

Risks of Professional Parenting (Original Research)

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Original Article

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Abstract:

Objective: The research aims to identify perceived risks of professional parenting from the viewpoint of professional parents, children's home employees cooperating with professional parents, and Educators.

Design: Comparative, quantitative and exploratory research

Participants: The research sample consisted of 115 participants - 56

professional parents, 27 children's home employees and 32 Educators. **Methods:** To identify perceived risks of professional parenting, our self-constructed questionnaire containing 32 items describing potential risks of professional parenting was used. These items were assessed by participants using a *5-point Likert Scale*.

Results: The results suggested statistically significant differences in perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting among children's home employees, professional parents, and Educators.

Conclusion: All the identified results favoured children's home employees and Educators, in the sense that they perceived higher risks in comparison to professional parents. In terms of effect size, observed differences in perceiving the risks from the viewpoint of employees and Educators were small ($\eta^2=.27-.31$).

Introduction

The provision of care to children who are removed from their biological families and placed into children's homes based on a court's order of institutional care or a provisional measure is regulated by the Act No. 305/2005 Coll. on Social and Legal Protection of Children and on Social Guardianship. Currently, it defines a form of provision of care to children in professional families as an option to provide care to a child in a domestic environment of a professional parent who is an employee of a children's home. Child care in a professional family primarily presupposes meeting of a child's individual needs in an environment as close as possible to the model of a family upbringing. The upbringing of a child in an environment where there is no staff rotation and where, instead, the permanent presence of a professional parent is ensured and a child is able to go through a certain period of their life in a family environment has a significant impact on the fulfillment of their psychosocial needs and positively affects their social functioning in their interpersonal relationships later in life (1).

The focus of the present study is on a specific area within the issue being discussed, namely on perceiving the risks of

performing the tasks of professional parenting. Specific attention is being paid to comparing risks perceived by professional parents, children's home employees and Educators. As the authors are unaware of any satisfactory empirical starting points for this specific area, the study could be considered an exploratory study introducing the issue in the context of the Slovak Republic.

Methodology and Results

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 27 children's home employees, 56 professional parents and 32 Educators.

Of professional parents, 52 were female (92.9%) and 4 male (7.1%). 38 professional parents (67.9%) completed secondary education with a school-leaving exam, 2 completed first-degree university education (3.6%) and 16 (28.6%) completed second-degree university education. As for the marital status, 5 (9.1%) professional parents were single, 36 (65.5%) were married, 6 (10.9%) lived in a partnership, 7 (12.7%) were divorced and one professional parent was widowed (1.8%).

There were 26 female and one male children's home employee. As for occupational position, our sample contained 10 Psychologists (37%), 8 Social Workers (29.6%), 6 children's home managers (22.2%), two Special Pedagogues (7.4%) and one Assistant Social Pedagogue (3.7%).

Of Educators, 30 were female and two male. There were 18 (56.3%) Social Workers, 12 Psychologists (37.5%) and two reported other positions. 31 Educators worked at the *Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family* and only one was an employee of an accredited body.

Research methods

To identify perceived risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting, our self-constructed questionnaire was used. The questionnaire contains 32 items describing potential risks related to the performance of professional parenting which were assessed by respondents using a 5-point Likert scale (1-not at all risky, 5-completely risky). Risks were assessed by professional parents, children's home employees, and Educators. The questionnaire used enabled a quantitative assessment of perceived risks and an application of comparative analysis of obtained data.

Statistical analysis

SPSS 21 Software was used to statistically process the results. Descriptive analysis and procedures of statistical inference

were employed. With regard to the ordinal level of measurement of examined variables, descriptive statistics were calculated (average order, median and, considering small differences between median values, also average and standard deviation). The *Mann-Whitney U Test* was used to identify differences in perceiving the risks among groups of respondents. To determine the effect size, a correlation measure was calculated, the values of which were interpreted as follows: $\eta=0.00-0.30$ - small effect, $\eta=0.30-0.50$ - medium effect, $\eta=0.51$ and more - large effect of a difference (2).

Results

The results pointed out statistically significant differences in perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting between children's home employees and professional parents. Significant differences were found in 12 of 32 observed risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting. These 12 areas are shown in **Table 1**.

All the identified results favored children's home employees and Educators, in the sense that they perceived higher risks in comparison to professional parents. In terms of the effect size, small to medium differences were found ($\eta=.23-.41$). There were no significant differences between the two groups of respondents in the other 20 risk areas.

Table 1: Perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting: a comparison between children's home employees and professional parents.

Issue	Informant	n	mR	Md	M	SD	U	p	η
Insufficient preparation for the performance of professional parenting	Employee	27	53.89	4	4.19	.92	408	.001	.38
	Professional parent	55	35.42	3	3.07	1.41			

Completed education of a professional parent in fields other than human and social sciences	Employee	27	49.70	2	2.56	1.28	521	.022	.26
	Professional parent	55	37.47	2	1.89	1.01			
“Us” vs. “them” distinction (biological family vs. a child in a professional family)	Employee	27	50.74	4	3.96	0.90	493	.011	.28
	Professional parent	55	36.96	3	3.16	1.29			
Insufficient support from one’s own family	Employee	27	49.67	4	3.93	1.07	549	.037	.23
	Professional parent	56	38.30	3	3.25	1.37			
Anxiety of a professional parent	Employee	27	53.17	4	4.33	0.68	454.5	.002	.34
	Professional parent	56	36.62	4	3.57	1.13			
Conflict between a biological child and a child in a professional family	Employee	27	50.80	4	3.96	1.13	518.5	.017	.27
	Professional parent	56	37.76	3	3.30	1.22			
High demands on a child, undue expectations on the part of a professional parent	Employee	27	51.19	4	4.07	.92	508	.012	.28
	Professional parent	56	37.57	3	3.48	.99			
Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child	Employee	27	55.13	4	3.93	.78	401.5	.000	.40
	Professional parent	56	35.67	3	2.89	1.34			
Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a partner	Employee	27	53.63	4	3.81	.88	442	.002	.35
	Professional parent	56	36.39	3	2.86	1.35			
Age of a professional parent under 25	Employee	27	53.28	4	3.63	1.11	451.5	.002	.34
	Professional parent	56	36.56	3	2.69	1.29			
Age of a professional parent over 55	Employee	27	53.13	3	2.96	1.16	455.5	.002	.34
	Professional parent	56	36.63	2	2.14	1.07			
Conflicts between professional parents and children in a professional family	Employee	27	55.78	4	4.15	.86	384	.000	.41
	Professional parent	56	35.36	3	3.13	1.18			

Notes: mR- mean Rank, Md – median, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, U – Mann-Whitney U Test, p – significance, η - effect size

The comparison between children's home employees and Educators has shown statistically significant differences in three areas of perceived risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting (Table 2). Children's home employees perceived

“Insufficient preparation for the performance of professional parenting” statistically significantly more risky than Educators. “Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child” and “after losing a partner” was perceived statistically significantly more risky by Educators in comparison to children's home employees. In terms of effect size, the observed differences were small ($\eta=.27-.31$).

significant differences in perceiving the risks in other 19 areas between the respondents.

Discussion

Following the results, the most notable differences between professional parents and professional Parenting Educators in perceiving the risks could be observed in three questionnaire items (Table 3).

In terms of effect size, the largest difference ($\eta=.59$) was found in perceiving the risk of the *age of a professional parent over 55*. Professional parents perceive the age over 55 as less risky in comparison to

Table 2: Perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting: a comparison between children's home employees and Educators.

Issue	Informant	n	mRank	Md	M	SD	U	p	η
Insufficient preparation for the performance of professional parenting	Employee	27	34.85	4	4.19	.92	301	.037	.27
	Educator	32	25.91	4	3.66	.97			
Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child	Employee	27	24.72	4	3.93	.78	289.5	.019	.31
	Educator	32	34.45	5	4.38	.79			
Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a partner	Employee	27	25.15	4	3.81	.88	301	.034	.28
	Educator	32	34.09	4	4.28	.81			

Notes: mR- mean Rank, Md – median, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, U – Mann-Whitney U test, p – significance, η - effect size

The comparison between Educators and professional parents in perceiving risks pointed out 13 statistically significant differences. Differences favored Educators in all 13 areas – they perceived these 13 areas (Table 3) as more risky in comparison to professional parents. In terms of effect size, differences between Educators and professional parents were medium to large ($\eta=.31-.59$) in ten areas. There were no statistically

Educators (Table 3). There were also professional parents aged over 55 among our respondents. The reason why they didn't consider this item risky could be the fact that a professional parent at this age has rich experience in the area of parenting and, in many cases, also their own adult children who are already relatively independent. Hence, they are able to devote themselves to a child in professional care more thoroughly

and effectively. It is very important for a professional parent to know that the performance of professional substitute care does not consist only of basic knowledge that they had acquired as a parent (3). The *age of a professional parent under 25* was also assessed by Educators as risky. The age under

25 is generally considered risky because of insufficient experience in the area of child care. Young people are one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable; their behavior is often the most challenging. In such cases, professional parents are expected to be able to provide professional care (4).

Table 3: Perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting: a comparison between Educators and professional parents.

Issue	Informant	n	mRank	Md	M	SD	U	p	η
Completed education of a professional parent in fields other than human and social sciences	Educator	32	51.53	3	2.38	0.94	639	.025	.24
	Professional parent	55	39.62	2	1.89	1.01			
Inappropriate treatment of a child on the part of a professional parent	Educator	32	55.59	5	4.47	0.88	541	.001	.35
	Professional parent	55	38.16	4	3.59	1.29			
“Us” vs. “them” distinction (biological family vs. a child in a professional family)	Educator	32	54.95	4	4.06	1.01	529.5	.001	.34
	Professional parent	55	37.63	3	3.16	1.29			
A large age difference between children in a professional family	Educator	32	55.83	3	3.16	0.88	533.5	.001	.35
	Professional parent	55	38.03	2	2.30	1.17			
Anxiety of a professional parent	Educator	32	52	4	4.09	0.89	565	.030	.23
	Professional parent	55	40.21	4	3.57	1.13			
Conflict between a biological child and a child in a professional family	Educator	32	52.83	4	3.94	0.88	629.5	.016	.26
	Professional parent	55	39.74	3	3.30	1.22			
Child of different ethnicity	Educator	32	54.24	3	3.03	0.84	550.5	.004	.31
	Professional parent	55	38.33	2	2.35	1.24			
High demands on a child, undue expectations on the part of a professional parent	Educator	32	57.50	4	4.28	0.63	480	.000	.41
	Professional parent	55	37.07	3	3.48	0.99			
Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child	Educator	32	61.84	5	4.38	0.79	341	.000	.54
	Professional parent	55	34.59	3	2.89	1.34			

Adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a partner	Educator	32	61.33	4	4.28	0.81	357.5	.000	.52
	Professional parent	55	34.88	3	2.86	1.35			
Age of a professional parent under 25	Educator	32	56.55	4	3.66	0.94	510.5	.001	.37
	Professional parent	55	37.62	3	2.69	1.29			
Age of a professional parent over 55	Educator	32	63.45	3.5	3.59	0.84	289.5	.000	.59
	Professional parent	55	33.67	2	2.14	1.07			
Conflicts between professional parents and children in a professional family	Educator	32	55.50	4	3.94	0.91	544	.002	.34
	Professional parent	55	38.21	3	3.13	1.18			

Notes: mR- mean Rank, Md – median, M – mean, SD – standard deviation, U – Mann-Whitney U Test, p – significance, η - effect size

Another large difference in terms of effect size was the perception of

adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child ($\eta=.54$) and of *adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a partner* ($\eta=.52$).

Professional parents perceived both areas as less risky than Educators (**Table 3**). In such cases, it is important for Educators to assess the interest and motivation of a person to perform professional care. If the desire to compensate for the loss of a close person primarily prevailed the main purpose of performing the tasks of professional parenting would disappear. The comparison between children's home employees and Educators has shown statistically significant differences in three areas, with the difference in perception of *adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child* (**Table 2**) being the most notable of them.

An interesting finding was related to the perception of risks by professional parents and Educators in the case of "Us vs. them" distinction (*biological family vs. a child in*

a professional family) (**Table 3**). One of the main reasons why a child is placed into a professional family is to teach them how a family works. Many children don't have the opportunity to imagine how a "healthy" family works. That is why professional parenting giving a child the opportunity to grow up in an environment that gives them enough incentives for their healthy development and the ability to form new family and social relationships is important. The essence of professional parenting lies in ensuring such a family environment where children can feel accepted (5). It is impossible for a child to feel accepted when making "us vs. them" distinctions, as they perceive differences in the way professional parents bring them up. This area was perceived as less risky by professional parents in comparison to Educators.

This area is closely associated with *inappropriate treatment of a child on the part of a professional parent* and with *high demands on a child, undue expectations on the part of a professional parent* (**Table 3**). It is assumed that a professional parent

is suitably selected based on their competences and experience, is well prepared for performing the role of a professional parent, and that there are no undiscovered pathological problems in their personality (4).

Perceiving risks by professional parents and children's home employees has shown statistically significant differences in perceiving the risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting. Most interesting were the results regarding perceiving the risk of *insufficient preparation for the performance of professional parenting (Table 1)*. Children's home employees perceived this area as more risky in comparison to professional parents ($\eta=.38$). Knowledge, experience, and education - a professional parent needs to have all of those to be a true professional and to be able to perform their job in the best possible way (3). Unless a professional parent has sufficient preparation, also other risks may become evident during the performance of the tasks of professional parenting - *inappropriate treatment of a child on the part of a professional parent, high demands on a child, undue expectations on the part of a professional parent, conflicts between professional parents and children in a professional family* and numerous others.

Conclusion

All the identified results favored children's home employees and Educators, in the sense that they perceived higher risks in comparison to professional parents. In terms of effect size, observed differences in perceiving the risks from the viewpoint of employees and Educators were small ($\eta=.27-.31$).

Perceived risks of performing the tasks of professional parenting from the viewpoint of professional parents, children's home employees and Educators overlap to a substantial extent. All three groups reported

similar risk areas – *adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a child; adopting a child into a professional family shortly after losing a partner; the age of a professional parent under 25; the age of a professional parent over 55; “us vs. them” distinction (biological family vs. a child in a professional family); high demands on a child; undue expectations on the part of a professional parent.*

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