

The Long Term Consequences Of the Phenomenon “Child Abandonment” Caused by Work Abroad

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Abstract: One or both parents leaving their home to work abroad brings important modification in the family life. Separation can be a forehand event, and all members of the respective family are familiarized with the change it implies. But many times the separation can be unexpected. The abrupt leave becomes, most of the times, a bitter event for the parents, but psycho traumatic for the child/children. In our country the phenomenon is attentively studied by the social workers, by sociologists, by psychologists, by educators, but what is the share of the economists?! Of course, the analysts are interested in the level of contribution in money of the Romanians working abroad reflected either in the GDP of the native country or of the employer countries. But is it enough?! Shouldn't we indentify and anticipate the work perspective economic consequences of the future active population, coming from families fragmented by life's shortcomings?!

Key words: home alone children, “abandoned children”, psycho-behavioral manifestations, perspective economic consequences.

The changes in a child's life, which happen after one or both the parents leave home to work abroad, are often understood from the point of view of the stages of psychological and social development of the child in relation with the life cycles and the development crisis mentioned in E. ERIKSON's psychosocial development theory (L. Iacob, “The psychology of ages” – class notes, Psychology

and Education Sciences Faculty, “A.I.I.Cuza University, Iasi, 2003). But, thinking about the child's economic evolution, and especially, at the impact it has on “tomorrow's” economy, it can't be let aside – as it still is – the almost inexistent interest of authorities for social support of the separated families, and most of all for the children which remain in the hands of the state, of relatives (in the

best of cases) or even by themselves.

The way in which the child lives and perceives the leave of his parents as life change is influenced by a series of factors:

- Familial factors – the family functionality before and after the parent(s) leaves: relations between the family members; emotional changes and the type of attachment between family members; dynamics of status and roles within the family;
- Factors related to the child – age and psychological characteristics of the child: psycho-social development; his vulnerability; his resistance;
- Environment factors: family and child social support.

Psychological theories and experience in working with home alone children show that an important role is held by the child's level of preparation, information and implication in the parent(s) decision of leaving. He needs to receive insurances in what concerns his physical comfort, the way in which his needs are satisfied and multiple emotional re-insurances. It is important for the child to feel he has a certain control over his new life situation. There are cases in which, the children initially are happy about their parent(s)'s leave abroad, thinking at the small benefits or wishes that would be fulfilled with the money their parents would send. The consequences are not seen because of their immaturity, and their optimism vanishes when they need the adult and they don't find it near.

The home alone children suffer of emotional negligence (together with other forms: nutritive, cultural, educational, medical...) because of the left parent(s), their physical absence diminish their "guard screen" or

overwhelm them by insecurity feelings. If bonds are made between the child and other relatives (grandparents, aunts, uncles, older cousins) before the parents leave, the need for affection is partly covered. Therefore, children find the necessary emotional support in the person that takes care of them.

The experience in working with children left alone in the country and the psychological theories regarding development show that by being neglected, the under age can have the following psycho-behavioral manifestations:

- Deterioration of school activity, decrease in school performances, absenteeism, school abandonment risk, conflicts with teachers and colleagues as a consequence of lack of parent's authority;
- Abandonment, insecurity, sadness, anxiety, depressive states as a result of missing the parent, need for parental affection, appreciation and approval;
- Apathy, stubbornness, which sometimes can lead to an aggressive behavior as result of frustration and need of attention. He considers that these are indifferent to his needs;
- Attention deficit – lack of concentration – children think mostly of the fact that their parents are left, their situation, the moments when they will get in touch with them, their gifts etc.;
- Lack of aspirations on long term or the presence of unrealistic aspirations – for example "when I will grow I will also leave abroad"; "I don't need to study in order to make money". This negative attitude towards education appears and develops because of the models their parents are, that,

even if they graduated from a university, they work abroad as unqualified personnel;

- Deficit of self-esteem, which manifest as follows:
 - Over-valuation towards children that have no money and the way they dress;
 - Undervaluation in relation to their equals, whose parents are present in important events from their lives – school celebrations, parents meetings.
- Tolerance to frustration - too low/high level in the direct relation with the child's adaptation capacity, with his defense mechanisms;
- Lack of motivation – apathy, tiredness which is caused by depression states or determined by the over-charging with adult tasks;
- Adaptation difficulties – light and transitory disorders, reversible and which usually last a few months;
- (Pre)delinquent behaviors – aggressiveness, abuse of drugs, taking part in committing crimes, frequenting clubs and places unfit for their age;
- Suicidal conduct – starting with 2006-2007, cases of suicide were registered between the children whose parents were gone to work abroad. Particularly, this type of suicide is related to the emotional-affective factors and events which are psycho-traumatic for the individual that is not prepared to face them. Children's and adolescent's suicidal impresses by the fragility of its motivation, the lack of knowledge in what concerns the irreversibility of the process. The

analysis of the phenomenon, especially of the motivation, becomes difficult at this age, sometimes being an act of imitation and opposition in front of a difficult moment: the abandonment feeling, the fear of punishment, the failure in school, the impossibility of adaptation to a new and difficult life rhythm, attachment disorders because of the separation from the mother (which creates insecurity feelings), discordance between the subjective representations and the external ones give by the media. The psychiatrist Cornel Marzuk (1992) draws attention over the fact that media's popularization of the suicide is related to the growth in suicide rate. Making known the suicidal conduits grows the risk of imitation in the case of unorganized groups. Making public the famous suicides, as well as the violence scenes develops a suicidal model known as copied suicide.

All the above mentioned elements contributed to establishing a policy regarding the protection of under-ages left alone by parents. The state gets involved, as far as it can and it knows, but it is not enough. It doesn't want or it doesn't have the capacity to understand the perspective consequences of this phenomenon. Especially, when it comes to the economic aspect, it is not sufficient to only make moment expenditures, with precise destination towards "abandoned" children, forced by the needy parents. The state, more than ever, should supplementary invest in them, not only socially, at least starting from a Romanian saying that says "who gives, gives himself". If the government

would have a bird's-eye view on the human potential in our country and if the ones chosen to rule the nation would be more preoccupied on developing a constructive philosophy based on humans, on their present and future needs in the cultural, ecological, economic, educational, social, political etc. context, their actions would be different.

Starting from the hypothesis of an existence which is not abruptly interrupted, elaborating previsions and economic and social plans based on the future active population, the analysis cannot neglect the risks to which are exposed the home alone children. For now, we are talking and taking action only socially. Wouldn't the benefits be more complex and numerous (for the individual and for the society) if we would take into account also the potential effects from the economic point of view?

- Over-charging with tasks – the responsibilities taken over by the adult (housekeeping, paying bills). A child under the everyday problems, normal for a mature person, but totally traumatic for an under-age, will get tired before time. It is not true that the more tasks one person has at an early age, the more resistant will be as a grown up. The speed and the requests of our times will deteriorate prematurely the organism and the psychic of tomorrow's young person. Those persons will not wish to get involved in more tasks, but they will run away from more responsibility, and the need to gain more by honest work, appreciated by others almost disappeared at the beginning of this millennium. Under these conditions, what would

be the benefits of an organization that would employ a before time tired person?!

- Vulnerability to abuses – physical, psychical, sexual, work exploitation, traffic of children and prostitution. What kind of activity would be able to accomplish a youngster to steps in the economic world with traumas? How would he be able to see his colleagues as work partners and not as oppressors? Why work to enrich others? What would his reaction be when a superior would shout at him? For what reasons would he be able to control himself under stress or mobilize to overcome the crisis situations at work?!
- Development insufficiency of independent life skills (necessary to stand the difficulties of a grown up) – independence in taking decisions, trust in their own abilities, skills in managing time and money, relationing and communication, emotion control and expression. The lack or the unsatisfying presence of these skills is negatively reflected in the capacity of working in team, of leading the team, of realizing a performance, of valorizing the people taking part at it... Also, either in the position of a simple employee he won't be able to grow professionally, because he will never dare to express his ideas, his initiatives, he won't even think that he could decide independently. What economic agent would invest in the professional formation of a timid person, who is not able to recognize his own potential and who does not desire to evolve?!

- The defective acquirement of ethical and moral norms – in the absence of a functional familial model, of a safe and coherent environment, home alone children can import the emotional negligence model which is present in his family to subsequently apply it at his adult age. After failing professionally, what successes can he have in his family, so as the economy can register economic gains?!
- Early sexual life – adolescents seek for affection and appreciation when they need it not only from their friends but also in intimacy. The lack of a proper education regarding the sexual life, the absence of surveillance, over-charging with tasks can lead to intimacies, escapes from home, concubinage, behavior that can lead to unwanted pregnancies or sexual diseases. Where would be the earnings in money?!

At present, the interest in children who remain home alone after their parents leave to work abroad, imposes the elaboration and implementation of protection, recuperation and social reintegration plans. Without militating for stopping the parent's migration in seek for welfare outside the country, ways of protecting the children in difficulty are looked for, starting from the idea that for the home alone children a specific approach is needed. For an efficient management of the respective cases, it is necessary to appeal to different information sources (teachers, policemen, neighbors, advisors, relatives, friend groups), to seek for the professionals and resources they need to identify and repair the vulnerabilities of the home alone children or

to confirm the existence of a secured environment for their development.

In perspective, society's major interest, not only children's, regards a series of social and economic policies based on neutralizing the manifestations caused by the parents' leave for long periods of time to work abroad and the lack of parental care, manifestations such as:

- Misbehavior, deterioration of school activity, physical and psychical degradation which are caused by a superficial education control, by a lack of positive models, by problems of communication or adaptation difficulties. The aging of these children costs society effort and expenditures of all kind. It would be normal that at the moment in which the youngsters coming from temporarily separated families become professionally active to repay the society for the previous investment, but that's something that won't happen. In the best of cases, the number of persons without traumatizing memory from childhood is much under the economic expectations of life.
- Living the abandonment feeling, with repercussions over personality. Mature personalities, whose frustrations deter the understanding of the inner balance, of the psychic and emotional stability, as well as of the support of colleagues and friends are not a source of economic success.
- The way of relationing in school, answering the school requests, verbal or physical violence. Over years, all these transform in difficulties in establishing cooperation organization behaviors, in the spirit of competitiveness

and efficiency, in deficiencies in adapting to the job requests, in incapacity of overcoming situations of tension, conflict and stress.

- Over-charging with responsibilities. Who gets tired in childhood, cannot resist many years of sustained and challenging work.
- Unsolved financial problems, in most of the cases. Often, the problems in

family (bore both by the children who remain in the country and the parents who seek welfare overseas), are, unfortunately, continued, traditionally, in the years when the youngster transforms in an adult. It is valid, not only for the inner storm, but also in the case of money availabilities, always insufficient to compensate the indigence in the early life.

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