

THE REFUGEES' COUNSELLING – A PREREQUISITE FOR INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF THEIR ADAPTATION TO THEIR NEW COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE

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Abstract: *The present work brings to attention a phenomenon that currently is a painful actuality to which solutions are still being looked for, namely – the refugees' issue. The survey brings to discussion a few sides of the intercultural adjustment for a group of Iraqi refugees, during one year. Their initial status and the steps carried out for their adjustment in our country draws the attention upon the difficulties of such endeavor and upon some solution possibilities of such. The main purposes of the survey are to identify the refugees' motivation for adjustment, the personal resources and their use in the social and economic context of our country so that in time they could find a place into our country that would represent a "home" for them.*

Key words: *refugee, intercultural adjustment, resilience*

1. INTRODUCTION

People's migration phenomenon in different places to look for a better life or a better job, leads to more intercultural contacts than before and also these are carried out at a higher speed than before. Such thing leads to a constant change of the world that we are live in and therefore a greater and faster need of adjustment than before. This is one sense of migration, sense that arises from the wish assumed by any person that looks for a better life for himself. However, it is not the same with the refugees that flee their country because they have to, many times in poor conditions, from one day to another.

Once they arrive in the new country they get in touch with the cultural differences and with the specific of each country. The cultural influence for the new ones that came into our country is felt in two ways, one in their culture brought through them in the new context and in our culture as being the context in which their life happens. This influence is visible in carrying out the cultural adjustment process, of socializing or more precisely of socialization in the conditions of a new society, of a new country. "The individual and social behaviors are comprised in these two boundaries: on one hand, the civilization's models and norms that give them meaning and content and on the other hand, the models and norms of the civilization that confer them a concrete and functional form of behavior, on a certain step of the social-historical and technical –economic development" [1]

Buber claims that "If a person walks along the road and meets another person who comes from the opposite direction, she or he only knows her or his own side of the road, not the other one's side. That knowledge can be achieved in the meeting with that person. Communicators can create a space between them if both parties want to share and learn from each other." [2].

The learning process of the new culture is not an adjustment and passive adoption of the new cultural concepts to the new life, but an integration of these through a gradual process of establishing the meaning of this experience so that these could be adjusted to its own life and this to be functional. The sudden coming and in dangerous conditions,

most of the times, makes this process to be more difficult, for the refugees. The adjustment to the new culture supposes the access of the new ones to the country's new language and therefore through the community to its values. One of the culture's characteristics is its axiological side, namely the values landmark system to which the social system relates to as a whole, the group, the organizations and even the members of the society itself. [1]

For the refugees, the access to all these is done through learning the language of the people where they have chosen to live, even if temporary. Their coming into our country brings them in contact with a reality that is much different than the one from their country, therefore the access to the social and cultural reality is done both from the cognitive perspective, but also in terms of needs, aspirations that must be satisfied and also in terms of patterns and values introverted throughout the ontogenesis, of the social experience accumulated, that need to be changed once by coming into a country. "We don't perceive the world, in which we are living, but we are building it; the social reality is an interpretation built through communication, based on human interaction in a certain cultural and historical frame". [1]

The interactions that arise in the social environment necessarily involve the appearance of the social influence phenomenon, as a mechanism of adjustment to the external conditions. Some of its dimensions are the conformism, the compliance and the obedience. Particularly, the conformism interests, of all. Often being the result of the group's pressure, this leads to the fact that the person adopts the new type of behavior or attitude, appropriated it as hers. This does not happen immediately, but gradually, in a long process that most of times is stressful. Sherif claims that the person that wishes to adapt, adopts the group's evaluations and frame marks and that in case of ambiguity, the social norms intervene. Later, two types of different influences have been discovered by Deutch and Gerard, which convinced the participants to the experiments to conform to:

- The informational influence – other people of the group assure a source of information in case of ambiguity and uncertainty

- The normative influence – in the situation in which the ambiguity is reduced, the norms of the group and the strong social pressure will convince people to comply with

It is not comfortable to be the "exception" in a group, because this place you outside the group, therefore the people conform to this in order to become part of it. In order to find their role and place in a group, the person uses coping mechanisms. Starting with defining the stress as being an organism-environment interactional configuration, we can look at the concept of "coping" as being the overall of mechanisms and conducts that the individual lays between him and the events perceived as stressful agents in order to diminish, tolerate, hold the effects on his physical and/or psychological comfort status. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define the "coping" as "all the cognitive and behavior efforts which are intended for controlling the stress factors that threat or exceed the resources of an individual" [3].

The flexibility of the coping reflects the personal attitudes about the efficiency of coping met in stressful situations and the personal intention to have adequate behavior to these. The flexibility of coping has to be linked to the psychological adjustment to the stressful situations rather than to the intention of giving desirable social answers [4]

In case of the refugees, it is not about simple mechanisms of coping, but adjusting in extreme conditions – at war, flee from one country to another, survival when you lack of material resources and you are a foreigner in a country that you don't know. The resilience, in a simple sense, is adapting to shock conditions, to adversities [5]

The resilience refers to our capacity to succeed in an acceptable way when the conditions in our lives change dramatically and always supposes the existence of

suffering. In finalizing successfully this process, the potential of the person which follows the process is important, the desire of giving sense to the experience and not giving in, the desire of finding a balance in the new conditions, the capacity of believing in his own resources, the possibility of activating them, the feeling of controlling your own life. Starting from these few theoretical concepts, the survey aims to capture some aspects of the refugees' motivation to adapt, developing certain strategies of succeeding in adapting, capturing the sense of adjustment and avoiding to transform the refugees in "outsiders" (persons which understand the meaning of change and adaptation to a new culture, but who cannot make this or even persons which cannot understand the meaning of change and adjustment).

2. WORK OBJECTIVES

Observation: the objectives of the survey refer to two different categories of subjects, children and adults.

1. Capturing the differences related to the everyday life, the culture, the dynamics of relations between the residence and origin countries.
2. Pointing out the personal resources involved in the school insertion of the children from the group.

3. WORK HYPOTHESIS

1. The resilience of the refugees can be improved by a psychological counseling process.
2. The efficiency of the cultural identification process has a positive role in the school adaptation of the refugees' children.

4. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

Ten (10) persons, four (4) children and six (6) adults attended to the survey, grouped in – one family, husband, wife with 3 children, one family, husband, wife with a child and 2 adult brothers among them.

These persons all fled from Iraq, leaving their origin family over there, their business and all assets gained along the years. The purpose for which this group leaves Iraq is due to the war. Initially, this group was larger, namely ten (10) families. They went to Turkey in 2011, where they had the status of refugees for 3 years and then they all came to Romania. In the beginning, they lived in Bucharest and in few months 5 of the 10 families have left to Timisoara where they live currently, and other 2 have left Romania. To be mentioned that the Iraq war has started in 2003 with the invasion of Iraq on 20 March 2003 by an American and United Kingdom coalition, led by the Americans. The main purpose, declared of this invasion was the fight against terrorism. The retreat of the troupes from Iraq has started in 2009, the English forces have closed the fight operations on 30 April 2011, but the Americans have still been there even in 2011. From their statements has resulted that the main reason of their leave was the war and the insecurity brought by it (besides the economic, financial uncertainty, there was always present an imminent danger- you could have lost your life, or your house or your loved ones at any time).

The age of the adults was comprised between 20 and 38 years and of the children between 7 and 13. The meeting took place during 3.03. –12.06.2015.

5. METHODS USED

Starting from what Groth - Marnat said *“Probably the only and most important thing in collecting the data, from the psychological evaluation is the interview”* [7]

I chose to use an interview guide in order to collect the data on the subjects and the start indices. The methods used in the intervention have been the drawing, the modeling, the collage, the art therapy

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The meetings have started with the description of the problems, done by the subjects, namely: the main problem mentioned by all has been the one of adaptation, other problems - related to children's education, school insertion, related to labor insertion. Related to the severity degree of the problem, perceived by all subjects, this has been – severity degree -difficult- given by all for the adaptation problem and they have mentioned that this is the most important problem; the others are related to it.

The start indices resulted at the first meeting are: the difficulty to be in contact with their own emotions, the confusion related to the utility of our meetings, the difficulty to be open, direct, and honest with the other members of the group. I consider that the main difficulty has appeared even from the way in which they have come to the meetings with me – they have been sent without being informed what they come for. I have begun this intervention in this group from the very definition of the group, of personal optimization, that was created for those who want to learn to communicate better to each other, having the value of consciousness and personal emotions.

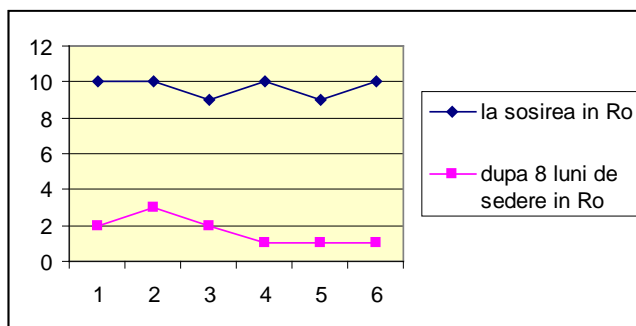
The difficulty consisted in the fact that they did not know exactly why they came to my office for. Noticing their reticence upon the communication, we have talked during the first encounter about the purpose of those meetings and they have succeeded in stating some expectations related to our meetings. They have mentioned that in their country they don't have such services and therefore they have never taken part of this. Thus, during the first meeting, an assessment of their needs has been done, of their problems to which solutions would be expected, of their personal resources; the determination of the suitability of the potential members of the group within the group. During this stage – I have realized that although they come from different families, the mutual experience in Turkey and Romania has tide them and now they consider themselves friends, thus there is comfort for relating and communication. The next meetings have continued with developing an alliance for work with the participants and between them, then giving information about the themes they requested and also about the value of the group and the way in which this has come to meet the needs of its members.

Some of the objectives established along for the group have been the following:

- ✘ Developing the concept of international culture and of the differences that exist between the residence countries and origin ones
- ✘ Encouraging the participants to achieve a wide personal experience and also to develop their own flexibility and adaptation abilities
- ✘ Developing the tolerance spirit towards other cultures
- ✘ The possibility to reflect upon values and upon the importance of the culture from which they come from and discovering the cultural influence upon their elections
- ✘ The opportunity to share within the group, the success strategies that have been valued differently by each one of them
- ✘ Motivating the children for the educational insertion (and also of their parents for achieving this in the Romanian education)

✘ Supporting the children to achieve and share some knowledge and certain multicultural experience (the story of their success in Turkey, valued as a success story and implementing the success strategies in our country as well).

Deutsch and Gerard indicate two different types of influence that convince the participants to conform: the informational influence and the normative one (both defined previously). Compared to these two types of influence, the adult group benefited of precise and constantly coherent information (related to issues they had to follow) from the foundation that facilitated their adaptation to our country. Unfortunately, the poor motivation for adaptation has made that most of the times this information to be eluded (information related to the professional insertion, related to children's insertion). Though the normative influence existed, it couldn't have been done integrally, due to the absence of validation by the participants of the informational one. The compliance with the responsibilities that their status of refugees in our country involves has been disrupted by the poor level of motivation of the participants. In the intercultural adaptation process, the motivation for adjustment plays a crucial role. The data related to the level of the participants' motivation (at stated level) are:



When arriving in RO

After 8 months residing in Ro

FIG.1 The self-perceived level of refugees' motivation

From figure 1 it can be seen the great discrepancy between the refugees self-perceived level when arriving in Romania and after 8 months of staying into our country. Aspects that have been disrupted due to the poor level of motivation or more precisely due to the constant decrease in time of it are:

✘ The appropriate perception of reality – poor contact with the reality due to the elusion of the informational data, and this has led them to a weaker adaptation. Those who succeeded to traverse the cultural differences and to value their resources, even if the motivation level was declining, those have succeed better to traverse the adaptation process.

✘ The ability to exercise voluntarily a control over behavior – not valued enough due to the fact that the “blame was always of others” (the teacher was not teaching in a good way, the organization was imposing conditions that were not liked, people in our country are....and something negative was following, etc.). This supposes a reduce degree of responsibility for change.

✘ Gender differences – differences that come from their culture, those between men and women suppose a responsibility in respect of the adaptation centered on the masculine type.

✘ The attitude to create relations full of affection – not learning fast the Romanian language makes them not to be capable of creating tight and satisfying relations with

others (others than the close ones – neighbors, relations with the families from children's school, other friends outside of their culture)

✘ The existence of productivity in respect of the women from the group – the cultural perception about work (women do not work) made these not to search or even to initiate the search for a job. They have succeeded this only when the organization that helped them the entire year intervened in this sense.

Starting from these first indices, we have focused on their personal resources and functional strategies for each one of them. This has drawn the attention upon the differences and similarities between them, having as a result the perception on the fact that they can accomplish the same thing in different ways, that they would not lose from their culture heritage any essential things by trying to adapt, that the will to traverse a road belongs to each one of us.

Following the stages of choosing an activity field has generated discussions related to employment, of the possibility to open a Registered Sole Trader /PFA or a Limited Liability Company/ SRL. Also, the relation between the employer and the employee has been discussed, the financial implications, the responsibility for health services and pension. The professional orientation has been accomplished as a custom activity related to the groups' wishes and requirements, starting from the fact that the persons have been guided to self-development, to know and accept a more complex image of themselves, about the role that they could have in the society; then, to test these personal discoveries in reality, so that this person to be able to integrate in labor and to be motivated to perform a job useful to the society and to himself. An important aspect is the one of the social responsibility, aspect that nowadays is weak pointed out to this group due to the fact that the personal purposes are currently centered on assuring the primary survival needs. It has been worked on optimizing this aspect.

Other aspect that has been worked on, was the desire of staying in Romania–due to the differences between expectations and reality found, one part of them are not decided whether to stay longer (or for how long) in Romania, this being a real obstacle in the adaptation process. The low level of motivation, corroborated with the increased level of disappointment maintains them constantly in a discomfort zone and this makes them to slip constantly to resistance strategies or not to start the action – “we have been tricked, we did wrong by coming here, I'm still thinking if..., I don't know what to do if I won't get any support”. This conduct makes them to choose often as a modality of coping, the support of the divinity. Activating the personal resources made them to realize the transition from passive coping modalities towards some active ones such as – the activism, the planning. No one from the participants of the group manifest the desire to leave Romania soon, but also none of them excludes this option.

The discussions about form and stages of the Romanian education has made the transition from the perception on an education that they do not like, without having solid explanations on the matter, to the desire of finding out which are the steps they have to follow for a good insertion in school. Also, these discussions have led to a short look at the university studies because part of the adult group was interested in continuing their studies. Another theme approach has been the one of extra-curricular activities for the children and its use (sport, artistic activities, volunteering). Thus, the transition has been realized, from a narrow vision upon school and the attendance of children to school (they just don't like it) to what they want to become, which are the steps to follow for this and how this can be achieved.

If we relate the results of this group to the Anderson's model, model built in 3 phases – processing the cultural shock, recovering from it and adjusting to this stress factor, we can say that we have found the participants to this group (most of them) at stage 2 and

together we have tried to finalize it and follow the third stage- adjusting this stress factor. During this process, the participants have succeeded in following some transition stages from the ethnocentric to the ethno-relative status, which comprises the complete adaptation and integration, so that through his experiences to build a state of wellbeing and safe in this country.

During the meetings, several milestones for the adult education have been achieved: identifying the indicators for personal restructuration (referring to the family education, for the career, for the parent), building or reconstructing the motivation for optimizing the quality of life. Other aspects discussed within the group were: to promote health and wellbeing – optimal functioning from the somatic, physiological, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and prevention point of view – of the negative affective mood, of self-distrust, of the difficulties in learning and social de-adaptation.

I mention that during the meetings, the degree of cohesion of the group increased the implication and opening degree of each participant, as well as the level of self-trust in respect of the personal evolution. At the end of the meetings, the results reported were:

- Related to the group of children, these have succeeded to be admitted in school following the exams
- Related to the adult group – from those six, 3 of them were hired and one started the employment procedures. Hiring those 2 women was difficult, due to the cultural differences related to the woman employment (both families have considered that the woman should not work and that this belonged exclusively to the man).

This group of refugees has been supported for a period of one year by a foundation from Romania – they received monthly a sum of money, they had a home, a teacher for Romanian language and counseling services. One of my wishes has been to follow the case even after they stopped receiving support. After 6 months without support, i have ascertained that the family with 3 children has remained in Romania, the adults had a job and the children were at school, and the rest of the persons from the group got back to Iraq, though 2 of them had a job even from the time they had the foundation's support.

7. LIMITS OF THE SURVEY

The main limit of the survey is the small number of participants, so that the survey represents only a short scenario in this vast matter. Another limit is that the subjects have arrived to my meetings more at the end of their support program and not in the beginning of it. The moment to start the counseling meetings is important in building the resilience and the moment chosen for them (by the foundation) came only after they were already de-motivated, disappointed and tired, especially due to the fact they did not understand the entire process they were transiting.

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