

# ATTITUDE OF FAMILIES IN DIFFICULTY AND SOCIAL WORKERS TO SOCIAL SERVICES

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**Abstract.** The article presents an overview of the scientific literature on the causes of difficulties faced by families related to the upbringing of children, neglect, and lack of social skills, addictions, inability to manage the family budget, unemployment, poverty, violence and other problems. The aim of the research is to analyze the attitudes of families experiencing difficulties and social workers towards the provided social services. The results of the research revealed the most important reasons for the emergence of families experiencing difficulties and the importance of social assistance.

**Keywords:** family, family in difficulty, empowerment.

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## INTRODUCTION

The subjects of families with problems are relevant in many EU countries, including Lithuania. As the economic and social situation changes in Lithuania, some families are not able to adapt to the new conditions. The difficult economical situation in urban and rural areas, unemployment, poverty, the underdeveloped network of pre-school institutions prevents individuals from participating in the labour market. There are also a number of negative consequences for families of alcohol or drug abuse, violence, neglect of children, inability to manage domestic and financial life. They find themselves marginalized and can no longer successfully integrate into society. In these families, underage children are the main victims, who often have low self-assessment and lack of social skills, and therefore need comprehensive social support. This subject is not sufficiently explored in the scientific literature and requires more detailed research in order to reduce the causes of occurrence of such families and make their return to a full-fledged more effective.

Frequently, a family with social problems seeks to get financial support, but basically finds it difficult to change its quality of life and is unable to perform its basic functions. It therefore needs a wide range of assistance, such as the provision of information, the development of social skills, crisis management, positive attitudes, values and the services that shape responsibility for oneself and one's family. The Law on Strengthening of the Family of the Republic of Lithuania (2017) specifies the basic package of family services - psychosocial and social skills development and support for families, child care and education, health, education, socio-cultural services providing necessary assistance to strengthen and provide with opportunities to create a safe, healthy and sustainable environment in the family.

Successful outcomes of a social worker depend on his / her competencies, ability to apply, combine and continuously improve them. Social work is a complex, emotionally stressful activity that places special demands on the professional, such as the ability to reflect and optimally regulate activities in the face of difficulties. Often, social workers working with families, due to the heavy workload and lack of time, do not have the opportunity to get to know the family better and provide it with more effective help, and some families lack motivation to change their situation, recognize the problems and tackle them independently.

The object is the attitude of families in difficulty and social workers to social services.

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The goals:

1. To characterize the family in difficulty.
2. To identify the causes of occurrence of families in difficulty and possibilities of social workers assistance.
3. To investigate the opinion of the families and social workers on the assistance provided.

The methods: scientific literature analysis, qualitative research- semi-structured interview, content analysis.

The research involved 3 social workers and 3 women from families with problems.

## CAUSES OF OCCURENCE OF FAMILIES WITH PROBLEMS

The family, as a small community, is like a model of a small society in which, according to Z. Cikatavičienė (2014) forms human character traits, attitudes towards moral and cultural values, and socializes children. Parents are the first to become the educators of their children, who are protected and defended, pass on the traditions of the family and the nation, develop human values, and prepare them as full members of society and the community. However, it happens that families often face various crisis situations or social risk factors that disturb the balance of family relationships. Families who are unable to cope with the problems they encounter gradually become vulnerable, cease to perform their functions, and after a while begin to feel influenced by social risk factors. Therefore, in the book “Social Work. Introduction to Professional Activity” (2004) the main risk factors for families, such as socio-economic, socio-demographic, medical, sanitary, psychological, pedagogical and criminal are presented.

According to V. Ivanauskienė (2012), families who are unable to cope with the problems are more vulnerable, and the children of such families have difficulties in educational institutions. It is noticed that they often come unwashed, dirty and hungry, they have not seen toys, do not have the necessary learning aids. This shows that the home does not provide the right conditions for their development and improvement, and growing up in such families children do not acquire the simplest social skills, do not have the basic knowledge about household tools, because their household is very poor. Most of such families live in social housing, dormitories, with parents or rent a dwelling place. In their homes dominate clutter, broken furniture, there is no hot water, gas, electricity, and they are in debt for services.

According to researchers, poverty increases the risk of neglect and violence against children in these families, but the stereotype that all poor families do not care for and abuse their children cannot be relied upon.

It can be stated that the number of such families is not decreasing, especially in rural areas, where the parents or one of the parents with whom the child lives, does not have sufficient social skills and motivation to manage their lives independently, is unemployed and cannot or does not care and raise children, create necessary conditions for physical, mental and spiritual development, and uses the received state support not for the interests of the family. The main feature of these families is that one or both parents have harmful habits (addiction to alcohol, drugs, toxic and psychotropic substances), frequent drinking occurs in the families, which does not ensure the child's right to normal living conditions, education and rest.

Social workers play an important role in helping these families, their main goal is to return the family the opportunity to improve social functioning, promote close communication, the ability to create new favorable economic and psychological conditions in the family.

According to R. Petrauskaitė - Dusevičienė, T. Jasiukevičiūtė (2014), in social work it is important to empower a person in order to reduce the feeling of hopelessness of a family member in a difficult situation, to promote change and change the surrounding environment, make effective decisions, provide freedom of choice, the necessary knowledge, skills, resources and at the same time encouraging responsibility for poor lifestyle and their actions. Meaningful social relations, according to M. Vensloviėnė (2015), define the content of empowerment by exchanging available information, sincere communication, respect, tolerance and responsibility. Meaningful social relations, according to M. Vensloviėnė (2015), define the content of empowerment by exchanging available information, sincere communication, respect, tolerance and responsibility.

Social work with families with social problems is complex, where professionals from various fields are involved - psychologists, social pedagogues, doctors, employees of the internal affairs system and others. The goal of a social worker is to provide assistance to the family by identifying the problem and making a decision, which is a constant search for tools, methods, ways of community support so that the family can live a full life.

In summary, a family with social problems is a family with children under the age of 18 and at least one of the parents suffers from addictions, due to a lack of social skills, unable to properly care for children, use psychological, physical or sexual abuse against them, and received state support uses for non-family interests and endangers the full development and safety of children. Therefore, social work with the family is specific, where the proper distribution of actions in crisis situations is important. The ability of a social worker to communicate and cooperate, to earn the trust of the family, increases the chances of enabling the family to lead an independent, full life faster and it gives the person the opportunity to change, think and act more critically and responsibly, be responsible for their lifestyle and actions.

## RESEARCH ON SOCIAL NEEDS OF FAMILIES IN DIFFICULTY

The empirical research method was chosen for the research - semi-structured interview, which is the most acceptable and most often used in modern qualitative research, because it provides an opportunity to look at the human problem more comprehensively, through his prism, perception, individuality, social reality.

The research involved three social workers – Rasa, Ausra and Lina (names changed based on confidentiality), working in town X with families with social problems (see Table 1).

Table 1.

### Demographic data of social workers

| No. | Name  | Age | Education                | Work experience | Number of families |
|-----|-------|-----|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| 1.  | Rasa  | 35  | Higher college education | 8 years         | 11 families        |
| 2.  | Ausra | 41  | Higher college education | 10 years        | 11 families        |
| 3.  | Lina  | 31  | Higher college education | 5 years         | 10 families        |

The research also involved three women whose families had problems, Gabriele, Paulina and Angele (names changed). They all are unmarried but live together with the children's parents. Only Gabriele is employed, while the other two women do not work and live on the benefits they receive and random wages of their cohabitants (see Table 2).

Table 2.

### Demographic data of women from families in difficulty

| No. | Name     | Age | Education               | Number of children | Marital status |
|-----|----------|-----|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| 1.  | Gabriele | 25  | Basic, (employed)       | 2                  | Cohabiting     |
| 2.  | Paulina  | 24  | Vocational (unemployed) | 1                  | Cohabiting     |
| 3.  | Angele   | 45  | Basic (unemployed)      | 4                  | Cohabiting     |

Social workers found that working with families in difficulty is challenging, requiring continuous improvement, good communication skills, consistency, flexibility, openness, honesty, non-judgment and empathy. However, they expressed a concern that there are too many such families for social workers to return them to normal life quickly. The causes of social problems in many families, according to social workers, are lack of social skills, poor lifestyle, lack of care for their children, violence, alcoholism, poverty, lack of responsibility, and children growing up in these families take over and realize the negative patterns of family behavior (see Table 3).

According to V. Rimkus, and S. Zemguliene (2013), families with problems who experience marginalization and social exclusion achieve the best results when not only social workers but also family relatives, loved ones, neighbors and community members are involved in the assistance process.

According to the opinion of social workers it can be stated that the constant lack of money, inability to distribute it, alcohol consumption, do not allow to provide children with teaching aids, quality food, clothing, organize their leisure time, take care of health and in the families alcohol consumption, clutter, unemployment and neglect of children often dominate. Parents are unable to understand their mistakes and harm they make to their children, they do not try to help themselves, and are hostile to the support of others, sometimes pouring out their anger, dissatisfaction, and even aggression on the social worker. Neighbors and relatives find it difficult to get involved in helping. Ausra and Lina noted that poverty, lack of education, lack of adequate housing, work, inability to take care of their children's upbringing, meeting their needs, as well as reluctance to change, admit mistakes made, hinder their integration into society.

When providing social assistance social workers identify family problems and plan activities in such a way, that it is as beneficial as possible for the family and help to solve the problems that have arisen, using all possible ways and possibilities to help these families integrate faster into society.

Table 3.

**Opinion of social workers on occurrence causes of families with problems**

| Category                                    | Subcategory                           | Confirmatory statements   |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Occurrence causes of families with problems | Unemployment                          | <...> <i>The most often cause is unwillingness to work.</i> [Rasa]; <...> <i>Failure to find a job due to low education</i> <...> [Ausra]; <...> <i>Inability to keep a job.</i> <...> [Lina]   |
|   | Addictions                            | <...> <i>Alcohol predominates in most families...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa; Lina] <...> <i>people abuse alcohol and lose their jobs quickly.</i> <...> [Ausra];   |
|   | Violence                              | <...> <i>There are many reasons, the main one is alcohol consumption, and the consequence of it is violence...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Ausra] <...> <i>one of the parents in the family is violent.</i> <...> [Lina]  |
|   | Education                             | <...> <i>The education of most these families is only basic, so it is more difficult to find a job...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Ausra; Lina]  |
|   | Lack of social skills                 | <...> <i>Families often experience a crisis due to lack of social skills...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa]; <...> <i>Some families lack of social skills and there are families where parents due to their own health problems are unable to take care of their children without the help of others, are unable to manage their homes, prepare food... &lt;...&gt;</i> [Lina]                      |
|   | Non-acceptance of assistance provided | <...> <i>Parents do not realize the mistakes and harm done to children, do not try to help themselves, are hostile to the help of others, sometimes pouring out their anger, dissatisfaction and even aggression on a social worker&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa]<br><...> <i>There are families who are hostile and unwilling to accept the assistance of a social worker&lt;...&gt;</i> [Aušra] |
|   | Financial illiteracy                  | <...> <i>Inability to distribute money available ...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa]<br><...> <i>Inability to distribute the benefits received rationally&lt;...&gt;</i> [Ausra]  |

According to the social workers opinion, the needs of the family are met, but for some families it is not enough, they need more attention and support and non-rejection from the community and more efforts by the family itself (see Table 4).

Table 4.

**Assistance provided by social workers**

| Category            | Subcategory               | Confirmatory statements  |
|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Assistance provided | Provision of support      | <...> <i>We have to take care of benefits, help to organize documents on support for children, take care of charity.</i> <...> [Rasa]; <...> <i>We take care of getting allowances for children to purchase school supplies. We help to take care of firewood, vehicles, find a job, etc.</i> <...> [Ausra]; <...> <i>The poorest families receive food, clothing, footwear, household appliances, and so on.</i> <...> [Lina] |
|                     | Information               | <...> <i>We have to inform on various issues, mediate and represent their interests...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa; Ausra]; <...> <i>we provide them with the necessary information about job vacancies and other issues of concern...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Lina]  |
|                     | Social skills development | <...> <i>Working with families, we teach the basics of cleanliness, keeping order, cooking, and raising children...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Rasa]; <...> <i>We teach how to prepare food, tidy up in the house, keep cleanliness...&lt;...&gt;</i> [Lina; Ausra]   |
|                     | Counseling                | <...> <i>Very often families have to be counseled on work, communication with teachers, health, legal and other issues.</i> <...> [Rasa; Ausra; Lina]  |
|                     | Collaboration             | <...> <i>The family support process involves family relatives, community members, neighbors, schools and cooperation with various institutions.</i> <...> [Rasa; Ausra]; <...> <i>We are constantly cooperating with various institutions and bodies. Family relatives, community members, neighbors are included.</i> <...> [Lina]  |
|                     | Education of children     | <...> <i>We communicate with educational institutions, prepare educational programs for children.</i> <...> [Rita]; <...> <i>We organize children's camps for.</i> <...> [Asta]  |

Summarizing the opinion of social workers, it can be stated that the needs of families are adequately met according to the state law, but not all families are able to take advantage of it, do not see their fault, and demand more and more financial help without finding work and improving their family situation. However, families who accept the help of a social worker communicate sincerely, change their lifestyle, find a job, give up harmful habits, acquire social skills integrate successfully into society. According to social workers Rasa, Ausra, Lina, families who are trying to change their lives make changes quickly, such as changing the way they live, undergoing treatment from addictions, managing at home, learning to properly care for and educate children, and working. However, there are families where the signs of change are very faint, slow but thanks to a great deal of effort, these families are also making progress.

The research also revealed the opinion of women on causes why their families occurred in difficulty and needed social assistance (see table 5).

Table 5.

**Women's opinion on family problems**

| Category        | Subcategory                     | Confirmatory statements  |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Family problems | Addictions                      | <...> My family's biggest problem is alcohol consumption, a friend likes to drink, and sometimes I do. As a result, there are deprivations in the house, there is a constant lack of money, and we are always on the "list of bad families" because our neighbors always complain." <..> [Gabriele]; <...> <i>My cohabitant spends on money on alcohol, so when we lack of money for food we have to borrow, and then neighbours complain and lie with their long tongues.</i> <...> [Paulina]; <...> <i>I think the problem is alcohol consumption. I drink little, but a social worker has found us drunk several times, she always says that I lack of social skills and I do not take proper care of my children.</i> <...> [Angele] |
|                 | Unemployment                    | <...> <i>My cohabitant is engaged in individual jobs, because he does don work long in one place becuse of his drinking, so we live on benefits...</i> <...> [Gabriele]; <...> <i>There is a constant shortage of money, because my friend does not have a constant job, and I cannot work because I need to take care of my child.</i> <...> [Paulina]; <...> <i>My friend can't find a job, so he goes to the village to the farmer, drinks ...</i> <...> [Angele]   |
|                 | Improper upbringing of children | <...> <i>Anyone bothers a lot about my two children; supposedly they are neglected and hungry.</i> <...> [Gabriele]; <...> <i>Neighbors lied that my girl is unattended and goes to school dirty.</i> <...> [Paulina]; <...> <i>Neighbors rumored that there was a mess and children were not cared for at home, and teachers complained at school that children do not have necessary aids and clothes are dirty so we got to a social worker.</i> <...> [Angele]   |

The research found that the main problems of these families are unemployment, lack of money, alcohol, violence, inability to manage at home, proper care and upbringing of children, so without the help of a social worker it would be difficult for these families to integrate into society and their children would experience social exclusion.

Women with family difficulties have identified what help they receive from social workers and whether this help is useful for them (see table 6).

It can be stated that the opinions of women and social workers in families are similar. These families are provided with a variety of social assistance, but the dissatisfaction is caused by the frequent visits of social workers, excessive interference in the family life, although this enables them to improve in all areas of their lives.

Women from families in difficulty were asked what they needed to improve their family situation and refuse the assistance provided.

“...There is lot of families like mine, but when there is a constant lack of money, things can't change much, but I think the situation will improve as the children grow and my husband finds a job...” [Gabriele]

“...I don't think we are very different from other families, we try to live to the best of our ability, but we don't starve. I think life will improve, although I don't think much about the future, because today we have something to eat and that is good, but officials don't care about us much...” [Paulina]

“... I can tell that the most important thing is to have a job so that you can feel better and the state support is low, but I think that family life should improve, maybe a man will get well, and I try to manage my life, give up drinking, it is important not to lose children. My family is big and we have a lot of problems, but

*with the help of a social worker we try to solve them. I would like the benefits to be higher and the neighbors to interfere less...*” [Angele]

Table 6.

**Women opinion on social workers’ assistance to the family**

| Category            | Subcategory             | Confirmatory statements  |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Assistance received | Document management     | <...> It is difficult even to name because there are different situations, they help to organize various documents regarding benefits.<...> [Gabriele]<br><...> <i>Social workers help to manage various documents...&lt;...&gt; [Paulina]; &lt;...&gt; If I don't know how to manage documents, she always helps and accompanies me to necessary institutions.&lt;...&gt; [Angele]</i>  |
|                     | Counseling              | <...> <i>She advises on upbringing and care of my daughter..&lt;...&gt; [Paulina]; &lt;...&gt; She always advises on various issues, it helps me a lot...&lt;...&gt; [Angele]</i>  |
|                     | Mediation               | <...> <i>She talks with my husband and offers help for work, for giving up alcohol. &lt;...&gt; [Gabriele]; &lt;...&gt; A social worker assisted in communicating with the lawyer.&lt;...&gt; [Paulina]; &lt;...&gt; A social worker helps to solve children's problems at school. To communicate with doctors...&lt;...&gt; [Angele]</i>  |
|                     | Provision of assistance | <...> <i>She provides food, sometimes even clothes, though we are trying to live in accordance with our possibilities, but I hope the life will improve... &lt;...&gt; [Gabriele]; &lt;...&gt; She provides food and clothes and communicates very sincerely, if she isn't here, I wouldn't know what should I do. &lt;...&gt; [Paulina]; &lt;...&gt; &lt;...&gt; I get food, clothes, home appliances from charity..&lt;...&gt; [Angele]</i>  |
|                     | Social skills training  | <...> <i>She reminds me sincerely that I should pay more attention to the order at home and take more care of children, their behaviour and learning... &lt;...&gt; [Gabriele]; &lt;...&gt; She teaches me how to handle with money properly, helps with shopping, but she could not so often visit us. &lt;...&gt; [Paulina]; &lt;...&gt; She teaches and helps to tidy up the house, to cook, to tidy up children's clothes, when I bring goodies from the country helps me to prepare them. She helps to solve all problems. &lt;...&gt; [Angele]</i> |

In summary, it can be stated that families with problems usually have more than one child, their education is low, they live on the benefits they receive, but they lack the desire to look for a job as a source for subsistence. They are dominated by alcohol consumption, parents do not feel responsible for the family being included in the list of problems with families, they lack social skills, and the main need is to receive higher social benefits.

The main ways to help these families are to counsel them, train them in social skills, manage benefits and other documents, organize charitable events, carry out preventive and educational activities, motivate family members and enable them to help themselves.

## CONCLUSIONS

- A family in difficulty is described as a family in which the emotional communication of the members is impaired, a negative environment does not promote healthy personality growth and full development of children; there is alcohol abuse in the family, poverty, unemployment, violence, lack of social skills.

- The research revealed that the main causes of occurrence of families in difficulty are persistent lack of money, inability to distribute them, alcohol consumption, child neglect, inadequate education, parental unemployment, lack of social skills, and so on. When working with families with problems, social workers provide them with a wide range of social assistance: information and counseling the families on various issues, mediation and representation their interests, teaching social skills, caring for charity, organizing various specialist consultations, helping with job search and enabling families to understand their problems and to address them.

- Families experiencing difficulties believe that the assistance of a social worker is needed, especially counseling, help with paperwork, communication with doctors, provision of food, charity.

However, they believe that social workers could interfere less in their lives and that state support is insufficient, i.e. too low benefits.

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