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***Assistance – Social Support – Counselling. Between
Theory and Practice of Supporting an Individual
in Personal Life, Education and Work. 5th National
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“...In the face of a multitude of challenges, the issues that are eternal, repetitive and universal, but above all new, unknown, appearing somehow beyond individual and social imagination, and unpredictable, solutions to which is impossible to prepare beforehand and rehearsed scenarios used in standard situations fail, there appears a need for assistance. Subjective and social resources of individuals which can be used in struggling with difficulties, critical situations or crises are increasingly inadequate in relation to specific requirements of the society, in which only change is constant, and more and more frequently it is necessary to look for external support, also professional one. In the culture of individualism, which is the result of choice or (as nowadays) of coercion, a person cannot always count on the help and support from traditional, natural reference groups. Loosening of family bonds, changes in the model of modern families, frequent abandoning of closer relationships in informal groups at the stage of education or participation in the labour market for the sake of not always consciously chosen solitude or numerous, but superficial relations on the Internet, give rise to the feeling of alienation and intensify the need for all kinds of help and support from professionals” (Piorunek, 2010, pp. 7-8). “The categories of “assistance,” “social support,” “guidance” are today not only the subject of theoretical analyses, the conceptual categories with considerable descriptive and explanatory potential in relation to social reality, but above all they are almost universally referred to as desirable states of affairs in increasingly frequent situations of helplessness, incapacity, frustration, overload, threat, everyday stress or while pursuing developmental tasks and meeting contemporary requirements in the course of a person’s life” (Piorunek, 2010, p. 10).

It is with these words that Professor Magdalena Piorunek, the Head of Social Counselling Department at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz

University (FES AMU) in Poznań and the Chair of the conference cycle devoted to the issues of counselling, opened the event. The first conference of this series entitled *Counselling and Social Support in the Course of Human Life*, organized also by the employees of the Social Counselling Department at the Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, was held in 2010; the second one, two years later, focused on the issues of *Child – Youth – Family as Addressees of Psycho-pedagogical and Social Assistance*; in 2014 the leading theme was: *Areas of Counselling and Social Support. Traditional and Alternative Strategies, Forms, Methods of Assistance*; and in 2017 another conference was organized under the title: *Supporters and Support Recipients. Needs – competences – assistance and counselling relations* (Trębińska-Szumigraj, 2018). The conference: *Assistance – Social Support – Counselling...* was thus the fifth event of this kind. It was supposed to have been held exactly one year earlier. Unfortunately, the pandemic, and as a consequence the necessary procedures and the sanitary-epidemiological regime, forced the organizers to reschedule and conduct it remotely, using the MS Teams platform. The conference received the patronage of the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences (CPS) of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS), the Polish Pedagogical Society (PPS), the Vice-Rector in charge of the School of Social Sciences, Prof. Zbyszko Melosik, and the Dean of the Faculty of Educational Studies, acting as the Head of CPS PAS, Prof. Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska. Almost 100 participants took part in the event, representing not only scholarly centres (among which there were more than twenty Polish universities), but also institutions that employed the reflective practitioners (psychological and pedagogical clinics, centres for the homeless, etc.). The conference focused on assistance, support, counselling from the theoretical and practical perspective, in the areas such as family, professional life, education, and work. The meetings were held in two forms: plenary and panel discussions, divided into thematic sections, and their open form enabled both theoreticians and practitioners to have inspiring discussions as well as exchange their reflections and views.

The conference was officially opened by the Vice-Rector of Adam Mickiewicz University, Prof. Zbyszko Melosik. The guests were also welcomed by the Dean of the Faculty and the Head of CPS PAS, Prof. Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska. Then the Head of the Conference Scientific Committee, Prof. Magdalena Piorunek, took the floor and introduced the participants to the subject matter of the event. She also informed them that during the current term of office of the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Section of Pedagogical Counselling was established and she was appointed the head thereof (Kozielska, Skowrońska-Pućka, 2020).

The first part of the plenary session was moderated by Prof. Magdalena Piorunek and Dr Joanna Kozielska, representing the hosts. Six papers were presented in this part. The first speaker, Prof. Andrzej Radziewicz-Winnicki (University of Silesia and University of Zielona Góra), focused his considerations on the issue of “pre-understanding” as a theoretical category present in the sub-disciplines whose

object of research is support and rehabilitation. Then, Prof. Agata Cudowska from the University of Białystok addressed the issue of resources in achieving well-being and social support, and Prof. Elżbieta Siarkiewicz from the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław brought the attention of conference participants to the phenomena of resistance and trust in the counselling processes. The next three speakers: Prof. Ryszard Gerlach (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz); Prof. Ewa Solarczyk-Ambrozik (AMU), and Prof. Ryszard Bera (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin) focused on the changes in the labour market and the challenges facing vocational guidance and paradigmatic breakthroughs in their research methodology.

In the second part of the plenary session we listened to presentations concerning the issues of broadly understood family and school support. These were the papers of the following speakers: Prof. Bożena Matyjas (Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce), Prof. Barbara Kromolicka (University of Szczecin), Prof. Joanna Ostrouch-Kamińska from the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn and Prof. Ewa Syrek from the University of Silesia in Katowice. The speakers presented the family as an environment supporting the personal development of its members as well as the one requiring help and receiving institutional support. On the other hand, Prof. Joanna Madalińska-Michalak (University of Warsaw) drew attention to the role of the school and the need to adhere to common values by its headmasters and teachers. The plenary session closed with the presentation of Prof. Katarzyna Klimkowska from Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, who focused on the issue of professional assistance provided to students.

The next part of the conference was carried out in four thematic sections.

The proceedings of the first section, entitled “Family that supports and needs support,” the first part of which was moderated by Prof. Anna Dudak (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin), Prof. Hanna Krauze-Sikorska and Dr Bożena Kanclerz (AMU), were a continuation of the topics raised during the second part of the plenary session. In the subsequent papers presented by Prof. Anna Dudak, Prof. Hanna Krauze-Sikorska, Dr Maja Piotrowska (University of Wrocław), Dr Józefa Matejek (Pedagogical University of Kraków) and Dr Bożena Kanclerz (AMU), the problems concerning the situations caused by disintegration of family life and the types of organized support provided to various types of families were discussed, while Anna Siemaszko, MA (Community Social Welfare Centre in Damnica) drew attention to the mutual support of families in difficult situations. The second part of this section, moderated by Prof. Ewa Włodarczyk and Dr Agnieszka Skowrońska-Pućka (AMU), also included presentations focused on everyday problems of family life, such as: support experienced by siblings (Agnieszka Nymś-Górna, MA, UAM), the impact of addictions and illness on family life (Prof. Ewa Włodarczyk, Dr Marek Banach, Pedagogical University of Kraków) and the issues concerning family conflicts (Dr Joanna Rajewska de Mezer, AMU), whereas Dr Agnieszka Skowrońska-Pućka (AMU), referring to the results of her own empirical research,

presented the issues of institutional foster care seen from the perspective of former foster care children.

The session of the section entitled “Support of an Individual in the Course of Professional Life” in the first part was moderated by Prof. Danuta Wosik-Kawala and Prof. Ewa Sarzyńska-Mazurek, representing the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and Żaneta Garbacik, MA, AMU, representing the hosts. In this part of the conference, the following problems were discussed based on the results of novel research: personal qualities of an employee (Prof. Danuta Wosik-Kawala and Prof. Ewa Sarzyńska-Mazurek), experiences related to professional life of scholars and university employees (Dr Iwona Werner – Poznań School of Banking; Dr Ewa Krause – Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz; Żaneta Garbacik, MA, AMU), biographical conditioning of professional activity (Dr Anna Wawrzonek, AMU, and Hanna Kądziołek-Sabanta, MA, University of Łódź), and selected forms and methods used in the process of socio-professional reintegration of people at risk of exclusion, based on the project “Step Forward” (Dr Dorota Nawrat-Wyraz, Academy of Humanities and Economics in Łódź).

The second part of this section was moderated by Dr Violetta Drabik-Podgórną (University of Wrocław), Dr Joanna Kozielska (AMU) and Dr Joanna Nawój-Połoczańska (AMU). The opening speech of the session was delivered by Prof. Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (University of Szczecin), in which she shared her reflections on the role of a dissertation supervisor, concerning such issues as: what role s/he assumes (a master, an advisor, a compassionate guardian, a co-researcher or a supporter) and what relations he/she enters into in the process of working on a doctoral dissertation. The speaker, on the basis of her own experience, created a typology of doctoral students, putting forward the postulate of perfecting the work of a promoter and the dissemination of good practices. Subsequent papers of the moderators: Dr Violetta Drabik-Podgórną (UWr), Dr Joanna Kozielska (AMU), and Dr Joanna Nawój-Połoczańska (AMU) expressed a clear stand on the need to ensure high quality vocational guidance in the educational system, while Dr Katarzyna Nowosad (UMCS) advocated the need for social support of police officers. Theoretical considerations were introduced by Dr Marek Podgórný (UWr), talking about the knowledge used in counselling and Dr Lucyna Myszka-Strychalska (AMU), analysing the category of individual employability as an investment conditioned by the career capital, learning process and acquisition of transferable competences. Dr Katarzyna Ludwikowska (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz), combining the perspectives of a researcher and a counsellor, discussed the trends and good practices in vocational guidance 3.0. This voice was reinforced by Anna Oleszczyk, MA, who works at the Psychological and Pedagogical Counselling Centre in Piła.

Section 3 was devoted to supporting students and teachers in the process of education, with particular attention paid to current issues related to COVID-19 and migration processes, and the diverse needs of different groups of students.

The moderators in the first part were: Prof. Beata Jakimiuk (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) and Prof. Sylwia Jaskulska and Karolina Domagalska-Nowak, MA (AMU). Prof. Beata Jakimiuk discussed the process from support to diagnosis, while the papers of Prof. Sylwia Jaskulska (AMU), Dr Anna Breś (Academy of Humanities and Economics in Łódź), Dr Mariola Pałka-Pilecka (Gdańsk School of Banking) and Dr Monika Czyżewska (Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw) referred to the contemporary context of education entangled in sanitary-epidemiological restrictions in times of the pandemic, with particular attention to the need for therapy and care for the child victim. Prof. Małgorzata Kuśpit (UMCS) focused her paper on the aspects of functioning of artistically gifted students, Dr Aneta Baranowska (Jakub Paradyż Academy in Gorzów Wielkopolski) spoke about school activities supporting foreign children in the process of adaptation to the new socio-cultural environment, while the case study of Polish migrant children in Norway was the subject of the paper presented by Karolina Domagalska-Nowak, MA (AMU).

The second part of section 3 was moderated by Prof. Marek Budajczak, Dr Ewa Kasperek-Golimowska and Dr Magdalena Barańska – representatives of the host university. The session was opened by Prof. Marek Budajczak, who presented the phenomenon of scaffolding, its relationships with home education and its consequences for education. Next, Dr Renata Wawrzyniak-Beszterda (AMU) presented the results of biographical research focusing on the problems and challenges faced by teachers at work as well as the burdens inherent in their profession. The discussion around the problem of social support experienced by novice kindergarten teachers was initiated by Dr Magdalena Grochowalska (Pedagogical University of Krakow), while Dr Ewa Kasperek-Golimowska (AMU) discussed teachers' health resources from the perspective of positive psychology. Dr Aleksandra Kulpa-Puczyńska (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) shared her experiences connected with the implementation of the international Erasmus+ project entitled "The Unteachables." Dr Mirosława Ściupider-Młodkowska (Faculty of Pedagogy and Arts, Adam Mickiewicz University in Kalisz), taking into account the phenomenon of Covid alienation, posed a rudimentary question about whether the contemporary educator is ready to provide comprehensive support in a situation of dynamic changes and destandardization of families. An attempt to address this question was presented by Dr Magdalena Barańska (AMU), who pointed out the possibility of using supervision in the work of an academic teacher who trains e.g. educators. Dr Anna Gulczyńska and Dr Anna Rybińska (AMU) spoke about the cooperation of the family and school environment as an activity that gives a chance for a harmonious support of an individual. In turn, Krzysztof Grala, MA (Academy of Special Education in Warsaw) focused on the positive role of mediation in the situation of professional burnout of teachers.

The proceedings in the first part of section 4 entitled "Forms and Methods of Supporting Individuals in the Course of Life" was moderated by Prof. Edyta

Zierkiewicz, from the University of Wrocław, Prof. Paulina Forma from the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, and Dr Michalina Kasprzak (AMU). The discussion in this section concerned forms and methods of supporting individuals in the course of life from various perspectives, i.e. pedagogical, psychological, social, and welfare. The meeting began with the presentation by Prof. Edyta Zierkiewicz on the issue of extroversion in supportive relations, followed by the presentation by Prof. Paulina Forma on a new category of social support, i.e. e-support, which has gained particular significance in the world affected by the pandemic. She focused on tutoring, mentoring and coaching in socio-therapeutic work, pointing out practical solutions and possibilities of applying these methods in the school environment. Dr Ewa Karmolińska-Jagodzik (UAM) focused on the role of supervision of specialists providing support and assistance, and Joanna Frątczak, MA (University of Lower Silesia, Wrocław) dealt with the role of personal transgressions in the counselling process. The next presentation by Dr Michalina Kasprzak (UAM) referred to the results of research on forms of assistance provided by local support institutions. The last presentation was given by Grzegorz Całek, MA (UWr), who focused on the support of parents of children with disabilities, in particular with Asperger's syndrome.

The second part of the fourth section was devoted to the issue of supporting the elderly or the ill and their families. It was opened by Prof. Norbert Piłkuła (Pedagogical University in Kraków), who was one of the section moderators. He focused his attention on the value of work in the perspective of the life of the elderly. The second moderator in this section was Żaneta Garbacik, MA. Considerations concerning the potential general support dedicated to seniors in their living environment were presented by Dr Jolanta Twardowska-Rajewska (AMU), who in the first paper indicated the possibility of supporting families acting as care-givers for their members, and in the second one, discussed the elderly affected by dementia and the difficult pandemic situation. Magdalena Pluta, MA (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz) spoke next, focusing on the issue of professional work in the life of women with cancer. The last presentation was delivered by Paulina Mencil, MA (AMU), whose paper was a summary of the reflections on the difficulties experienced in the course of chronic diseases. The speaker presented negative consequences of these diseases and indicated the resources which may be used in the process of coping with the existing difficulties.

The event ended with a summary. In this part, moderators of each of the sections took the floor, and the Vice-Chairman of CPS PAS, Prof. Stefan Kwiatkowski, indicated the accuracy of the speakers' emphasis placed on the role of social/relational capital in the context of the effectiveness of support. He congratulated the participants on their interesting and inspiring presentations, and the conference organizers on the fulfilling of all the plans from the scholarly program of the meeting. In conclusion, the Head of the Conference Scientific Committee, Prof. Magdalena Piorunek, confirmed that despite the difficulties associated with the pandemic,

the conference met her expectations, and she thanked the co-organizers and all the speakers for their participation.

The conference, for the first time in 11 years, was held in a new, unusual mode: remotely, via online cameras and microphones. There were no joint discussions during the gala dinner, backstage debates and inspiring face-to-face meetings. Sessions in individual sections, however, became an opportunity to discuss the presented research fields. Circumstances hindered but did not stop the academic tasks from being pursued. Therefore, the conference series has been preserved, and it will continue in the years to come, hopefully in the direct, traditional mode.

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