

Social support in a crisis situation on the example of the nationwide program of psychological and pedagogical support

Wsparcie społeczne w sytuacji kryzysowej. Na przykładzie ogólnopolskiego programu wsparcia psychologiczno-pedagogicznego

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Introduction

The issue of social support is often discussed by interdisciplinary researchers. Among others, Stanisław Kawula, Helena Sęk, Roman Cieśla, Philip Zimbardo, Bogdan Wojciszke, Paulina Forma, and many others have shown their interest in it. The subject matter of support in a new perspective, the so-called Internet support, was also raised by Natalia Walter, as one of the first, in her publication entitled *Internet social support. Sociopedagogical study*. The author focused on online support in crisis situations.

Social support is one of the key terms of pedagogy. In this article, the key definition of social support has been adopted, in which it is understood as “objectively existing and accessible social networks that stand out from other networks by the fact that, through the existence of ties, social contacts, belonging, they perform a support function for people in a difficult situation” (Zamkowska 2009, p. 97). Social support refers to emotional, information and instrumental support provided to an individual by significant persons, such as family members, teachers or specialists, pedagogues, psychologists, and therapists.

When referring to the contemporary situation of crisis and even trauma¹ faced by Ukrainian citizens, it is worth relating to the theory of exchange, one of the most important elements of which is the principle of reciprocity. It is realized both in interactions between individuals and between individuals and the community. E. Baniowska-Kopacz (2020,

¹ Trauma – after P. Sztompka understood in the social dimension as “a collective phenomenon, a state felt by the whole group, community as a result of destabilizing events” Compare: P. Sztompka, *Trauma wielkiej zmiany. Społeczne koszty transformacji*, Warszawa 2000, p. 27.

p. 236), recalling the studies of anthropologists and ethnographers, Marcel Mauss (1973) and Bronisław Malinowski (1984), wrote that “the exchange should be considered as a comprehensive service, a comprehensive social fact”. The legitimacy of the theories distinguished by the author in the context of an attempt to describe social support refers to the confirmed forms of action, i.e., “giving, reciprocity”, feedback and experiencing a sense of agency, extremely valuable for balance and order in social life. This empathy and cooperation are visible in the scale of transferring online posts, sharing them in wider groups. As noted by M. Piorunek (2010, pp. 7–10), we live in a time when “in the face of the multiplicity of challenges, eternal, repetitive and common problems, but above all, new, unknown ones, appearing somehow beyond individual and social imagination, unpredictable ones, for which solutions cannot be prepared as well as practiced scenarios used in standard situations of a certain type fail, there is a need for support, especially when “subjective and environmental resources of individuals that can be used in struggling with difficulties, critical and crisis situations, are more and more often not adequate to the specific requirements of the society of permanent risk, it is more and more often necessary to seek external support”.

As indicated by the analysis of the source materials, certain stages can be distinguished when offering support. Below there is a table illustrating a set of the multi-stage process of supporting people affected by a difficult situation.

Table 1. Elements of a multi-stage process of aiding people in need of support

Active participation in readaptation		
Medicinal activities	activities involving spiritual support	participation of people experiencing trauma
Psychological activities		
Pedagogical activities		
Social activities		
Professional activities		

Source: own study

When relating to the literature on the subject, it should be noted that assistance to people in need of support depends to a large extent on the place of these people in society (Sztaba 2011, p. 318). For people coming from

Ukraine, 24 February 2022 became an important date, determining their position in society. The citizens of Ukraine were somehow divided into those already staying and those who arrived after the outbreak of the war. This resulted in the emergence of various solutions, especially regarding the legalization of stay in Poland, or the readaptation process². In addition, on 12 March 2022 an act on assistance to Ukrainian citizens in connection with the armed conflict in the territory of this country was passed in Poland, which gives many rights to Ukrainian citizens residing in Poland and simplifies the procedures related to the above-mentioned legalization of stay or employment of labor from Ukraine.

Therefore, the implementation of the support process imposes specific requirements on both the person in need and the society, which should accept these people and help them on equal terms with others.

It is worth adding that the manner and scope of overcoming difficulties by people experiencing trauma is differentiated in the context of personality and social factors.

The presence and support of others, including family members, may help cope better and faster with difficult situations (Matyjas 2012, p. 161). Taking into account the very fact of experiencing the war and its consequences, it is inevitable that very difficult experiences will occur. And this is where the e-support system plays a huge role as a category of social support. It is both a factor conducive to stress reduction, it contributes to strengthening the resilience of an individual, and favors the transformation of certain potential human resources into those actually used in effective and adaptive coping with difficult situations (Sęk 1991, pp. 493–494).

As indicated in the literature on the subject, the concept of social support is ambiguous, thus, when referring to it in the context of remote forms of assistance to people experiencing trauma, there are two approaches illustrated below, based on the existing scientific positions come across, taking into account the structure and functions of support.

² A good example in this regard may be the Świętokrzyskie initiative of Polish language courses, which can be used by Ukrainian citizens residing in Kielce. This course is organized by Starachowice Municipality in cooperation with Jan Kochanowski University of Kielce from the funds obtained for this purpose under the project “Direction for the Future – Starachowice Local Development Program” financed from the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014–2021.

Phenomenon of a crisis

A crisis may affect not only the individual, but also the family or other social groups. The creators of the theory of crisis – G. Caplan and E. Lindemann, defined a crisis as “a reaction of a healthy person to a difficult situation” (Nasiłowska-Barud 2004, p. 17). A crisis is a phenomenon or condition that is characterized by such a degree of disproportion and imbalance of elements that it requires significant changes. This is often a turning point in a process (Sęk 1998, p. 487). According to psychological concepts, a crisis means a temporary state of internal imbalance, caused by a critical event or life events, requiring significant changes and decisions (Badura-Madej 1999, p. 16). A crisis can become a serious opportunity to change one’s life perspective, a turning point (for better or worse). It may raise the awareness of the need to change the current way of psychosocial functioning of the individual within a relatively short time (Kubacka-Jasiecka 2005, pp. 248–249). A crisis response can take place in four main stages.

1. Stage of shock, surprise with a traumatic event and the basic defense mechanism appears – denial.
2. Stage of emotional reaction, developing as a result of confrontation with reality – the person tries to adapt to the new situation.
3. Stage of work on the crisis – as a result of outside help, the person in crisis frees themselves from its influence.
4. Stage of new orientation – gradual regaining the sense of control over one’s own life, rebuilding self-esteem (Kožyczkowska 2004, pp. 34–35).

The end of the crisis is usually the resultant of the nature of the problem, the personality of the individual and their previous experiences on the one hand, and the effectiveness of the intervention undertaken on the other (Kubacka-Jasiecka 1997, p. 26).

Crises can appear on various levels of human life. L.M. Brammer distinguished crises: developmental, situational, existential, and environmental (quoted after: K. Mariańczyk 2005, p. 10). In turn, J. Cullberg proposes the following division of crises and crisis situations:

- crises of change (developmental, normative),
- situational crises (traumatic),
- chronic crises (Badura-Madej 1999, pp. 17–23).

A crisis is a state that configures the person’s position, i.e., their position in the family, local community, it is also the result of preceding situations, defined as critical, crisis situations. Crisis situations are related to problems such as:

1. loss: of another person through death or abandonment, self-esteem, sources of support, health or trust in others, a sense of identity and freedom;
2. changes: of a job, marital status, parental role, identity;
3. disorders: interpersonal relations between close people;
4. conflicts: inability to choose one of the alternatives (Pilecka 2004, pp. 9–10).

It follows from the above that almost anything can be a crisis: feelings, job loss, moving house, change of weather or calendar pages (Zaniewska 2006, p. 12). Most often, difficult life situations are a test of maturity. We are able to solve most of the crises that we experience ourselves, without outside help. Some authors claim that the more sensitive a person is the more crises they experience. However, some of them, especially existential crises, if they occur together with a high suicidal threat, require professional intervention (J. Kasprzak, www.terapia.rubikon.pl).

As already written, the crisis may concern a single person, but also a group, a family. We talk about the family in crisis when its stability is disturbed. In the literature on the subject, it is emphasized that a crisis in the family is a temporary disorganization of the system, requiring changes to restore stability and internal balance. These changes include rules, interaction patterns, roles, and family structure (Matyjas 2007, p. 89).

Psychological and pedagogical support program as a model of remote solutions and good practices

Psychological and pedagogical support program for students and teachers, managed by the vice-rector for student affairs and education at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Anna Fidelus, PhD, associate professor of UKSW fits the type of social support described above, offering e-support (on-line support) for parents, students, and teachers, as well as specialists from psychological and pedagogical counseling centers. The members of the steering committee of the aforementioned program are practitioners and experts in the fields of pedagogy and psychology. An online specialist and advisory platform turned out to be an extremely valuable means for transferring e-support³. It is a valuable source of theoretical knowledge and practical examples, useful in reducing the negative effects of problematic situations in education, also related to the need to provide education to children from

³ pwpp.uksw.edu.pl

Ukraine. Its advantage is the fact that it guarantees unlimited (in time and place) access to consultations and teaching and research materials, both in Polish and Ukrainian. In addition, the e-support is offered in the form of individual and group online meetings, conducted by several dozen specialists (psychologists, pedagogues, psychotherapists) with many years of experience in psychological, pedagogical, therapeutic, and psychotherapeutic work, cooperating with the education sector.

This form of e-support, e-counselling includes psychological and pedagogical help in the following situations: depression, crisis, difficult life experiences and everyday challenges, personality disorders, problems with self-esteem, anxiety, and panic attacks, learning difficulties, aggressive behavior, disorders of proper communication, conflict resolution, relationship building, dealing with chronic stress and difficult emotions, etc. E-support for teachers, school principals, specialists, parents of students with special educational needs, covered by a special type of support, i.e., educational, and methodical e-support is also worth noting.

E-meetings also turned out to be extremely valuable – the so-called “Peace lessons in war conditions”, the aim of which is to try to adapt classes, schools, and local communities as quickly as possible to accept groups of students and teachers from across the eastern border. Michał Paluch, PhD, who had previously trained support staff in the development of “deep competences”, took up the conduct of open meetings supporting the subjectivity of the participants⁴. Within their frames, following the outbreak of the war, he conducted meetings entitled “How to behave when a parent of a Ukrainian student dies in the war?”⁵.

To sum up, psychological and pedagogical support, also dedicated in the form of social e-support, has become visible and noticeable nowadays, and deserves special attention. It should be remembered, however, there is further educational work for specialists for the benefit of intercultural, interreligious, existential integration, preventing the phenomena occurring after armed conflicts, such as an increased level of anger and the need for revenge. These activities require “pedagogy of the heart” (Suchomliński 2019, Łopatkowa 1992), trust, integration, subjective dialogue, a combination of Polish-Ukrainian ped-

⁴ Deep competences are a proposal for teachers, trainers and therapists that strengthens their own existential resources and balances social competences and key competences focused on efficiency and functionality (Paluch 2021, 2022).

⁵ Due to the difficult subject matter, a Ukrainian psychologist Aleksandr Tereshchenko and an experienced methodological advisor Beata Sapiejweska-Dąbrowska, were also invited to conduct the classes.

agogical thought, pedagogical support for the future. They may, for example, take the form of joint research and development projects, conferences, seminars, internet platforms.

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SUMMARY

The article is theoretical with reference to practical guidelines. It relates to the category of support in a crisis situation. Its advantages have recently been revealed, especially by the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the armed conflict in Ukraine, during which psychological and pedagogical support reached various groups of recipients. The text also indicates good practices in the field of assistance on the example of the project entitled “Psychological and pedagogical support program for students and teachers”.

KEYWORDS: psychological and pedagogical support, social support, assistance, cooperation

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł ma charakter teoretyczny w odniesieniu do wskazówek praktycznych. Odnosi się do kategorii wsparcia w sytuacji kryzysowej. Jego zalety ujawnił ostatnio okres pandemii COVID-19 i konfliktu zbrojnego na Ukrainie, podczas którego wsparcie psychologiczno-pedagogiczne docierało do różnych grup odbiorców. W tekście wskazano także dobre praktyki w zakresie pomocy na przykładzie projektu pt. „Program wsparcia psychologiczno-pedagogicznego dla uczniów i nauczycieli”.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: wsparcie psychologiczno-pedagogiczne, wsparcie społeczne, pomoc, współpraca

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