

A CHILD IN THE SOCIAL EXCLUSION PROCESS

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Submitted: 2014-01-23

Accepted: 2014-03-02

Published online: 2014-07-15

Abstract

The social exclusion is a serious global problem, and the social exclusion of the child has not been examined in a more conceptual way so far. Our main objective is to refer to the social exclusion of the child as to a dimension to which attention is not paid adequately, although it belongs to serious negative phenomena of multi-dimensional nature. The introduction deals with historical and European context of the social exclusion. On the basis of a system analysis we created two groups of subsets by categorization from a set of propositions concerning the social exclusion, namely the category of reasons of the social exclusion and the category of general characteristics of individuals that are in the process of social exclusion. Subsequently, we describe the reasons of the social exclusion of children, specifying and causally designating the subjects that initiate the social exclusion of children. We believe that whether the social exclusion of the child is caused by his/her parents or by another factor we cannot understand it only within an individual failure as external reasons also exist where it is a failure of several structures that can ensure a needed social integration of children within social activities. We point out that, in terms of the social exclusion of the child, we cannot focus only on monetary and consumption dimension of parents but also on the dynamics of the process of social exclusion when the child is integrated into the process of social exclusion by force without his/her effort as his/her outlook for the future is weak due to external factors.

Finally, we refer to the consequences that the social exclusion of children can have for the whole climate in the society in the future, especially, for its stability and prevention of socio-pathologic phenomena.

Key words: social exclusion; child; reasons; exclusion; consequences

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social inclusion was, and still remains, a widely discussed topic not only within Europe but also on a global scale. Unfortunately, the social exclusion of children is mentioned very little which may indicate a uniformity of opinion that the social exclusion of children starts right there. The concept of social exclusion has been at the centre of academic discourse in Western European social policy

for approximately two decades and is currently becoming a dominant concept in discussions on poverty and the battle against it in European Union countries (Džambazovič and Gerbery 2005, p. 143–176). EU development policy is striving to decrease differences in the GDP per citizen and various indicators are used for measuring poverty, to which social exclusion is almost always related. When determining these indicators, children are often excluded, e.g. the indicator for social

interaction with friends and relatives outside the home is only defined for those over 16 years. Child poverty and the related social exclusion is not a premise by which this poverty should be monitored more conceptually.

If we look back through history, then in March 2000, fifteen governments of EU countries declared that the number of people living below the poverty line and social exclusion in the European Union is unacceptable. The fight against social exclusion is even explicitly mentioned in the Amsterdam Treaty and individual European governments are striving to define social exclusion as a result long term poverty which causes limited general resources.

However, poverty alone may be defined using various methods and unlike social exclusion, it can be measured. It is clear that in relation to social exclusion, it is necessary to focus upon the concept of poverty, preferably upon it causing possible social exclusion in the future. Therefore, the concept of social exclusion should be defined as an explicit accompaniment to poverty. However, social exclusion as an accompaniment will still be a theme discussed in the wide scientific circles since, unlike poverty, it is difficult to measure as it is a process which inevitably leads from the first signs of social exclusion, which are generally lost in manifestations of poverty, to marked manifestations of social exclusion such as segregation. In December 2001, the European Council adopted Laeken indicators which are used to measure poverty and social exclusion. They cover four areas: health, employment, education and financial poverty. However, half of the indicators focus upon measuring financial poverty and, therefore, these criteria for measuring social exclusion are questioned by several authors.

For example, the British government defines social exclusion as a term for something which may occur if people or areas suffer a combination of interlinked problems such as unemployment, low qualifications, low income, poor housing, high crime, an unsuitable living environment, poor health and family breakdown. According to Levitas, for example, social exclusion is a characteristic feature of post-modern society and not only a marginal phenomenon. Exclusion means a barrier not only to accessing the economic capital of the majority of society and to its

standard of living or life chances, but also to its social and cultural capital, leading to apathy (Mareš 2000).

Scientific definitions of social exclusion offer several opinions and systemic analysis of the term 'social exclusion' may be based on the following statements: "... low participation..." (Džambazovič 2013, p. 157); "... the result of social exclusion is deprivation..., ... inadequate social participation..., ... insufficient integration..., ... social exclusion is helplessness, ... the nature of catastrophic discontinuity..." (Mareš 2000, p. 285–297); "... poverty and exclusion are two terms, ... social exclusion is a process..., ... it is a result of extreme poverty..." (Abrahamson 1995, p. 119–136); "... poor prospects for the future..." (Atkinson 1998, p. 47–65); "... withheld (or unrealised) civil, political and social rights of citizens" (Institute for Labour and Family Research 2013); "... exclusion is the status of being separated from the moral order..." (Walker 1995, p. 102–128); "... social or cultural isolation..., ... uneven share of society's resources, ... a barrier not only to accessing the economic capital of the majority of society and to its standard of living or life chances..." (Mareš 2000, p. 285–297); "... the main cause of social exclusion is insufficient redistribution of wealth..., ... the failure of structural, cultural and moral bonds which link an individual to society..., ... they adopted such moral codes of behaviour which do not allow them to return to normal society..." (Levitas 1998, p. 227); "... the result of social exclusion leads to brutal changes to the model of mutual dependence..." (Plantinga 2003, p. 46); "... social exclusion is an offence against embrace..., ... social exclusion is an offence against separation..., ... it therefore becomes an enemy which should be removed from ourselves and which must be abandoned (removed) by one's self as somebody unwanted, as a superfluous being who should not be regarded and who can be renounced..." (Volf 1996, p. 45); "... the more accurately defined rules and borders a society has, the more closed the society becomes and its potential for exclusion increases..." (Estivill 2003, p. 25–26); "... live intensively through their inferiority..." (Volf 1996, p. 65).

From the collection of quotations stated above, we may categorise two sub-sets – a category of the causes of social exclusion and

a category of properties of individuals who are in the social exclusion process.

Based on this categorisation, we conclude that social exclusion is a social event which has its own cause and also therefore, its effect, which varies quantitatively or qualitatively depending upon the duration of an assumed cause which could induce a causal effect, i.e. a consequence, in our case social exclusion. If we deduce that category A is the cause which induced an effect – category B – then it is clear that the presented causes in category A were also a result of another cause or causes (Kotradyová 2013, p. 161–165).

Micklewright (2002, p. 44), within the social exclusion context, predicted three paradigms which are related to each other. These are relativity, agency and dynamic elements. The relativity element is determined by looking at the person and the circumstances in which they find themselves in relation to others in a given place and at a given moment. The agency element, in its concept, focuses upon those who exclude, and the dynamic element perceives social exclusion in the context of the fact that social exclusion may occur due to unfavourable prospects for the future and not only due to the current situation of the given person. These three elements alone may provide useful reference points for a discussion on the social exclusion of a child.

This is since children may only be socially excluded in relation to their situation and in relation to other persons, often their parents. If we talk about the social exclusion of children, we must answer the question: “Which particular aspect must be taken into consideration?” Evaluation of child exclusion requires a systematic definition of a child’s needs, what a child should do and what the child does not receive in return (Nolan 2000, p. 73).

If we return to Micklewright and his three paradigms, we may obtain a more objective view of child and youth social exclusion.

The relativity element predicts that a socially excluded child may be observed when looking at the child in the context of comparison with others. This could include the child’s clothing, their outward appearance, hygiene and even their behaviour.

This premise of social exclusion is relative and is not therefore always reliable since this

is a given moment in relation to those who are with the child in the given place. We believe that this element does not always have to be decisive and a child who comes from a weak social situation does not necessarily have to be badly dressed or dirty. However, the agency and dynamics elements almost always explicitly severely affect the life of the child in a significantly negative sense.

In terms of the agency element, who is the one excluding the child? The first are the parents who, due to insufficient income, cannot provide for the child, for example, in terms of hobbies, or the child cannot attend swimming or skiing lessons due to the living conditions in which the child is brought up. The desperate situation in the labour market at present leads many parents to believe that education is not worth it and, therefore, for example, the mother does not encourage her children to go to school.

We believe that an inadequate intellectual quality of the parents’ lives, together with situations marked by a high level of conflict and stress induced by extreme poverty and the position on the edge of society, usually places great pressure on the family and is especially reflected in the lives of children (Matulayová 2003, p. 153).

Underestimating the importance of education and upbringing mainly takes place in segregated Roma communities where the majority of adults are long term unemployed (Fabianová 2003, p. 153).

An unemployed individual is perceived by their surroundings as a person who needs help from society since they cannot manage alone, they cannot resolve the situation in which they have found themselves using their own resources and strength, and they cannot take care of themselves, their family or their home. Income decreases, which may lead to secondary social isolation caused by the fact that the person does not have sufficient financial means for culture, such as visits to the cinema, theatre, swimming pool or various sports events (Šefčíková and Lušňáková 2009, p. 424).

The economic dependence of parents upon the state and a tendency to conflict with social standards are premises which are more typical for a population in poverty, who do not have the chance to escape poverty, mainly because they have no education,

qualifications and social and communication abilities. The poverty trap is characterised by the fact that the only regular income for parents is state social security benefits. Within this context, these are parents for whom the social exclusion process only started because they are poor and this process has already started in their children. According to Turčan, parental poverty may influence children in various ways. The consequences are always negative. They are expressed at an emotional level, the child may feel undervalued, have low self-confidence and be lonely since they may be neglected by their parents. The child often feels the existential stress of parents which may be expressed by anxiety and attempts to escape reality. In 2004, 20.6% of the Slovak population were under the threat of poverty; after six years in the European Union, the situation in Slovakia has not improved significantly. Currently, 25.3% of children under 18 years are at the risk of poverty and in the working population, this figure is 20.2% (Harkotová 2013).

More marked exclusion of a child can be caused by a school alone (Beyond Child Poverty: The Social Exclusion of Children 2003), which expels a child from the school due to bad behaviour, or the child is expelled from the school to their low mental abilities and is subsequently moved to a special school. If we return to the premise of educating marginalised Roma children, we must realise the ongoing inflexibility of the school system which still does not accept the distinctiveness of Roma children and youth, does not build on their specific qualities and therefore suppresses their natural activity and creativity. Many Roma children have sufficient general intelligence to complete the compulsory schooling in classic primary and secondary schools; however, many are placed in specialist facilities.

Another exclusion may be caused by the Courts which, for example, forcibly remove the child from their parents and place them in foster care or into institutional care.

We may object and say this is not social exclusion; however, in these circumstances, the child is excluded from a family environment and does not receive the necessary close social relationships which may only be provided by the primary family, regardless of its status. Subjects contributing towards child social

exclusion also include employers who do not create sufficient jobs or create grounds for paying low wages, resulting in the fact that the parents of children find themselves at a relative poverty level, or even end up at subsistence level. A lengthy duration in this position directly starts the negative process of social exclusion.

We must mention that it is the State alone which indirectly influences the social exclusion of children via its measures and legislative arrangements, by establishing such conditions in society that the child is exposed to social exclusion. Let us mention, for example, the differing child benefit within EU countries. Whilst child benefit in Slovakia is circa 20 Euros, in nearby Austria it is 150 Euros. There are voices in Slovakia saying that parents who have not worked a certain number of years should not receive child benefit. However, who will the State punish by adopting this measure? Being objective, will it not be the child who will be directly punished?

Another forcible exclusion of a child can be by the community in which the child lives, or even the peer group into which the child belongs. Whether this is based on the personal condition of the child itself, their behaviour or appearance or based on the fact that the community or peer group excludes the child due to their primary family.

The third element of social exclusion is the dynamics element which perceives social exclusion within the context that social exclusion could possibly be caused by unfavourable prospects for the future and not only due to the current situation of the given person.

The dynamics element is important from the viewpoint of the social climate in the particular society since within the current period, many people are exposed daily to negative information about redundancies, the poor economic situation, the financial and economic crisis, etc. Negative information triggers a wave of fear, fear by adults about their future, and also about the fact that they may not be able to meet basic social needs in the following years. Unfavourable prospects in the future may not only be reflected in the fact that the process of social exclusion will start within the family, although the family is not poor, but also in the fact that parents'

frustration may be directly transferred to the child.

This is since a child's soul is like plasticine: it is shapeable and formable. However, if this is not done correctly or it is shaped into the incorrect shapes, the consequences are unimaginable (Croissant 1994, p. 168).

The way a child lives their life, what meaning their life will have, what position they assume in life and how they regard themselves certainly depends to a great extent upon the child itself, but if the child is already in the process of social exclusion, the guilt is borne by us all. To large extent, this is just the State and its concept of social policy. This is since quality of life is expressed by a person based on mutual effects of living conditions, social and economic factors and personal properties (Strieženec 1999, p. 215).

In families where the basic financial, social and many times psychological needs important during childhood are not sufficiently satisfied, there is a great likelihood that the already-started process of social exclusion of a child will proceed. The quality of the child's further life depends upon the level of satisfaction and saturation of the child's needs. The child therefore needs an adequate inflow of incentives and sufficient stimulation to become an active, sensitive and perceptive person.

The responsibility of the family and the State for the social development of children, their upbringing, education, attitudes, the emotional side of their personality and morale is indisputable.

The influence of social exclusion upon children deforms their psychological, physical, emotional, social and spiritual development. This is also reflected in the sphere of self-evaluation and a mistrust of their surrounding world. Some children are unable to handle this problem throughout their whole lives. The influence of social exclusion upon a child's behaviour may even cause various anomalies and changes (Kotradyová 2009, p. 247–253).

Individual EU countries have declared the implementation of conceptual instruments for fighting poverty since it is generally declared that insufficient financial means is one of the causal factors creating social exclusion. Džambazović and Gerbery (2005, p. 171) state that seeking the differences between the term "fight against social exclusion" and "social

inclusion policy" may appear pointless. They claim that these are actually two different definitions characterising the same aim; however, "the negative connotations of the first and the strong positive charge of the second phrase are not only a matter of semantics". Social inclusion is up against social exclusion. Reducing the risk of social exclusion does not automatically mean that we are talking about inclusion programmes. Social inclusion carries the vision of society's desirable status, which has a stronger normative impetus than in the case of the phrase "the fight against social exclusion". This slight difference corresponds with the easily identifiable efforts by some European institutions to "create" reality (positive action), and not only for the "prevention" of adverse events (negative actions). The ongoing social exclusion of children may create deeper and deeper disharmony in society which will conveyed throughout the next generations and, therefore, social exclusion may not only threaten the stability and legitimacy of democratic order, but may also affect the effective functioning of the State (Klasen 2010).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we would like to express the belief that the fight against the social exclusion of children may not only help in the fight against subsequent social exclusion in adulthood, but may also contribute towards the prosperity and stability of society as a whole and may also explicitly contribute towards decreasing various social and pathological phenomena. The social exclusion of children is of a violent nature, mainly if we consider the relativity and dynamics elements in relation to the person involved. The social exclusion of children does not take place in isolation, but it is influenced by the activities of other individuals and often society itself.

It is not easy to measure the social exclusion of children and we would have to pose the following questions. What is exclusion? If a person has a job and related contacts, does this mean that they are not in the process of social exclusion? Is the number and quality of contacts or any other combination a relevant measure by the State? What dimensions

does inclusion have? Is it about the labour market, consumption? If a person is socially excluded, are their children also automatically excluded?

Only if we obtain relevant data can we create more conceptual approaches in the fight against the social exclusion of children, not only at national level but also at Pan-European

or global level. It is necessary to transfer focus from a family's financial handicap to identifying various disadvantages which arise directly from the long-term poverty of a child. Additionally, it is necessary to focus not only upon resources with a household, but also upon resources in the local communities in which the child is raised.

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