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PhD Thesis Summary

CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM. CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF SYSTEM DEPENDENCE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS (entirely)

Abbreviations	p.4
Introduction	p.5
Motivation for choosing the research topic - objectives	p.6
 Chapter I. Choice and application of research methods	p.12
 Chapter II. Protection institution (state and / or private)	p.29
2.1. The orphanage - documentary attestation	p.29
2.2. Presentation of orphanages after 1989 - the impact on the press	p.30
2.3. Aspects of the Romanian child protection institutions, before and after 1989	p.34
2.4. Population structure. Evolution and weight	p.44
2.5. Establishment and functioning of NGOs in Romania	p.49
2.6. Child protection institution - Challenges and impact on children	p.55
 Chapter III. Family - Tradition and trends	p.63
3.1. The family - the first social institution in the history of the world	p.63
3.2. The family from a legal perspective.....	p.78
 Chapter IV. Social assistance in Romania	p.81
4.1. Legal provisions	p.81
4.2. History of social assistance	p.82
4.3. Values of social assistance applied in the Romanian context	p.84
 Chapter V. Dependence on the protection system (Study 1 - Maternal Center, alternative to abandonment or dependence on the system)	p.88
 Chapter VI. Involvement of staff in working with the institutionalized child	p.105
6.1. Independent living skills	p.105
6.2. Skills (learned behaviors)	p.117
6.3. Approaches in working with young people.....	p.119
6.4. Tools for assessing independent living skills	p.120

6.5. Study 4 - The perception of young people assisted in placement centers regarding the existence of activities for the development of independent living skills	p.123
6.6.Study 5 - Aspects regarding the acquisition and development of independent living skills.	p.134

Chapter VII: Opportunities for change in the child and youth protection system	p.163
---	-------

Conclusions	p.171
--------------------------	-------

Own contributions	p.177
--------------------------------	-------

Limitations and future directions of research	p.177
--	-------

Annexes	p.180
----------------------	-------

References	p.187
-------------------------	-------

Introduction

Doctoral thesis, entitled The Child Protection System. Causes and effects of system dependence, wants to emphasize the link between the lack of life skills in institutionalized young people, and the large number of young people who continue to be dependent on the protection system, and at the same time bring more objectivity in terms of improving the living conditions of beneficiaries in the institutional environment, based on the views of young people included in this research, and at the same time emphasizing the need to develop the independent living skills of children and young people in shelters.

My research focuses both on the study of beneficiaries in the maternal center (currently belonging to the government system) and on bringing to the fore the views of young people included in a life skills development program, research conducted within an NGO. The research of this scientific paper aims to emphasize, based on the opinions of the subjects taken into account, the need to offer a wide range of possibilities in terms of social integration, insertion in the labor market, reducing stigma in the existing popular mentality, by increasing self-esteem and minimizing the number of delinquents among them, services that are currently underrepresented at the level of shelters, which also highlights the existence of a large number of beneficiaries who use the services of the maternity center. Although such priority objectives have been set to improve the situation of children in the special protection system, with a view to accelerating the development of community services, fair and equitable treatment of all children in our society (notions developed in the National Strategy¹), there are major shortcomings in promoting the exercise of rights by them, and the challenge of my work, is to promote a participatory and multisectoral approach to the issue of children / young people assisted in social centers, facilitating respect for the best interests of the child in all areas.

We aimed to emphasize the status of public utility granted to NGOs and to clarify the issues related to the rights conferred by this status, including those related to the contracting of services, in parallel with the services provided by government institutions. Some of the important partners in the field of child protection in our country, along with established NGOs and operating in several countries, are the Romanian Orthodox Church, or religious cults recognized by law, and although there are legislative and status changes and at this level, their social vocation and effectiveness in action are recognized. To date, however, there is no institutional framework on which to develop this collaboration at the national level (example: the Center for Women Victims of Domestic

¹ *Strategia Națională pentru Protecția și Promovarea Drepturilor Copilului* (http://www.mmuncii.ro/j33/images/Documente/Transparenta/2014/2014-02-03_Anexa1_HG_Strategie_protectia_copilului.pdf), accesat la data de 14.10.2017

Violence set up locally on the basis of a partnership between the Directorate-General for Social Assistance and Child Protection sector 1 and Patriarchate, operating in Bucharest, and which, despite a limited space - 4 seats, offered protection as a matter of urgency for many mother-child couples in difficulty or from a violent environment), noting that there are continuous changes in the organization and reorganization of specialized centers, so that over the last five years there have been multiple changes (abolition of certain centers, reorganization of social activities, etc.).

This situation was implicitly reflected in the conduct of this research, giving me the opportunity, but also the challenge to rethink and reorient research, structuring it into three studies that seek to emphasize the interdependence of areas considered essential.

Although we initially designed the study with the central objective of children and young people in placement centers, in order to obtain concrete views on the existence of special programs for the development of independent living skills, the research gained new value with the closure of the center we were focused, the information obtained remaining at an insignificant numerical stage (30 subjects), information that cannot be extrapolated at national level to constitute a standard in research. The study thus remains to have only an exploratory role, at micro level, representing a point of view of the beneficiaries of the placement center, being taken into account only as a benchmark on their perception of existing problems.

The research, consisting of three studies, aims to highlight the shortcomings in shelters, necessary services for institutionalized young people, which could effectively support raising living standards and, consequently, the development of human capital, providing alternatives for their integration on labor market, centralizing and taking into account the views expressed by research participants. In line with European and national policies and strategies in the field of social assistance, in this case child protection, the present study aims to highlight the gaps in the educational and educational programs in care centers, and which are reflected in the development of child welfare and ensuring efficient protection within the institutional framework, by presenting and analyzing the state and private institutional environment, in the post-communist period, taking into account the transformations that the Romanian family went through, from the traditional model to the current trends.

General aspects

Starting from the analysis of existing documents, of the constantly updated legislation, of the existing publications and studies in the field of social assistance, as well as of the observation of the existing deficiencies in preparing children and young people for independent life, we outlined the objectives around which we built and later developed this paper. Following the documentation, I pointed out that in the last two decades of the communist regime, in Romania there was a real explosion of abandonment, generated by the aggressive pronatalist policy launched in 1966, which

resulted in the birth of a large number of unwanted children and increased mortality due to empirical abortions. Detailed aspects of this fact can be found in the chapter Demographic policy of the Ceausescu regime, of the Final Report² prepared in 2006 by the *Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania*. Decree 770 of October 1, 1966, on the regulation of abortion, was the normative act by which the Ceausescu regime laid the foundations of what would constitute "one of the most repressive and harshest pronatalist regimes in history"³. This decree criminalized abortion, and repealed Decree 463/1957 which allowed this practice. Decree 770/1966, has undergone changes over time, its purpose being to increase the birth rate in our country. The report on the Demographic Policy of the Ceausescu regime states that "In the context of a growing shortage, including the insufficiency of heat, electricity and food, carrying a child raises both material, health and moral issues"⁴.

The main effect of the transformations, which took place in post-communism in all areas of public interest, for the assisted young people of the care institutions who reach the age of 18, the age at which they will leave the system (except only those who are still in school at this age, day education, and who can benefit from accommodation in social apartments until the age of 26), is the lack of subsequent support, adequate to their needs and expectations, having the effect of their rejection by the company that had protected them until then.

What is still missing today is the existence of a unitary, coherent, planned, implemented and centrally conducted policy to ensure: on the one hand, the continued support of young adults (former assisted), after the end of the care period for a adequate social integration, by monitoring professional integration and providing facilities regarding housing, housekeeping, income management, etc.; on the other hand, actions for planning the future discharge of the assisted, which would determine, perhaps, changes in the structure of programs carried out in institutions, in the direction of developing independent living capacities and providing and achieving openness to the community outside the institution. The lack of independent living skills is often doubled by young people assisted by a total lack of knowledge and acceptance of social norms - generated by the lack of real contacts with the world outside the institution, which contributes to their rejection of young people by society (there is still a mentality in schools of stigmatizing children from placement centers and even in the situation of holding a job interview), leading to their rejection of society, and the tendency, which has increased today, of endogrouping , to consider the institution

² Raportul Final, (2006), *Politica demografică a regimului Ceaușescu*, Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, București, p509-521 (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org>, accesat la 02.03.2021),

³ Decretul 770/1966 pentru reglementarea întreruperii cursului sarcinii în „Buletinul Oficial al RSR”, nr. 60 din 1 octombrie 1966.

⁴ Raportul Final, (2006), *Politica demografică a regimului Ceaușescu*, Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România, București, p509-521 (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org>, accesat la 02.03.2021),

as an ideal model of life and colleagues of the institution as models of human behavior, and which, moreover, can hardly be abandoned.

These young people thus develop a strong sense of social exclusion; their attempts at integration result, in most cases, in failures. It is, without a doubt, one of the causes of the increase in crime in this category of young adults; many of them without a stable home and clear chances of survival - are exposed to the phenomena of prostitution, delinquency, abuse of hallucinogenic substances, etc. - phenomena that mainly affect the category of the homeless, generically called "street children" and which come mostly from the assisted minors of the orphanages.

The general objective of the project is to highlight the deficits at the educational level in child and youth care centers, the dependence on the social protection system, as well as the living conditions of children and young people assisted in care institutions, from their perspective, making a parallel between services provided by private and public care institutions, while emphasizing their dependence on the system (social assistance).

The **specific objectives** of the project are:

- Analysis of the child protection system (state and private);
- Analysis of the Romanian family dynamics;
- The characteristics of care in the institutional environment, child-centered, promoted by NGOs, adopted, implemented and developed by the governmental protection system;
- Opinions of institutionalized and post-institutionalized young people, which can be a support for making changes in the structure of programs in institutions, in the direction of developing the independent living capacity of young people to leave care institutions.

Regarding the research, in order to emphasize the importance of intercorrelating the obtained data, we resorted to dividing it into three studies:

- a) Dependence on the protection system - Maternal Center, alternative to abandonment or dependence on the system;
- b) The perception of young people assisted in placement centers regarding the existence of activities for the development of independent living skills;
- c) Aspects regarding the acquisition and development of independent living skills.

By using *triangulation*, I tried to look objectively at the topics covered, covering a wide range:

- a) from the perspective of assisted children and young people,
- b) young women (re) admitted to the protection system (maternity center),
- c) the degree of training of young people in the acquisition of independent living skills,

the three studies included in this research, interrelated by the impact they have on the protection, development and integration into society of the generically defined population segment - beneficiaries of the protection system, as well as their dependence on the social assistance system.

Research questions

The research (summing up the three studies) considers the main questions:

- a) How does the attitudes of employees in the field of social assistance influence the evolution and development of children / young people assisted in the child protection system?
- b) What are the opinions of the institutionalized and post-institutionalized young people, aiming at changes in the structure of the programs developed in the institutions, in the direction of developing the independent living capacity of the young people who are going to leave the care institutions?
- c) To what extent are young people assisted in centers prepared to leave the care institution and social integration?
- d) What influence did the institutional environment have on the adult life, in the case of the former assisted young people, who resort to (re) admission in a maternal center?

Categories of subjects

- * young people aged between 14 and 20, assisted in placement centers;
- * mothers assisted in the maternal center;
- * who have been assisted in the protection system and who request (re) admission to the maternity center;
- * former assistants of the child protection system who, after reaching the age of 18, still request material, financial assistance, etc .

Samples to be investigated

The total number of subjects taken into account for this research paper is 739, the grouping being done as follows on the three studies (private research):

- a) For **Study No. 1**, we had a total number of 569 reference subjects (mother-child couples, pregnant women with / without other children, minor mothers / pregnant women transferred from minor or community admissions, women victims of domestic violence, etc., assisted in the St. Nicholas Maternal Center, within DGASPC sector 1, Bucharest) constituting the database for analysis (considering the fact that I am the one who conducted the interview of the subjects for a period of 20 years) , specifying that during the actual study within the doctoral school, the interview guide (Annex no. 1) was applied to a number of 91 people, between November 2015 and October 2016;
- b) **Study no.2** - focused on interviewing (Annex no.3), respectively testing an internationally established work tool and adapted to the Romanian context, a sample of 30 young people (15 girls and 15 boys) protected in the system of protection of state - respectively the Social Services Complex Sf. Nicolae, Bucharest, sector 1, for a period of 6 months (January-June 2017), these having ages between 14 and 20 years, with the mention that:
 - 16 young people (7 boys, 9 girls) received protection only in state institutions,

- 10 young people (6 boys, 4 girls) were protected for 7 years in a private system (family type house) and then admitted to the state center (following the abolition of the private protection center), and

- 4 young people (2 boys, 2 girls) were placed in foster care (foster carers),

the sample of subjects being extracted from the number of 170 young people participating in the study presented (Study no. 3), representing 18% of the children / young people who were analyzed as representative for the four centers within sector 1, Bucharest.

c) **Study no.3** - a number of 170 children / young people (102 girls and 68 boys) were included, from four residential centers within the sector of Bucharest 1, aged between 14 and 20 years, from a population of 329, representing 52%, having as starting point the database of the FLUENS Association. The study took place between March 2015 and April 2016.

Choice and application of research methods

The choice of the appropriate research method for the study I proposed in this paper was determined especially by the respect for the feelings, subjectivity and subtlety of each person, by the emphasis on relationships, egalitarianism and the contribution of participants, thus becoming collaborators in research. The type of action research that I have also addressed in this research is often used, being considered a form of research that is based according to Kurt Lewin (1946), "on the effects produced by the direct participation of researchers together with a participatory society, in order to improve the quality of the studied community"⁵. Given that I considered qualitative research methods more compatible with the way of knowing and perceiving the study area - social assistance, I resorted to using them in much of my research. Although the limited number of subjects in one of the three studies does not allow me to generalize the results obtained by the low degree of representativeness of the sample to be researched, I still resorted to quantifying the results. analysis and having an exploratory role, which I gave importance in the general analysis of information.

The continued legislative change and restructuring in the field of child protection, respectively reorganization of the child care system in our country, the abolition of mammoth placement centers (with a capacity of more than 50 seats) and regrouping on family-type houses (with a maximum of 16 children), ma determined of course to resort to adapting my work. Thus, although initially I wanted to address exclusively the issue of children and young people in foster care, and to emphasize the lack of concrete support programs for the acquisition of independent

⁵ Lewin,K. (1946), *Action Research and Minority Problems*,Journal of Social Issues, [Volume2, Issue4](https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x), November Pages 34-46, <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1946.tb02295.x>, accesat la data de 03.04.2021.

living skills, the decentralization of the child protection system led me to focus my attention. on the dependence of the former assisted young people, on the existing protection system, so that the central research of the work became the one carried out on the beneficiaries of the maternal center. The research wants to emphasize the initial hypothesis that the lack of adequate activities in child and youth care centers, over time, leads to their dependence on the system.

Mixed research methods

The main methods of collecting empirical data, which we used in this paper, are the following: *observation*, *semi-structured interview* and *analysis of social documents*. To these was added a research approach by applying a questionnaire (established international-file: [/// E: /Life-Skills-Assessment-Div.-Of-Children.pdf](#), accessed on 20.01.2016) adapted by me to Romanian context and which allows me to quantify the data obtained. Analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of each research method, and considering that the value of a research increases when several research methods, techniques or processes are combined, I included *triangulation* in my research as a strategy for validating information in the study of particular aspects of human behavior. First used by Norman K. Denzin⁶ (1970: 310), the term triangulation was later used in many researches, triangulation being considered an information collection strategy that facilitates the achievement of validity requirements through the methods used.

Two of its basic hypostases, data triangulation (use of various data sources in the study) and methodological triangulation (use of multiple methods to study a single problem), I considered useful to verify the data obtained from the application of quantitative methods and qualitative. It is considered that "methodological triangulation is a goal that should be followed in socio-human research, especially as it minimizes methodological risks and maximizes the strength and flexibility of data"⁷.

Regarding the use of *observation*, I opted for the use of Participatory Observation as it involves the involvement of the observer in the social activities of the subjects in order to understand their mechanisms and submit them to subsequent theoretical analysis. I used two variants of application: 1) involvement of the observer in the respective social situation; 2) the observer adopts in the group both the role of participant and that of researcher, being able to resort to other methods of investigation (questionnaires, formal interviews, analysis of social documents, etc.).

Combining the methods of quantitative research, respectively qualitative research, I aimed to obtain concrete information on the target topics for this study by ensuring, on the one hand,

⁶ Denzin, N. K. (1970), *The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Chicago, IL: Aldine, p.310.

⁷ Janesick, (1994), citat de Rotariu&Iluț, (1997), *Ancheta sociologică și sondajul de opinie*, Iași, Editura Polirom, p. 69.

objectivity by limiting to research issues that have measurable variables using standardized tools (questionnaires , interview guides), as well as the application of qualitative studies in which more open and more subjective ways of collecting and analyzing information are preferred, in order to understand the condition of the subjects in the target groups.

I thus noticed that the obligation to report (according to the quantitative method) to a representative sample for my study and to measure the same variable in each member of the group, limits the investigation by minimizing the depth and details while gathering information. through the qualitative method (semi-structured interview) it offers the understanding of the subjects' feelings, and the extent to which the things found can be relevant is much greater through the richness of details offered. In order to apply generalization possibilities to the subjects from the target groups, their choice was determined by their interest and availability, both for the application of the questionnaires and for the participation in actions (in the case of young people considered for the study).

The analysis of social documents is an important source of this study and as a result the use of this method helped me to complete the main elements of the research proposed in this paper. As a form of presentation (language, content, addressability), the analyzed documents are part of both the expressive (personal and / or public) and official categories, the existing materials in the files being an important source of information (application of secondary analysis), which, for example, in the case of research conducted on the beneficiaries of the maternal center, they came to support the shaping and verification of the initial hypotheses.

I advocated pluralism in terms of the application of research methods, considering the concept of mixed research more appropriate for this paper, which capitalizes on the differences in approach and emphasis, and the contribution of each mode (quantitative and qualitative), it is welcome in addition to the other's contribution, for the research carried out in the chosen field (of social assistance).

Studies performed, components of research

In order to better exemplify the component studies of this paper, I will further present, broken down on each particular research, the objectives, hypotheses and methodology used:

***Study no.1** - Dependence on the protection system - Maternal Center, alternative to abandonment or dependence on the system*

Through this study I sought to bring to the fore relevant elements regarding the evolution of the case of the maternal center - as an alternative in preventing child abandonment, highlighting educational shortcomings in child and youth care centers, dependence on the social protection system, such as and the motivation to request the social service, from their perspective.

Objectives

The general objective of the study aims to highlight the existing gaps in education in child and youth care centers, which is reflected in their choices after leaving the centers (readmission to a center, in the case of former assisted).

Specific objectives

- Analysis of the Romanian family dynamics centered on the mother-child couples admitted in the maternal center;
- The characteristics of care in the institutional environment, promoted by NGOs, adopted, implemented and developed by the public protection system;
- Analysis of the system dependence of the former assisted.

Hypotheses

In order to emphasize the importance of independent living skills, and the fact that there is a large proportion of a certain dependence on the social assistance system, to which the former beneficiaries of the protection system resort, we have outlined the following working hypotheses:

- *If the emphasis is on the empowerment of young people who use the services of the maternal center, then the dependence on the system will be reduced by repeatedly accessing the service.*
- *The more children / young people assisted are deprived of activities for preparation for independent living, the more likely they are to become dependent on social services, after leaving the protection system.*

Methodology - Description of instruments

Observation, interview and analysis of social documents are the research methods used in this particular research. The use of triangulation gave me the opportunity to gather rich information needed to study particular aspects of human behavior.

From an administrative point of view, I specify that when a mother-child or pregnant couple is admitted to the maternal center, a semi-structured interview takes place, a questionnaire is applied (this has existed since the establishment of the establishment under the guidance of the NGO). in detail the basic information of the case (origin, biographical data, life experience, education, relationships, etc.), which together with other relevant documents (social investigation reports, documents issued by other medical or legal institutions on the situation of the beneficiary, files work, etc.) complement the social file and are the basis for investigating the case, by estimating and establishing the social services to be provided to the mother-child couple.

These data formed the basis for establishing a study framework for my research, and between November 2015 and October 2016, I conducted the actual study (within the doctoral school), continuing the direct application of the questionnaires. Based on the data collected through

quantitative research, I developed an interview guide, presented in Annex no. 1 of the paper, [on a number of 91 mother-child couples (91 mothers and 163 children), digitally being included in the total number taken into account for the study], statistically completing the existing data (recorded by me as a direct worker with the cases, in each social file).

The information obtained using the method of semistructured interview (qualitative), including participatory observation, highlighted important aspects of the issue addressed, complementing the results obtained through quantification, research tools (questionnaire type) applied to beneficiaries of the maternal center, bringing to the fore the causes of dependence on the system protection of former beneficiaries.

The analysis of social documents was an important source of this study and as a result the use of this method helped me to add value to the research proposed in this paper. The existing database in the maternal center, for the entire specified period, was an important source of information that represented the starting point in the (secondary) analysis performed during the research. In terms of language, content, addressability, the analyzed documents contain both personal and public or official information, the existing materials in the analyzed files being an important source of information, which came to support the shaping and verification of initial hypotheses.

I recorded in the social files of the beneficiaries (during the administrative interview - there is a record of concrete data, useful for identifying the problem facing the beneficiary), relevant information provided by them, both at admission to the maternity center and during care, information highlighting the family evolution of the mother-child couple, the reasons for using the center's services, as well as the dependence on the social protection system in the case of mother-child couples, or those who use this type of support several times. The social survey, conducted in the field, for each case, as well as the interviews with the beneficiaries, were recorded in their files, and the collection of information was facilitated by the fact that working personally with the beneficiaries and gathering relevant data, quality of information has not been modified by tertiary transmission or omission. By analyzing the documents taken into account for this research, I followed the expressions used, the ideas expressed towards a specific topic, the items related to education, health, the relationship with family members, the relationship with the authorities, the beneficiary's expectations regarding certain social services, etc. which is relevant and outlines an overview of each case.

The focus on this segment of the population was also determined by the fact that carrying out my activity within the program intended to assist mother-child couples, I noticed the share (60%) that the beneficiaries of the maternal center represented as former system assistants. protection (out of a number of 569 mothers admitted to the maternity center for a period of 20

years, 341 of them also benefited from assistance in a social establishment (such as a cradle, children's home, etc.) , thus pointing out a dependence on the system and thus raising the question: At what point in their existence should have intervened effectively to avoid or at least minimize such requirements? The results of the study are also presented in the form of tables, graphs, diagrams, along with data interpretation.

Study no.2 - Perception of young people assisted in placement centers regarding the existence of activities for the development of independent living skills

The aim of the study is to describe a picture as close as possible to reality in terms of how they perceive children and young people assisted in foster care, existence or non-existence, specific activities on developing independent living skills, necessary for their subsequent integration in the company after leaving the placement center.

Research objectives

Starting from the observations made in the group of young people, we outlined and tried to achieve through this research, the following objectives:

- Assessment of independent living skills of assisted young people;
- Assessing the needs of young beneficiaries of the protection system;
- Identifying existing independent living skills and their level, in order to gain autonomy and social and community integration;
- Identifying the appropriate behaviors that lead to the acquisition of the desired skill;
- Identifying the degree to which a plan of activities specific to each assisted young person exists and is applied;
- Identify the degree to which there is and apply a personalized (actually) specific intervention plan for each young person leaving the center.

Hypotheses

- *Identifying gaps in young people assisted in life skills centers can help to improve the personalized specific intervention plan for each young person who is about to leave the center.*
- *The views of young people on the existence of a plan of activities specific to each beneficiary, emphasize the need for the help they expect for integration into society.*

The identification of independent living skills for assisted children / young people and the elaboration of real and applicable *Personalized Intervention Plans*, will lead to the development of independent living skills, necessary for a good adaptation and integration in society. Emphasizing the development of independent living skills of children and young people protected in protection institutions, will thus offer them a wide range of possibilities in terms of social integration, labor market integration, reducing stigma in the existing popular mentality, by increasing self-esteem and minimizing the number of delinquents among them.

Methodology - Description of instruments

I considered the qualitative research methods to be more compatible with the way of knowing and perceiving the beneficiaries of the target group. Thus I used the semi-structured interview, as a method of data collection for this study, given the limited number of samples, applying a questionnaire to the subjects, the quantified results coming to highlight the data obtained from the interviews. At the same time, the use of methodological triangulation allowed me to use different techniques of data collection: observation, interview, data analysis (techniques used both in Study no.2 and in Study no.3).

The questions that constitute the (international consecrated) questionnaire adapted for the Romanian language, consist of 12 questions, each question having between 4 and 14 items, totaling 84 items [Annex no.3], and are so factual in nature, following elements of behavior of subjects, those around them, the situations that characterize the life of the subjects and the community they belong to, as well as opinion questions that address issues related to the inner universe of the individual (opinions, attitudes, expectations, beliefs, etc.). This questionnaire [Questionnaire aimed at assessing independent living skills, from the perspective of institutionalized children (age 14-20 years): Annex 3], is an adaptation and resizing of the *Skills Questionnaire*⁷ and the *Interest Questionnaire*⁸, in conjunction with *the Life Skills Assessment Inventory Independent: Life Skills Inventory DSHS 10-267 (12/2000)*⁹, in the Romanian context.

*Life Skills Inventory DSHS 10-267*¹⁰ was developed in 2000 by a team from the United States Department of Social and Health Services in Washington, DC. of America. This inventory was used to identify and evaluate existing independent living skills, as well as those that need to be acquired by subjects. It is applied - generally, on subjects aged 15-16 years, in the present study it is adapted and applied to a wider age group, respectively 14-20 years. The inventory contains categories of independent living skills such as: Money management, Food management, Personal image and Personal hygiene, Health, Housing hygiene, Living skills, Means of transport, Educational planning, Looking for a job, Keeping a job, Special Emergency and Safety Services, Community Guidance, Interpersonal Relationships, and Pregnancy Prevention / Parental Skills, elements taken over and partially transposed in the adapted questionnaire we used in the study.

The rating was initially made according to the number of skills held, for each category there are 4 levels of development: basic level, intermediate level, advanced level and exceptional level.

The adaptation itself of the original questionnaires mentioned above, in the Romanian context, is in fact a resizing of the points contained in the original questionnaires, taking the form of

⁷ file:///E:/Life-Skills-Assessment-Div.-Of-Children.pdf, accesat la data de 20.01.2016,

⁸ <http://educar.ro/index.php/en/resources/62-chestionar-de-apitudini>, accesat la data de 22.01.2016

⁹ https://www.academia.edu/37829921/CHESTIONAR_DE_INTERESE, accesat la data de 22.01.2016

¹⁰ file:///E:/Life-Skills-Assessment-Div.-Of-Children.pdf, accesat la data de 20.01.2016,

a simplified questionnaire, taking into account the capacity of children / young people (Romanians) perception, expression, communication of the notions to which an answer was requested. The questions used in the adapted questionnaire are both closed questions (for example: Possessing certain things) and those that require answers in the form of an ordinal scale, which tries to gradually capture the intensity of an opinion (for example: How satisfied you are with the following things in your life? or How often do you spend your time doing the following activities?). Thus, scales with 4, 5 or more scale values were built, made to express the opinion of the subjects as simply as possible, on their understanding and in accordance with their degree of perception and development. We used this internationally acclaimed questionnaire [Annex no.3], simplifying it to facilitate its application, on a sample of 30 young people, a sample extracted from a population of 170 subjects (mentioned in Study no.3).

The adapted questionnaire was used with an exploratory role, in order to test in the Romanian context the items included and to see:

- 1) if it can become a research tool used at macro level, on the segment of the population made up of young people leaving the protection system in our country, in terms of acquiring independent living skills;
- 2) the opportunity to verify the coherence of the research tool using data triangulation to increase the number of samples, nuance and highlighting a larger number of facets of the phenomenon studied, through an analysis exercise.

Thus, using triangulation, we tried to analyze the target phenomenon at different levels (individual, interactive and group). The justification for using this method is that it represents the very mode of existence of individuals. The results of the study are presented along with the interpretation of the data and examples of response, respectively graphs.

Study no.3 - Aspects regarding the acquisition and development of independent living skills

This study involved working directly with young people for a long period (14 months), the research-action method being the one we considered appropriate for this research sequence, the information obtained being valuable in terms of expressiveness, depth and originality, as well as in terms of importance in terms of the need for change and approach in the protection system targeting children and young people.

Objectives

- identifying the level at which the independent living skills are acquired by the young people included in the project;
- identifying the opinion of the beneficiaries regarding the role of professionals in the education of young people;
- identification of the deficiencies of the protection system through the prism of the beneficiaries.

Hypotheses

If the views of the beneficiaries of the protection system are taken into account, then it will be possible to provide them with the necessary framework for proper development and accountability.

The emphasis on employee involvement in the education and training of young people will result in the development of youth autonomy to leave the protection system.

The results presented in this study give us a vision of the deficiencies of the social assistance system and are reflected in the work with beneficiaries, data found and in research focused on young people (adolescents) included in the FLUENS Association program in which I worked .

Methodology - Description of instruments

The qualitative research component of this study used as a method of data collection the unstructured interview (Annex no. 6) and also observation as the main tool (Annex no. 7), using the research-action method, to collect the opinions and interventions of young people, this component aiming at identifying the problems faced by young people who are about to leave the protection system and at the same time recording their suggestions for improving the services currently received.

Within the FLUENS Association, where I worked for 14 months (March 2015 - April 2016), on the component of preparing young people for the acquisition of independent living skills, I was able to identify a series of life situations expressed by young people included in the project, specific to state institutions, with possible repercussions on their skills. The project included a number of 170 children / young people (102 girls and 68 boys), from four residential centers in the area of sector 1 Bucharest, aged between 14 and 20 years, from a target popup of 329¹¹. Participants active in the actions planned within the FLUENS project, they expressed their interest in learning new things, different from those received in the shelters, but some young people participate selectively depending on the interest in certain events , actions or locations included in the project, expressing their desire to participate and be included in the project.

The research was carried out both inside the protection units, within the specific information activities, interactive games, opinion polls on various topics, etc., and within the extensive actions that took place outside the institutions: visits to museums, theaters, activities in parks, visits to different institutions in order to view and understand the trades (with emphasis on behavior in public spaces, addressability to the authorities), but also actions involving self-management (for example: shopping in a limited amount, daily basket, meal preparation, designing a CV, preparing for the interview, etc.).

I presented these two studies (Study no.2 and Study no.3), to make a comparison, as a secondary

¹¹ Raport UNICEF, (2014), *România : copiii din sistemul de protecție a copilului* / coord.: Manuela Sofia Stănculescu, Vlad Grigoraș, Emil Teșliuc și Voichița Pop. - Buzău : Alpha MDN, 2016, ISBN 978-973-139-350-6, <https://www.unicef.org/romania/media/1981/file>, p.530-531, accesat la data de 14.09.2017.

objective of the research, having the role of highlighting the differences between the provision of social services by employees of state centers (public), respectively of those belonging to an NGO (private), perceived through the prism of the assisted young people. The research methods used in this paper aimed to present the need for early intervention in children and young people assisted in the protection system, so that, over time, there will be a decrease in repetitive cases of re-admission to the system (dependence on the system), diminishing the failures of social integration and those of assimilation on the labor market. The combination of the two research methods emphasized to me once again that qualitative research remains useful in that it studies the problems in detail, giving depth and density to the quantitative results obtained. The results of the study are presented along with the interpretation of the data and in the form of graphs and tables.

Ethical considerations

Regarding the deontological aspects of my study, in the first place there is full conscious consent, confidentiality and information management, and last but not least the relationship established in the research, a balanced relationship in which those involved in the study are designated as participants or collaborators in research (action research), and not only as in the case of quantitative research, where there is a tendency not to disclose to research participants, research objectives, procedure and results. Thus, the subjects were presented with the fundamental aspects related to the objective of the study, the procedures used and their rights as voluntary participants. The information was provided in plain language, for the understanding of the subjects and with their assurance of confidentiality. The conditions for the development were established from the beginning of the study:

- the frequency with which the study participants will be contacted;
- duration of meetings;
- the place where the interviews take place;
- recording information (on paper or electronically);
- emphasizing the degree of anonymity or confidentiality of the information collected and of the participants;
- description of the way information is disseminated (presentation of a scientific paper, printed form);
- explaining the rights of the person (with whom the conversation is being conducted), and of course taking into account delicate emotional aspects that may arise during the study.

In studies focused on children and young people, we took into account the fact that some participants may come into contact with disturbing aspects of their experience, which involved taking certain measures:

- I explained to each subject involved in the research, the fact that it can interrupt the conversation if the affected subject creates a state of discomfort;
- we took into account the proximity of some reference persons for the interviewed subjects (young people, mothers), as well as an intervention team, to whom the subject can address in case of discomfort felt as a result of the topics discussed.

Conclusions

The actual research represents an intercorrelation of the information obtained following the application of a system of mixed research methods, having as a tool for data collection the semi-structured interview, as well as observation, and administrative questionnaires, considering that the information thus obtained will be relevant for the small sample of subjects, taken into account for the study, without necessarily aiming at extrapolating the results at national level, but wishing to emphasize the importance of data in an intelligible model, which can be applied in the field and modified according to circumstances and can of course find the utility in the real world of social assistance in Romania. I centralized the results of the research carried out within the social assistance institution DGASPC sector 1, for which we have the written agreement as previously mentioned, the hypotheses initially conceived being validated following the opinions formulated by the assistants from the child protection system.

Approaching the field and the topic itself is a significant contribution to research in the field (where there is little research) for the Romanian academic space, the implementation of independent living skills development programs being analyzed from the perspective of beneficiaries, with direct impact on staff this segment of the population - children and young people protected in the child protection system, the research being carried out on several segments: the perception of assisted beneficiaries both on their own life within the institution, but also on issues directly related to services provided by employees, information that was useful to demonstrate that the lack of these skills properly assimilated leads to dependence on the system and services provided (public or private).

I have chosen to present in this paper the three studies (as case studies), trying to point out the close link between the way employees of the system work, what it offers to children and young beneficiaries of the protection system, and the impact that the institutional environment has it on the beneficiaries, even after leaving the protection system by them. The continuous legislative change (abolition of large centers, according to the legislation applied in the period 2016-2020) in the field of social assistance, allowed me to conduct studies on the subjects of the maternal center, as well as the study carried out following direct work with young people (of the four centers). The NGO mentioned above gave me the opportunity to demonstrate one of the initial hypotheses, namely that

the lack of adequate existence of specific programs in child care centers, led over years to a dependence on the system of protection of beneficiaries. these centers, either by requesting accommodation in a residential establishment (maternal center), or by perpetual requesting to benefit from social services (especially financial), refusing labor market integration or schooling (existence of a low level of schooling).

Of course, applying the questionnaire (adapted to the Romanian context) to a much larger sample of young people (in the case of Study no. 2), could better outline their views on the notion of independent living and how they understand to assume autonomy. What I tried to present in this study, on a small sample of subjects, was an exercise in analysis and I thought it appropriate to apply the adapted research tool, being an effective tool for measuring the self-perception of young people, but also of the degree to which there is and is applied a personalized plan of specific intervention (actually), intended for each young person who is about to leave the center. Closely related to this exploratory study, which targeted a small number of children, are the aspects presented in the last study (Study no. 3) in which, working with the young people included in the project (170 children / young people), I tried to I present their views in detail, which I consider important sources of information to bring about improvements in care centers for future generations of children and young people, who, regardless of their will, will be beneficiaries of the protection system.

Through the three studies, one of them (Study no. 2) of an exploratory nature, but also through the use of mixed research methods, I tried to highlight the problems that still exist in the social assistance system, the fact that young people in care centers fail. Often in the process of social integration (the percentage of those who manage to be autonomous being insignificant) or on the labor market, constituting a segment of the population dependent on the social assistance system, through the perpetual (often transgenerational) demand for material or financial goods, shelter (maternity centers, night shelters, etc.) or other social services (steps they would be able to do on their own, without medical conditions, for example), but also taking into account the existing gaps in training and mentality of employees in this domain.

I consider it appropriate to extend this type of program so that the entire population of children and young people assisted in the protection system can be guided and have access to an appropriate level of incentive to acquire, assimilate and develop the knowledge and skills necessary for proper community integration. and the labor market.

By implementing at the legislative level an appropriate program (state, or private-public partnership) for the needs of children and young people protected in the current protection system, which should also involve adequate selection, training and training of care staff, and actively and personalized involves each child / young person assisted, could offer equal opportunities for

development to all beneficiaries according to the degree of understanding of each, intellectual and physical capacity, being differentiated, from case to case, the application of a type of approach - discrimination.

The situation found at the level of the four placement centers within sector 1, Bucharest, in which the 170 children included in the project were assisted (during the project), but possibly also found at national level, is the very large number of assisted children (50-100 per care institution), compared to the insufficient number of staff (approx. 2-3 caregivers per shift), given that in such institutions are admitted both children with mental intellect within normal limits (following evaluations) , as well as children / young people with liminal intellect or other conditions that require additional attention, supervision and intervention, which lead to a dramatic situation in terms of proper preparation for school (homework, accompanying additional activities according to the abilities of children / young people - painting, music, sports, etc.) and for community integration after discharge from the centers (preparation for the interview, application for a place work, necessary steps in obtaining documents, etc.).

At the same time, the chance of gifted children and young people with special skills (musical performance, inclinations for art, drawing, IT, sports activities, etc.) is diminished and in most cases young people choose a way to ensure a source of income and survival post-institutional environment, although initially there was the possibility of success in a plan aimed at performance in those areas.

The lack of independent living skills is often doubled by young people assisted by a total lack of knowledge and acceptance of social norms - the lack of real contacts with the world outside the institution - which contributes to their rejection of young people by society (there is still a mentality in schools of stigmatizing children from foster care and even in the situation of holding a job interview), leading to their rejection of this society and the growing trend of endogrouping today, to consider the institution as an ideal model of life and the colleagues of the institution as models of human behavior, which, moreover, can hardly be abandoned.

Own contributions

I believe that this research makes an important contribution, both conceptually and methodologically, to achieving the proposed objectives, in terms of childcare and the importance of developing and implementing specific programs in childcare and youth institutions, on independent living skills, the results obtained highlighting relevant practical aspects regarding the sample of children.

Throughout the development of the research topic, a series of own contributions in the field of child welfare and the acquisition of independent living skills have emerged, such as:

- the approach of the field and the topic itself is a significant contribution to the research of a field in which little research has been done for the Romanian academic space, the implementation of independent life skills development programs being seen from the perspective of beneficiaries (children and young people child protection).
- systematic presentation of indicators for the development of independent living skills of children and young people, the current implementation of programs and their evolution, but also in terms of use and functionality, with emphasis on the main subjective indicators currently used in international research.
- development of its own scheme indicating the link between the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and research into the field of independent living skills development, applied on a small scale to a small sample of children and young people in foster care, by adapting to the country's system of some internationally used tools.

Limitations and future research directions

As in any field of research, of course, we encountered limitations related to establishing the sample of subjects, their availability to participate in the study, the extension of the study taking into account the period of legislative and system change of the entire field of social assistance (2015 until now) - reorganization at national and regional level of social assistance centers, decentralization and redistribution of beneficiaries (children and young people assisted) in another area of protection (dissolution of high-capacity centers), theoretical and methodological issues specific to any study that deals with the welfare, social integration and adaptation of young former assistants of the Romanian child protection system.

During the interviews, children and young people made a number of comments on certain items and suggested removing, replacing or reformulating some of them, with qualitative methods applied as support in this regard. The responses (or refusal to respond) and suggestions from children and young people emphasized once again the importance of their involvement and participation, of encouraging the expression of their views on important aspects of their lives in the interview. Future research will need to be based on a process of consulting and taking into account children's views on topics and aspects of life that are relevant to their age and understanding. Such information would more accurately reflect the situation of children in different contexts, taking into account different characteristics, and provide a way to connect the objectives of academic studies and research, programs and policies for children and young people assisted in institutions. (state or private, Romanian), with their real needs, aspirations, skills, motivation, desires and their capacity for social integration.

Given that the development of independent living skills of children and young people in shelters is still in its infancy, without much emphasis on preparing them to leave the protection

system, it can still be considered limited to providing concrete alternatives for social integration, or insertion on the labor market, and implicitly, maintaining a high number of delinquents or socially maladapted, among these young people.

At the same time, the lack of training strategies for staff working in the field of social assistance, which should take place constantly and the allocation of financial and material resources to increase the professionalism of employees, along with the continuous transition of the child protection system, have as a result, the provision of social services that unfortunately cannot provide good guidance and guidance to young people on the road to independent living and social integration.

The results obtained from the study are a source of significant data, which demonstrates the importance of implementing specific programs on independent living skills in children and young people assisted in the child protection system in Romania, by bringing to the surface new and credible information about the subjective quality of life of this segment of the population.

Children and young people protected in the Romanian child protection system, is a significant part of the population, not to be neglected, in the context in which the fight against school dropout (currently growing among the population included in this study), in the work of young people (deficient - due to inadequate and realistic unpreparedness to leave the protection system), and family irresponsibility, lead to an alarming decline in the quality of life of the population in our country.

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