FACTORS AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CHILD IN THE FAMILY
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Abstract

A number of examinations identified variables which proved to help the optimal progress of a child. The level of presence of risk factors influencing the development of the child between 0 and 7 in the life of the families were examined in 980 families in Hungary. To verify the connection between the variables mathematical and statistical methods were applied. Our analysis showed that risk factors influencing the development of the child occur simultaneously in several cases and increase the possibility of an unfavourable development by strengthening the effect of each others.

Key words: child, development, family, risk factors, protective factors

1. INTRODUCTION

The needs and problems of identifying risk and protective factors presence in the family

Nowadays it is an evidence that family as a primary agent in socialization has a key role in child development. Several studies have identified those variables in the child's environment which help or even inhibit the optimal development, including the whole of personality and cognitive development. In the studies before 1965 primarily socioeconomic status of the family have been identified as an effect responsible for the child's cognitive development. From the end of the 1960s a practice started to spread when an interview was developed which examines those environmental features having an important role in child development. To ensure the way of dealing with a child, games, experiences and the possibilities to support development became the object of the examination. The most frequently applied research tool was the HOME-inventory (Home Observation for the Measurement of the Environment) which is still widely applied to combine observation and interview technique in development-related researches (Ribiczey 2010). Sameroff approached the relation between environment and development from a different aspect, he applied a multiple risk index with his colleagues in the Rochester Longitudinal Research. This risk index captures along 10 dimensions that how optimal, or even negative the child's environment. The identified features were the following: belonging to a minority group, employment of the head of the family, the highest educational level of the mother, family size the lack of the father, stressful life events, parenting attitudes and knowledge about development, anxiety of the mother, knowledge, mental health of the mother, parent-child interaction (Sameroff et al. 1993; Sameroff & Seifer 2011). During the preparation of the research tool, all these dimensions has been taking into account to compile a list of questions for parents.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

Our research is an exploratory, cross-sectional, descriptive study, with quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative (focus group interview) methods.

The target group of the parental attitude examination within the SROP 6.1.4. Early Childhood (0-7 years) priority project was a group of children between 0-7 years living in Hungary. The selected areas with nationwide coverage in the research were: Budapest, Baranya, Borsod-Abáuj-Zemplén, Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Vas counties. The questionnaires were allocated by health visitors who were included in the representative sample of the other two elements of the research (time scale and expert attitude examination). The sampling was implemented as part of a two-stage random proportional method. From July to August 2013, 380 health visitors chose three children between 0-7 years per
capita randomly from the children population within the district boundaries. 980 evaluable questionnaires left after the recording of the 1140 pieces of distributed questionnaire after data setting and cleaning in SPSS program. In our questionnaire-based study on satisfaction of parents related to basic care and their attitude towards parenting, one parent (or tutelary) represent the parents. As a part of the qualitative research, experiences from the focus group interviews supported the compiling of the questionnaire (10 focus group interviews occurred, with 93 parents attended).

2.1. The aim of the questionnaires related to the exploration of risk and protective factors

During the identification of risk and protective factors present in the family our primary aim was to determine the level of risk factors named by Sameroff occurring in the families to get to know the incidence of these factors. We have not examined all the 10 dimensions because of the quantitative research, cross-sectional nature. To map the socio-economic status our questions focused on the family structure, the highest educational level of the parents, occupation position in the structure, and ethnicity. We applied the shortened version of CRPR questionnaire to examine parenting style. To assess the knowledge about development we compared children's development as perceived by the parent and the health visitor, and identified those who misconceive their child's development process. No data were collected about the stressful events of life, maternal anxiety, maternal mental health, as well as parent-child interaction. Accordingly, we can make findings partially regarding families rearing a 0-7 year-old child on the basis of the risk index according to Sameroff.

2.2. Method of the statistical analysis

After the descriptive statistical tests to explore the closer relationship between the variables mathematical statistical tests, correlation analysis, χ² test were applied for the analysis of the named variables in the risk index. The effects of the seemingly relevant variables were confirmed by multivariate analysis. Statistical significance was considered at p≤0.05 value.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Socio-economic status as risk, protective factors

The mapping of family socio-economic status serves the knowledge of social background, which is a strong outcome predictor of development. However, since SES is a static indicator, it is unable to capture the dynamic changes in the environment. The social status of parents affects a child's development through several intermediary variables. Numerous studies have shown that lower social status will result in less optimal parent-child interaction. Parents with lower social status are not always adequately respond to their infants' signals, less responsiveness than parents with higher social status. Children of highly educated mothers are particularly favored where maternal responsiveness is significantly higher.

In our study we asked about the socio-economic status of the family according to the dimensions of Sameroff in respect of family size, the mother's level of education, the ethnicity of parents and the place of the father in the occupational structure. 32% of mothers involved in the study do not have a high school degree, which on the basis of Field's researches projects a less active interaction between the mother and baby (Field 1980). Fathers are working in the significant part of the examined families (87%), only 11% of the sample were unemployed or getting social aids. Sameroff considered the unemployment status of a father as a risk according to the development of a child. In our study we formulated our questions to identify ethnicity similar to census. Accordingly, those identifying themselves as Gypsy/Roma are present in 12%. Based on the index, belonging to a minority group is considered to be a risk factor from the point of the child's development.

Based on the results according to Sameroff the intelligence level of children is significantly lower in families with 7 or more risks (average 30 points) in comparison with the level of intelligence of
children living in the risk-free families. The child's behavior was not included in the risk index at all, which means that it is possible to predict the differences manifested in intelligence without examining the child. Therefore, in this present study we considered it important to examine how typical that these risk factors occur together. During the development of multiple risk index by Sameroff, mothers not finishing high school were listed in the risk group from the point of the child's development. Therefore, analysis along the three categories - where on the basis of their level of education the mothers were classified in groups up to eight class, graduates of secondary education and graduate from higher education - has proved to be relevant. Among the interviewed Gypsy/Roma families there is a high proportion of mothers carried a maximum of eight elementary classes, so thus children in these families have disadvantage in development compared to the Hungarian mothers with secondary and upper education (Figure 1). In terms of the level of education a significant difference is shown between the Gypsy/Roma and Hungarian mothers (p<0.05).

![Figure 1. Correlation between the highest education of a mother and ethnicity (n=980)](image)

The unemployment status of the father is considered to be a factor hindering child development. The originally five attribute regarding the father's place in occupational structure has been reduced to three, so in addition to the working groups the child-care or pension-like and the unemployed/social groups. Among the Gypsy/Roma families the ratio of fathers who are unemployment/getting social aid is rather high. In terms of work the difference between the Gypsy/Roma and Hungarian fathers is significant (Figure 2).
According to Sameroff, the lack of the father may be qualified as a risk factor. In 10 cases of the examined families (11%), mothers have not indicated fathers as a person involved in the upbringing of the child. Correlation analyzes show that the father's absence is more typical in the Gypsy/Roma families, in families where mothers participated in primary school education at the most, as well as among fathers who are unemployed or getting social aid. The differences are significant in the above listed cases. The high number of dependents commonly means difficulties for the financial situation and living conditions of families. In the families involved to the research, the average number of children is 1.95, which shows differences based on socio-demographic characteristics. While in Gypsy/Roma families the average number of children is 2.57, in Hungarian families it is 1.87. The mother's highest level of education also affects the number of children in a way that in case of the lowest (up to 8 classes) educated mothers the average number of children is the highest (2.56), while this number is the lowest among those having high school degree or diploma (1.74). In relation to fathers those who are unemployed or getting social aid or pension-like supplies are raising more children than working fathers.

3.2. Parenting style as risk or protective factor

The parental treatment in personality development of children can induce both positive and negative developments. Authors of domestic and foreign researches found similar results when examining the correlation between adolescent, youth and adult deviant behavior and parent-child relationship. They have indicated that the background of criminality, alcoholism, and other deviations as well as anxiety and low self-esteem may be problematic parent-child relationship, which in itself deserves the deeper exploration of parenting style and practice (Csima at al. 2015b). The relation of anxiety parental behavior was examined by Ranschburg and colleagues in domestic conditions, and the results have shown strong correspondence between cold-restrictive parental practice and anxiety (Ranschburg, Bolla & Sipos 1984). The researches of Parker shows that less caring, but strictly restrictive parental treatment stands together with the high risk of several neurotic disorders (Parker 1983). While Narita et al highlighted the relation between low parental care and depression appearing during life (Narita et al. 2000), Margitics and Pauwlik drew attention to the connection between the effect of parenting and the child’s coping strategies (Margitics & Pauwlik 2006). The reviewed surveys in summary featured the negative consequences of inadequate parental treatment.
From the factors affecting personality development of children, the positive role of supporting parenting styles have shown in numerous studies. Researches of Weiss, Schwarz and Oroszné drew attention to that supporting, increased caring parental manifestations have the most favorable effects in late adolescence (Weiss & Schwarz 1996; Oroszné 2002). Studies of Sallay and Munnich, have shown that children of highly restrictive and highly caring mothers reported the highest level of trust and understanding (Sallay & Munnich 1999). From the point of psychological self-development less restrictive and highly caring atmosphere conducts the monitoring of abilities, preferences, emotions and personality characteristics and the emphasis of these in self-image. The main conclusion of our research is that for the development of self the warm, accepting mother attitude has a beneficial effect, and thus it proves to be a protective factor from the point of personality development (Sallay & Munnich 1999).

In our own research during the analysis we identified the variables that affect parenting style. In this respect the mother's highest level of education, age, the location of the family, the ethnicity of the respondent (parent/guardian), and age of the child proved to be differentiating factors, however, these variables are not independent of each other. We were looking for an answer to the question of how the mother’s highest qualification as an independent variable influences the parenting practice. The results of the φ2-test demonstrated a significant difference between the low educational level of the mothers and higher education in parenting practice. Accordingly, a strong correlation was observed between the mother’s level of education and the restriction manifesting in parenting practice. According to the χ2-test result the mother's highest level of education differentiates not only in restrictive parenting, but also in care manifesting in parenting practice (p <0.01). The lower the educational level the mother has, the less flexible parental attitudes and practices appears in parenting (Csima at al. 2015a).

3.3. Knowledge about development, as risk and protective factor

Benasich and Brooks-Gunn in the field of thinking about the development of children, groups of mothers with categorical and perspective thinking were divided (Benasich & Brooks-Gunn 1996). The mother's knowledge about the progress of child development was a good predictor of both home environment and the child's later behavioral problems, as well as the child's intelligence. The mother's knowledge about the child's development determine how the mother structures the environment of the child that affects the outcome of development. Landry et al, in this context drew attention to that the thinking of the mother about the developmental needs of a child influences his responsiveness, and it correlates with maternal techniques applied during the game activities (Landry et al. 2001). Adequate knowledge of the mother about development correlates with better strategies for maternal managing attention, which stimulates the child's learning processes (Ribiczey 2010).

3.4. Factors influencing the opinion about parents with reference to the development of their children

Only a few literature data are available about the parent's perception of adequate is the development of the child, that is, how consistent with the opinion of the professional which is in principle objective and based on standards, objective and professional assessment of standards-based. Our research provided an opportunity to recognize that particular area of development where parents are able to correctly assess the development of their child compared to the peers (in this case a similar opinion to a specialist/health visitor), and also to their judgment about those factors which have influence. Descriptive statistical results show that while the monitoring of sensory functions the perception of parents and professionals hardly differ from each other (for seeing and hearing: the difference is between 3.8% and 2.8%), regarding the perception of speech and mental development the difference is highly significant (23.3% and 24.6%).

Factors influencing the assessment of parents regarding child development were identified by multifactorial analysis, with odds ratio and relative risk. Mostly the low (up to 8 elementary class) educational level and poor financial situation inhibited the parents to answer questions concerning the development of their children in the questionnaire. Among parents who assessed the development...
level of their child higher than the opinion of professionals examined, in the field of physical, intellectual and language development a significantly higher rate represented from bad financial situation and Gypsies/Roma. Over the previous two groups in the field of speech and mental development children considered to be more developed by parents with a maximum of eight elementary classes, who are unemployed and those who belong to restrictive and not caring parenting style categories. Regarding parents perceiving the development of their child negatively compared to the professionals statistical analysis showed correlation in case of educational level. In the possession of our findings it can be said that parents with higher educational qualifications compared to other parents underestimated the development of their children opposed to the professional in a significantly higher rate. This naturally raises the question of whether these parents are over-careful and over-critical of their child's development, or perhaps a part of them considers the development of their children correctly even against the professionals (Deutsch 2015).

4. DISCUSSION, SUMMARY

Several studies have shown that in the optimal development of children family environment plays a key role. With the application of the multiple risk index Sameroff and colleagues measures how the child's environment is optimal, or even have negative impact along 10 dimensions (Sameroff et al. 1993).

During the preparation of our research tool a series of questions for parents has been compiled on the basis of the dimensions of Sameroff and the experiences of focus group interviews. While exploring the risk and protective factors present in the family our primary aim was to determine the rate of these named risk factors in the examined families and to recognize combined incidence of these factors. Due to the nature of this research, not all the ten dimensions were examined, we made findings with limited validity based on the available data about the families with children between 0-7 years old. From the point of the child's development the low educational level of the mother, the unemployed status of the father, the absence of the father, the high number of dependents, the family is belonging to a minority group and parenting style unfavorably affecting child development are considered to be risk factors.

Our analysis revealed that these factors often occur together, and by strengthening the effect of each other contribute to disadvantageous development, increasing the risk of fallback. The shortened version of 40 items of the CRPR questionnaire was applied to examine parenting style of which four statements were deleted. As expected, the questionnaire was suitable for the examination of parenting styles: scale elements for both restrictive and the caring dimensions showed significantly high inner consistence. The scale, in particular the weighted scale designed by us seemed to be a good predictor of the developmental lag. Parental opinions given in the focus group interviews consistent with our results obtained during the questionnaire survey. The lack of interaction between parents and children is an element of risk index according to Sameroff. In our survey in-depth exploration was beyond possibility, however during focus group discussions parents emphasized the importance of continuous attention and interaction. Divorce (father absence as risk index), unemployment, and long-term stress is also in line with those listed in the risk index. It is an extremely important achievement of the focus group discussions that the participating parents classified restrictive, prohibiting practices as factors endangering the development of the child. This finding corresponds with the results formulated after analysis of data obtained from questionnaires, so similar data collected from the analysis of qualitative and quantitative methods support the validity of our research.
REFERENCES


