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DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES AND DEVIANT AND DELINQUENT BEHAVIOUR OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Abstract

Numerous scientific and professional opinions emphasise the importance of the family's role in the socialisation process of an individual, its member. The first impulse to determine the role of the family in the system of social relations was given by theorists of functionalism, who pointed out that society as a whole function through the consensus of its institutions, among which the family occupies an important place. Although the role of the family in the life of an adult cannot be ignored, not only in the function of emotional support, but it is also undeniable that its greatest influence is realised in the phase of so-called primary socialisation, that is, in the period of earliest childhood, when parents play a crucial role in shaping the child's first social experience. The family is the first level of social control over the behaviour of its members in society in terms of its basic values and in accordance with generally accepted norms of behaviour. When communication between family members is disrupted or non-existent, then the

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sense of belonging and cohesion is missing, we are talking about a dysfunctional family. Having established the initial hypothesis – the dysfunctional family is a strong trigger for deviant and delinquent behaviour of children and adolescents – my goal was to apply the causal-functional method to demonstrate its correctness by determining the severity of harmful consequences that result from the inability to achieve positive family functions partially or completely.

Keywords: family structure disorders, broken home, socialization, family environment, upbringing

INTRODUCTION

The family is the vestibule of society from which its members will enter other “rooms” to the extent that they develop and become ready to accept various social obligations. This readiness is achieved through the process of socialization, in which a person as an individual learns to behave in society by accepting the values and norms of a certain social community in order to develop normal interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the family is rightly considered to be the first step of social control. If we get stuck at the first step, there are great chances that we will fall or, in the best case, be late where we started, that is, the normal course of life will go in the wrong direction. Why is there a possibility of stumbling on the first step, that is, failure in the phase of primary socialization? If we exclude biological and autonomous psychological predispositions, which also have a negative impact on the socialization process, but are not the subject of this paper, the answer we get is family dysfunction, that is, a disruption of the social environment in which primary socialization should take place. It is considered that a family is dysfunctional if it is damaged or there is a complete absence of communication between its members, i.e., when there is no sense of belonging and cohesion.

If a consensus is not established with other social institutions, a disruption in the family can lead to a chain reaction, until the final collapse of the broader

social community, of which the family is an organic part. That is why the social community has an interest in timely recognizing the symptoms of disturbances in family relationships and taking the necessary preventive, i.e., intervening, measures in order to establish social control. Therefore, my goal in this paper is to first determine the place of the family in the functional system of socialization, and then the characteristics of the dysfunctional family and its negative effects, according to the ratio of the opposition of the consequences, to determine the correctness of the initial hypothesis – the dysfunctional family is a strong generator of deviant and delinquent behaviour of children and adolescents. On the way to that goal, I relied to the greatest extent on causal-functional analysis.

THE FAMILY'S POSITIVE ROLE IN THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

The possibility of the social order functioning question gained special importance in science with the works of Émile Durkheim. Looking for an answer to the question of how to preserve the stability of society, he imagined society as an organism that functions thanks to the work of its organs, where none of these organs can function on its own. A disturbance in the functioning of one organ reflects on the work of other parts of the organism, which is why they are forced to adapt their functioning to the newly created situation, in order to maintain a satisfactory level of stability in the entire organism. That adaptation takes place according to certain rules, and analogously to that idea, society functions thanks to the existence of a consensus on respecting the rules that ensure its stability. Durkheim's thinking like this had an impact on the development of the structural functionalist theory (Amoah & Ayim, 2018, p. 108), which was modernized in the works of Talcott Parsons in the twentieth century's middle. Like Durkheim's comparison of society with an organism, functionalism sees the functioning of society through the consensus of its institutions, among which the family occupies an important place. At the same time, the so-called nuclear family (family consisting of parents and child/children) is primary for the functionalists.

From the functionalist perspective of the family, the main positive functions of

the nuclear family stand out (Figure 1):

- reproduction of the next generation,
- primary socialisation of the young,
- education function,
- stable satisfaction of the sex drive,
- caring for the elderly, and
- emotional and psychological security.

The family is given a more significant role in the primary socialization phase, which is related to the early period of childhood, and represents teaching children communication and adoption of values according to the standards of their family, but also of wider society (forming awareness about gender, ethnic and religious affiliation, etc.) and norms of behaviour, which is characteristic for that age. This functionalist approach, primarily by George Murdock and Talcott Parsons, is generally accepted, but often interpreted in a simplified manner. This simplification is reflected in attaching great importance to the family in the process of socialization only at the early age of the child. In the processes of secondary (inclusion in the education process) and tertiary socialization (accepting the roles of an adult), its role is placed on the margin of influence, and the main roles are assigned to the social environment outside the family circle. The participation of all social structures in shaping the individual in the process of socialization is the starting point of view of functionalists, so their giving less importance to the influence of the family in the secondary and tertiary stages of socialization is a logical consequence. After the period of primary socialization, the function of the family is reduced to emotional support for its members, which Parsons explained through his theory of a warm bath – a person in the aegis of his family, as in a warm bath, removes stress from a hard-working day and refreshes himself for new challenges (see Ormerod, 2020). The simplistic interpretation of the function of the family by Parsons himself, but also by other functionalists, received the most criticism from the ranks of Marxists and feminists. Most of the criticism is aimed at the one-

sided observation of the family, in a “pink” frame, since it is not difficult to prove that there are many families living in complex and very difficult circumstances. Also, the idea of Parsons about of the woman biological role and the importance of the working role of the father (Parsons & Bales, 1955, p. 21), is considered outdated today, just like the idea of reducing the role of the nuclear family to basic instrumental and expressive functions.

The family is the basic cell of society. Everything starts with her, including life itself. If we are talking about a normal family, in which there are no elements of pathological dysfunction, then it is naturally expected to be a regulator of the adoption and maintenance of positive social values, as well as the legal relationship to respect for social norms, including moral as well. As can be seen in Figure 1, the function of the family in the education process is present although the process primarily takes place in educational institutions. This should include the family's interest in the quality of their member's participation in the education process, as well as his or her behaviour outside the family circle. Functionalist positive values – caring for the elderly and emotional and psychological security – are not sustainable beyond such family participation in the life of its member. This is important because society is an organism with very sensitive organs, and even in the case when the family itself is healthy, the disruption of some other institution of society can make it impossible to establish a consensus if the negative effect of such disruption takes place beyond the control of other institutions. In particular, members of a functional family can be exposed to negative influences at school, on the street, at the workplace, and in general in any social environment. If the relationships in the family are healthy and there is mutual communication, which implies the family's interest in the activities of its members, regardless of age, the escalation of the consequences of disturbances in society can be prevented in a timely manner, that is, the resulting consequences can be remedied in time. If such communication and mutual interest in each other do not exist, then we cannot even talk about a functional family, and at that point, we come to the subject of this paper.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A “BROKEN HOME”

The family is considered the cradle of personality because it is the environment in which the first forms of socialization are acquired. The direction in which relationships will develop in the society that the youngest members of the family enter depend on the quality of the “material” from which that cradle is built. That material is made by parents because their behaviour determines the direction of children's sociological development. The parent-child relationship is particularly important for society. The basic social function of the family is to raise children in a positive spirit, in a way that will make them desirable members of society, who have adopted positive moral norms and values of the wider social community. Thanks to moral integrity and healthy mutual relations, most families successfully cope with this task, despite a significant number of interfering circumstances. The problem arises when, for various reasons, parents are unable to develop positive behaviour patterns in their children. In such circumstances, the family, instead of performing an educational function, can become a trigger for children's delinquent and deviant behaviour. Then we don't talk about the family as the “cradle of personality”, but about the “broken home”. In the narrower and most common sense, it is a family in which at least one family member has left, usually due to divorce, and in a broader sense, it is a dysfunctional family. Difficult material conditions, disagreements between family members, as well as some socio pathological phenomena, which can be both the cause and/or consequence of disagreements within the family, are recognized as the main causes of the formation of a dysfunctional family in practice.

Poor financial conditions make it difficult for parents to make efforts to provide their children with equal conditions for life, compared to financially disadvantaged families. Such a situation in itself can reduce the value of parents in the eyes of children. In other words, there is a possibility that they see the blame for such a situation in the insufficient ability or insufficient effort of their parents to achieve more favourable material conditions. In that case, children will more easily decide

to look for role models in other personalities, imaginary (films, comics, literary works...) or real (from the environment in which they perform their social duties or from the world of famous people, about whom they learn most often through the media). In both cases, it may happen that negative role models are chosen, especially in modern society where the influence of multimedia content on personality development is enormous. These can be reality programs that promote violence and other negative moral values, video games with negative content (war, crime, etc.) that encourage the development of aggressiveness in children (see Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020). Also, if not mostly, social networks on the Internet, especially considering the various forms of violence promoted there (TikTok lately) and that can have very serious consequences. In the “best” case, children become addicted to the Internet. That is why, they lose a realistic idea of real life outside the virtual world and become easier “targets” for the negative influences of the peer environment, but also for various predators among adults (see Bjelajac & Filipović, 2021; compare 2020). Looking for a role model outside the family circle does not have to be a consequence of (only) poor material conditions, but also an insufficient interest of parents in their children's activities, i.e. their absence from children's lives due to the nature of work, misunderstanding of the role of parents, the death of one or both parents, abandonment/divorce, or just adventurousness.

Socio-pathological phenomena appear both as a cause and as a consequence of a broken home, and in the first place, it is about addictions, violent behaviour, sexual abuse, prostitution and criminal behaviour. According to research in the USA, one in five children grows up in a family where at least one parent is addicted to drugs or alcohol (Thatcher, 2020).

Alcohol is one of the substances with a high addictive risk because over time it leads to psychological and then organic dependence. Excessive amounts of alcohol lead to behavioural disorders, which are difficult to control, among which the most dangerous is aggressiveness, towards others, but also towards oneself. Even

when it does not lead to aggressive behaviour, alcoholism produces an irresponsible attitude towards work and social obligations, including obligations towards one's own family. Alcoholism of one or both parents, regardless of the cause, is an almost certain introduction to family conflicts, which turn into interpersonal violence, and even child abuse by one or both parents. Even when they are not the direct object of violence, children are passive victims, because quarrels and, especially, physical confrontation between parents, create confusion in the minds of children, forcing them to choose which of the parents to attach labels with the epithets "good" and "evil". This distances them from the family, which they do not perceive as a refuge, and they are prone to antisocial reactions. Children often assume the role of the head of the family, and instead of their parents taking care of them, they take care of their alcoholic parents, living in fear of their parents and uncertain material existence, but also in fear of their parent's lives (Nijam, 2020). In addition, following the negative example of parents, children can also be drawn into the world of alcoholism, which is not immediately recognized because there is no adequate parental supervision.

Drug addiction in the family is a more complex problem alcoholism. Pathological drug addiction can be caused by many events in complex social circumstances. For young people, entering the world of drug addiction can be initiated in the process of searching for their own identity, and under the influence of peers. This is especially facilitated if the child comes from a dysfunctional family, but it is quite certain that even when this is not the case, entering the world of drug addiction is a strong factor in disrupting family stability. The first step into the world of drug addiction can come from curiosity, also under the influence of peers. Then, under the influence of side effects and side effects of substances that are taken for the first time, the chain of addiction becomes long. Also, mental illnesses can be one of the reasons for taking drugs and creating addiction. Regardless of the reason that initiates taking drugs for the first time, there is no doubt that drug addiction has a harmful effect on the entire society, including the family as its basic unit.

Domestic violence is the most widespread form of interpersonal violence in peacetime circumstances (Marković & Zirojević, 2021, p. 314), and its frequency also speaks of the worryingly large number of dysfunctional families. Given that the family is a place of expected tranquillity, support and security, violence within it has a special weight and can cause very different reactions from family members who are victims of that violence. Violence in the family can be a consequence of alcoholism or drug addiction of one of the family members, but it can also cause these two socio-pathological phenomena and thus close the circle of dysfunctionality.

CRIMINOGENIC INFLUENCE OF THE FAMILY

Scientific research confirms the repeatedly stated thesis that children from broken families, especially those in which the factor of violence was present, are more prone to violence and criminal behaviour (Petrosino et al., 2009).

Domestic violence is a criminogenic phenomenon, which does not have to be caused by other socio-pathological phenomena, such as alcoholism and drug addiction. A wrong approach to raising children, such as excessive authoritarianism or striving to achieve unrealizable ambitions through children, can push young family members towards deviant behaviour. Crude authoritarianism prevents young family members from developing normally as free-thinking individuals, and instead, they become insecure in themselves and distrustful of others, with a tendency towards alcoholism and developing aggressiveness as a dominant trait (Saladino et al., 2020, p. 017). Fathers tend to be overly authoritarian, but mothers, on the other hand, tend to be overly caring. It can also have a negative impact on the child's personality development, especially when parents come into conflict with other authorities, primarily at school, defending the child's antisocial behaviour and pointing the finger of blame at others. When the child has already shown a tendency towards deviant behaviour, the over-caring parent often receives justification, or even support, instead of condemnation.

In a certain period of growing up, there is a need to express diversity, but also to belong to a certain subculture, that is, to look for role models (social learning theory), which can often be imaginary. This is especially evident in children who lack a strong father figure, when they grow up without a father, or when the father is physically present, but has fallen morally (gambling, alcoholism, drug addiction, crime) and cannot be a positive role model. Research shows that growing up with a strong father figure, children have better emotional development, a higher degree of tolerance and a lower tendency towards aggression (Dyer et al., 2014). If there is no positive educational influence of parents, primarily through personal example, young family members will look for role models in imaginary or real life outside their family. Regardless of looking for role models outside the family, poor material conditions can develop in children, who at the same time lack the positive influence of their parents, a tendency towards criminal behaviour for the illegal acquisition of material goods. This is especially pronounced when there is no family upbringing, through which other values would be presented to children positively so that material goods are not placed in the primary plan. Children are especially sensitive during puberty because then they tend to adopt “values” that are simply imposed on them in their personal environment. The desire to stand out in society or to have the same financial opportunities as wealthier peers, even though the family's financial circumstances do not allow it, can lead young people to the world of property crime. This is more likely to happen in degraded families, than in those in which family harmony reigns and in which positive moral values are developed transparently. The feeling of material inferiority in relation to his peers, with or without the burden of a degraded family to which he belongs, can also lead a young person to the world of alcoholism or drug addiction. In this way, the basis for antisocial behaviour is expanded, which very often goes beyond the scope of social maladjustment and enters the area of criminal behaviour. Young people who have already accepted criminal behaviour as a model of life, guided primarily by their material interests, will try to draw into their world peers who do not have the support of a healthy family. However,

that path is not always completely open, because not every person who comes from a degraded family is prone to moral lapses. Even in the conditions of the existence of a significant degree of educational neglect, maladjusted behaviour as a consequence does not necessarily turn into criminal behaviour but can remain at the level of misdemeanour delinquency.

However, if the degradation of the family is based on the criminal behaviour of its adult members, then we are talking about a criminogenic family hearth, which increases the risks of criminogenic influence on younger members. The role of parents should represent a model for children to follow. They do it most often, even when it comes to a model as a negative role model from the point of view of society's morals. The feeling for positive values is lost over time and even transformed into patterns of deviant and criminogenic behaviour as correct and acceptable. There are numerous statistical indicators that children who have been physically abused in their family or one of their parents has been in prison for a crime are more likely to exhibit criminal behaviour. That is why it is very important to focus public policy on the prevention of criminal behaviour of younger family members who grow up in the so-called criminogenic family hearths.

CONCLUSION

The family, as the basic cell of society, plays an extremely important role in the formation of personality. That role can be both positive and negative, which depends on both biological and social factors. The most significant function of the family takes place in the process of socialization of children. Through the educational role of parents, primarily through personal example, rules of behaviour are instilled in children in accordance with the basic moral requirements and values of the social community. Such a family is called a family hearth. In dysfunctional families, mutual communication, understanding, and support are impaired. The hearth is cold. Even when they are not in a direct relationship with the children, broken relationships in the family have a negative impact on their psyche, hindering them from developing self-confidence, but also causing a feeling of injustice and

powerlessness to change something. This pushes children under the influence of other social factors, primarily peers, either passively in the form of role models, or actively by directly leading them to deviant behaviour. Poverty can be a trigger for criminal behaviour if parents do not develop positive values in their children, i.e., if they neglect their educational role, focused on ensuring material existence. If the dysfunctionality of the family is caused by violence, or violence has developed from it, then there is a great risk that children from such a family will resort to violent behaviour or withdraw into themselves and give in to alcohol or enter the world of drug addiction. Both are the basis for the development of criminal behaviour. The family can be a direct trigger for children's criminal behaviour if one of the parents is from a criminal milieu, passively as a negative role model, and actively encouraging them to engage in crime.

Bearing all this in mind, it is completely clear that the conditions of the impossibility of realizing the family's positive functions, that is, the dysfunctional family, is a strong trigger for deviant and delinquent behaviour of children and adolescents. Therefore, public policies should be directed towards creating the most favourable conditions for healthy family functioning, as well as designing and developing programs for effective intervention in case of family dysfunction, with the aim of preventing delinquent behaviour of the youngest family members.

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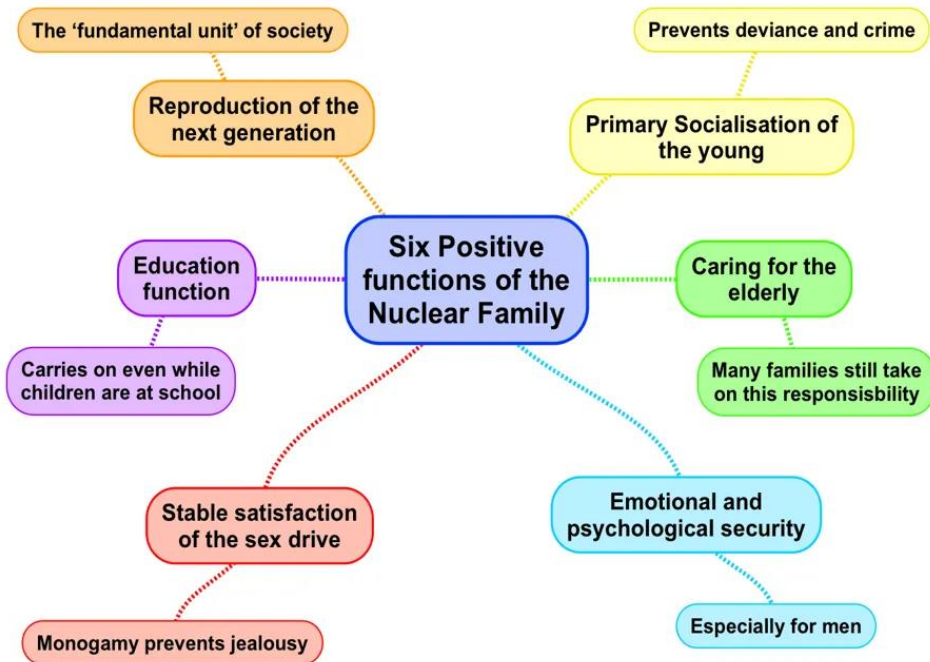
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APPENDIX

Figure 1.

The positive functions of the family



Note. (Thompson, 2014, February 9).

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ДИСФУНКЦИОНАЛНЕ ПОРОДИЦЕ И ДЕВИЈАНТНО И ДЕЛИНКВЕНТНО ПОНАШАЊЕ ДЕЦЕ И АДОЛЕСЦЕНАТА

Сажетак

Бројна научна и стручна мишљења истичу важност улоге породице у процесу социјализације појединца, њеног члана. Почетни импулс утврђивању улоге породице у систему друштвених односа дали су теоретичари функционализма, указујући на то да друштво као целина функционише кроз консензус његових институција, међу којима значајно место заузима и породица. Иако се улога породице не може занемарити ни у животу одрасле особе, не само у функцији емоционалне подршке, неоспорно је да се њен највећи утицај остварује у фази тзв. примарне социјализације, односно у периоду најранијег детињства, када родитељи имају кључну улогу у формирању првог друштвеног искуства детета. Породица је први степен друштвене контроле над понашањем њеног члана у друштву у духу његових основних вредности и у складу са општеприхваћеним нормама понашања. Када је комуникација између чланова породице нарушена или не постоји, тада изостаје и осећај припадности и кохезије, те говоримо о дисфункционалној породици. Након постављања почетне хипотезе – дисфункционална породица је снажан окидач за девијантно и делинквентно понашања деце и адолесцената – мој циљ је био да применом узрочно-функционалне методе покажем њену исправност утврђивањем тежине штетних последица које настају због немогућности остваривања позитивних функција породице, делимично или у потпуности.

Кључне речи: поремећаји структуре породице, разорени дом, социјализација, породично окружење, васпитање