

ANALYSIS OF THE OPPORTUNITIES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION OF CHILDREN FROM FAMILIES AT SOCIAL RISK IN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

The article deals with the opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk attending children's day care centres into community life, social educational and cultural activity, volunteering. The article presents the analysis of a qualitative semi-structured interview. Performing target content analysis of the experiences of the professionals of children's day care centres (N=10) the main directions of social inclusion of the members of families at risk and their realization opportunities from the aspect of the subjective opinion of the professionals revealing current situation and predicting possible demands are emphasized.

Keywords: *family at social risk, social inclusion, volunteering, children's day care centres.*

Introduction

Families at social risk are described as families, where the collaboration and emotional communication of the members are disordered, and the environment itself is not suitable for full development of personality. In such families there is a bigger probability that child's psychosocial and physical needs will not be appropriately satisfied, and the way of communication itself limits child's opportunities to express needs and feelings to a rather great extent. Children growing up in such families have low self-esteem, they do not expect that their needs are important and can be satisfied, they do not have appropriate social skills. In such families crisis is predominant because one or several members of a family abuse alcohol, narcotic and psychotropic substances or are addicted to gambling, or because of their disability, poverty, lack of social skills cannot or do not know how to care about children, or they use psychical, physical or sexual violence, or use the support from the government not for the interests of the family (The Law on Social Services of the Republic of Lithuania, 2006; The Child Welfare State Policy Concept of Lithuania 2003, Child Welfare Programme, 2013–2018, The Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to the Family and Community Based Services to the Children with Disabilities and the Children who Have Lost Parental Care for 2014–2020, 2014).

The data of the Department of Statistics of the Republic of Lithuania and the aforementioned documents indicate that 10 235 families raising 20 664 under-age children were included into the group of families at social risk. It should be noted that alcohol and psychotropic substance abuse and lack of social skills in families remain the main reasons why the biggest number of families are included into the record in whole Lithuania.

The authors (Jonutytė, 2007; Malinauskas, 2011) present wider factors of social risk: social economic factors (low material level of a family, poor conditions of accommodation, parents' unemployment) social demographical factors (absence of one or both parents, remarriage, a child from outside the family), medical-sanitary factors (unfavourable living conditions, parents' chronic diseases, complicated heredity), psychological-pedagogical factors (disorders of internal interpersonal relations in the family, deformation of value attitudes of the family members, parents' pedagogical failures, not sufficiently emotional and distrust-based relationships between parents and children), criminal factors (violence in the close environment). In such a situation in families children know the skills of socially unacceptable behaviour better, such children face more social problems because their feeling of safety and confidence in oneself and environment are not formed, difficulties in communication increase, children feel anxiety, sadness, the symptoms of depression appear, self-control decreases, tendency to conflicts and aggression increase, initiative fades out, cognitive activity weakens.

The aim of the family policy is to prepare and implement measures in order to establish the conditions for a family to be an autonomous, responsible, firm, stable, active and independent institute able to independently perform its functions, to ensure the welfare of generations, development of healthy society, vitality and creativity of the nation and state. Therefore, state and nongovernmental institutions must ensure friendly environment for the integrity of a family increasing its social inclusion and activeness. In the recent decade social and economic (poverty, violence, unemployment) problems have become apparent, the system of social assistance and support for family is insufficient. The current infrastructure of social support is poorly developed, the system of social assistance and support is focused not on preventive work or providing services to a family but rather on consequences (Conception of Family Policy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2008).

In order to reduce social exclusion and increase social inclusion, to ensure child's, especially growing in a family at social risk, right to growing up in a family friendly to him/her the activity of children's day care centres was being developed in municipalities and communities providing outclient day social and educational services for children growing up in families at social risk, their families, expanding the network of natural (institutions, volunteers) social support. (The Child Welfare State Policy Concept, 2003; Child Welfare Programme, 2013-2018).

The data of the scientific research (Aperavičienė, 2009; Indrašienė & Šlapelienė, 2007; Rimkus & Žemgulienė, 2013; Masiliauskienė & Griškutė, 2010, etc.) analysing the opportunities of social pedagogical support for children of families at risk do not raise doubt about the purposefulness of children's day care centres aiming at positive socialization of clients, inclusion of the families of these children into social and cultural domain of communities. *What are the opportunities of the inclusion of these centres into the activity of the community, NGOs, other institutions? What is the collaboration with the institutions and volunteers of the community and the members of these children's families? What are the opportunities of the development of these activities?* These and other questions form the problem field of the article.

Object of the research – opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk from the aspect of the subjective experiences of the professionals.

Aim of the research – to reveal the opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk.

Methodology and sample of the research. The informants were chosen by target convenience sampling, i.e., professionals in various fields working at children's day care centres were chosen. To analyse the experiences of those professionals of day centres (N=10) qualitative method of data collection (semi-structured *interview*) was chosen, directly communicating with the informants. During the interview open questions not limiting possible answers according to the evaluation areas set by the researchers were used. The areas were distinguished having analysed scientific literature and documents (National Programme of Children's Day Care Centres, 2005–2007, The Child Welfare State Policy Concept of Lithuania 2003, Child Welfare Programme, 2013–2018), The Action Plan for the Transition from Institutional Care to the Family and Community Based Services to the Children with Disabilities and the Children Who Have Lost Parental Care for 2014–2020, 2014).

The research data were arranged applying the method of content analysis, using the procedure of open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Kvale, 2003). The results of qualitative research were divided into diagnostic areas, the responses according to meaning were divided into categories, the frequency of notional units was calculated. Applying this method, according to Merkys (1995), it is necessary to encounter characteristic typical structural units in the contents of the texts analysed. The informants (professionals in various fields working at children's day care centres) were chosen by target sampling. For the validation of the data of qualitative research the method of experts was used (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Kvale, 2003). The expert was given the tables of the qualitative research with previewed diagnostic areas, the categories characterizing them and statements illustrating them, having analysed them the expert expressed the opinion about the suitability of the data presented. The expert's essential remarks (naming and specification of diagnostic areas, regrouping and highlighting of certain illustrating statements, distinguishing and highlighting the services "provided", "to be provided" or expected and the directions of activity) were taken into account analysing and interpreting the data. That allowed striving for the clearer, more detailed presentation of the research, more precise presentation and analysis of the empiric data of the qualitative research, the quality of the interpretation and presentation of the results. During the research preconceived theoretical descriptions were avoided, the categories were not theoretically purposefully grouped.

Analysis of the results of the research

During the interview it was aimed to distinguish the peculiarities of the development of social education, educational services of children's day care centres (educational process, leisure, material support, communication with children's families, organization of volunteering, etc.). In the article we will present just a few fields of evaluation. One of them is the opportunities of the inclusion of the clients of children's day care centres and collaboration with other institutions. The data have been analysed from the aspects of the evaluation of the current situation and demand, the development of possible and desirable activity (Table 1).

Table 1. Opportunities of the inclusion of the clients of children's day care centres and collaboration with other institutions: subjective evaluation of the situation and demand

Social inclusion of the clients of children's day care centres and the opportunities of the collaboration with other institutions: subjective evaluation of the current situation		
Categories	N	Examples of proving statements (notional units)
Collaboration with municipality institutions	10	"Only in particular case with PPS", "Department of education" "Department of social support", "Eldership".
Collaboration with educational institutions	10	"Very strong contact with schools, ...with school social pedagogues or a special pedagogue", "...with class teachers, tutors" "; "With the community of the kindergarten" .
Collaboration with other institutions and NGOs	10	"ŠU", "Vilnius pedagogical training centre", "Romučiai village rehabilitation (additions) centre", "Confederation of Šiauliai non-governmental organizations", "Association of the Christian education of children"; "ŠU, Art Therapy Centre;...other CDCC"; "Women's "Lions" club"; "Various funds.
Collaboration with police services for juvenile matters	8	"...It is prevention to a greater extent; ...as much as it is necessary"; "...we keep in touch ..."; "...particular help"; "Preventive events ...".
Collaboration with healthcare institutions	6	"...because of TBC", "It is ...sometimes done what is to be done by a family"; "... According to the needs".
Keeping in touch with the community	6	"Community (neighbours); ...seniors are involved"; "Very strong..."; "Participation in joint activity ... trying to talk..."
Social inclusion of the clients of children's day care centres and the opportunities of the collaboration with other institutions: evaluation of demand		
Need for the police as an institution performing a preventive role	10	"...For prevention"; "More initiative is expected..."; "...Prevention... not as an instrument for threatening".
Need for the collaboration with other institutions and NGOs for project activities and financing	10	"Collaboration can be very wide... both on the issue of professionals and financing..."; "...public institutions, ŠU for professionals...for financing..."; "...especially other CDCCs; ...for help implementing projects", "As much contacts as possible"; "It is necessary to collaborate with NGOs more"
Need for municipality institutions as providing assistance not supporting control	9	"...more listening...and mutual openness"; "... Children's Rights Protection Service should care for the activity of CDCCs not statistically ...it would be possible...to address without humiliation or an outstretched hand..."; ", Children's Rights Protection Service – one of the main partners ...department of social support";
Need for the participation of educational institutions	9	"It should start from kindergartens, ...establish relations with various hobby groups"; "Especially close relation ...with school"; "'negotiations' with various hobby groups".
Need for keeping in touch with the community	9	"CDCC is not a "torn-out" unit ..."; "CDCC is one of the links of the community, ...for example ,to involve pensioners into activity..."; "...to look for contacts ourselves...; ...solve problems together...; ...it would be good to participate in joint events as much as possible...".
Need for the involvement of healthcare institutions	7	"According to particular needs; Very necessary...".

Analysing the evaluation area of the opportunities of social inclusion of the clients of children's day care centres and collaboration with other institutions the complexity and many-layeredness of this process are distinguished as well as the social situation itself of children of families at risk. It is evident that the collaboration mostly takes place with municipality, educational institutions, NGOs, and the importance of their participation in providing social services and organizing educational process at CDCC is emphasized. Such collaboration and mutual commitment with the aforementioned institutions is also set in National Programme of Children's Day Care Centres, 2005–2007 (2004).

Police services for juvenile matters is considered as an important social partner of CDCC (N=8), as well as healthcare institutions (N=6) that should be involved into the process of social assistance to children from families at risk in case of need, according to the demands (because of tuberculosis, scabies or other health problems), when it is necessary to "temporarily substitute" parents, if they because of various reasons do not feel it is necessary to take care of their children.

CDCC staff state that there are social relations with the community (participation in events, voluntary actions), but it happens that children from families at risk are sometimes ignored allowing to understand their otherness, social exclusion.

Analysing the opportunities of the development of the collaboration of CDCC in the statements of the professionals the deficit of certain activities or the unrealized domains of activity are distinct. Discussing the activity of police services for juvenile matters the informants (N=10) indicate the lack of "*initiative...*", the importance of "*...prevention but not threatening...*". It is likely that the methods of the assistance in advance but not of authorisation would help to much more effectively solve the social situation of children from families at social risk.

The involvement of municipality institutions (N=9) in the activity of CDCC in the context of the development of joint relations is poorly implemented. The professionals state that the probability of the help for these children would be bigger if the officials showed more *openness* and *listening* instead of waiting for "*humiliation with an outstretched hand...*".

In the CDCC professionals' opinion, the action powers of extracurricular activity of educational institutions (hobby groups, children's engagement in activities) are not sufficiently implemented as a universal social educational space for children, adults and seniors, including families at social risk (Aperavičienė, 2009; Guščinskienė & Kondrotaitė, 2006; Vaitkevičius, 1995).

Summing up it is possible to state that the collaboration of CDCC with various institutions is going on positively. Insufficiently implemented but important activity areas are worrying: development of preventive activity of statutory institutions, involvement of communities into social and educational activity that would allow viewing children's day care centres not as an object of exclusion but as a component of the society that has its own needs and wishes to experience the success of social inclusion together with everyone.

During the research it was aimed to learn about the professionals' experiences about the opportunities of the involvement of volunteers into the activity of children's day care centres (Table 2).

Table 2. Volunteering in the activity of children's day care centres: subjective evaluation of the situation and demand

Volunteering in the activity of children's day care centres: evaluation of the current situation		
Categories	N	Examples of proving statements (notional units)
Participation of professionals of various fields	9	<i>"An artist, an actress work there..."; "There is a constant hygienist"; "There is an astrologist..."; "Psychologist,...others from time to time"; "Momentary – according to the demands; ...one a month on a certain topic".</i>
Peculiarities of students' volunteering	6	<i>"Yes, constantly, but not much and for a short time", "usually trainees"; "...there were cases...of students ready for permanent work, but there is no continuity".</i>
Specifics of high school students' involvement	5	<i>"To motivate,...playing music"; "Yes, but little ,occasionally"; "Gymnasium students constantly work there...homework, games"; "These are usually one-time projects".</i>
Volunteering in the activity of children's day care centres: evaluation of demand		
Need for encouraging students' volunteering	10	<i>"...should have strong motivation and willingness"; "it is a mission..."; "...they are needed as helpers very much..."; "There should be very particular activity, constant"; "...traditions and continuity would be necessary...".</i>
Need for professionals of various fields sharing their experience in the context of volunteering	10	<i>"The most useful – with particular professional activity or ...project..."; "Very necessary, ...it is rather a lifestyle", "...especially artists...";</i>
Need for the development of high school students' voluntary activity	7	<i>"It has to be developed ..."; "Yes...there should be...particular activity...desire...and readiness".</i>

Analysing the situation of the involvement of volunteers into the activity of children's day care centres it becomes distinct that the professionals of various fields participate there (N=9): *artist, actress, astrologist, psychologist*, enriching the process of social education of children from families at risk with new social and cultural experience that they lack. According to the participants of the research, it is regrettable that the activity of these professionals is not consistent, they come episodically and rarely meet the children.

University students (N=6) and high school students (N=5) also volunteer at CDCC. University students come during practical placements and for rather a short time, high school students, especially gymnasium students, are constant volunteers and help children from families at risk very much *doing homework, learning or organizing leisure time*.

The participants of the research think that the participation of volunteers in the activity of CDCC is undoubtedly a positive thing, only, in their opinion, it should take place in an orderly manner, regularly, volunteers should be motivated, maybe even specially trained. That would help to create the variety of educational, social and cultural activities of these centres, stimulate the children's self-development and possible successful involvement into the society. The informants think that volunteering should be perceived as *"lifestyle", "mission with positive mutual profit"*.

Volunteering is desirable and to be encouraged, unfortunately, it is a rather weak link of the activity of CDCC, because of poorly developed culture of volunteering in our country, lack of motivation of volunteers themselves, the gaps in the system of their bringing together and training. Although being rather chaotic volunteering is very desirable in children's day care centres, this work should be systematic and have a clearly defined field of activity. It is desirable to establish relations with higher educational institutions, gymnasiums and progymnasiums, organizations that train volunteers. It is likely that disinterested help to a neighbour is one of the strongest factors of personality development that allow experiencing the joy of communion, gaining experience (Jonutytė, 2007; Jordans & Ochman, 1998; Karasevičiūtė, 2013).

Conclusions. Discussion

The analysis of scientific literature, legal documents, statistical data shows that in spite of difficult social and economic conditions of the country, a great extent of migration, the number of families at social risk is slightly decreasing. It is likely that it is influenced by the development of educational and social services of the community and children's day care centres that can be assured by the implementation of socioeducational initiative of the aforementioned institutions and the institutions of municipality, education and training, statutory, healthcare institutions, NGOs, communities that develop intelligent, inclusive, active, solidary, learning society that involves vulnerable groups of the society into this process as well, especially children.

In state documents regulating welfare of families and children it is admitted that there exists social exclusion in the society, violations of the rights of these people, especially children, and the opportunities to preserve their dignity, value, improve their life quality, social welfare. The documents presuppose the development of training, social and educational services, helping a learner, giving priority to children from families of social exclusion and risk group. Implementing the ideas set in state documents it was aimed to reduce social exclusion, to increase social inclusion, to ensure child's right to grow in a family, therefore, the activity of children's day care centres was being developed.

Collaboration of children's day care centres with various institutions is going on quite smoothly, on the other hand, there are many yet unrealized opportunities involving municipality institutions, statutory services and communities themselves into the collaboration process. It is likely that the probability of helping children from families at risk would be higher and more effective, if the participants of the educational process and the officials, specialists of statutory institutions worked on a parity basis, giving priority to preventive activity, and if educational institutions and communities perceived these children and families not as a sore point, but as a component of the society that has its own needs and wishes to experience the success of social inclusion together with everyone. The society is a many-layered structure and in order to preserve its stability it is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all the strata and their active interaction.

Development of voluntary activity can be a positive factor stimulating the success of social functioning of CDCC clients. It should be stated that because of poorly developed culture of volunteering in our country, lack of motivation of volunteers themselves, the gaps in the system of their bringing together and training this field of activity still has a large potential for realization. Although being rather chaotic volunteering is very desirable in children's day care centres, this work should be systematic and have a clearly defined field of activity.

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Summary

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The article deals with the opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk attending children's day care centres into community life, social educational and cultural activity, volunteering. The data of the scientific research (Aperavičienė, 2009; Indrašienė & Šlapelienė, 2007; Rimkus & Žemgulienė, 2013; Masiliauskienė & Griškutė, 2010, etc.) analysing the opportunities of

social pedagogical support for children of families at risk do not raise doubt about the purposefulness of children's day care centres aiming at positive socialization of clients, inclusion of the families of these children into social and cultural domain of communities. The main topic could be defined as: *What are the opportunities of the inclusion of these centres into the activity of the community, NGOs, other institutions? What is the collaboration with the institutions and volunteers of the community and the members of these children's families? What are the opportunities of the development of these activities?*

Object of the research – opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk from the aspect of the subjective experiences of the professionals. **Aim of the research** – to reveal the opportunities of social inclusion of children from families at social risk. To analyse the experiences of the professionals of day centres (N=10) qualitative method of data collection (semi-structured *interview*) was chosen, directly communicating with the informants.

In state documents regulating welfare of families and children it is admitted that there exists social exclusion in the society, violations of the rights of these people, especially children, and the opportunities to preserve their dignity, value, improve their life quality, social welfare. The documents presuppose the development of training, social and educational services, helping a learner, giving priority to children from families of social exclusion and risk group. Collaboration of children's day care centres with various institutions is going on quite smoothly, on the other hand, there are many yet unrealized opportunities involving municipality institutions, statutory services and communities themselves into the collaboration process. It is likely that the probability of helping children from families at risk would be higher and more effective, if the participants of the educational process and the officials, specialists of statutory institutions worked on a parity basis, giving priority to preventive activity, and if educational institutions and communities perceived these children and families not as a sore point, but as a component of the society that has its own needs and wishes to experience the success of social inclusion together with everyone. The society is a many-layered structure and in order to preserve its stability it is necessary to ensure the inclusion of all the strata and their active interaction. Development of voluntary activity can be a positive factor stimulating the success of social functioning of centres' clients. It should be stated that because of poorly developed culture of volunteering in our country, lack of motivation of volunteers themselves, the gaps in the system of their bringing together and training this field of activity still has a large potential for realization. Although being rather chaotic volunteering is very desirable in children's day care centres, this work should be systematic and have a clearly defined field of activity