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The Impact of the Financial Income on the Family Communication

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The Impact of the Financial Income on the Family Communication

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Abstract

A functional family is the basic condition for optimal social functioning of all its members. Through fulfilment of functions imposed by society, family creates a safe environment for survival and development of family members. Family functioning depends on functioning of family in different dimensions. One of the key dimensions is communication. Therefore, it is possible for a comprehensive look at the family as a social system neglected area of family communication.

The aim of our study was to investigate how financial income affects the communication in the family system. For assessing family communication, as one of the dimensions of family functioning was used the Family Assessment Device (FAD). The research sample consisted of 310 respondents living below the poverty line. The reference group consisted of 310 respondents living in families with income standard.

The analysis of results show negative impact of low financial income on the family communication. Low-income families showed a higher degree of distortion in communication than the standard income families.

Financial income of families affects the functioning of communication among its members. When working with families living below the poverty line, we need pay attention to the development of new communication patterns and promote a clear and direct communication between family members.

Keywords: *Family, family functioning, communication, financial income.*

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1. Introduction

Communication is part of the life of every person. It is a prerequisite and a major prerequisite for social functioning not only individuals but also social groups. Despite the fact that communication is part of everyday life, it is not possible to find one generally valid definition of this term. The reason is the fact that communication is comprehensive and multidisciplinary concept of using scientific disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, ethnology, linguistics and so on. and it is not possible to reach a consensus on what it should be defined (Krauss, Fussell, 1996). Specific understanding of the term is a reflection of the purpose for which was the definition formulated and also specific professional orientation of the author. Human communication can be simplistically viewed as a process of information exchanges occurring between two or more entities. Nemečková, Žiaková and Mištuna (2000), however, point to the fact that in communication occurs not only to transfer of information itself. They see communication as a form of behaviour in which, in addition to submission, receipt and processing of information there is also an exchange of needs, values and attitudes, which should lead to mutual understanding. This exchange is always created in a certain emotional context and usually also has some moral-value dimension. From the systemic perspective communication is a key dimension of the operation of each system. Therefore, within a comprehensive look at the family as a social system it is not possible to avoid the field of family communication. Koerner and Fitzpatrick, 2002; Olson, Baiocchi-Vagner, Wilson-Kratzer, Symonds (2012) describe family communication as messages that are intentionally or unintentionally exchanged under the system of individuals that share a sense of collective identity which share a common history and a common future too, but also between the individuals and people outside of the system. Similar view is offered by Le Poire (2006) who understands family communication as targeted news broadcasts that are perceived as deliberate and promote further sharing of meanings between individuals. Family system, however, in addition to awareness of belonging and collective identity, is defined through the existence of biological, laborious or marital bond and mutual care and control. Family communication is a dynamic two-way process, which is influenced by different factors. Among its fundamental determinants we can classify: personal characteristics of the individual family members; environment in which communication takes place; the participation of other people in communication; the quality and

intensity of relations between people who are communicating; perceptive capability of individual participants of communication; timeframe of communication; family atmosphere; motivation for communication; standards to which communication is subjected (Gabura, 2012).

In general, determinants affecting family communication can be divided into two groups. The first group are the characteristics of the family as a whole, its individual members and the family environment. These determinants can involve the family atmosphere, family interaction networks, norms and communication patterns, the degree of conformity of individual members, family rituals but also socio-cultural context. The second group of determinants consists of the characteristics of the communication itself. It is mainly the level of communication, a form of communication, communication mode (oral or written etc.), cultural characteristics of the communication process, and the area of communications. The atmosphere in the family is most frequently associated with the quality and structure of relations between family members but also between family communication patterns and rules, standards by which the communication is managed. Rosenblatt (2009) sees the rules and patterns of communication as a kind of maps that indicate where a family can interact and where it is not possible to go anymore. Although family members often are not able to verbalize and name the different rules and to recognize specific formulas, their mutual communication is nevertheless continually affected by those rules and subjected to them. Rules and patterns are not fixed, but rather are open to change, completion or situational differentiation. In everyday life of the family a situation may happen in which more than one standard or pattern is applicable. In this case, the family is faced with conflicts and contradictions. This usually occurs in cases in which operate meta rules concerning the standing of the applicable rules, that is when conflict and contradiction relates to rules and formulas. Family patterns are also in centre of attention in the communication dimension McMasters' assessment model of family functioning. Authors of this model understand these rules as contrasting to the communication style of family members. They followed the global definition of communication (Ryan et al., 2005).

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993) in an attempt to describe family communication and mutual influence of communication and family atmosphere created two concepts of family communication - the concept of conformity orientation and concept of conversation orientation.

The concept of communication orientation is defined by the extent to which the family is able to create an environment and atmosphere that encourages all its members to become involved in interaction and discussion on a wide range of topics. Within optimal family functioning the rate of conversation orientation is high enough, allowing individuals to freely, frequently and spontaneously enter into interaction with others and in their mutual communication no time or thematic barriers are present. Thus members of such a family spend a lot of time in mutual interaction and through open and frequent communication are able to share their individual activities, thoughts and feelings with others. Of a particularly great importance is the high degree of conversation orientation in the communication of parents with children, because sharing ideas, opinions and values are the primary means of learning and socialization. On the other hand, families with low conversation orientation are characterized by individualism of their members, less time spent together and open communication limited to few topics. Due to the limited communication in these families free sharing of ideas and opinions does not occur and views of individuals are not welcome and sought after in the process of family decision-making (Fitzpatrick, Ritchie, 1993; Koerner, Fitzpatrick, 2004).

Unlike in the concept of conversation orientation, for the concept of conformity orientation, it is important to what level does the family communication show consistency and homogeneity in attitudes, values and beliefs. High family conformity is shaping unity of opinions and attitudes. Family members are interdependent and their interaction is harmonious, non-conflictual. The authors of this model relate a high level of conformity orientation with the traditional family, which in addition to high cohesion is characterized also by emphasis on hierarchy. In their view of traditional family is characteristic that family members prefer family relationships over the other and expect the mutual sharing of time and resources. Individual activities of individuals are subordinated to family activities and individuals organize their time in order to maximize the amount of time a family spends together. The high degree of conformity orientation of the traditional family is also reflected in the operation of the subsystem child – parents. While the parents are expected to act and to decide always in the interest of the family, expectations for children should focus on their submission to parental will. The opposite of "traditional families" with a high degree of conformity orientation is a family in which individual members consider relationships with the environment outside the family system as important and significant

as relationships within the family. From others they expect that they will accept and support their independence and individual development and growth even in the case that this will lead to the weakening of family structures (Fitzpatrick, Ritchie, 1993, Koerner, Fitzpatrick, 2004, Koerner, Fitzpatrick, 1997).

2. Methodology

In order to achieve our objectives and evaluate the family communication, we took into consideration the McMaster model of family functioning. The model is based on system theory and Miller et al. (2000) for its main assumptions considered: (1) all parts of the family are mutual; (2) one part of the family cannot be understood in isolation from the rest of the family system, (3) overall picture of family functioning cannot be created in a simple reduced understanding of each individual family member or subgroup; (4) family structure and organization are important factors that strongly influence and determine the behaviour of family members; (5) transactional patterns of family system strongly shape the behaviour of family members.

Communication is one of the six dimensions of McMaster model of family functioning.

Purpose of the study was to investigate how financial income affects the communication in the family system.

2.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 620 participants divided into two groups. The first group consisted of 310 participants (mean age = 32.05 ± 15.57 , range = 11 – 76) living in families with income below the level of subsistence minimum. The subsistence minimum in the Slovak Republic is recognized by the state as a poverty line. The second group was control group consisting of 310 participants (mean age = 34.24 ± 16.10 , range = 11 – 82) living in families with income standard.

2.2 Measures and procedure

In order to evaluate family communication, Family Assessment Device (FAD) questionnaire was used. It is a 60 -item self-assessment tool. The task of participant was to identify how much the statement describes his or her family (on a scale from strongly agree - agree - disagree - strongly disagree).

Questionnaire was designed to assess selected dimensions of family functioning and is based on the McMaster model of family functioning. Assessed dimensions are: problem solving, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, control of behavior, communication and general functioning.

Dimension of Communication expresses the exchange of information within families, focusing primarily on verbal communication and verbal expression. The model focuses on family communication patterns as opposed to the communication style of the family members. Although the authors do not deny the importance of the model of nonverbal communication, it not included in the evaluation because of methodological difficulties (Ryan et al., 2005).

3. Results

When comparing average scores of individuals living below the poverty threshold with Cut-off Score, there were observed differences in the dimension Communication. Mean score in dimension Communication was 2.29 (Minimum score 1, maximum score 3.22).

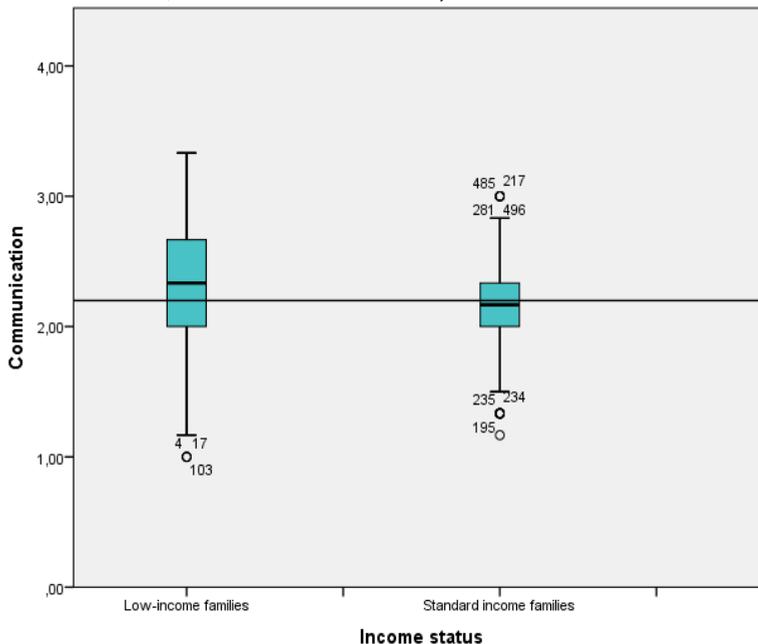


Fig. 1 – Comparison of average scores

As the figure 1 shows, Cut-off score for the dimension of Communication is 2.2. It means that values 2.2 and over indicate

dysfunction of the dimension. Whereas in 59,7% of low-income families disruption of the functioning in dimension of Communication can be seen, only 47,7% of standard income families reached scores showing a dysfunction in this dimension. But on the other hand, we can see that low-income families have more variations of the score in this dimension. Generally, among low-income families there were more families with better communication functioning than within standard income families.

The results of Mann Whitney U test, applied to compare the average score in the dimension "communication" shows a significant difference between the group of participants living below the poverty threshold and a group of participants with a standard income ($Z = - 3.926$, $p = 0.000$). The mean rank of the group living below the poverty threshold was 338.47, while in the group of participants with a standard income, the mean rank was 282.53 .

4. Discuscusion and conclusion

The functioning of the family system is influenced by several factors. One of these factors is also a level of resources that a family has available to meet their needs. The results of our research demonstrate the impact of poverty on the functioning of the family system. The findings were also comparable McLanahan (1985), which points to the fact that economic deprivation and the stress associated with recent family disruption account for nearly all the negative effects of family structure on offsprings. As mentioned above, family communication is influenced by several factors. One of the determinants of family communication are also family interaction networks, representing a model of communication interaction in the family. This model is based on who communicates with whom in the family and how often. Family interaction networks present a framework for the study of family communication. Galvin (et al, 2004) highlights their importance in this regard and sees them as flow patterns, meaningful messages within the network created by bundled relations localized within a defined cultural context. Speaking about family communication, we should not forget the importance of rituals. These are a means of symbolic communication. Through their maintenance and thanks to their role they have for various members of the family they help to retain family identity (Segrin, Flora, 2011). Among the rituals we can include regularly recurring activities, which are of symbolic meaning for individual family members. They could be birthday parties, anniversary or other celebration, but also can take the form

of ritualized behavior at the table, or in other significant activities for the family. Through them the family manifests to its members acceptance, positive feelings etc. Sergin and Flora (2011) also associated rituals with a symbolic expression if a role or behavior are acceptable or not.

In addition to factors arising from the family as a system, its individual elements and arrangements a great impact on the effective and optimal functioning of family communication also have several characteristics of the communication process itself.

One of the fundamental characteristics of family communication can be considered its form. Communication within the family, like any other interpersonal communication can take several forms. In terms of interaction between family members as the most frequent can be designated verbal communication, the content of which is usually expressed through words and non-verbal communication, where the content of the communication signaled through posture, facial expressions, tone of voice and the like. Examination of verbal and nonverbal communication in the family especially the conflict between them may lead to the disclosure of communication failures and can signal obliqueness or effort to mask the communication. If the main motivation for communication in the family is considered the sharing of information, attitudes and values then essential prerequisite for success of communication is the clarity of delivered content. It is important that individual parties are in understood in communication. Ryan (et al., 2005) points out in relation to success of communication and clarity on its two fundamental characteristics that are clear vs. vague continuum, direct vs. indirect continuum. Clear vs. vague continuum focuses on whether the content of the report has been expressed clearly or disguised, cloudy, vague. Direct vs. indirect continuum focuses on whether the message is delivered directly to the intended target or reflected from someone else. An example of indirect continuum may for instance be the situation when the message intended for one family member is transmitted through a third party. In both cases, the sender and recipient are involved in the communication patterns of the family.

Given the fact that these two continuums are separate and independent of each other, within the family communication can occur its combination.

Studies realized in this area have shown that the healthy functioning family communicates in a clear and straightforward manner in its instrumental and in affective area. Communication in families with

disturbances in the functioning is less direct and clear. As noted above, in detecting communication it is appropriate to focus also on non-verbal communication, especially the contradiction of nonverbal and verbal communication. This can indicate masking and obliqueness in communication (Ryan et al., 2005).

To the communication dimension of the family a great impact also have cultural characteristics. We can say that every family has its unique method of communication that the individual members gradually acquire from birth, and which is later on transferred from the family of origin to the family of procreation. Communication is not an isolated dimension but is influenced by individual, family cultural characteristics, but also by the culture of the wider environment in which the family lives. Feldman and Scherz (2006) combine family culture with attitudes, values, standards and routinely conduct that are received and accepted without the need for verbalizing. Cultural environment in which the family lives also influences its individual members through tradition and standards based on specific socio-cultural context, but also through the funds from which the family can draw on when building its own communication. The above-mentioned authors in this regard point to the concept of "culture of poverty", which currently is under discussions between experts from different fields. One of the basic premiums of this concept is deprivation of family due to the unavailability of cultural resources or inability to use these resources due to discrimination, social exclusion and so on. Members of families suffering from this kind of deprivation fail to develop verbal communication. Research realized in this area, for example, have shown a direct impact between poor families and vocabulary development in children. This fact is largely influenced by the fact that most children coming from low-income home environment does not have sufficient access to formal language register. Lack of knowledge of formal registers of language, and the inability to properly use it in communications disqualify them in the educational process as well as later when trying to compete on the labour market (Pan, Rowe, Snow, 2005; Payne et al., 2010).

Another element that family communication culture affects is a communication mode. The two main modes of communication are verbal and written communication. In order for an individual to be able to work optimally in the society he should be able to communicate both orally and in writing form in a satisfactory manner. Basics of both communication modes are obtained within the family. However, it is necessary to have in the

process of acquisition sufficient amount of stimuli mediated by parents. In a properly functioning family parents provide children with enough incentives and stimulate the development of their communication. When distortions of functioning of a family system occur, however, there may be a problem in this area as a child without properly elected initiatives does not have the opportunity to adopt both modes of communication within the optimal range. A problem can be especially in written communication. Payne (et al., 2010) describes the effect of the lack of a communication culture and the lack of incentives in the family, which causes that the child is not able to adopt a formal communication register. In the current register, however, the importance of communication consists primarily of nonverbal communication elements. Choice of words and syntax are up to second place. In written communication, which is a normal part of the educational system and working life, therefore children from such families often fail because their ability to formulate ideas without using nonverbal cues is limited. Family communication consists of two components, namely the instrumental communication and affective communication. Affective communication focuses on the expression of feelings, affections and interests of individual family members. Lietz (2013) recognized affective communication as an essential element in building and reinforcing family cohesion. Instrumental area of communication focuses on issues and events of everyday life. The functioning of the family system in the communication dimension must be assessed separately with respect to both of these areas. The family may have problems in affective communication, but the instrumental area may be well-functioning.

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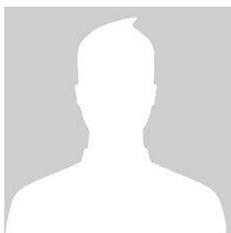
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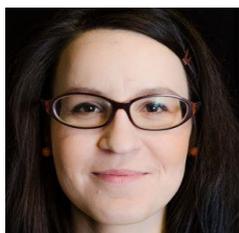
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