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ABSTRACT

Protecting the best interest of the child is of great importance in the organization of social benefits for the family. In order to achieve this goal, social work interventions should not merely provide social assistance to families, but also address the factors which lead to family dysfunctions and help families reach their full potential. In this article, the case of a father who has difficulties in taking care of his children for economic reasons and applies to the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies* for social and economic benefits is presented. The planned change process designed in line with the ecological systems and empowerment approaches is explained in detail.

Keywords: Child in need of protection or services, the planned change process, social work intervention, social work approaches.

ÖZ

Aileye yönelik sosyal yardımların organizasyonunda çocuğun yüksek yararının korunması ve geliştirilmesi amacı büyük önem taşımaktadır. Sosyal hizmetin profesyonel müdahale sürecinde anne, baba, çocuklar ve diğer aile üyelerinin işlevselliklerini engelleyen tıkanıklıklar başarılı bir biçimde tanımlanmalı ve aileye verilecek sosyal yardıma ek olarak, ailenin mevcut potansiyelinin harekete geçirilmesi hedeflenmelidir. Bu çalışmada, ekonomik yoksunluk nedeniyle, çocuklarına bakmakta güçlük çeken, bu nedenle sosyal ve ekonomik destek hizmetinden yararlanmak için Aile ve Sosyal Politikalar İl Müdürlüğü'ne başvuran, bir baba ve ailesiyle ekolojik sistem ve güçlendirme yaklaşımları ekseninde, planlı değişim süreci takip edilerek, yürütülen mesleki müdahale süreci ayrıntılarıyla açıklanacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Korunmaya ya da hizmete gereksinim duyan çocuk, planlı değişim süreci, sosyal hizmet müdahalesi, sosyal hizmet yaklaşımları.

INTRODUCTION

In Turkey, a financial assistance program entitled Social and Economic Support Services (SED) was designed for families who could not take care of their children due to social and/or economic reasons. As a principle of the protection, development and encouragement of the child's best interest, SED program services, which are delivered by the Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies, target families wanting to leave their children under 18 years old to state protection due to unemployment, disability, or poverty related issues. These families' social environment, relations, and interactions are observed by the program staff through home visits, and the families are given financial assistance in order that they can sustain their functionality. With this program, the number of children who are left to nursery schools or orphanages has decreased and these children have

been supported for healthy biopsychosocial identity development in their own family environments.

The aim of this article is to present a social work intervention case, implemented to support a father who applied to Sakarya Provincial Directorate of Family and Social Policies with his wife and his three children for giving their children to institutional care because of financial problems.

Introduction of the Case

S.T. (32) and O.T. (27) have three children: Y.T. (9, male), K.T. (7, male) and M.T. (4, male). The mother is 68% disabled. The father has been living with his wife and three children. He has not got a proper occupation. He has applied for their caring and protection due to the fact that his wife is not able to take care / responsibility of their children due to her disability. With the demand of client S.T., this intervention has been implemented.

* In 2018, the "Ministry of Family and Social Policies" and the "Ministry of Labor" were combined. Currently, the name of this institution is changed as Provincial Directorate of Family, Labor and Social Services.

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THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Social work profession carries out professional practice according to the needs and problems of the client groups with the principle of "every person is unique". In this case, a seven-staged planned change process has been followed and presented below:

1. Engagement

Together with S.T., social worker made a pre-meeting to assess the problem and determine to which unit of the Social Work Center** he should be referred. As a result of this pre-meeting, official application was taken and a file about S.T. and his family was discussed. At this first encounter, it was learned that the father took the responsibility of his disabled wife and three children and he felt himself inadequate and helpless to care them so he wanted them to be taken under state protection for providing them a better future. Social workers went to client's home to assess psycho-social and environmental resources, determine the situation of the family, and make evaluation of the case. The information form of case from the first session was examined and the general profile of the client was obtained. S.T. and his family had been living in a two-floor house with garden. Social workers asked for permission to observe and meet the family members. The social worker explained to the client their aim, responsibilities and duty in order to learn their problems, desires and requests. Social worker listened to the client while observing his body language and interpersonal communication skills and he took short notes without disturbing the client.

2. Assessment

2.1. Client System: S.T. was born in 1982, Sakarya and was married and had three children. He had been working as a construction worker to earn his living after he finished primary school. In recent years he had not been in social and work life constantly due to his wife's increasing disability. S.T. had four siblings, his father had died fifteen years ago and his mother had been living with his brother. He didn't have a close relationship with his mother and siblings who were living in the same city. His mother could not undertake her grandchildren's care and responsibility because of her own health problems.

2.2. Problems and Requirements of Client System: Because S.T. did not have a proper income and he could not look after his children, he had feelings like helplessness and burnout syndrome. Also, he had been feeling alone and deserted because he didn't have enough time for social life and his friends' visits. S.T.'s financial problems had increased after his children started to go to school. Therefore, inadequate social support given to the client had negative

effects on his situation and this had prevented him to deal with his problems. Although he had devoted himself to his family, he had needed professional support and guidance to discover his strengths.

2.3. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Client: S. T. wanted to leave his children to the state care for their development and future because he thought that he could not look after them and provide them good living conditions. The client stated that he had to leave them to the state and he wanted to visit his children when they were under protection and care of state. S.T. had positive relationships with his children and he had mixed feelings about separating from them. Also he was willing to collaborate with the social worker to improve the welfare of his family.

3. Planning

3.1. Working with the Client System: After negotiating and evaluations, they agreed to collaborate to solve the problems and answer the needs and they decided the targets of the intervention together.

3.2. Problems and Needs of the Client System:

a) The client does not have a proper job and he has isolated himself from social life. He needs a proper job which provides social insurance and he also needs to be a person beneficial to the society.

b) The client does not have enough income to afford his family's expenses. Therefore, the family needs support for food, education, health aids, etc.

c) The client does not have enough psycho-social support. He needs professional psychological support and guidance.

d) The client does not have any relatives to help his wife's and his children's care. They need a full time professional home care personnel.

e) Y.T. (one of the children) has not good grades at school. The child has perception and connection problems and her/his mental development is not enough compared with child's peers. Y.T. needs child psychiatrist examination.

3.3. Purposes:

a) To find a proper job for S.T. via Turkish Employment Organization.

b) To increase social and financial welfare level of the family.

c) To provide professional psychological counseling service that focuses on family and children.

d) To provide home care personnel for the disabled wife and children.

e) To refer Y.T. to a child psychiatrist.

** These centers provide protective, preventive, supportive, developmental services and guidance and counseling services to children, young people, women, men, disabled people, elderly people, martyrs, veterans and their families.

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4. Implementation / Intervention

Problems were detected and targets and aims were decided with client S.T., the client enrolled to Turkish Employment Organization system to get a suitable job for his age, experience and other specialties. During this process, Social and Economic Support System helped him to overcome financial deficiency. S.T. got an appointment from psychological treatment department. At the same time, "Counseling Services Decision"*** was acted in the name of the children by Juvenile Court to provide S.T. the support he needed for his child's developmental issues and parenting. In order to find home care personnel for the disabled wife and children, local authority, municipality, charity foundation, neighbors and employment organization were connected and finally full time personnel were found. The client started to work in a month and when he was at work, his wife and his children were looked after by home care personnel.

5. Evaluation

Plenty of goals were achieved and client's problem solving skills increased. When the client reached necessary resources to supply his needs, he realized that his problems had been solved with collaboration and sensibility. Hence, the social welfare of family increased after financial support and the family could have access to health and education opportunities.

6. Termination

S.T. was benefited from Social and Financial Support System for his children. He found a job after he applied to the System. The economic prosperity of the family was relatively increased, care support was provided for the disabled mother, psycho-social supports were given to the children. In order to observe the effectiveness of the social work intervention, it was decided to monitor the situation of the family at certain time intervals.

7. Monitoring and Follow-Up

It has been agreed that the client S.T. and his children should be followed once every three months because of their physical, mental and emotional situation. S.T. has been contacted via telephone or was met in person. The academic statuses of his children have been regularly controlled through contacting their teachers. As of today, the father has a job, monthly financial aid has been provided for the children's care, the children attended to school regularly, and home care personnel has provided his wife's and his children's care. After this professional intervention, it is expected that the family's social functionality will increase by developing their psycho-social, cultural and financial conditions, the parent-child

relationships will get better as a result of the psychological support given to the family, the family's desire to live together will increase, the financial and emotional problems of family will disappear. The intervention will be terminated once these goals are observed to be permanently reached.

DISCUSSION

According to the empowerment approach, every person has power; this power can be developed, and both the person and the environment are full of resources. The other approach used in this intervention, the ecological systems approach, indicates that any problem at sub-elements of system will affect general functionality of system negatively. Especially, providing psycho-social support, child development counseling, and financial support simultaneously to the families having difficulties in caring their children due to economic problems has great importance in terms of protecting and developing child mental health and family structure.

Empowerment is one of the most commonly used approaches in social work practices at economic and psycho-social deficiency situations (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh and Winstok, 2000: 10). Empowerment approach is especially preferred by social workers working with client groups social inequality and social exclusion. The biggest advantage of the empowerment approach for the practitioners is that it suggests considering personal and social dimensions of cases simultaneously. (Honold, 1997: 202). The empowerment approach, which aims to help the individual realize his full potential and overcome his problems by using his own resources and coping strategies, is defined as an effort for building, developing and increasing power via sharing and working together (Wilkinson, 1998: 1-12).

In the presented case, a fragmented family due to financial problems was saved by directing the father to the employment services and to psychological treatment, by providing social and economic support, and through the counseling decision that enabled children to take part in social life and provided parents guidance and educations. Therefore, motivation in the family was empowered and the family members found the desire to protect their union.

*** According to the Turkish Child Protection Law no. 5395, "Counseling Services Decision" is defined as guidance services towards people who have the responsibility to grow up a child. It also includes the services provided to children in order to solve problems related to her/his education and development.

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In order to enable people to overcome their problems, the empowerment approach presents a view that supports person for solving his problems by activating his present potential and strengths instead of dealing with the individual's weakness or pathologies (McWhirter, 1991: 224; Öntaş, 2001: 103). Thus, the father was supported psycho-socially and financially to activate his protective, caring functions for his family.

The focus empowerment approach is support and reveals the potential goodness in every person (Van Wormer, 1999: 51). According to Şahin (2005: 44) the importance of empowerment in social work relies on thoughts that the positive quality capacity of human is necessary to appreciate, personal and social resources can be developed and this development can be lasted. In this direction, in our case study, this family has been appreciated for their effort to increase family's functionality after participating in professional meetings. This family has also realized that they can stand on their own feet if they protect that desire and motivation about change in the near future.

Today, professionals like psychologists, pedagogues, or social workers adopt the "person in environment" perspective and evaluate clients within their ecological systems (O'Melia, Miley, DuBois 1998: 9-11). These professionals take into consideration both the mental processes and external dynamics that affect client's life (Ashman and Zastrow 1990:10). In this case study, professional intervention employed ecological systems and empowerment approaches as the guiding frameworks.

According to Ashman and Hull (1999: 14), in terms of ecological system approach, a person is in dynamic interaction with so many systems; family, friends, social services, policies, belief system, goods and services system, work life and education life. The main assumption of this approach is that person can adapt himself easier to the environmental changes by developing interactions between his/her personality and his/her environment. Therefore, in this intervention, positive interfamilial interactions, husband-wife relations, parent-children relations, communication in whole family and interaction patterns were supported. At all home visits, the positive contribution of all family members to help them get rid of problems has great importance especially for family members and family structure and the relation processes and interactions between family members have been supported.

Day by day, family structure, social institutions and other system's functions have been changing so the life has been more complicated for people. This situation has affected

the adaptation of people to social environment negatively and instability between personal desires and social resources has caused stress (Danış 2006: 46). People have to build a balance between desires and resources of environment and own opportunity and skills (Compton and Galaway 1979: 29). According to ecological system; personal, social and family problems can be prevented and overcome function deficiencies among the systems before they come true with balance between person and his environment (Payne 1979: 145-147; O'Melia, Miley and DuBois 1998: 35-36; Turan 1999: 311; Kornblum and Julian 2001: 181-182). With this point of view presented by the ecological system approach, providing protection and care needs of children firstly, a connection between family's needs, desires and expectations and social resources has been tried to build. For this purpose, the existing social assistance system has been activated and the tendency of the family to leave their children for economic reasons has fallen from family's agenda due to the strengthening of the family care option through financial support for the family.

CONCLUSION

In this article, a social work intervention with a father, who wanted to leave his children to state protection because of social and financial problems, with the hope that they would have a better future, was presented. The client's wife had disability, so she was not able to take care of the children either.

In Turkey, Social and Economic Support program was developed to return the children under state protection to their families or to support families which could not afford their children. In this way children who need protection or who are at risk of being needy stay with their parents while they are growing up. The families which benefit from Social and Economic Support Services are followed periodically and after their cultural setting and environment are examined, these parents are either directed to other agencies and resources, or are guided for the best interest of their children. These family-oriented programs and interventions have helped to reduce the number of children in need of protection and the awareness of families about their children's' care and development has been rising. Consequently, parents develop awareness about their strengths and participate in social life fully.

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