

## YOUNGSTERS AND SOCIAL POLICIES OF SUPPORT DURING CRISIS

**Gheorghita Nistor**

University of Bucharest - ROMANIA

Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Social Work Department

Assistant Professor Ph. D.

**Mirela Anghel**

University of Bucharest - ROMANIA

Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Social Work Department

Lecturer Ph. D.

### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** The children represent a vulnerable age category that is exposed to numerous social risks. Poverty represents a social risk but also a cause of social exclusion for children and youngsters. **Purpose of Study:** Education represents the key factor of social inclusion for this category of population and preventing school dropout needs to represent the target of social policies. Social policies of support need to ensure coherent strategies in the educational milieu especially in the context of present economic crisis. The children represent the future generation who will support the economy and these social-educational policies circumstances need to support school integration, discrimination prevention and social inequalities. **Research Methods:** The sociological research was achieved on a group of children and youngsters in 2011 and tried to gather information regarding their opinion towards social policies integration at school level. The methods of research were quantitative methods i.e. the sociological survey. **Findings and Conclusions:** The social policies of support are mostly perceived negatively without consensual strategies for the crisis time being. The social policies should prevent school dropout therefore breaking the link which specialists entitled *the culture of poverty*.

**Keywords:** youngsters, poverty, social-economical crisis, social-educational policies.

**JEL Classification:** I24 - Education and Inequality

## I. INTRODUCTION

Among the social-political objectives we find that social protection and security of population lies in difficulty zone. Other objectives refer to the promotion of public goods (health, education, science etc.) or social development by ensuring certain **social** conditions considered to be important for the society such as education, family, children and elderly care. Regardless of the other objective we shall focus on the concept of collective welfare that refer to a decent living for all. (Zamfir, Zamfir, 1995: 44). All the latest studies show that youngsters and children represent a vulnerable social category that is in full growth and progress that needs to be supported by offering access to education. Social policies for education need to reduce the social inequalities regarding children and youngsters. Blocking the access to fundamental services – education, health – leads to negative effects over the normal child development leading towards the social exclusion of the future adult.

Therefore, we may say that child social exclusion can be a trespassing of his rights and UN stipulates that education is a universal right. Due to certain problems that Romanian family is facing today – poverty, unemployment, less-favoured areas a.s.o – it is hard to ensure the minimum decent required to procure food, clothes, school books. Most unfortunately the right to education is no longer respected. According to the Romanian Constitution and Educational Law the citizens have an indiscriminate right to education. For that the State provides raised funds to support school education. In reality the facts are different. The causes are due to the fact that the community with its resources, goods, and available services cannot support these services.

The fact is that the state's intervention using certain social protection measures needs to be present. Although a series of *stimulation measures* were introduced their outcome proved to be insufficient. Among the *stimulation measures* we mention: alimony for school children, the “Croissant and Milk” program, study scholarships, social scholarships, free sanitary assistance, social protection for children with special needs. The strategies suggested by the social policies need to promote equality of chances to access school by certain measures focused on poor children, counselling in school development and social welfare. The distributions of the social chances are connected to school. The differences in the social status regard life style, life expectancy, child behaviours etc. some specialists claim that “as long as school remains the most important process that places individuals into social stratification system the chances to access school can be equal. The family

mobilizes resource in order to offer education for the descendants, and, from the resources' perspective, modern societies are far to be equal." (Rotaru, Iluț, 1996: 124).

Chance inequality is a state of fact that characterizes every society, a manifest problem of the educational system that cumulates a series of multiple inequality aspects. The sources are various and heterogenic related to school and outside of it: geographical, economical, and social-cultural. These are determined by structural factors (educational system) or functional factors (communitarian, mental). The educational system holds the growth role in the social functioning.

Recession, and especially the financial-economical crisis, affects the young generation. "Crises are generated by chaos, mess, and they lead to social and interpersonal relation degradation... People are reduced more often to the condition of consumers and fighting constantly to the paradox of the society (over-connected but in the same time isolated), fighting the disorganized and overrated images. Some prefer to take refuge in the narcissistic artifice, adopt aggressive and addictive behaviours, get depressed and cannot overcome it. Forms of pathology and crime have always existed but they always have manifestations that reflect the crisis of the society." (Barus-Michel; Neculau, 2011:10).

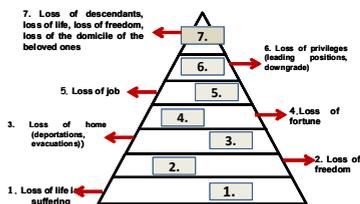
Regardless the type of the crisis we are debating on, either economical-financial crises or a political, we cannot argue the fact that crisis generates fear, anguish, phobia, anxiety. By defining crisis, from the Greek *krisis* – *decision*, we can assert that it represents a decisive moment where everything takes a wrong turn. (Barus-Michel, 2011: 36-37) The usual dynamic of the society is suddenly suspended and anomy and anarchy occur. The decision power escape and chaos takes its place. It might occur an *internal tension* (the excess of order, rigid laws, broken rights, freedom privation) or depression. The crisis generates *instability*, *disarray*, loosen social and interpersonal relations, as well as *violence and aggressiveness*. From a psycho-social point of view the crisis can be analysed starting from social fears that generate and can lead towards a "pyramid of social fears". (Chelcea in Barus-Michel, Neculau, 2011: 290) In 1995 the psychiatrists Cristophe Andre and Patrick Legeron proposed a **pyramid of anxieties** that they hierarchized as follows: **1.** Fear of failure, **2.** Failure of disclosure, **3.** Fear to impose, **4.** Fear of being noticed. It is shown that the fear from the top level always involve the fears from the inferior level, such as Maslow's pyramid. In the social fears pyramid this very fact is not respected anymore: the superior levels do not condition the inferior levels.

Some specialists that analysed the crises from a psycho-sociological perspective proved that there are certain stages of development: (Barus-Michel, 2011: 45-48).

1. **The pre-critical (pre-clinical) phase** – there is a false normality, contradictions are denied, a state of discomfort and worry occur.
2. **The paroxysm phase** – the barriers of defence are broken
3. **The open or explosive phase** – contradicts burst an the unity of the whole is affected. Scenarios are made and a image of the catastrophe is made based on the disorganized, irrational decisions made, such as anguish and panic that are individual and collective symptoms; confusion – paranoiac and supported by rumours – and suspicion arises. We can now talk about the generalization of the anomy that leads to despair, unemployment, poverty and isolation.
4. **The social unity disintegration and destruction** – it affects the entire assembly of leading institutions. This is the moment where social calmness and equilibrium are settled.

Certain research were made that revealed the fact that fear is omnipresent in society and it is “an inevitable part of human existence” (Öhman, 2008:708 apud Chelcea, 2011: 277, in Barus-Michel, Neculau, 2011).

Can we talk about a pyramid of social fears? Apparently we can. Such as Maslow identified a pyramid of needs of 5 stages, respectively 7, Chelcea (2011: 291) establishes a **pyramid of social fears**.



**Figure 1 The pyramid of social fears Source: Chelcea, 2011: 291**

We can notice that the most poignant fear from the nowadays time i.e. the democratic society – not totalitarian systems – is the loss of job, the 5<sup>th</sup> stage. Fears related to future uncertainty and care for the future generations are closely followed. If during the communist time the social fears were obviously vital –

such as fear of death and freedom privation – in present Romania the future and uncertainty affect the lives of the individuals.

## **II. YOUNGSTER’S PERSPECTIVE OVER THE SOCIAL POLICIES OF SUPPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF CRISIS – SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

### **1. The general and methodological frame of research**

The research was done between April and June in 6 high schools in Bucharest and 2 faculties. The general purpose of the research was to notice how students react towards the social policies of support during Romania in crisis.

The sociological method used several combined methods to get a higher accuracy of field data. Therefore, we used the sociological inquiry by applying the questionnaire and the focus groups, SWOT analysis, analysis of public documents and other documents of impact. The research instruments were designed with other colleagues – professor Ioan Neacșu and Roxana Urea.

#### **The targets of the questionnaire**

- a. to estimate the perception of level of living for a three year span
  - b. the source of date regarding level of living
  - c. factors that influence the existence, behaviour and attitudes of youngsters.
- In order to do that we inventoried a series of variables regarding the economical performances, youngsters leaving abroad and the drop of impact that school has on students, the violation of ethical values in the professional live or social competition (contests, exams) that take no regard on professional or value criteria.

Regarding the social policies of support during crisis we started to gather their opinion regarding the **consensual social strategies** regarding certain vulnerable groups that needed to be encourages and protected, such as youngsters, elderly people, unemployed people, children with special educational needs or performers. From this perspective we wanted to gather how the inter-institutional and political cooperation in perceived when we talk about introducing certain social policies for youngsters.

**The scale of measurement** most used over the opinions expresses was the Likert scale that we will refer on every item. We therefore present some synthetic interpretations.

## 2. The synthetic results of the empirical research

Firstly we present data over the subject interviewed. The research was made in 2011 on a sample of 460 subjects, 276 girls - 60% and 184 boys - 40%. Based on age we present the following statistic 350 teenagers - 76% and 110 students - 24%. This can be also noticed the figure below.

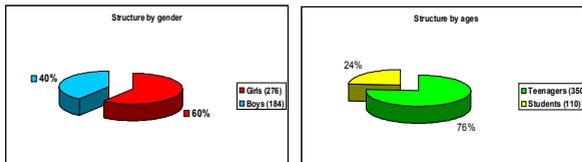


Figure 1 The componence of research lot on sex

Figure 2 The componence of the research lot based on age

## III. THE EVOLUTION OF LIVING STANDARD FOR THE LAST THREE YEARS

Among the first category that we built the working instrument on was the *level of living evolution* (welfare, rate of poverty, personal income, family income) for the last three years. On a scale of 1-5 (1 meaning critical and 5 meaning very good) we have the following answers: 75 % - average level of living, 37,4% relatively good living standards and 37% considered they have a good standard of living. We can draw the conclusion that not many changes occurred in the last 3 years. The tiniest percentage of 18,7% considered they had a significant improvement in their level of living in the last three years. The situation was critical for 7%. It's worth noticing that there was no answer for the option for the answer option "very severe situation".

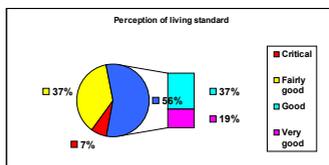


Figure 3: Perception of living standard

## IV. THE METHODS/ MEANS/ WAYS THAT OFFER SIGNIFICANT DATA OVER THE STANDARD OF LIVING NOWADAYS

In this item we wanted to gather what are the youngster's sources of information regarding the social-economical situation of Romania. We took into consideration the public institutions as well as the private ones such as national and local mass

media. The governmental institutions gathered the greatest number on the list of 67%, approx. 2/3, closely followed by national mass media – 62%, local press – 55%, National Institute of Statistics – 54%. We can say that the governmental institutions are the most credible and they offer enough information. In the same time the information provided by national mass-media seem to be enough to satisfy the information necessities. See bellow figure 4.

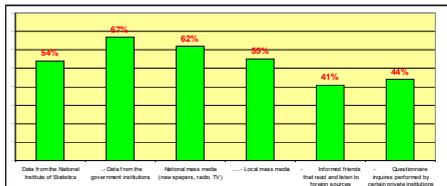
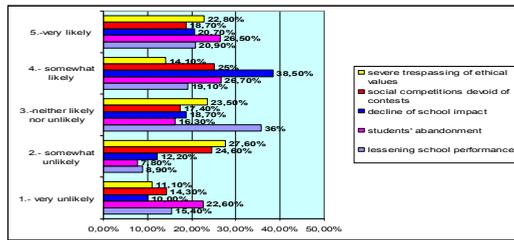


Figure 4: Methods of information regarding the living stanard

## V. THE LEVEL BASED ON THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE DAILY YOUNGSTERS' EXISTANCE, BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES

Among the variables that we tried to gather were the factors with the greatest impact over the existence and behaviour of youngsters. Ranking first we have the **low impact of school over student's evolution**: more than half 59,2% said that they are much and very much influenced by school. Ranking secondly we find out that **leaving abroad** affect them as well. **The social competition (contests, exams) without taking into consideration professional criteria** affects a percentage of 43,7%. This aspect can negatively influence the formation of youngster's personalities that can lead towards the development of certain anomic patterns in the behaviour of the future adults. **Lessening school performance** is a item where 40% answered that their existence is influenced by the economical factor.

**Disorder/ breach of professional life ethical values** affects 36.9% of the surveyed youngsters. School needs to offer a learning environment based on certain learning activities and development where children, teenagers, and youngsters can be prepared for social life, to understand the world they are living in. All these acquire desirable moral values, a capacity to adapt to change, and problem solving skills that contribute to the social balance and reduce social failure. School is the second court of socialization for teenagers after family, as it is the institution that should provide models and induce values for this category of population. Violation of these ethnical values frequently around them can affect the image a teenager forms on the operation of socio-professional life.

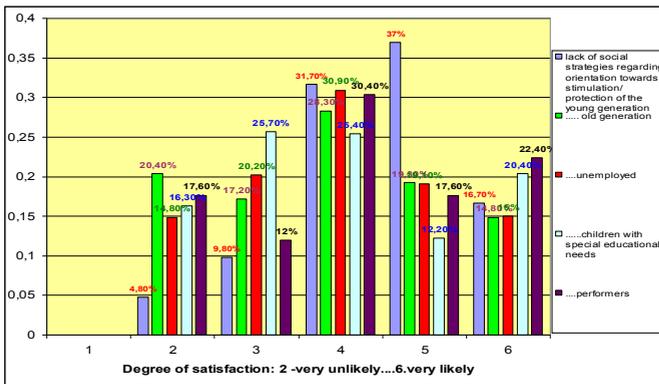


**Figure 5: The perception of the impact factors over the youngsters' behaviour and living**

Social policies from the educational field have to support groups of vulnerable teenagers who come from disadvantaged environments that risk school dropout. **Lack of social consensus strategy regarding orientation in stimulating / protecting young generation** affect more than half of investigated population, 53.7% of subjects respectively. Fears for the future and lack of strategies to support young people are confirmed by other sociological studies conducted on adult population reminded previously. Studies in the poverty area show that the most vulnerable groups are single-parent families and families with many children (Zamfir, 2000: 44). The school represents an instrument of equal opportunities, social inclusion for groups at risk or prone to social exclusion. Children in rural areas also represent a risk category of school dropout. "According to the data given by the *Anti-Poverty Commission and Social Inclusion (CASPI)* children living in poor households are more than twice as likely to drop out of school than children living in households that are not poor, increasing to over three times for those who live in severely poor households. In 2003 the share of early school dropouts was of 23.2% compared to the value of 18.1% for the EU – 15 and 16.0% in EU – 25" (Mărginean, Popescu, Arpinte, Neagu, 2006:10).

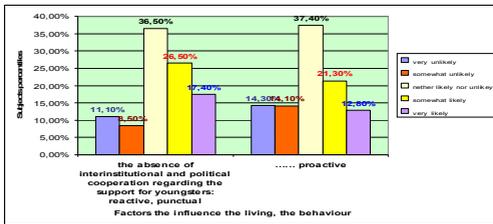
Another group affected by the lack of support strategies is represented by the group of talented children, **the performers** – 40% of surveyed subjects considered they were affected in large and very large extent due to lack of support strategies. It is said that young people are *the future of the country, the future adults of tomorrow*. Initially developed social policies in education focused on the *equalization of opportunities to educational access*, and this process has changed and oriented towards performance. Thus, access to education was doubled by *equal chances of success*. This requires the development of methods, tools, and forms of education that meets the needs of every child. Considering the idea of educational democratization process the problem should take into consideration

whether the same treatment should be granted to every student, responding to different needs of the child, be it a performer. Some studies (Nistor, Vlad, 2012: 55) take into consideration the category of gifted children, the talented ones that should be supported to develop successful careers revealed that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds need socio-economic support in the vocational area to be able to attend the courses. A percentage of 34.1% among the subjects perceived lack of consensus and support strategies heavily. The same percentage of 34.1% among respondents perceives this lack of focused strategies to the unemployed who are affected to a large and heavily absence of support policies. Children that need special educational needs are a vulnerable group, a significant proportion of students (32.6%) perceived lack of strategies as lacking in a very large extent. Education involves a lengthy and expensive process but also provides some training to the individuals that can have access to the labour market (see chart no. 6).



**Figure 6: Perception of the affected categories due to the lack of social consensual strategies regarding the orientation towards stimulation/ protection**

For developing timely strategies of support for children and young people in vulnerable situations there should be inter-ministerial and governmental cooperation as well as the non-governmental sector. From chart number 7 one can see that at the institutional level is not perceived introducing cooperation and support interventions for reactive youngsters, the lack of time perceived - 80.4% of relative measure of cooperation in large and very large extent, but no proactive support, 71, 6% of the subjects interviewed.



**Figure 7: The perception due to the absence of interinstitutional and political cooperation regarding the support for youngsters**

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Social policies in education should be aimed at supporting children and youngsters at risk of dropping school mainly due to the poverty these families face. Educational strategies must be correlated with family support and child support, especially for single parent families. Socio-economic crisis, rising unemployment factors lead to an increased level of vulnerability among teenagers and youngsters. Educational policies should provide equal opportunities to all children regardless of their provenance or their needs (gifted children with educational special needs). Social policies are negatively perceived without social support, without consensual social strategies in the current crisis, and a lack of institutional cooperation. By preventing school dropout we therefore prevent social exclusion by breaking one link in what experts call the culture of poverty. Social inclusion policies, in particular those that focus on the educational are take into consideration these targets: a) creating opportunities and facilities for school dropout prevention and related events, b) the development of socio-educational support programs for families and children in difficult situations. Psycho-pedagogical counselling and school social work should focus on issues in the single parents families, victims of “new poverty” and provide (material, psychological) support to exit the crisis.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barus-Michel Jacqueline, Adrian Neculau (2011), *Psihosociologia crizei*, București: Trei
- Krogsrud Miley Karla, O’Melia Michel, DuBois Brenda (2006) *Practica asistenței sociale*, Iași: Polirom,
- Mărginean Ioan, Raluca Popescu, Daniel Arpinte, Gabriela Neagu (2006), *Condiții Sociale ale Excluziunii Copilului*, Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții

- Maslow Abraham (2007) *Motivație și personalitate*, București: Trei
- Nistor Gheorghiuța (2011) *Copiii – victime ale sărăciei. Cercetări și cnexiuni teoretico-metodologice/Children-victims of poverty. Reserches and theoretical and methodological approches*, Bucurest: Universitară
- Nistor Gheorghiuța, 2009, *Sărăcia- factor de risc pentru abandonul școlar*, în Revista *Protecția socială a copilului*, revistă de pedagogie și asistență socială, nr. 34/2009, editată de Federația Internațională a Comunităților Educative - FICE România, Bucuresti: Universitară
- Nistor Gheorghiuța, Vlad Ioana Camelia (2012) în Dumitrașcu Hanibal (coord), *Consilierea în asistența Socială*, Iași: Editura Polirom
- Rotaru Traian, Iluț Petre (1996), *Sociologie*, Cluj- Napoca: Mesagerul,
- Zamfir Cătălin (2004) *O analiză critică a tranziției. Ce va fi “după”*, Iași: Polirom
- Zamfir, Elena (2000 ) *Strategii anti-saracie si dezvoltare comunitară*, Bucuresti: Expert
- Zamfir, Elena, Zamfir, C Cătălin, 1995, *Politici sociale. România în context European*, București: Alternative.