Parenting Education
in Romania

București - 2011

PARENT EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Bucharest, 2011

Research study conducted as part of the project "The Childhood and Parenting Centre" implemented by Holt Romania – Iaşi Branch, with UNICEF Romania support

Authors:

Senior Lecturer Ştefan Cojocaru, **PhD**, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Director of Holt Romania – Iaşi Branch.

Reader Daniela Cojocaru, **PhD**, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, Department of Sociology and Social Work.

UNICEF Project Coordinator: **Luminiţa Costache**, Social Policy Specialist

Contents

Executive Summary

Parent education generally refers, *in the wider sense,* to "programmes, services and resources dedicated to children's parents and caregivers, with the aim of supporting them and improving their child-rearing capacities" (Carter, 1996). In its more *narrow sense*, parent education concerns programmes that help parents develop and improve their parenting skills, understand child development, learn how to reduce stress that may affect parental functions and how to use alternative approaches to difficult situations they have to tackle with their children.

The goal of this research study is to make an inventory of parent education programmes provided by nongovernmental organisations involved in child protection and to make an overview of programme features that can guide family and parenting support policies in Romania; at the same time, our research has also aimed at a curricular analysis of the main national parent education programmes which have conferred certain meanings and significances to parenting support.

In general, the effects of parent education most often invoked by specialised literature are: parents' improved knowledge on child development, needs and means to cover them so as to support the child's physical and mental health; parents' information about the rights of the child and ways to fulfil them; parents' improved skills to communicate with chil-

dren, to realistically adjust their expectations from them; parents' more responsive and supportive attitudes towards children; enhanced capacity to support child empowerment through positive discipline, etc.

All these things can be solutions to a series of major social problems: child abuse, drop-out, teenagers' social problems (drug use, delinquency, etc.), school failure, youth violence; moreover, they have a positive effect on adults in terms of parental identity construction and parent dignity, of their social networks which they animate, restructure and solidify, of parenting stress management and reduction (Goddard, Myers-Walls, Lee, 2004).

In order to analyse parent education programmes active in Romania, in the absence of previous Romanian studies focused on the matter, we have looked at a series of descriptors that international literature has accounted as relevant for the efficiency of these programmes. They are as follows: type of programme (self-standing programme or complementary to other family support programmes), dominant theoretical approach, application methodology, duration of courses and frequency of meetings, target population and its features, learning content and course support materials, categories of parent educators and their professional background, training procedures, parent educator certification and supervision, programme funding, etc.

Based on these descriptors, a questionnaire was drawn up to be later completed online by organisations delivering parent education programmes. To identify parenting programme providers, support was sought from General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection (GDSACP), which gave us information about the organisations involved in this social

service field. Using the information received from these local institutions, all organisations were invited, by phone or via e-mail, to fill out the data in the online questionnaire. The interpretation of the questionnaire-collected data is not statistically relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, as we worked with GDSACP to identify providers, certain parent education providers falling outside Directorates' area of interest are likely to have been left out of the list (only 78.2% of GDSACP responded to our invitation to nominate local parent education programme providers, and only six of these GDSACP reported the existence of such programmes locally). On the other hand, out of the nearly 30 providers we identified using the GDSACP data and web resources, only 18 completed the online questionnaire.

Data analysis was preponderantly used to identify categories of analysis, common and recurrent themes, to describe more general aspects that are typical to parent education in Romania. More organisations that offer parent education programmes may be in place, without their work being known to GDSACP at local level as they may work in partnership with other types of public institutions (school inspectorates, schools, kindergartens, children's hospitals, maternity facilities, etc.). As a result, the main methodological limitations of this study arise from the fact that it was not possible to collect comprehensive data as research didn't include all parent education providers. For more valid conclusions, we resorted to data source triangulation, corroborating during the analytical stage the data collected via the questionnaire with the data documented in the Social Services Directory, managed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection and containing the list of accredited social service providers, as well as with

the data comprised in the parent education handbooks and parents' guidelines of key parent education providers at national level: Holt Romania, Step by Step, Our Children Foundation, Save the Children. Moreover, other important public sources of data were the websites with information about parent education courses.

The analysis of the data collected from the above-mentioned sources and the identification of parent education programme features in Romania enabled us to formulate recommendations for their optimisation, in terms of adjusting content and methodology to target group features, of developing national professional standards, of funding such programmes from public funds, etc.

Parent education needs a solid base, not just pilot programmes in various medical, social and educational areas. That is why, the implementation of the National Integrated Strategy for the Training and Development of Parenting Competencies, including parent education as an integral part of lifelong learning, may lay the foundations for building, operating and developing a national integrated parent education system. Even if different public institutions proclaim the importance of parent education, no regulation stipulates the need for parent education, nor does it make it compulsory. For this reason, public policies must be implemented in this department and the infrastructure for training, funding, certification and supervision must be strengthened, with current parent education providers contributing with expertise, technical assistance, models, etc.

Parent Education in Romania

What Is Parenting? Parenting in Postmodernism

Terry Arendell, developing the constructionist approach to family, supported by Gubrium and Holstein in "*What is family*" (1990), and particularising it to parenting, comments on the fact that "parenting activities are not natural behaviours, deriving from the reproductive capacity, but instead the ways in which children are reared, cared for and socialised (...) they are dynamic, open and mutable social processes. Multidimensional and complex parenting involves various behaviours, skills and objectives*, learnt* through participation in the social community. Even the ability to care for others and to empathise with them, despite being intrinsic to human nature, is developed through learning. Parent-child relations are formed and maintained through social interaction, and relations and experiences are interpreted and signified" (Arendell, 1997, p.4).

Consequently, parenting is placed in space and time; it does not occur in a social void, instead it is "entirely interrelated to and shaped by demographic changes, historical events and patterns, cultural norms and values, systems of social layering, family developments and arrangements, mutations in the social organisation and structure" (Arendell, 1997, p.4). Stacey, referring to the very diverse meanings of parenting, almost im-

possible to quantify in a coherent synthesis, says that historical and anthropological research reveals that family is "an ideological concept, a symbolic construction, with its own history and policies" (apud. Arendell, 1997, p.4), and this is also valid for parenting, which is maybe the most ideologized and politicised dimension of family experience, alongside that of childhood. In the past two decades, American and Western European family literature has highlighted the fact that major changes in the population's marital status, together with other socio-demographic changes, have resulted in dramatic mutations in children's and youngsters' parental life arrangements (Taylor, 1997, p.69). These mutations have overlapped with the propagation of family life arrangements, more simply called by Beck-Gernsheim lifestyles (2002) or non-traditional or alternative family patterns (versus the classical triangular configuration).

Deep and rapid changes in social surroundings, against the backdrop of postmodernism-driven de-structuring and de-construction, generate highly significant effects on the family milieu. The deprivatisation of family environment, paired with the intrusion of varied institutions in the domestic life and the influence of media on the construction of social realities, places family in a position of needing support from the outside. Institutional prescriptions, deriving from the promotion of current values, turn into norms which force families to adapt to new ideologies and to experiment new child practices.

Parenting Professionalization and Parenting Competencies

The rise in child- and childhood-oriented professional discourses has led to an *accelerated professionalization of parenting*, which has started to be considered a profession with specific rules and organisational talk (Sellenet, 2007, p.110). Thus, we notice that, starting with the second half of the last century, psychological studies have had a major concern for looking into human experiences related to parent-child interaction in terms of *parenting competency*. In the rhetoric of child welfare institutions and in the academic discourse from the fields of psychology and social assistance, the evaluation of parenting success or failure unanimously revolves around "the identification of children's needs, establishing if these are met, appreciating the impact of any identified lack on child functioning and development, describing the nature and potential origins of adults' difficulties in exercising parenting roles, and estimating potential changes" to better meet the child's needs (Reder et al., 2003, p.14).

Sellenet (2007, p.117) even speaks about an "obsession of meeting the child's alleged needs" imposed on parents by experts, starting with the child's intrauterine life (the pregnancy) and until adolescence. An important number of parenting studies point out some authors' concern, often considered excessive, to define a "parental optimum", which we don't know how much it works in practice, and an *adequate minimum parental standard* to describe the accepted minimum level of parenting competencies (Reder et al., 2003, p.14); nevertheless, as far as parenting studies are concerned, some authors (Greene and Killi, apud. Reder et al., p.15) share the idea that "there are

no operational definitions or quantitative criteria, nor standard-ised tests or preset evaluation strategies that can establish to what extent parenting competencies meet, come close to or ex-ceed the [parental, A/N] minimum". Among the strategies aimed at a professional approach to parenting, promoted by social policies in the area of family and child protection in Romania in the past two decades, we can recall *parent educa-tion programmes*, community-based rehabilitation programmes for children with disabilities, foster care/personal assis-tance/probation programmes, etc.

Often, the new ideologies advanced especially in the field of child protection stumble upon conservative mentalities, a family value system that needs to be reformed, reorganised and reconfigured. That is why, families in today's society are ever more in need of *external support* to adjust to these require-ments, in the context where parents claim either inability to manage their relations with their own children or stay attached to traditional values that they consider the grounds for valid intra-family interaction models. This last attitude, which for parent education is synonym of parents' reluctance to partici-pate in parenting classes, is sometimes encountered in profes-sionals' discourse, which idealises traditional family as the ide-al structure. We have to mention that we endorse the theoretical approach according to which family is not intelligi-ble as objective reality, being instead a socio-cultural product, "a constellation of ideas, images and terminologies" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1990) created and permanently recreated by so-cio-cultural practices.

The change in social expectations with respect to parents' behaviours towards their children exerts additional pressure on parents, who are most frequently caught between the often con-

tradicting demands of their career and family lives. For example, we talk about child participation in decisions that concern him or her, but social practices haven't yet incorporated the values that can change adults' behaviours towards children in the sense of encouraging child participation. This requires restructuring institutional practices so that they may offer models for fulfilling this right, for training professionals who work with children in various social, educational and medical services, etc.

In 2001, Jones suggested that *parenting competencies* should include primary care activities and behaviours conducted with the aim of empowering children. A series of recent British works (Reder et al., 2003, p.3) find that the purpose of parenting activities is to facilitate the child's optimal development in a safe environment and that such activities comprise several dimensions: a) the care dimension, b) the control dimension, c) the development dimension, and d) to this end, parents need resources such as *knowledge* (about children's needs and ways to meet them, how to develop the child's potential, etc.), *motivation* to invest time, energy, material and non-material *resources*, and *opportunities*.

In order to analyse the quality of care, we find it useful to run an analysis on parenting responsibilities, the manner in which they are built and assumed by family members. Alvy (apud. Small and Eastman, 1991, pp.455-462) proposes 4 parenting functions and responsibilities: a) meeting children's basic needs (providing resources and caring for the home); b) protecting children; c) supporting children's physical and psychological development, and d) advocating with the wider community on the behalf of children. Starting from the typology of parental responsibilities developed by Alvy, Small and

Eastman (1991, pp.455-462), the authors have a look at these functions and variables which help profile parenting competencies:

- *Providing basic resources* involves providing the conditions needed for survival: food, clothes, housing, access to basic health care; some of the family environment variables that may affect this function are: adults' (parents') level of education, their profession, income, as well as their consumption priorities or strategies. Sometimes, this last aspect becomes very important as it can make the difference between families with comparable income levels or economic statuses whose parenting competencies are very different, especially when it comes to meeting the child's basic needs. In addition, family structure may affect the quality of parenting as it influences income: the number of income-earning adults; the financial support provided by the absent parent to children from a previous marriage; adult family members' qualifications which influence their efficiency and availability on the labour market (Thomas and Sawhill, 2005, pp.57-74). Parent education programmes promote, with their various topics, the enhancement of parents' skills to provide basic resources. This is one of the priority skills in these programmes, aiming at making parents aware of children's needs according to their age.

- *The protective function* links to parent's responsibility for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, ethnic and cultural integrity in relation to the surrounding environment, people, groups, institutions (Alvy, 1987). Small and Eastman (1991, pp.455-462) consider that parents' child protection function is covered by two types of behaviour: *parental monitoring or parental control* (referring to supervision of nutrition, child health, behaviours related to a series of risk factors, such as to-

bacco/alcohol use, sexual activity, etc.) and *teaching self-protection skills*. These skills play a major role in adolescence, when children's autonomy from adults is greater and parental supervision becomes increasingly more difficult to apply, particularly with the great variety of family arrangements in which children are cared for and contemporary society's labour market demands that parents are faced with. In the American literature of the 60's, a debate was launched about the importance of time that parents spent with their children; some opinions supported the importance of *quantity time* and were later sustained, in the 80's, by a series of empirical studies (Gallinski, 1999, p.59) establishing that the time a child spends with the mother in the first year of life is crucial to his or her development (babies that were separated from their mothers for more than 20 hours a week had problems attaching to her); others, on the contrary, sustained as a priority the quality of parent-child interaction (*quality time*) irrespective of the quantity of time spent together. The study made by E. Gallinsky in the United States in 1999 shows that the *regularity* of parents' interaction with their children in activities like eating together, doing homework, playing different games is essential for the perception children have of their parents: parents who are more involved in such activities are considered by their children as people who manage to address personal and professional matters, who place family before work and "who make them [children] feel important and loved, who spend time talking to them to find out what is really going on in their life, who encourage them to learn and give them the pleasure of learning, who appreciate them for who they are, who calm them down when they have to, who stand by their children when they are sick, who set out family traditions, routines and rules …" (Gallin-

sky, 1999, p. 84). Although research shows an indirect proportionality between parental control and the prevalence of pre-delinquent and delinquent behaviours among youngsters (Dornbusch et al., 1985, pp.326-341), optimal parenting is considered an involved and concerned, yet non-invasive parental behaviour.

- *Supporting physical and psychological development* refers to promoting all child development aspects, including physical, emotional, cognitive, social, moral, sexual, spiritual, cultural and educational ones (Alvy, 1987). Small and Eastman (1991) make an overview of the following parental relationship features connected to this responsibility: *strictness* – referring to behavioural control as understood in Baumrind's taxonomy (1991); *emotional attachment* (the need to offer the child emotional support, love), *control over the balance of power* in parent-child relations (one of the most serious challenges is finding the right boundary within which the child may express or experiment his or her freedom). All researched programmes have a priority component that details child development stages and presents to parents communication strategies meant to balance out child-parent power relations. For example, the programme "How to become better parents" (Holt Romania) includes a session on *positive discipline*, where parents learn that parental authority is built on permission and interdiction; parents are encouraged to reflect on ways to set boundaries and build self-control and on strategies that encourage desirable behaviours. This balance between boundaries and permission in child education is also tackled in the programme "Educate This Way" (Our Children Foundation), encouraging parents to practice appreciation and reward, to set limits and interdictions. In the Step by Step programme, discipline is approached from

both the perspective of parents' practical means to react when children break the rules and the reflexive perspective of building a context for children to experiment self-control. The more recent programme developed by Save the Children also has a component that focuses on child discipline as a form of managing the balance of power between parent and child.

Advocating with the wider community on the behalf of children refers to the role parents play in the child's interaction with various persons, groups, institutions in the community, especially when the child's age does not allow him or her to represent himself/herself. The "new morality" of parenting

Parenting has become the subject of advanced professionalization and has turned into a public concern open to professional and parental control, subject to demands arising from the rhetoric of the institutions dealing with child development and education. The empirical approach to parenting (the attempt and error model), so familiar until not long ago, has started to be considered amateur-like and sometimes irresponsible (Golding, 2000). Thus, given the new morality of parenting, the parent is considered to be the one who has to develop his or her parenting skills as social expectations and requirements change according to ideological considerations. Therefore, social service providers offer different learning programmes to parents, proposing parental role structuring models. Some parent education programmes express this explicitly, stating that "the *job* as a parent is one of the hardest, yet most fulfilling" (Holt Romania). Looking at parenting as a job involves major mutations in the approach to parenting: the parent has to be informed, to get training, qualifications, to learn the ins and outs of this experience, to rise up to new expectations, etc. Therefore, parents' child care and education

practice has become the subject of a "new morality" (Beck Gernsheim, 2003), reflected in the agenda that the society draws up for parents; consequently, parent education programmes comprise, in a more or less explicit manner, the traits of "good parenting" as defined "here and now": a good parent is a *responsible* one, able to identify and meet his or her child's *needs*, informed about the *rights* of the child, etc.

Parent Education: Introduction and Brief History

Parent education programmes are an integral part of family support policies and are based on two principles (Carter, 1996):
- The best means to positively influence child development and behaviour is to act on parents' beliefs, attitudes as they are children's first and closest teachers.
- *Being* a parent is something one has to learn and practise rather than something innate or inherited.

Despite the absence of full consensus on what 'parent education' means*, in the wider sense* it defines "programmes, services and resources dedicated to children's parents and caregivers, with the aim of supporting them and improving their child-rearing capacities" (Carter, 1996). In its more *narrow sense*, parent education concerns programmes that help parents develop and improve their parenting skills, understand child development, learn how to reduce stress that may affect parental functions and how to use alternative approaches to difficult situations they have to tackle with their children (Small,

1990). The beginnings of parent education programmes are claimed by the medical field, focusing on informing parents about how to keep their children healthy. Dr. Benjamin Spock's book (*Baby and Child Care)* published in 1946 became a quick *bestseller*. In the 60's, influenced by the works of Erikson, Bowlby and Ginott, parent education programmes shifted from medical field to psychology as the parent educator was considered the expert who could help parents understand the child's needs and how they could learn to solve the problems they had with their children. The 80's marked an accelerated development of parent education models, inspired by social perspective and cultural diversity (Carter, 1996).

In Romania, parent education started to grow in the late 90's, with the implementation of the first internationally inspired programmes. In 1998, the "Educate This Way" programme, carried out by Our Children Foundation, based on a model developed by the Netherlands Institute for Care and Wellbeing (NIZW), was a pilot programme tested with the Ministry of Education and Research in three counties. In 2000, with support from UNICEF, the programme continued to develop for five years until it gained national reach. Starting with 2005, the "Educate This Tay" programme was taken over by the Ministry of Education and Research as a National Parenting Programme in Preschool Education (UNICEF, 2009).

In 2000, the programme "How to become better parents" (implemented by Holt Romania) was developed for parents of children aged 0-3 years, based on the US Birth to Three model; after approximately 10 years of adjustments, it was extended to parents of school children. This programme also had UNICEF's support from the start and enjoyed speedy dynamics in terms of adjusting to different parent groups and developing

a specific system of parent educator training, supervision and accreditation (UNICEF, 2009).

In 2004, the Romanian Association for Education and Development, in partnership with the Institute for Education Sciences and UNICEF, initiated the project "Future Parents' Education", in which support materials were developed for the optional subject "Future Parents' Education" for 9th-12th grades (UNICEF, 2009).

National organisations delivering parent education programmes imported their programmes, inspired from various models, and adapted them to Romanian parents. The programme of Save the Children is based on the Triple P - Positive Parenting Programme model (developed by the University of Queensland, Australia) and was first implemented in Romania through Counselling Centres in 2010.

The recent import of parent education programmes and models already tested in other cultures went through a process of adjustment to socio-cultural specificity, to different parent groups; to this end, parenting programme providers held parenting courses adapting their curricula to the cultural specificity of different groups of parents (parents of young children, preschool children, school children, adolescents, children with disabilities, etc.). Locally, the programmes delivered by local organisations are more eclectic, being inspired from those implemented by national organisations and embedding various theoretical approaches.

Beyond the implementation of national parent education programmes (Our Children Foundation, Holt Romania, Step by Step, Save the Children), to develop and support this area of intervention in Romania, UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, the National Authority for Child Rights Protection, the Minis-

try of Health and NGOs providing parent education programmes have started to develop the National Integrated Strategy for the Training and Development of Parenting Competencies (UNICEF, 2009).

Efficiency of parent education programmes

In general, the efficiency of parent education programmes and their capacity to optimise parental behaviours and child development depends on a series of factors (Riley, 1994) that we have taken into account in our analysis of Romanian programmes:

- *Environmental* approach: the most efficient programmes don't focus exclusively on parents' behaviours, but they also bear in mind the social systems and networks around the child-parent relation, taking an interest in policies and regulations that regard labour market, health, education, neighbourhood, community, etc., as these have a major influence on parenting practices.

- *Duration*: the most efficient programmes are long-term whereas short-term ones manage only to inform instead of changing beliefs and behaviours.

- *Staff*: studies on parent education programmes have showed that beneficiaries consider parent educators or the facilitators of such programmes more important even than the content they are exposed to; this is firstly due to their communication and emphatic skills, and secondly to their educational background.

- *Programme specificity*, according to the child's age and aiming at specific objectives: the most efficient programmes are those that tackle specific issues, such as

child abuse prevention or prevention of deviant behaviours in adolescents, and are always strongly related to the child's age.

- Capacity to *build parents' strengths and resources*, looking to identify and appreciate parents strengths and not their distance or difference from an ideal model.
- Capacity to *tolerate and celebrate differences*: the best programmes are flexible and avoid dogmatic approaches; they encourage parents' creativity and recognise the fact that they are the authority who eventually decides what piece of advice best suites their child and family. Besides this criterion, there is always programme adaptation to the cultural specificity of beneficiary groups (Barth, 2009), making sure that parents and children receive such programmes in a proper manner.

Parent education versus parental support

The goal of parent education is to develop parent-child relationships by encouraging parents' supportive behaviours and changing non-productive or harmful behaviours (Small, 1990). Parent education programmes normally aim at developing new, positive behaviours in parents, on the one hand, and at eliminating a series of behaviours that damage child development, on the other hand. Small (1990) operates with differences between *parent education* and *parental support*. As a self-standing entity or in combination with other programmes, parent education helps parents develop and improve their parenting skills, understand human development, alternate child-rearing approaches and learn techniques to reduce stress that harms parental functions (Small, 1990). Parent education em-

phasises both improved parenting and the therapeutic component of reducing parenting-generated tensions. The aim of *parental support* is to improve parents' capacity to use resources from outside the family for their and their children's wellbeing. We believe that these differences captured by the author can help clarify the manner in which parent education answers to specific needs and yields certain effects. In Romania, there is often confusion about parent education: time and again, any intervention on parents (counselling, moral support, support groups, information, etc.) is considered a parent education endeavour.

As parents participate in parent education programmes, they become better capable of offering more attentive care to children. It is not enough to just inform people and for them to understand information campaign messages in order to change behaviours. The examples most often cited in literature are related to health behaviours and lifestyle; hence, despite endless information and education campaigns, smokers haven't changed their behaviour, people who batter family members haven't become less aggressive or less violent, parents who neglect their children haven't become more attentive to them, etc. Making a behavioural change implies the comprehensive understanding of the culture, of personal and social factors, providing contexts for interaction and social control that can motivate and support change.

Do we need parent education? Benefits and limitations of parent education

In general, the effects of parent education most often invoked by specialised literature are: parents' improved

knowledge on child development, needs and means to cover them so as to support the child's physical and mental health; parents' information about the rights of the child and ways to fulfil them; parents' improved skills to communicate with children, to realistically adjust their expectations from them; parents' more responsive and supportive attitudes towards children; enhanced capacity to support child empowerment through positive discipline, etc.

All these things can be solutions to a series of major social problems: child abuse, drop-out, teenagers' social problems (drug use, delinquency, etc.), school failure, youth violence; moreover, they have a positive effect on adults in terms of parental identity construction and parent dignity, of their social networks which they animate, restructure and solidify, of parenting stress management and reduction (Goddard, Myers-Walls, Lee, 2004).

Although parent education has undisputable benefits, still it is not a cure-all (Carter, 1996): it cannot put an end to poverty and its devastating effects on families or to social inequalities or problems in the family and child welfare system, etc.; nevertheless, it can improve parents' ability to offer their children love and health, thus giving them better chances in life.

With priority focus on vulnerable and disadvantaged families, parent education programmes plead the case that in these families the child is subject to risks such as: abuse, neglect, child labour, violation of fundamental rights, etc. The need for such programmes is highlighted even more by the fact that these groups of families are less exposed to institutional prescriptions regarding children's rights and are more deprived of social interaction that can influence parenting behaviours and competencies. Maybe that is why parenting courses, under-

stood as activities meant to provide a context for inter-parent interaction, seem more adapted to parents' needs and more flexible in building *learning communities*. Within such settings, parents can interact, can share from their own experience, can share ideas, solutions and beliefs, and can compare their own behaviours with other parents'. Parents participating in parenting programmes show a direct intent to *reduce power asymmetry* between expert (parent educator) and parent; parents believe that parent educators should be parents in the first place. Thus, by comparison and similarity, multiplying the number of persons sharing the same values, a legitimate framework is created as well as a social setting facilitating parents to embrace values, norms and prescriptions, on the one hand, and experiment new behaviours, on the other hand.

Parent education programmes taking place in group meetings are considered *less invasive* on family environment because institutional prescriptions are moderated by group members' shared values and the meetings with experts (parent educators) are not perceived as a form of institutional control; in this case, parents see parent educators more like facilitators, support people and social role models.

The goal of parent education programmes is to support parenting, understood as a set of attitudes and educational practices which upgrades parents' competencies (in order to attune them to the system of values promoted in the society). Parent education aims at the development of *practical competencies*, as well as of *reflexive ones*. Parenting practice is defined more like a reflexive experience and not only as a set of chores or practical tasks which must be learnt and which rigidly define the roles of a mother and a father (Golding, 2000).

Difficulties in measuring the effects of participation in parent education courses

The intention to accurately measure, using statistical methods, the change in parents' behaviour towards their children as an effect of their participation in parenting classes stumbles upon a series of setbacks, the most important one being parents' distorted answers due to the social desirability bias (amplified by parenting courses). The accurate quantification of post-course changes would probably require (live or recorded) observational methods applied to the same family environment over a significant period of time, before participation in the parent education course to identify behavioural patterns in the parent-child relationship, and also over a significant period of time after finishing the course to observe absolute changes.

There is a risk of reporting invisible or volatile effects due to a family system resilient to change (especially when the course is attended by only one of the partners) and we might fail to spot right away changes in parents' reflection on their relations with children. This happens in particular when parent education courses are preponderantly organised as information sessions, without parents' participation in practical interactions during courses (exercises, role plays, etc.) and without experimenting as homework in the family environment a series of practices tackled in class.

A number of changes can be identified during parent education courses which comprise several successive meetings with the same parents – changes in terms of language and of resigning behaviours in the interaction with the others. Parent interaction developed during several successive meetings triggers changes in participants' language (acquiring new expres-

sions/phrases, defining new situations, experimenting new reference frameworks activated in certain contexts, etc.).

Some programmes are based on the idea that *improving parenting skills* and connecting parents to children's needs should lead to measurable improvements in child development. Studies made to correlate parent education effects on parents with changes in child development have proved that the programmes which bring about short-term effects for parents have an almost unperceivable impact on child development (Brown, 2005). For this reason, to ensure sustainability of the skills developed during course participation, conditions must be ensured to maintain parent interaction; our research sustains the fact that, when support groups are held for parents who have benefited from parenting training, the effects of courses are maintained for a longer period of time.

Characteristics of Parent Education Programmes in Romania

Methodological features

In order to analyse parent education programmes active in Romania, in the absence of previous Romanian studies focused on the matter, we have looked at a series of descriptors that international literature has accounted as relevant for the efficiency of these programmes. Based on these descriptors, a questionnaire was drawn up to be later completed online by organisations delivering parent education programmes. To identify parenting programme providers, support was sought from General Directorates for Social Assistance and Child Protection (GDSACP), which gave us information about the or-

ganisations involved in this social service field. Using the information received from these local institutions, all organisations were invited, by phone or via e-mail, to fill out the data in the online questionnaire. The interpretation of the questionnaire-collected data is not statistically relevant for two reasons. On the one hand, as we worked with GDSACP to identify providers, certain parent education providers falling outside Directorates' area of interest are likely to have been left out of the list (only 78.2% of GDSACP responded to our invitation to nominate local parent education programme providers, and only six of these GDSACP reported the existence of such programmes locally). On the other hand, out of the nearly 30 providers we identified using the GDSACP data and web resources, only 18 completed the online questionnaire (Annex 1).

Data analysis was preponderantly used to identify categories of analysis, common and recurrent themes, to describe more general aspects that are typical to parent education in Romania. More organisations that offer parent education programmes may be in place, without their work being known to GDSACP at local level as they may work in partnership with other types of public institutions (school inspectorates, schools, kindergartens, children's hospitals, maternity facilities, etc.). As a result, the main methodological limitations of this study arise from the fact that it was not possible to collect comprehensive data as research didn't include all parent education providers. For more valid conclusions, we resorted to data source triangulation, corroborating during the analytical stage the data collected via the questionnaire with the data documented in the Social Services Directory, managed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection and containing

the list of accredited social service providers, as well as with the data comprised in the parent education handbooks and parents' guidelines of key parent education providers at national level: Holt Romania, Step by Step, Our Children Foundation, Save the Children. Moreover, other important public sources of data were the websites with information about parent education courses.

Lack of data on parent education providers and programmes

Although many governmental and nongovernmental organisations recognise the importance of parent education and its benefits, both on parents and children, our documentation highlights the fact that the number of organisations which have developed parent education programmes as independent and autonomous services to support and strengthen parenting and family is very small. In fact, nationwide, we have identified only four providers of such national programmes; more frequent is the case where parent education is a component of other social and educational programmes aimed at family and parenting support. The analysis of the data from the Social Services Directory, managed by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, shows us the poor identity of parent education programmes in Romania. Of 2,670 providers accredited to carry out social services, only two organisations have parent education programmes accredited as independent services by the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection; these are Holt Romania, accredited for the parent education programme implemented in the County of Iaşi, and Our Children Foundation, accredited for a programme in Bucharest.

Other organisations include parent education as a complementary programme or additional service, delivered in counselling and child and family support centres.

The websites of the organisations offering parent education programmes at local and national levels post very generic information about their parenting programmes, without any details about programme content, structure, information materials, statistics, etc. Most of the time, organisational websites only name the parenting course as part of the services delivered by the organisation and specifies target groups that benefit from that service; they also bring arguments supporting the need for parent education and its benefits for today's parents[1]. Nonetheless, some parent education providers give more details about these courses – like themes, duration or structure[2]. This lack of detailed relevant information indicates the poor marketing of these services and the beginner's level in the development of the parenting-focused social service market. The small rate of providers' answers to our request to fill out the data in the questionnaire in order to make the national catalogue of parent education providers (60%) shows that organisations and institutions active in this field have a pretty low interest to promote this service and to be part of a national parenting network.

Approaches to parent education

To identify the manner in which parent education programmes contribute to parenting skill development, we looked at a descriptor concerning the *approach to parenting and family*. Thus, we identified four main approaches inspired from the Carter model (1996), as follows:

- *Systemic/family system-centred approach*, which focuses on family as a system, with elements that fulfil specific functions; programme providers often automatically consider parental functions as being the main axes that guide prescriptions for parental roles, the ways in which parental functions adapt to children's various needs, etc. Parent education programmes using mainly the systemic approach have the general tendency to stress the normative facet, preponderantly offering advice and solutions for particular contexts; the tendency to convey prescriptions to parents is supported by the use of definitions for good parent, the functionality of parenting roles, etc. In our documentation, the data provided by the organisations that deliver parent education programmes show that 6 out of the 18 programmes included in the providers' catalogue embrace a systemic approach (see Annex 1).

- *Empowerment and participation* is the approach that focuses primarily on parent participation, on parent involvement in the development of their parenting skills and on the development of a *reflexive pattern* to make sustainable changes in parents' behaviours. According to this pattern, the parent takes part in the structuring and strengthening of these prescriptions, being considered an expert when it comes to experiences with their own children; the responsive nature of the parent education programme highlights the importance of developing parents' skills to identify and adequately value internal and external parenting resources (at the level of social networks), most appropriate in various specific contexts. The majority of the researched programmes (11 organi-

sations out of 18) have embraced this approach to parenting programmes (www.educatieparentala.ro).

- *Community-based approach/approach sensitive to local culture and values* takes into account the cultural specificity of attending parent groups, their beliefs and values, their individual life and parenting conditions that characterise different social media. It is the least frequent approach in the analysed programmes as only two out of 18 programmes declare they have an approach to parenting that is sensitive to local cultural patterns and values (www.educatieparentala.ro).

- *Interdisciplinary approach/with collaborative infrastructure involving experts from different fields* is an approach where staff with different professional backgrounds offer information from various fields. This is featured in some national programmes which have developed networks of widely experienced parent educators (social workers, nurses, teachers, kindergarten teachers, psychologists, etc.) or in local programmes addressed mainly to parents of children with disabilities (where parent educators also come from professional groups that work with children with special needs, such as: speech therapists, physical therapists, doctors, educational counsellors, clinical psychologists, etc.). Six of the 18 researched programmes fall into this category (www.educatieparentala.ro). The data collected shows that none of the 18 organisations included in the parent education providers' catalogue believes that it combines all four perspectives previously described.

In general, Romanian parent education programmes are

more focused on family, while aspects related to child representation before different institutions come second. The premise from which such programmes start is that parents need information, methods, and techniques to help them develop their parenting skills. Family-centred approaches (drawing up and advancing prescriptions that are exclusively focused on intra-family relations) manage to reduce children's emotional problems and to develop parent-child communication and relating skills, but don't bring significant changes in children's behaviours and skills to relate to other environments outside family (peer groups or other people outside their family) (Wyatt Kaminski et al, 2008).

The place where parent education programmes are held

 Neutral meeting places – courses held in a space outside social protection, medical or educational institutions. Half of the 18 researched programmes say they carry out courses in neutral places (for example: mayoralty offices, private facilities of nongovernmental organisations (www.educatieparentala.ro).

 Programmes delivered *at family home* usually have an *information*-based educational component. These are local programmes primarily aimed at families with children with disabilities (three such programmes have been identified).

 Programmes delivered in *care, medical and educational establishments*, for example maternity/placement centres/kindergartens/schools/day care centres. Parenting classes are preponderantly held in kindergartens and schools, but also in day care centres or recovery centres for children with disabilities. Twelve of the 18 analysed programmes are held in educational or care institutions.

Online parent education is only in its nascent stages in Romania (just one online course is promoted on the Internet by Our Children Foundation). Beyond advanced logistics (Internet, online interactive materials, online tools, etc.), sustained practice for developing online parenting programmes remains to be developed. This is also due to the fact that parent education in Romania is still in its early stages and focuses mainly on vulnerable and disadvantaged families without access to such services or skills for using such tools.

Duration and frequency of parent education programmes

As regards the *duration* of parent education programmes and the *frequency* of meetings, few research studies have explored the optimal duration of an efficient parenting programme or the optimal frequency of meetings. Reflecting upon applied practices, parent education providers accept the idea that longer programmes are more efficient, allowing to make changes in parents' attitudes and competencies, to practice interaction within the parent group and to strengthen participants' behaviours. Course duration and meeting frequency varies according to programme, organisational resources, target groups and the model each organisation has developed. Some programmes involve weekly parent meetings for a period of 8-9 weeks, monthly meetings for 7-9 months or even quarter meetings. Programme heterogeneity is extremely pronounced when it comes to the time factor.

Who are parent educators?

The parent educator plays a key role in facilitating parent interaction, in offering reference and discussion frameworks during meetings, in creating a tension-free trustful atmosphere (Bertelli, 2010). When we talk about parent educators, we must keep a few aspects in mind regarding their specialised training, type of initial professional training, accreditation system and their supervision.

Training of parent educators

The analysis of parent education in Romania gives us relevant information about specialised training programmes offered to parent educators. Based on this analysis, we believe that we need to underline a few aspects specific to these programmes:

- On parent education market, parent educators are trained in different programmes, based on different models, most of them imported from international practice.

- The duration of practical and theoretical training programmes addressed to parent educators varies from one programme to another, but it is quite impossible to establish an average number of hours required for their training. The only programme which specifies the number of parent educators' training hours is the one implemented by Holt Romania - 40 hours of theoretical training and 40 hours of practical training (www.educatieparentala.ro).

- Some local parent education programmes are delivered

by experts from various fields without any specialised training in parent education as their child work expertise is considered good enough to hold parenting courses.

- There is a shortage of parent education training and preparation, especially when it comes to local programmes where makeshift courses have been developed on the professional background and practical social service experience of organisations' practitioners (psychologists, social workers, educational psychologists, etc.).

- At national level, parent education programmes feature ambiguous training and practice standards, which is further complicated by the multidisciplinary nature of the field (parent educators are sometimes professionals with different backgrounds and the trainer filters curricular information through his or her own training).

Professional background

The analysis of parent education programmes draws attention to the emergent and eclectic nature of parent education, on the one hand, and to the diversity of initial qualifications held by the experts who deliver parent education programmes, on the other. The analysis of these programmes highlights several parent education directions:

- Some parent education programmes are directed towards the school and preschool environment, being dedicated to parents of children enrolled in the education system, while parent educators are teachers; most of these programmes are held in educational establishments;

- Programmes dedicated to small age children (0-3 years) where parent educators are social workers, nurses and doctors, and parents come from vulnerable and disadvantaged groups; in this case, programmes are usually carried out in neutral places (mayoralties or resource centres for parents and children) or in health care facilities (maternities or paediatric wards);

- Programmes dedicated to parents of children with disabilities offered by professionals who play a major role in children's recovery (psychologists, speech therapists, physical therapists, doctors, psychotherapists, etc.).

In general, we notice that *local parent education programmes* have a *predominantly psychological* focus (inspired by psychological theories on child development), and *national programmes* focus on a more *social component* (stressing the social aspects of parenting, childhood, family and parental roles and embracing the social learning theory). The prevalence of one focus or another does not exclude the other, but rather uses it in this eclectic universe of parents-dedicated prescriptions. Even if parenting and childhood theses differ, each of the researched programmes highlights certain aspects it considers as being directly or implicitly more important to parents.

The system of parent educator accreditation

Parent educator accreditation is a topic that has not grown into a generalised parent education practice. The lack of an accreditation system is linked to the absence of a national/regional parent education infrastructure and to the inexistence of a supervision process at the level of many programme providers. Most parenting programmes don't work with accred-

ited parent educators; providers consider basic training in a certain field sufficient for holding training programmes. Some experts' participation in different parent education training sessions is viewed as a form of accreditation for an indefinite period of time. Only national programmes have experimented, to a small extent, parent educator accreditation for their own models, developing a system of periodic accreditation. Of the 18 organisations that completed the online questionnaire, only one has reported to have a system of parent educator accreditation and re-accreditation standards, with accreditation being valid for one year (Holt Romania, see www.educatieparentala.ro). The Parent Education Providers' Catalogue or the websites don't make any reference to the accreditation of the parent educators trained in the other national programmes.

Parent educators' supervision

Most programmes include no or poor, sporadic supervision. This affects the quality of parent education services and their development, programme flexibility to family values and responsiveness to parents' constantly changing needs. In general, local parenting programmes, which are not included in a national system, are either developed by local initiatives (associations of parents of children with disabilities, experts who have identified parents' or children's needs) or ad-hoc programmes primarily focusing on giving information to parents or on developing child work skills for the rehabilitation of children with special needs. Lack of supervision is amplified by lack of stable financial resources allocated to parent education programmes, which depend on the existence of funding programmes that support parent education as local authorities get

seldom involved in parenting support. Moreover, supervision is also an underrated practice in Romania, not only in terms of parent education, but in the entire social service system, being more of a desideratum than a reality. On the other hand, in spite of master's degree programmes set up to qualify supervisors, the social service system hasn't incorporated this practice, even if the minimum working standards make it compulsory.

Intensity of parent education programmes

This descriptor tries to capture the intensity of parent educator's intervention, from the mere parent information to complex clinical intervention. With this descriptor in mind, we come across several types of programmes:

- *Information programmes*. These are programmes that primarily aim to inform parents via different channels about the rights of the child, parental responsibilities, children's needs, child development notions, hygiene, diseases, newborn's breastfeeding, vaccinations, child care, etc. In general, the information most frequently given to parents (in information campaigns) is linked to medical concerns, being always accompanied by the advice to see a doctor. This category also includes information programmes from maternities or paediatric wards, which focus on young child care, nutrition and observation. Programmes centred on educational issues, child rights and other situations (especially critical ones) are sporadic and dependent on external funding. Eight of the 18 researched parent education programmes have a parent information component.
- *Workshop* is considered to be "the first *real* level of par-

ent education" (Carter, 1996, p. 10) because it reduces power asymmetry between the expert and participants in the context of intense interaction within the group and because parents can be empowered. It is the most often invoked type by parent education providers (10 providers out of 18), considered to be more adequate to a specialised group intervention where the parent educator continues to play the role of an expert.

- *Discussion or support groups*. They are considered types of parent education that focus on reflexive elements and on the parent educator's role as a facilitator. It amplifies the cultural specificity of the environment in which the parenting programme is held, it values parents' experience and sustains the *empowering* nature of the programme. Eight of the 18 analysed organisations resort to this type of parenting courses.

- *Systematic evaluation and planned intervention* involve home visits and an intensive working group specialised in different parenting aspects when there is a specific problem. This type of parenting course has been identified in the practice of two organisations that deliver parent education services to parents of children with disabilities.

- *Clinical intervention*. It is the type of intervention dedicated to parents who deal with different problems that cause major family dysfunctions or affect relationships with children and generate major family crises. In the case of the analysed programmes, *clinical intervention* is planned in small programmes (with a small number of beneficiaries) that focus on parents with specific prob-

lems (delinquent adolescents, adolescents with disabilities, etc.) and requires specific therapeutic or clinical expertise (not every parent educator is capable of clinical intervention as this requires specialised training). This type was mentioned in the questionnaire by 5 organisations of the 18 included in the research.

Cultural diversity

A very small number of parent education programmes included in the providers' catalogue declare they have adjusted to cultural diversity (only two of the 18 organisations take cultural diversity into account when delivering parent education programmes). Parenting programmes are adjusted to characteristics related to child age and child issues rather than to the socio-cultural features of the population. The analysed parent education programmes are adapted to the local cultures of different groups of beneficiaries selected according to child and socio-economic features, but they pay little attention to cultural differences in various groups (large families, Roma families, single-parent families, etc.). Parenting programmes are not very open to getting parents involved in programme design, management or implementation, offering instead prescriptions, recipes and solutions to parents' problems. This may be explained by the fact that most programmes implemented nationwide based on structured curricula have been imported from the international experience through translated foreign handbooks. These materials constitute the programme's "hard core", and programme adaptation to Romanian specificity is normally done through a more flexible number of meetings, through parents' freedom to come up with specific themes of

interest (Holt Romania, 2010; Save the Children, 2008).

Target groups

Target groups are the groups of parents who take part in parent education programmes. Some providers work with a wider range of target groups to which parenting programmes are addressed. Based on participants' characteristics, this is how programmes look like:

No	Target group	No of pro-grammes
1	Programmes for future parents	2
2	Programmes for pregnant women	2
3	Families with children aged 0-3 years	3
4	Families with preschool children	8
5	Families with primary school children	10
6	Families with secondary school children	9
7	Families with adolescents	6
8	Low-income families	8
9	Families from different specific ethnic cultures	4
10	Rural families	7
11	Urban families	10
12	Families with children with disabilities	7
13	Adoptive families	4
14	Foster carers	10
15	Other caregivers (relatives, grandparents)	7

Source: www.educatieparentala.ro

Funding of parent education programmes

Funding for parent education programmes continues to be an unresolved issue despite the fact that national and local institutions proclaim the importance of parenting for preventing different problems (child abuse, child separation from family, drop-out, neglect, child labour, etc.). The data given by the organisations that implement parent education programmes in Romania show us that these types of services are supported financially mainly with own resources (11 organisations out of 18) and private funding (7 organisations). Only four parent education providers benefit from public funding, and three providers deliver parent education services with participants' contribution (www.educatieparentala.ro). The lack of a national or local funding system for such programmes and the lack of funding continuity lead to a dramatic drop in the efficiency of such social services.

Characteristics of parent education programme content

Content diversity

Parent education programme content is extremely diverse, and even when themes are the same (like positive discipline, parental stress reduction) the approach to them is different. In some local programmes, it was impossible to accurately identify programme themes as they were more generic and reflected the expert's approach to parents rather than a clear thematic core meant to strengthen parenting skills. This may be explained by the fact that such local programmes put the highest price on the professional background of parent educators (psychologists, social workers, educational psychologists) who

leave their mark on the content and parenting themes. National programmes, which have been delivered for longer, have a wider geographic reach and a coherent theoretical basis, comprising themes that focus on child development, parental roles, positive discipline, parent-child communication and interaction, child behaviours and parent reactions, etc. The issue raised by this theoretical and practical heterogeneity of parent education programmes is related to the mechanisms that may be used to shift from the diversity of parent education models to a *nucleus of basic competencies* that can be assumed by parent education providers and can help strengthen parent education programmes in Romania.

Content adjustment and father's participation in parent education programmes

The content analysis of parent education programmes shows that these are primarily oriented towards the mother. Even if parenting handbooks most often refer to the "parent", there are very few cases where the message is addressed to the father (such an attempt has been made in the materials of Our Children Foundation, focused on father participation). The literature evaluating the efficiency of parent education programmes normally considers fathers' poor participation in such programmes to be due to lack of specific messages for fathers and to methodologies and contents unadjusted to fathers' needs in their relationship with their own children and the rest of the family.

Feminisation of parent education in Romania

Another phenomenon that we want to underline is the feminisation of parent education in Romania (as regards both

parent educators and participants). Beneficiaries are preponderantly mothers (even if such programmes are addressed to fathers as well) as most participants are women and fathers' participation rate is quite modest. Increasing fathers' participation in parent education programmes is one of the providers' objectives worldwide. At the same time, parent educators too are mostly female, and this feminisation of the field is due to the cultural pattern which associates child care and educational roles with women.

Focus on parent-child relationship

The analysed parent education programmes focus primarily on the parent-child relationship and less on developing parent's skills to represent the child's interest in various social arenas (the fourth skill in the model developed by Small and Eastman, 1991).

Obstacles to parent education

Beyond parent education providers' intention to draw as many parents to their programmes, a series of programme implementation obstacles have been identified, which have to do with parents and local government support:

- *Parents' availability/lack of motivation.* Beyond time issues (often invoked as the reason for which parents' cannot participate in parenting courses), parents tend to think they are good parents and don't need specialised courses to be parents.

- *Difficulties in identifying parents with common features.* This difficulty comes from programme providers' practice of identifying parents with common features.

The most frequently used parent selection criterion is child age; therefore, focusing on certain areas of expertise, many service providers take this criterion into account when defining and consolidating programme identity (programmes for parents of young children, preschool children, school children, etc.).

- *Educators' quality and competencies*. International educational studies indicate that parent educators are more important to beneficiaries than the content they are exposed to. As a result, educators' quality and competencies are fundamental for programme efficiency. Placed in a highly dynamic universe, parent education programmes are challenged to refine institutional prescriptions and to train professionals able to properly convey programme content. In the absence of a coherent professional training system needed to develop a common core of competencies dedicated to various professionals with different specialisations, parent education programmes have little visibility and social prestige.

- *The absence of support measures from authorities*. Central and local governments continue to lend little support to parent education. Although one of the programmes has been benefiting from constant support since 2000 and was incorporated into the school infrastructure by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2005, most parenting programmes are not allocated resources from public budgets, are not promoted or supported through specific infrastructure such as special facilities, human resources, etc. Lack of continuity in the funding of parent education programmes is the most frequent criticism

to the success of these programmes. Practically, only small-scale local parenting programmes have been identified as being initiated or supported by authorities. Local authorities haven't developed mechanisms to support their own parenting programmes or to provide financial support to those implemented by private providers. A highly sensitive issue is lack of parenting services at GDSACP, where such programmes should be used for remedial purposes, for recovering deficient and dysfunctional parenting or for training certain groups of parents in parental functionality (e.g. adopting parents). Although parenting programme attendance is a compulsory step for parents in certain procedures – such as the family reintegration of children in the childcare system – this requirement is actually not met and is replaced by brief parent counselling sessions, meetings, home visits, etc.

Recommendations

Development of professional parent education standards

The diversity of parent education programmes and of the specialisations held by people involved in parent education, the eclectic nature of this practice – underdeveloped in Romania, the lack of a coherent system of parent educator training, certification and supervision come to support the need to set professional standards for the development of a common core of competencies that may champion parent education development and ensure a flexible mechanism of programme adjustment to local and family cultures.

Shift from intervention to prevention

The prevention of abuse, neglect, child labour, abandonment and other problems is underfinanced, poorly professionalized at the level of Public Social Assistance Services, while prevention programmes are fragmented, selective, and often one-off; they don't follow up for longer periods of time the effects on specific population segments, which makes it impossible to measure the effects and duration of expected outcomes. Parent education may constitute one of the most important and efficient directions for prevention programme development, which involves lower costs that those of some protection or special intervention measures.

Funding from public funds

Central and local governments should take on the funding of prevention services that include concrete parent education programmes (not only declarations of intent). Parent education, as a fundamental strategy of preventing undesirable phenomena – such as child abuse, youth delinquency, school failure and drop-out – can be considered efficient when it manages to change parenting behaviours so as to meet children's developmental needs. For a positive behavioural change, at least two conditions must be fulfilled: a) involving a great number of parents in parent education programmes so that social networks are created to promote certain models and to maintain the knowledge gained in those programmes; b) involving the representatives of community institutions (mayoralty, church, police, school, health care facilities) as parenting programme beneficiaries and promoters of a desirable parenting philosophy (principles, values, beliefs) and models; c) ensure programme funding continuity as a premise for building educational communities for parents.

Development of a coherent national system

Parent education needs a solid base, not just pilot programmes in various medical, social and educational areas. That is why, the implementation of the National Integrated Strategy for the Training and Development of Parenting Competencies, including parent education as an integral part of lifelong learning, may lay the foundations for building, operating and developing a national integrated parent education system. Even if different public institutions proclaim the importance of parent

education, no regulation stipulates the need for parent education, nor does it make it compulsory. For this reason, public policies must be implemented in this department and the infrastructure for training, funding, certification and supervision must be strengthened, with current parent education providers contributing with expertise, technical assistance, models, etc.

Content and method adjustment to target group features

Content and method adjustment to the different features of various parent groups is another direction for development that we need to take into account. Parent education programmes must be transparent and responsive to parents' values, cultivating parent participation as an involvement and learning strategy; developing work with illiterate parents (oral and graphic content elements and practical types of courses) may be an interventional direction that can ensure impact on the most disadvantaged parent groups. Thus, the existence and application of a formal framework for developing, producing and distributing specialised parent education materials accessible to parents may support the development of this field in Romania.

Parent education programme expansion to parents with larger social networks

Short-term interventions on isolated social segments will not yield sustainable effects over time and will not lead to the wanted change in the overall mentality. Expanding parent education programme addressability to parents with larger and es-

tablished social networks would allow for a better programme promotion that would contribute to a change in parenting behaviours. On the other hand, for more efficient parenting programmes, they need to be extended to large groups of population and delivered for a long period of time.

Bibliography

Alvy, K.T., 1987, Parent training: a social necessity, Studio City, CA; Center for the improvement of child caring.

Arendell, T., 1997, Contemporary parenting. Challenges and issues, Sage Publications, California.

Baumrind, D., 1991, "Effective parenting during the early adolescent transition", in P. A. Cowan, M. Hetherington (coord.), Family transitions, Lawrence Erlbaum, pp.111-164.

Beck-Gernsheim, E., 2002, Reinventing the family: in search of new stylelifes, Polity, Oxford.

Bertelli, E., (2010). Being a "good enough" mum and dad. Courses of family education in Early Childhood Education Services, *Rivista italiana di educazione familiare*, no. 1, pp. 37-43.

Biagioni, B., (2010). Joining together for understanding, *Rivista italiana di educazione familiare*, no. 1, pp. 29-38.

Bigner, J., Yang, R. (1996). Parent education in popular literature: 1972-1990. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 25, pp. 3-27.

Brown, M.B., 2005, *Parent education and support literature review,* University of Delaware Cooperative Extension, http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/professionalresources/parentEd/ 2005litreview.htm

Carter, N., 1996, See how we grow: a report on the status of parent education in the US, Philadelphia: Pew Cheritable Trusts.

Catarsi, E., (2010). Family education and childhood services in Tuscany, *Rivista italiana di educazione familiare*, no. 1, pp. 5-13.

Coleman, M., Ganong, L.H. (1983). Parent-child interaction: a prototype for parent education. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 11, pp. 235-244.

Gallinsky, E., 1999, Ask the children. The breaktrough study that reveals how to succeed at work and parenting, Harper Collins Publishers, New York.

Giles-Sims, J, Lockhart, C. (2005). Culturally shaped patterns of disciplining children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 26, pp. 196-218.

Goddard, H.W., Myers-Walls, J.A., Lee, T.R. (2004). Parenting: have we arrived? Or do we continue the journey? *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 33, pp. 457-474.

Golding, K., (2000). Parent management training as an intervention to promote adequate parenting. *Clinical child psychology and psychiatry,* 5, pp. 357-371.

Gubrium, J., Holstein, J., 1990, What is family,

Holt România, 2010, Cum să devenim părinţi mai buni. Ghidul părintelui, Expert Projects, Iaşi.

Holt România, 2010, Cum să devenim părinţi mai buni. Manualul educatorului parental, Expert Projects, Iaşi.

Johnson, D.C., Harrison, B.C., Burnett, M.F., Emerson, P. (2003). Deterrents to participation in parenting education. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 31, pp. 403-424.

Jones, D., 2001, "The assesment of parental capacity", in Horwath (coord.)., The child´s world: assesing children in need, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Landelijk Centrum GVO, Netherlands Instituut vorr Zorg en Welzijn (NIZW), Educaţi aşa, trad. rom. Fundaţia Copiii Noştri, curs nepublicat, Bucureşti.

Miller, S., Sambell, K. (2003). What do parents feel they need? Implications of parents' perspectives for the facilitation of parenting programmes. *Children & Society,* 17, pp. 32-44.

Molinari, M., Tomaselli, A., (2010). Working towards respect for individuality and differences in gender. Strategies for family education in Infant Services within Comune of Florence, *Rivista italiana di educazione familiare*, no. 1, pp. 15-23.

Reder, P., Duncan, S., Lucey, C., 2003, "What priciples guide parenting assessments?", in S.Duncan, C. Lucey, P. Reder (coord.), Studies in the assessment of parenting, Brunner, Routledge, New York.

Riley, D., 1994, "Some principles for designing effective parent education/support", in *Can government promote competent parenting*, Winsconsin Family Impact seminars. Breifing report, pp.7-14.

Salvaţi Copiii, 2008, Cu părinţii la şcoală. Ghid pentru părinţi, Vârsta preşcolară

Salvaţi Copiii, 2008, Cu părinţii la şcoală. Ghid pentru părinţi, Vârsta şcolară

Salvaţi Copiii, 2008, Cu părinţii la şcoală. Ghid pentru părinţi, Preadolescenţa şi adolescenţa

Sellenet, C., 2007, La parentalité decryptée. Pertinence et dérives d´un concept, L´Harmattan, Paris.

Small S.A., Eastman, G., 1991, "Rearing adolescents in contemporary society: a conceptual framework for understanding the responsibilities and needs of family parents, family relations, vol. 40, pp.455-462.

Small, S. A. (1990). Preventive programs that support families with adolescents. CarnegieWorking paper: Washington, DC.

Smith, C.M., Van Loon, P., DeFrates-Densch, N., Schrader, T. (1998). Content changes in parent education books for parents of adolescents. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 27, pp. 194-213.

Step by Step, *Curriculum pentru părinţi*, curs nepublicat, Bucureşti.

Taylor, R.L., 1997, Who´s parenting, Trends and patterns, in T. Arendell (coord.) Contemporary parenting. Challenges and issues, Sage Publications, Thousands Oaks, CA, pp.68-91.

UNICEF, 2005, *Cunoştinţe, atitudini şi practici parentale în România*, Bucureşti.

UNICEF, 2009, Educaţia parentală contează. *Uniţi pentru copii: Buletin informativ trimestrial al UNICEF România,*, nr. 5, pp. 3-5.

Wyatt Kaminski, J., Valle, L.A., Filene, J.H., Boyle, C.L. (2008). A meta-analytic review of components associated with parent training program effectiveness. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36, pp. 567-589.

Annex 1: List of programmes which have filled out the online questionnaire

LANGDON DOWN Association Oltenia, Teodora Educational Centre

Counselling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, Plopii fără Soţ – Parental stress

Counselling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, Plopii fără Soţ - Compare

Counselling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, Plopii fără Soţ - Triple P

Counselling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, Plopii fără Soţ – How to become better parents

Counselling and Support Centre for Parents and Children, Plopii fără Soţ – Parent Education Programme for Parents of Adolescents

St. Andrew Day Care Centre – Mediaş, Sibiu

The Foundation for Community Support

The International Foundation for Child and Family

Bethany Social Service Foundation

Star of Hope Foundation Romania

One Child, One Hope Foundation

Holt Romania

Parentime

Parent Education Programme - Speranţa Andradei Association

Parent Education Programme – Inocenţi Foundation

Parent Education Programme – Save the Children Organisation, Suceava Branch

World Vision Romania

Annex 2. List of programmes whose curricula have been ana-lysed

    1. Our Children Foundation
    2. Holt Romania
    3. Save the Children
    4. Step by Step

[1]http://www.terapiam.ro/educatia-parentala;
http://fcn61.wordpress.com/educatia-parentala/;
http://www.taraluiandrei.ro/Jurnal/post/2010/04/23/Cursuri-de-educatie-parentala-la-Fundatia-Sensiblu.html;http://www.ruhama.ro/ro/noutati/73-programe-de-educatie-parentala-initiate-de-fundatia-ruhama;
[2]http://www.athenahospital.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=119& Itemid=1&lang=en, www.holt.ro; www.holtis.ro;