



THE EFFICIENCY OF A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERVENTION FOR THE CHILDREN HAVING THEIR PARENTS LEFT TO WORK ABROAD

Elena Bonchis
University of Oradea, Romania
ebonchis@uoradea.ro

Delia Birle
University of Oradea, Romania
deliabreban@yahoo.com

Rosana Stan
University of Oradea, Romania
rosana_stan@yahoo.com

Monica Secui
University of Oradea, Romania
monlias@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

The migration of the workforce has constantly grown in the past decade. In UNICEF's and Alternative Social Association's reports it is shown that in 2008, in Romania 350 000 children had one of their parents gone and 126 000 had both of their parents gone off to work elsewhere. The participants to this study were 40 children, aged 9-10, who had in that time one or both parents at work, abroad. Randomly, they were grouped in intervention group and control group. The intervention activities focused on self-knowledge, strengths, self-esteem, social skills, emotional and behavioral control. Significant results were found, on different dimensions. Implications of the study will be discussed

Keywords: psychological intervention, social and emotional development, children, parents left to work abroad

INTRODUCTION

The programs initiated by Ann Vernon, *Thinking, Feeling, Behaving* (Vernon, 1989) and the *Passport Program* (Vernon, 1998) offer a comprehensive curriculum for teachers, counselors, educational psychologists, social workers so they can use it to help children and adolescents learn the core concepts about mental health. Bernard's and his collaborators' research shows that these four foundations are sustained by 11 positive skills of the mind: 1. Self-acceptance, 2. Risk taking, 3. Independence, 4. Optimism, 5. Internal Locus of Control, 6. Frustration tolerance, 7. Goal setting, 8. Time management, 9. Tolerance of others, 10. Reflective problem solving, 11. Tolerance of limits. These skills form a positive mindset. The program has experimental support and is being successfully applied in schools from Australia, the United States of America and England (Ellis and Bernard, 2007).

Hudson (1993, apud Bernard, 2006) examines the effect of rational-emotional education on school performance, motivation and self-esteem (*You Can Do It Program*). He found significant differences in favour of the experimental group with regards to their performance at mathematics and reading. There haven't been significant differences concerning the self-concept, motivation and the evaluations conducted by the teachers.



The migration of the workforce has constantly grown in the past decade, the majority of the international migrants, approximately 64 million having their residence in Europe. In UNICEF's and Alternative Social Association's reports it is shown that in 2008, in Romania 350 000 children one of their parents gone and 126 000 had both of their parents gone off to work elsewhere (<http://www.unicef.ro/&files/copii-ramasi-acasa-.pdf>, at 21.05.2010).

The research rapport of the study "Migration effects: the children left at home. The risks and the solutions" realized by Soros Foundation Romania (<http://www.soros.ro/ro/publicatii.php>) emphasize the existence of a larger number of negative consequences compared to the positive ones, which are coming together with the higher financial level for the Romanian children and adolescents left at home after their parents decided to work abroad. The frequent problems are depressive symptoms, loneliness feelings, abandonment.

An aspect of the family that can transform it into a potential risk factor lies within its structure. Many single parents prove to have all the necessary abilities to offer their children a proper education, however quite often the risk to generate social-emotional problems is revealed. The most frequent incomplete parenting scenarios are the ones generated by divorce, death, incarceration, temporary separation through working abroad. These aspects will be discussed as follows.

The present study is based on the studies conducted by Bonchis, Birle, Stan (2010), Bonchis, Birle, Roman (2010) and Secui, Dindelegan, Roman (2010) which state that there are significant differences between the children with and incomplete parenting scenario due to their parents leaving to work and the children with both parents. The authors mention the necessity of an intervention program focusing on the social – emotional dimension, dimension on which the incomplete parenting situation has had an impact.

The main objective of the present study is to demonstrate the efficiency of a rational-emotional and behavioral educational program for the children in the situation of incomplete parenting (on the level of irrationality, the optimization of social relations and behavioral problems, respectively the increase in self-esteem).

METHOD

Research Hypothesis

Children in the situation of incomplete parenting increase their level of self-esteem, improve the quality of peer relation and the self-control and, also, decrease the level of irrationality.

Design

Repeated measures, with control group.



Participants

The participants to this study were 40 children, aged 9-10, who have one or both parents at work, abroad. Randomly, they were grouped in intervention group and control group. All participants are from the suburb area of Oradea town, where the life quality is not very good.

Instruments

The following instruments were used:

- A measure of self-esteem, in relation with peers (alpha Cronbach =.75), with family (alpha Cronbach =.86) and with school (alpha Cronbach =.84), consisting in 28 items, having the items from *Hare self-esteem scale* (Bruce R. Hare, 1985, apud Fischer, J. & Corcoran, K., 1994) as a base line in constructing the new items;
- Child and Adolescent Scale of Irrationality, (CASI - Bernard and Laws, 1988, apud Trip, 2007). Trip (2007) presented the results of the validity study for this scale on Romanian population;
- Self-statement scale for the social interaction with others, is a measure of social anxiety, consisting in 23 items and two factors – positive and negative cognitions during social interactions. The items were generated on the same structure as the items from Social Interaction Self-Statement Test (Glass, Merluzzi, Biever, Larsen, 1982, apud Fischer, J. & Corcoran, K., 1994). Alpha Cronbach was calculated for the two subscales: .74 for positive cognitions and .86 for negative cognitions associated with social interactions;
- Self-control rating scale – SCRS; Kendall, Wilcox, 1979, apud Fisher, Corcoran, 1994. With 58 evaluators, an alpha Cronbach =.80 was found, for the 33 items.

Procedure

The pretesting for intervention group took place at the beginning of January of the school year 2009-2010. The intervention took place throughout 10 weeks, once a week for one hour. The topics covered throughout the program are part of the program proposed by Birle (in Bonchis coord., 2010). The intervention activities were carried out by a school psychologist, who worked together with the teachers, in a school from Oradea town suburb.

RESULTS

Data were collected and analyzed, using descriptive and inferential statistics. Data distributions were normal in population (conclusions after calculated Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) for the variables implied in the study. Factorial ANOVA was used for the effect of intervention and group variables on the social and emotional dimensions. The results presented here are mostly focussed on the psycho-educational program effect for the intervention group.



Table 1. Means and standard deviations for the self-esteem (SE) dimensions in pretest, posttest and follow-up moments

variables		N	m pretest	s.d. pretest	m posttest	s.d. posttest	m follow-up	s.d. follow-up
Intervention	General SE	20	76.05	5.08	93.10	8.51	93.35	8.89
	SE - peers	20	23.55	1.87	29.80	4.95	29.00	4.87
	SE - family	20	26.25	1.97	32.65	2.58	33.05	3.45
	SE - school	20	26.25	3.61	30.65	3.84	31.30	2.93
Control	General SE	20	85.05	8.94	85.20	8.30	88.05	11.78
	SE - peers	20	26.50	4.38	27.05	2.60	27.50	3.05
	SE - family	20	31.35	3.18	31.05	2.39	31.60	4.61
	SE - school	20	27.20	4.38	27.10	5.98	28.95	6.63

For all dimensions of self-esteem, we found significant differences for intervention factor and also for group factor. For the SE in relation with peers, we found for intervention factor [F(2;76)= 10.875, p<.01], for SE – family, we found [F(2;76)= 15.728, p<.01], for SE – school the results show [F(2;76)= 6.617, p<.01]. For the general SE, the F value is [F(2;76)= 18.374, p<.01].

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for the social relations in pretest, posttest and follow-up moments

Group	N	m pretest	s.d. pretest	m posttest	s.d. posttest	m follow-up	s.d. follow-up
Intervention	20	39.65	4.23	29.00	8.52	26.55	8.69
Control	20	33.05	12.79	29.55	3.61	30.80	9.08

We found statistical significant results for intervention factor, the obtained values are [F(2;76)= 9.731, p<.01].

Table 3. Means and standard deviations for the irrationality in pretest, posttest and follow-up moments

variables		N	m pretest	s.d. pretest	m posttest	s.d. posttest	m follow-up	s.d. follow-up
Intervention	Irrationality	20	88.70	9.75	73.75	10.42	74.85	10.31
	LFT work	20	25.65	4.65	21.55	6.86	20.25	7.63
	Global eval.	20	24.85	3.55	18.45	4.14	19.80	6.15
	Absol. demand.	20	21.65	2.75	19.90	4.93	20.95	5.49
	LFT rules	20	16.55	2.99	13.85	2.60	13.85	2.60
Control	Irrationality	20	85.60	16.00	72.65	11.80	73.55	13.29
	LFT work	20	25.45	6.90	24.00	4.82	24.30	6.13
	Global eval.	20	23.50	5.31	19.45	4.59	19.80	5.35
	Absol. demand.	20	21.10	4.37	16.85	3.51	17.50	3.62



LFT rules	20	15.55	4.13	11.95	2.03	11.95	2.03
-----------	----	-------	------	-------	------	-------	------

For LFT (low frustration tolerance) in relation with rules dimension we found significant differences, $[F(2;76)=3.474, p<.05]$, for absolute demands for justice we found, for intervention factor $[F(2;76)=5.516, p<.01]$, for global evaluation of self we found $[F(2,76)=13.099, p<.01]$. Also, for LFT in relation with work dimension, related to intervention factor, the results are $F(2;76)=25.520, p<.01$. The global score of irrationality show also significant differences between the intervention moments, with $[F(1.728;65.671) =17.821, p<.01]$. When we analyze the result of the control group, we can see how irrationality slightly decreases, so we can hardly consider the results of the intervention group as a consequence of our intervention.

Tabel 4. Means and standard deviations for the self-control in pretest, posttest and follow-up moments, as evaluated by teachers

Group	N	m pretest	s.d. pretest	m posttest	s.d. posttest	m follow-up	s.d. follow-up
Intervention	20	86.75	23.31	61.10	14.17	60.85	12.61
Control	20	69.20	19.93	70.25	24.08	68.25	22.14

We found statistical significant differences between the level of self-control problems compared in pretest, posttest and follow-up moments $[F(1.456;55.231)= 7.919, p<.01]$. In the teachers' opinion for the intervention group the self control problems dramatically reduced from pretest to posttest.

CONCLUSION

All the research hypothesis were sustained by the results of inferential statistics. ANOVA bifactorial was the statistical procedure used in the data analysis and the research design is a mixed one.

We consider that this intervention program proved its efficiency in reducing emotional, social and behavioral problems of the children who have the parents left to work abroad. The school psychologists and the teachers who are trained in school psychology are encouraged to use this program to support these children. More and more children are affected by this situation. These children are also in danger to dropout school because of the loss of motivation for learning. This loss of interest and motivation is based, frequently, on the loneliness, depression and abandonment feelings they experience. It is necessary to support them, in a multisystemic intervention: to imply the extended family, to imply the local community, school, psychological services and social assistance services.

REFERENCES

- Bernard, M. E. (2006). It's time we teach social-emotional competence as well as we teach academic competence. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, 22, 103–119.
- Bonchiș, E. (coord) (2010). *Impactul parentingului incomplet asupra dezvoltării soci-emoționale a copilului și adolescentului: modalități de intervenție psiho-educatională. Ghid pentru cadre didactice*, Editura Universității din Oradea, Oradea.
- Bonchiș, E., Bîrle, D., & Roman, D. (2010). Behavioral and self-control problems in the case of adolescents in the situation of incomplete parenting, *Analele Universității din Oradea, Fascicula Psihologie*, Vol.XVIII, 95-104.



- Bonchiș, E., Bîrle, D., & Stan, R. (2010). Parenting incomplet: Impactul asupra stimei de sine la copii. *Revista de Psihologie școlară*.
- Ellis, A., & Bernard, E. M. (2007). *Terapia Rațional Emotivă și Comportamentală în tulburările copilului și adolescentului: Teorie, Practică și cercetare*, Editura RTS, Cluj-Napoca.
- Fischer, J., & Corcoran, K. (1994). *Measures for clinical practice. a sourcebook. Volume 1. Couples, Families and Children*. New York: The Free Press.
- Secui, M., Dindelegan, C., & Roman, D. (2010). Probleme de internalizare la adolescenții cu părinți plecați la muncă în străinătate, în *Revista de Psihologie Școlară*, Editura Universității din Oradea Vol.III, Nr. 5, ISSN:1844 – 1815, 47-61.
- Trip, S. (2007). *Educație rațional emotivă și comportamentală: Formarea deprinderilor de gândire rațională la copii și adolescenți*, Editura Universității din Oradea.
- Vernon, A. (1998b). *The passport program: A journey through emotional, social, cognitive, and self-development, grades 1-5*. Champaign, IL: Research Press.
- Vernon, A., (1989). *Thinking, feeling, behaving: An emotional education curriculum for children/grades 1-6*. Research Pr Pub.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted with the support of CNCSIS, by the research grant PN II Idei 666/2009