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# Transgenerational Genogram Analysis

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**Abstract**: The genogram technique was developed by Muray Bowen (1993) within the Family Systems Theory, based on studies in which transgenerational aspects within the family were followed. The cited author states that family problems are transmitted from one generation to another, subjects tending to reproduce behaviors that they learned socially from their ancestors (Zamoșteanu, n.d., pp. 23-25). The genogram (or family tree) is a method that can be helpful in understanding family dynamics and has also been used with adoptive and foster families.

**Keywords:** *transgenerational genogram; family tree; family dynamics.*

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## Introduction to the Use of the Transgenerational Genogram in Family Psychotherapy

The genogram technique was developed by Muray Bowen (1993) within the Family Systems Theory, based on studies in which transgenerational aspects within the family were followed. The cited author states that family problems are transmitted from one generation to another, subjects tending to reproduce behaviors that they learned socially from their ancestors (Zamoșteanu, n.d., pp. 23-25). Bowen (1993) believes that the family functions as a system within which complex interactions take place, designed to ensure a permanent connection between its members. The family system tends to maintain a homeostatic balance of all the elements that interact within it: members, rules, relationships, influences, all of this to ensure its perpetual protection and functionality (Celmare, 2017).

The term genogram is also found in specialized literature under the name "genetic diagram" (Worchel & Cooper, 1983). S. Worchel and J. Cooper (1983) define the genogram as "the diagram of the client's family structure in which, based on some graphic symbols and the marking of the relationships between them, both the elements and phenomena within a family, as well as their possible dynamics, can be analyzed".

The genogram (or family tree) is a method that can be helpful in understanding family dynamics and has also been used with adoptive and foster families. "The genogram describes the types of relationships and events throughout the generations. Births, deaths, divorces, crises and other significant life events can be briefly recorded. A 'case' presentation of a few pages of social history can be condensed into a diagram' (Coulshed, 1993). As Coulshed (1993) states, genograms can be useful for understanding families, which, while helping the social worker to complete them, begin to reveal the unwritten rules of their families, secrets, taboos. The family relationship map can also show how patterns can repeat themselves across generations.

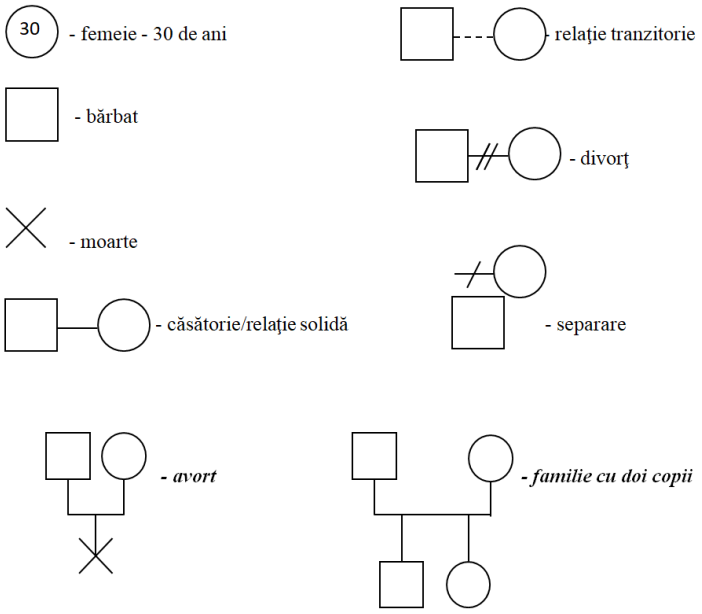
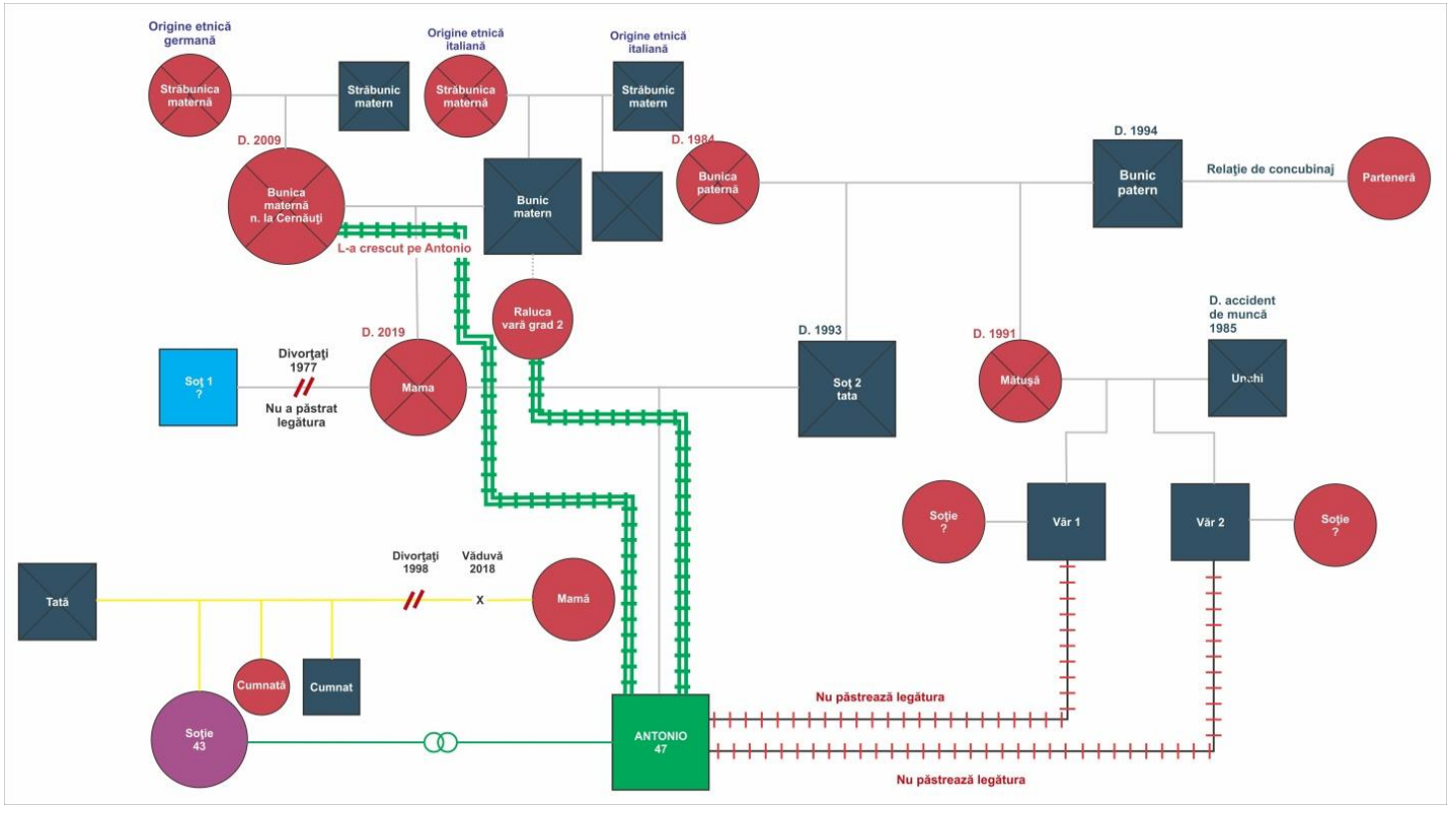



**Figure 1** - Genogram symbols
Source: Organizația Salvați Copiii/Alternative Sociale (2002)

In order to create genograms, the social worker must establish authentic communication relationships with family members, which leads to the gradual diminishing of the meaning of myths and taboos brought by past generations, which can create obstacles in solving problems (Sandu, Unguru & Frunză, 2020). Observation, as well as active listening, are methods by which the social worker contributes to supporting the family, making a graphic design of the relationships within the family or family relationships, as a system of other systems, thus coordinating the process of change within the family" (Miftode, 2010).

## Applied genogram analysis




Source: author's contribution

## *1. The Relationship with the Family of Origin*

The subject of this analysis is ANTONIO. Antonio is 47 years old, married, without children. Antonio has been married to Bianca for almost 3 years, being the first marriage for both. This delay in settling into a marital couple can be attributed to a pattern of transgenerational transmission of marital failure in Antonio's case. The subject's mother was divorced and remarried, the subject being the only child of the parents. This may predispose to a certain amount of selfishness, which may, to some extent, explain the lateness of marriage. This lateness can also be explained by the codependent relationship with the mother and maternal grandmother. There is also an almost complete lack of relationships with other relatives. Subject has very few close relatives of close age - only 2 first cousins with whom he does not maintain contact. The subject did not maintain contact with the paternal grandparents, and contact with the father was problematic. This can also be interpreted in the sense of a deficiency in assuming the paternal figure. We note that the subject has no children either from the current marriage relationship, or from previous relationships.

It is noteworthy that, on the maternal line, the subject comes from a multi-ethnic family, the maternal grandfather being of Italian ethnic origin and the maternal great-grandmother – of German ethnic origin.

On the paternal side, the subject knew his grandparents very little, making only a few visits to them as a child, which could not build a relationship between the subject and them. After the father's death, the subject's relationship with the paternal family ceased, with only 2 encounters with one of the first cousins in 20 years. The subject knows that his cousins are married and have children, but does not know their families.

The subject maintains contact sporadically with only one second cousin on the maternal line, a figure who was relatively central in the subject's childhood. But it cannot be said that they grew up together, living in different cities. During childhood, the subject interfered with cousins of the mother, who lived and currently live in the same city as the subject, but with whom the relationship dissolved during adulthood.

Although the subject's extended family has a multi-ethnic component, the subject does not have behaviors specific to other national minorities and does not know the language of the minorities from which the grandparents and great-grandparents come. However, some choleric outbursts are attributed to Italian blood descent, but the subject disagrees with this labelling.

Regarding the generational transmission of some patterns, we can only talk about the relationship with the parents, previously mentioned, the behavioral patterns acquired from them, especially targeting the conflicting approach to authority and challenging it. An exception is represented by the figure of the maternal grandmother, who practically raised the subject, the mother rather assuming the role of helping the grandmother in raising the child. The maternal grandmother was an extremely authoritarian figure, exercising her authority over all family members.

### *2. The relationship with the wife and her family of origin*

As for the relationship with the wife - this is a particularly happy one, the marriage taking place at a time when the subject no longer granted himself any chance of marriage. In the relationship with the wife, the lack of a child is felt, which could have mobilized the energies of the two in this direction, maturing the relationship. The wife manifests a maternal attitude towards the subject, and the subject very easily accepts this approach, practicing some behavioral patterns inherited from the relationship with the mother. Beyond these aspects, the marital relationship is healthy and complete, satisfying for both partners.

The subject's relationship with the wife's family tends to follow the pattern of the relationship with the subject's own paternal family—that is, the absence of the relationship and voluntary distancing from them—except for one of the wife's sisters, with whom the relationship is more professional than familial. The relationship with the mother-in-law is sporadic, based on mutual respect and refraining from deep communication on both parts. Apparently, the mother-in-law has positive feelings about the subject and, otherwise, the whole family he knows from the wife's side has favorable feelings about the subject. We mention that in addition to the wife's mother, brother and sister and their related families, the subject also knows an aunt of the wife. The rest of her relatives are unknown to the subject and the wife does not seem to have frequent relations with other members of the extended family in the period after marriage. The wife's father is unknown to the subject, him being divorced from the wife's mother at the time the subject's relationship with the wife began, the wife not maintaining contact with her father on his initiative.

## Themes to Explore for Possible Family Therapy

In the case of the subject analyzed in this paper, a potential family therapy should focus on his lack of habit of relating to the family as a resource. Also, the subject's ability to base his trust in others on previous

experiences must be explored, in the context where many of his experiences relating to his family members have failed over time, and this failure may be due to transgenerationally transmitted habitus.

Also, the subject should learn to rebuild his identity, at least within his own family, starting from trust and stability in the couple.

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