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Abstract: The problem of poverty resonates in the entire history of society. It has far-reaching consequences for each individual. Poverty often adversely affects not only the life of individuals themselves, but also people around them, most of all children, even though family is a social unit that should give all its members a sense of security.

Due to various circumstances parents often undergo crisis, and subsequently are forced to solve the situation radically. In order to ensure a good family background and protection for children, parents are always looking for options to avoid any unwanted interference; they try to maintain the optimal functioning of a family.

Key words: family, child poverty, social inequality, social exclusion, family with more children, single-parent family

The present contribution is rather illustrative than representative. We treat the observations and examples referred to in the present paper as a source of inspiration to touch upon the subject in question.

Nowadays Slovakia is transforming into a modern society, where one of the essential characteristics is its differentiation. Social stratification is a typical feature in which poverty is objective and measurable lower pole of the ideal stratification bipolarity of “poverty” and “wealth”.¹ Therefore the bipolarity has always been and still remains one of the impulses of human motivation and social development.

Generally, we understand poverty as a very complex phenomenon, which is often associated with the concept of inequality. Although these two concepts are linked, they are by no means identical. The basis of inequality is

¹ *National Human Development Report Slovakia 2000*, p. 77.

assigned but now also increasingly obtained status.² Mareš states that “in context of inequality, poverty can be seen as an expression of extreme inequality, or rather as a difference of one special part of population not only from rich people, but also from the rest of population.”³ At present the issue of poverty and social exclusion is not construed only as a lack of income. Poverty is not perceived as one-dimensional social phenomenon. All the people involved — social scientists, social policy makers as well as the poor themselves — are aware of various aspects of poverty and they accept it as a process.⁴

Ondrejkoivič defines poverty as a social phenomenon characterized by a lack of resources that an individual or a group suffers from. In this sense, it is considered a social problem or a socio-pathological phenomenon. Poverty is a social phenomenon (social fact or event) in which existing relationships (structural site) and current processes do not allow not only the individual, social group (village, community, region), but also society as a whole effectively produces and consumes material resources and intellectual property to meet primary (primary) and secondary (higher) interests and needs of people.⁵ This ultimately leads to their exclusion from the society, their spiritual decay and emotional absence in relations between people.⁶ Not all the groups are equally vulnerable to poverty. Kováčiková⁷ notes that the European Union has currently identified two groups that are most vulnerable to poverty. One of them is a group of elderly people and people with poor education. Families with children are at a high risk of poverty as well.

Family as a social institution is certainly very significant unit that influences formation of our society. Family is the first environment in which everyone should obtain an optimal basis for later assertion of himself/herself. Chorvát⁸ claims that although in the last three decades a lot of western psychologists, sociologists and social scientists count family as an institution in crisis that does not fulfil its functions (which could even endanger healthy development of democratic society), it seems that it is still an institution

² P. Mareš: *Sociology of Inequality and Poverty*. Prague 1999, p. 23.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁴ R. Džambazovič: “*The Various Forms of Poverty in Slovakia*”. In: *Proceedings of the Conference of the UNESCO MOST — Poverty in the Slovak Society and the Attitude of the Slovak Society Towards Poverty*. Bratislava 2006, p. 432.

⁵ P. Ondrejkoivič et al.: *Social Pathology*. Bratislava 2001, p. 59.

⁶ J. Matis: “Poverty as a social phenomenon”. In: *Proceedings of the Annual Conference...*, p. 32.

⁷ A. Hudec: “Poverty — a Social Problem Today”. *Proceedings contribution of scientific conference with international participation*. Banská Bystrica 2005, p. 65.

⁸ I. Chorvát: “The family — a Factor of Development of Humanity and the Future Value Basis”. In: *Proceedings of International Symposium — The Family as a Subject of Science*. Bratislava 1994, p. 41.

which is the most competent to perform certain tasks and that is essentially irreplaceable. The importance of family is obvious particularly in connection with its most significant function that actually constitutes the essence of family. Many radical authors acting against the family simply do not take into account this important function. We mean children, shaping their character and personality, and thus preparing them for their life in society.

Usually it is assumed that children have parents who should be their caregivers. Child poverty is therefore derived primarily from the poverty of parents. It stems from the fact that inequality is shared on the basis of status, and child poverty is associated with the status of their families, with the size of family and position of children within it.⁹ Both parents have a duty to ensure their children enough space for joy, sufficient conditions and harmonious growth. Although Slovak society is still perceived as being quite conservative, values appreciated by young people are different from the ones preferred by older generations. People who decide to undertake the task of being a parent are older and older, which means that they postpone this role to the later period of their lives. Our approach to having children and to their protection has changed radically during the last few generations. Children mean so much to us partly because they have become much scarcer, and partly because the decision to have children in our country is rather different in comparison with previous generations. While in the traditional family children meant economic benefits, nowadays, mainly in western countries, having a child puts a great financial drain to parents. The decision to have a child is today based on the specific emotional and psychological needs of individuals. We must understand our concerns about the effects of divorce on children and about the existence of many families without father on the background of our higher expectations as for a child care and child protection.¹⁰ Families with children have always been exposed to much higher risk of poverty than families without children and this risk increases proportionately with the number of dependents. Number of children still remains the most significant factor, which reduces the actual living standard of families.¹¹

Many foreign and domestic researches point particularly at the high risk of child poverty. In our opinion, the issue of child poverty is currently not so obvious because the problem is presented mainly against the background of households or families, and children are put aside. Empirical studies of child poverty are mostly focused on the adult population; the baby is shown there as “a consumption unit”. Therefore, they are not interested in the healthy psycho-social development of children and functioning of the family. Finan-

⁹ P. Mareš: *Sociology...*, p. 53.

¹⁰ A. Giddens: *Runaway World*. Prague 2000, 79 p.

¹¹ R. Džambazovič: *The Various Forms of Poverty...*, p. 121.

cial and material situation is not reflected from the child's point of view, or actually they do not consider facts relevant for a child. Recent studies thus emphasize the need to notice the specific needs of children and young people.¹²

Another reason for overlooking child poverty is the fact that the state decides on the needs of families and children and it determines benefits for families. This way the state minimizes children's needs. However, several authors underline that there exists the minimal living standard for child.¹³

The children who have to minimize their needs in the time of their growing up usually faces more difficult conditions than children from well-situated families. They are often excluded from the collective of children, they are objects of victimization and jeering that could probably have adverse effects on their future life and their role as parents. In our opinion, double income in a family belongs to the most important factors that reduce the risk of poverty. The risk of poverty is therefore evident in single-parent families, at present it means mostly mother with children and to a lesser extent father with children. On the other hand, we believe that nuclear families with both parents are also exposed to the high risk of poverty.

The National Action Plan on social inclusion indicates that the risk of poverty is obviously increasing in households with three or more children. Here in Slovakia even family with one child exceeds the average level of risk of poverty (22%) and this risk increases proportionally to the number of children in the family. The risk is therefore much more significant in families with more children where mother stays at home taking care of children.¹⁴

The revenue situation of the child depends on the size, composition and characteristics (age, parents' education) of a household in which the child grows.¹⁵

According to Pavelová,¹⁶ the social exclusion of individuals can easily impact on their families. Families with dependent members and families with unemployed head of household equally often find themselves in poverty. Lack of financial resources reduces the possibility of people to participate in some activities that are relevant for social inclusion.

Socio-economic situation of children in the early stages of life is still one of the main factors that determines their overall well-being and future chances see Table 1. Children who grow up in poverty have greater health problems, they are at higher risk of interruption of education, may have troubles with finding or keeping a job and entering society. Less motivating environment

¹² www.sspr.gov.sk

¹³ www.cphr.sk

¹⁴ R. Džambazovič: *The Various Forms of Poverty...*, p. 158—159.

¹⁵ www.ec.europa.eu

¹⁶ Ľ. Pavelová: *Family Problems in Terms of Poverty...*, p. 735.

in which children grow up most likely condemns their future life to poverty even in adulthood. Due to lack of education it will be hard for them to find a permanent job with a reasonable salary and they could become unemployed again and again.

Table 1

Factors influencing social exclusion of children¹⁷

Childs' development	Economic factors	Parental factors	School factors
Low weight at birth physical and mental disturbance	poor families living	low aspirations in relation to children and lack of interest	poor pre-school sup- port or lack thereof
Poor visual-motor skills	social housing in eco- nomically deprived areas	problematic relations- hips within the fami- ly, especially between parents and children, family breakdown	inadequate transition from pre-school care in the education sys- tem
Lack of cognitive development in early childhood	the high density of people in the apart- ment	an absent adult role model for children	poor relations betwe- en the child's family and school
Insufficient mastery of basic skills (read- ing, counting)	low income of fami- lies	frequent changes of caregivers and lack of parent	weak relationship be- tween teacher and child
Difficulties with tem- perament (hyperac- tivity, impulsivity, attention deficit dis- order)		long-term unemploy- ment of parent / par- ents	inadequate monitor- ing the progress and achievements of the child
Behavioral problems		single parent parents with alcohol problems, drug	

Conclusion

One of the basic functions of family, as we already mentioned, is to ensure an adequate standard of living for children in a family. Parents in this case should explore various ways to prevent such adverse situations. Nowadays, labour market situation in Slovakia is not very favourable, so the possibility of labour migration is one (but not only one) of acceptable ways to improve

¹⁷ Based on: M. Deluca, P. Evans: *Social Exclusion and Children — Creating Identity Capital: Some Conceptual Issues and Practical Solutions*. OECD 2001.

the adverse financial situation of family. Also other strategies may be used for escaping from adverse financial situation, but on the other hand, they can open up many new problems as for of distortion of family structure. Its strength is vital for its duration. Poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood. Poor children may become poor parents when they grow old. Everything that child in such situations faces emerges as a consequence of the status of adult family members.