

PSIWORLD 2014

Parental Competence of the Vulnerable Groups – an Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Studies on vulnerable groups are generally focused on the social and professional integration of their members rather than on the influence of their parental behaviour on the development of children's harmonious personality and, implicitly, of a fully psychosocially integrated next generation. The objective of this research is to investigate (on a general level) the parental competence of vulnerable groups and to adapt the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) (Glăveanu, 2012) to the new context. The statistical results (N=64) prove that the adapted PCQ has scientifically adequate psychometric qualities and can be used for investigating the parental competence of the vulnerable groups.

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Peer-review under responsibility of the Scientific Committee of PSIWORLD 2014.

Keywords: parental competence; vulnerable groups; knowing the child; affective support; disciplining; time management; crisis management.

1. Introduction

The scientific literature contains a large number of studies on vulnerable groups and on their socioeconomic issues. Vulnerable groups are those that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population – ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people, the homeless, those struggling with substance abuse, isolated elderly people and children, those with low levels of education, unemployed or underemployed (Nardo, Cortese & McAnaney, 2014), people from urban/rural areas with precarious financial situation, institutionalized persons and/or affected by domestic violence, the numerous families and the single-parent ones (Popescu, 2011). In the literature there are numerous strategies and programmes addressed to vulnerable groups, whose purpose is to fight poverty (Buzducea, 2013) and social exclusion (Herausgeber, Herausgeber & Herausgeber, 2014; Zamfir, Rotaru & Runceanu, 2014; Weissbrodt, 2011; Groom, 2009; Liamputtong, 2007) with a focus on efforts to socially and professionally integrate the members of the groups in question. A major aspect which can influence the long-

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term impact of vulnerable groups and their relation with the rest of the society is the degree to which the parents in those groups provide proper conditions for the development of children's harmonious personalities.

A variable that significantly influences the development of the next generation is the "parental competence", defined as a "system of knowledge, skills, capabilities, abilities and habits that allow the parent to successfully fulfill the parental responsibilities and also to prevent/deal with crisis situations in a manner that contributes to the child's development" (Glăveanu & Creangă, 2009, p. 181).

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1. Objective

The goal of the research is to investigate (at a general level) the parental competence of the vulnerable groups, and to adapt the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) so that it might be used in the new context.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted on 64 parents from various regions of Romania, who had children aged between 7 and 11 and belonged to vulnerable groups (age $M = 35.8$, $SD = 14.76$). 58 subjects were women and 6 men, all affected by critical financial conditions. Among them, 12 belonged to a minority (Roma), 13 were single parents, 8 had experienced domestic violence, 14 lived in the rural area, 8 displayed physical disabilities (without diagnosed mental disorders) and 9 had a numerous family (more than 4 children).

3.2. Procedure

PCQ (Glăveanu, 2012) was used in order to complete the objective of the study. The questionnaire was validated on 535 parents, with children aged between 7 and 11, using the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) (r between 0.5 and 0.9; level 0.01 bilateral); it originally had 81 items separated into 5 dimensions – briefly described below:

- Knowing the specificities of the child between 7 and 11 years of age ($\alpha=0.71$) – is about the parent's ability of becoming aware of the child's level of development (dependent on the child's age), therefore being able to explain and understand the child's reactions and needs and to provide adequate answers.
- Affective support and stress management ($\alpha=0.74$) – is about the parent's capacity of knowing and applying efficient methods for both preventing an up rush of the familial stress and coping with it; this capacity is about managing the familial tensional situations and also, about providing some affective assistance that helps the child to manage and overcome negative emotions.
- Disciplining ($\alpha=0.82$) – reflects the parental capacity of being assertive in relation to the child and of adequately managing the reward-punition system in order to permit and stimulate the development of all the components of a well-balanced personality.
- Time management ($\alpha=0.77$) – reveals, on one hand, the parent's ability of defining the amount of time spent with the child (as well as its quality) and, on the other hand, the parental capacity of guiding the child's own time by creating situations that are stimulative for the development of critical and creative thinking, aesthetic sense etc. and, also, that sustain the child's social insertion.
- Crisis management ($\alpha=0.77$) – reflects the parental capacity of being a good leader, of finding solutions to the child's problems together with the child, consequently overcoming the educational, personal etc. crises and stimulating the development of critical (rational) thinking and problem-solving capacity.

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