FAMILY IN THE PREVENTION OF RISK BEHAVIOUR OF PUPILS

Kamil Janiš

Svoboda Hoferková, S., & Bělík, V. (2019). *Rodina v prevenci rizikového chování žáků [Family in the Prevention of Risk Behaviour of Pupils]*. Hradec Králové: Gaudeamus.

The reviewed publication *Family in the Prevention of Risk Behaviour of Pupils* focuses on highly topical current problem posed by prevention of risk behaviour of pupils in the school environment. Its content connects seamlessly to the previous publication of the creative team, namely *Prevention of Risk Behaviour in Pupils from the Perspective of Pedagogues* (2018), but its added value is the fact that it focuses on possible involvement of the second important factor in the prevention system, the family. In this regard, the present monograph, written in very comprehensible language, benefits not only parents and pedagogues, but also other members of the public who are interested in the issue of prevention of risk behaviour.

The authors focus on all manifestations which may occur in school environment. Precisely this problem becomes the subject of the first chapter *"Risk behaviour of pupils in today's Czech school"* (p. 9–34). Based on their study of professional sources, the authors define the central concept as follows: *"risk behaviour, which we understand as such behaviour of children and youth that endangers their health or the health of the society."* (p. 9). Equally interesting is the view of pedagogues on risk behaviour which they perceive as the greatest trend and challenge. This is firstly due to the "increase in the number of phenomena that we deal with at school" (19 %) and also to the "greater awareness of teachers about the risk phenomena" (18 %). (p. 16–17). As the authors state, at present, we can see an increase in "aggressiveness, bullying, coarse language and truancy." However, the most puzzling about the trend is the lack of the parents' interest in the children and poor communication between the family and school. Another trend is greater interest of schools on being better informed about some of the manifestations of risk behaviour, but also activity of other entities who deal with the prevention of risk behaviour. This can be considered as positive, yet, many statistics still confirm a gradual increase in respective negative phenomena.

Part of the publication presents the results of an extensive research. Special attention was paid to the aggressive behaviour of pupils. The authors define aggression as *"multifactorial phenomenon conditioned by many aspects. In addition to personal dispositions, an essential role is played by the family and the general exposure of the child to aggressive behaviour (on the part of the parents, in the media), in a broader sense, the social climate and the degree of tolerance to violence in the society itself."*

(p. 20). In the whole work, there are demonstrations of several case studies (some of them really "rough") which underscore the serious situation of prevention.

The second area of risk behaviour manifestations present themselves is the cyberspace which is among today's youth an immensely popular and widespread environment which occupies a sweepingly predominant part of many children and teenagers' leisure activity. Even in this environment, it is possible to participate actively in some aggressive games, for example, but also to bully someone else (e.g. by sexting).

Spanning several pages, brief descriptions of several specific manifestations of risk behaviour are presented, including such cases as aggressive behaviour, truancy and substance abuse, which are supplemented by real case studies. Furthermore, the text mentions other phenomena.

One of the most interesting and central parts of the publication occurs in section *"Risk Behaviour of Children and the Role of the Family"* (p. 34–54), especially Table no. 5 (p. 34) which captures protective risk factors, such as the individual, family, peers, school, community, society. Of all listed multitude of factors enumerated, the authors focus primarily on the family, but they admit that there is some influence of endogenous factors (p. 37). For the system of prevention, it is extremely important to be aware that the risk factors in the family environment include *"dysfunctional family, unhealthy family lifestyle, undefined or non-existent rules of behaviour, disinterest of parents, positive attitude towards the violation of social norms or to risk behaviour, mental illness in the family, socially pathological or negative phenomena (domestic violence, addiction), poor socio-economic situation, unemployment and poverty, belonging to minorities, divorce or family break-up."* (p. 35)

It is quite undeniable that the family is *"the most important socialization factor"* but at the same time, traits are presented which *"characterize the contemporary family as a potential factors of deviant (risk) behaviour"* (cf. Kraus, 2015). In accordance with the mentioned author, the authors include here the demographic situation, democratization of family life, socio-economic situation of families, disintegration of family life, the isolation of families, family lifestyle and shifts in the functions of the family (p. 38–41). There is undoubtedly nothing to disagree with about this. The question remains how the undesirable condition can be changed. Disorders related to family functioning represent an all-social (if not global) problem. This category includes inappropriate parenting styles (e.g. protectionist or inconsistent upbringing), and one of the undoubtedly most significant factors, divorce, family break-up and role of the single parent (p. 46–49).

The risk environment of greatest potential (and undoubtedly real) impact on the tendency to manifestations of risk behaviour in children is the family, especially one in which social pathologies are present. These are various addictions, but also domestic violence, neglect, maltreatment or sexual abuse of children, criminal activity, etc. (p. 49–52). All these factors may magnify if such family live in an excluded locality. As already mentioned, the authors illustrate all the factors presented in their case studies.

One of the most interesting and valuable chapters throughout the monograph is entitled *"Awareness of Parents About Risk Behaviour and Prevention in the School Environment"*

(p. 55–76). The chapter contains the implemented research of *"awareness of parents about risk behaviour of children and of the practical implementation of prevention of risk behaviour in schools"*. It presents the findings of a research notably interesting due to the answers to what parents actually imagine, or what parents consider as risk phenomena (p. 57–58). Such phenomena as risk sexual behaviour, lying, bad peer group or intolerance, are considered as less represented by the parents. *"It is also noteworthy that only a relatively small percentage of parents reported as risk behaviour children's on-line presence* (p. 59), which may be considered extremely surprising in our present times. A series of further investigations confirms that it is in the on-line environments that a number of risk behaviour manifestations, or even beginnings of criminal behaviour, occur. It is true that this environment is considered by the parents as preferential as their children are staying at home and browse the virtual environment "only". They obtain a great variety of new information, which means that the environment is not considered as dangerous by parents due to the fact that many parents cannot use information technology on a level comparable to their children's.

Therefore, many parents are not aware of what content and which social networks their child frequents and with whom they communicate.

Equally interesting is the answer whether *"parents have noticed their children's risk behaviour"* (p. 62). The result that only 14 % of parents responded in the affirmative, meaning that they have noticed risk behaviour in their children, is striking. In many cases, parents tend to overlook manifestations of risk behaviour in their children. The question remains whether consciously or unconsciously.

Awareness plays an important role. Parents feel sufficiently informed in the area of addictive substances (almost 26 %) and bullying (almost 17 %). A total of a fifth of parents has sufficient information about all the negative phenomena (p. 64). What is positive, however, is that parents showed the greatest interest in lectures on the mentioned manifestations of risk behaviour, such as risks associated with cyberspace and social networking, cyberbullying, sexting and online addiction (28 %). Addictive substances only follow these (21 %). Such findings are very interesting, as according to the results presented at an earlier point in the monograph, they are not afraid of the phenomena. Maybe they want to become more aware of the dangers. However, it is striking that they do not know of the existence of school prevention program, as only 1 % of parents know it from the school website personally (p. 69). Indeed, many parents are immune or tolerant to certain manifestations of risk behaviour. For example, the authors report that *"parents are aware that their child drinks alcohol but do not consider it as risk behaviour."* (p. 72)

The last chapter *"Conclusions and Recommendations for Practice"* (p. 77–86) presents a number of interesting and constructive ideas on how to address the situation in family and school environments. The emphasis is on family upbringing, which can seem like somewhat utopian in a situation where a relatively large proportion of marriages end in divorce. A much more realistic applications are the so-called Early Intervention System (p. 78–81), Mentor Interventions (p. 83–84) and a system of lectures for parents of pupils (p. 84–86).

To evaluate the monograph as a whole, we may appreciate the effort of the two authors to highlight the role of the family and its example in the prevention system. This means that the entire publication can be an important source of inspiration for all those who deal with prevention of risk behaviour, as well as for teachers who are first in line to come into contact with the various manifestations of risk behaviour of pupils, and last but not least for the parents.

As a way of conclusion, let me quote from the review by Miloslav Jůzl: *"Apart from school, the family plays an essential role in (mainly primary) prevention of risk or criminal behaviour of children and youth, which is why, as documented by the authors through their research, without close cooperation with and involvement of the family, effective and meaningful preventive activities cannot be created or implemented. One may call it a uniform educational front"*. It remains only to add that there is room for improvements not only within the school environment, such as improving the corresponding "related" school lessons, the activities of educational advisor, the structure of prevention programs, but also within the communication between the school and the family, informing families and exhorting the parents themselves.

The publication has some internal imperfections, such as the non-corresponding pagination, the contents are inconsistent with the following chapters (e.g. the first chapter starts on page 9 and ends on page 34, but according to the contents, it should span pages 6 to 24).

Author

doc. PhDr. PaedDr. Kamil Janiš, CSc.
Faculty of Public Policies in Opava, Silesian University in Opava
Institute of Pedagogical and Psychological Sciences
Bezručovo nám. 885/14, 746 01 Opava, Czech Republic
doc.kamil.janis@fvp.slu.cz