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Parental education for children's rights

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Abstract

The paper aims to analyze the factors that influence parents attitudes and behavior towards children's rights. The research is done in order to develop educational programs to improve parenting and parent relationships with the child and with the educational institution. Assumptions that started research were: parental attitudes towards children's rights are conditioned by the dominant cultural model in the family; recognition and respect for children's rights in the family are subject to constraints of micro-social climate (related with family group functionality but also with the community in which family lives); relations with the educational institutions (including the relation with the teachers) is a facilitator factor in promoting and respecting the rights of children by the parents. Research is mixed, including both quantitative methods (questionnaire based survey) and qualitative (focus groups and case studies). The research has revealed that not only socio-economical factors are important in conditioning parents attitudes and behavior towards children's rights, but also parents awareness and understanding of these rights. Consequently, parental education programs will focus on increasing the understanding and awareness of children's rights, promotion of pro-democratic cultural patterns and learning new ways to manage the problems of intra-familial relationships.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Context of the development of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were marked by increased efforts in cultural and political areas in initiating and developing actions to protect and support children in need. It is also noted that any

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coherent action designed to support the development and the protection of a child needs is an universally recognized and accepted worldwide legal framework. The idea of child rights is launched for the first time through the Declaration of Geneva in 1924. Later, these laws will be developed after World War in The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, adopted by the United Nations in 1959. In this framework, one can identify a particular focus on child protection and welfare to the detriment of the child's right to be an active part in decisions affecting him. This right we find it valued the late '60s, when the focus was on the child's right to participate in decisions affecting him. Polish government initiative from 1978 to draw up a project on the development of a new law on children's rights has resulted in a broad UN action. So, on 20 November 1989 was adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by most countries of the world except the U.S. and Somalia.

1.2. Children's rights in Romania

Romania has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 28 September 1990. This ratification constituted the regulatory preamble that was necessary to articulate the child's social protection policies in our country. Policy of children's rights protection and promotion in Romania has been heavily criticized in the 90s, when there were most abandoned and institutionalized children without any clear perspectives for normal biopsychosocial development. Government Strategy on Child Protection (1997-2000) marks the beginning of the reform of the Child Protection System in Romania. Immediate concerns were related to the articulation of a coherent legal framework to allow the operation and intervention of specialized institutions in the protection and promotion of child rights. Major policy intervention to protect and promote children's rights in Romania has been represented by adaption of legislation and interventional practices to the standards set by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In this sense, for Romania, Law no. 272/2004 is the core legislation for the protection and promotion of children's rights. In this legislation all the rights (related to protection, development and participation) are found successfully described. Given the relatively recent regulatory compliance of the strategies promoting children's rights, in Romanian social space is found, despite a legislative background, the existence of habits and weaknesses in respect to children's rights, both inside and outside family space.

Research conducted in Romania on parental recognition and respect for the children's rights is relatively few. The initiative for the research belonged, in particular, to non-governmental organizations, and for the most part has focused on investigations to identify the extent to which children's rights are recognized and respected by the social factors outside the family space. In terms of parenting concerns in Romania, they focused on identifying training needs and improve parenting skills. That can be explained also because it was found that in Romania, in the last twenty years, the number of families with children is higher than the European average (Eurostat 2011 report indicates for Romania 6 families out of 10 having children, and in other European countries, the percentage is reduced by half). Thus, in 2008, was conducted, with the support of UNICEF, a proposal for a national integrated strategy for training and development of parenting skills. In line with the objectives of the National Development Strategy (2009-2014), for the formation and development of parenting skills is necessary to facilitate awareness and manifestation by parents of their own parental and educational functions and to support their optimization process. On the other hand, the development of social protection institutions and actions have allowed the identification of a variety of social problems, resulting in difficulty situations for the children, due to parental ignorance, non-recognition and non-respecting of children's rights: abuse / maltreatment (in physical and/or emotional development), varying degrees and forms of the child's needs neglect, the use of child labor as detrimental to his participation in educational activities, etc.

Considering these aspects, the question that arises is: *which factors are facilitating or blocking the parents' recognition and respect of children's rights?* This study aims to answer this question, in order to optimize the strategies to promote and respect the rights of children, particularly the actions of training and development of parenting skills focused on children's rights.

2. Methods

2.1. The methods and techniques

It was used both quantitative (questionnaire based survey) and qualitative (focus-group interviews and case studies) methods. Triangulation was considered to be beneficial both for the methods and for the target groups, to gain a comprehensive picture of the factors influencing the attitudes and behaviors of parents towards children's rights. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions addressing choice questions (questions targeting a single answer, and questions targeting more responses) and 5 open questions inserted between the other 25. The questions aimed:

- To identify the family environment values, norms, customs related to child growth, care and education;
- To identify the level of understanding and acceptance of the concept of "children's rights";
- Identification of family socioeconomic factors (household type, income level, education level of parents, type of occupation/employment, access to information resources, extracurricular education) and the factors related to the residence of the child (types of educational services, recreation, and medical care, infrastructure – like running water, sewage, electricity and heat - the existence and action of the institutions for child protection);
- Description of the relationship between educational institution (kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, high school) and parents, including the relationship of communication between parent and teacher.

Questionnaires were developed after consultation of specialized literature and undergone a process of a peer-reviewed, and validated by application to a group of 10 parents prior to carrying out the research. Questionnaires were facilitated by field operators (students of Educational Sciences) trained in advance.

Focus-group interviews focused on capturing the perceptions of parents on recognizing and respecting the rights of the child, the parenting styles, patterns of intra-family relationships, as well as the parents' relationship with social institutions.

Case studies have described the situation of families with attitudes and behaviors situated at the two poles of the axis respect/non-respect for the child rights aiming to a finer capture of action and interdependence of factors influencing compliance/non-compliance with children's rights.

2.2. The group of subjects. Questionnaires were applied to a lot of intentionality, consisting of 150 parents chosen for their willingness to participate in research, from two different communities, both in rural areas (57 parents, of which 15 with preschool children, 20 -primary school children, 15 - middle school, 7 - high school) and urban (93, of which 25 with preschool children, 25- primary school, 25- middle school, and 18 - high school). For focus group interviews were formed two groups (one group for rural and one for urban areas) each with 12 parents (3 from each level of schooling, depending on the availability of parents). For case studies were identified 7 families after the survey and also indicated by teachers, of which three were considered "models for child support and respect", and 4 were identified also by Child Care Services that representing situations of abuse and/or neglect of children.

2.3. Data analysis

We also used triangulation method for data analysis, the data obtained from the questionnaires were combined with those obtained from group interviews and case studies. We sorted and structured the data by coding and quantization, using non-parametric statistical tests of data processing in order to facilitate their interpretation

3. Results and discussions

Regarding parental characteristics of the research group were noted: significant difference between urban and rural areas are registered on education level indicators (very few educated in rural) and socio-professional category (predominant agricultural activities and executive functions in the public services in rural areas). Stated level of income indicator revealed a small difference in percentage between the two areas. For details you can follow Table 1.

There were identified three types of family cultural patterns:

- a) traditionalist-authoritarian (cca.55% rural households and 30% of urban families), which promotes values centered on the position of authority of the parent, the sole decider on tasks and life of the child (verbal attitudes like "I made you done, I'll kill you"), the representation of the child as dependent on adult's will, as long as the child is in parents care, regardless of child's age (concepts like "Acting as my name, do what I say"), valuing

obedience, rigorous compliance with rules, one-way communication (only parent speaks and the child hears), providing material resources to raising children, emphasizing the importance of school education and morality.

Table 1. Percentage of the main characteristics followed in parents group

Residence	Rural	Urban
Level of education		
Inferior (sub 8 clase)	20,14%	2%
Mediu (studii liceal, postliceale, scoli profesionale)	74,6%	56%
Superior (studii universitare)	5,26%	42%
Type of occupation		
Agricultural labor	45,5%	0%
Executive positions in public/private service	40,3%	63,5
Leadership positions in public/private service	5,2%	26%
Owners/employers	9%	10,6%
Income level/per family		
≤ 1000Ron	35%	30%
1001-2000Ron	47,46%	44,5%
2001-3000Ron	17,54%	20%
>3000 Ron	0%	5,5%
Average age		
kindergarden	24	26,5
primary school	26	31
secondary school	32	33
high school	35	37

b) Traditionalist-humanist (45% rural, 35% urban) centered on Christian values, promoting the position of authority of the parent, but lenient attitude towards the child, who is entitled to make mistakes, to be forgiven; it emphasizes quality family relationships - non-confrontational communication, emotional security and moral framework for the development of the child;

c) Modern model (35% urban, 0% rural) characterized by the relativization of hierarchy of roles within the family, both parents and children have different needs to be met alternatively or simultaneously, parental authority lies in satisfying children needs and desires and negotiating penalty/rewards system, dominant values are cooperation, freedom of expression and of decision making, honesty, communication is bidirectional; it valorizes not only school education, but also the education "for life".

Regarding micro-social factors pertaining to the functionality of the family group, it was found that in solving various problems within family are less respected children's emotional needs and the right to hold opinions and to participate in decisions that affect them directly or indirectly. In general, conflict resolution strategies are: avoiding communication and problem accountability, accepting only solution that the authority parent has (usually the father), avoid involving children in conflict between parents or the contrary, their use as a bargaining item, and when conflicts appear between parents and children, the prevalent behaviors are those that dominate the child.

In terms of parents perception on children's rights was found that the factor "educational level of parents" positively correlated with a high level of knowledge of children's rights, but not with growing level of recognition of the importance, application, and promotion of rights in child care practice and education. Nor the factor "parental occupation" can be significantly associated with an increase / decrease of the level of recognition and promotion of children's rights. Urban families who use extra resources to support family childcare (such as kindergarten, after-school programs, nannies, kids clubs) are more concerned with how these resources meet the physical and intellectual needs of children and less concerned with the relationship and communication with the child types, with how is meeting their emotional needs, or how this facilitate and strengthen the child's ego. In both areas of residence parents are first aware of rights on education, social welfare, appropriate health services, to have a family and appropriate care in the home. The least acknowledged rights were those related to mental development (problems in identifying cases of emotional abuse, or parental stress situations impact on child development) and child participation in their own development and social life. Please note that urban parents have stated / identified several rights, especially in the field of rights related to expression and participation, this being due to the existence of information resources and outside familial care and extra-curricular education, and also due to interaction (cooperation or competition) of parents with an increased educational and occupational status.

The factor "age" had no significant correlation with parent attitudes and behavior toward children's rights.

In connection with the factor "relationship with educational institutions" it was identified a greater share of communication strategies of written messages to the detriment of verbal, face to face interaction with parents. Written messages were displayed through material panels on each group/class, or on the walls of kindergartens/schools and contained references to children's rights or parenting that promotes the wellbeing of children. Parents have stated the need for a continuous and direct contact with specialists in education (teachers, and sometimes school counselor) to facilitate knowledge and assumption of children's rights.

In summary, the most important research issues raised were: level of education and occupational status of parents is not a factor that significantly differentiate the attitudes and behavior of parents regarding the rights of children. Although parents in urban areas, with a higher level of education, on average know (are informed about) the existence and some content of the UN Convention from 1989 they disregarded it in everyday life practices of child care and education. The prevalence of rights relating to education, health services, physical development and family, in the consciousness of most parents can be explained by focusing efforts and parenting skills to ensure these rights, and the existence or absence of resident communities or services institutions ensuring conditions for meeting these needs/rights. Also, the cultural family model may act as facilitator or inhibitor of "pro" attitudes and behaviors on children's rights. The modern cultural model (described in the previous pages) is enabling the development and maintenance of attitudes and behaviors centered, or at least having as a starting point, the rights of children, by providing a family environment that meets the needs of a harmonious bio-psycho-social development and especially avoiding situations of emotional abuse. The traditionalist-authoritarian model (found in 3 of the 4 cases reported by teachers and social services) is inhibitor on the development and especially on manifestation of parenting practices that respect children's rights (especially those related to expression and participation); also this model may even encourage behaviors of physical abuse and/or emotional abuse or neglect of basic emotional needs. The traditional-humanist model favored rights related to a harmonious bio-psycho-social development, but inhibitor on attitudes and behaviors that promote the right to opinion, to dissent, to decide on the child's own developments.

4. Conclusions

It can be concluded that social and economic factors, both family and residential environment, not directly, specific conditioning attitudes and behaviors of parents on recognizing and respecting the rights of children. These factors may influence to a small extent the knowledge of these rights, especially the awareness of the importance of respecting all the rights to promote psycho-somatic health, spiritual development of children and increase their quality of life. The existence of a relatively small proportion, and only in urban areas, of the

modern cultural model, favorable to promoting and respecting all children's rights, can be an indicator of negative value prognosis of the average degree of parents involvement (in both areas of residence) in promotion actions and enforcement of these rights. Moreover, values, norms and practices of growth, care and education of children summarized in family cultural model is a mirror that reflects the level of learning and awareness not only of the concept of children's rights, but also of each right. Thus, we can say that awareness of child rights is more an effect of values and norms prevailing in the family group, rather than the socio-economic factors action. These, however, there may be factors that influence and promote certain values and social practices. For example, in communities with more extra-familial resources of growth, care and education for children, parents are faced with diverse attitudes and behaviors, are monitored more often and by more people (teachers, social pedagogues, non-formal educational instructors, social workers etc.) regarding relationships with the children and the type of proven parenting skills. This creates favorable conditions for the manifestation of values and norms "pro-" children's rights. Instead, only the involvement of family members, even extended family, in raising children helps perpetuate the family cultural model, without offering opportunities for confrontation, or monitoring parenting skills.

Parental education is primarily done in an informal manner, under the influence of parental behavior patterns existing in affiliation groups or reference groups of the children and youth, or presented via the media. But this is not enough and is not always "good practices" for developing effective parenting skills in reflexive modernity. Parental education, which is completing an educational specialist training, focused on children's rights, involves educational activities that can increase the level of understanding and awareness of each right, promotion of pro-democracy cultural models (the only ones that can keep children's rights as fundamental to social existence and value) and learning new ways of conflict management and problem solving solution within the family, grounded on respecting of child needs and rights.

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