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Scientific Bulletin of Chełm - Section of Pedagogy nr 1, 71-75

2014

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT OF STUDENT FAMILY

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ABSTRACT: *In the article the main characteristics of student family are outlined, the problem of its social and psychological support is theoretically proved, the results of the empirical study of the problems of student families are presented, the author's program of social and psychological support of student families is described.*

KEY WORDS: *family, young family, student family, marital adaptation, integration, marital conflict, social and psychological support, family cohesion and adaptation*

The problems of family formation and stability are among the main problems of modern society. Family, family relationships, and marital relationships were and still are the objects of such sciences as philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, sociology, demography, and many others. Such attention to family, its rise and fall is due to its great meaning as a social institution, which determines not only the way people live, but also the quality of their progeny, the health of the nation and the state.

Much more than any mature family, student family needs social and state support in creating conditions for the realization of its most important functions such as: insuring the reproduction of physically and mentally healthy progeny; being emotionally and psychologically stable; solving all family conflicts themselves without the help of social services; contributing to material and moral well-being and personal interests satisfaction of each family member; creating conditions for strengthening all family members' health and for having good rest.

The relevance of the subject is determined by the fact that student family faces many socio-psychological difficulties at the initial stage of its development. When young people belonging to the category of students create a family, they face problems such as character compatibility, overcoming various crises, planning the birth of the child and its education, family economy, the professional growth of the family members, the combination of studies and family life. According to sociologists, the main part of divorces among young families, which include student families, happens during the first years of marriage – during the period of marriage adaptation. This is due to many reasons: the failure of spouses' adaptation to family life, unfavorable material conditions, psychological unpreparedness to the marriage, etc.

Student family is a complex and still poorly studied object of researches. In our research, student family is understood as the family, where both spouses are full-time

students of higher education establishments, i.e. it is homogeneous (uniform) from the point of husband and wife's social status. It is a young family, where both spouses are not more than 28 years old, and their family life experience does not exceed 5 years. Children in student families are usually of preschool age.

Student families have some traits of young families; so many problems of student family are viewed through the prism of the traits of young families. However, student family has its specific features.

Student years are favorable for higher education and marriage. Students form an unstable social group, which changes its social, sex and age composition, values, attitudes toward marriage and family.

On this basis, there are new tasks to be solved, for example, to form youth's positive life orientation and active life position. These tasks are solved more successfully among married students, because young people, who think and care not only about themselves but also about others, lose their infantilism more rapidly than those, who are still single.

According to T.S. Zubkova and N.V. Timoshina, the reduction of the number of student families nowadays is connected with the changes in socio-economic situation in the country, the decline of the living standards, the emergence of commercial education, the changes of youth's spiritual and moral guidelines about getting education and prestigious job, the changes in the marriage age, as well as the improvement of the culture relations between the sexes¹.

Student families are characterized by greater stability than other types of families, because spouses are united by common interests and views, their actions are aimed at studies. Student age is favorable for marriage and childbirth both from physiological and psychological aspects. Favorable factors, which contribute to the strengthening of relations, are similarities in education, social status, views on the most basic life questions, common interests and types of activities, similar sexual needs, as well as personal characteristics, including the ability to create and accept intimacy, to adopt to the circumstances, emotional stability, and many others. Students are assigned to one social group, have common interests, sphere of activities and similar problems, which strengthen their relationship. Marriage increases their responsibility and desire to improve the quality of studying. Student families are characterized by high cohesion, activity, emotionality. The similarity of perspective goals is the main point of student marriage specifics.

One thing which is different in students families in comparison with other types of families is a source of income. According to B.I. Govako, student family has three sources of income, including scholarships, parents' help and additional income.

Most of the married students refrain from the expansion of their family. The reasons, why student families do not have children, include education, straitened living conditions, financial difficulties, and difficulties associated with looking after children. In student families difficulties primarily arise after the birth of the child. Obviously, after the birth of the child the level of spouses' socio-psychological well-being decreases. During this period things that affect marital satisfaction mostly are material wellbeing, housing and parenting conditions, sharing house duties. Therefore, among all student families, families with children deserve special attention. Young couples face the major problem: how to combine their study, family life and parenting.

¹ Cf. T. S. Zubkova, N. F. Timoshina, *Organizatsiya i sodержanie raboty po socialnoj zashite zhenshin, detei i semji*, Moscow 2004.

One of the main conditions of the successful functioning of student family is future spouses' preparedness to family life before marriage. *Motivational readiness* for family life includes love as the main motive of creating a family, preparedness to independence, the sense of responsibility for the future family, readiness for the birth and upbringing of children. *Psychological readiness* for family life means the presence of well-developed interpersonal communication skills, unity or similarity of views on the world and family life, the ability to create a healthy financial and psychological climate in the family, the stability of character and senses, and well-developed personal willed traits. The fate of the future family, whether it is safe and happy or, on the contrary, face various challenges and difficulties, depends largely on the family atmosphere, in which future spouses were brought up. *Pedagogical readiness* for the creation of the family includes pedagogical competence, economic skills, sex education. Pedagogical competence of young people entering family life presupposes having knowledge about the laws of children development and peculiarities of their education, as well as baby care skills. Economic skills mean skills of planning, dividing and observing the family budget, organizing life and leisure, creating family comfort.

Another important factor of the couple's stability and well-being is their marital compatibility. Compatibility is partly determined by satisfaction. I.N. Obozov identified four aspects of marital compatibility, and showed that the necessity of their differentiation is justified by the differences in their characteristic criteria, patterns and implications:

1) spiritual compatibility characterizes the consistency of the partners' purposeful behavior components such as their beliefs, values, needs, interests, attitudes, evaluations, opinions, etc.; the basic law of spiritual compatibility is the similarity of the spouses' spiritual orders;

2) personal compatibility characterizes the accordance of the partners' structural dynamic features such as their temperament, character, emotional and volitional attributes; one of the criteria of personal compatibility is conflict-free distribution of interpersonal roles;

3) family and household compatibility characterizes mates' functional features such as the consistency of their views on family functions and structure, role expectations and aspirations in the implementation of these functions, the unity and similarity of their views on the world and family life, the ability to create a healthy material and psychological climate in the family, the sustainability of their characters and well-developed personal willed traits. The psychological essence of marriage is to confirm the relationship in marriage, to integrate and coordinate it with other relations of the young couple.

4) physiological compatibility².

Married compatibility does not mean spouses' complete similarity. They may differ significantly in their traits, temperament, ways to solve various problems. These differences let them complement each other, and assist their partner in solving different issues. Such differences can make the spouse's image more attractive.

Among the main reasons of marital conflicts in student families are the breach of the marital relationship ethics (betrayal, jealousy), biological incompatibility, incorrect relationships of the spouses (one of them) with people around them (relatives, friends, colleagues, etc.), interests and needs incompatibility, personal weaknesses or negative qualities of one or both spouses, the spouses' selfishness, different views on family life, unrealized expectations and needs, rudeness, disrespect, financial difficulties, etc. The conflict in student family may also happen because of the spouses' dissatisfaction about their leisure

² Cf. I. N. Obozov, A. I. Obozova, *Semjya i lichnost*, Moscow 1979.

activity, which has a great value among youth. Creating a family suggests the emergence of new responsibilities, and hence the decrease in free time. Leisure contents also changes.

The resilience of young families depends on the spouses' ability to build relationships, to communicate and control their behavior. The spouses' different views on how they will behave in non-familial sphere may also be a source of conflicts in student family.

Thus, student families are characterized by the emergence of internal structure, adaptation to new social roles, as well as the process of spouses' self-determination in personal and professional terms. This exacerbates the problem of the student marriage sustainability and stability.

We have made a research about the problems of student families in Brest State University named after A.S. Pushkin. Two hundred and four unmarried students, whose average age is 21-22 years and whose experience of family life is up to 2 years (usually 1 year) took part in our survey. The key research results are the following:

1. The place and age of acquaintance: the acquaintance of the future spouses in most cases occurred at a disco or a party; the marriage happened on the 4th (1st place) or 3rd course (2nd place).
2. The main motive for marriage: love and desire to have their own home;
3. Values: the main thing in family relations is mutual love, shared goals, and parenting; students are mostly focused on such values as the desire to be a good spouse, and material welfare.
4. The peculiarities of material support: 70% of students are supported by their parents financially; in most families, decisions about the division of the family budget is made by spouses together; students view their own material well-being as average and below average.
5. Having conflicts: conflicts arise because of financial difficulties, problems in relations with relatives.

Parenting problems were not declared by the students, who participated in the survey, as only 12% of students have children during the period of their study at the university. However, most students are planning the birth of children after graduation, so they need to be prepared for the parenthood.

The analysis of the research results allowed us to identify the main problems of the student family, to formulate the directions and objectives of the work with student families in the framework of the student family support program.

Social and psychosocial support for married students contributes to the development and strengthening of the family as a social institution, to a wider use of spouses' own possibilities for their social self-defense, to the improvement of social health and well-being indicators

of young families and children. The program of social and psychological support is designed for successful adaptation of the young couple to the family life.

The main goal of the program is to provide timely socio-psychological and pedagogical assistance to student families, which supposes creating conditions for providing legal, psychological and pedagogical well-being of families at the initial stage of its development.

The main objectives are:

1. Raising of student families' awareness about marriage and family;
2. Prevention of negative family interactions;
3. Correction of the marital relationship;
4. Formation of readiness for parenthood.

The program includes three directions of work:

- informative and educational (round tables “Student years and marriage”, “Fatherhood in the 21st century”; the info session “The legal framework of marriage and family in the Republic of Belarus”; seminars “Legal aid for young families”, “The bases of family management”, “Reproductive health and safe motherhood”, “Child as a subject of family micro group”, “Communication skills in the family”; the discussion “Family - what is it?”; the lecture-conversation “The difficulties and joys of a young family”; lectures-discussions “Family budget: income and expenses”, “Responsible parenthood”, “Spousal roles and responsibilities: how to distribute them in my family”, “Partner idealization”);
- corrective and preventive (interactive conversations “Jealousy: how to deal with”, “Relationship with parent family”, “Feelings and emotions in marriage”; trainings “Husband and Wife – new social roles”, “Family cohesion”, “Family psychological climate”, “Student family and its environment”, “Responsibility and decision-making in marriage”, “Power and influence in the family”, “Mother – father – child”, “Prevention and resolution of family conflicts”);
- consulting (group meetings with experts, as well as individual consultations on psychological and educational, legal, socio-economic and health issues).

The program will help to:

- create conditions for the development of young families members’ psychological knowledge and skills, which are necessary for the optimal organization of their interpersonal communication and interaction;
- form psychological, educational, legal and financial competence in the sphere of planning and creating a family, forming high moral principles in couples’ family relationships, as well as their readiness for having children.

Thus, as a result of deliberate and systematic work with student families we expect to increase their awareness about modern family and marital relationships, and the difficulties they may encounter; to reduce the level of spouses’ conflict behavior; to succeed in overcoming crises; to improve the legal competence of young married couples; to form the readiness for childbirth in young families; to develop family budget planning skills. In perspective, it will help to reduce the divorce rate among young families, the number of single-parent families, to increase childbirths.

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