Parental Counseling and Its Effects on the Formation of the Child's Personality

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Abstract: Raising children is a challenge, as children grow, change, go through a series of evolutionary phases with different tasks and goals, which the parent often does not know. The child starts from the stage where his primary need is care until he has to detach from his parents to explore the world. Parental counseling is of fundamental importance regarding the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of the child in the first years of life. The socio-economic status and the cultural context influence the way parents raise and educate their children. Many of the parents living in poverty and social exclusion, concerned about the conditions in which they live do not realize their parental style and its influence on the development of children, do not problematize the parent-child relationship and the importance of the first years of life for the formation of the child's personality. The article illustrates how through different sessions of parental counseling 50 Romani families from different marginalized communities in Alba Iulia were supported, in their educational role and in activating resources and skills for raising children. Families who have been parental counselors have become aware of the importance of children's education, the need to go to school, the value of attachment in building the parent-child relationship, and the future relationships that the child will have in the future, etc. Parental counseling offered parents a path through which to deepen, clarify, improve their educational style and family communication.

Keywords: *parental counseling, child development, marginalized communities, family, educational style.*

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1. Introduction

The first years of life are the most important years for the physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of children. To understand the child's development, the most important environment to consider is the family, because most of the child raising and development process takes place within it.

The scholarly literature emphasizes that the first six to seven years of a child's life are the most important in terms of personality building and forming the basis for mental activity. The child's personality forms its basic elements in relationships with others and through life experiences (Verza, Verza 2007).

The family is the environment in which the child's primary socialization takes place, it is the context in which the child feels protected and loved, the micro-universe in which he learns norms and values. The family has a great influence on the child's development in all its dimensions: physical, cognitive and psychosocial. "The family is the first fundamental factor of character formation and therefore there is a close correlation between its qualities and the existence in children of certain characteristic traits" (Crețu 2016, p. 182). The family environment focused on the adult / caregiver is for the child the affective and protective climate which is the essential condition for the formation of future relationships, this climate influencing development (Golu 2015). "Parents play a fundamental role in the formation and development of the child, through behavioral patterns, cultural and social values, habits, traditions, roles and interpersonal behavior manifested in everyday life" (Glăvanu, p. 59).

The relationship with the mother is very important in terms of the development of the child aged between 0 and 7 years. The child seeks protection and safety, seeks a secure foundation. The attachment between the child and the mother, which is formed in the "infancy", influences the psychosocial and cognitive development of the child (Papalia, Wendkos Olds, Feldman 2009). John Bowlby introduced the concept of a secure base, which is formed in early childhood and lasts a lifetime, it is the base that shows availability, security, encouragement, a base to which the child can return at any time.

The phases of the attachment relationship are:

-Pre-attachment – 0 – 2 months – the child orients and responds to any person.

-Attachment in training – 2 – 7 months – the child orients himself and communicates through: crying smile, etc. with the mother he perceives distinctly.

-Obvious attachment – 7 – 24 months – the child protests at separation, wants to maintain proximity, by exploration, following.

- Goal-oriented partnership – after 24 months – relationships are bidirectional, empathic and reciprocal (Cotigă, 2010).

By studying the interactions between mothers and their children over several years, Ainsworth (2006) came to identify three main types of attachment:

- secure (or confident): the child is confident in the availability and support of the attachment figure, in case of dangerous situations. In this way, he feels free to explore the world. This style is promoted by a person who is sensitive to the child's signals, available and ready to offer protection when the child asks for it.

- insecure (or unsafe) avoidant: this style is characterized by the belief that when the person asks for help, not only will the attachment figure not be available, but will even be rejected by him/her. In this way, the child builds his own experiences, relying exclusively on himself, without the love and support of others, seeking self-sufficiency even on an emotional level, thus building a false self. This style is the result of an attachment figure that constantly rejects the child whenever he approaches him / her for comfort or protection.

- insecure (or doubtful) anxious ambivalent: the person with this type of attachment is not sure that the attachment figure will respond to the request for assistance. For this reason, the exploration of the world is uncertain, hesitant, characterized by anxiety, the child being prone to separation anxiety. This style is promoted by a figure who is only available at certain times, with frequent separations, with threats of abandonment used as coercive means.

In addition to the models proposed by Ainsworth, experimental research (Main & Solomon 1990) demonstrated the possibility of identifying a fourth group of behaviors of children subjected to the Strange Situation (a tool created by Main to analyze the child's reaction to mother separation), a type of behavior which is related to both the ambivalent anxious attachment and the avoidant attachment:

- disorganized: the child should find safety and protection from a figure who shows anxiety precisely in his vicinity, who has attitudes of fear and who transmits fear

The child's first interactions are with the adult next to him. Ainsworth (1979) indicates some coordinates in the way the child relates to those around him, especially the mother:

- social responsiveness: in the first 2-3 months children establish contact with others through crying, babbling, etc.;
- proximity search: from 7 to 24 months, children seek adult eye contact;
- partnership behavior: after 2 years children become aware that their parents are distinct and important people.

Parental competence is closely linked to the formation of the attachment between child and mother, and for this reason attachment was one of the important indicators used to analyze the parent-child relationship.

The attachment relationship, the safe base built by the parents (where the child feels safe and protected) shapes the child's life scenario and prevents possible behavioral or emotional problems, as well as stress (Ruiz, Waters & Yates 2019).

To properly understand and respond to the child's needs, the parent does not have to be perfect as long as he is "good enough" (Winnicott 2013). Raising children is a challenge for many parents, a challenge in understanding the different stages of development, in responding to the needs of children and in finding the right style of education. When a couple has a child, the dyad turns into a triad, and the couple moves on to the family. This moment of transition is a new experience for the couple, a time that requires resources to adapt to the role of parent. When the adaptation to the role of parent is not made, the moment of transition from the couple to the family can become a moment of crisis.

Parental styles influence how children's personality develops. An effective parental style promotes acceptance and autonomy, clear communication, setting rules and boundaries. There are several parental styles described in the literature, but three of them are the best known: authoritarian style, permissive style and democratic style. Authoritarian style is the style in which parents emphasize control and domination, and children conform to authority and are generally punished. Parents with this style are not affectionate, and children are withdrawn and insecure. Permissive style is the style in which parents have few requirements and do not control. Parents with this style are affectionate, and children tend to be immature and lack self-control. The democratic style is the style in which the emphasis is on the individuality of the child, but also on the imposition of rules. Parents with this style have a warm and supportive relationship, offer affection and are understanding, but they are also firm in maintaining discipline.

Glăvanu (2012) describes several parental models: *the model of authoritarian parents* (discipline is fundamental in this parental style, parents have power and they sanction, the child models his behavior according to absolute imposed standards), *the model of indulgent parents* (freedom of expression, tolerance and lack of authority are the characteristics of this style, parents are dependent on the child's love), *the model of protective / hyper-protective parents* (excessive attention to child safety, concern and panic of parents who adopt this style lead to negative effects in child development), *inconsistent parenting model* (parents with this style show a lack of relational consistency and move from extreme authority to extreme permissiveness, the child becomes confused and insecure), *the model of indifferent parents* (parents neglect the child, being concerned with professional tasks and show a general indifference related to the child's development, the consequences of such a parental style can be behavioral deviations and antisocial attitudes), *the model of aggressive parents* (the style is characterized by aggression and child abuse, parents are not integrated socially and professionally or they are mentally ill) and *the model of effective parents* (control is combined with support for the child, the parent concerned with the child's development is receptive, offers flexible rules, encourages positive behaviors of the child, the parent-child relationship is characterized by empathy, respect and stimulation of autonomy).

Another important aspect to take into account when analyzing the parent-child relationship is the communication. The parent-child relationship is understood as a communication between two persons. We cannot talk about relationship and attachment without coming to a halt at what communication means, because it is a key element for both the attachment behavior and the parent-child relationship. Communication involves relating to others, it means that we use the main tool we have to create and maintain relationships. Therefore, there is certain reciprocity between communication and relationship, if not interdependence, in the sense that one does not exist without the other. Communication is done, as we know, when a sender sends a message to a recipient, through a system of coded signs, through a certain channel and in a certain context. In order for communication to make sense, the recipient is indispensable and a "witness" of communication is needed. Communication is not just an exchange of information, but it is the creation of mutual relationships, the creation of a relational platform between interacting persons..

Emotions play a very important role in the communication between parents and children, that's why parents must pay attention to this aspect, to the way they express themselves emotionally, to building "peer-to-peer"

relationships. Identifying and managing emotions is very important in children's development (Gottman, 1996).

Parental roles are learned as one progresses in the experience of being a parent, there are no predefined recipes. Parental competence corresponds to a complex construction, it cannot be attributed to personal qualities of the parent but rather to the parent-child relationship dynamics. This multidimensional construction of parental competence includes affective and cognitive dimensions that guide the behavior of parents towards children. In the first years of the child's life, parental competence is related to the care function, which refers to affection, acceptance, receptivity – the ability to understand and respond to the child's signals, control – rules and limits, and parental expectations and causal attributions for the child's behavior (Cena, Imbasciati, Baldoni 2010).

The involvement of both parents in the upbringing and education of children is very important in every stage of children's development, starting with the prenatal period (Yan, Schoppe-Sullivan & Kamp Dush, 2018).

Parental counseling is part of the psychological counseling, which the psychologist performs with parents and children to explore and discover ways to use resources efficiently, in order to optimize the parent-child relationship. Parental counseling is one of the most important tools that the parent has to adapt to the parental role or to manage different moments in the life of the parent and the parent-child relationship.

Parental counseling is one of the tools through which preventive and corrective action can be taken in the child's development. Through parental counseling one observes and understands how the child's development is structured. Parents have a very important role in the child's physical, cognitive and psychosocial development, favoring or impeding the developmental processes. In this sense, parenting can be considered in a dimension of protection, when it is functional for development or in a dimension of risk and compromise, when it is dysfunctional and abusive.

Through parental counseling, parents are supported and guided so that they themselves feel capable and adequate in supporting and guiding their children, in the difficult task of helping them to become happy and fulfilled adults.

The research focused on the psychosocial dimension of child development, analyzing the dynamics of family relationships and the emotional dimension. All the theoretical concepts presented in this section can be found in the research part, specifically in the tools used for research.

2. Research questions/aims of the research

The article illustrates how through various parental counseling sessions, 50 Romani families from different marginalized communities in Alba Iulia were supported in their educational role and in activating resources and skills for raising children.

The families that benefited from parental counseling were selected in the project based on the criterion of belongingness to a marginalized community. These families' inclusion in the marginalization conditions was proved in the project by a series of criteria: low educational level (less than 8 classes graduated), adults are not employed in the formal labor market, children are not integrated into the school system, families have a large number of members living in small and unhealthy spaces (less than 15 sqm for one member). All families who have benefited from parental counseling live in marginalization conditions and have been eligible to benefit from this service, the living conditions being those of poverty and social exclusion.

The aim of the research is to demonstrate the importance of parental counseling and its effects on the formation of the child's personality, especially in the poor and precarious socio-economic and educational context of Romani communities. Specifically, through parental counseling, the psycho-social development of the child between 0 and 7 years of age is facilitated in 50 Romani families living in conditions of marginalization and poverty.

Parental counseling was provided in marginalized communities in Alba Iulia, within the Alba Iulia 360 project funded by the Human Capital Operational Program, over 2 years (February 2018 - February 2020).

In my capacity of parental counselor-psychologist in the above-mentioned project and of university lecturer teaching the discipline of developmental psychology, I was able to perform parental counseling and interpret its results, thus drawing the research presented in this article.

The research was qualitative, following the particularity and uniqueness of the way to provide parental counseling for individuals / families belonging to marginalized communities, before making general statements (applicable to a larger population) or comparative (comparisons with other cases). This aspect of applying parental counseling to people belonging to marginalized communities at risk of poverty and marginalization is the originality of the research and leads to the uniqueness of the article.

3. Research methods

The sample of 50 families used for the research was determined through the project in which the actual parental counseling was performed, the selection criterion being to belong to marginalized communities. The 50 families live in marginalized communities in Alba Iulia in conditions of poverty, social exclusion and territorial and social segregation. Most families are Romani and consist of several members (several children and several generations living in the same space). Out of the 123 children of families from marginalized communities, 72 children (23 girls and 49 boys) participated in the research, their ages ranging from 0 to 7 years. Children with these ages were chosen for research because the first years of life are the most important for development and in these years the attachment relationship is formed and strengthened, and the foundations of personality are laid.

The following tools were used in the qualitative research: direct observation, family drawing test, semi-structured interview (tools used to know the relationship dynamics), group counseling, parental counseling sessions (tools used for intervention).

The tools used were designed for two approaches:

- Child approach: direct observation, family drawing test.
- Parent approach: direct observation, semi-structured interview, parental counseling sessions.

The research participants were seen as people in interaction – the relationship / interaction between parents and children – each giving a certain meaning to the relationship. Parent-child relationships were observed and studied in their natural context without being influenced and without any manipulation of the context (for example through instructions or behavioral guidance).

The observation had the purpose, the intention to know and describe the parent-child relationship, objectively recording important information of relational dynamics. The indicators used in the observation grid were: living conditions; attachment; communication (linguistically and emotionally); autonomy (personal – space management); interaction / socialization (adult-child / child / child relationship).

The observation was made in several intervals (4-5) of 2 or 3 hours for each family, this longer observation period reducing the risk of accidentally detecting a high frequency of a certain behavior of the parent or child.

The results obtained through direct observation were confronted with the parents during the parental counseling sessions.

The family drawing test was used because the child's drawing reveals many aspects of intellectual and emotional development, as well as the child's way of perceiving the reality around him, in our case the reality of the family. "Drawing does not only involve formal elements. In addition to form, there is content, and this content expresses a piece of the whole personality" (Corman 2012, p. 17).

The family drawing test was used for children between 4 and 7 years old, depending on cognitive development and the level of development of fine motor skills (it is mentioned that the test was applied to a single 3-year-old girl, whose cognitive development allowed the use of this tool). The family drawing test took place over a period of time ranging from 30 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the involvement and particular needs of each child. In applying the test the following were observed: the order in which the characters are drawn; the time allocated to the drawing; the child's non-verbal language and the answers given to the questions asked (Who is the happiest? Who is the least cute?, etc.). During the parental counseling sessions, the drawing of the family made by the children was used to illustrate to the parents the dynamics of the family relations perceived by the child and to calibrate the way of parental intervention.

Through the semi-structured interview, information about the parent-child relationship was collected directly from the parents, especially from the mother. The interview guide was built with some predefined questions, which guided the discussions on the topic of the parent-child relationship, but also allowed the construction of other questions on the specific topic, depending on the answers obtained. The duration of the semi-structured interview was 1 hour, and the predefined questions focused on: the degree of satisfaction with the child-parent relationship, specific problems, the ways of educational intervention and the parent's expectations in relation with the child.

In some of the families, where there was availability, the semi-structured interview was applied to both parents and grandparents, who are important attachment figures. In this case, it was possible to compare the predefined questions from the interview grid and it was observed how the relationship that each of the parents has with the child was built. As pointed out in the introductory part, the involvement of both parents in the development of their children is very important.

The parental counseling was performed according to the need and situation of each family, the intervention being calibrated on the existing

problems and difficulties and on the age peculiarities encountered in the families.

The purpose of the parenting sessions was to identify what is not "working" in the relationship with the child, to guide parents in discovering new ways to be in a relationship with the child, understanding his basic needs, i.e. physical protection and emotional security. Through parental counseling, parents were supported in their role, in discovering and improving individual resources, in acquiring specific parenting skills and self-assessment skills, for a better understanding of the child.

4. Results

The results obtained in the research will be summarized in charts (where possible) to be concise and clear, and in Chapter 5 they are going to be interpreted.

As to living conditions, direct observation found that most families live in poor conditions, we found overcrowding, makeshift rooms, high degradation of housing, lack of utilities (running water, sewerage and gas) and dirt.

Chart 1 – Living Conditions

Direct observation allowed the collection of information regarding the attachment that children formed in the relationship with their parents; linguistic and emotional communication; personal autonomy and space management; interaction / socialization (adult-child / child-child relationship).

Chart 2 – Attachment, communication, independence and interaction

The identified traits that characterize the attachment relationship were related to safety in exploration, the perception of separation, self-confidence and the need for help, the predominant emotions. When identifying the attachment relationship we also took into account the child's age and the phase of the attachment relationship (pre-attachment – 0 – 2 months; training attachment – 2 – 7 months; obvious attachment – 7 – 24 months; goal-oriented partnership – after 24 months. 79.2% of children formed an insecure attachment in relation to the parent / caregiver, compared to 20.8% who formed a secure attachment.

The development of linguistic and emotional communication is below the average age for 68% of children, according to the average age for 26.4% of children and above the average age for 5.6% of children. Regarding the linguistic communication, we took into account the development of the language according to the age stages, as well as the pre-linguistic stage that precedes the appearance of the language in the case of younger children (babbling, whining, imitation of speech sounds, etc.). The relationship with the parent allows the child to regulate his own emotions, in this way the emotional communication with the other is built, and the

emotions are manifested in an appropriate manner. The observation of emotional communication focused on how children identify and express / verbalize the primary emotions (joy, sadness, fear and anger) they feel, and whether this expression is supported by the parent.

As to personal autonomy and space management, it was observed that 51.4% of children are independent and show autonomy in exploring the environment, while 48.6% are dependent on the parent's figure in exploring the environment.

The interaction and socialization of children with those around them was observed through various games and activities in the family environment. Some important elements of the interaction were observed: contact, hugs, imitation, language, etc. 34.7% of children are sociable and cooperative, while 65.3% are isolated and uncooperative.

The family drawing test was applied to a number of 43 children aged between 4 and 7 years, out of a total of 72 children. The test illustrated the family's connections and dynamics, as the children represented in the drawing their perception of the family. All the drawings were used in the parenting sessions to illustrate to the parents how the children perceive the family. In most cases, the children's perception of the family surprised the parents by the fidelity through which the children represented the difficulties they go through. Below, there are two tests: the left test, in which the child presents the traumatic situation he is going through (the father's departure, the appearance of a new partner of his mother, jealousy towards the other two siblings, etc.) and the right test in which the child presents a smiling and united family. Both perceptions corresponded to reality, being confirmed by parents during parental counseling sessions.

Image 1 – Family Drawing tests

One of the aspects analyzed through the semi-structured interview was the degree of satisfaction of the parents / grandparents towards the relationship they have with their own children / grandchildren. In the 50 families, 70 interviews were made – 50 mothers were interviewed, 8 fathers were interviewed and 12 grandparents were interviewed. Most of the parents and grandparents interviewed said they were satisfied with the relationship with the child / grandchild.

Chart 3 – Degree of satisfaction of the parents / grandparents in the relationship with the children / grandchildren

The specific problems mentioned by parents in the semi-structured interviews were related to the difficulties of managing children's behaviors (in 5 of the families children are diagnosed with autism or ADHD), emotional problems of children, children's health problems, bedwetting, quarrels between siblings, divergences between the educational style of parents and grandparents, difficulties in starting kindergarten or school, loss of a family member, divorce of parents, lack of involvement of the father, aggression and alcoholism of the father, departure of a parent or both abroad, parent-child conflict. Many of the interviewees mentioned as a major problem the precarious financial and material situation, which influences the process of raising and educating children.

Regarding the modalities of educational intervention, most of the interviewees did not question the way they educate their children /

grandchildren, punishment being the only method used in raising and educating children. Out of the 70 people interviewed, only 12 people stated that they use explanation and example in children's education.

Regarding the expectations of parents and grandparents towards children, most of the interviewees stated that they want good and obedient children. 21 of the persons specified that they want a material and financial security that the children should have and that they can obtain through education / school attendance.

Out of the 50 families, 45 needed parental counseling sessions for corrective purposes, and 5 families needed parental counseling sessions for preventive purposes.

Each family benefited from a number of 3-5 parental counseling sessions, except for one family, which considered that it did not need parental support, despite the fact that the family drawing test showed that there are problems in the perception of the family (the child showed jealousy towards the younger brother, excluding him from the drawing, the father's character was drawn very far from the family, which indicates problems in the father-son relationship, the very small size of his own character indicated insecurity and low self-esteem, etc.).

Parental counseling was designed and developed in an integrated way, with a set of specific tools (direct observation, family drawing test, semi-structured interview), to meet the needs of each family.

Parental counseling sessions responded to the different needs of parents and focused on the following issues:

- knowing the characteristics of the child's developmental stages and understanding his needs in order to be able to identify the appropriate way to respond to these needs;
- emotional support and emotional control / attachment;
- educational ways of intervention / parenting style;
- crisis management;
- the ability of the parent to determine the quality and quantity of time spent with the child and to create appropriate contexts for development.

The success of parental counseling was also determined by the conscious, active and responsible involvement of each family member.

5. Discussions

The results obtained by applying different tools and in particular the parental counseling sessions show us that the socio-economic status of the

family determines the way in which parents raise and educate their children. Living in conditions of poverty and social exclusion (82% of families live in precarious conditions), concerned about ensuring the money needed for everyday living, most parents in marginalized communities are not aware of their parenting style and do not understand its influence on children's development, do not question the relationship parent-child and the importance of the first years of life for the formation of the child's personality.

A very high percentage of the children who participated in the research (79.2%) formed an insecure attachment in the relationship with their parents and starting from this reality the attachment was one of the aspects that we worked on during the parenting counseling sessions. Parental counseling has helped parents understand the value of attachment and the fact that this attachment is formed in the first years of life will condition the relationships that the child will have in the future. Thus, the parents understood how a child actually manifests himself:

- with a secure attachment: safety in exploring the environment, the conviction to be kind, the ability to endure prolonged separations, no fear of abandonment, confidence in one's own abilities and those of others, the positive and confident self, the other is seen positive and available, the predominant emotion is joy.

- with an insecure attachment: insecurity in exploring the world, the conviction of not being loved, the inability to endure prolonged separations, the perception of separation as "predictable", the tendency to avoid the relationship due to the conviction of rejection, anxiety of abandonment, apparent self-confidence and refusal to ask for help, self-positive and confident, the other is seen negatively and distrustfully, the predominant emotions are sadness and guilt.

The quality of parent-child interactions influences the adjustment of children's emotions, communication and children's development in general. In the studied communities, parent-child interactions leave much to be desired, and this is reflected in the development of linguistic and emotional communication, which is below the age average for 68% of children, according to the age average for 26.4% of children and over the age average for 5.6% of children. Starting from these aspects, during the parenting counseling sessions, the parents were informed about the different parenting styles and helped to become aware of their own parenting style and its influences on the child's development.

The independence and autonomy demonstrated by children in exploring the environment (51.4% of children compared to 48.6% of

children) is most likely related to the cultural model present in Romani communities (children are left to fend for themselves, very often being cared for by older siblings).

The family drawing test and the semi-structured interview provided important information for structuring the intervention through parental counseling sessions. The issues identified through the semi-structured interview were analyzed and debated during the parental counseling sessions.

Parents of children from the marginalized communities analyzed are satisfied with the relationship they have with their own children, have quite realistic expectations from them and do not question the way in which they educate their children. Although most parents did not attend school, they want education to be the tool for their children to have a better future.

Parental counseling sessions had two effects: prevention and intervention. Thus, the parents were informed and understood the characteristics of the child's development in the different stages of age, and by understanding these characteristics they were able to better fulfill their role as parents. By understanding the importance of the attachment relationship for the development of the children's personality and by becoming aware of their own parental style, the parents managed to initiate a change from this point of view. There is no doubt that these changes cannot be quantified and longitudinal research is likely to be needed to show that parents have begun to put the information they have received into practice and to continue to exercise parental competence. However, it can be confirmed that during the parental counseling sessions the parents showed interest and goodwill in fulfilling their parental duties as efficiently as possible, helping the children to develop in a balanced and harmonious way.

Families who benefited from parental counseling expressed their consent to the processing of their personal data. The various institutions involved in Alba Iulia 360 project (1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Alba Iulia City Hall and other partners) are operators who have the right to process personal data. All participants in the project were free to leave the project at any time, without any consequences, being informed of this aspect before entering the project. However, no one left the project (during the two years of carrying out parental counseling activities), expressing their interest in the various integrated activities of the project and in particular for the psychological support from the parental counselor.

In the performance of parental counseling activities, any risk of mental, emotional or physical damage to persons was excluded. Thus, the benefic character for the participants in the parental counseling, the respect

for the autonomy of the participants, the justice - the sensitivity to any impact that the parental counseling could have had were observed.

This article, in line with international research in the social and educational field (Pietrantonio & Glance, 2019), calls for greater awareness of actors involved in fighting poverty and its effects on the most vulnerable families and on the lives of children. Parental counseling is one of the tools that can be used in this fragile social context, and the article illustrates this, with a major contribution to emphasizing the importance of parental counseling in fighting the effects of poverty in marginalized communities. Undoubtedly, through parental counseling we can intervene effectively from an educational point of view in vulnerable families, helping them to use the resource of parental competence, but other tools are needed to be able to change the reality in these marginalized contexts.

The article adds value in the field of education, showing how the parental counseling tool can be used for families in marginalized communities, parents being supported in their role, aware of the importance of this task, and children being properly educated and therefore protected from possible educational mistakes. To understand the child's development, the most important environment to consider is the family, because most of the individual's upbringing and becoming an adult process takes place within the family. Through parental counseling, we improve the individual and parental resources that each parent has and that are difficult to recognize sometimes, and we facilitate the acquisition of specific educational skills and related self-assessment and monitoring skills.

6. Conclusions

The relationship is the basis of development. As Buber put it, "in the beginning there was relation" (Buber 1954, p. 21). For Buber, there is no I without You, and the I - you dialogue is placed at the center of human existence. We must get out of ourselves and go towards the other to meet him, to open our relationship with trust. From this perspective, the interpersonal relationship is fundamental to human existence.

The child is prepared from birth to enter into a relationship with those who care for him, his survival depends on how he is cared for. The child's development is intrinsically linked to the relationship which the child builds with the parents during the first years of life. Parental counseling has beneficial effects on the formation of the child's personality, because it is the ideal tool to improve the parent-child relationship.

The balanced development of the child's personality is achieved within the family where on the one hand the child feels loved and appreciated, and on the other hand he experiences clear boundaries that allow him to distinguish the external and internal world and help him tolerate tensions and manage impulses and emotions.

The research was conducted in communities where people live in poverty and marginalization, sometimes in conditions of absolute poverty, where children lack: regular nutrition, medical care, adequate housing, appropriate clothing, access to educational, sports and cultural activities. All these aspects, to which we may add the lack of awareness about the importance of the parent-child relationship, make the development opportunities of these children limited. Parental counseling focused on resources, not problems, on human potential, which must be recognized, supported and guided.

Raising children is a challenge and a difficult mission in this complex context of today's society (Capaldi, 2019), but with the right tools parents can find resources to help children become resilient today and balanced adults tomorrow. One such tool can be parental counseling, through which parents are helped to use parenting skills as resources for the harmonious physical, cognitive and psychosocial upbringing of children.

Parental counseling can be, metaphorically, like a compass that indicates the direction to follow to optimize the parent-child relationship. When a parent feels that he is losing direction, he can use this resource, which brings him back into the relationship with his own child.

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