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Family assistance – social support for families with many problems

Asystentura rodziny – wsparcie społeczne rodzin z wieloma problemami

Abstract

Introduction. The contemporary world, with speedy development of information and tele-communication technologies, offers us a wide range of opportunities. At the same time, these rapid changes in the area of the contemporary social life result in opacity and uncertainty of the human life environment. Numerous families cannot cope with the new challenges and issues. Often such a situation leads to risky behaviours. The situation is difficult in particular for resourceless families, with educational problems, or dysfunctional families. These are mostly poorly educated families, unable to influence development, socialization, or education of their children. They are also helpless in making a living. Once the dysfunctionality level overwhelms such a family, external assistance is needed.

Aim. This article is an attempt at initiating a debate over a range of actions to be taken by family assistants for families included in the support programme. It describes the func-

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tion of a family assistant, including the scope of duties and the job description. It is also an attempt at pointing out the highly diverse forms of family life in the post modern world. Work in such a diversified environment is highly challenging for a family assistant.

Methods and materials. Overview and critical analysis of educational and sociological literature.

Results and conclusion. Based on the analyses made, it can be concluded that assistance provided to families with multiple issues has become a structural and organizational solution using the potential and the resources of a beneficiary. While the unstandardized nature of the duties of a family assistant obliges him/her for continuous improvement their competence and work methodology. It essential as well, that a family assistant at work acts as a coordinator of children and family support initiatives taken by other social services.

Keywords: assistance programme, family assistant, child, family, social support.

Abstrakt

Wprowadzenie. Świat, w którym współcześnie żyjemy, ze względu na szybki rozwój technik informacyjnych i telekomunikacji stwarza człowiekowi bardzo dużo możliwości. Jednocześnie te szybkie zmiany dokonujące się w sferze współczesnego życia społecznego powodują nieprzejrzystość, a także niepewność sytuacji, w jakich ludziom przyszło funkcjonować. Wiele rodzin nie potrafi sobie poradzić z nowymi wyzwaniami i problemami. Niejednokrotnie taki stan rzeczy sprzyja zachowaniom ryzykownym. Szczególnie w trudnej sytuacji znajdują się rodziny niezaradne życiowo, niewydolne wychowawczo lub patologiczne. Zazwyczaj cechuje je niski poziom kultury pedagogicznej, nie są w stanie w sposób właściwy oddziaływać na rozwój, socjalizację i wychowanie swoich dzieci. Są też bezradne w wypełnianiu życiowych funkcji. Gdy poziom problemów przerasta możliwości rodziny, wówczas potrzebna jest pomoc z zewnątrz.

Cel. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest próba zainicjowania dyskusji nad możliwymi działaniami podejmowanymi przez asystentów rodziny względem rodzin objętych wsparciem. W artykule scharakteryzowana została także osoba asystenta rodziny oraz jego działania i zakres zadań. To również próba zwrócenia uwagi na fakt, jak zróżnicowane w ponowoczesnym świecie są formy życia rodzinnego. Praca w tak zróżnicowanych środowiskach stanowi duże wyzwanie dla asystenta rodziny.

Metody i materiały. Przegląd i krytyczna analiza literatury pedagogicznej i socjologicznej.

Wyniki i wnioski. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że aktualnie asystowanie rodzinie z wieloma problemami stało się rozwiązaniem strukturalno-organizacyjnym wykorzystującym potencjał i zasoby beneficjenta. Niestandardowość zadań asystenta rodziny obliguje go natomiast do ustawicznego podnoszenia swoich kompetencji i doskonalenia metod pracy. Ważne jest też, aby realizując swoje zadania, asystent rodziny przejął na siebie rolę koordynatora działań innych służb społecznych pracujących na rzecz dzieci i rodziny.

Rodzina jest pierwszą i podstawową szkołą miłości społecznej.
Trzeba uczynić wszystko ażeby ta szkoła mogła pozostawać sobą
[The family is the first and fundamental school of social love.
Everything should be done to ensure that this school can remain]
(Jan Paweł II do pielgrzymów zgromadzonych na lotnisku
Katowice-Muchowiec, 21 czerwca 1983 r.)
[John Paul II to the pilgrims gathered at the airport
Katowice-Muchowiec, June 21, 1983]

Introduction

It is indisputable that the family has a special place among natural educational environments. It is in a properly functioning family environment that the process of raising a child takes place, shaping their character traits and developing their interests. Parents prepare their children for fulfilling basic social roles and functions, they teach them norms, cultural values, customs and traditions that are practised in their home. They take care of their children's health, education and safety in certain life situations. An important goal of the family should therefore be to ensure the proper bio-socio-cultural development of the child and a favourable educational atmosphere. The measurable effect of successful primary socialisation and the upbringing process is a well-adjusted person who lives in harmony with themselves and others, and who respects certain environmental standards (Pytka, 1995).

The family has always been at the top of the hierarchy of values. According to Franciszek Adamski (2011)

[...] we do not know of any culture that is not based on the marriage and family structure: starting with Aristotle, all analyses of social life begin with the family and kinship structure (p. 45).

According to a survey conducted in January 2019 by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS), Poles consistently put family first among the most important values they follow in life. The vast majority of respondents (80%) believe that a person needs a family to be truly happy. In second place, with a much lower number of indications (55%), was health, and in third place – peace of mind (48%) (CBOS, 2019b). Fewer and fewer people prefer to have one child, while the proportion of those who would

like to have three children is growing (CBOS, 2019a). In addition, there is a trend towards multi-generational families; since 2013, the proportion of people who consider a large multi-generational family to be the best model has increased by 3 percentage points and, according to CBOS (2019a), this is a continuation of a trend that has been visible since 2008. According to Marta Bożewicz, this state of affairs may be related to grandparents helping to look after their grandchildren and supporting ageing parents in their daily lives. With this family model, meeting these needs is the easiest to achieve (CBOS, 2019a).

The importance of the family environment is inextricably connected with its continuity and constancy. Anna Kwak emphasises that continuity means fulfilling a socialising function, also when non-family environments are involved. The constancy of the family, meanwhile, stems from the fact that the non-family environments in which the child lives change frequently, while the family itself is constant, even though dynamic internal changes take place within it (Kwak, 2011). Indeed, the family changes both its structure and functions, adapting them to the ongoing sociocultural changes. However, as Henryk Cudak notes, its internal strengths are so great that no external pressure can destroy it as a basic group, institution and educational environment (Cudak, 1995).

The concept of family – basic definitions

It should be emphasised that a family is traditionally understood to be a married couple with children; classical definitions therefore do not take into account alternative forms of relationships in which people live.

> The family was a shared asset, a home, material wealth shared by its members, but also spiritual values: traditions inherited together with the entire sphere of material objects from generation to generation (Adamski, 2021, p. 151).

Therefore, not only the economic aspect is emphasised, but also the spiritual one. Furthermore, the traditionally understood family was characterised by a bond with relatives and a connection to the wider community. It was characterised by a legal status, often a gender-based division of roles, the superior position of the man, lifelong duration, and sexuality linked to procreation (Kwak, 2005; Melosik, 2010). In the post-modern era of dynamic socio-cultural and moral changes, the very concept of family is no longer so unambiguous. Undoubtedly, this state of affairs is the result of different family models and ways of life. Above all, in the contemporary family, the focus has shifted to emotional relationships and connections between people. In marriage as a relationship, the partnership aspect is important, as is the disappearance of the divi-

sion of roles into typically female and male, privacy and relative isolation from the social environment (Krasiejko, 2019). It is worth emphasising that we are currently dealing with gender egalitarianism, independence of partners, personal freedom, and thus characteristics of the individualistic orientation.

Families are increasingly based on cohabitation, concubine, patchwork, and homosexual relationships. Mateusz Melosik also draws attention to a variation of the cohabitation phenomenon – LAt (*living apart together*); this is the situation where partners are in a relationship but do not live together (this can also apply to married couples) (Melosik, 2010). According to the researcher, LAt is becoming increasingly popular in highly developed countries with a high standard of living and a liberal attitude towards family and raising children.

In research publications, there are various definitions of marriage and family. The ways of defining them depend, among other things, on time, culture, type of society, and religion. Three types of marriage are commonly distinguished (Slany, 2008):
- formal (religious or secular),
- customary (no formalisation required, entered into by mutual declaration of marriage),
- cohabitation (heterosexual and homosexual couples).

There are also four ways of defining family (Larson, Goltz, Hobart, 1994):
- structural approach – assumes that a family is formed by at least one parent and one child who are biologically related (through the birth of a child) and have a shared place of residence; social norms also allow for relationships such as adoption. Marriage, meanwhile, is defined as the union of a man and a woman who form a socially accepted relationship and live together;
- functional approach – focuses on the basic goals and functions that the family should fulfil both towards its members and towards society as a whole. In this approach, a family is defined as a group consisting of at least one parent and one child or children, fulfilling the functions of socialisation and intimacy, and satisfying physical and psychological needs. Marital relations are normatively defined;
- inclusive (open) approach – articulates the importance of interpersonal relationships between members of a family group. The institutional definition of the family is therefore abandoned in favour of perceiving it as a private, voluntary social group with special relationships. The definition of family is liberal, as it implies that it is any group of adults and children who maintain relationships with each other that lead to the development of family feelings and bonds (e.g., cohabiting and homosexual couples). It should be emphasised that this definition is highly controversial (e.g., it is not in line with the teachings of the Church), as het-

erosexuality, which has been the defining factor in the definition of marriage and family up to now, is no longer considered relevant;
–   universal approach – promotes the family as a normatively defined group of kinship, aimed at the fulfilment of procreative and socialising tasks. The term *kinship* means that the members are connected by kinship ties defined by marriage; however, kinship does not determine the number of parents or the number of children. According to this definition, single-parent families, families with adopted children or families with children conceived within the relationship are also considered families. According to this approach, homosexual relationships are not considered a family because they are not socially recognised as marriage; childless couples are also not considered a family. Legitimacy, ceremony, social sanctions, social control, affective relationships, and recognition of sexual life are terms characteristic of this approach.

In practice, there are numerous deviations from these requirements. For example, the situation of children born in extramarital relationships is no longer rare, but society still associates procreation with a formal relationship.

In Polish legislation, the term *family* appears in numerous regulations, but *de facto* there is no single normative definition of the family. The definition of family can vary depending on the area of legislation. For example, the *Kodeks rodzinny i opiekuńczy* [Family and Guardianship Code] (*k.r.o.*; *Ustawa*, 1964) does not define the concept of family *explicitly*. According to the wording of Article 23 and Article 27 of the aforementioned Act, a family is formed by a woman and a man through marriage. Although case law has extended the concept of family in Article 23 *in fine* to include cohabitation, both grammatical and systemic interpretations argue for a narrowing of the concept of "[...] the family which the spouses have created through their relationship" (Article 23 *in fine*) to include only spouses and their children. In the *Ustawa o pomocy społecznej* [Act on social welfare] (*Ustawa*, 2004), on the other hand, the legislator extended the concept of family to include partnerships and other forms of cohabitation. According to Article 6(14), a family in a given legal act is considered to be related and unrelated persons living in a de facto relationship, living together and managing their household, whereby these two conditions must be met cumulatively. The constitutionally preferred vision of the family, on the other hand, is that "[...] marriage as a union of a woman and a man, the family, motherhood and parenthood are under the protection and care of the Republic of Poland" (*Kontytucja* [Constitution], 1997, art. 18).

There is also no single sociological definition. Sociological definitions focus on different characteristics of the family, thus articulating what is expected of it. For example, the well-known family sociologist Franciszek Adamski (2002) states that

[...] a family is a spiritual union of a small group of people, centred around a common household, characterised by mutual help and care, based on the belief in real or perceived biological connection, family and social tradition. A family group is distinguished from other groups by the co-occurrence of the following characteristics: members living together, sharing a surname, sharing property, biological continuity, and a shared spiritual culture (p. 29)

and for Zbigniew Tyszka (1979), a family is "[...] a group of people connected by marriage, kinship, affinity, or adoption"(Tyszka, 1979, p. 74). However, it should be noted that the sociologist also talks about "[...] non-legalised de facto marriages' with shared property, a home and children" (p. 78).

Nowadays, it is therefore proposed that instead of one definition of the family, there should be many, depending on the type of relationship and its family arrangement (Baker, 2001).

The family – the primary micro-environment for socialisation and upbringing, influencing the development of the child

The idea that the family is an important part of a child's environment, which influences their physical and psychological development and their attitude, is not new, but research in this area is still relevant.

The postmodern reality is characterised by a high level of change in the economic and socio-cultural spheres, which is a source of emerging states of uncertainty and danger. This situation makes it difficult for many families to adopt a rational approach to life. Particularly vulnerable are families with disabilities, people who are afraid of change and risk, for whom every new task is a major challenge, as well as families who are not very resourceful and have a lower level of education. A low level of education can correlate not only with a lack of elementary knowledge but also with a poor economic and housing situation and an inability to fulfil the function of care and upbringing. Pathological families form a separate group. The symptoms of pathology causing dysfunction in the realisation of basic family functions include alcoholism, criminality, domestic violence, prostitution, adult family members avoiding work, and personality disorders with symptoms of developmental disharmony and disintegration. Disintegration can lead to conditions such as frustration, apathy and pathological habits. Social pathologies also include social orphanhood. It is a manifestation of gross negligence of children by their parents, which leads to disorders in the child's psychophysical development.

In dysfunctional and pathological families*, the child's needs are not met and there are difficulties in raising the child. It is also difficult for these families to create a good home atmosphere that is conducive to establishing contacts and facilitating the development of psychosocial competencies.

If parents are interested in the "outside" and "inside" world of their child's relationships with friends, interests, needs, emotions, sadness, and anger, if they talk to their child a lot, treat them with respect and trust, then this child will not be submissive in adulthood, will have their own opinion and will be able to defend it logically and objectively. And most importantly, they have a healthy self-esteem. The actions they take are therefore in line with their abilities (Reykowski, 1970). They are also able to appreciate themselves; however, to appreciate oneself, one needs a circle of people who respect and appreciate them, and inspire them to act, and a properly functioning family plays an undeniable role in this. Dysfunctional and pathological families lack positive emotions – warmth and affection. A child, like an adult, has a strong sense of belonging to a group. They want someone to take an interest in them, to listen to them and try to understand them. In families that have problems with the fulfilment of the care and upbringing function, parents usually do not try to understand their child's behaviour, relationships are disturbed, and there is a lack of support and positive reinforcement. A dysfunctional family environment is not able to develop the child's ability to communicate properly, which is associated with self-esteem. Such a child may have problems functioning in adult life. The development of a child's skills and abilities therefore depends to a significant extent on family stimulation; other educational environments, including school, according to Leon Dyczewski (1995), only complement and develop the skills learned in the family home. Therefore, it is important to take all measures to strengthen and support the family environment, because they contribute to the quality of life and development of the child (Segiet, 2000).

In the American concept of benefit-oriented social work, which supports dysfunctional families and their children in their natural environment, there is a service called the *homemaker* (Dubois & Miley, 1996). They are provided by professionals whose tasks are: to conduct strengthening care activities, to help with housekeeping, to teach life skills, to provide pedagogical education for parents, and to shape proper parent-child interactions. The services provided by the *homemaker* must be carried out in such

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* In the opinion of Jadwiga Izdebska, "[...] a dysfunctional family does not fully fulfil its responsibilities towards its own children, neglects to fulfil its functions or creates a risk of this state occurring" (Izdebska, 2000, p. 34). A dysfunctional family lacks positive feelings, which are replaced by coldness, resentment and a lack of mutual respect between its members (Szczepański, 1972). Pathological families, on the other hand, are those that are in constant conflict with the law and morality, e.g., due to robbery, theft, smuggling, alcoholism, drug addiction, or crime (Kawula, 2007).

a way that the parents' acquisition of new skills necessary for the proper fulfilment of social roles is visible. The employees must be empathetic, and above all, they must not usurp the role of parents and take over their duties. Instead, they should complement and strengthen the parents' competencies in regard to their own children.

In Poland, the equivalent of the American *homemaker is* the family assistant. Family assistantship was introduced by the *Ustawa z 9 czerwca 2011 r. o wspieraniu rodziny i systemie pieczy zastępczej* [Act of 9 June 2011 on family support and the foster care system] (*Ustawa*, 2011), which came into force on January 1, 2012. The law specifies family assistants' educational requirements, responsibilities, and professional rights. The number of families that a family assistant can work with at the same time is, according to Article 15.4 of the Act, dependent on the difficulty of the tasks performed, with the proviso that it cannot be greater than 15. Work with a family can be carried out in the family's home environment or in an environment indicated by the family itself. This form of support is organised by the municipality or an entity commissioned by the municipality to carry out this task. These are:

– non-governmental organisations operating in the field of family support, foster care or social assistance,
– legal persons and organisational units operating based on the regulations on the relationship of the State to the Catholic Church in the Republic of Poland, the relationship of the State to other churches and religious associations, if they include activities for the benefit of children and families in their statutes (Article 190.1. paragraphs 1 and 2.).

Family assistance was optional between 2012 and 2014 but has been compulsory since 2015. Family assistance is provided with the family's consent and with their active participation. However, the legislator has reserved the right to oblige the family to work with a family assistant by court order.

Terminology – *family assistance* and *family assistant*. The role and tasks of a family assistant

Family assistance is a deliberate external (institutional) measure to support families in fulfilling their care and upbringing function. The main objective of assistance is to prevent the family from becoming dependent on outside help, and if this state of affairs does occur, the aim should be to reduce the duration or mitigate the effects. This action should be comprehensive, taking into account the current resources of the family and at the same time it must rely on the release and activation of the family's internal forces and their involvement. Family assistance is inextricably connected

with educational activity and is intended to gradually lead to a reduction in the size and intensity of the professional help and support provided. It is characterised by individualised work with the beneficiary and professional relationships.

Anna Kotlarska-Michalska (2011) understands family assistance as individual work "in" the family, "with" the family, and "for" the family. Monika Kornaszewska-Polak (2016), meanwhile, states that assistance

> [...] consists of supporting families experiencing exceptionally difficult problems that they are unable to handle on their own. The assistantship is a comprehensive activity focusing on: searching for solutions to their difficult situation together with the family, supporting parents in their care and upbringing function, organising the family's everyday life, and supporting them in contact with institutions and offices in the process of solving problems. Assistance also means supporting families in the educational field for children and adults, helping adults find work and helping them find employment on the labour market. Assistance is characterised by [...], introducing positive changes in the lives of beneficiaries aimed at improving their functioning and independence (pp. 39–40).

The assistantship is therefore aimed in particular at those families for whom the current assistance system has proved insufficient and there is a need to separate local social work from the function of allocating cash benefits (Lubińska-Tomczak, 2017).

The characteristic feature of assistance is helping the supported persons to meet their physical and psychological needs and eliminate the negative effects of undesirable actions. We will talk about the measurable effect of assistance when the members of a given family achieve sustainable development and full self-realisation.

The person providing support to families with multiple problems is a family assistant. A family assistant, as Izabela Krasiejko (2013) states, is not a carer, but a catalyst for change and a motivator for action. They primarily provide emotional, informational and instrumental support, with these individual types of support generally being provided comprehensively.

Emotional support consists of actions expressing willingness and care to help solve problems. A family assistant is therefore expected to show empathy, kindness and respect for the person being supported. It is also important for the assistant to use positive reinforcement, as it is a tool that can increase the likelihood of desired behaviour.

Informational support, which is based on feedback between the family assistant and the beneficiary, is also considered to be important. The family assistant informs the family about possible ways to solve problems and motivates them to take action to improve the supported person's life situation. In return, the family assistant expects feedback about the corrective steps taken.

Instrumental support is particularly important, as it aims to provide information on specific behaviours that can improve everyday life, strengthen family relationships and rebuild broken bonds.

Material support, based on the allocation of both financial and in-kind resources, should also be mentioned. Although this form of assistance is not part of the family assistant's tasks, they can take action to obtain material resources from other people, authorities or institutions (Chrząszcz, 2014).

In their work, family assistants can use a range of working models that determine the direction of their activities. Five working models are commonly discussed: the problem-solving model, the Solution-Focused Approach (SFA), Systems Theory, the ecosystem model, and motivational dialogue. Choosing the right working model allows the assistant to fulfil the functions assigned to them. In their work, they perform motivational and activating, advisory, coordination of family-oriented activities, psychological and emotional, educational, diagnostic and monitoring, caring and mediating functions (Malinowski, 2011).

It therefore seems that the scope of a family assistant's activities is very broad. Their priority task is to help families improve their living situation and enable them to function independently in society. Their role is also to help with acquiring the skills to run a household properly, solving psychological problems or solving parenting issues with children. The tasks of the assistant also include pedagogical education of parents, health education (in the field of health hygiene, proper nutrition, the necessity of treatment or rehabilitation), and education in the field of rational leisure time management. In addition, the activities of the family assistant should be directed at eliminating factors that could lead to the placement of a child in foster care. Ensuring the proper psychophysical development of children and providing them with a safe educational environment is crucial in reducing the scale of social problems.

The family assistant's responsibilities cover four areas: direct work with the child, direct work with the family, indirect activities for the benefit of the child and the family, and the organisation of their work (Mirewska, 2011). In carrying out their tasks, they become the coordinator of the activities of other social services, which also include work for the benefit of children and families within the scope of their duties and tasks. They are also often the moderator of multi-professional teams.

Partners of the family assistant should include social workers, educators, teachers, psychologists/therapists, as well as institutions such as courts, police, local government institutions and organisations, health clinics (primary care, specialised care, addiction and co-addiction treatment), municipal authorities, housing associations, housing communities. Partners for the return of the child to the family, such as family foster care organisers and educational care facilities, also play a significant role. This network and system approach to supporting and helping families with children allows for a more

in-depth look at the family's situation, a better understanding of it and the development of a joint action model. Only coordinated and complementary actions can bring measurable results.

Working with a family with many problems

Because of the current legal regulations, there are three ways in which a family experiencing difficulties in fulfilling their child-rearing and caregiving responsibilities can be assigned a family assistant:

1. At the request of the family itself, which is aware of the risks and dysfunctions associated with meeting, e.g., basic needs and development.
2. At the request of a social worker who has determined that the situation in a given family requires services other than those related to material dysfunction. In this case, the family is obliged to cooperate with the family assistant.
3. By court order. This usually happens when the family is dysfunctional, the welfare of the child/children is at risk and the family has not agreed to the support offered by the social worker.

How a family is qualified to work with a family assistant, therefore, has a significant impact on their attitude towards the assistant and the implementation of the individual assistance plan developed specifically for them. It is difficult to work with a beneficiary who has been "motivated" to work with an assistant by an institution. Focus group research conducted in the second quarter of 2024 shows that among the 8 (100% of the surveyed population) family assistants employed at the Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Bielsko-Biała, the least problematic are those who applied for support themselves. This is most common when a parent is trying to regain custody of their children who have been placed in foster care. As a rule, such a family is very active in solving their problems and is highly motivated to change a difficult situation resulting from, among other things, alcoholism, evading work, long-term unemployment, lack of resourcefulness, long-term illness or alternative forms of family life (cohabitation, cohabiting relationships, blended families, stepfamilies, families with complicated relationships due to children from previous relationships), which are related to the upbringing of children and the accepted parenting approach. The family assistant is then perceived as a person who gives a sense of security, brings hope for a change in the current life situation, a therapist, and a person who can always be depended on.

A negative attitude towards themselves (especially at the beginning of work) is observed by the assistants in question, in particular in families who have been granted this form of assistance by court decisions. In their opinion, such a situation may result

from: resistance and fear of drastic changes on the part of the beneficiaries, fear of en-trusting children to foster care, a demanding attitude, personality disorders caused by long-term use of psychoactive substances, medical conditions (e.g., anxiety neurosis, mental illness), intellectual disability. This situation is very difficult for the assistant and requires well-considered decisions and specialised skills, including psychological skills such as active listening, the art of persuasion, interpersonal relations, and com-petence in the basics of sociology, pedagogy, law (including family, administrative, and criminal law), legal regulations in the field of support and the foster care system, and developmental and educational psychology. family, administrative, criminal, and legal regulations in the field of support and the foster care system, developmental and educational psychology. An important component of the family assistant's com-petencies is also the basics of ethics. The family assistants should be responsible, credible, and reliable; they are required to treat beneficiaries equally, act purposefully and maintain confidentiality.

To ensure that the support provided to families with multiple problems is effec-tive in narrowing and alleviating their problematic situation, and at the same time is an ethical activity, it is worth adhering to the following requirements:

- the family should be supported at an early stage of dysfunction to prevent it from worsening;
- the family diagnosis should include, for example, data determining the family's potential, which determines both the family's strengths and weaknesses. The fam-ily assistant should know what the family is self-sufficient in and what needs to be strengthened to stimulate its internal strengths to take action to change the situation in which it finds itself;
- in the family diagnosis, it is important to identify the specific causes of the prob-lems to be able to eliminate them later;
- it is a good idea to ask the beneficiary to define their expectations and how they imagine the cooperation with the assistant;
- the form of support should be tailored to the family's needs so that the family can make regular attempts to solve problems on their own;
- an individual approach is important – each family has different problems, needs, and expectations, and each family has a different cause of dysfunction. Modern families are also very diverse in terms of the quality of their living conditions and lifestyles. The structure of the family and the forms of marital and fam-ily life are also diverse. Therefore, the division of roles and responsibilities and the quality of interaction between family members varies;
- support activities should also take spontaneity into account, the bureaucrat's attitude should be avoided, but at the same time certain boundaries that cannot be crossed should be set;

- in interpersonal contacts, the principle of cooperation and interpersonal dialogue should be taken into account;
- parents should be educated with elements of therapy and social work, and motivated to participate in group psycho-pedagogical activities;
- it is worth working towards the integration of the family with the environment in which it functions;
- the family assistant should maintain relations between the family and other aid institutions working for the family;
- the beneficiary should feel that the assistant wants to help them;
- the support provided should be based on ethical standards with particular emphasis on respect for privacy and human dignity;
- family assistants should be assigned to specific environments, and they should have qualifications that are tailored to the specific dysfunction present in the family;
- after the work with the family is completed, there should be reliable monitoring of the objectives that were achieved (this is an obligatory requirement of Article 15.1. point 16).

Conclusion

Strengthening families in crisis should be a priority task of social policy, because "[...] a family in crisis is not able to produce good people, as evidenced by the inheritance of pathologies, which poses a threat to society" (Joachimowska, 2010, p. 416).

The family assistant thus fulfils an invaluable role in supporting the family and counteracting social exclusion. It should be emphasised that they work primarily for the good of families, who would find it difficult to make positive changes in their lives without outside help. Using the family's internal and external resources, support and advice is the right way to strengthen the beneficiary and encourage them to take responsibility for their life. It is important that family assistants are not only substantively prepared and equipped with interdisciplinary knowledge, but also have the appropriate moral standing. It is important to bear in mind that the assistant's activities involve interfering in the families' lives.

Conducting research on the profession of family assistants and their activities can be an incentive to introduce necessary changes, which will contribute to improving the quality of services provided.

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