

FAMILIES IN A CHRONIC SITUATION WITHIN THE SOCIAL SERVICES IN SPAIN: WHAT EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEXT GENERATION?⁴

ABSTRACT

Families in a chronic situation within social services are one of the common profiles that make up the social protection system in Spain as well as in many other European countries. In this article, we analyse the discourses shaped around the future expectations for children belonging to these families. To do so, we have used a qualitative research approach through interviews, professional self-assessments and focus groups involving twenty-nine practitioners and thirty-five parents. Our results reveal three major lines of discourse. The first offers a fatalistic view based on intergenerational reproduction. The second incorporates differential elements, in a positive vein, on prospective expectations for the second generation of migrant families. The third is constructed through self-criticism seeking to reconsider elements of the present that allow plotting out a different future. We conclude by pointing out the advisability of taking

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greater account of the expectations that the environment imposes on children, as they can either have a positive or a negative objective impact on their life project. In terms of implications for intervention, it should be considered that how professionals relate with families affects their favourable or unfavourable prospects, as well as the reversibility of the effects on children.

INTRODUCTION

Families in a chronic situation (FCS) within social services (SS) are one of the common profiles that make up the social protection system in Spain (Malgesini, González and Gracia, 2021), as well as in many other European countries (Spasova et al., 2018.). Often, these families' relationship with their social workers is mediated by a reciprocal feeling of helplessness before the persistent difficulty of modifying their life projects. Interventions with negative outcomes, diagnoses that are unclear, contradictory or that do not reflect the actual situation, and backgrounds of intervention that are maintained over time, tend to be persistent elements (Lázaro, 2004.; Campos, Cardona and Cuartero, 2017.).

Indeed, the time factor is one of the most important aspects involved in the phenomenon of chronicity in the sense that prolonged interventions do not bring about substantial changes or progress in the context of the family attended to. Moreover, the same element is a factor of cumulative risk, as its prolongation may result in being an exponent that hinders the ability to cope with the life challenges they must face (Moore, 2005.), becoming increasingly dependent on help from the SS, and even the risk of generational transmission.

The literature contains a multitude of terms that identify a broad spectrum of families that can be found in such a situation of permanent attention in the SS: multi-problem families (Bodden and Dekovic, 2016.; Matos and Sousa, 2004.; Van Brandenburg and Puts, 2002.); multi-assisted families (Reder, 1985.); disorganized families (Minuchin et al.1967.); multiagency families (Minuchin, Colapinto and Minuchin, 2006.); families with the involvement of multiple institutions (Imber-Black, 1988.); resistant families (Forrester et al., 2008.); families in crisis (Rapoport, 1962.); and multi-stressed families (Jakob, 2018.). However, in our case we prefer to use the term "families in a chronic situation" (FSC), and we do so as a conceptual category (Miranda, Pirla and Julià, 2020.). Through this category, we aim to integrate the various manifestations and typologies associated with the phenomenon of temporality at the SS, regardless of the specific causes that characterize them. What becomes relevant is the absence of significant results during the course of intervention. This is a cause of burnout for the professionals (Lloyd, King and Chenoweth, 2002.) and a progressive factor for the families (Moore, 2005.).

In addition to the present problems, one of the main risks associated with FCS is the intergenerational reproduction of their situation (Moore, 2004.). In this regard, there is abundant scientific evidence that exposes how a person's future achievements, insofar as economic and material, cultural and social capital, are closely related to the achievements of the previous generation. This has been a classic, proven line of research in the field of the social sciences (Bernstein, 1964.; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977.; Douglas, 1964.; Hyman, 1967.; Willis, 1977.). More recently, several studies have continued along these same lines. Thus, correlations between people who share similar socioeconomic backgrounds suggest that such backgrounds significantly influence life achievements, and it can be concluded that childhood experiences determine poverty in adulthood (Biblarz and Raftery, 1993.; McLanahan, 2009.; Moore, 2005.; Morris et al., 2018.; Musick, and Mare, 2004.; Pascual, 2009.; Sharkey, 2008.).

At the centre of these variables as factors of social reproduction, we should add one further element, which is a cornerstone in our study; expectations. Through two intertwined classic theories, such as those developed by the sociologist Robert C. Merton (1948.) through his *self-fulfilling prophecies*, and by the psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968.) through the *Pygmalion effect*, we know that beliefs and expectations that others have of us affect how we behave and have significant implications for our future. As Rosenthal and Jacobson showed in the school scenario, this influence is more prevalent in children, especially in early childhood. They tend to present behaviours that are consistent with the expectations that, in this case, their teachers held of them. Merton, meanwhile, offered a theory illustrating how stereotypical beliefs can contribute to increasing inequalities and social problems. Thus, the effects of the self-fulfilling prophecy create problems because of their accumulation and when the magnitude of the self-fulfilling effect of an individual becomes stronger over time. Thus, self-fulfilling prophecies can create and perpetuate these social inequalities by widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged individuals and groups over time. When various individuals simultaneously have similar beliefs concerning the same goal, the self-fulfilling effect on the behaviour of the subject becomes reality (Madon et al., 2011.).

The context

This article is part of a participatory research-action (PRA) project launched in 2017 between the SS of the town of Lleida, in the region of Catalonia, and the University of Lleida. The project originated from an explicit request by SS professionals. They reported, with concern, the deterioration of family situations and individuals to whom they had been providing social care over a prolonged period of time. The professionals have the perception of the scarce effectiveness of their interventions

with a remarkably large population group. This brings about continuous demand for care and the perception that cases become chronic.

In light of such concern, an initial investigation began that would, first, ascertain in greater depth and perspective the profiles of the individuals and FCS in the local social services. Second, the researchers sought to analyse the intervention strategies implemented by the professionals on this population. The results of the initial research were published (Pirla, Julià and Miranda, 2019.) and have been used to design four experimental intervention projects.

In mid-2019, a second research project began focusing specifically on children belonging to FCS. This was in response to the need to apply preventive actions to reduce the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Thus, it was considered strategic to gain further knowledge about this population and the basic features of their life situation. An initial publication has been produced presenting the general results of the study (Julià, Pirla and Miranda, 2021.) and two experimental intervention projects are currently being carried out involving 18 families with minors.

Aim

While this second project has several research goals, in this paper we present the results of one of them. Specifically, the one aimed at analysing the main discourses that professionals and parents establish with respect to the family context and social situation and, more specifically, in terms of projections and expectations with regard to children belonging to families in a chronic situation, and the implication that such discourse has in the present. In terms of hypothesis, we initially proposed a domain of fatalistic discourse among parents and professionals regarding the children's future. The reproduction of the basic elements of material and cultural deprivation, coupled with the accumulation of negative results in professional interventions and families' distrust of public services - social and educational - as mechanisms for social improvement and mobility, would form the substrate of this assessment. Thus, a series of negative expectations may be being projected for the next generation, which would, today, already be eroding some of their abilities and potential.

METHOD

Research techniques and sample

Consistent with the PRA approach (Barbera, 2008.; Walker et al., 2002.), a mixed working team of 14 people was set up, consisting of SS and university staff.

The team used three research techniques to complete the research objective and test the hypothesis, that is, interview (in-depth, semi-structured), professional self-assessment, and focus group. Thus, 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with parents in a chronic situation with social services. These interviews focused on self-analysis of the family situation and the outlook for the second generation. The average time spent on each interview was 120 minutes. It should be noted that we use the term »chronic« to refer to families with open files that have been attended to by SS continuously for at least the last six years. According to the database of the City of Lleida, during the period 2008-2018 (the last year of reference for the start of the study), a total of 1057 families with children (aged 0 to 17 years) were in a chronic situation. With regard to the interventions by SS professionals targeting families - we refer basically to follow-up interviews and home visits - we find a mean of 11 per year for moderate-, and 13 for high-chronicity typologies. In the case of the resources managed (classified into eight typologies: economic; employment; health; housing; training; personal and social, leisure; others), the mean is of 19 for the former and 33 for the latter.

The sample was carried out following weighted parameters of representativeness of the population universe (1057). To do so, the following four main variables were used: type of family, average number of children, origin, and type of chronicity. In relation to the entire sample, we find that most families are nuclear (59%), followed by single-parent (25%), and extended (8%). The first has an average of 2.2 children, the second of 1.7, and the third 1.6. With respect to their origin, 42% of families with children are from a migrant background. Finally, 20% belong to the highly chronic category (families that have been attended to continuously for the last 10 years), and 80% belong to the moderately chronic category (attended to for between six and nine years continuously in the last 10 years). Having applied the first statistical filter, an intentional criterion was used to make the final selection of the 35 participating families. To do so, the criterion of SS professionals was sought, who were asked to identify common cases (ignoring non-representative critical and extreme cases) among the subsample groups. Given the need to hold in-depth interviews and since it was not possible to use interpreters, the parents - in the case of immigrants - were required to have a sufficient level of comprehension and oral expression in Catalan or Spanish.

Meanwhile, professional self-assessment was carried out by 19 social workers, all involved in social intervention with the 35 selected families. This aspect allowed contrasting and complementing the view of the professional with that previously obtained from the families. Professional self-assessment is a technique that allows social workers to review their interventions over time and, at the same time, incorporate subjective appraisals regarding their relationship with the family; detecting potentials and strengths; and finally, assessment of the results obtained to date, considering the resources used. The professionals were given two weeks to comple-

te the self-assessment document. Some of the data collected through this tool are analysed qualitatively, while others are analysed quantitatively. According to the participants, the average time spent completing them was 200 minutes.

The professional view was complemented by further two actions. On the one hand, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with social workers not belonging to SS, but within the social care system and in contact with the children linked to the 35 families interviewed. Therefore, they were professionals coordinating with the social workers involved in the self-assessment. Of these 10 professionals, four are linked to third-sector entities, one to the field of health, two to education, and three to social care provided to children and adolescents. Their incorporation was important to contrast the discourses established between the families and the professionals of the municipal SS and provide nuances of interest to the subject matter. The average duration of each interview was 60 minutes.

Finally, a group of social workers involved in the self-assessment (11) joined the focus group. This group was set up to discuss, in a targeted manner, the expectations that professionals had for the children of these families. The average duration was 135 minutes.

As a whole, the number of professional participants was 29, of whom 23 were social workers. Fieldwork was carried out between September 2019 and February 2020.

Limitations

The results presented cannot provide causal explanations, but they do contribute to the subject of study in the European context. Let us recall that the empirical work carried out is set in a micro-context represented by an intentional sample. Therefore, the results and conclusions are limited and provisional. The research team is aware of this, and also of the highly subjective value of the information collected, as well as of the difficulty of interpreting such material in a manner that is faithful and accurate to the meanings that the study participants intend to convey. However, our work has respected the criterion of objective analysis. We understand that this criterion may afford us the possibility of making significant and generalizable contributions.

Ethical considerations

This work has been conducted following the instructions set out in the code of practice governing social work in the region of Catalonia. It states that investigations by social workers must be carried out taking into account the communities studied,

ensuring that the goals and results have a positive impact on the persons involved (Official Association of Social Work of Catalonia, 2000.). With regard to the confidentiality of information and personal data, it should be noted that the fieldwork was conducted having received the informed consent of all participants.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed an inductive approach (Krippendorff, 1980.; Patton, 2002.; White and Marsh, 2006.). With this, we have sought to deepen the meaning and interpretations generated by participants within their specific areas of experience. Complementarily, we have used quantitative data retrieved from the municipal database (1057 records). These data have helped to uphold some contributions from the qualitative analysis. To develop the analysis, a procedure based on five phases was carried out. The first phase consisted of transcribing the recorded material and the collection of data from the self-assessment documents. Then, through various focus sessions among the researchers, subcategories through which to structure the information were constructed. These were transversely linked to the two basic categories: professionals and parents. Thirdly, the data were coded to become coding units. In all, 411 units were worked with. Fourthly, systematic content analysis was conducted, thereby establishing links between subcategories and coding units. Finally, the material was interpreted and then contrasted with the existing literature on the subject, and conclusions were drawn.

Table 1. Analysis categories and subcategories and number of coding units

Categories	Subcategories and number of coding units
Professionals and Parents	»Children« (33); »Material and economic factors« (31); »Education« (30); »Employment« (28); »Resources and services« (28); »Cultural reproduction« (25); »Social capital« (21); »Meritocracy« (20); »Roma ethnicity« (20); »Professional burnout« (20); »Immigrants« (19); »Natives« (17); »Chronicity« (15); »Motivation« (14); »Health« (14); »Self-criticism« (12); »Future« (12); »Expectations« (11); »Nuclear family« (9); »Single-parent family« (9); »Large family« (8); »Professional tie« (8); »Potentials« (8); »Weaknesses« (6); »Family dysfunctionality« (5); »Prevention« (4); »Resiliency« (4).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

While participants have expressed different, cross-cutting, multiple and even contradictory discourses, our analysis has consisted of classifying and profiling the main trends that were shaping patterns of meaning around the subject at hand. Thus, we have developed three major discursive lines that we present below in order of representativeness. The first is attuned to the initial hypothesis. However, the two following ones have different characteristics. The second incorporates differential elements - in a positive vein - on the projected expectations concerning the children of migrant families. The third, meanwhile, is constructed through self-criticism seeking to reconsider elements of the present that allow plotting out different future expectations.

The intergenerational reproduction of chronicity. Inertia that is difficult to counter

This discourse is founded on a principle of reality detected in a significant portion of the interventions by professionals and parents. Poverty, embodied in economic and material terms, is expressed as the main risk factor in the spread of chronicity between generations (Flores, Gómez and Renes, 2016.). As a result of this, elements affecting the social and cultural capital of the families are subsequently related (Conger and Conger, 2008.). That is, we start from a pragmatic ascertainment in terms of social vulnerability and insecurity (derived from insufficient income, debts, poor housing conditions, and situations of exclusion from the labour market) that generates subsequent deprivation in different fields and with multiple negative effects. Some of them are manifested in children's education (low performance and a pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of educational success and upward social mobility); in families' functional perception of the SS (merely as providers of resources); and in the emergence of conflictive intrafamily aspects (concerning the organization and emotional management of the effects of poverty).

The framework built by such discourse corresponds objectively with the families' financial reality. Taking the population universe of the whole sample, families in a moderately chronic situation in the town of Lleida have an average monthly income of 674 euros, while for families in a highly chronic situation, it is 784 euros. Both amounts put them in a clear situation of poverty if they are compared to the economic indicators that establish the poverty threshold in Spain for 2018 of 1,576.50 euros for a typical family composed of two adults and two children (INE, 2019.).

In terms of characterization, the professionals understand that they are working with poor rather than multi-problem families. While a relatively small percentage of the latter do exist, the social repercussions of precariousness in economic and material terms are considered as consequences of this initial determining factor. A factor that is most dangerous if maintained over time and consolidated, since it involves a situation of dependency on the public SS. This is where the professionals identify a transcendental moment.

»When they expect you to tell them and organize everything (...) and they prefer you to establish them because they no longer want to choose« (professional 9).

Based on their experience with FCS, the professionals describe a phenomenon linked to FCSs' loss of agency as their situation sets in. Thus, gradually there is a transfer of responsibility to the professionals which, given the inability to establish sufficiently significant mechanisms of change, ends up generating burnout and, eventually, demotivation. The ties between professionals and users are also depleted due to this.

»There are families that generate a huge level of impotence. I have been at this school for 12 years and I've been saying I must leave for a while now. Because it burns me out. With this group of families there's no solution. They're reproducing. How do we break it? It's impossible« (professional 27).

Entering such dynamics also generates high levels of distress and suffering among parents regarding the future of their children.

»I feel sick when I think that I can't keep working and that I have to reapply for benefit (...) and it'll take ages. It makes me fear for them (children)« (parents 3).

These situations that fester and dilate over time are drivers of attitudes of distrust towards the social and educational system. As a result, a "functional" interpretation of the SS as resource dispensers is detected in the parents' discourse. Meanwhile, the professionals note a degree of impermeability before the professional intervention and the difficulty of acquiring a different cultural capital for future generations. This is corroborated by certain interventions by parents expressing the low educational outlook that is conceived regarding their sons and daughters.

»The future is complicated. I wish they could study, but it looks difficult. It takes a lot to get to university. The oldest is 14 and says that at 16 he wants to go to work in a warehouse, or something...« (parents 14).

In some cases, the professionals ask the reason "why there are no improvements" if they have acted for so long and intensely. Demotivation is sensed in families in which the effectiveness of resources is very deficient, and in which their

cultural logic differs from the professional logic. For example, when they continue to have children despite the complexity of their situation. In this regard, exploring the quantitative data has confirmed a positive statistical significance: the more children, the greater the chronicity.

»Families that are struggling and they come and tell you they are pregnant again. Where is the responsibility?« (professional 19).

Some professional discourses advocate the need for a more realistic approach, consisting of accepting the inevitable intergenerational reproduction of poverty and dependence on the SS in some cases with which they work. Accepting this reality is understood as a necessary first step to designing more useful, more suitable actions. However, it should be noted that this more pragmatic perspective focuses more on local families and less on families of migrant origin.

»There are families who will always be chronic. And with these families, we need to know what percentage we can ask of parents. Getting this percentage right is the key. If we ask for 50 and they can only reach 30, it will always be a failure« (professional 3).

The migration project: A driver of change for the second generation

The population growth in the city of Lleida since the beginning of this century has been characterized by the arrival of immigrants, especially from Eastern Europe, North Africa, China and West Africa. The immigrant population, which accounted for 1.8% of citizenship in the year 2000, reached 18.1% in 2018. In the context of the SS, their presence is very significant. In fact, we find an overrepresentation of this group compared with the native population because, as mentioned earlier, it accounted for 42% of chronic cases in the SS during the ten-year period between 2008 and 2018.

Despite its very strong presence, we have noted a discourse characterized by unique elements that distinguish the expectations for this population from those for the local population in a chronic situation with the SS. Broadly speaking, professionals indicate more positive future expectations given a perception of greater parental concern regarding the social and educational investment in their children. Likewise, these families have incorporated elements associated with a meritocratic discourse linked to effort and individual ability through which they seek to aspire to the upward social mobility of the future generation.

»The families who have come here have done so because one thing was clear to them, the projection of their children. They have difficulties, but they want

their children to progress. And they work hard (...). And really, I am beginning to see some results (...) that they study, they enter the labor market. Unfortunately, I cannot say this of all of them, but there are many who do» (professional 14).

»I hope that my children keep studying. For this we must make a big effort« (parents 21).

»Social services cannot help us with everything. Someone like me can make ends meet (...) so I must work« (parents 5).

»I don't want my children to depend on anyone in the future« (parents 15).

In this desire for a better future, a key role is played by the education their children can receive and, very specifically, the studies they may pursue and achieve along the way. Many of the families specifically refer to the fact that they can reach the university level which enables them to access the labor market, and that, unlike the experiences of their parents, will help them have more opportunities in their future life project.

Thus, there is general recognition of a commitment to improvement through the migration process itself and through investing resources (human and material) in their children. Despite not being a guarantee of a better future, it is something that is highly valued in professional discourses, as an aspect of drive towards change. By way of example, professionals speak of families where, although the parents receive financial subsidies, their children have managed to get into university.

In this context, relations between families and professionals are marked by higher levels of motivation. The professionals identify different strengths and potentials in families that help them keep fighting for the welfare of the family despite the difficulties. However, a large number of families believe that the emotional support received has been fundamental to getting by in difficult times. More relevantly, this recognition appears in immigrant women comprising single-parent families. These women live motherhood in greater solitude. Psychological and emotional help and support from the SS is perceived as a cornerstone. The added vulnerability they may suffer due to these conditions leads them to open up to social workers differently from other women who are not in the same situation.

»I have no family here and the only person who would listen to me at that time was the social worker. I tell my mother, who is far away, as little as possible so as not to worry her. She doesn't know anything. So she (the professional) listened to me and helped me« (single-parent family 5).

So what happens, therefore, with the native population? We return to the time factor as a core aspect of chronicity. It is associated to a greater extent with

this population that has witnessed how more than one generation has been attended to by the SS. This is not so for the migrant population as insufficient time has elapsed to ascertain its evolution with time. In this sense, there is a feeling of living a defining moment for children from a migrant background in terms of projecting their future. If a good job can be done with the second generation, this might lead to a real possibility of improvement over the previous generation. Thus, there is a window of hope for them, in contrast to the ominous situation facing a larger proportion of local children, where chronicity is already a consolidated phenomenon. In particular, this poor outlook is heightened when we refer to the Roma people, who are highly dependent on resources and services.

»It's a cliché. But it's really hard to work with the Roma community. There's no sincerity« (professional 5).

»This group accumulates a great deal of failure« (professional 1).

»I think that with Roma people we must take a break and rethink intervention« (professional 11).

A future constructed in the present

The discourse of professionals and parents is full of elements for improvement in the present that may lead to benefits for the future generation. In this sense, the professionals have been particularly critical of their work, as we have seen in the self-assessments. Here is a small sample:

»There isn't a joint intervention with all of the core members« (professional 18).

»I think they are the protagonists of their own lives and of their development and so another kind of support would be required (...) we must respect their rhythms, decisions, ideas, beliefs, etc. « (professional 23).

The main aspect indicated is the need to work using the parents' and children's strengths, and for these strengths to be used to offset weaknesses. It is therefore deemed necessary to know the life project in greater depth and more comprehensively. The need to establish strategies for this purpose is also indicated, since the families struggle to recognize their strong points. So far, work has primarily been carried out through needs and problems. Thus, the appropriateness of families having a more active role in shaping their own diagnosis is pointed out.

Similarly, establishing more positive practitioner-user relationships is considered essential. The professionals point to the need to collaborate more harmoniously

and more committedly with the families. The possibility of establishing a more committed relationship with the help process stands out as an important point that can have a positive impact on the intervention. However, the professionals are aware of the difficulty of carrying out this task in more dependent families which generate increased burnout. While the goal is clear, it has proved more complex to establish the methodology by means of which to render this change of perception. All this is highly complex, given the inertia of working in a bureaucratic framework of services and resources which are accessed through the categorization of problems and needs. The families themselves are aware of this:

»You always have to prove the need. They've already got lots of my documents (...) but they ask you for them again (...) and they make you wait (...) and they give you another appointment because you have to bring even more documents. And they don't solve it« (parents 8).

Concerning actions with children, in general terms they are regarded as being too partial and superficial. There is a need for more transversal work between systems (basically between social, health and education) that includes many areas of the children's life project (more global and integral) is indicated. To carry out a real socio-educational intervention through proximity and support in which young people can have clear references and various options. To work in less of a welfare-oriented, less directive and less hasty manner, and to reflect (and relativize) certain ideas and notions of the families that are taken for granted.

»Our care model continues to be based on the power of the professional over and above the people we serve« (professional 24).

»The key is to plan a life project (...) that considers the various dimensions of the person (...). The work will make more sense if it is global and integral. And we must be able to network to have greater chances of success« (professional 8).

Also indicated, in positive terms, however, is the fact that some young people from migrant families in a chronic situation are developing well, socially and in their education, building a life project with real expectations and seeking to improve on the previous generation. They are still an exception, although the professionals have difficulty identifying which elements have determined this good progress. The need to describe these processes more deeply is stressed, to find out and highlight which mechanisms the family and the child him/herself have put in motion. This information would be especially valuable for social services.

»I have often asked myself why some work and others don't, when the fact is that we have done the same thing« (professional 12)

The professionals, furthermore, bring to the table the need to intervene preventively, especially in families in a moderately chronic situation. There is a heightened awareness of the unintended consequences that dependency on services generates and the difficulty to reverse this once it is consolidated intergenerationally. This assessment is in line with what is reflected by the quantitative data of the set of files: the longer time spent in a chronic situation, the higher the average number of actions conducted by SS and the greater the resources for investing.

In addition, connections are established between the poor social situation and health problems of parents and children. Increased mental and emotional distress, as interpreted from a biomedical perspective, is notable. In this regard, an overrepresentation of this medical interpretation is indicated (in terms of ill health) of some ailments that can be placed more on a social than a biological plane. Thus, the presence is underscored of social risk factors that generate broad exposure to situations of vulnerability and which, understandably, generate sadness as well as anxiety and depression.

»In the most deteriorated families we have mental health problems. There are lots of children with emotional problems, who are disruptive (...). Many are resulting from mental health problems (...) and are taking some kind of medication« (professional 24).

Children living in situations of poverty have development and growth potential like any other child, however, life circumstances characterized by an increased presence of social risk factors can disrupt their progress (Jack and Gil, 2013.). Thus, poverty in the family setting increases children's risk of suffering mental health problems, with a greater occurrence of anxiety and depression. It also decreases parents' abilities and effectiveness, making it difficult for them to exercise a consistent role, since they are more exposed to conflicts and tensions (Robichaud et al., 2012.).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Through this research, we have detected that building expectations regarding children belonging to FCS are linked to two components. The first relates to the objective conditions that shape the social context of the families. The second relates to the intergenerational accumulation of chronicity, associated mainly with native families. With regard to the objective conditions, the discourses are in line with some of the basic elements presented in the scientific literature, which establish the variables that adversely affect children's life projects. Among them, poverty is the most important because it is perceived as a determining factor of lifetime achievements. Poverty limits material resources, affecting the family environment, physical and social conditions, parents' mental health, interactions between parents and

children, and physical health. Poverty equally affects children's behaviour, regardless of their ethnic origin (Pachter et al., 2006.; Yaqub, 2002.) and hinders their success at school (Ferguson, Bovaird and Mueller, 2007.; Gheorghita, 2017.; Silva et al., 2020.). In addition, the stress of inadequate resources can affect parents' efforts to care for their children (Humphry, 1995.), with a greater impact on the children who are more susceptible to the consequences than the parents themselves (Cooper and Boyden, 2007.). Thus, the "weight" of poverty clearly affects the discourses of professionals and native parents. The former does so in a more technical manner, albeit with high degrees of burnout and frustrated expectations. In line with other similar research, professionals feel overwhelmed and unable to change the material and social circumstances (Morris et al., 2018.). The latter, meanwhile, does so in an experiential and "in-the-flesh" manner, as they experience the harsh consequences first-hand. The efforts by families to keep the everyday routine significantly limit the possibility of building social mobility strategies for their children. We agree with Pachter et al., (2006.) when they point out that parents' irrelevant perception regarding the planning of social itineraries, due to an accumulation of failure, is interpreted by professionals in terms of lack of interest.

Indeed, the burden of such accumulation is greatly linked to native families, and less so to first-generation migrants, even though they all receive more than six consecutive years of professional social care. Hence the negative discursive synergy associated with the former is not detected in the latter. Where is the differential element? While the transmission of poverty is rooted in intrinsic cyclical processes (Cooper and Boyden, 2007), migrant families have shown initial resistance and an explicit will to overcome such adversity; the actual migration process. In addition, elements of great effort and overcoming difficulties are present in their discourse that connect with a more positive social imagination, especially with respect to social investment for the future of their children. Conversely, the energy invested by professionals in the former, as is clearly evidenced in the Roma, is perceived as ineffective.

Although the research has been carried out in a micro-context, the transversal character of the topic lets us indicate practical implications for professionals working beyond Spain. In this regard, it should be considered that how social workers relate with families affects their favorable or unfavourable prospects, as well as the reversibility of the effects on children. In fact, the absence of positive expectations in the environment is directly related to the children's poor prospects (Swann and Bosson, 2016.; Willard and Madon, 2016.; Weinstein, 2016.). On the other hand, motivation for change, as well as parental attitudes towards the intervention and the service are associated with more favourable prospects for them (Rodrigo et al., 2009.). In this sense, discourse analysis reveals another implicit factor determining prospects, that is therapeutic alliance (Carr, 2009.), noting that it is more robust in cases where positive expectations for the future are palpable.

In view of the above, we consider the elements of self-criticism reflected in the discourse of the professionals as being of great interest, as they enable analysing and evaluating interventions conducted with families that generate the greatest burnout and in which the burden of frustration is highest. These reflexive practices (Banks, 2021.; Payne, 2020.) allow professionals to become aware of the social context of families in a more entrenched chronic situation and have the opportunity to redress the actions taken so far. Interrupting intergenerational poverty requires many factors not within the reach of the professionals who provide direct assistance. Social policy, from local to national, must incorporate greater economic and technical efforts to address it. In addition, in Spain, an organizational change in SS, currently based on a system that is overly bureaucratic and principally reactive, is essential (Fantova, 2015.). To enable such a change, the need to learn actively from the users of the services requires stressing (Strier, Nouman and Kantarovich, 2022.). This involves listening and assessing their subjective experiences and treating them as potential knowledge for social work (Krumer-Nevo, 2008.). Furthermore, it is important that professionals and parents can think critically about the representations arising from their own discourses. In this regard, we agree with Morris et al. (2018.) concerning the need to support professionals and parents in the task of understanding and addressing poverty from a representative standpoint.

In the discipline of social work, we must strive – right from university training – to foment a holistic understanding of poverty and the chronic situations it entails, in agreement with our ethical principles (Davis and Wainwright, 2005.). This means interpreting it in the framework of human rights, social justice (Reininger et al., 2018.) and respect for difference (Jack and Gil, 2013.). From this perspective, poverty represents a violation of human rights. However, such an understanding is difficult to achieve, given the general lack of support and structure often encountered by the professionals (Morris et al., 2018.) and the social centrality occupied by other far more conservative visions of the phenomenon.

To promote such holistic understanding, it is essential to integrate the ideological perspective into the action of social work. This means taking an attitude of resistance to the neoliberal tendency that turns social problems into individual issues and also being aware of the political burden that any process of knowledge production entails. In this regard, the proposal by Krumer-Nevo (2016., 2017., 2022.) based on the Poverty Aware Paradigm (PAP) is of particular interest. Through this paradigm, the author presents a critical, committed and analytical look that contrasts with the dominant conservative and structural paradigms. The PAP offers an ontological, epistemological and axiological proposal in constant interrelation and influence with the practice of social work. From our point of view, this is an interesting proposal that is in line with the purpose of our work, that is, the design and implementation of community guidance and collective action programmes (Mantle and Backwith, 2010.) that can have a more significant impact on maximizing the opportunities for this body.

Unfortunately, there is a general trend towards the construction of a cultural framework of poverty detached from the conditions of inequality, oppression and social injustice that comprise it. Concentrating efforts on family casework and the lack of a group and community approach is a clear demonstration of how far this framework has progressed in the field of the SS in Spain. In this research, we have striven to reflect on this jointly -professionals, academics and users-, recalling that the commitment of social work to human rights and social justice is also played out in the field of cultural settings, discourses and expectations.

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OBITELJI KOJE DUGOTRAJNO KORISTE SOCIJALNE USLUGE U ŠPANJOLSKOJ: KAKVA SU OČEKIVANJA ZA SLJEDEĆU GENERACIJU?

SAŽETAK

Obitelji koje dugotrajno koriste socijalne usluge jedan su od korisnika sustava socijalne zaštite u Španjolskoj, kao i u mnogim drugim europskim zemljama. U ovome radu analiziraju se diskursi koji nastaju vezano uz očekivanja od budućnosti za djecu iz tih obitelji. U tu svrhu provedeno je kvalitativno istraživanje putem intervjua, profesionalne samoprocjene i fokus grupa koje su uključivale 29 praktičara i 35 roditelja. Rezultati pokazuju tri različita diskursa. Prvi nudi fatalistički stav utemeljen na međugeneracijskom prijenosu. Drugi uključuje deferencijalne elemente, u pozitivnom smislu, o očekivanjima za drugu generaciju migracijskih obitelji. Treći je konstruiran kroz samokritike kojima se nastoji ponovno razmotriti elemente sadašnjosti koji omogućuju kreiranje drugačije budućnosti. U zaključku je naglašeno kako je opravdano više pažnje posvetiti očekivanjima koje okružje nameće djeci, jer ona mogu imati pozitivniji ili negativniji učinak na njihov životni put. U smislu implikacija za intervenciju, valjalo bi razmotriti da način na koji se stručnjaci odnose prema obiteljima utječe na njihove povoljne ili nepovoljne izgleda, kao i na reverzibilnost tih učinaka na djecu.

Ključne riječi: socijalne usluge; maloljetnici; obitelji koje dugotrajno koriste socijalne usluge; očekivanja; Španjolska.



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