Parental Competence of the Vulnerable Groups – an Exploratory Study

Simona Maria Glăveanu*

*Global Economy Institute, Romanian Academy, Cal. 13 September no 13, Bucharest 060711, Romania

Abstract

Studies on vulnerable groups are generally focused on the social and professional integration of their members rather than on the influence of their parental behaviour on the development of children’s harmonious personality and, implicitly, of a fully psychosocially integrated next generation. The objective of this research is to investigate (on a general level) the parental competence of vulnerable groups and to adapt the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) (Glăveanu, 2012) to the new context. The statistical results (N=64) prove that the adapted PCQ has scientifically adequate psychometric qualities and can be used for investigating the parental competence of the vulnerable groups.

Keywords: parental competence; vulnerable groups; knowing the child; affective support; disciplining; time management; crisis management.

1. Introduction

The scientific literature contains a large number of studies on vulnerable groups and on their socioeconomic issues. Vulnerable groups are those that experience a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion than the general population – ethnic minorities, migrants, disabled people, the homeless, those struggling with substance abuse, isolated elderly people and children, those with low levels of education, unemployed or underemployed (Nardo, Cortese & McAnaney, 2014), people from urban/rural areas with precarious financial situation, institutionalized persons and/or affected by domestic violence, the numerous families and the single-parent ones (Popescu, 2011). In the literature there are numerous strategies and programmes addressed to vulnerable groups, whose purpose is to fight poverty (Buzduca, 2013) and social exclusion (Herausgeber, Herausgeber & Herausgeber, 2014; Zamfir, Rotaru & Runcianu, 2014; Weissbrodt, 2011; Groom, 2009; Liamputtong, 2007) with a focus on efforts to socially and professionally integrate the members of the groups in question. A major aspect which can influence the long-

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +0-4076-264-3155
E-mail address: simona.glaveanu@yahoo.com
term impact of vulnerable groups and their relation with the rest of the society is the degree to which the parents in those groups provide proper conditions for the development of children’s harmonious personalities.

A variable that significantly influences the development of the next generation is the “parental competence”, defined as a “system of knowledge, skills, capabilities, abilities and habits that allow the parent to successfully fulfill the parental responsibilities and also to prevent/deal with crisis situations in a manner that contributes to the child’s development” (Glăveanu & Creanga, 2009, p. 181).

2. Objectives and Hypotheses

2.1. Objective

The goal of the research is to investigate (at a general level) the parental competence of the vulnerable groups, and to adapt the Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) so that it might be used in the new context.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The research was conducted on 64 parents from various regions of Romania, who had children aged between 7 and 11 and belonged to vulnerable groups (age $M = 35.8$, $SD = 14.76$). 58 subjects were women and 6 men, all affected by critical financial conditions. Among them, 12 belonged to a minority (Roma), 13 were single parents, 8 had experienced domestic violence, 14 lived in the rural area, 8 displayed physical disabilities (without diagnosed mental disorders) and 9 had a numerous family (more than 4 children).

2.2. Procedure

PCQ (Glăveanu, 2012) was used in order to complete the objective of the study. The questionnaire was validated on 535 parents, with children aged between 7 and 11, using the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) ($r$ between 0.5 and 0.9; level 0.01 bilateral); it originally had 81 items separated into 5 dimensions – briefly described below:

- Knowing the specificities of the child between 7 and 11 years of age ($\alpha = 0.71$) – is about the parent’s ability of becoming aware of the child’s level of development (dependent on the child’s age), therefore being able to explain and understand the child’s reactions and needs and to provide adequate answers.
- Affective support and stress management ($\alpha = 0.74$) – is about the parent’s capacity of knowing and applying efficient methods for both preventing an up rush of the familial stress and coping with it; this capacity is about managing the familial tensional situations and also, about providing some affective assistance that helps the child to manage and overcome negative emotions.
- Disciplining ($\alpha = 0.82$) – reflects the parental capacity of being assertive in relation to the child and of adequately managing the reward-punition system in order to permit and stimulate the development of all the components of a well-balanced personality.
- Time management ($\alpha = 0.77$) – reveals, on one hand, the parent’s ability of defining the amount of time spent with the child (as well as its quality) and, on the other hand, the parental capacity of guiding the child’s own time by creating situations that are stimulative for the development of critical and creative thinking, aesthetic sense etc. and, also, that sustain the child’s social insertion.
- Crisis management ($\alpha = 0.77$) – reflects the parental capacity of being a good leader, of finding solutions to the child’s problems together with the child, consequently overcoming the educational, personal etc. crises and stimulating the development of critical (rational) thinking and problem-solving capacity.
3. Results

In order to use the PCQ in the new context, it has been adapted to the particularities of vulnerable groups; thus, a series of items have been eliminated, others have been rephrased and new ones have been introduced. The item analysis and the exploratory analysis have been revised, the psychometric qualities have been recalculated and the new standard has been established. More precisely, item scaling has been maintained by assigning numbers from 1 to 5 (the parents being requested to rate the level to which the listed conducts are characteristic to them). Additionally, the score calculation method has been kept (drawing a total of the numbers corresponding to the answer for each item; there are items for which the rating indexes are reversed).

The item analysis has revealed statistically acceptable values of the difficulty (between 0.3 and 0.6) and discrimination indexes (between 0.4 and 0.5). The exploratory analysis has indicated a communality between 0.47 and 0.65, a 0.4 saturation, as well as the sample group adequacy (KMO 0.62).

The psychometric qualities of the questionnaire have been underlined as follows: for internal consistency (the accuracy estimation derived from the test items intercorrelations), the calculation of the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient has revealed statistically acceptable values (between 0.7 and 0.86); validity has been ensured by extracting conduct samples from the qualitative research results (interviews), collecting information from the literature and resorting to the experts’ analysis (8 experts have assessed the relevance of the items for the investigated construct and the features of vulnerable groups).

The adapted form of the PCQ contains 41 items, and the final score ranges between 41 and 205. It features both a global benchmark (with results grouped in three classes – low, medium, high), as well as distinct benchmarks for each dimension (as these remain standalone in the assessment of the investigated construct).

4. Conclusions

The statistical data has revealed that this initial form of adapted PCQ possesses adequate values of the psychometric qualities. Some items have been additionally explained for certain individuals with a low general knowledge level and, since they were understood by most subjects, they have been kept, displaying statistically adequate difficulty levels and power of discrimination. However, the validation process will be continued for as adapted PCQ form can be used as an instrument for assessing parental competence within vulnerable groups.

The limitations of this research are generated by the low number of subjects (being basically a pilot study) and the unequal distribution within each and every vulnerable group, and the results correspond to an exploratory research, providing strictly a general picture/a basis for more complex undertakings to be designed on. The present study is part of an ampler research entitled “The Development of the Vulnerable Groups’ Parental Competence – a Mediating Factor for the Next Generation’s Socioeconomic Integration” (the first programme of this type in Romania, carried out under the patronage of the Romanian Academy).

The future research paths take into account more minute differentiations, depending on: the vulnerability type, the sociodemographic data, the training/literacy level, the personality traits, the intellectual level, the existence/inexistence of depression, the help received from the close ones, etc. Since the PCQ is a self-assessment tool, in order to increase the degree of relevance for the parents-children interaction, a lying assessment scale shall also be applied, and the results obtained shall be interpreted in correlation.

The final goal of the research shall be, starting from identifying the parental competence particularities within vulnerable groups (by means of an adapted PCQ form), the design of parental competence development programmes specific to each vulnerable group.

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References

Appendix A. Parental Competence Questionnaire (PCQ) – version adapted for the vulnerable groups

Please indicate the answer you consider it characterizes you in regard to the relationship with your child/children (1 – never; 2 – rarely; 3 – sometimes; 4 – often; 5 – always).

Although the child promises to do something, he or she needs to be supported and verified in order to successfully complete the action.

When I ask something of the child, I make sure that he/she clearly understands what I am referring to. The child makes so many mistakes that when he/she does something positive I remain indifferent.

I do not have the means to make him/her not to behave that way.

Some situations in the child’s life find their solution by themselves, even if they are not taken into accounts by the parents.

Instead of punishing the child for bad deed, I would rather praise him/her whenever he/she refrains from doing them.

School must teach the child how to behave among other people/in society.

In the event that the child has a problem, I discuss with him/her solutions and we establish together as a family what he/she has to do.

I believe that “One should spare the rod and spoil the child”, which helps you have well-behaved children.

In the case when the child (repeatedly) experiences difficulties and poor results at a given basic subject matter, I believe he/she simply lacks talent and we must get alerted.

I apply several punishments and none show results.

I taught the child that, whenever getting into a conflict with someone, he/she should take all steps to avoid turning it into a physical fight.

I teach my child that one can learn something from every problem/failure, provided that one does their best to overcome and not repeat it.

When the child makes a mistake, I threaten him/her with various types of punishments, but I do not apply them.

After each of the child’s wrongdoings, I discuss with him/her its short-term and long-term outcomes.

Before asking him/her to do something, I explain it to the child, as many times as necessary, until he/she understands why what I tell him/her must be done.

In the event that the child should repeatedly consider himself/herself less valuable than the others, I would discuss with the child and remind him/her what he/she is good at.

If I were to find out from the elementary teacher that the child has started many conflicts and would have a low conduct grade, I would get furious and a period of serious arguments and severe punishments would ensue.

I teach my child that, beside violence, there are other ways, too, of making the others take into account what you tell them and what you wish/want.

The experiences of our acquaintances or those seen on television are discussed with my child so that he/she may find out the advantages and disadvantages of that person’s each single behaviour.

I try to reveal from every circumstance a piece of advice related to how the child should behave in the future.

After the child has returned from play/school/other activities, we discuss what happened there.

The models provided by friends are important in creating the child’s habitude.

I advise my child to make friends with children I believe he/she can learn something from.

The issues we have are discussed in the family and we try to help one another in finding the best methods to settle them.

When one family member is upset, he/she lets off steam on the others.

When the child fails to understand and learn in order to receive at least the “Pass” grade at a subject matter, we read the lessons together several times.
The most important role in the child’s obtaining positive school results belongs to the elementary teacher, and not to the child’s proper efforts.

In the event that the child should have failed classes for certain subject matters, I would discuss with the elementary teacher to find out what is the matter with him/her and what they suggest in order to overcome the situation.

I teach my child that what we feel is one thing, and a totally different one to act upon the first impulse when we are angry.

In order to help the child control their temper, anger and fear, I provide examples on the behaviour adopted by other people known by us.

I keep my child away from the unfortunate events in my family (unemployment or the medical condition of a family member, issues between spouses, financial issues, etc.).

When somebody in the family faces difficulties, we discuss together and each contributes to finding solutions.

It happens to me to get angry out of anything and then let off steam on anybody from the family.

Household chores take up all my time; I nearly have no time left to be with the children.

I need a better time management/sequencing.

I manage to keep a balance/harmony between my activities and spending time with my children.

Every week we go out to have fun with the entire family.

I take my child to the theatre/the movies/other cultural events.

On certain occasions, I offer my child books which could help in his/her formation as a human being who knows how to get along with and handle him/herself among the other members of the society.