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The Parental Competence of Single-parent Families from Vulnerable Groups

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Abstract

Starting from studies including the single-parent family in the category of vulnerable groups and from researches that drew a certain connection between the specificities of the parents' conduct and the development of the child, the objective of this research was to identify the particularities of the parental competence of the single-parent family. The results of the study (N=65) indicated that the parents from rural environments had a higher level of the "affective support" and "disciplining" dimensions than those from urban environments and, also, that the parents with a precarious financial situation had the lowest score in parental competence.

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Keywords: parental competence; single-parent family; knowing the child; affective support; disciplining; time management; crisis management.

1. Introduction

A more and more often encountered situation in the current society is that of the single-parent family, representing approximately 13.4 % of the total families. It is made up of a single parent along with the child/children, and its' existence can be determined by multiple causes: divorce/death of one of the parents, the leave of one of the parents in the non-married couples after the birth of a child; the decision of some women to have a child without entering a conjugal relation etc. (Cambir *et al.*, 2009; Voinea, 2005). In the specialized literature, there are numerous studies and researches regarding the association of the single-parent family with lower levels of school attendance of the children, as compared to the ones originating from the classical "nuclear families" (DeLeire & Kalil, 2002), but also with higher level of the probability of occurrence, at the adult age, of the risk behaviours,

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alcohol and drug consumption (Carlson, 2006), dissolution of the romantic/conjugal relations (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Kiernan & Hobcraft, 1997). At the same time, there are also encountered descriptions of the manners in which some disturbances of the child and of the future adult can be prevented (Deal, 2012; Ginsberg, 2009; Morris, 2007).

However, children raised and educated by both parents can also develop psycho-social disturbances in relation to the parents' conduct toward them (practically, in relation to the parents' level of „parental competence”).

The „parental competence” was defined by Glăveanu & Creangă (2009) 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.

No matter the family type (parental/single-parent/recomposed), what has a major importance for a normal bio-psycho-social development of the child is the harmonious management by the parent/parents of all the factors which could negatively influence his evolution – an aspect whose degree increases in direct reaction with the level of the parental competence.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Purpose

Starting from a series of studies which included the single-parent family in the category of vulnerable groups (Popescu, 2011) and from researches which revealed the detrimental impact of the parents' divorce (VanDenBerghe, 2000), of the economic difficulties of single parents (Dowd, 1997) and of certain particularities of their conduct (Ghani *et al.*, 2014) over the development of the child (Tihan, 2004), the objective of this research is that of identifying the particularities of the parental competence of the single-parent family in relation with the living environment and the financial situation (criteria of inclusion in the social category of the vulnerable groups being the rural environment and the precarious financial situation).

The investigative process was guided by two hypotheses:

- There are significant differences in terms of the parental competence between the parents in the single-parent families in the urban and rural environment.
- The parental competence encounters variations in reference to the financial situation of the parents in the single-parent families.

2.2. Subjects

The study was conducted on 65 parents belonging to single-parent families (61 women and 4 men – age $M=32.96$; $SD=5.42$) having from 1 up to 5 children with the age ranging between 7 and 11 years, of which 32 from the rural environment and 33 from the urban environment, with various financial situations – 21 had a precarious financial situation (benefiting from unemployment/social allowance or without any official income), 23 – national minimal wage and 21 – medium and good financial situation. The data were declared by the subjects, the author of the research not having control over their accuracy.

2.3. Methods

In order to study the parental competence of single-parent families, the Parental Competence Questionnaire – PCQ (developed by Glăveanu, 2009) was used; the PCQ has 81 items grouped on the following five dimensions:

- Knowing the specificities of the child between 7 and 11 years of age (17 items) – 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 (17 items) – 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

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