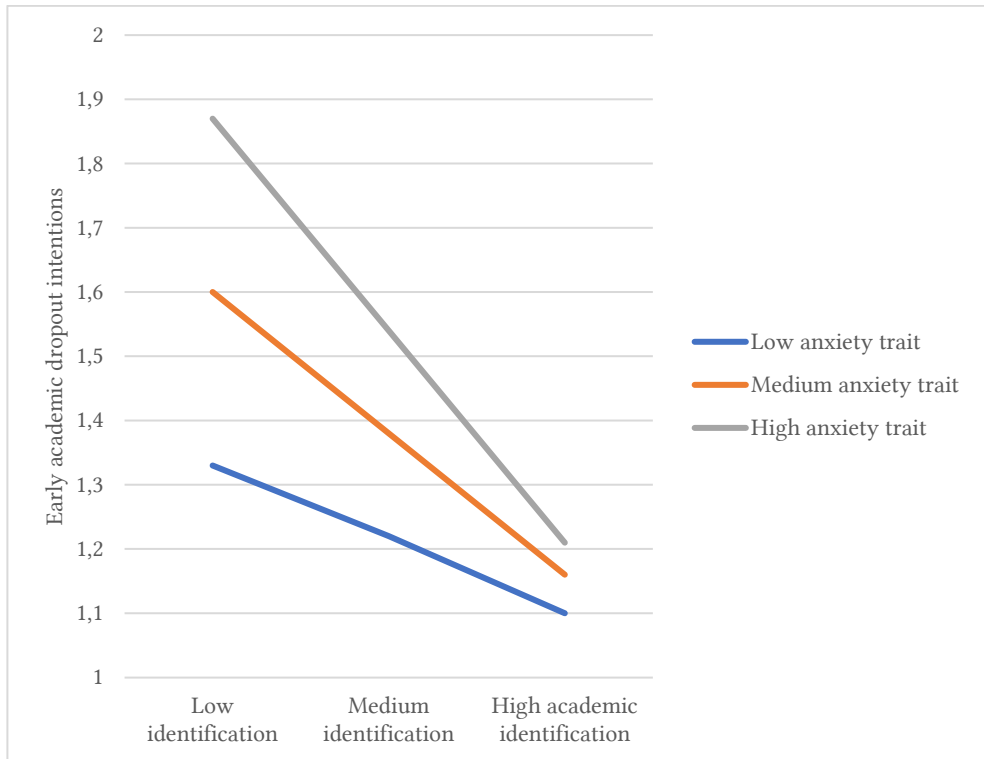


Figure 2. Prediction of early academic dropout intentions as an interaction between academic identification and anxiety trait

All the main variables and covariates accounted for a significant amount of variance in EADI ($R^2 = .57$, $F(7, 431) = 15.70$, $p < .001$; see Table 2) and almost all predictors showed significant explanatory power, except the level of education of parents and a marginal effect of educational expectancies. The interaction term accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in EADI ($R^2 = .03$, $F(1, 431) = 9.42$, $p = .002$). The conditional effect of the focal predictor at the values of the moderator revealed an enhanced significant effect on the lower level of AI ($b = .35$, $se = .06$, $p < .001$) and on the average levels of AI ($b = .21$, $se = .05$, $p < .001$), compared to the nonsignificant results on the high levels of identification ($b = .07$, $se = .06$, $p = .31$; see Figure 1). Results also show that gender significantly determines EADI ($b = .48$, $se = .10$, $p < .001$), indicating that men are more prone to EADI ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .92$), compared to women ($M = 1.5$, $SD = .72$). Education expectancies and parents' education background does not determine EADI significantly.

11. Discussions

Besides the low rate of enrolment in tertiary education, the phenomenon of academic dropout is one of the top topics on the educational policy agenda in Romania and in the European Union. In a study using the U-Multirank self-

assessment exercise, different authors show that Romanian universities face a high dropout rate, with the highest dropout rate recorded in the year I, with almost half of the students enrolled in the year I not completing their studies, and almost 40% enrolled in tertiary education not completing their degree (Sava et. al 2017; Verdes, 2021, World Bank Project, 2015, Statista, 2022). The literature explicitly considered the intention to drop out of education as „the strongest single predictor of dropout” and this link was confirmed by various studies (Eicher, et. al. 2014), but we believe that trait anxiety and academic identification are relevant for the early formation of intentions. Although EADIs do not necessarily lead to quitting studies, they constitute a clear sign of disengagement and an increased risk of dropping out. The current study confirms that EADI is determined by TA and by how strongly they identify with their new academic role.

Prior research links dropout risk to anxiety since adolescence, with higher anxiety scores correlating with increased dropout intentions (Carsley, 2017; Respondek, 2017). Our findings align with literature showing significant personality differences between college persisters and dropouts (Tinto, 2017). This research also highlights an interaction between anxiety (TA) and academic identification (AI), suggesting potential student profiles. Dropouts often display impulsivity, lack emotional commitment, and struggle with flexibility and stability, contrasting with their persisting peers (Tinto, 2017). Rootman (1972) suggests dropout is a response to a misfit between an individual and institutional norm, especially concerning intellectual and social climates.

Furthermore, we also identify gender as being important for this process of understanding EADI Concordant to previous empirical results (Vossensteyn et al., 2015) men are more at risk of forming EADI. Gender plays a crucial role in understanding EADI; men, particularly in social sciences, show a higher inclination toward academic dropout than women (Vossensteyn et al., 2015; Korhonen & Rautopuro, 2019). Girls often report more depressive symptoms, while boys exhibit more conduct problems (Vossensteyn et al., 2015). While personality traits like anxiety significantly influence dropout intentions, other factors like socioeconomic status and parents' education didn't show a significant impact in our study (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). These factors are interconnected, affecting academic performance holistically. Notably, about one in ten young students have a diagnosable mental disorder, highlighting prevalent psychological challenges (Parviainen et al., 2020).

12. Limits of the study

The first limitation of the study is that all the participants are enrolled in social sciences and the general representativity of results is limited. The unbalanced distribution of gender (83% women, 17% men) is also a limitation of the study since the analyses include gender comparisons. Still, this discrepancy is generally representative of the social sciences domain. Another factor limiting the generality of our results is that we used a conventional population. Further studies should consider sampling ways for participants. Another limitation of the study is that

measurement invariance has not been shown before conducting group comparisons. We also did not provide a power analysis to control for sample size and for sufficient statistical power to detect a real significant association. It is important to note some practical limitations of this study and potential future developments within the departments that handle counselling and guide students during their enrolment. This study has practical limitations, focusing on first-year social sciences students at a Romanian university. Future research should examine AI and TA's predictive impact on EADI, accessing dropout records from Academic Services across universities and diverse fields. Including student interviews can validate quantitative findings. Other factors like dissatisfaction and academic exhaustion are linked to dropout intentions (Cvetkovski et al., 2018; Holdsworth et al., 2018; Solberg Nes et al., 2009). Casanova et al. (2021) emphasize the role of autonomy, resilience, and academic achievement in academic challenges. While this study delves into stable psychological traits like trait anxiety and academic identification influencing early dropout intentions, early screening tools are crucial for at-risk students.

13. Practical implications

Research links psychological issues to school dropout risk (Bask & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Internalizing symptoms include anxiety and sorrow, while externalizing symptoms involve aggression and defiance. Similarly, to other work (i.e., Respondek, 2017) that found that anxiety, perceived as a latent variable and component of academic emotions, is strongly correlated with dropout intention, we believe this component is relevant to long-term academic development and various outcomes. Students' symptoms of anxiety are associated with various academic-related problems, such as low work engagement, poor academic achievement, and truancy (Egger et al., 2003). Thus, psychological ill-being – where anxiety is one of the major components- is also linked to the intention of dropping out of university (Mills, 2017), which may, in turn, place an individual at a disadvantage later in life.

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*** World Bank Project to Help Romania Reverse Increasing High School Dropout Rates and Declining University Enrolment; <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/03/16/world-bank-project-to-help-romania-reverse-increasing-high-school-dropout-rates-and-declining-university-enrollment> [accessed February, 2022]

BOOK REVIEW

**Marius Lazăr, (2023). Teoria blocului de gheață. Explorări în
sociologia relațiilor interetnice [*Ice Block Theory*.
Explorations in the Sociology of Interethnic Relations],
Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj Napoca**

Adrian NETEDU¹

Casa Cărții de Știință, a well-known publishing house from Cluj Napoca (founded in 1992) publishes a new volume by the renowned sociologist Marius Lazăr, volume with the surprising title: *The Ice Block Theory* (metaphorical suggestion related to the reaction of minorities towards dominant groups between identity conservatism and openness relations towards the majority). It is a series of studies by the author gathered over twenty years of research on interethnic relations (focusing mainly on Romanian-Hungarian relations in Transylvania) conducted through the *Research Center of Interethnic Relations - CCRIT, Institute for the Study of National Minorities Problems - ISPMN, Resource Center for Ethnocultural Diversity - CRDE, Metro Media Transilvania-MMT* etc.

The first part of the volume comes with typological clarifications (minorities grouped into three categories: Hungarians, Roma, and small minorities) but also historical. Thus, in the Old Kingdom the state was manifestly monoethnic, observes the author and after 1918 Romania became multiethnic. Through the signed international treaties, which guaranteed the borders of Greater Romania, the task of protecting national minorities was enshrined, even in conditions of ideological or nationalist slippages. After 1930, minorities were reduced quantitatively (following World War II, deportations, or emigration), the only minority with a significant increase being the Roma. Today, several 19 minorities are recognized in Romania, and their parliamentary representation is a reality (except for UDMR, all other parties and cultural associations have one parliamentary mandate). Marius Lazar analyses majority-minority political relations, highlighting certain tendencies of the current political scene, from the tendency to incorporate minority-elected representatives to the positive external image given by the political representation of minorities. A remarkable

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contribution of the author is to clarify the evolution of the concept of *minority* following the logic of overlapping three systems: the first coming from the Versailles peace treaty of 1919 (along with the state reconfigurations the protection of minorities was proposed, as I mentioned), the second coming from the Soviet model (with a declarative equalization of opportunities but with the „freezing of potential conflicts” to reactivate them if needed) and the third model - the one imposed by the EU (which enshrines a partial delegitimization of the principles of national sovereignty concerning minorities). The author notes that these three perspectives do not contribute fairly to the sociological definition of minority, just as the mere statistical mention of census data is not enough. So is the situation of various hegemonically imposed typologies. That is why the author proposes a review of anthropological perspectives, but also of political sociology regarding the evolution of the notion of *minority* (often associated with that of *ethnicity* – a concept difficult to define, as seen in *the CCRIT Eurobarometer* conducted in 2000). The first approach is the culturalist one, followed by a political approach. That said, the author details an extended definition of ethnicity in a subchapter distinguished by the quality of sociological reflection (in the good Bourdieusian tradition). Remarkable is M. Lazar's analysis regarding the „French” from Banat (starting from a study of Smaranda Vultur) settled/displaced since the 1700s in Tomnatic commune (Timiș county), who after decades were assimilated with the Swabians or Hungarians, and were going to ask for repatriation after World War II. The example given by Marius Lazar allows him to bring into discussion the sociological perspective of ethnicity „as modus operandi” by using the concepts of *habitus*, *social or symbolic capital* (P. Bourdieu) but also the notion of homophily (coming from social network theory). Regarding the historical evolution of minorities, the author notes that they are subject to two contradictory phenomena: a continuous process of homogenization (imposed by majority pressure) accompanied by a decrease in demographic capital and a process of „solidification” ensured internally by all instances that support the cultural reproduction of ethnic groups. The 'ice block' model appears in this analysis: dissipation and erosion on the outside versus the continuous strengthening of a hard core on the inside.

An example of these extremely complex relationships is found by the author in the case of (mixed) marriages as the main vehicle of ethnic and identity reproduction (referring to the declared ethnicity of descendants). Marius Lazar recalls situations in which the declared lineage is rather inclined towards the dominant group (as an expression of modernity and/or increasing the chances of upward social mobility). In this context, ethnocentrism is not circumvented but only tempered: there are, says the author, *pure ethnic groups* only in the discourse of certain ideologies ready to justify various forms of domination.

A second chapter (written in collaboration with Istvan Horvath) is dedicated to interethnic sources of conflicts/tensions in Transylvania with a starting point in the elections that took place in 1996. The author makes a concise analysis of Romania before and after the Revolution to identify the sources of conflicts often knowingly provoked at the micro or macro social level. The analysis

of the evolution of social tensions from the perspective of capital theory proves very opportune here (see the idea that the new elite, the heiress of the former communist elite, actually converted *relational capital* into private *economic capital*). As for the reform of local administrations in the post-revolution period, this was done through a sinuous itinerary dictated by the redefinition of central vs. local relations to which were added the interethnic tensions (re)appeared. As far as political competition is concerned, the author notes the similarities of voting/political orientation according to the ethnic map of Transylvania. An in-depth factorial analysis applied to a sample from the municipality of Cluj brings a series of important nuances by identifying the contribution of four variables in social differentiation worthy of consideration in any profile analysis: urban/rural origin, parents' studies, level of social integration and standard of living. Another argument taken into account by the author was the weight of UDMR (The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania) in the Transylvanian counties (a fact with significant influence on the vote in the presidential elections of that year) but also the rural/urban differences (which blurred the ethnic divergences). The same blurring has been visible in interviews with local elected officials: a certain sense of collectivity makes threats usually come from outside, while internal ethnic relations are described as harmonious. If certain tensions arise, it would rather be due to the intrusion of those from the centre into the local administration (through its representatives – the communal secretaries).

The third chapter of the paper extends a research conducted by the author and a group of sociologist colleagues in the year 2000 in Harghita and Covasna counties with the purpose indicated in the title, to identify „conflicting identities and antagonistic roles” in minority-majority relations. The survey included a sample of 1282 respondents representative of the population in both counties. The author draws attention to the tendency to read *Szeklerland* as an exotic space characterized by distorted information or uncontrollable urban legends. To overcome these limitations, the author recommends direct field observation as well as avoidance of *double insider syndrome* (Naumovici, 1999) to ensure objectivity and neutrality of the researcher. Marius Lazăr reviews the establishment and evolution of *Szeklerland* (from ancient tribal descent to the Hungarian Autonomous Region) highlighting the sinuous interethnic relations between Romanians and Hungarians (an example would be the double exclusion at the discursive level: „the majority want to implement a Romanian colonization”, the minorities believe vs. „the Romanians are expelled from the two counties”, the majority believe etc.). The interviews conducted by the research team brought several additional clarifications and relativized to a large extent „perceived discrimination”. Analysis of the interviews revealed difficulties with linguistic adaptation, political socialization, or perceptions of the historical past and religious oppression. However, discrimination is more intensely invoked in urban areas, more intensely in Covasna than in Harghita, more intensely where Hungarians are dominant, more intensely even among those who declare that they know Hungarian at a satisfactory level etc. An important finding was that interethnic tensions are directly related to the

ethno-demographic structure of localities in the sense that „the declared adversity towards the representatives of the competing group is lower in the areas where the two groups coexist only where the population is perfectly homogeneous” (p. 115). This is possible because a social process of *tolerance building* intervenes and acts as a control in the face of potential conflict. This explains why interethnic conflicts exist on a declarative level, but not in real life. Another important aspect concerns the majority's strategy of considering themselves as minorities and each other. Finally, one of the many conclusions drawn by the author can be mentioned here: the majority-minority role-playing game is variable depending on the competitors' frame of reference. In this context, the conflict avoidance strategies are „complex role-playing games, double strategies, combined modes of survival and often masks”.

Chapter four entitled *Social Semantics and Ethnicity* aims to identify a typology of *discursive identity modes*. The author proceeds to a secondary analysis of the data collected in the research from 1997-2008 focused on the topic of *ethnicity*, and the main technique was factorial analysis / principal components analysis. As is well known, such an analysis aims to simplify a large number of variables to a small number of factors designed to synthesize distinct types of attitudes. Two large groups of variables entered the analysis: the first consisting of socio-demographic and cultural characteristics (likely to influence attitudinal variations) and the second group consisting of attitudinal variables grouped according to 14 thematic areas. Finally, the author identified eight factors (actually eight distinct attitudinal types): *orientation towards the political right, orientation towards UDMR, critical loyalism, Roma activism, xenophobia and nationalist radicalism, minority radical loyalism, liberalism and moderate Hungarianophobic liberalism*, each of the attitudes being attributed to well-defined social groups/strata by socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics. In the end, the author draws attention to the fact that the methodology used to explain ethnocentrism has facilitated the identification of some „ideal types” that only reveal a very complex sociocultural reality influenced by how „ethnocentric glasses” are used: by denying the relevance of ethnicity by the majority or by denying objective social relations by the minority.

Chapter five is an analysis of *the local press and the interethnic climate*. Marius Lazar resumes a series of classic clarifications regarding the research of media consumption and the impact of information starting from P. Lazarsfeld or R. Merton. The purpose of such research is to understand the importance of local media in the communication structure of Transylvanian ethnicities. The author makes a series of subtle demarcations between the central press, the regional press, and the local press in Romanian/Hungarian, especially given that several central press agencies have set up local branches. The *content analysis* research took place in March-May 1999 with an area covering 13 Transylvanian counties following 57 publications, the research goals being listed from the start: thematic coverage of the respective publications, attitudes of publications in the space of political opinions in Romania and attitudes regarding minorities and interethnic. The

content analysis used four types of tools: description according to the editorial box, first-page sheet, editorial evaluative sheet, *ethnic* and *regional* evaluative sheet. The evaluative analyses were accompanied by a five-step attitude scale: from *very positive* to *very negative*. After laborious thematic and attitudinal analyses, the author calculated, as appropriate, *the dominant attitude index* (Ia). Each publication was thus characterized by themes and editorial evaluations. The author was thus able to ascertain the significant differences between publications in Romanian and those in Hungarian, taking into account their origin (former publications governed by PCR [the Romanian Communist Party] vs. new publications) or addressability area (local, regional, central). Regarding the problems of the Hungarian community, the Romanian-language press was generally critical, while the Hungarian-language press tended towards neutrality. In fact, 41.3% of the Romanian-language press have an unfavourable or very unfavourable attitude towards Hungarians. Such percentages were higher in the local press and much more weighted in the central press. Making a typology of attitudes towards Hungarians, the author differentiates between radical and moderate attitudes. Among the radical ones, the unfavourable attitude came from Romanian/local/former PCR publications, while the favourable attitudes came from Hungarian/local/new publications after the Revolution (1989). Overall, Marius Lazar observes that 'ethnic' attitudes must also be seen in relation to specific transformations of the Romanian press in the new period of democratic opening.

The second part of this paper is entitled *Reactions* and shows us another face of Marius Lazar: the sociologist is also a man of the city, which is why he reacts to topics of public interest, from editorial appearances to various artistic events. These are events that can benefit from clarification through the prism of a rich tradition of sociological research on ethnicity. Thus, the author's contributions were briefly the following: notes on urban Cluj and the nationalist administration of sad memory; reflections starting from an exhibition of photographs signed by „Duo van der Mixt” (in fact Mihai Pop and Ciprian Rusu artists); a foreword to the Romanian version of the volume signed by R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, J. Fox and L. Grancea (2006). *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, Oxford; a very critical comment on a volume signed by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (1999). *Subjective Transylvania*, Humanitas; a critical but well-reasoned review of Dan David's volume (2015), *The Psychology of the Romanian People*, Polirom; a small essay on *Conflicts, stereotypes and ethnic prejudices* and finally a commentary on a show entitled *Double Bind* played in 2015 at the Astra Film Fest Festival in Sibiu. All these contributions are directly related to the research detailed in the first part of the book and come to complete a very complex vision of the social reality that we see in Marius Lazăr, a sociologist with a sinuous speech reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's style, but also a brilliant methodologist who builds his arguments mainly on the statistical interpretation of data with a starting point in sociological field observation.