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СОВРЕМЕНИ БЕЗБЕДНОСНИ ПРЕДИЗВИЦИ И ЈАКНЕЊЕ НА ОТПОРНОСТА НА ЗЕМЈИТЕ ОД ЈУГОИСТОЧНА ЕВРОПА

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FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN THE RESOCIALIZATION PROCESS OF CHILDREN PLACED IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The resocialization of children with social and behavioural problems placed in educational facilities (or small-scale facilities) is a very difficult process accompanied by numerous challenges. The success of the resocialization process of the children placed in such facilities largely depends on the involvement and engagement of the family before, during and in the time after the child leaves the facility.

In that sense, the subject of this paper is the role of the family in the process of resocialization of children placed in educational facilities and the forms of their inclusion and engagement in this process. The family as child's primary social group is one of the key actors in the resocialization process. The involvement of the family takes place through maintaining communication with the child in any form, as well as through cooperation with social services for the preparation of an individual plan and the realization of certain activities. This mean, active involvement and cooperation of the family members with the authorities from the social services in order to be determined their capacities and opportunities, to be developed a plan for family active involvement, which means strengthening and creating favourable conditions (through the use of certain rights and social services in the system) or finding other adults who would be included in the support network, with an aim of successful **resocialization and reintegration of the child after leaving the educational facility.**

Introduction

Increasing family engagement in the juvenile justice system is an increasing focus for many researchers and practitioners. Historically, families have mainly been researched solely as a risk factor for juvenile delinquency (Hoeve et al., 2009; Norman et al., 2012; Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner 2011) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018), but children's families as much as can have a negative effect on behaviour of the child can also have a positive impact through greater engagement and involvement in any aspect when children are in risk or in conflict with the law.

Family engagement would mean establishing cooperation in which families will be partners both in the treatment of their children and in developing policies, programmes and practices in the juvenile justice system. Children need their family's involvement in their experience with the system in order to promote positive outcomes in their development.

In situations where children are placed in educational institutions, family engagement has a significant role in the process of resocialization and reintegration. Research shows that family involving and engaging before, during and after leaving a certain institution, affects the overall well-being of the child (UNICEF, 2020) and on more successful process of reintegration. The process itself and its success can be affected by

many factors. Platt (2012) states that parents/family involvement in the process of reintegration depends on many factors, including a range of external factors (e.g. parents' circumstances and resources, skills of the professional staff/social worker/carer) and a range of internal factors among parents (e.g. cognition, affect, motivation) and these will essentially determine the engagement of parents in relation to the reintegration of children and on the children results (Melz, 2021). Although family engagement can be met by many obstacles, it is necessary to develop strategies for effective family involvement as a partner in the resocialization process even in the most complicated situations. Hence the question arises "Which forms of family engagement can have positive effects on the child during the stay but also after leaving the educational institution?"

1. Forms of family engagement in the process of resocialization of the children placed in educational institutions

Much conducted research show the positive aspects of family engagement **in the process of resocialization of children placed in educational institutions.** Based on Whittaker et al., international review of therapeutic residential settings for children, family involvement was found to be associated with positive outcomes for children, particularly when it involved working with families before, after, and during placement (UNICEF, 2020). It is considered that the reconnection with the family upon entering the institution is a significant step for resocialization and better reintegration after leaving it (Development Services Group, 2018)**.**

There range of modalities through which the involvement of the family in these processes can be reflected: **1. communication with and visits to the child while he is placed in the educational institution** , **2. cooperation of the family with the social services and their involvement in the preparation and realization of activities foreseen in the plan for resocialization and reintegration** and 3. **Cooperation with social services in relation to family use of certain social protection rights and social services**. This would mean active engagement and cooperation of family members with the authorities from social services , in order to determine their capacities and opportunities, to develop a plan for their active involvement, which means strengthening and creating favourable conditions in the family (through the use of certain rights and social services in the system) or finding other adults who would be included in the support network, with the aim of successful reintegration of the child.

<u>**The first form through which the effective involvement of the family can be recognized is the maintenance of contact with the child**</u> even upon entering the institution. **The contacts that the family should maintain with the child,** either informal (through visits, phone calls, letters) or formal (meetings with the authorities regarding the progress of the child's behaviour, parents meetings with the authorities etc.) during the first few months after placement are crucial both for the child's mental health during placement in the institution, and for his progress and behaviour after leaving it (Monahan, Goldweber, & Cauffman, 2011).

Personal contacts and other methods of social support, such as phone calls and letter writing, can play a significant role in minimizing the stress and isolation that occurs as a result of involvement in the system. According to Cohen & Willis (1985) family visits and support appear as a way of reducing the harmful effects of negative or stressful events (Shanahan & diZerega., 2016), so young people who receive more frequent visits from their parents while they are placed in the institution show a greater reduction in depressive symptoms (Shanahan & diZerega., 2016), get higher grades when they are involved in the

educational process and have fewer violent incidents while they are placed in the facility (Monahan, Goldweber, & Cauffman, 2011)institutions (Villalobos Agudelo, 2013). The effects were mostly cumulative: the greater the number of family visits, the greater the reduction in depressive symptoms (Development Services Group, 2018). Additionally, a study with children placed in penal institutions in Ohio found a positive relationship between weekly visits from family members and maintaining good behaviour and improving school performance in the institution (Agudelo, 2013) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018). In Israel, Attar-Schwartz found that the better quality and more intensive parents visits are associated with better psychological outcomes in children after leaving the institution (UNICEF, 2020), and especially in terms of reducing recidivism in children (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005) Positive effects on children from the visits are identified regardless of quality of the relationship that existed between the parent and the child (Monahan, Goldweber, & Cauffman, 2011). The analysis that was carried out on the process of resocialization and reintegration of children with educational problems or with disordered behaviour placed in small group homes in R.S. Macedonia, [154]showed absence of family engagement in the process of resocialization of children in any aspect. Regarding the visits and communication, based on the conducted interviews with the children, it is generally observed that a small number of the children receive visits from their family while staying in small group homes. Problematic regarding the parents' visits is the impossibility the visits to be in the small group homes, even though the idea of these small group homes is precisely in the development of socialization and re-education in conditions that are similar to family living. Although the impossibility of home visits is often justified by the need to protect other children placed in the small group home, this policy means limiting parents from getting to know the place and conditions where their child lives. In that sense, policies should be changed and more frequent visits to the family should be recommended and encouraged, (Villalobos Agudelo, 2013) which would take place in a specific room in the small group home (except when there is some other reason or limitation for possible contact of the child with the family), which would mean a simultaneous reduction of the costs that would exist if the child had to meet the parents in some other place outside the group home.

If the question is what the reasons for children are not receiving family visits while they are placed in the small group home, from the children files and from the statements of the interviewed persons, it can be determined that the obstacles are more numerous. Although the data indicate that the family is often not interested in communication, the absence of visits is also due to the fact that a large number of the children have been placed in institutions/institutions for many years, have interrupted or disrupted communication with the biological family, come from dysfunctional families, have parents who do not have the capacity and skills to take care of children, some of them have certain mental problems, disabilities or the presence of addiction, and in some, the parents or one of the parents is deceased. What are the most common reasons why the family is not involved and activated to establish communication with children, how much social services are trying to establish communication between parents and children and what approaches they use to achieve it, are questions that require additional in-depth analysis. The absence of parents or other relatives' visits is, among other things, since often families live in the

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[154]The analysis of the resocialization process of children with educational problems and with disordered behavior placed in small group homes was carried out by a project team prof. Dr. Vesna Stefanovska, Prof., Dr. Oliver Bachanović, Prof. Dr. Dragana Batic and Prof. Dr. Natasha Peovska from the Faculty of Security-Skopje in cooperation with the Institute for Social Activities-Skopje in the period June-December 2023.

interior of the country and the visit itself imposes certain transportation costs. In such a situation, families often cannot provide means of transportation, due to the difficult material situation in which they find themselves. Hence, it is problematic to talk about family visits from another city, if they do not have means of transportation, and the social services in Macedonia does not have funds that can be used to improve the contacts **between the family members and the child placed in the small group home**.

Maintaining contact with parents can also be achieved **by using a certain type of leave by the children** (weekend, annual vacation) in the family. According to the analysis data, parents often do not have the conditions to take care of their children, they do not accept them, or their parents are deceased, and the extended family is not interested in maintaining contact with them. Also, as a problem that appears are the financial means needed for transportation to the city where the primary family lives, which it cannot provide due to the material situation. In the absence of material resources, often the children save from their weekly pocket money in order to collect money and go on a weekend leave. Such data indicates that social services need to find ways to motivate and help parents or other family members or adults whom children trust to make contacts with family, and even financially to support the process of communication and visits.

In case when the children did not have parents, who could be involved in the process of resocialization and reintegration, the competent social services should use **the approach of finding a family.** Family tracing is a set of methods and strategies for locating and involving some from broader family. This would mean that caregivers or social workers identify suitable relatives in order to determine whether these individuals can potentially participate in planning services, serve as a resource for placement of the child, host sibling visits, or serve as mentors for children placed in educational or correctional institutions (Melz et al., 2019). Relatives do not always have to be seen as a resource for placing a child, but relationships that are built, nurtured and maintained over time can help form a support network of adults that children can trust when they are not receive supervision, guidance, services and support from employees in educational institutions or from the competent official in the social service (Shanahan & diZerega., 2016). The family or relative may be located through review of child reports, interviews with family, friends, teachers, or other means (Melz, 2021).

The family engagement also refers to **their participation in the preparation and realization of certain activities foreseen in the plan for resocialization and reintegration.** Research conducted with over 1,000 family members of youth who have been in conflict with the law, shows that 86% of them showed an interest in being more involved in the treatment of their children (Justice for Families 2012; Vera Institute of Justice 2014) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018). But at the same time it is pointed out that often the family role in these processes is minimized, the procedures do not provide enough space for their participation and many families felt excluded from the system that is in charge of taking care of their children (Osher and Hunt 2002 cited in (Development Services Group, 2018), and thereby preventing them from getting involved in changing their child's behaviour (Shaw & Angus-Kleinman). It is therefore important that the competent services use different approaches to establish and maintain the relationships of children with families and incorporate their voice, perspectives and priorities for the well-being of children. In terms of case-level involvement, family members must be involved as meaningful partners in developing plans and decisions for their children's welfare (Melz, 2021).

The data from the analysis that was carried out on the process of resocialization and reintegration of children with educational problems or with disordered behaviour placed in small group homes in Macedonia, indicate that families do not get involved, partly due to reasons originating from the families, due to lack of staff in Social Work Centres, lack of interest and lack of motivation among certain staff etc. In terms of encouraging family involvement in certain activities, competent workers from the social service and employees from the small group can play a significant role. They could occasionally organize educational, or group workshops intended for parents or support persons for the child, with the aim of simultaneously improving the situation and capacities of both parties.

The cooperation and family engagement in the process of resocialization and reintegration can be improved and developed when **the competent social services determine the needs of the family and facilitate their access to use certain rights and social services,** in order to improve the family situation in relation to all aspects of its functioning (among members, in relation to financial, mental, health functionality, creation of appropriate housing conditions and improvement of parenting skills and capacities). Preparing and establishing appropriate conditions in the family facilitates the process of reintegration of the child. Given that there are high rates of behavioural problems, mental health problems, and other risky activities associated with youth involved in the legal system, (Weisz & Kazdin 2003) cited the (Development Services Group, 2018) a specific family-based therapeutic interventions that focus on addressing these particular problems are needed (Rowe & Liddle 2003) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018). These programmes are implemented for families who have children diagnosed with emotional and behavioural problems such as conduct problems, depression, or social or school problems. (Kumpfer & Alvarado 2003) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018). There are a variety of family therapy programmes (e.g. functional family therapy, family strengthening programmes, social skills training) that can affect family dysfunction and child problem behaviour, including delinquency (Henggeler and Borduin 1990; Sexton). and Alexander 2000; Waldron and Turner 2008) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018). Such therapeutic practices are based on the idea that improving functioning of dysfunctional families should in turn reduce the behavioural problems of children and adolescents (Kumpfer and Alvarado 2003). (Development Services Group, 2018).

If family factors are the key in assessing the risk of recidivism among young people (Andrews & Bonta, 2010) cited in (Trotter, Evans, & Baidawi, Collaborative Family Work in Youth Justice, 2019), then working with the families of children who are placed in certain educational institutions can be effective in reducing recidivism (Trotter, Evans, & Baidawi, Collaborative Family Work in Youth Justice, 2019). A detailed review by Lipsey and Cullen (2007) that looked at four different meta-analyses of the effectiveness of family interventions for children found a reduction in child recidivism of 20% to 52% compared to control groups that were not treated with this type of intervention. Petrosino et al. (2009), in reviewing available research, found that family-based interventions have a significant impact on recidivism, that is, children involved in family-based interventions have 16% to 28% lower rates of recidivism compared to control groups (Trotter, Collaborative Family Work in Youth Justice, 2021).

When it comes to the situation in Macedonia, the Law on Social Protection of 2019 year, provides a series of social rights and social services that can be used in order to improve the family conditions in many aspects of its functioning. Officials from the Social Work Centres should guide and help families in that process. However, the state system is

indirectly amnestied from the possibility that all legally provided services can be used by the persons who need them, indicating that a certain service can be used if the service is developed and available (LSP, art. 105). The role of Social Work Centres in terms of strengthening families for children to return to their biological families is emphasized in article 127 of **the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization in the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2027 "Timjanik"**: **"**For children, the primary goal should be to return to their families (and prepare the adolescents for independent living), for which it is necessary to strengthen the financial and professional support of biological families". According to article 131 of **the National Strategy for Deinstitutionalization in the Republic of Macedonia 2018-2027 "Timjanik",** it is also stated that "... Social Work Centres should play a major role in organizing and participating in cooperation processes because they are part of the services at the community level and have a good knowledge of the community and its resources". This would mean that the guardians/professionals who must draw up an individual plan for reintegration, must exhaust all possibilities for involvement and preparation of the family for the return of the child in their home.

Maintaining communication and support from the family or with other support persons should be a field in which social services should operate even after the young people leave the institutions. Especially after leaving the institution, they can face with numerous challenges that hardly any of the young people would be able to cope with if they did not have a support network (Стефановска, Бачановиќ, & Пеовска, 2023).

In principle, for improving the situation of the primary family, but also increase and intensify the support network for the children in the process of resocialization and reintegration in N. Macedonia, the recommendations from the Report on the Functioning and Proposals for the Transformation of the Public Institution for Taking Care of Children with Educational and Social Problems and Deviant Behaviour – Skopje, prepared by the Institute of Social Activities in 2018, should be updated again, which states the need for: **Educational centres for group work with parents** at the local level and within the small group homes. Analyses have shown that this type of support for parents gives positive results, especially for children in conflict with the law and their families. In the framework of this form, educational workshops can be foreseen which would be implemented within the framework of the small group homes, in order to improve parenting skills and to receive certain advice on the further care of the child after leaving the small group homes. In this way, several goals in terms of communication and cooperation will be achieved at the same time: increased contacts between family and children, family and the professional staff and more intense engagement of parents in the process of resocialization of the child during his stay in the small group homes.[155] Particularly significant is **the mentoring programme** - (the programme for mentoring children in conflict with the law) which was implemented in 2012 by the Social Work Centre of the City of Skopje and it showed positive effects among children (visible through the reduction of recidivism). For these reasons, this form of treatment and protection is good to be introduce as a regular measure of help and protection for children at risk and children in conflict with the law.

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[155] Сунчица Димитриевска „Менторска програма за малолетници во конфликт со законот"

Conclusion

Family engagement in the process of resocialization and reintegration of children placed in educational institutions is a significant mechanism for achieving positive effects in children (Graves & Shelton, 2007), both in terms of behaviour and progress during the stay in the institution and after leaving it. The main goals of the efforts for family engagement of the children who have entered the juvenile justice system are: to help children to be responsible for their behaviour and to help them fulfil the obligations set for them by the competent institutions (National Research Council 2013; Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner 2011); to provide a source of supervision, protection, guidance, and emotional support (Justice for Families 2012; National Research Council 2013), and to promote children's connection to their kinship ties (Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner 2011) cited in (Development Services Group, 2018).

But the process of family engagement is not a simple process. There are many challenges and obstacles that can hinder the same, from conceptual, systemic, reasons that come from the family or from the children themselves, from the capacities and motivation of the competent personnel who should encourage the involvement of the family, the attitudes of the community etc. All these obstacles should be subject to additional and in-depth analysis in the interest of a more successful process of resocialization of the child. Challenges should not be an obstacle in the efforts in the juvenile justice system to build strategies and approaches that will emphasize and enhance family involvement. Approaches would mean: intensifying the contacts of families with children placed in educational institutions, building partnership relations of competent services with families during the creation and implementation of programmes for resocialization and simultaneously strengthening family capacities and opportunities (Maschi , Schwalbe , & Ristow, 2013), to achieve the ultimate goal - successful reintegration of the child in the primary family and in the community.

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