ABANDONMENT DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION

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ABSTRACT. Family represents a set of conditions necessary for the child's growth and his or her acquisition of skills, and the place where the child is integrated into human life, society, culture and framework for developing his or her habits. The presence of a carer is important for the child's social integration. Still, there are cases of child abandonment, presented in this paper, which lead to negative developmental skills in children. The purpose of this paper is thus to underline and define the concept of abandonment, to present its causes and results, and in the end, to offer a list of qualities needed by any care giver in order to meet the child's needs and to help him develop properly

KEYWORDS: abandonment, family disequilibrium, abandonment prevention

1. ABANDON–CONCEPT DEFINITIONS

Family represents, for a child, the environment which is most suitable for his or her growth and development; as well as the tool through which the child grasps into social and cultural life. Cases when parents are unable or unwilling to take responsibility to care for their own children are unfortunately most frequent (Șchiopu, 1997).

For all these children, a separation from their families generates a deep trauma with serious repercussions on their personality development in the future. The child's socio-psycho-affective development is influenced by achieved attachment and the bond of affection between mother and child. The absence of parents and of a family environment determines the absence of certain regular feelings and emotions, delays in the child's physical growth and behavioural disturbances (Rose, 1972).

Three elements are crucial in case of separation:
- separation period;
- separation conditions and causes;
- Caring and development arrangements provided to the child in case of separation (Popescu, 1969).

The process of separation from a family is a stressful situation, which generates emotional frustration with negative consequences for the adaptation and integration of children into care institutions and for their future maturity. Child abandonment is an extreme form of separation from parents (Vlas, 1992).

The term abandoned child refers to any child who does not live with his parents or at least one of his parents and all the responsibility for his raising is transferred to an institution or a person who is not their relative (Popescu, 1969).

There are cases when, for instance, parents leave abroad for work and leave the child at a friend / neighbour with the promise to send money for their caring; once they arrive there, parents forget their child; basically the child is abandoned, even if there is no formal decision to acknowledge it.

There are children who are left in hospitals for treatments and the visits of parents become scarce, the child is no longer desired, and that basically makes them obtain the status of abandoned child. In this case of an abandoned child (not the judicial aspect of the term) parental responsibility diminishes and is transferred to various institutions such as: hospitals, maternity wards and paediatric wards which is the main gateway to institutionalization. There are also cases in which the explicit abandoned decision is not finally taken, and the child is entrusted to certain institutions or relatives (Miftode, 1999).

It is necessary to distinguish between cases in which the responsibility for the growth, education and care processes is entrusted to an institution or another kind of protection outside the family; this is a temporary solution or a definitive one. In case of a temporary solution, the family shall maintain relations with the child they visit and remain interested in him/her. Some authors call this phenomenon as one of "quasiabandon" which keeps the unfortunate potential for the child to be abandoned soon.

For example if abandonment is definitive, it is manifested by an explicit decision, made by the family, in the form of consent to adoption, or by judicial declaration of child abandonment if "the family is disinterested in him, obviously, for more

than 6 months". Thus, the child is abandoned as a result of a court ruling. (Law no. 47/1993)

This disinterest is defined as the cessation of any connection between parents and child, or any bonds, to prove the existence of normal parental relationships.

Institutionalized children are qualified as abandoned children, a term used according to a decision of the Commission for Child Protection. Once the child reaches an institution, parents transfer full responsibility for their children development in the hands of specialists, or better said to "the state" (Miftode, 1999).

Often, arguments can be found on the role of the state in children caring. "The state is obliged to raise my child" or "I want to give it to state," are phrases often heard from parents who want to abandon their children.

The term abandonment is of French origin and is clarified by French dictionaries (Şchiopu, 1997). The term means "one's discretion", "at the mercy of a person". The prefix "a" has the meaning of depriving and in this sense; a parent who leaves his child loses all rights to it. In this perspective it means renunciation, abandonment, desertion, refusal to deal with the child, to entrust the responsibility of bringing up another person, the care and upbringing of the child.

The phase of transfer in the practice of Social work for children and families has a major importance.

In some cases when a family has life difficulties, there is an option to temporarily entrust the child to an institution or a family who is not a relative (such as a caregiver). In case in which the child was temporarily entrusted to an institution, risks of definitive abandonment grow.

The reason is that the family cannot acknowledge transfer, to the full extent. In case of a temporary custody of a child to a foster family, the risks of definitive abandonment are significantly diminished because parents know the family caregiver, also they can relate interpersonally and not institutional (Miftode, 1999).

Abandonment means entrusting, which has two opposite directions: the positive one "to give" (to offer something that belongs to an individual), and the negative one is "to leave" (to abandon). Abandonment is a statement of fact, in which parents neglect their own rights and responsibilities towards the child.

According to a judicial point of view, abandonment is: "the act in which parents have legal obligations to child maintenance, leave him/her, banish, or do not provide any help exposing the child to physical or moral suffering." (Mitrofan, 1991 p. 3)

The legal definition of abandonment is not equal to what is happening in reality in psychosocial care institutions or alternative services as institutionalization.

Thus, placement centres or other forms of protection are formed of a big number of children assisted but not abandoned legally.

In fact, they are already abandoned by their parents, and have no ties or relationships of any kind. When law representatives try to initiate legal procedure of abandonment, parents or other relatives, are generally opposed (Miftode, 1999).

In many cases, to avoid the procedure of declaring abandonment, parents come to the institution not to visit their children but to sign the register of visits. This registry demonstrates that parents visited the child within the period provided by law, even if the child is neglected, abandonment cannot be declared. However there are cases when children from placements care centres are rejected by their family, not visited or taken home for weekends or holidays.

Although they are not considered abandoned, and the process of entrust to care is probably seen as a temporary solution to help the family overcome a difficult period.

It is important to mention that abandonment (the mental state and not as a category of law) already took place and the child was actually abandoned.

2. CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF ABANDON

The problem of child abandonment should be tackled according to the child's age, his or her medical situation, his family's status and, not least the functionality of institutions in which the child is introduced. Such an approach helps to identify the most efficient social services to prevent abandonment, guided by families needs. Thus, a policy to prevent child abandonment of a young child (preschool) will inevitably differ from policy to prevent early school-age child, etc.

An identification of "abandon strategies" is needed in the case of options used by parents who abandon their children (e.g. hospital abandon, when a request of commission for child protection or child welfare directorate is made or the child is chased home, etc.). In order to annihilate these "strategies" by articulating the links between various institutions, local communities, etc. is needed.

That's how one can identify "source institutions"; mainly those representative places for abandoned kids (especially those with medical guidance) and which provide the basis for developing ways to prevent disturbances of good practice that encourage abandonment.

Examples of these kinds of institutions are: hospitals, maternity ward for premature and dystrophic sections.

Working with these institutions remains a strong point in order to find the weak points in the operating system of those institutions and solutions that allow close nurseries which allow child abandonment.

For example, in some hospitals when the child is registered in a hospital, identity documents from parents and children are not required (while the invoking of lost documents should be quickly verified via computerized registration service).

There are multiple causes of child abandonment:

a. Lack of material conditions due to poverty

Often poverty is the main reason why children are abandoned, even if it is combined with others, such as alcohol, domestic violence, neglect, etc. After 1989, the poverty of families became greatly emphasized. Surveys and official statistics highlighted an ongoing process of impoverishment of the population.

In terms of unemployment due to lack of financial resources, the economic conditions of local communities, child abandonment becomes almost something normal.

Each month a number of parents which ask to hospitalize their children into childcare institutions grow.

According to a study conducted in 1991 by the Minister of Health, the Institute for Mother and Child and UNICEF, based on data given by paediatric therapy wards in hospitals, showed that the abandonment of children in these institutions is closely linked to economic conditions and family income.

Thus, 74% of parents were unemployed, 58% had inadequate housing conditions or had no home.

A precarious financial situation is expressed by the absence of income, the number of children in the family, poor living conditions, etc.

It can thus be observed that not all families which suffer from financial problems abandon their children; therefore, it is interesting to create a study based on that type of families. Although, the situation is still precarious they keep children in family (Doise, 1990).

b. Absence of housing is another major factor

Massive layoffs, economic conditions and the progressive increase in maintenance costs, evacuation housing for bad debtors, selling apartments to meet expenses, increased the number of homeless, or people who temporarily live with their friends or relatives.

The concubine relationships are another cause of child abandonment. Typically, these relationships are associated with poverty and lack of responsibility of partners in raising children.

Often, young mothers are forced to raise their children alone because the child's appearance leads to broken relationships with the partner. Statistics show that the highest risk for child abandonment is recorded among mothers aged fewer than 20 and they often abandon the child in maternity.

According to the survey 40% of children abandoned in orphanages and nutritional therapy wards came from accidental or concubinage relationships, mothers being unmarried.

Unfortunately, in most cases when a young women is pregnant she losses support from family. The appearance of an unwanted pregnancy is usually hidden, and the women's family refuses to admit the child because they think that "our daughter ruined her future".

When parents condemn that their daughter is pregnant, they start to blame her and renounce at their support for her. They accuse the young mother, instead of admitting that the situation was the result of a lack of communication.

In case in which pregnancy is kept as secret from parents, the young mother (supported by partner or not) usually finds abandonment as a solution.

Another factor is a reduced access to information about family planning. Most often, abortion is seen as one of the solutions, and the only form of "family planning". Therefore, for 9 years, Romania had the first place in Europe in terms of the number of abortions.

That happened because some segments of the population have limited access to contraceptives due to cost and poor informational and organizational access. Only a few programs that offer family planning services were accessible to disadvantaged groups.

The placement of children in care institutions increases the risk of child abandonment. Such a solution, as temporary abandonment for families with material difficulties, causes a progressive loss of the link between the family and child, which ultimately leads to abandonment. Parents do not visit their children.

This happens because they have no possibility to care for the child or because they see it as a form of protection institution that provides better conditions than they could.

The lack of services for mothers with children, such as nurseries, kindergartens, dormitories (with extended hours) or because these have a high cost, and are often inaccessible, don't encourage mothers.

Mothers cannot work; they do not have secure and stable income, leading to even greater poverty.

The lack of proper social services, which must involve the following things, must also be underlined: preventing abandonment; family reintegration with children which are placed in institutions; adoption or foster care for abandoned children; support and programs for responsible family planning. All the options must be effective and accessible.

Only during recent years social services with professional social worker were created, who have knowledge in working in maternity wards, in therapeutic sections, schools, to identify and support families who are in a position to abandon children to maintain children in their family, and if this is not possible, establishing alternatives that respond best to the child's interests.

c. Death of a Parent

Cases of abandonment after the mother's death in comparison to the father's death are more common, especially if the child is in preschool.

Widowed mothers entrust their children to institutions only in desperate situations, like: unemployment, homelessness, illness. While widowed fathers, especially if children are young and requires constant care, entrust them to institutions more easily.

Current legislation on child abandonment is also a source, which in some ways respects and encourages parents to abandon their children, and decreases the level of responsibility of parents for their children. Law no. 47/1993 partially helps solve the problems of abandoned children.

It specifies a minimum of six months in which parents manifest disinterested in the child. The existing legislation does not emphasize the responsibility of parents to raise and educate their children and the support that must be given to them.

Divorce is preceded by misunderstandings, conflicts that negatively reflect on the child.

The first effect of such conflicts is child neglect. Typically, children are "divided" between the two partners and one of them abandons him or her. There are innumerable cases where children arrive in institution after parents' divorce.

Parental responsibility is given to the institution. And when another parent finds out about the abandonment, quarrels are renewed.

Cases in which parents have chronic somatic diseases - physiological or psychological usually create more disturbances in the family. Family imbalances that can lead to child abandonment are often. This happens more frequently when the mother is ill.

d. The presence of child disabilities.

If the child has certain deficiencies, he has a higher risk of abandonment. Some children have lived their entire childhood in the orphanage, because they have health problems after birth, being hospitalized for treatment in premature wards or paediatric wards in hospitals. The extension of the hospitalization period, not necessarily for treatment, led due to disinterest of parents or their inability to take care of their children, leads to seeing abandonment as a solution to their problem.

- The number of births: the higher it is, the higher the risk of abandonment is. The coming of a new child into a family already dwindling effort that often, and some families can't afford.
- A living example is the case in which a family member or friend already made an abandonment; this significantly increases the likelihood of a family to abandon another child.

3. CONSEQUENCES OF ABANDONMENT

Abandonment by his or her family has a great impact on the personality of the child.

Nothing can justify such a gesture, in relationships with the family, the child basically has no chance to receive basic emotions: love, great spiritual closeness, care and support and strong preference and interpersonal attraction (Parish, 1983).

Psychosocial effects of early trauma are undeniable. In order to maintain the balance of the child's psychological health, especially in the first period, when various components of his/her personality are shaped and fixed, it is necessary first of all, to maintain relationships within the family, through the identification of one's child (Mitrofan, 1991).

The state of abandonment may be associated with depression, the attitudes of self-isolation, loss of self-esteem and therefore therapeutic educational activities are needed (Gonta, 1999).

Abandonment causes observed are:
a) It's impossible to create and maintain long lasting attachments - when children are abandoned in institutions.
b) The impossibility to satisfy material needs and a need for protection, which are characteristic to kids rose in the family.
c) Disbelief, inadequacy due to separation.
d) A lack of emotions, caused by the separation, lack of attachment from the most important person in the child's life, the mother.
e) Initiation of some negative feelings associated with feelings of guilt.
f) The difficulty of relating with other children.

g) A development delay of children from institutions, low level language, and law intellectual performance.

h) Difficult behaviour, aggression.

i) Physical and psychological trauma.

j)Little developed social skills (Mitrofan, 1991)..

All these are reflected in the child's socio-psycho-emotional development. Even if, due to the court action, parents who committed the act of child abandonment resume their duties and the child is back in family again, negative results are still present. This does not mean that psychological trauma is automatically removed.

Once a child was abandoned, they may still face "fear of abandonment". In addition, the child will never be able to maintain relationship with the one who committed abandonment (Miftode, 1999).

Each individual is integrated in society via to the social groups they takes part in. The individual does not integrate directly into the society. One of the first social groups in which the child is involved, as well as one of the most important social groups, is represented by the family. The family represents a set of conditions necessary for growth and acquisition skills, and the place where the child is integrated into human life, society, culture and framework for developing their habits site.

The presence of the parents with the child as much and as efficiently provide him or her with opportunities to socialize, to develop and to become a balanced adult, emotionally fulfilled and able to adapt to social conditions. The family is the social unit consisting of adults and children, there is the relationship between spinning - natural (blood) or social - regardless of other considerations (Stănculescu, 1997). By this definition implicitly acknowledges the importance of permanent families for children. In the early years the child develops security and attachment to parents that it builds social habits in social practice.

The child is able to analyse not only social structures but social objects and phenomena as well. A lack of parents' attention due to child separation from his or her family and placing the child in a care institution leads to a poor habits developing. The institution cannot provide a tutor for every single child, so the child has no role model.

Children living since birth in institutions, orphanages, special schools and who have never known their parents, as a result, have not formed attachment emotional need, felt in one form or another absence, state prison is located. If the child lived with their family and by a complex of circumstances get to live in an institution, will have more resources to develop.

David Mowe stated that "Even the most deficient family - material and emotional – even a family that fails to provide optimal care and training of the child, is still a better solution than the best equipped and most appropriate protection agency, which fails to compensate the family group function, brothers, grandparents and parents first picture in the child's person." (Howe, 1999, p.127)

4. CONCLUSIONS

According to worldwide practice various ways to prevent child abandonment exist. Some of them can also be applied in our country. However, the most effective solution is still represented by residential and family placement. Under this service, children at risk of abandonment are placed in environment of specialists or foster families, both offering a set of services to help in solving the crisis they are living, which would provide reintegration of children in their natural families.

The aim of integration services is to train professional foster specialists. So far this branch consisted of a school, with a three months programme, which offered graduates maternal assistant qualifications. Practice shows that any professional maternal assistant cannot assure the reintegration of the child into his natural family.

A professional maternal assistant can be effective only in case in which he or she can be characterized by number of moral qualities such as: empathy, tolerance, conscientiousness, sensitivity and proper motivation. Studies and analyses on the qualities of a proper person to care for children have underlined the following results (Popescu, 1969):

- a balanced behaviour in both directions (manifestation or non manifestation),
- sufficient resources in terms of intelligence,
- an average value of ego stability,
- a balanced attitude between humble, gentle and kind and assertive attitude, and the aggressive, authoritarian and stubborn behaviour,
- well balanced and efficient personality adopted to life conditions,
- an extremely conscientious behaviour and well structured sense of duty, a well-balanced and adapted personality,
- high level of understanding, team work and ability to cooperate, confident in own abilities and others,
- conservatism in their behaviour and a tendency for team work,
- have good communication skills and are able to collaborate with other people, as well high level of empathy Q3 - more liberal, independent

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