Resilience factors in families of children with hearing impairment

Abstract. The aim of the research was to identify and describe the function of resilience factors in families of children with hearing impairment. The research sample included 54 families. The definition of time data, the time interval between the first parents’ suspicion and completion of the diagnostic process and the time interval between the diagnosis and provision of first compensation aid, may be seen as the most significant outcomes. The results show that stability and pro-social elements are not affected by the structure of the family, nor by the educational level or religiousness of the parents. Moreover, it was demonstrated that the communication burden affecting the family of a child with hearing impairment is lower in children whose parents became aware of the hearing deficiency at the child’s lower age, and significantly lower if the hearing impairment was diagnosed before the 12th month of the child’s age. In terms of the social impact of the child’s hearing impairment on the family it was demonstrated that the income level significantly affects the impact of the child’s hearing impairment on social life, and also that the religiosity of parents has no effect on eliminating the negative perception of the hearing impairment.

Key words: hearing impairment, resilience, social impact

INTRODUCTION

Family is regarded as a basic element of society and historically this approach has remained unchanged within the European cultural context. In their dictionary, Pavel Hartl and Helena Hartlová (2000) offer a characteristics of a family from the psychological point of view and describe it as a group linked through marriage or blood relationships, mutual responsibility and assistance. The Dictionary of Pedagogy by Jiří Mareš, Jan Průcha, Eliška Walterová, (2003) defines a family in terms of its structure and width. Some other authors have noted that it is difficult to find a consensus regarding the definition of resilience (e.g. Kinard, 1998). In such a situation, to compromise, a group of relevant meanings associated with resilience can be used. For the purpose of this research the following functional definitions were used: “The path a family follows as it adapts and prospers in the face of...
stress” (Hawley, DeHaan, 2003); “the capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful” (Walsh, 2006). In accordance e.g. to Suniya S. Luthar, Domenc V. Cicchetti, Bronwyn Becker (2000) two main parameters must be present: 1) a significant threat and 2) positive adaptation. Peter Fonagy defines resilience as: “normal development under difficult circumstances” (Fonagy et al., 1994, p. 223). Another definition is offered by Deborah Ghate and Neah Hazel: “the ability of some individuals to maintain healthy functioning in spite of a background of disadvantage commonly associated with poor outcomes” (Ghate, Hazel, 2002, p. 15).

As specific functions the authors mention the establishment of emotional climate, transfer of values and formation of values (e.g. Potmesil, 2010), attitudes, lifestyle and other factors. The philosophical perspective of a family and its importance have been based on the development of society and current knowledge. In his short historical overview, Arno Anzenbacher (1991) draws on Aristotle – EN VII, 14,1162a (Anzenbacher, 1991, p. 194). Similarly, in his perception of a family, Georg Wolfgang Friedrich Hegel (Anzenbacher, 1991, p. 194) is cited as an author emphasizing the presence of a child as the uniting element; he points at the natural unity of this formation and, in terms of importance and time, puts family before society. It means that a family has been historically understood as an emotionally and relationship-wise coherent unit able to provide its members with protection and resistance against external forces. If a family is seen in the context of its own resilience, then the perspective of “the other side” may be applied. In order to describe crisis intervention focused on a family, Daniela Vodáčková et al. (2007) define stages in the development and areas of family life that are, in terms of crisis intervention, sensitive or fragile. For the purposes of this paper, the respective stages may be used as a basis, after Vodáčková, and could be defined as follows:

1. married couple without children – from mutual devotion to preparation for parenting;
2. family with children – specific period, typically with the birth of the first child followed by other children;
3. family with a child of pre-school age – defining space for individual family members, introducing the child to institutional care;
4. family with school children – school responsibilities affecting the family life as a limiting factor to individual activities of parents and to common activities;
5. family with adolescents – acceptance of a maturing individual during the most turbulent time, acceptance of experiments, search for independence and testing of different roles;
6. family sending young adults into the world – related to the empty nest syndrome, represents a significant burden on the family and brings the necessity to look for a new balance, forming and functioning of relationships;
7. middle-aged parents – acceptance of the “empty nest” status;
8. ageing family members – retirement, uncertainty about the future, economic and health uncertainty and old age – factors forming a comprehensive phenomenon deserving closer attention with respect to a possible threat to family resilience.

Family cohesion and family climate are under increased pressure in terms of the child/children development, frequent episodic presence of transitory crises, and occurrence of physical or mental disorders, crises of parents’ marriage and later of children’s marriages. In the given examples it is necessary to search for resilience as a form of the family’s response to critical situations and the ability to respond in such a way.

The entire psychology of human resilience includes a theory of mechanisms and processes used by a person to cope with changes in the external environment. Karel Paulík (2010) studies human resilience in a well-arranged manner and with respect to a family. In that matter a family demonstrates its resil-