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## **DYSFUNCTIONS IN THE FAMILY AS A SOURCE OF LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ORPHANAGE OF A CHILD - SELECTED ISSUES**

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**Abstract.** The image of the family has changed dynamically in recent years. This concerns not only its structure, values, ways of communication and leisure time activities, but also problems experienced by modern families. The family is exposed to the influence of many disintegrating factors that threaten its proper functioning. Despite the fact that every family strives to maintain a relatively stable internal balance, there are still many situations that destructively affect the functions it performs. The processes accompanying the ongoing civilization and cultural changes and socio-economic transformation have significantly intensified various types of family dysfunctionality phenomena. Orphanhood and loneliness of a child is one of the most important problems concerning children and is directly related to the functioning of the family - topics concerning selected issues in this area constitute the content of the prepared study.

**Keywords:** family, child, orphanage, loneliness.

## **DISFUNCTIILE ÎN FAMILIE CA SURSĂ A SINGURĂȚĂȚII ȘI ORFANAJULUI SOCIAL A UNUI COPIL - SELECȚII**

**Rezumat.** Imaginea familiei sa schimbat dinamic în ultimii ani. Aceasta se referă nu doar la structura, valorile, căile de comunicare și activitățile de timp liber, dar și la problemele cu care se confruntă familiile moderne. Familia este expusă influenței multor factori de dezintegrare care îi amenință buna funcționare. În ciuda faptului că fiecare familie se străduiește să mențină un echilibru intern relativ stabil, există încă multe situații care afectează distructiv funcțiile pe care le îndeplinește. Procesele care însoțesc actuala civilizație și schimbările culturale și transformarea socio-economică au intensificat semnificativ diferitele tipuri de fenomene de disfuncționalitate familială. Orfanitatea și singurătatea unui copil reprezintă una dintre cele mai importante probleme legate de copii și este direct legată de funcționarea familiei - subiectele subiectelor selectate în acest domeniu constituie conținutul studiului pregătit.

**Cuvinte cheie:** familie, copil, orfelinat, singurătate.

### **Introduction**

The functioning of the contemporary family is often accompanied by various problems which negatively affect its structure, durability, fulfilling its functions and the quality of mutual relations between its members. The family faces not only new challenges, but also factors threatening its functioning. More and more often we see the phenomenon of increasing the number of families requiring assistance and support due to unemployment, disability, addiction, long-term serious illness, as well as helplessness in running a household and raising children. Problems appearing in the family often result in its disintegration and dysfunction, which is closely related to the situation of children growing up in the family. An orphanhood of a child is often a result of family disorders, and its effects are visible in different areas of individual life and may be the cause of many problems of social functioning of a child. Analyzing the situations that cause

orphanhood of children, we come to the conclusion that in fact there is not only one issue causing the feeling of orphanhood or loneliness of a child, but most often there are several factors in the family leading to such a result.

### **The family as the environment of human life - dysfunctions in the family**

The family is a natural and basic environment for human birth and development. It has the greatest potential for transmitting culture and social norms and, as a result, for shaping the personal and social identity of the individual. It therefore influences the behaviour of the individual and his or her attitude towards the world of values and norms of conduct. The family is the element of the educational environment that has the longest lasting impact on its members, sometimes even throughout their lives. The educational influence of the family is the strongest in early childhood and then gradually gives way to other environments and institutions that co-create the process of upbringing. It is in the family that a person acquires patterns of conduct and behaviour in various life situations. In the family environment he also acquires his first social experiences and shapes his system of values and attitudes "the family is the environment which through its specificity, intimacy, directness creates conditions for development and upbringing. It is a place of first interpersonal contacts, first psychological bonds of a child with parents and siblings [3, p. 58]. A child participating in everyday natural situations of family life, in direct interactions between family members, assimilates elementary knowledge about the world, moral and social norms, culture of family home, learns how to satisfy many needs and develop their own interests.

The family is a special community of persons, fulfilling many tasks and objectives, including ensuring cultural and biological continuity, meeting basic human needs, and providing a sense of security for all its members. Franciszek Adamski emphasizes that the family is a "group of people united by one of two types of social relations: marriage and parent-child relations" [1, p. 28], whereas Zbigniew Tyszka described the family as "a group of people bound together by the bond of marriage, kinship, affinity or adoption" [21, p. 74]. The family can be included in the categories of "social group" as well as "social institution". In the first case, attention is paid to social roles, cohesion, psychosocial interactions, social positions. In the second case, the family is treated as a culturally conditioned regulator of family behaviours and a social entity that satisfies the essential needs of the individual and society, which are satisfied by integrated family patterns of behaviours and activities of members who perform certain functions of the family" [4, p. 20-21]. A properly functioning family is a prerequisite for the existence of a social order in the everyday life of an individual and for the definition of his or her identity.

The family has specific functions and tasks for its members, and through their proper implementation, it meets basic needs and provides a sense of security. The

functions of the family are the result of actions or behaviours of family members leading to concrete results. They may or may not be intended, but they come together in a specific whole which may be affected if any dysfunction of family life arises. The functions of the family are related to its internal structure, the type of bond that links its members and the nature of the family. They also vary according to the socio-economic conditions of the family according to the capacity and degree to meet the needs of its members. In the typologies that appear in the literature on the subject, we can find many different classifications of family functions, for example, Stanisław Kawula distinguishes: biological and protective function, cultural and social function, economic function and educational function [8, p. 57] whereas Zbigniew Tyszką [22, p. 199] mentions more functions of the family, which he divides into four groups:

1. Biopsychic functions (procreative function, sexual function)
2. Economic functions (material-economic function, care and safety function)
3. Socially determinative functions (class function, legalization and control function)
4. Sociopsychological functions (socialisation and educational function, cultural function, recreational and social function, emotional and expressive function).

The presented family functions are closely connected with each other, because the proper realization of some influences both the quality and the way of realization of others. In each typology, the important role of the family in maintaining the biological continuity of humanity is pointed out, and it is also stated that the role of the family does not end with the birth of a child, but is only the beginning of the existence of the protective and educational function in relation to it.

In a properly functioning family, the basic needs of its members, such as: the need for love, self-fulfilment, belonging, the need for security, respect, emotional support and fulfilment, are also satisfied to an optimal extent. Additionally, the family supports the development of the child by creating conditions for the development of its activity and attitudes by showing interpersonal relations in everyday life. The most important psychological needs of children are: the need for love, sense of security, belonging, emotional contact, recognition and cognitive need. Unmet needs are the reason why the child feels states of anxiety, slower pace of psychophysical development - especially among young children there is a tendency to stay in isolation and unwillingness to contact and talk.

Analyzing the functioning of the contemporary family we often notice various difficulties and problems. Difficulties experienced by families take different forms, they also have different scope and multifaceted course. Families in the face of social problems, complex pathologies resulting from global transformations are increasingly experiencing various crisis situations "it is worth emphasizing that understanding the processes and condition of a modern family requires a genetic approach, backwardness, tracing the conditions and logic of its transformations in a longer period of time, with the

distinction of naturally emerging stages of social macro- and microstructural transformations" [23, p. 193]. According to Jadwiga Izdebska, "the dysfunction of the family can be considered in terms of difficulties in fulfilling its functions for the benefit of society and for the benefit of family members. A dysfunctional family does not fully meet its obligations towards its own children, neglects its functions or poses a threat to its existence. In this way, it does not meet the expectations of its own group or society" [5, p. 34]. The appearance of various types of disturbances in the child's social and family behaviour and functioning may indicate disturbances in the realization of the family's basic functions. A dysfunctionality may concern various types of tasks performed by a family, it may include individual family functions, we are talking then about a partial dysfunction or most or all of the functions - this dysfunction is referred to as a total dysfunction. Family dysfunctionality may concern both the scope of tasks performed by the family and the way in which they are performed. We can distinguish economic dysfunctions of the family, socialisation dysfunctions, as well as educational, caring and emotional dysfunctions [2, p. 8].

Knowing the causes of family dysfunctionality is a complex task, because often the factors that cause such a state occur in the family as well as outside it, and dysfunction in one sphere affects the occurrence of dysfunction in other spheres of family life. The causes of family dysfunction can be found in both intra-family and extra-family factors. In the literature we can find many classifications of causes that result in family dysfunctions. These include: lack of one parent; parental conflict preceding family breakdown and divorce; pathological phenomena - most often alcoholism; violence; demoralisation; as well as long-term illness or disability of one or both parents; inefficiency in household management and childcare. The second group includes reasons arising from wider social determinants, e.g.: permanent work of one parent outside the place of residence, economic migration; unemployment or reluctance of one or both parents to work; negative impact of the media on the development of children and young people; youth belonging to e.g. subcultural groups, movements and sects [25, 2, 8, 9, 11, 10].

Each of the above-mentioned factors of family dysfunction causes serious disturbances in the process of satisfying the material, psychological and social needs of its members and becomes a source of orphanhood and loneliness of the child. The emergence of a dysfunctional family situation most often consists of a set of factors, which in consequence contribute to the breakdown of family ties, cause lack of care for the child and educational negligence, and lead to increasing difficulties of the family. In dysfunctional families, children do not talk about their true feelings, they live in a sense of fear, shame and hopelessness, a sense of loneliness and social orphanage is born. A dysfunctional family is a source of tension and anxiety, both for children and for adult members, and everyday situations experienced by a child cause often increasing feeling

of loneliness. As Jadwiga Izdebska emphasizes, each of them experiences a lonely childhood in a different way, depending on the harm suffered by the family and how it copes with loneliness [6].

### **Orphanhood - loneliness of a child in a family - psychopedagogical consequences of the phenomenon**

Orphanhood is one of the most important problems for children and is directly related to the functioning of the family. It is a particularly worrying phenomenon because of its extent, different forms of occurrence and difficulties in preventing and diagnosing the situations that cause it. The term orphan initially referred to children deprived of care as a result of the death of their parents, while the situation in which the parents did not care for the child - abandoning it - was called abandonment. Both orphanhood and abandonment lead to loneliness of the individual, so the phenomenon of loneliness was the most general concept meaning no real care of the child [18, p. 35]. In order to distinguish the random situation of children, the term orphanhood is accompanied by the adjective "natural" or "social". Natural orphanhood is the result of death of biological parents of a child and is an irreversible state, while social orphanhood is the phenomenon of "lack of parental care resulting mainly from disorders in the functioning of the family: lack of care for a child, crime and demoralization of parents, alcoholism and serious upbringing mistakes" was the most general concept meaning the lack of real care of a child [12, p. 5]. The natural and social orphanhood is linked by the fact that the natural parental care of the child is actually lost and, as a result, the direct links between the child and the parents in the family are broken, although both the loss of care and the breaking of links in both types of orphanhood are of a completely different nature. In a natural orphanhood, it is not possible to restore the child's own parents, as opposed to a state of social orphanhood where there is a chance and hope for partial or even complete restoration of the child's own family and home.

Among the causes influencing the occurrence of the phenomenon of social orphanhood we can see many factors that are directly related to the situation of the family - its dysfunctions and the problems mentioned above, among others: addictions, especially alcoholism, poor material conditions, family demoralization, parents' disease, family breakdown (divorce), abandonment of a child or deprivation of parental authority. Janina Maciaszkowa also finds the causes of orphanhood in the conditions of social life [14, p. 91-92], while Róża Pawłowska and Elżbieta Jundził distinguish two groups of causes of social orphanhood: macro-social and micro-social [17, p. 216]. Macro-social causes include the general socio-political situation and accompanying phenomena such as unemployment, homelessness, while micro-social causes concern the improper functioning of the family in the educational sphere, the occurrence of pathological phenomena in the family and the disturbed structure of the family. Sources of the

phenomenon of social orphanhood should also be sought in failing to meet the basic needs of a child, neglect and lack of acceptance on the part of biological parents.

Being alone and loneliness are not unambiguous concepts, but they are often treated as synonyms and used interchangeably. Jan Szczepański proposes to distinguish the notion of being alone from loneliness because he emphasizes that being alone is a mental state which a person chooses consciously to focus on experiences in his or her interior. However, loneliness is the lack of contact with a person, the individual can not establish a relationship with other people, communicate with them. The feeling of loneliness is not a voluntary choice of a person - it is caused by the breaking of bonds with people, often not of one's own free will [20].

The phenomenon of loneliness is increasingly common among children. Loneliness of a child is caused by his or her life situation - the bonds between him or her and the closest people are loosening. As Jadwiga Izdebska writes, such a situation may be caused by pathological phenomena in the family home, the child feels powerless, helpless and deprived of a sense of security. Loneliness of a child can be defined as individual, subjective experiences resulting from weakening or breaking the emotional bond with people close to him or her [6]. Maria Łopatkowa, on the other hand, considers the lack of parents and home as factors determining the feeling of loneliness [13]. Mirosława Gawęcka, on the other hand, believes that loneliness is a "subjective psychological state resulting from emotional deprivation in the psychosocial relationship between parents and a child in a natural family (...), a child's sense of loneliness is a mental state or psychosocial phenomenon of a subjective nature arising as a result of disturbances in the emotional bond between parents and a child, inappropriate emotional relationship between parents and a child and their dysfunctional educational influences blocking the child's proper satisfaction of his or her individual mental needs in the family" [4, p. 4]. As Jadwiga Izdebska emphasizes, in relation to a child, the term loneliness, not being alone, may be more adequate to describe his or her psychological state, subjective experiences and sensations. Children are rarely alone, but often lonely. By nature, a child does not consciously seek loneliness, is afraid to be alone, rarely concentrates only on his or her own inner experiences, interacting only with himself or herself. On the other hand, he or she feels very strongly the need for care, love, belonging, recognition on the part of others, he or she wants constant interpersonal contacts, always staying with someone" [7, p. 361].

The effects of social orphanhood and loneliness of a child can be observed at various levels of the individual's functioning, because they include the overall conditions for the formation of the child's personality and the satisfaction of his or her needs. The child's inner world shaped by the educational environment determines his or her attitudes and relations with the environment. Positive self-esteem develops in children accepted and loved by their parents. Abandoned, lonely children consider themselves unnecessary

to anyone, and the lack of proper relations with the family results in erroneous judgements about reality and emotional disorders. As Marzena Sendyk emphasizes, the essence of social orphanhood is the lack of appropriate care for a child, the lack of satisfaction of his or her needs, mainly psychological, but in some cases also biological and material, lack of interest in his or her matters, results in education and contacts with peers [19, p. 22]. Irena Obuchowska, on the other hand [15, p. 3-6] writes about the loss of a child in the problems associated with the situation of social orphanhood. The author also considers the consequences of this loss - which are not the same among all social orphans and depend on such factors as: the age at which the child becomes a social orphan; psychological trauma experienced by the child; the course of the process of separating the child from his or her own family; the quality of contacts maintained with the family; the educational value of the environment in which the child will find himself or herself after separating from the natural family. Moreover, according to Irena Obuchowska, there are three main faces of losing a child in orphanhood, such as: emotional instability of people who are close to the child, ambiguity as to the child's belonging and placing unstable patterns of conduct on the child [15, p. 3].

The emotional instability of people who are close to the child affects the sense of security which is necessary to ensure the proper mental and physical development of the child. The most important element of stability is the stability of emotional bonds, the quality of which changes with the age of the child. Families with dysfunctions are usually characterized by instability, especially emotional instability, emotional chaos, unpredictability of emotional reactions and their shallowness. Such a situation causes the child to take over the family relations and, as a result, the child becomes emotionally unstable.

The ambiguity regarding the belonging of a child results from the change that accompanies it at the moment of taking his or her from a natural family which is dysfunctional and educational. The child usually receives better conditions for social, physical and mental development, but loses the sense of belonging. Many times in such a situation the child feels torn emotionally, detached from what is known to him/her, with the elapse of time a feeling of ambiguous belonging appears. Some children accept the new situation as advantageous and at the same time maintain contact with their biological family, while others reject the relationship with the family and do not feel attached to anyone. This is why it is so important to create a sense of belonging to a place and person for a child in a new foster environment.

Placing the child with heterogeneous and unstable patterns of behavior - this is the problem most often associated with older children, who set out of their own families specific rules of conduct that they use when dealing with the biological family. This often means alternating the use of various moral patterns and burdens, as a result of which children feel an internal disorientation about behavior.

The consequences of a child's social orphanhood have a strong emotional impact - because an insatiable need for security causes a sense of insecurity and loneliness. The child's self-esteem is underestimated, he/she does not believe in his/her own strength - he/she has lower aspirations. The sense of social orphanhood and loneliness in children is also transferred to their social relations, where in the case of younger children, the so-called emotional hunger appears - that is, the search for someone who would love them - children reach out to every adult person. On the other hand, older children may manifest an attitude of indifference, lack of trust, unwillingness to establish emotional contact, the so-called emotional chill, may also isolate themselves from the environment, which may lead to confusion and loneliness. The lack of sense of belonging felt by the child can cause the creation of negative - aggressive behaviors because if you do not know who you are and where you belong, it is better to mark your existence in any way e.g. negative (being bad is better than being nobody). Adopting such an attitude by the child significantly hinders the educational impact in the foster environment and significantly increases the sense of impunity. It is worth noting that the psyche of a child in a situation of loss or loneliness does not remain indifferent but defense mechanisms are produced, which include among others: mechanism of displacement of unpleasant events, running away into fantasy, creating so-called reactions of the opposite (telling oneself feelings opposite to those that one really experiences). Defense mechanisms contribute to the improvement of mood and allow to temporarily overcome the state of loss or loneliness, but unfortunately do not affect the change of reality.

A child who feels lonely in the family home due to negative emotional relations with parents may also have problems with functioning on the basis of a peer group, i.e. with taking on the role of a pupil and a colleague, which in turn influences the process of his/her socialisation. Children often feel unaccepted, isolated and in direct contact rejected by the group, which results in low self-esteem, withdrawal and general depression caused by the lack of acceptance and fulfilment of needs in direct contact with peers. A child with a sense of loneliness cannot establish an emotional bond with other people, feels a fear of emotional rejection, which was previously experienced by its relatives. He or she has difficulties with proper reading of other people's behaviour towards him or her, which makes it much more difficult to make friends with peers - and may also result in alienation in the school classroom.

It is therefore worth stressing that the attitude of parents towards their children is extremely important not only for their emotional development, but also for their social adaptation. The family upbringing environment is created primarily by the culture of interpersonal relations within the family, interactions between family members, the need and ability to communicate their experiences, thoughts and the world of cultural symbols” [5, p. 15]. The development and upbringing and socialization of the child takes place primarily through the influence of the closest environment which is the family,

through appropriate social relations filled with emotional content, mutual understanding and respect.

## **Conclusion**

Taking into account the problems of the contemporary family and the fact that it is subject to many transformations, especially in recent years, resulting from the changes taking place in social life, we should not forget about the increasing scale of the occurrence of the phenomenon of loneliness and social orphanhood of children. These processes are the result of the accumulation of destructive factors in the family and result from the lack of bonds and permanent contact with a person significant for the child. Disorganized, with disturbed internal harmony, family homes are often not able to provide the child with constant, proper care. The aforementioned issues of lack of satisfaction of biological, psychological and cultural needs should also be mentioned, as well as the importance of family dysfunction in this context for the socialization processes. As Teresa Olearczyk stresses, "the contemporary family lives in exceptional times of rapid and violent political, cultural, social and mental changes" [16, p. 5], where all forms of disorganisation of family life cause the psychological balance of children to be disturbed, there are educational difficulties which often initiate the process of loneliness and social orphanhood of a child.

Analyzing selected issues concerning dysfunction in the family as a source of orphanhood and loneliness of a child, it is clear that the disturbances in the functioning of a modern family are integrated into general shapes and forms of family life, and their effects are often felt by the youngest members of society. Therefore, it is worth stressing in conclusion - quoting Jadwiga Izdebska's words that children will not feel alone when parents talk to them, spend their free time with their children, are interested in the child's affairs, show them care and love, pay attention and interest in the child, support the child, and give a lot of warmth and understanding ... .

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