

## SOCIAL MOBILITY OF FAMILIES AT RISK

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**Abstract.** *Social mobility is shifting from one social status to another, commonly to a status that is either higher or lower. Disadvantaged family affects all social risk: poverty, unemployment, and addictions, violence, crime environment. The authors try to review the situation of families at risk in the community; to investigate the changes of social mobility of the families at risk. The aim of research in presented article is – to reveal the social mobility and the changes of the social status of families at risk in X community. Performing the research, the literature analysis and instantly qualitative study were done. Several qualitative research methods: observation, genogram, family social network, and family functioning assessment questionnaire were selected.*

**Keywords:** *families at risk, social exclusion, social mobility.*

### Introduction

After the change of socio-economic conditions in Lithuania, certain groups of people feel unsecured, as it is difficult for them to adapt to the pace of modern life and social economic changes. An increasing number of various social society groups become partially or completely socially excluded. As the result of this, some people feel like they aren't a part or, in fact, they aren't the part of society in which they live. To describe this, the concept "social exclusion" is used to describe this phenomena and it is an integral part of a particular public imagination what does it mean to be a full-fledged member of society.

In European Union countries, the most common prevalent perception that social segregation is the process by which individuals are pushed to the edge of society. Then poverty, lack of basic skills, lifelong learning opportunities and discrimination limits their full participation in the society life and the labour market. These families don't support their children, including access to financial, social and cultural capital. Such families are attributed to the families at social risk. Social risk families interfere now with such sociodemographic risks as poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, families with many children, child neglect, divorce, etc. Without a doubt, these families' social mobility is impaired, too. Psychologists, lawyers, sociologists, politicians are looking for

solution of social mobility problems of families at social risk. Different institutions as Children's Rights Protection Service (CRPS), school social pedagogues, police commissariats, juvenile affairs services, municipal social assistance departments, organizers of social work in communities functionate to solve such problems.

As argued Beller (2009), to understand social mobility of families at risk researchers must bridge a longstanding gap between theory and practice that increasingly distorts social mobility. A gap exists because, in theory, class background (i.e., childhood class position) is a family-level variable, but the conventional research practice equates class background solely with a father's class position. This assumes that mothers' economic participation is not common or important to class background and that father-headed families are the norm. Breen & Karlson (2014) proposed research methods to investigate changes of social status in relation to the education. They applied these methods to examine whether education has come to play an increasing role in intergenerational social class mobility.

However, these families' changes of social status must be analysed in a complex. Also, the current situation raises issue of need the effective assessment instrument of the changes in these families.

**The article' aim is** – to reveal the social mobility and the changes of the social status of families at risk in X community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In Lithuania family at social risk is defined as: a family raising children under the age of 18 and in which at least one of the parents abuse alcohol, narcotic, psychotropic or toxic substances, addicted to gambling, due to lack of social skills is unable or can't properly take care of the children, use to them psychological, physical or sexual violence, use received state's support to other than family needs and there is a risk of children's physical, mental, spiritual, moral development and security. Social risk families include the family, which child is in temporary custody (care) according to the law (LR Socialinių paslaugų įstatymas, 2006).

Families at social risk are different, because there are a lot of social risks factors, which might cause undesirable effects for human health, social environmental, activities. Risk factors that lead to the appearance of the social families at risk could be conditionally classified into two big groups:

- the peculiarities of the family structure such as incomplete or poorly equipped families, families with disabled or persons with chronic diseases, which need of permanent care; families with a member/members are in custody or have just returned from them and

- are in the process of social adaptation and persons in belonging to any social risk;
- the distorted format of family members interactions as absence of general public life and domestic interests, objectives, uncertainty and mutual distrust, the lack of mutual understanding and support, rude and brutal relationship with their relatives (Leliūgienė & Sadauskas, 2011).

According to research of Lithuanian municipalities in rural areas, there are distinguished the main problems of families at social risk are the increasing number of families at social risk, relationships between alcoholism and unemployment, crime and involvement in the smuggling of illegal goods across the state border of children growing in families at social risk (Širvinskienė, 2013).

Mostly families at social risk do not take care about families' social mobility and public opinion about them due their incorrect behaviour. They have the only problem in their life - money, which usually spend on drugs, smoking. Social problems affected people become indifferent to the positive socio-cultural environment, choose limited people society with the similar problems and inadequate lifestyle due their frustration. Impoverished families often are not able to take care on themselves. Often the society tends to react at such families rather conservatively and stereotypically. Children from risk families (especially asocial) often are called "sluggards", "worthless" and "of second sort". Therefore, the problem of child is even more deepened and the perspective of his psychosocial development becomes complicated (Mikutavičienė, 2009). To help in solution of this problem the social pedagogue can help. Social pedagogues have to create the conditions in the education institutions to form child's personality purposefully, basing upon humanistic foundations and to amortize the influence of family environment (negative). If the problematic of the child, who suffers isolation is recognized and solved on time, we can significantly "to soften" the educational and social consequences of such situation (Mikutavičienė, 2009).

However, taking into account the increasing number of people who are not able to resist to the process of social exclusion, remains the possibility of the formation of group with permanent or long lasting exclusion form the society (Širvinskienė, 2013). The concept of social mobility becomes more important. The social mobility – measures the degree to which people's social status changes between generations. It is seen by many as a measure of the equality of life opportunities, reflecting the extent to which parents influence the success of their children in later life or, on the flipside, the extent to which individuals can make it by virtue of their own talents, motivation and luck (Blanden, et al., 2005). With regard to the social exclusion, formation assumptions of families at

social risk, vertical social mobility becomes relevant when transition from one social group to another affects and influences the individual's wealth and status in society. Social mobility provides opportunities to move from poverty to materially better lifestyle, from unskilled to higher-skilled work, from the lower social status to a higher status in the social group. Children born in families at risk are now less likely to break free of their background and fulfil their potential (Blanden, et al., 2005). In other words, social mobility is an indicator which shows the level of position's improvement in society.

### **Empirical Research Material and Methods**

Performing the research, the literature analysis and instantly qualitative study in order to investigate the social status changes of families at risk in X community were done.

The experience of family life and interaction with other families and social institutes in family' qualitative study is analysed (Juozeliūnienė & Kanapienienė, 2012). Gilgun (1992), named family qualitative research as a research in which the experience of family life and family interaction with other families and social institutes is analysed as well. According by Gilgun (1992), several qualitative research methods: observation, genogram, family social network, adapted for research family functioning assessment scale (Global Assessment of functional, Scale) and family functioning assessment questionnaire by Jakubovska (2012) were selected.

**Genogram method.** Genogram was used in order to summarize the data about the evolution of the family. A questionnaire of family genogram was made.

**Family social network method.** Family relations network (family eco-map) method was used to find out family members relationships with the community and those relationships influence meeting such needs in the family. The method also helped to identify the persons or institutions that can provide assistance to the family. By preparing the family social network and establishing their social relationships respondents were asked to answer the questionnaire.

**Assessment of family functioning.** According to the assessment of family functioning scale (Global Assessment of Functional Scale), families were assessed by observing if the changes of functioning were going. In May, August and November 2015, family functioning was also assessed under the questionnaire by Jakubovska (2012). It was assessed these functioning areas of the family at social risk: addictions, the family relationships and health, housing, motivation and material resources.

**The research environment and respondents.** The respondents were from 8 families at risk of X community (the study was conducted on February - May

of 2013 and on May - November of 2015). In accordance with the ethics and the confidentiality of information, all of the investigated families were coded. The letters and numbers were selected by coding, for example: A1B2 - the first capital letter refers to father's family, the number - which child is in the family, the second capital letter - the mother's family, the number - which child is in the family.

### **Survey Results**

The main finding of research showed that 56 per cent of the social status of surveyed families had changed to a lower status. In many cases, respondents communicated only with Municipality Social Support Centre due to benefits granted to them. They don't participate in the events in Culture centre, library and church. Ties between the community and these families are weak. Mostly, these families tended to communicate only with similar status families and the communication with the community is described as an ineffective in the most cases. Majority of the respondents would like to have a better material life; they emphasized that they would work if the work is to be closer to home or at least within community' boundary; they mainly expected more help from the state, relatives, community members and they wouldn't take responsibility for their better own and children's life. Exactly, work, gaining of qualification, communication with other members in the community accelerates social change, but this is important only to a few investigated families. Help of social pedagogue and social worker is usually forced for families at risk.

The structure of investigated families is similar - the majority of respondents originated from large families. Themselves families have three or more children, the relations with the children are confused (see Fig. 1).

After analysing the families case files, authors of article found out that education of all surveyed families was higher than their parents, but the social status - lower. Families have professional skills to work agricultural works but they are not applied, live in poverty and their main income is child and social benefits. Mothers of investigated families often replicate their parents' social position.

Functioning of families at social risk were assessed four months in 2013 and four months in 2015 under the GAF scale (from 1 to 100 points). The assessment averages presented in the Figure 2.

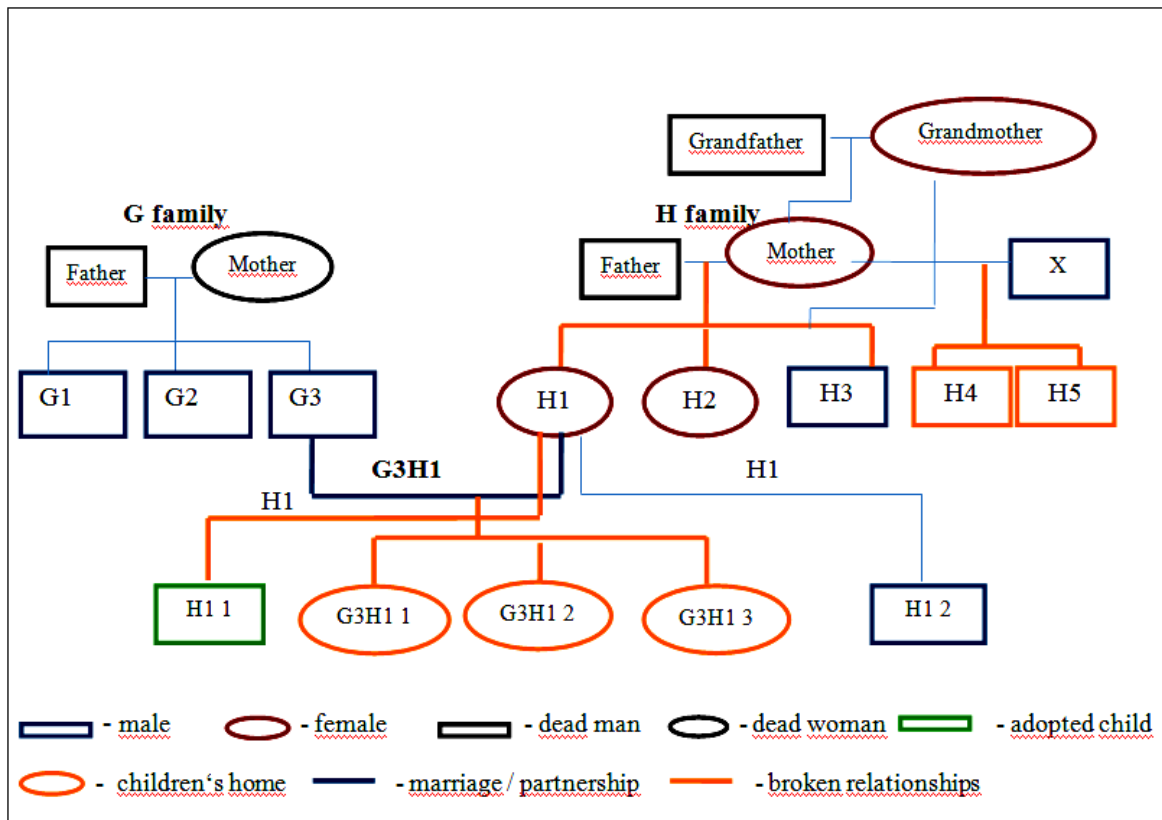


Figure 1 Genogram of G3H1 family

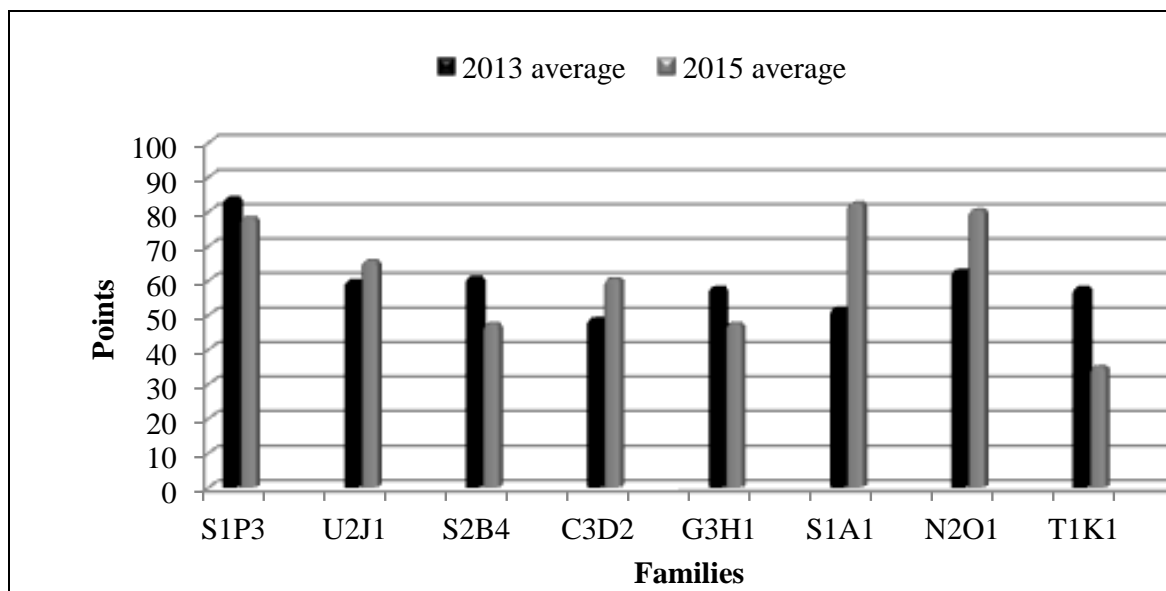


Figure 2 Changes of functioning of investigated families at social risk in 2013-2015

Research results showed, that the functioning of most families was embarrassed i.e., there were remained medium disorders of severity functioning

which manifest themselves in material difficulties, social and employment disorders, depressed mood of the family and so on. In accordance with Figure 2 data, functioning of three from eight investigated families had deteriorated, the functioning of three families had improved and functioning of two families had remained almost at the same level. In 2013, the overall average of family functioning was 61 point, in 2015 - 62 points. So, in summary, it could be said that functioning of investigated family almost unchanged.

In May and November 2015, these functioning fields of families at social risk were assessed: addiction, family relationships and health, housing, work, motivation, income. Questionnaire by Jakubovska (2012) was chosen as the instrument for the research. This assessment clearly shows the functioning changes of the investigated families during the investigation period. Changes of functioning of one family (C3D2) during the four- month period were assessed with 1-6 point scale (where 1 – “bad” situation, 6 – “good” situation) are presented in Figure 3.

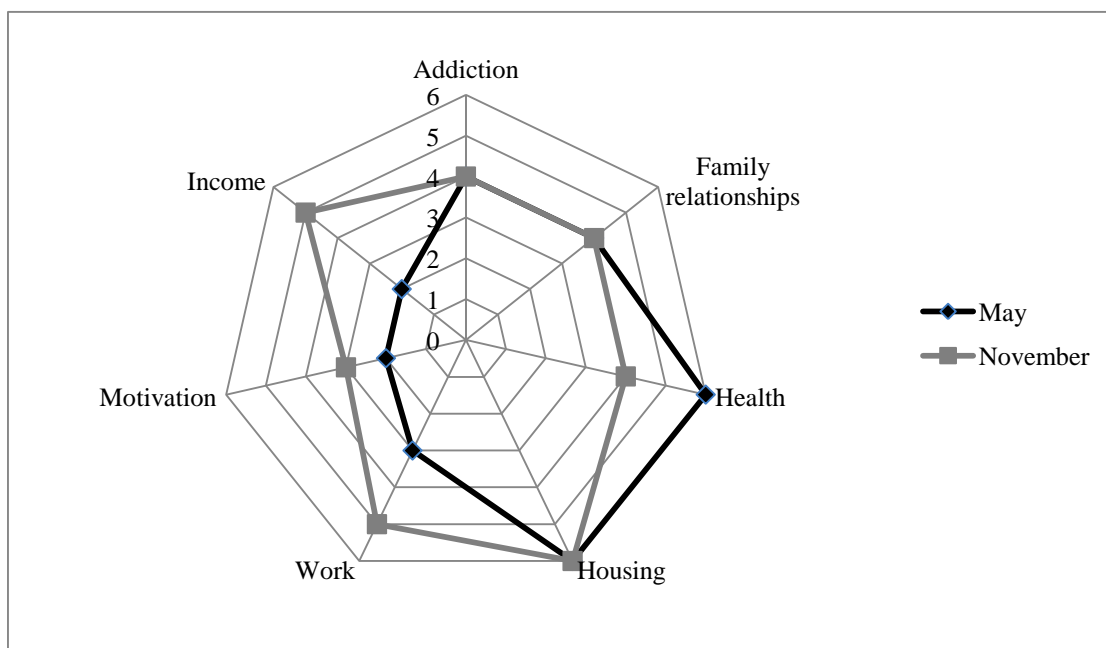


Figure 3 Changes of functioning of C3D2 family in May-November, 2015

Figure 3 data indicated that family functioning hadn't changed in areas of housing, family relationships and addiction. The family solved addiction's problem, the family relationships were labile and they had relatives who supported; the family had a permanent place of residence. The family had made improvements in the areas of work, motivation and income.

Observation had shown that the majority of the investigated families members' relationships were based on material basis, the other type of communication was fixed rarely. In majority of families, children finally appeared in child care homes, but it also was not the rate for exchange and improvement of social status. In summary, theoretically the positive social changes were relevant to the families at social risk but, practically, the perspectives of such families got into higher status were weak.

### Conclusions

1. The families at social risk do not take care about families' social mobility. Social pedagogy and social worker are able to promote social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity by observing families' at risk in complex.
2. Changes of social status of families at social risk are lower than their parents. Families at social risk generally expected the material support from parents, but not all of the research participants were able to help their children.
3. Families at social risk relations with social networks are weak or completely unsupported.
4. Families at social risk have an average functioning disorder to manifested material difficulties, social and work activities problems, family depressed mood. Such families avoid to work and keep distance from surrounding people.
5. The research results showed that opportunities of X community families at social risk to rise to a higher social status are low. The changes are determined by narrow social networks, weak relations with the community, low motivation and risk inheritance of these families.

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