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**A PRELIMINARY MODEL OF THE SOCIAL SITUATION
OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT OF HOMELESS CHILDREN**

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Abstract

Social adjustment is one of the areas which play an important role in the process of socialization of not only minor children. Deficits or disorders in the area of social adjustment can be the cause of many life difficulties which may adversely affect the development of children or they can be the cause of their unhealthy development. The aim of the present study is to understand and describe the mechanisms of social adjustment of homeless children (in shelters and hostels) in the city of Ostrava. This region has the highest number of people excluded from housing, including children, in the whole of the Czech Republic. Based on the findings of the current research and the researchers' understanding of the social reality a preliminary situational map was created which is to serve as a reference point for other researchers (according to Clarke, 2015). Social adaptation disorders cause plenty of disruptions to the children's development. They are a response to negative living conditions or a specific stress factor, being a manifestation of impaired ability to maintain balance. Factors that lead to a disruption of social adaptation include, among others, disrupted parenting, physical violence, frequent childhood migrations, or growing up in a disadvantaged environment. There are two typical resources which influence social adjustment, namely the (1) external and (2) internal ones. The external and internal resources function in a certain social context (situation) which can increase or reduce their effects.

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Keywords: [Homeless children, social adjustment, preliminary model, external resources, internal resources]



1. Introduction

Social adjustment is one of the areas which play an important role in the process of socialization of not only minor children. Deficits or disorders in the area of social adjustment can be the cause of many life difficulties and according to the Act No. 359/1999 Coll., on Social and Legal Protection of Children, they may adversely affect the development of children or they can be the cause of their unhealthy development. Social adjustment disorders include a range of disruptions in the children's development, their reactivity and the incidence of mental disorders. They are a response to negative life circumstances or a specific stress factor, being a manifestation of the impaired ability to keep equilibrium. In accordance with Ponizovsky, Levov, Schultz, and Radomislensky (2011) we consider the following factors influencing social adjustment of children living in shelters and hostels to be the key ones: the parents' divorce or their broken relationship, physical violence, their impaired relation to parents, disturbed emotional bonding, frequent moving in their childhood, family abuse or growing up in a disadvantaged environment. The factors mentioned above can very often be found accumulated in the children living in shelters and hostels, i.e. without a home of their own, and therefore we expect a high possibility of disturbed social adjustment there. As shown by the research (Labella, Narayan, & Masten, 2016) the emotional climate in families having experience with homelessness also influences socio-emotional adjustment in school. Frequent migration of children living in shelters and hostels is also linked to school mobility, where some research (Fantuzzo, Leboeuf, Chen, Rouse, & Culhane, 2012) draws attention to the need for specific legislation dealing with the education of such mobile children. Even though, in various countries, the connection between social adjustment disorders and homelessness has been a proven fact, we miss similar research in the Czech Republic.

2. Problem Statement

Social adaptation of homeless children depends on several factors (Novotný, 2015; Mendez, Fantuzzo, & Cicchetti, 2012), and the interdependence of internal and external factors must be emphasized. In view of this, we base our research on an ecological approach to social work (McKinnon & Alston, 2016; Haight & Taylor, 2013). The factors influencing social adaptation are a set of mutually influencing external and internal entities. The individual thus becomes an integral part of the environment, in which he lives, and which he can only partially influence as far as minors are concerned. Social adaptation of children living in shelters and hostels should then be examined in the context of their entire life situation - taking into account the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Research shows that the longer an individual lives away from home, the lower his social adaptation is (Lipschitz-Elhawi & Izhaky, 2005). This fact should reflect social policy instruments that should pay attention to homeless children in the context of social work interventions. Our research has been carried out in the city of Ostrava. The city of Ostrava, which is the capital of the Moravian-Silesian region, has been chosen because in this region a process of depopulation and deindustrialisation of the "old" industrial cities is taking place (Illner, 2010). Ostrava represents a highly dynamic and complex environment as far as housing exclusion is concerned. It has the highest number of persons living in hostels and in socially excluded localities within the Czech Republic (GAC, 2015). A description of social exclusion (2015) mentions that in Ostrava and the Ostrava region, more than anywhere else in the Czech

Republic, inhabitants are increasingly at the risk of social exclusion. In the city of Ostrava there are currently 12 shelters, including 5 shelters for the target group of mothers with children and one for families, with a total capacity of 210 places. In Ostrava, there are 15 socially excluded localities and 36 hostels (Agency for Social Inclusion, 2015). The fact is that the numbers of socially excluded localities and hostels tend to increase in Ostrava (GAC, 2015). The case study of the city of Ostrava will provide a chance to monitor, describe and explain the circumstances of the issue in its complexity and so to understand the context (Coolican, 2014).

3. Research Questions

Our research question was: How do the mechanisms of social adjustment of the homeless children in shelters and hostels in Ostrava function? Based on a certain degree of pre-understanding based on the wider socio-cultural, historical, political and economic context of the social situation of homeless children in the Czech Republic and then specifically in the city of Ostrava, the researchers sought both internal and external factors to capture the examined social phenomenon in its complexity.

4. Purpose of the Study

In relation to the above mentioned, the purpose of our study is to describe the mechanisms of social adjustment of homeless children (in shelters and hostels) in the city of Ostrava – the region with the highest number of people excluded from housing, including children, within the whole of the Czech Republic – and to create a preliminary conceptual map of social adjustment of homelessness children.

5. Research Methods

The first phase of the research has an exploratory character, trying to bring as much information on the examined phenomenon as possible based on our existing pre-understanding. The core of our complex research is to uncover how people understand, experience, interpret, and thus create social reality (see, for example, Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2004; Hendl, 2016). The applied approach is based on abductive logic, drawing upon the fact that data acquisition, processing, analysis and interpretation are not separate processes, or phases, of the research. On the contrary, they are permeating and influencing each other, which means that the individual sub-steps of the research cycle are constantly intermingling. Thanks to this, we are able to reflect the contexts of both the existing and newly communicated information by the individual informants, and the dynamics of the development of the examined phenomenon related to its history. Another unavoidable feature of the applied approach is the researcher's reflexivity. As she becomes part of the research process, she has to take her position into account in line with the meaning of the language, i.e. specific linguistic contexts typical of the examined group as well as the theoretical background.

The research of social adjustment of homeless children was carried out with the following assumptions:

- In accordance with Nilson (2007) we regard social adjustment as a complex and multidimensional process.

- The individual adjustment dimensions (emotional, academic, cultural, and social) in homeless children are in interaction (Obradović et al., 2009).
- Factors influencing social adjustment have a cumulative nature in homeless children (Ponizovsky et al., 2011).
- In accordance with the conception of Prinstein, Boergers, and Vernberg, (2010) we state that the environmental conditioning of social adjustment in homeless children is strongly influenced by two predisposing factors: the state of being homeless and the experience with domestic violence.
- Considering the multifactorial conditioning of social adjustment in homeless children, we draw on the ecological model, and in accordance with Levendosky and Graham-Bermann, (2001) we consider children's behaviour as a certain continuum and not as an individual's pathology.
- The social environment where the homeless children grow up can be regarded as a certain context where the disordered social adjustment begins (see Swick & Williams, 2010; Nebbitt, Lombe, Yu, & Vaughn, 2012; Hinton & Cassel, 2013).
- The family background is seen as particularly important in the social context of disordered social adjustment (Anooshian, 2005).
- In accordance with Anooshian (2005) and Swick and Williams (2010) we are aware of the fact that the links among social adjustment, bad peer-pressure, and violence, are reciprocal and dynamic.
- We suppose that the children's academic success is influenced by their social adjustment (Masten, 2012).

Furthermore, the researchers drew on their knowledge of the situation in the region in question and the practice of social work with the target group.

6. Findings

As can be seen in Table 01, there are many elements in the social situation of homeless children that we have divided into the following 12 components. Some of the 111 identified elements can be assigned to internal factors linked to (a) the caregiver, such as the mental state of mothers, parental responsibility for housing, non-adaptability, or (b) the minor child - e.g. special educational needs or problems in the areas of behaviour, psychological stability, social adjustment, learning, and socialization. McDonald, Jourilles, and Skopp (2006) report that 53% of children living in in an asylum house (for more than 2 years) have difficulties in establishing and maintaining social relationships and have a higher incidence of internalized problems (anxiety and withdrawal). Most of the identified elements in the social situation of homeless children are the external factors.

Table 01. A preliminary conceptual map of social adjustment of homelessness children

Individual human components (18)	Collective participants (13)	The discourse relating to human participants (12)	The discourse relating to non-human participants (10)
Children, Mothers, Fathers, Partners, Siblings, Fellow occupants (in hostels and shelters), Social workers, Teachers,	Asylum homes, Hostels, Private houses, Department of Social and Legal Protection of Children, Social services, The Public,	Bad mothers, Anti-mothers, Parenting as a domain of women, Bad father, Unhappy children, "Children with problems", The	The crisis of the welfare state, The crisis of social work, Theory and methods of social work, The influence of postmodern perspectives and critical social work,

Physicians, Family members, Family friends, Schoolmates, Friends, Peer groups, Flat owners, Neighbours, Playgroup leaders, Clergymen	Schools, Healthcare facilities, Participatory organizations, Platform for social housing, Network of participants in housing, Mother support network, Users of social services	Homeless, The Maladjusted, Abuse of social benefits and state support, Role and position of social workers in asylum homes, Role and position of teachers, Role and position of pupils at school	Structural versus individual causes of homelessness, Typologizing/objectivizing versus individual approach to clients, Bureaucratization and measurability of social work, System of individual planning in social services and social-legal protection of children, Target group of asylum homes for families with children, Preventive strategies at school
The considered areas of problems (14)	National socio-political components (13)	Regional socio-political components (4)	Spatial components (12)
Homelessness as a cause of social adjustment disorders, Mother and child relationship, Domestic violence as a cause of homelessness of women, Loss of housing competencies, Relationship between loss of housing and mental state of mothers, Relationship between loss of housing and parental competencies, Relationship between mothers' mental state and parental competences, Impacts of domestic violence on children, Poverty and its consequences for children, Special educational needs of homeless children, Absenteeism from school, Academic success of homeless children, Help versus control in social work, Relationship between social worker and client	Absence of the Social Housing Act, Non-relatedness of social services, Increasing number of homeless families, Concept of merit, Housing ready, Pilot projects Housing first, Methodology of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA), Social housing concept of MLSA, Transfer of social housing agenda from MLSA to Ministry for Local Development, An Amendment to the Act on Social Services, An Amendment to the Act on Material Need, A Draft Amendment to the Insolvency Act, Payment of social benefits	Ostrava Social Housing Project, Strategic Plan for the Development of the Statutory City of Ostrava 2017-2023, Community Planning for the Development of Social Services of the Statutory City of Ostrava, Medium-Term Plan for the Development of Social Services in the Moravian-Silesian Region 2015-2020	Environment of the shelter, Environment of the hostel, Reclusiveness/exclusion of shelters and hostels, Placement of shelter homes in socially excluded localities, Placement of the so-called start-up apartment in socially excluded localities, Non-apartment asylum houses, Shared rooms and absence of privacy, Technical state and cleanliness of accommodation, Lack of adequately stimulating environment for children's preparation to school, Regime in the facility, Supervision, The hazards of the environment as perceived by the users
Time components (6)	Socio-cultural components (4)	Symbolic components (2)	Tacit components (3)
Child development period, Consequences in adulthood, Temporal length of stay in asylum houses, Short-term agreements in hostels, Frequent migration and school change, Measurability of social work interventions in time	Gender, Ethnicity, Religiosity (social services provided by ecclesiastical organizations), Nationality	Expectations of users in relation to asylum homes, Expectations of social workers and teachers related to users of asylum homes	Oppression of homeless people, Intersectional nature of the oppression, Prestige of social work as a profession

Based on the findings of the current research and the researcher's pre-understanding of the social reality, a preliminary ordered situational map was created which is to serve as a reference point for other researchers (according to Clarke, 2015).

7. Conclusion

Following the Preliminary Conceptual Map of Social Adjustment of Homeless Children, which became our starting point before entering the field again, we decided to focus on the microsystem in the second phase of our research. The microsystems of children living in asylum homes and hostels consist of their closest social environment, which means that individual human components intervene in it in the most fundamental way (see Figure 01).

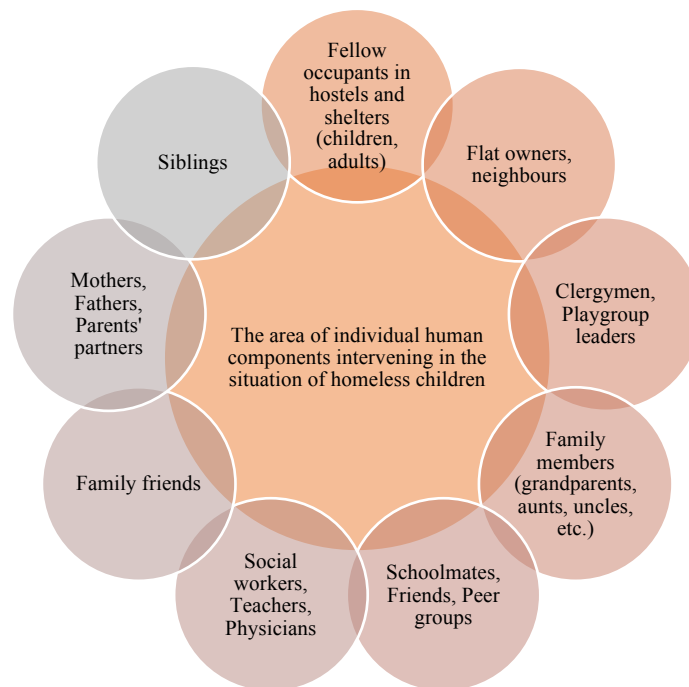


Figure 01. The area of individual human components intervening in the situation of homeless children

In subsequent phases, the researchers will focus on examining the relationships between individual microsystems, i.e. on the mesosystem. Within the mesosystem they will focus on understanding the relationships between the family and the school, the children living in asylum homes and their peers, the family and social workers, etc. In the context of socio-ecological theories, they will also consider the identified elements of the exosystem (represented not only by spatial components), the macrosystem (represented by the discourses and socio-political, socio-cultural, symbolic and tacit components) and the chronosystem (i.e. the historical context and time components) – see Figure 02.

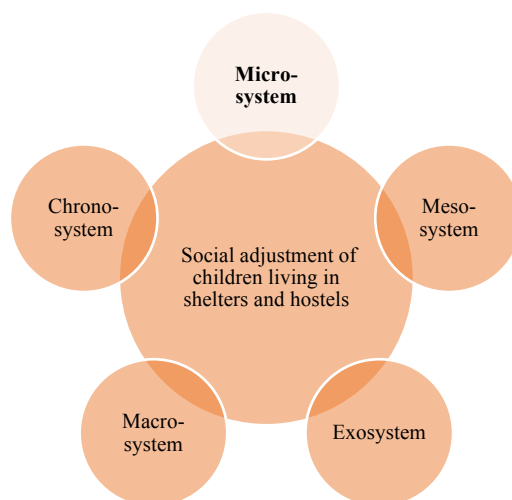


Figure 02. Systems operating in the social situation of children living in shelters and hostels

The situation of homeless children is complicated by the fact that there is still no legislation in the Czech Republic defining social housing and eligible beneficiaries who could benefit from it. The rights and obligations of individual entities implementing social housing, and their competencies and responsibilities are not established, either. This situation is seen as an unsatisfactory one not only by various citizens' initiatives but also by the general public. According to the opinion poll titled Attitudes to the Social Housing Act and its Form (MEDIAN, 2017), which was attended by 752 respondents, 88% of the respondents supported the entitlement to social housing in the case of single mothers in material need, 86% of the respondents considered the entitlement correct for children from children's homes, 84% saw it right for people with disabilities, 79% for families with children and 75% for seniors. Among the very or rather important principles of the Social Housing Act, agreed by more than 75% of the respondents, are: targeting people in real need, putting an end to business with poverty in hostels; assistance to children at risk, i.e. so that no children should need to grow up in hostels or in children's homes; securing financing, or money for social housing, for municipalities (to make the money from benefits go to municipalities, not to private owners). On the other hand, the least importance in terms of the benefits of the proposed law is attributed by the public to those in debts.

As can be seen from the preliminary conceptual map, the homelessness of children living in asylum homes and hostels in the Czech Republic (the city of Ostrava) is a very complex problem. That is why, when examining the phenomenon of social adjustment of homeless children, we have to take into account all uncovered components with their elements, i.e. the whole social situation. Social adjustment cannot be isolated from homelessness and examined separately, since its contextuality would be lost. It can be assumed that if we understand the connection between social adjustment disorders in children and the fact of homelessness, we will be able to achieve a change in the children's behaviour.

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