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The Support of the Child and the Family Experiencing Spiritual Loneliness – as One of the Tasks of Family Assistants

Wsparcie dziecka i rodziny doświadczających samotności duchowej – jako jedno z zadań asystentów rodziny

Streszczenie

Rodzina to najważniejsze środowisko wychowujące młode pokolenie, to tam młody człowiek zdobywa wiedzę o świecie i przygotowuje się do samodzielności. By jednak to osiągnąć, musi najpierw mieć zaspokojone wszystkie potrzeby psychiczne, miłości, szacunku, bezpieczeństwa, przynależności. Gdy tego zabraknie (a tak dzieje się w rodzinach dysfunkcjonalnych), dziecko pozostawione jest same sobie i rodzi się w nim poczucie samotności.

Samotność to złożone zjawisko. W literaturze wymienia się kilka wymiarów tego stanu: społeczny, emocjonalny, aksjonormatywny (duchowy). Tekst dotyczy tego ostatniego rodzaju samotności, którą doświadczać może dziecko w rodzinie patologicznej. Jest to stan zagubienia w świecie norm i wartości, co skutkuje pustką moralną, brakiem świadomości i samoświadomości, światopoglądu, nieodczuwaniem miłości, wrażliwości, twórczości. Wynika ona z zaburzonych więzi psychospołecznych z najbliższymi, głównie z rodzicami (którzy często sami doświadczają tego stanu). Wsparcie takim rodzinom udziela wiele instytucji i osób. Jedną z nich są asystenci rodziny, którzy pełnią wiele zadań, wśród których ważne miejsce odgrywa wsparcie duchowe.

Słowa kluczowe: samotność duchowa, wsparcie duchowe, dziecko, rodzina dysfunkcjonalna, asystent rodziny.

Abstract

Family is the most important environment for the raising of the younger generation; there a young man gains knowledge about the world and prepares for independence. However, to achieve this, it must first have met all the needs of mental health, love, respect, security and belonging. When this runs out (as it happens in dysfunctional families), the child is left to fend for themselves and a sense of loneliness arises.

Loneliness is a complex phenomenon. The literature mentions several dimensions of this state: social, emotional, axio-normative (spiritual).The text refers to this latter kind of loneliness, which can be experienced by a child in a pathological family. It is a state of confusion in the world of norms and values, which results in moral emptiness, lack of awareness and self-awareness, lack of a worldview, not having the feelings of love, sensitivity and creativity. It stems from disturbed psycho-social ties with the loved ones, mostly with parents (who often experience this state themselves). Support for these families is provided by a number of institutions and individuals. One of them is family assistants, who perform many tasks, among which spiritual support plays an important role.

Keywords: Spiritual loneliness, spiritual support, child, dysfunctional family, family assistant.

Introduction

A family is a social group whose mission is to educate the young generation and to prepare them to live independently in the community. According to Helena Izdebska it primarily performs upbringing functions for children. The author considers caring for the proper physical and mental development of children, meeting the needs, especially the mental ones, of children, teaching about the culture as well as the norms and rules of a given society, developing cultural needs, teaching openness to the world's problems, how to cope with difficulties, motivating towards independence, organizing their own lives, exploring the potential of every child, shaping aspirations, striving for improvement, developing modesty, dignity and tolerance, respect for tradition and the nation as the most important parental activities[1]. Today, however, the ubiquitous social change, pluralism of values and moral norms, more often leads to disorganization and the disintegration of a family. The consequence is the emergence of family crises and its dysfunctionality. In families like this "impossible is constant and individual development of its members, who are closed for the contacts with the environment, the relationship between the members are not based on even relative sincerity and reciprocity, and the roles and standards are not clearly defined and

[1] H. Izdebska, *A family and its educating function*, [in:] W. Pomykało (ed.), *Pedagogy Encyklopedia*, Fundacja Innowacja, Warszawa 1993, p. 702.

accepted by each of its members"[2]. Moreover, the needs of people in the family, biological, emotional, and spiritual, are not met. Children growing up in such a family feel its consequences, because they experience physical, mental and moral negligence. The greatest danger is the emergence of loneliness, which results from disturbed psycho-social ties with the loved ones, especially with parents and this is the topic I will dedicate this text to.

The child's spiritual loneliness experienced in the dysfunctional family

Family is the most important educational environment for a child. According toArt.6 of the Acton Social Assistance from 12.03.2004 it consists of "related or unrelated persons remaining in the actual relationship, living together and running a household"[3]. A family, especially the parents have to fulfil a number of functions for each other and their children: economic, care, cultural, reproductive, social, and emotional[4]. When these tasks are not properly completed, the family becomes dysfunctional. We must remember that not only the emerging social problems (such as, for example, unemployment, addiction, mental illness, poverty) indicate a crisis situation, but also the lack of interest in the child. This is especially apparent in modern times, when parents being absorbed with work and other responsibilities, spend time with their child in shopping malls, where they compensate the lack of attention by buying new toys and gadgets. After all, a family is to meet the most important emotional needs of a child: acceptance, safety, love, belonging, recognition for positive achievements, support in difficulties, sharing emotions, stability and good prospects (graduating from school, self-empowerment[5]). When these are missing, negligence towards the child, and consequently loneliness occurs.

Loneliness is the objective or subjective state of being alone, without the support of other people, not being able to count on their help in the difficult moments of life. Loneliness is the "condition or situation when a person can not benefit from interpersonal ties, even though he wishes and needs to – sometimes so much that this unsatisfied desire and need may endanger his health and life, as

[2] B.T. Woronowicz, *Addiction. Genesis, treatment, recovery*, Parpamedia Publisher, Warszawa 2009, p. 325.

[3] The Act of 12 March 2004. *on social assistance*, Dz. U. 2004 No. 64, item. 593, as amended.

[4] Vide: F. Adamski, *Family – social – cultural dimension*, Jagiellonian University Publisher, Kraków 2002; J. Szczepański, *Basic Concepts of sociology*, Polish Scientific Publishers PWN, Warszawa 1970; Z. Tyszka, *Family Sociology*, Polish Scientific Publishers PWN, Warszawa 1976; S. Kawula, J. Brągiel, A.W. Janke, *Pedagogy of a family – areas and panorama issues*, Adam Marszałek Publisher, Toruń 2004.

[5] Z. Dąbrowski, *An outline of care pedagogy*, Higher School of Pedagogy Publisher, Olsztyn 1994, pp. 115–116.

well as become a major obstacle to personal development and fruitful self-fulfilment being a valuable contribution to the universal heritage"[6]. Loneliness can be felt in a variety of relationships, however, according to many authors, the worst is the one experienced in the family. "There was to be sensitiveness, there is coldness. Instead of mutual understanding – mutual demands and grievances. Therefore, deep in my heart, even though we are among the people close for us, we long for someone who would understands us and appreciates the value of our heroism, who could help, who would care about our headache, and for whom we would feel indispensable"[7]. Mirosława Gawęcka believes that loneliness among members of a family is a "mental or psycho-social phenomenon of a subjective basis arising from disorders of the emotional bonds between parents and a child, the improper emotional relationship between parents and children and their dys-functional educational impact which blocks proper satisfaction of the child's individual needs for mental health in the family"[8]. It turns out that loneliness may be already experienced by a baby who does not feel parental love, and who sometimes can not satisfy it's own psychological needs, experiences deprivation in terms of contact with other people, especially the ones who are important for him[9]. So loneliness can be regarded as the result of "deprivation of the child's needs that should be met, often with the help of adults, but it happens that for various reasons this does not happen"[10]. According to Brunon Hołyst the strongest loneliness is experienced by a man who "felt like the link in a collective action faces a wall of indifference – not even hostile silence, but the lack of interest"[11].

We can distinguish several types of loneliness:

— social loneliness is the difficulty in establishing appropriate relationships with parents and the environment, which can lead to isolation;
— emotional loneliness which is the unsatisfying of emotional needs by parents, especially proximity;
— spiritual loneliness (axio-normative) – being lost in a world of norms and values, which results in moral emptiness, lack of a world view and self-awareness, no feeling of love, sensitivity or creativity[12].

Focusing on the latter dimension, it should be emphasized that there is lack of literature on it and is associated more with religiosity. More often a study on

[6] K. Osińska, *Experiencing loneliness*, [in:] A. Matusiak (ed.), *Willed and unwanted loneliness*, eSPe Publisher, Kraków 2009, pp. 17–18.
[7] A. Bochniarz, *The Word of different values*, Michalineum Publisher, Marki 1998, pp. 171–172.
[8] M. Gawęcka, *The feeling of loneliness of a chil in own family*, MADO Publisher, Toruń 2005, p. 10.
[9] M. Kleszcz, M. Łączyk, *Secondary school students to the values, loneliness and passions*, Impuls Publisher, Kraków – Katowice 2012, p. 50.
[10] Ibidem, p. 60.
[11] B. Hołyst, *Suicide – chance or necessity*, Polish Scientific Publishers, Warszawa 1983, p. 14.
[12] K.M. Wasilewska, *The loneliness of youth*, Kujawsko-Pomorska Szkoła Wyższa, Bydgoszcz 2010, pp. 27–31.

spiritual orphanhood can be found, which is defined as: the type of social loneliness synonymous with emotional orphaning or a separate phenomenon[13]. Spiritual loneliness can be considered as inability to ask existential questions, which begins at the moment when "a man rises above his body and over his psyche to ask himself what is the meaning of his body, his thoughts and his emotions, and what is the meaning in himself and the life that he participates in"[14]. It is the inability to discover who you are, where you come from and where are you going to, as well as what values and ties you have got with the environment[15]. Spirituality is inner harmony, self-confidence, empathy, hope, and love; it is entering a higher social and emotional level with the loved ones, mutual understanding, helping finding goals in life and building a hierarchy of values. Spirituality refers to man's attitude towards himself, the world and the absolute values, which "can explain the surprising and unpredictable events experienced by a person throughout life and the environment"[16]. This is an important aspect of human life, which if not developed causes a spiritual void and solitude. In case of children full spiritual development is not possible without the support of adults and their presence. They should show the world of standards and moral principles, explain the rules that govern society, emphasize the importance of the emotional bonds with loved ones. The sole and exclusive remedy for the spiritual loneliness of a child is true parental love: "full of respect for the dignity of a man – a person; reasonably challenging, but always forgiving; sincere and welcoming, bringing in a flow of joy and hope; ready to provide assistance as needed and with simplicity asking for help; enabled to share not only what it has, but also itself"[17]. Love is the foundation of family life. However, it should be wise and good. "Wisdom makes it easier to adapt to the changing conditions of life, helps in coexistence with others, and reduces the number of family tensions and conflicts. Wisdom, goodness, kindness and trustworthiness give any actions undertaken by parent's warmth, emotion and depth. In parental love there are in fact the most beautiful human desires and attitudes embracing the ability to provide for others unselfish kindness and trust"[18]. However, very often the spiritual loneliness of a child is born at home where the parents also experience this condition. Then support should be extended to the whole family and for this purpose

[13] Vide: M. Sendyk, *Social adaptation of children with a sense of spiritual orphanhood*, Impuls Publisher, Kraków 2001, p. 41.

[14] M. Dziewiecki, *Alcoholism and the enslavement of the spiritual sphere*, http://www.psychologia.edu.pl/czytelnia/62-wiat-problemow/169-choroba-alkoholowa-a-zniewolenie-sfery-duchowej.html [access: 5.04.2014].

[15] Ibidem.

[16] H. Mielicka, *Postmodern religiosity and its functions*, [in:] H. Mielicka (ed.), *Social problem sof postmodernity. Spirituality*, Jan Kochanowski University of Humanities and Science in Kielce, Kielce 2011, p. 218.

[17] K. Osińska, *Experiencing loneliness...*, op. cit., p. 18.

[18] M. Sendyk, *Social adaptation of children...*, op. cit., pp. 20–21.

there are many institutions and entities that are to help families to get out of the crisis. One of such measures is the family assistantship.

Spiritual support of family assistants

In Poland since 2006 projects were carried out related to family assistantships. Although they did a lot of good, there was one defect, which was the defined completion date, after which the need to support families continued to exist. Seeing many positive effects of the work of the assistants there was a law created which has governed the profession. It was published on June 9, 2011 and concerned family support and the foster care system. According to it a family assistant has to fulfil many tasks. Firstly, the creation of a work plan with the family is to be completed. It is made in agreement with the family, social worker or foster care coordinator. Secondly, it must provide various forms of assistance for the family in solving the life, social, psychological, and educational difficulties. The next task is to support and to give motivation to the members of the family to take up social, professional actions and also to participate in various activities to upgrade and develop their skills. He also runs individual consultations related to the process of education in the family. In situations concerning safety and in life-threatening situations the family assistant is required to take intervention measures. While performing his work he keeps records, prepares periodic assessments of the family situation and, at the request of the court, opinions. It also works with other people, organizations, units of state and local government, an interdisciplinary team or working group[19].

Assistants can perform many functions. According to Jan Malinowski they provide psycho-emotional support, diagnose and monitor, deal with the spheres of caring, educational, advisory, mediation, motivation-activating and coordinating activities aimed at the family[20].They also play an important role of "social friends", family care-givers, whose help you can always count on. Tadeusz Kotarbiński uses the term "trustworthy guardian", which also matches the profession: "The guardian is trustworthy when you can rightly trust his care, that he does not disappoint, that he does everything he can, that he keeps company in danger and is always at your side in difficult circumstances"[21].

[19] The Act of 9 June 2011. *on supporting families and foster care system*, Dz. U. 2011, No. 149, item. 887.

[20] J. Malinowski, *The roles, functions and tasks of the family assistant*, [in:] A. Żukiewicz (ed.), *Family assistant. A new profession and new sernice in the system of supporting familie from care and help to support*, Impuls Publisher, Kraków 2011, p. 40.

[21] T. Kotarbiński, *Meditations on a decent life*, Publishing Common Knowledge, Warszawa 1985, p. 59.

However, I think that the most important task of the assistant is to give the family spiritual support. The family, which is experiencing a specific problem, often is left to itself. Its loneliness makes it worse to cope with the crisis being experienced. Every difficult moment is possible to go through, when you are surrounded by people who can professionally and objectively advise you how to do so. Only with a heart you can change someone. An assistant must also hope that he can help the family. This hope should be transferred to customers so they could see the opportunity for a change in life. You can not expect changes right away, because only step by step work is possible. First you have to look at the family, meet the expectations of each of its members, try to understand the behaviour of the people, listen carefully and hear what they say. Then you should decide on a common plan of action and a time frame in which to pursue it.

Nowadays, the importance of spirituality and its role in the wider social work, including family assistantship is noticed more often. According to Tomasz Biernat, this profession requires "entering a relationship with another human at various levels: social, psychological, cultural, institutional. However, you can also specify its much deeper dimension, as it relates to the spiritual reality, ties and spiritual values. They just make the job human – with the people, among the people and for the people. It is a meeting and a dialogue of people that takes place in space, in which intangible, spiritual values are manifested"[22]. The same author stresses the importance of faith, hope and love as the "underestimated spiritual values that play an extremely important role in the work with a man who is lost, weak, who is suffering"[23]. It is therefore worth paying attention to this item in the process of educating assistants. Many problems of families and individuals are born out of spiritual emptiness.

Summary

The family is a unique place, which can not be replaced, because in it a "person takes the first steps towards personal development. In it receives mother's spiritual guidance for their full development. It's in the family environment where educational process and promotion of human being originates"[24]. The family system has a lot of resources in its cohesion, adaptability, organization, communication, strength, flexibility, strong ties, the time spent together[25].

[22] T. Biernat, *Spiritual dimension of social work. The potencial of faith, hope and love*, „Social Work" 2011, № 6, p. 4.

[23] Ibidem, p. 6.

[24] M. Brzeziński, *Children from the streets. Pastoral – theological recognition*, [in:] J. Jęczeń, B. Lelonek-Kuleta (ed.), *The borders of streetworking*, Polihymnia Publisher, Sandomierz – Lublin 2013, p. 95.

[25] I. Krasiejko, *Methodology of family assistan's' actions. Different models of social work and family therapy*, Scientific Publisher, Ed. 2, Katowice 2012, pp. 17–18.

For a child to develop properly it needs a home in which "both parents living together in a stable emotional community, loving each other, bearing the trouble of raising children, providing them with appropriate materials, consistent with their capabilities and spiritual living conditions. A mother of the child is a symbol of warmth, care and dedication, while a father is to give him a sense of personal safety, strength, confidence, courage and wisdom that will help to overcome the difficulties of life in the future"[26].

Currently, however, it is more and more difficult to be a "good parent". It is not only because of a lack of willingness or skill, and having to make choices. Living in the era of hedonism and materialism we focus on "having" rather than "being". The need for achieving individual success detracts from team work and cooperation. Focusing on the pursuit of happiness understood in terms of materialism being makes you lose what is universal and timeless; truth, love and goodness. Losing these values, over time, a person begins to feel spiritual emptiness and loneliness. This may give rise to further problems, which can be coped with by the assistance of professionals. Assistants are one of the professional groups whose mission is to support families in difficult situations. It is encouraging that the number of assistants employed in our country has been increasing (in 2012 there were 2105 and 2013 there were 18947[27]). The amount of funds allocated for this purpose has also increased (in 2013 the amount of 37828 378,55zł[28]). However, it is important that the assistants were professionals and properly carried out their task. They should not be associated by people only as being those who come to inspect and require. They should be more spiritual family caregivers competent in their work and sensitive to the suffering of others. A good example would be the opinion of one of the assistants of the family about her work, which may be kind of a summary of theses contained in this article: "Mrs. Magdalena, who takes care of Mrs. Agnieszka's family quickly gained the favour of the household. She gives immense spiritual support, helps to solve problems, family members talk freely about their problems in the comfort of hearth and home, as a friend of the house she is involved in family life. When there is a problem you can always confide to the assistant, who is strongly com-

[26] M. Sendyk, *Social adaptation of children...*, op. cit., pp. 22–23.

[27] Information from the Council of Ministers on the implementation in 2012 of the Act of 9 June 2011. *on supporting families and foster care system*, Dz. U. of 2013. Pos. 135, as amended, http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki7ka.nsf/0/FE8895265577BD33C1257BD5003730E6/$File/1669.pdf [access: 5.04.2014].

[28] Departmental program of family support and foster care system in 2013 – a family assistant and a coordinator of the family foster care - correction of the settlement, http://www.mpips.gov.pl/wsparcie-dla-rodzin-z-dziecmi/opieka-zastepcza-nad-dzieckiem/konkursy/resortowy-program-wspierania-rodziny-i-systemu-pieczy-zastepczej-na-rok-2013/esortowyprogramwspieraniarodzinyisystemupieczyzastpczejnarok2013-asystentrodzinyikoordynatorrodzinnejpieczyzastpczej-korektarozstrzygnicia/ [access: 05.04.2014].

mitted and provides support. The family assistant mobilizes the family to take care of cleanliness and order in the house"[29].

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