

## CHILD SOCIAL PROTECTION SERVICES AT URBAN LEVEL IN ROMANIA

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### Abstract

This paper addresses a very important issue in the area of the social public services on the urban level. Social protection as part of the public services system is a sensitive subject in every country, but it's becoming really challenging in the developing countries. This paper is approaching the child social protection, which is one of the most relevant subjects nowadays. The research study is based on a particular survey developed on the topic of child social protection on national and urban level, inside the borders of Romania. The main objective of the research study, was to find out how much are the Romanian children being protected by the social services on national and urban level and how effective are they from the perspective of the child rights. The survey includes some key issues related to the child abuse and the role of the school and family during the education process. Starting from that point, some variables were defined and a representative sample was taken on the urban level. The main research methods used were a questioner and a semi-structured interview in order to get to know the current situation and the opinions of the actors involved in the child social protection services. The obtained information were briefly analysed and some main ideas were concluded in the last part of the current paper.

**Keywords:** social services; children abuse; social protection.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There are several international agreements recognizing social protection as a fundamental aspect of the human rights. Looking on the international statistics, more than half of the people in the world, lack access to any form of social protection, and in the world's poorest regions less than 10% of the population enjoy basic levels of social protection (Jones and Holmes, 2010). In the recent years, social protection as a development measure has gained substantial attention. Social protection is increasingly being considered as part of the response to child poverty and vulnerability. In this frame the subject of child abuse and how it could be reduced through effective social services provided by schools and other specialised state institutions, is developed. Although, considerable research has been devoted to social protection, rather less attention has been paid to child social protection services. So far, investigations have been confined to social protection services of persons with disabilities. Recently, there has been growing interest in child social protection services. The purpose of this paper is to identify and to analyse the social protection services for children. We argue that child social protection needs a special attention and we are going to demonstrate how the actors involved can influence the content and the quality of such public services.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ON SOCIAL PROTECTION, IN GENERAL AND SOCIAL PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, IN PARTICULAR

The interest on social protection and its potential benefits has grown exponentially in the past years. If we look into the literature, there is not a single accepted definition of this concept. As we can see, there are two main perspectives of approaching the social protection, in general and applied to child rights in particular. One is produced by the international organizations and the other one is argued by the researchers. The basic guiding principles have been formulated by The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other development partners. The definition of social protection assumed by the World Bank is also quite distinct in that it emphasized the role of social protection in improving and protecting human capital and regards labour market interventions as a form of social protection (World Bank, 2009).

Drawing upon the definitions adopted by the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF and the World Bank, the experts are explaining the concept of social protection such as: "a set of interventions whose objective is to reduce social and economic risk and vulnerabilities, and to alleviate extreme poverty and deprivation" (Hopes and Homes, 2009). Child poverty is widely recognized to have far-reaching short-term and long-run adverse impacts in terms of income, education and health and other areas of well-being (Havemann and Wolfe, 1995).

From the researchers perspective, the fact that children growing up in a poor or low-income family are more likely to receive poorer health care, to obtain lower educational outcomes and to reach lower levels of attainment in the labour market, is clear. (Duncan and Brooks, 1997). As a general request, the social services system in each country should be adapted to the national and local economic and politic context in order to fulfil the needs of people in general and of children, in particular (Androniceanu, 2008).

There are other experts in the social services who understand that the social protection services for children are being based on three core dimensions which have to match in a coherent way. (Roelen and Sabates, 2011). According to them, these core dimensions are: (1) the protection and support of minimum income standards for families with children; (2) the protection of children's access to adequate parental time and adult supervision, and (3) the provision of services and vital support to well-being and healthy development.

Formal social security systems exist in all countries, but these provide only a limited range of benefits to those employed in the formal sector. The social system is strongly influenced by the economy; fiscal

and financial constrains and by the socio-cultural attitudes and values. (Plumb, Androniceanu, 2003). Related to this point Handley (2009) argues that there are few mechanisms for creation the fiscal space of social protection. These are the following:

- increasing revenue through increased economic activity and taxation;
- reallocating spending;
- reducing debts;
- increasing borrowing;
- increasing aid in the form of grants and loans;
- generating revenue.

In this context, the attitudes towards children and child rights are also highly conservative. Discriminatory, socio-cultural attitudes and practices underpin children's vulnerability to violence, abuse and neglect, including harmful traditional practices such as early marriage, female genital mutilation or cutting and various forms of domestic and religious servitude (Havemann, 1995).

The experts and the scientists try to find an appropriate way for measuring social protection and child protection. They proposed a sort of indices. These indices were reviewed according to several criteria. The indices identified one index focusing solely on social protection indicators. As some experts underlined in their papers, the social protection indicators are used "to quantify the impact of social protection activities in schemes following a standard methodology" (Baulch, Weber, and Wood, 2008; Burlacu, Jiroveanu, 2009). They appreciate the Social Protection Index like a monitoring instrument that is able to facilitate international comparisons of both the statutory intents and policy-related outcomes of national social protection programmes. The incorporation of social protection indicators in future indices, will require new social protection measurement instruments, or the adaptation of an existing instrument. The Council of Europe and the European Commission's Mutual Information System on Social Protection databases are virtually identical in terms of the indicators making up each database. According to the Institute for Health and Social Policy's World Database, approximately 97% of United Nations Member States legally guarantee the right to some form of paid maternity leave (Ciocoiu, 2011).

Social protection for children is receiving increased attention in both the high-income and industrialised countries and the middle and low income countries. Aging population are increasing the financial burden on national budgets as the costs of pensions and health care rise, and these are the largest components of national social protection schemes in developed and developing countries. From the

social protection services perspective, Romania occupies one of the last positions in the category of developing countries. If we look at the Romanian children social protection system we find out a huge gap between Romania and other countries from the European Union. These are few research arguments for choosing this topic. Next section is presenting a general view about the Romanian legislation on social services, the content and the principles of social protection in Romania and how the Romanian institutions are supporting them at operational level.

### **3. SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILD PROTECTION IN ROMANIA**

There are different categories of social services in Romania. According to the Law on Social Assistance no. 292/2011, these are classified as following:

- Personal care;
- Service recovery / rehabilitation
- Insertion service / social reinsertion

.Social services are addressed to the following categories of beneficiaries

- Child and/or family;- Persons with disabilities;
- Elderly people;
- Victims of domestic violence;- Homelessness;
- People with various addictions (alcohol, drugs, toxic substances, internet, gambling etc.).
- Victims of trafficking;
- Detainees;
- Sanctioned persons with educational measure or non-custodial sentence under probation supervision services;
- Persons with mental disorders,
- People in isolated communities;
- Long-term unemployed, etc.

According to the Romanian legislation, the assistance regime is including:

- Accommodation services on fixed or indefinite period: residential centres for children, the elderly, adults with disabilities, protected housing for people with disabilities through integration centres, occupational therapy for adults with disabilities; night shelters for adults; day and night shelters for children, centres for maternal support, shelters for child emergency; centres for domestic violence victims, etc..
- Services without accommodation: day care centres and/or home care facilities, soup kitchens, mobile services providing food, social ambulance;
- Place award.

Social services are provided in different locations, such as:

- The residence of the beneficiary
- In day care centres
- In residential settings with limited or permanent accommodation;
- The residence of the person providing the service;
- In the community.

Social services in Romania may be provided by:

- a) public providers of social services which are:
  - Specialized structures within / subordination to local authorities and executive authorities of administrative units organized in the village, town, city and in the districts of Bucharest
  - Central government authorities or other institutions subordinate or coordinate them with duties established by law for providing social services for certain categories of beneficiaries;
  - Health care facilities, schools and other public institutions that develop services at Community level, named integrated social services.
- b) private providers of social services:
  - Non-governmental organizations (associations and foundations in social activities);
  - Religious denominations recognized by law;
  - Individuals authorized by law;

- Subsidiaries and branches of international associations and foundations recognized in accordance with the law;
- Operators under special conditions prescribed by law.

In this paper we are focusing on social services for children. An overview concerning the beneficiaries of the social services offered by the National Agency for Payments and Social Inspection which is working under the authority of the Romanian Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1 - THE SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN ROMANIA AND THEIR PAYMENTS (FEBRUARY 2012)

No.	Beneficiaries of social assistance	Number of beneficiaries	Payments (Ron)
1.	State allowances for children under three years	3887158	233459468
2.	Monthly parental allowances for children	169823	2513990
3.	Monthly allowances for children growth	1503	243172
4.	Social allowances for people with minimum wages	188818	32696908

Source: Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, 2012

If we look in more details in statistics, the evidences concerning Romanian children with different disabilities are showing the fact that their number and the total amount allocated to them increased yearly.

Table 2 presents the number of children distributed on the main handicap types.

TABLE 2 - THE EVIDENCE OF THE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN FEBRUARY 2012

No.	Total number of children with disabilities, of which:	71410
	Children with low level of handicap	2598
	Children with medium level of handicap	20896
	Children with high level of handicap	14468
	Children with severe disabilities	33448

Source: Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, 2012

There is a clear evidence concerning the social services for abused and exploited children. Figure 1 is presenting the abuse types in Romania and the social services for children in the annual rate of 2012.

Figure 1 is showing the magnitude of each abuse in Romania and the associated social services provided by the public and private organizations. As we can see there are two types of abuses more prevalent on national level. One is the neglect of the relation with the children and the second is the labour exploitation.

The next section is containing a selected part of a larger research study conducted in Bucharest in the first part of this year. We can see how the social services for children from high school are provided by the state authorities in order to protect them by different types of abuses and what they think about that.

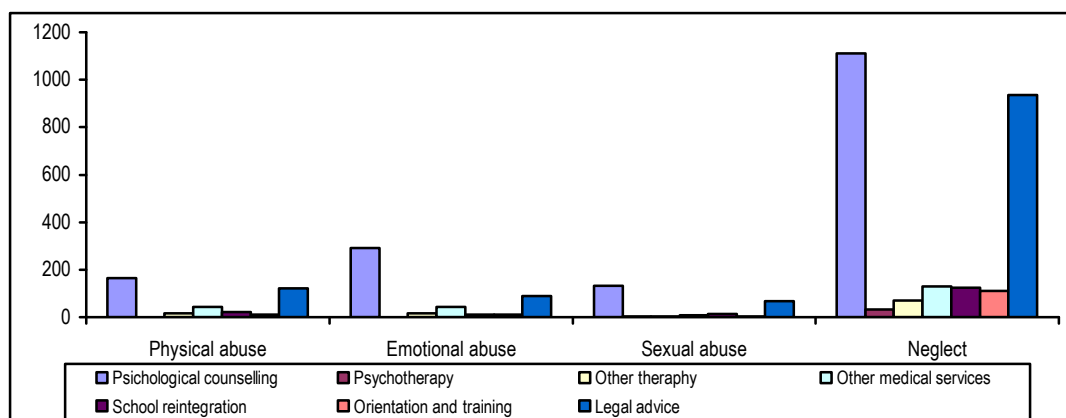


FIGURE 1 - ABUSES TYPES AND THE CORRESPONDING SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN FEBRUARY 2012

Source: General Directions for Social Assistance and Children Protection

#### 4. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to know the current situation in Romania, in general and in a high schools from Bucharest particularly, a research study was conducted based on a standardized methodology applied.

##### 4.1. Research objectives and the survey structure

The main research objectives were the following:

- to find out if children from Bucharest know their fundamental rights;
- to know the degree of implementation and enforcement of the child rights in schools and families;
- to determine the perceptions of various forms of discrimination and the causes thereof, relationships with parents, friends and teachers.

The research process contains three main parts. In the first part, a questionnaire with 20 questions was prepared according to the research objectives mentioned above and the Romanian legislation in charge. Then a representative sample was set up at the level of Bucharest.

In the next stage the questioner was administrated and the answers of the respondents were organized based on different criteria and variables. In order to enrich the research database the author had the initiative to schedule several semi-structured interview and three focus groups. After that, all the data and information obtained were organised like a consistent base for a deep analysis.

In the last sequences of the research process were set up the main results and the research conclusions delivered later on to the National Agency for Child Protection and to the directions of child

protection agencies of each sector. This approach offered the explicit information about the main problems facing children in defence of their rights and showed the more accurate identification of actual needs of the children social services in Romania.

#### **4.2. The sample**

A survey is not done most often through a direct investigation of the entire population. In most cases, the researchers determine a sample which should be representative for the entire population.

The sample is, by definition, representative for the population from which it was extracted.

The sample representative depends mainly by the characteristics of the population to be studied, the sample size and the sampling procedure used. In our case, we used a formula (1) for determining the sample size, as it can be seen below:

$$n = \frac{t^2 p(1-p)}{\Delta^2 \omega} \quad (1)$$

where:

n = sample size; t = coefficient corresponding probability that guarantee the results; p = proportion of sample components possessing characteristics studied (equal to 0.5 is considered to make the dispersion to have the maximum possible level);

$\Delta \omega$  = acceptable error limit.

As a calculation result, the sample dimension is 242 students from a representative high school located in Bucharest. That means an accepted errors of 5% and a confidence level of 95%.

#### **4.3. Data collection, processing and their analysis**

In this research study there were considered different perspectives of children social services provided at central and urban level in Romania. Some of the most relevant perspectives included in this research study are the following:

- Level of knowledge about children's rights;
- Source of information for children on their rights;
- Availability of information sources;
- Knowledge about child protection helpline;



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- The role of teachers in informing children about their rights;
- Perception concerning children's discrimination or abuse;
- Integration of children with disabilities in schools;
- The worst abuses as they are perceived by children;
- Situations where children need support of a parent and of the school;
- Perception concerning the parental involvement in school life;
- The parental support for the children's homework.

Parts of this research dimensions were selected for collecting the data and a brief analysis is presented in this section of the paper.

a) *Level of knowledge about children's rights*

As it can be seen in Figure 2 more than three quarters (77%) of students surveyed had heard about the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, but only 22% of them know what it consist of. The awareness is higher among girls than boys. The rest of the students included in the sample didn't hear about the subject.

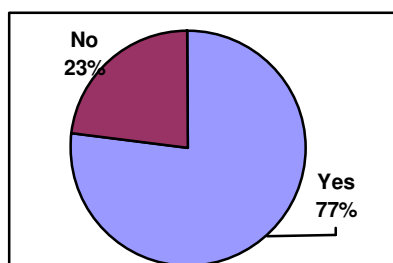


FIGURE 2 - LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS CONCERNING THE UN CONVENTION ON THE CHILD RIGHTS

b) *The main source of information*

As a source of information in this regard, first is the media (TV, newspapers, others) with an accumulated percentage of 60%. As the Figure 3 is presenting, 38% of students have learned their rights from teachers in different hours of their curricula.

The survey raised the fact that 2% of the students are using the Internet for self information or asked their parents, colleagues, friends about the social services for children and their basic rights.

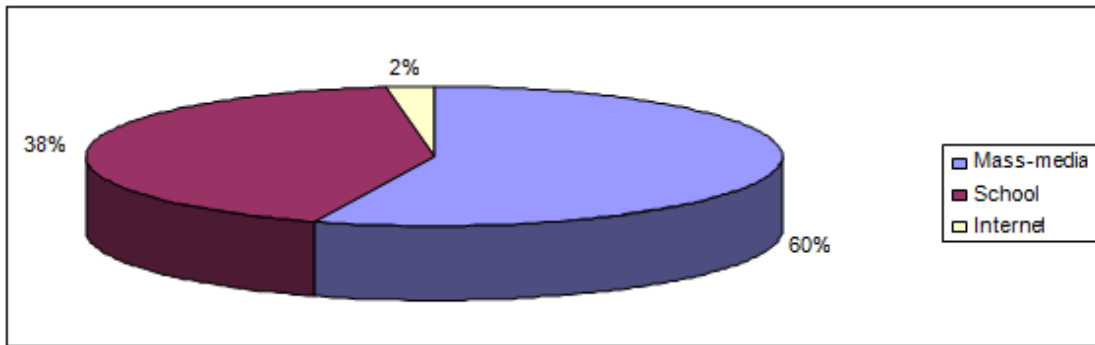


FIGURE 3 - THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE INFORMATION SOURCES CONCERNING THE CHILD RIGHTS

*c) The access to public information sources (TV, library, theatre, newspapers, internet)*

The respondents mentioned that their access to TV, theatre, newspapers and internet is very large (54%), but in most cases they are not interested about the social services and the children rights.

*d) Knowledge about the phone line 08008200200 for the children protection and when they want to access it*

According to our survey about 47% of the respondents have heard about the helpline 0800 8200200 – Child Telephone line, but they don't want to access it at all. As the answers of the students are showing, nearly 19% of the students would call it in case of any abuse against children. No more than 10% of them would call it when a child is bitten by an adult only.

As we found out only 5% of them would call in a very dangerous situations only. The student's answers are presented in Figure 4.

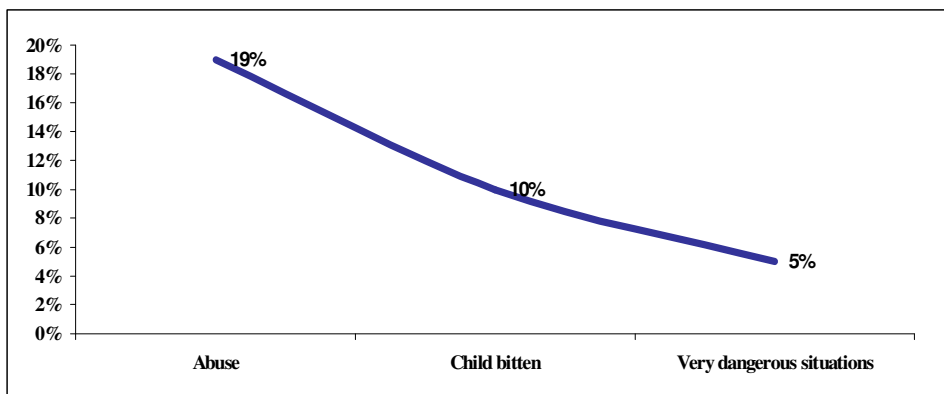


FIGURE 4 - THE SITUATIONS WHERE THE STUDENTS WOULD LIKE TO USE THE HELPLINE

As we can see, the students are not very communicative and they don't like very much to cooperate with the authorities, except in the very few situations mentioned there.

e) *The perception concerning the advertising champagne about the children rights within the schools and mass media*

Two thirds of the students surveyed said that their school are doing such promotion. The main instruments for that are: civic education open lessons, tutoring, leaflets, brochures, campaigns. The perception concerning the promotion of the children's rights in the media is quite high among students. As we found out during the research process nearly 26% of them believe that the media does not deal with the issue, while 73% believe that the media handles it, but not enough because of a lower public interest on it.

During the interviews and the focus groups meetings, children proposed a more diversified advertising champagne about their rights done through different programs, articles, moves and other various programs financed by public and private organizations.

f) *The perception concerning discrimination and abuses*

Concerning this dimension, the survey has shown that only 26% of students considered to be discriminated by the school environment. Thus, 24% of them are feeling discriminated by colleagues and 23% by the teachers. During the interviews and focus-group meetings

I found out a worrying situation namely that nearly 21% of the involved respondents are abused by their families in different ways. The research found out the fact that between 2% and 4% of the students only are abused or discriminated by other people, neighbours or friends. It is also concerned the attitude of the professors which is another source of discrimination.

They mentioned the fact that professors have preferences for certain children in the classroom. More than 55% of the students believe that they are not sufficiently protected against abuses and discrimination.

As the children declared during the interview sections and the focus-group meetings, in the near future they are expecting to be better protected both by their families and by the specialized public and private organizations.

g) *Worst abuses considered by the children*

The most serious abuse in the students opinion is the physical violence such as: maltreatment, beatings, sexual abuse (90%). The other 10% are considering psychological violence like another form of children's abuse. As the students mentioned, they reject violent behaviour, and want more education instruments based on understanding, communication and accountability.

Almost 90% of them believe that beating or other physical punishments should be replaced with a good word / advice / illness (40% of children), or discussions / counselling (30% of children), or to give them (25%) less money, less free time, less time at the computer. As expected, this form of punishment is more accepted among boys, which can be attributed masculine personality characteristics in training at this age.

*h) The integration of the students with handicaps, disabilities and other diseases*

Students perceive very different forms of discrimination against children with disabilities. Thus, more than two thirds of them (65%) believe that they cannot easily be integrated in their school. The rest of the students are considering that the children with different handicaps, including HIV and other kind of diseases should attend special schools.

Their comments indicate a rejection of the students with different problems which is another form of discrimination generated by some of them in their attitudes and beliefs. The main attitudes listed by them during the interview and the focus-group meetings were: isolation, jocks, admonition, indifference or others.

*i) Situations when the parents are imposing them against children and different parental abuses*

An important remark on the parent - child relation is that parents give children a relatively high degree of freedom and choice. Only 32% of parents require children to go to one special school, but most of them ( 68%) are imposing themselves in relation with their children in case of learning process.

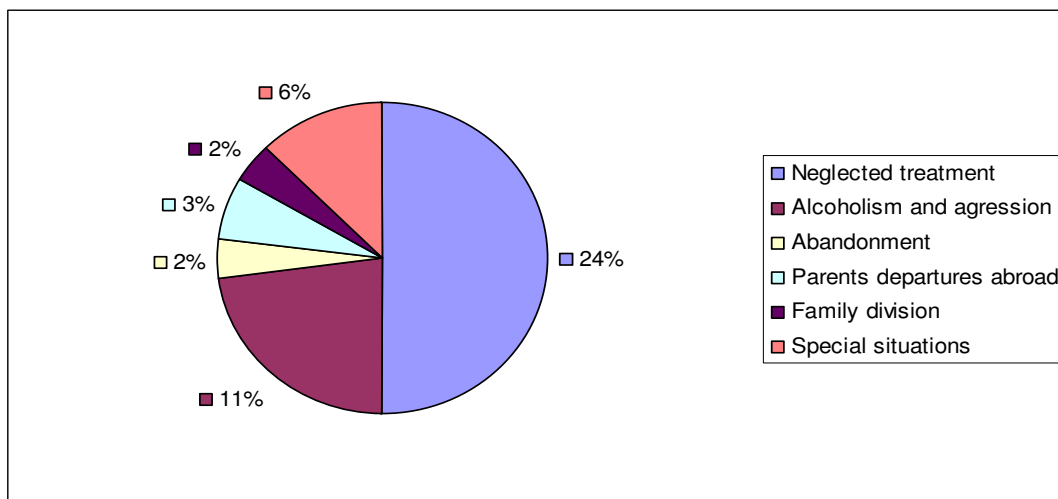


FIGURE 5 - DIFFERENT TYPES OF PARENTAL ABUSE

As the Figure 5 is showing there are different reasons when the parents are influencing the children behaviours in a negative way and these are considered by their children a sort of parental abuses.

j) *Children fears when they go home after they did poorly*

Another indicator of friendship and trust relationship that exists between parents and children is the fear of any punishment. Thus, the question "are you afraid to go home after you did poorly?"

More than three quarters (76%) have said, 'no' and 22% of them said, 'yes'. During the interviews and focus-group meetings they explained this feeling in different ways: good understanding of their parents; tolerance of them; indifference; lower level of the parents education; lack of parents knowledge and motivation.

k) *Special programs for health protection developed in schools*

According to the students statements, there are many health education programs in many schools. About 58% of them mentioned various courses and programs on health protection: special classes on hygiene / sex / health education; anti-Tobacco programs, anti-drug, anti-AIDS.

However, the perception of most students is that the school and other state institutions does not make sufficient efforts to reduce children abuses and drug consumption. As we see in Figure 6, an absolute majority of the sample is considering programmes for children health protection very poor.

This situation is requesting consistent reforms and programs financed in the area of children health protection both in schools and outside them.

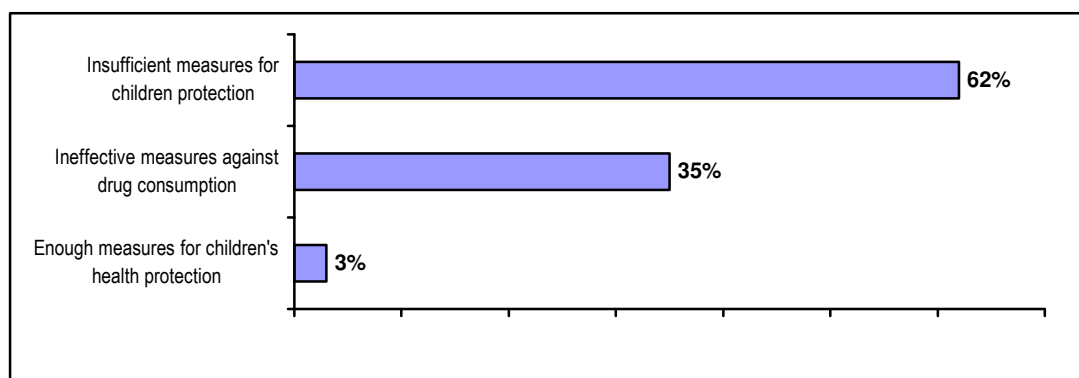


FIGURE 6 - THE PERCEPTION OF THE STUDENTS CONCERNING CHILDREN'S HEALTH PROTECTION IN SCHOOLS

l) *The opinions of the students about their parents openness for communication*

As the figure 7 is presenting, the students think that their parents and professors do not listen to them enough. The main reasons are: low common interest; insufficient time; different opinions or views. The impact of such situations is creating a gap between the children and their parents and has unexpected negative results later on. The situation is changed when the children are involved in communication with

their colleagues. Nearly 38% appreciated the fact that the communication between children is openness and effective, but not in all cases.

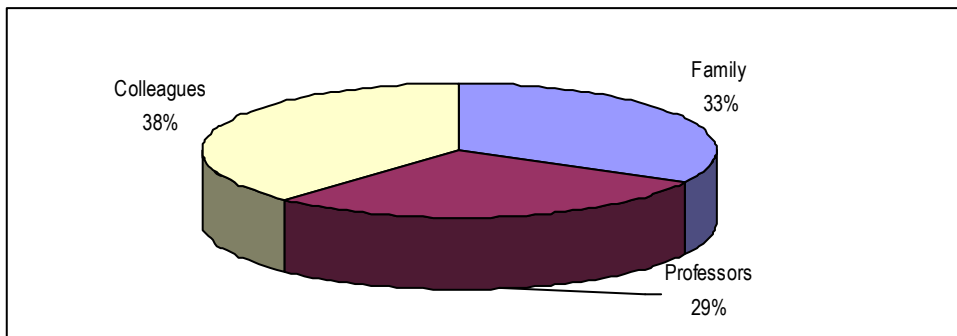


FIGURE 7 - THE CHILDREN PERCEPTION CONCERNING THE ADULTS OPENNESS AND THE OPENNESS OF THEIR COLLEAGUES

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the current study on social services for children mainly, we can conclude that they are not enough known by the state authorities involved. We can also say that the cooperation between state institutions and families with children can be improved and diversified according to the needs and interests of the children. A special attention could have been given to children with special needs in order to help them for an effective integration in groups and in the community later on. Making such changes requests an appropriate financial support of public institutions and organizations. Working together with other international specialised organizations, the schools managers and the state administration can manage these very diverse issues found out by this qualitative research study. We have shown, that social services in Romania are not sufficiently known as they should be, in order to deliver effective services in this area. Nonetheless, the results of this study can be used by the beneficiaries and should be extended with further research. The tools used in this research can be enriched and the sample can be extended for a large consistency on national level. Social services for children can not be changed without involving in the research process all three parties: children, state institutions including schools and families. Delivering good social services for children is not an easy task, mainly because there are many actors involved and their policies must be coordinated in a very coherent way in order to reach better results.

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