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## SOCIAL PROFILE OF THE ROMA FAMILY WITH JUVENILE OFFENDERS

M. Ilieva\*, R. Vassilev, A. Stoykov

Department of Social Affairs, Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

### ABSTRACT

The article outlines the social profile of the Roma family with juvenile offenders. It displays the correlation between the specificity of the relationships in it and the nature of antisocial behavior of minor and underage students. Empirical data was derived from a study, conducted in 30 Roma families, where there are children of the indicated contingent.

During the last few years we have witnessed a vicious circle in which the Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin deepen their problems. Especially characteristic is the problem of poor school attendance, school dropout, early marriage, children becoming parents and remaining illiterate or semi-literate. All the above problems, as well as the constant companions, namely poverty and hunger, lead children to criminal acts, begging, stealing and prostitution at a very early school age.

As a result of the above factors, the Roma citizens are permanently isolated and almost do not participate in public activities. The chances of the adult and adolescent Roma population to integrate in society are reduced. Over time, the process of isolation has been deepening, which is in conflict to the trend of society globalization. This isolation significantly counteracts to the integration processes in social relationships. This led to the conduction of an empirical and theoretical study of 30 Roma families from the residential district of "Lozenets" in the town of Stara Zagora. The study involved juvenile offenders and its aim was to determine the correlation between the specificity of the relationships in the residential district and the nature of the antisocial behavior of minor and underage students.

There are several reasons for conducting the empirical and theoretical study:

1. There has never been such a study in Roma families with juvenile offenders.
2. The dropout from school affects the whole process of socialization.
3. The Roma population is subject to a stigmatization at two levels (from the macro society and within the community).

### Socio-demographic structure of the excerpt

The contingent of the questionnaire survey are Bulgarian citizens of Roma origin from the group of the Turkish Gypsies, also known as fichiri. The survey involves a total of 30 people, 30 women (100%).

In terms of age the excerpt is quite diverse – the youngest participant is 29 years old, and the oldest – 43 years old.

The marital status of the respondents is characterized by diversity. The majority of 22 women (73%) live with a partner without being married to him, 4 of them (13,5%) have a civil marriage and 4 women (13,5%) are single and live without a partner.

The next demographic indicator is the educational level of the respondents. They are distributed in the following educational categories: primary, elementary and secondary education. The largest share in the excerpt are the respondents with a primary education (from

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\*Correspondence to: M. Ilieva, Department of Social Affairs, Faculty of Medicine, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, [soc.dein@abv.bg](mailto:soc.dein@abv.bg)

1st to 4th grade) – these are 25 of the women (83%). 3 of the respondents (10%) have an elementary education (from 5th to 8th grade), or have not completed the elementary education at all. The remaining 2 of the surveyed women (7%) are those who have never studied or enrolled in school. As a whole, the prevailing group in the excerpt is that of the women who have primary education.

In terms of employment, only four women (13%) are employed through a labour contract, the remaining 26 women (87%) receive social benefits. As a whole, the women say that they live in the unregulated part (illegal) of the Roma neighbourhood and maintain close relations with their other relatives. This statement correlates with the important community traditions and the relationships within the big family, that determine the group norms and the strictly defined hierarchy.

When asked, the surveyed women said that they had no health problems and did not suffer from chronic diseases. They have never used drugs and intoxicants as well.

If we are to make a 'summarized' portrait of the participants in the survey, it would look like that: it is a woman of Roma ethnic origin, aged 29. She lives together with her partner, without being married, and has a mobile lifestyle. Poorly educated, without a qualification, unemployed, physically healthy, does not use drugs and intoxicants.

One of the important results of the analysis is the finding that the Roma women are afraid of their husbands and say that there is violence and aggression in the family. This is imposed by the traditions and the existing myths and attitudes in the community, which accompany the Roma everyday life – the husband is basically allowed everything, whereas the woman is in a subordinate position. In conversations women share some of the fears they have:

- "He can leave me."
- "There's no other way, he has to beat me when it is necessary."
- "I've earned to be beaten."
- "Men's way to educate is to beat."

Due to this fact the majority of women do not attend social services, oriented towards victims of violence, be it a Crisis center or self-help groups.

This suggests that people from the community should take active part in the development of programs and policies at all levels, oriented towards the community. It is extremely important that the Roma community participates at all levels in the implementation of programs and projects with Roma target group - the project idea, the implementation of the objectives and activities, the project management, the monitoring of programs and policies. Unfortunately, there are only few examples of consultative vote in making decisions for the community.

It is rather worrying that 20 (67%) of the respondents said that the majority of their social contacts are limited within the family and the community. Their relationships outside the community are usually with representatives of institutions, such as the social authorities, the police, the school. The respondents feel that school is the institution, which is responsible for their children, their children's education, whereas the teachers are responsible for the behavior and socialization of the children.

The decisions that the family takes about their children in terms of school and continuation of the education, are taken by the husband, with the active participation of the mother-in-law. In the community, the opinion of old women is honored and respected. It is believed that it is important for the boys to acquire a driver's license, whereas the girls' education is not of primary importance.

When asked if their children, who are of school age, attend school, they gave the following responses:

- The children of 23 of the surveyed respondents, who are of school age, do not attend school regularly, which makes 77%.
- The remaining seven interviewed women answered that their children, who are of school age, attend school regularly, which is 23%.

The students who do not attend school help the family to make a living – they crack walnuts, pick cherries and do any other seasonal work, help the parents in their job, which brings them profit.

The expressed opinion is that parents do not let their children go to school in order "not to have the girls stolen" or "because the weather is bad", or because they "cannot keep up with the requirements of the teachers", etc. Roma parents

do not trust easily if they are in an unfamiliar environment. They consider that environment hostile and alien.

When asked about the value system of the parents and whether they are interested in material or spiritual things, the following answers were received:

To me, the very important issues in life are (more than one answer):

- "money" – pointed by 28 of the respondents (93%);
- "nice and fancy things" – pointed by 22 of the respondents (73%);
- "human relations" – pointed by 11 of the surveyed women (37%).

#### **Books and education are not mentioned in any of the respondents' answers.**

A larger proportion of the excerpt, 25 women (84%), say that the information they need, they learn from neighbors, friends, relatives and TV. They do not use the Internet and do not read newspapers. The other five women (16%) learn the necessary information from their children, through the internet or when they go to a certain institution.

As demonstrated by the study, the main identified problems are: serious economic difficulties and poor housing conditions; the presence of aggression and violence by fathers against mothers and children in the families with juvenile offenders, minimal opportunities for child care in the community, limited access to services in the community due to lack of information or limited access to it.

Parental involvement in school life, familiarizing teachers with the specifics of the Roma ethnic group, is a good basis for joint training, based on intercultural understanding, which in turn will be able to overcome the negativity in teachers towards the ability of Roma people and a prerequisite for mutual understanding and tolerance – things, so necessary in the post-industrial society. It is necessary for the Roma children to have an incentive and a role model.

As a result of this research, the following conclusions have been outlined:

**1. There is a necessity of synchronizing the programs of the various institutions and organizations, concerned with the antisocial behavior of minor and underage children -**

**ministries and agencies, local authorities, universities and NGOs.**

#### **2. Strengthening and supporting the intercultural education in school curricula.**

Enhancing self-confidence makes children more cooperative in mutual activities, both with peers and adults. The school curriculum should include games, close to the culture of children. The games have to promote mastery of skills for joint collaboration and planning activities, as well reducing antisocial behavior of children and students.

#### **3. Persistence on the part of teachers to increase the involvement of parents of Roma children.**

Due to the great difficulties in Bulgarian schools, and the environment in which they grow, the Roma children and their parents often lack the patience and willingness to make the necessary effort to succeed. It is therefore necessary to work continuously and with smaller specific steps. Each success shall be awarded, no matter how small it is! It is necessary to devote more time and work towards the inclusion of children in early childhood education in kindergartens and learning Bulgarian language by gradually involving and engaging parents in school life and generating interest in them. This can happen through the practical implementation of intercultural education in the classes of free selective training, the class for solving class issues and other school forms.

#### **4. Encouraging the active search for extracurricular forms and support from the children themselves.**

The aim here is to make children ask for help from their parents, to engage their parents, and not to let "influence" come from outside the family. Despite the fact that the presented here theoretical and empirical study is not representative for Bulgaria, or for the district of Stara Zagora, it provides information about the correlation between the specificity of the relationships within it and the nature of antisocial behavior of minor and underage students and the opportunities in the development of educational and preventive services in the Roma community, especially in the larger Roma neighborhoods.

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