Early Education and Early Intervention - Long-term Investment in the Human Capital

Magdalena Vicovan

The motherhood vocation can be included in the definition of feminity, while the woman’s lack of ability to give birth to a child is experienced as a strong frustration. Motherhood is the prevailing meaning of the feminine existence.

This study provides a close examination of the maternal behavior and makes a proper survey on the problems associated with the young mothers’ identity construction deprived in their own early childhood both of motherly caring and chance of development within a family, namely the youth institutionalized in Romania. The truth about the conditions of growth and development of Romanian children from orphanages has travelled around the world after the fall of the communist regime, but we think it is properly to know what kind of maternal typology has generated such sad and cruel reality, what kind of welfare is offered to children by these mothers and how they perceive the appearance of risk situations for children. The qualitative methods of research, such as participatory observation, interviews, and case study highlight the existence or absence of communication and maternal sensitivity in childcare.

The sample is consisted of young mothers included in a program for preventing child separation from the family, developed within the maternity center in Romania, as well as for mothers who have grown in social institutions and who have experienced the mother separation trauma.

Early intervention and investment in early education is the only solution for the physical, mental, social, and emotional child development, which is optimal to prosper in the future. It is the unanimous voice of all international organizations that promote a good start in the life of human beings, which certifies that the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical health and the socialization interact and have a tight relationship with the age of the infant child. (OECD)

Keywords: undertaking maternity, maternal sensitivity, institutionalized child, early intervention, early childhood education.

1 Magdalena Vicovan – PhD. Student Faculty of Philosophy and Social-Political Science, Al. I. Cuza University, Boulevard Carol I, No.11, Iași, Romania, Research Project: European Social Fund in Romania Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646] E-mail: magdalena_vicovan@yahoo.com
Introduction

The first cry of the child shortly after birth brings happiness and liberation to any women who bore a child in the womb, no matter how desirable or undesirable the child is. When taking a child for the first time in your arms, touching his body and skin, you will feel like living a miracle. However, it is no longer a novelty that neglect and inadequate care at a young age bring significant delays in the mental development of children and can cause long-term behavioral disorders.

Although it has been proposed a new focus on children and childhood by promoting and respecting their human rights, we acknowledge that in the recent years great emphasis has been investing in early childhood - an investment supported by the interdisciplinary findings made by the Human Development Sciences.

Respecting the Children's rights, which is a political desideratum assumed along with the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), involves understanding and strengthening the image of children as human beings that hold proper rights ever since the moment they interact with the world. The absence of this image can be considered as a major obstacle in the complex vision about child protection and education (Rayna, S., Laevers, F., 2011: 172).

"Investing in Children" – the guiding principle of the Child and Family Policy, such as the directives of the Lisbon Summit in 2000, implies that in the next 10 years, the European Union should become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world. As an important means of achieving this objective, investment in human capital and wide integration of the population into the labor market have been set as priorities (European Council, 2000; OECD, 2006).

Within the concept of investing in human capital, the children play now a key role, while previously played only a marginal role in the broader political strategies. The new-built importance of this group of population comes from the hypothesis that the ability to build human capital is determined in particular in the first years of life.

Tackling the investment in terms of human capital training as soon as possible is based on neurobiological findings demonstrating that the process of setting the synaptic connections within the human brain through early stimulation has a positive influence on subsequent cognitive skills (Singer, 2002 apud Rayna, Laevers, 2011: 163). Early learning experiences and
cognitive skills that have been established at this stage of life enhance the willingness to learn and increase the capacity of the educational works (Curtis, O'Hagan, 2003).

Particular attention should be paid both to development of the Sociology of Early Childhood Education and to socio-political approach of childhood, given the changes in the family structure, new forms of family life, destruction of the family system as a result of migration, such phenomena deserving further attention (Favarro, Mantovani, şi Musatti 2008 apud Rayna, Laevers, 2011: 163).

We note the increasingly accentuated orientation of the developed countries towards investment in early childhood through family policies appropriate to the modern family: the development of children care facilities, aiming to make the parents participating in the labor market, to conciliate the family life with professional life, to provide opportunities for woman in order to increase the birth rate, which is in decline in all European countries, but also to put special emphasis on the development of the institutional forms of early child education.

Certainly, in this context we are interested in new forms of institutions developed to support the infant and his family. The legislative changes have facilitated parental child care by providing: parental leave, income from social benefits for children and families, a.s.o. Furthermore, the articles of the Act which refers expressly to children aged 0-2 years, is particularly important in supporting the idea that in our country the concept of early childhood has changed. All these prove that the legislative changes in our country are beneficial and have positive impact on society. All the discoveries in the field of bio-socio-psychology have influenced the family policy in favour of children in our country.

This essayistic study proposes to examine the maternal behaviors and the problems associated with construction of maternal identity for young mothers who have been deprived of mother care in their early childhood, including also a brief presentation of the opportunity that these young mothers (namely, the young institutionalized girls in Romania) develop within a common family. The reality of the conditions for raising and development of children in orphanages has circled the world after the fall of the Communist regime, but we think it is good to know what type of maternity has lead to the sad reality, what kind of welfare these young mothers are able to provide to their children and how they perceive the occurrence of the situations of risk for the child.
Qualitative research methods, such as participatory observation, interview and case study highlight the existence or absence of communication and maternal sensitivity in child care.

The sample is consisted of young mothers included in a program for preventing child separation from the family, developed within the maternity center in Romania, as well as for mothers who have grown in social institutions and who have experienced the mother separation trauma.

**Research Ethics**

Respecting the ethical principles of qualitative research, we emphasize that this study does not have confidential information that could be regarded as an abuse of the right to freedom and privacy of individuals. Given the actual goals that may be in favour of the types of case, we consider that, “the ethical dilemmas which are posed everywhere in the social research” will not exceed the balance between “the need to know and the rights of others” (Jupp, 2010: 193). Acknowledging the importance of ethical issues in the social research has entailed an informed consent sought from the social actors involved in research. A formal consent has been obtained from the mothers involved in the research, along with their information about the purpose of this research and the ethical obligations of the researcher (Agabrian, 2004: 89).

**Methodology**

This study plans to highlight the creative role of empirical research, which may lead to the development of early warning systems and intervention aiming at the protection of the rights of all children. The active role proved by this research has been spotlighted by Robert Merton (1949) by supporting the thesis that “the empirical research is not limited to the passive role of checking and testing the theory, testing or checking hypotheses but it gives rise to new hypotheses through the discovery of results that have not been pursued initially and that may represent starting points for theory” (Merton, 2004: 3-4). As part of a broader research carried out by the author in case of single-parent families, complex living situations of minor mothers who have been themselves deprived of maternal care and protection have been observed.

In support of this study we also mention that the social worker cannot fail to see that ignorance and abuse prevail in the “social arenas” that normally should build behavioral and educational models (Gambrill, 2011).
The Qualitative Research Methods that used in the study are as follows: the method of semi-structured interview conducted with each minor mother in the presence of the legal representative, and the method of direct observation. The thematic units of the “Guide to semi-structured interview” include the description of feelings about the child, the type of relationship with the father of the child, with the family members and various officials of the community, before and after childbirth, being operationalized through appropriate questions. The interviews were conducted by the author between October 15th and November 25th, 2011. The observation sheet has been structured on the monitoring of the aspects related to the mother-baby relationship, the training and strengthening of maternal affective skills, emotional experiences of the minor mother with reference to the relationship with the father of the child and the future plans. For a better relevance, the information has been completed with those collected by direct observation.

**History of child protection in Romania**

The decentralization of child protection work has not been limited to the establishment of commissions and specialized public services subordinated to the county councils, but also to the restructuring of the old-type institutions for the protection of the child. At the same time, family-type alternatives for the residential-type protection of the child as well as child abandonment prevention services have been created. The traditional institutions of high capacity (between 100 and 400 seats) have been restructured in the attempt to reduce their capacity and to modulate them, in order to provide more space for each child, in an environment as close as possible to the normal environment of a family (Buzdugea, 2005: 46). The identified and developed solutions for the closure of old-type institutions are as follows: child's reintegration into the natural family, child’s protection through family-type alternatives (relatives, other families/individuals, professional caregivers) as well as the protection of child in family-type homes or apartments.

Thus, at the end of June 2006, there were approximately 600 functional alternative services, including maternity centers, day centers, care and support services for young people from shelters (placement centres), counseling and support centers for children and parents, services for preventing abandonment in the prenatal period, daycare centers and recovery centers for children with disabilities, services for homeless children, counseling and support for the
children who were victims of abuse, mistreatment, neglect or domestic violence (Bratianu, Rosca, 2005: 64).

We cannot speak about personalized care in institutions where care and early education was provided to over 100 children. Today, those children are adults or they are parents themselves.

What kind of parents they are, we can deduce from how and what has been invested in the human capital in early childhood.

Reality which leaves no room for comments

Worldwide, a child's family environment can be extremely diverse, with oscillations from a beneficial environment, oriented towards promoting genuine virtues and values, to a traumatic environment because of poverty, labor migration of women, the incidence of parents diseases and parents inappropriate or non protective behavior.

Poor family environments offer a “risky development” (Killen, 2003: 77), referring to the environment provided to children by young girls who have become mothers without internalizing this model. The young mothers from such environments are often in conflict with people of the community, failing to develop membership relations but employing in unstable friendships which may contribute to the destruction of the safety climate for the child. It is a certainty that nothing can replace a mother's permanent presence near her children and in the case of real and profound changes in the structure of the family, “the children are paying a price” (Gimenez, 2007: 109).

The way in which parents understand their kids is of great importance to ensure appropriate parental behaviour and to ensure the necessary conditions for the raising and development of their children. The more realistic this perception is, the greater the children relationship possibilities grow, in accordance with their needs and requirements (Killen, 2003). The ability of the parents to see the children as they are in reality depends on how parents prepare for their arrival on the world and how they are influenced by the child's behaviour and reactions. Providing a family environment for the development of children by parents, involves parental responsibilities, which is a goal and a purpose for family policies.

Our attention is focused on the parents who are not prepared to understand the role of parent, the lack of training being a possible cause of psycho-social disadvantage. The specialty
literature describes how much influence may have on assuming parental roles the childhood relationship of a parent with his own parents (Becker-Stoll et.al., 2008, Killeen, 2003; Muntean, 2007, 2009). The most important prerequisite to ensure and put in place a good enough child care is that the parents themselves receive sufficient care during their childhood. It is very hard to provide what you yourself have not received. It is therefore very important to understand “the social stock of knowledge” of the parent (Berger, Luckmann, 2008), who faces difficulties in assuming responsibilities. The social stock of knowledge includes knowledge of own situation and limits.

Berger and Luckmann (2008) talk about the “knowledge of own situations” based on the real understanding of our wealth state. If we are poor “we cannot afford to hope that we will have homes in a luxurious neighborhood (Berger, Luckmann, 2008: 62). This understanding is not possible for people who do not participate in “knowledge”, in the example given, do not realize the state-of-poverty, because the criteria for classification in this case are different. Returning to the issue of assuming the parental roles, we are talking about a “recipe-based knowledge”, “knowledge limited to the practical competence in routine actions” (Berger, Luckmann, 2008: 63), but we must take into account the understanding of parental responsibility by each person you has to fulfill this role. After childbirth, the mother is able to acknowledge the actual situation only through daily living with and closeness to the child. In the building of motherhood there is no “recipe” if we refer to disadvantaged families. When a person remains homeless or ends up into conflict with the family of origin, even when such person is about to give birth to a child (to a new human being), it is obviously a proof of privacy failures, failures in assuming roles in the family of origin.

According to our study, 25% of the young girls who have been institutionalized in their early childhood are able to assume parental responsibilities only with the community support, as long as the extended family does not exist (being abandoned at birth). 45% of them have developed poor domestic skills of child raising and care, they do not make long-term projects or future plans with their children. Only 35% of the young girls institutionalized in large Romanian facilities develop domestic skills of child raising and care. These results have been obtained under a study conducted on a sample of 37 young mothers, former beneficiary of the child protection system since the birth of their child. They have been under participative observation and included in programs for parental education. The interviews reveal their desire to keep and
raise the child, saying they do not want to abandon the child, as they have been abandoned in turn in their childhood. Instead, assuming parental responsibilities is very hard, depending on long-term support programs. Inclusion of their children in early childhood education projects would not allow the recurrence of parental deficiencies and deviances.

**Valences of early childhood education**

We must start from the understanding that the children welfare state has an interest in exercising control over early childhood education and in investing directly in early education (Goeb, 2008: 5). Early childhood care and education in Romania has not yet found its place and value recognition. It is necessary in our country a new approach to infant development, a change to improve the educational concepts of women who are about to become a mother, but also of the woman who discovers that she fulfills this role without full accountability.

Early education is the cumulation of existing or organized individual and social experiences, which the child undergoes during the early years of life, serving to protect, grow and develop the human beings through endowing them with physical and mental culture capacities, which would provide them identity and own self dignity (Kumar *apud* Evans, Meyers, Ilfeld, 2000: 7). It provides the fundamentals of sound physical and mental development, as well as a complex social, spiritual and cultural development. What children learn in the early years represents more than a half of what they will learn in the rest of their life (Curtis and O'Hagan, 2003; Tassoni, Beith, Bulman, 2005).

Early education is a relatively new field in our country but with an international recognition for over three decades and includes all the necessary support for all children on their rights, starting from the right to survival and protection, ensuring a good development from the birth of the human person (Evans, Myers, Ilfeld, 2000: 7). Investment in early education is the only solution for the physical, mental, social, and emotional child development, which is optimal to prosper in the future. It is the unanimous voice of all international organizations that promote a good start in the life of human beings, which certifies that the intellectual, emotional, spiritual and physical health and the socialization interact and have a tight relationship with the age of the infant child (OECD).
Early education involves a holistic approach to child and his needs, wherein learning plays a central role. Early learning is performed accompanied by an adult who is guiding the child in the process of knowledge and who defines to the child the meaning of what he learns. Through Early Education, the child gets the “keys” wherewith he is able to structure and organize his own self-coherence, in relation to the world in which he lives. For development learning is crucial, and at this age, it is defined as acquisition of knowledge, skills and habits formed through experimentation, reflection and/or study and training (Myers, 1995, *apud* Evans, Meyers, Ilfeld, 2000: 38). Stagnation of child’s development in early education inhibits both early childhood learning and the further education (Levinger, 1992 *apud* Evans, Meyers, Ilfeld, 2000: 39).

In terms of learning theory we can say that immediately after birth the child passes through a period of life in which he learns predominantly by doing, as a result of ongoing interactions between the child and the adults around him. Albert Bandura originator of this theory emphasizes the importance of observation and modeling of behavior, attitudes and emotional reactions of others, as well as the outstanding role of the behavioral modeling and conditioning through the award-penalty, a process that begins at a young age and lasts a lifetime. Just analyze the interaction with the external variables, the personal characteristics of those with whom the child interacts, the visible and hidden behavior of an individual (Bandura, 1969: 46) – all of such things being a condition to learning, and we will find that following an inadequate award-penalty conditioning process, the child develops vicious behavior, violent tendencies of human action, which are not inherited but acquired.

**Conclusions**

Education is the process by which the formation and development of human personality is made. It is a necessity for the individual and society. Early childhood education is carried out as informal education (in family and community), and as formal education (in nurseries, kindergartens and other institutions of care and education). Early education bears the free will imprint of those involved, but it is a key condition for a good start in life, providing children (irrespective of their willingness) with behavioral conditioning for their general development, in line with their individual characteristics of age, culture, family and community (Tassoni, 2006: 12). Such education is crucial for further development and education of the child and is made by
using new methodologies and appropriate programs, tailored to the individuality of each child, as well as by providing training and parental education to the qualified staff who is always willing to ensure *close cooperation* between the family and community services for the young child: healthcare services, education, social protection, support and advocacy, public and private services (Tassoni, Beith, Bulman, 2005; Tassoni, 2006).

Focus on early education is important because it corresponds to the period when children are developing rapidly and if the development process is neglected at this stage it is much more difficult and costly to compensate the losses later. The choices we make now and the actions undertaken both by the child’s parents and caregivers have a strong influence on the child's long-term individual progress (Evans, Meyers, Ilfeld, 2000: 11).

Each child is unique with his specific and individual needs, becoming the only and unrepeatable person.

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