

DEFORMED FAMILY COMMUNICATION IN CASE OF EURO-ORPHAN FAMILIES

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The literature discusses that successful family functioning is based on instrumental and affective communication, which includes both verbal and nonverbal information exchange between family members (Epstein, et als, 1993). Poor communication in a family is associated with more behavioural problems in children.

The paper discusses the communication of adult family members with their children during a longterm separation due to economical migration of parents. The children left behind in literature are called “euro-orphans”. Euro-orphan is a child of family where one or both parents are absent due to longterm economic emigration (at least six months). This definition characterizes euro-orphan as containing some element of disfunction and poorer communication.

The paper is based on a qualitative study of euro-orphans whose parent/-s have laft Latvia due to economical reasons and have left their children with grandparents, one parent, adult neighbours, or siblings. There are a few cases reporting teenagers left by themselves. According to the statistics, there are about 7-8 thousand euro-orphans in Latvia. The youth left behind have identified main consequences of separation from parents: (1) positive – financial and economical gains; (2) negative – insufficient emotional and moral support, increasing risks of negative behaviours.

There are a few statements regarding the euro-orphans’ view on their parents’ migration. Majority of youth report positive changes in their economical situation and increasing financial and material resources, there still are claims about difficulties to manage „the make the ends meet”.

The communication pattern changes both between emigrated parent and child and between spouses. Euro-orphan youth have reported cases of divorce and poor family climate between parents. Also the psychological well-being is discussed as being more negative. Young children, adolsecnt and teeneager euro-orphans refer to lack of moral and emotional support, poor communication, loneliness and longing. At the same time there was an opinion expressing being satisfied with the psychological climate at home because of a more relaxed climate at home because parents had fighting a lot. Latvian data support findings from other studies (Romania, Poland) about negative psychological consequences. This result is true particularly for psychological aspects related to internalized behaviors (e.g. behaviors that affect thinking or feeling such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem).

In order to communicate with their parents living abroad, majority of euro-orphans use Internet (skype, email and national facebook portal) and phone. A few teenagers report no communication with parents during the last months. However,

regardless the mean of communication, the euro-orphans have strongly expressed their need for a closer relationship and need of communication with their parents, particularly at situations of stress and vulnerability. Therefore, the enhancement of communication between parents and children is necessary, and the modern technologies seem to be the most appropriate mean

The study has identified several aspects and dimensions of communication problems. The typical communication between actors includes only verbal communication and misses nonverbal communication with parents. The communication has become fragmented (from one call or skype conversation to next). The communication is mainly informative “have you done your homework at school”, “how is your behaviour”, “do you obey grandma”, and misses communication on attitudes, values, feelings and emotions. Family communication has changed from communication with both parents to communication with one parent at a time, which affects upbringing process and learning gender roles. There is poor or no communication between parent and teacher that might help to understand child’s problems at school. There is missing communicative help from parents when child needs immediate support. It may result in increasing psychological vulnerability of euro-orphans and might lead to mental health problems, particularly a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety later in their life. More concretely, the child left behind misses the emotional support from parents, and a possible cause that intensify this negative feeling is the absence of sufficient communication opportunities “he/she was not by my side when I needed”.