

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CONVICTS AND THEIR FAMILIES IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

### PERSPEKTYWA FUNKCJONOWANIA OSADZONYCH I ICH RODZIN W SPOŁECZNOŚCI LOKALNEJ

Anna Kieszowska<sup>(A,B,C,D,E,F,G)</sup>

Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach

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#### Summary

Modern family is increasingly exposed to the threat of the impact of various social phenomena, which are largely the result of the processes of political, economic change, as well as cultural phenomena, diffusion of new styles of functioning in society. Common causes of dysfunctional families are: alcohol and other drugs, behaviors associated with aggression and violence against members of a family, juvenile delinquency and adult self-destructive behavior, family breakdown, narrowed emotional relationship in the family, the pathological behavior of parents.

The imprisonment of the perpetrator does not just affect the person staying in the in prison, but the entire family system, so the most appropriate definition of the concept seems to be imprisoned family.

**Keywords:** families of prisoners, social ties, isolation parent, family in a situation of rejection, the process of social reintegration

#### Streszczenie

Współczesna rodzina jest coraz bardziej narażona na zagrożenie wpływem różnych zjawisk społecznych, które w dużej mierze wynikają z procesów zmian politycznych, gospodarczych, a także zjawisk kulturowych, dyfuzji nowych stylów funkcjonowania w społeczeństwie. Najczęstszymi przyczynami konfliktów w rodzinach dysfunkcyjnych są: alkohol, środki psychoaktywne, zachowania związane z agresją i przemocą wobec członków rodziny, przestępczość nieletnich i zachowania autodestrukcyjne osób dorosłych, rozpad rodziny, zawężenie relacji emocjonalnych w rodzinie, patologiczne zachowanie rodziców. Więzienie sprawcy nie dotyczy tylko osoby przebywającej w więzieniu, ale całego systemu rodzinnego, poszczególnych członków którzy stają się też osobami uwięzionymi i uwikłanymi w trudną sytuację.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodziny uwięzionych, więź społeczna, izolacja rodzica, rodzina w sytuacji odrzucenia, proces reintegracji społecznej

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#### Introduction

A contemporary family is more and more exposed to the threat of the impact of various social phenomena, which are largely the result of political processes, economic changes, cultural occurrences, spread of new styles of functioning in the society. The most common causes of family dysfunctionality are: abuse of alcohol and drugs, behaviours associated with aggression and violence against members of the family, juvenile delinquency and adult self-destructive behaviour, family disruption, narrowed

emotional relations in the family, pathological behaviour of parents (e.g. violence against the child, etc.). Difficulties in the implementation of some family functions cause, among others, phenomena such as the lack of parental interest in the child, lack of due care, professional problems - loss of a job, poverty, homelessness.

The imprisonment of the perpetrator does not only affect a person put in prison, but the entire family system, hence, the most appropriate definition seems to be the concept of the imprisoned family (Marczak 2012). The imprisonment of the

**Adres korespondencyjny:** Anna Kieszowska, Uniwersytet Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, ul. Krakowska 11, 25-029 Kielce, e-mail: akiesz@op.pl, tel.: 41 349 67 25

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family means its short or long-term isolation from the family environment and abnormal functioning of other family members, due to significant reduction or complete suspension in the performance of partnerships and parental roles.

Staying of one of the family members for a long time in prison becomes a factor that violates its current functioning of the family as a whole system. Separation from loved ones, even if the family ties are not very strong - in line with the assumptions of systemic model of intrafamily relations - largely determines the behaviour of individuals and the functioning of the family as a whole, and, in particular, makes it difficult to fulfil certain tasks and family roles by the other members (Kieszkowska 2012).

Therefore, the families of prisoners, that is the families whose members, due to violations of social norms, committing a criminal act, are staying in a penitentiary institution, are in a difficult situation. Its diagnosis requires the examination of the functioning of individual members of those families in their own environment and family relationships, as well as in social functioning in neighbouring and professional environment.

Due to the rapid pace of development, change in the living conditions, situations that require quick decision-making, lack of experience in entering new situations, the threat of pathology automatically occurs. The family instantly loses contact with the person deprived of liberty, and its potential remedies are often negligible. Therefore, there is the need of current research in the families of the imprisoned, becoming familiar with the functioning of individual persons, in particular children left without care, not understanding social rejection. Moreover, it becomes significant to enable various social groups to live with the families of the imprisoned in their local environment.

The consequence of the imprisonment of a man / father (or mother) is not only jeopardising the role of the father, but also a parent's authority, since his action point to specific ways of functioning in the society. Isolation of a parent leads to the inability to meet emotional and social needs of the family members, loss of emotional ties, lack of support for children, restriction in the use of educational methods, and custody, disorders in the perception of children and their developmental needs, as well as distortions and deformations in the way of communication with the child (Pawełek 2008).

Prison isolation causes a complete change of the environment of a convict, with the simultaneous separation from the family environment, problems and life events important for all family members. This makes the significant interaction with the loved ones difficult and it limits the person's participation in the family life and proper fulfilment partner, marriage and parenting roles, even if they have been fulfilled only to a small extent so far (Marczak 2011). Therefore, it can be assumed that the

imprisonment of one of the family members triggers negative consequences not only for the functioning of the person to whom it happened, but for the entire family system. Additionally, during the stay of the parent in prison, the lack of a role model of the father exerts a negative impact on children and it deprives them of parental care, which becomes a public issue that triggers educational, cultural, economic and social consequences due to the withdrawal of children from social life or their entering on the criminal path.

As a result of the imprisonment of one of the family members, the family faces disturbance and disorganisation of the remaining family members' lives. The social situation of family members of persons deprived of liberty is manifested, among other things, in the disturbed sense of financial security and emotional support that is associated with social well-being.

Well-being is an overall assessment of a particular situation, laden with subjective perception of the present, when it comes to comparing the position of the family and the convicted, analysing the situation in terms of profits and losses associated with isolation of a person, difficulties and problems of psychophysical nature (Kotlarska-Michalska, Rusanen, Niemela 1977).

The stress resulting from the arrest and sentencing of a family member has a huge impact on the future and the quality of the family functioning. In relation to the imprisoned, there appear ambivalent feelings associated with the committed act, moreover, families must face the stigma on the part of the environment, material problems, they acutely feel the loneliness associated with taking up new social roles, they often have to fulfil the obligations of the person deprived of liberty, i.e. becoming a single parent or breadwinner (Pawełek 2009).

Putting a convict in prison transfers into all areas of the family life in the local community. Social, economic and internal situation of the families deprived of liberty is most often impaired after the imprisonment. Putting in prison of one of the members contributes to loosening ties with children and partner, breaking contact with loved ones, a sense of danger from the public sending negative messages towards the family.

In the situation of rejection and condemnation, the family itself holds a grudge against the jailed, and at the same time it feels rejected by the society. It does not take proper intervention, because it is inevitably withdrawing from social life. Only the assistance on the part of institutions and the use of certain forms of therapy provides an opportunity to rebuild relations both in the environment as well as with the prisoner.

Family members should obtain appropriate information, advice, they should participate in the supportive workshops, specific forms of counselling, learn how to help themselves, their family and

how to maintain good relations with the convict. Properly implemented professional assistance helps to alleviate the trauma suffered by the family.

The conducted social rehabilitation of a convict in prison results from the consequences of the occurrence of relatively coupled operations and actions, expressed in terms of: guilt, punishment, forgiveness, which should be analysed in two directions. Guilt appears after the occurrence of the committed act by an individual against another individual, society, or the act committed by society against another society.

In turns, the society punishes the individual for the committed act, but at the same time it exercises a kind of punishment in the form of stigmatising, reinforcing negative feelings and rejecting or spending energy and resources in order to restore the public. Positive examples of behaviour result from subjective social feelings related to the use of sanctions against a certain person.

Mature and responsible society forgives the delinquent act of a person by taking social reintegration and therapeutic actions against them, to the extent so that the person could return to the environment, and the convicted in prison, through the analysis of their previous conduct, makes an effort to change themselves, and partly absolves the society of guilt for the existence of destructive action on his behalf.

Social bond provides a sense of power, it enables a person to find the meaning of life, fills the void after the loss of what was especially important, and also provides an answer to the question that the individual is himself and is close to the family. After leaving prison, a person must have a sense of belonging, a sense of acceptance and security, so that they are able to become themselves and have a chance to repay the society.

Undoubtedly, the family plays the most important role in the social reintegration of offenders. Therefore, it must be an ally to penitentiary administration in its corrective efforts and thus, it is an important element of this work and must take part in it. No corrective programme will be successful if the people with whom the prisoner will live after leaving the prison will not be taken into account, those who will favour him in taking up social roles accepted in the society, values, patterns and norms of behaviour. Taking into consideration the above, the contact of prisoners with their families is crucial.

Contact is an expression of the inalienable right to have the family. Due to that, the convicts maintain positive self-images, are rewarded emotional satisfaction, maintain strong identification with the family, acquire and reinforce the belief that there are still important for their loved ones and therefore, they are motivated to improve / change their behaviour. The family often becomes the primary link between the convicted person and the society, the life that goes beyond prison walls (Pindel 2011). In order to

continue, exist and develop, the family must have certain ties. Family bond is a special type of social ties, and this is one of the primary determinants of the process of social rehabilitation. Imprisonment cannot be implemented at the expense of breaking the bond between prisoner and the family, since that bond underlies the life of this family, and thus, it is decisive when it comes to his integration or disintegration and frequently, it determines the possibility and effectiveness of any impacts applied to the convict. Loosening or breaking ties increases difficulties in the return to functioning in the open environment after leaving prison (Muskala 2006).

Previous criminal behaviour and stay in prison not only weaken, but actually cause break of social ties between the deviant and his immediate surroundings, but they also very often impair the family of an offender in the social and psychological dimension, as well as they mark his learning or professional environment, circles of neighbours and friends. Therefore, restoring proper ties with neighbours and family must be considered in the overall system of post-penitentiary care as the most important form of support, both in the preparation of the prisoner to life behind the walls of prison and after his leaving. Obviously, you cannot fix dysfunctional relationship with his family and the environment in the workplace or at school, or fix as fleeting contact during a pass, or in the period directly preceding the release from prison. This should be a continuous process which had already started in the moment of imprisonment to the time when convicts leave the facility, or even after leaving prison (Ambrozik 2007, p. 190).

People who have committed an offense and have been sentenced to imprisonment, and then released, regardless of their biological age and time of isolation, primarily expect help from the family. During the imprisonment, caring and psycho-hygienic family functions are revealed, which particularly satisfy emotional needs. On the other hand, after being released from the facility, other functions appear. The family often becomes the only primary link between the person and the social world. Therefore, it covers all areas of human life and deals with the most difficult issues, including the fact of committing the crime, which is met with condemnation by the rule of law and the society. The family is the most important and often the only support for former prisoners. Settlement and shelter in the environment and the family seems to fulfil an essential role in the social re-adaptation after leaving prison. The few examples of the successful social reintegration process allows to put forward the thesis that the process of social rehabilitation should involve the family environment, which will take care of and provide support to the convict after his leaving the correctional facility, or at the time when the former prisoner manages to start a family. Settling in the family life, employment and financial security are the best guarantee for the orderly

return of former prisoner to a normal life in the society. Except the family, it is the environmental impact that aims to provide emotional support for the people making the effort of social reintegration. Favourable disposition of the immediate environment can undoubtedly help the convict in solving important life issues and problems, and positively affect the change in the attitudes of people subjected to probation. Some people from the social environment of a former prisoner can have a big impact on his positive behaviour, because there are close ties between them. Therefore, such people, to a certain extent and scope, should be the subjects participating in the educational process and preparation of the prisoner for freedom (Ambrozik 2007).

### **Selected examples of imprisoned families in the local environment**

For every human being, the family is very important, it always is a point of reference, even in the situation, where the individual cannot count on its support or does not have any relatives. The family in the case of people, who are in formal and informal relationships with former prisoners, is entangled in many conflicts and personal, family, professional and social problems, faced and experienced by its members. Awaiting for good relations in the family, warmth, kindness and acceptance is the first and difficult to achieve, and the feeling of social rejection so severe that individuals cannot cope with the search for positive solutions to their situation.

Moreover, living in the family with a stigmatised person has a negative effect also on the partner, who has decided to help a former prisoner. In many cases, people in such relationships are unable to withstand the test of time, when they cannot cope with the problems of the former prisoner, their own problems and the pressure of the society. They are often afraid to move away, because of the unpredictable behaviour of the former prisoner, including aggressive behaviour, violent outbursts of anger or threats.

It is worth to quote some cases of the life of such families, struggling with a sense of rejection by the society, the stigma from their families and finally, the problems of adolescent children, who have limited opportunities to participate in social life and a sense of belonging to marginalised groups. And thus, often due to the past of their close ones, they are forced (in their opinion) to manifest anti-social behaviour.

The examples are based on authentic facts, obtained in the course of research in the families of convicts in the years 2001-2011 (Kieszkowska 2012). Still, the full anonymity is preserved, and the selected excerpts of the situation descriptions can be consistent and similar to the problems faced by many other families who are in difficult situations (Kieszkowska 2011/2012). The examples are left

without any comment, so that the reader could find answers to questions on his own and understand the need and necessity of implementing support measures in the family and the local environment, as well as to see the family from a different perspective.

### **Case 1**

#### ***The sound of the closing bars will remain forever in the memory...***

"(...) the lecture refers to the re-adaptation of prisoners into the local environment. After I have heard the topic, I already feel that again that I may not cope, but nobody knows that I know much better what chances they have to return to a normal life. It turns out that the lecturer discusses the return in the formal dimension, post-penitentiary assistance and finally reaches the problems of the family and the environment. I feel that can no longer cope, I start to wriggle, in order not to cry. Some of the students, probably of some departments, are trying to say, who former prisoners are, that they deserve what they have, and no one specifically wonders whether the society should help such families, someone else says that he has no regrets at all. And for me it is very painful. When the teacher sees no understanding of the situation of ex-convicts, she says that he will show a film about mothers who reside in the facility and their interactions with the environment. Everybody wants to watch the film, and I know that I will start crying in a moment. Nobody can help me. At the time, when I hear the sounds of officers from the tape and the sound of metal crates closed, I try to break away somehow, I reach under the seat, so that I do not have to look, just listen. I am choking up, finally, with great heartache, on my last legs, I try to get out of the classroom, because I do not want to start cry in front of others. The concerned teacher walks out after me, she sees that I tremble and weep, she does not ask right away, but she tries to seat me in a chair and ask whether it is because of the emotions or if something hurts me, and whether to ask someone for company. I need to be alone. None of those people may know, they would destroy me. I say it is because of the emotions and that I want to remain alone for a moment. She ensures that I am all right and returns to the students. I cry terribly, I see myself in those corridors during visits when I was pregnant, I remember the looks and comments when I passed, I remember the comments of other prisoners, and finally joy, concern and sadness of my husband, who was to be at liberty in a few years.

All the noises and sounds I hear until today (...) Sometimes I think that our child, who sometimes suddenly wakes up at night and is very afraid, has also dreams of that time, when I was horribly experiencing any visit in the facility. The teacher comes to me, looks at me with great emotion, I only ask that not to have to go back to the classroom. She gives me the key to her room and says that the

group will go out of the classroom in a moment, and I can go into the room and there we will meet. She probably guesses what I will say now. However, I do it, so that nobody saw me weeping. Over the three years of studies I have managed to survive, not telling anyone about my problems. I wonder now what I will do, if I can trust anybody. Will I not make the situation worse, when it is bad enough? What to do?... (...) Meanwhile, she sits down opposite to me and calmly says: "I can see that it is very hard to you, that situation is extremely difficult, what can I do to help?". I did not expect such a question, I thought that she would ask me about all the details, I had the impression that she has read this all of my face. I felt relieved that finally I do not have to reveal the cards, we sat for a moment in silence and suddenly I looked at her eyes, where I saw the tears of emotion, in one breath I confessed the truth what family I have. That I am married to the offender that I have the kids with, but he is not really interested in them at all, nor he is in me.... He has his imagined life, he tracks people, trust nobody, we do not meet anybody, he plays with children for a while and then suddenly goes away, forgets about many issues, sits idly for a few hours not knowing why, happens to be aggressive and then he is unpredictable, he does not work, because he thinks everyone is watching him.

He is in contact only with a friend with whom he committed the last offense. And that generally I feel so bad, because even my family stopped visiting us. I started studying, so that I could understand more of these problems and learn to live with them, but here I have realised that for me there is no place among other students, because they cannot look at criminals.

(...) We talked for a long time, I calmed down, I knew what I can do now. And above all, how I can help my children and husband. I left this room calm and it seemed to me that once again I have the strength to fight for my place on earth, with my family and for the family. But I also have to help others, I am to be a pedagogue (...) ".

Before another lecture, when I saw the teacher I wanted to tell her that maybe it is a little better in my family, but actually nothing has changed, only that I have more strength since then, and better cope with responsibilities. When the lecture started, the teacher did not give up, she said that students should think once again how to help families, how to be a neighbour of such people. Again, aggressive speeches of students emerged, and I was terrified, but this time I had confidence that the teacher wants to help me, but I was not quite sure. When a few brave souls praised what they would do with such people, the teacher then asked all some questions about help another human being, situations where anyone can become a criminal, responsibility for one another and the question, and if each of us here today would face difficult situation, would we reject him, "I felt a strange noise in the ears". At the end, I can only remember that we read memories

of the prisoner, who was surrounded by care in his neighbourhood, and thanks to that his children, family, and he "could start a new life with the hope for a better future."

At the end, the teacher asked whether it is not worth the time to look at another human from a positive perspective, and maybe reach a hand to him, which can enrich us spiritually. Some people even began to tell that in their families there have been such situations, that if there is understanding, the prisoners want and try to live a normal life in the community. It was a relief.

At the end she asked how much we help selflessly to one another, and perhaps it would be good to shake hands for goodbye today, since anyone of us could be in a difficult situation. Coming out of the classroom, we shook hands and smiled to each other. I needed such support. I understood some things and I even decided about the change and improvement in my life. Coming out of the classroom, I went to the teacher and shook her hand, she shook mine and said: I believe that you will raise a spark of hope in your family, you will cope. I ran out of the classroom with great joy and immediately called to my children, to my husband... Yet I have to cope, when I know I am not alone (...) ".

## Case 2

### *It's hard to grow up in a family with stigma*

"Today I am a grown woman, in my family it was never good because alcoholic father tormented me, my siblings and my mother. One day he simply killed her, he went to prison, and I with my younger siblings in the care of my grandmother.

After graduating from vocational school, my sister went to work and permanently remained abroad, my brother currently abuses alcohol, but he lives in another city, so I do not see him on a regular basis, but I cannot ask him for any help. He hates our father and does not want to know him. Neighbours and friends rather avoid us, and the moment when the punishment of my father comes to an end, they avoid us even more. I am the only person who has contact with my father in prison. He wrote letters to me as the eldest child, he asked for forgiveness, but when I visit him (mostly because of the holidays and at the urging of my grandmother), I do not want to think what will happen next, because I am scared of him. Because of him, we had no childhood, I do not know what it means to cuddle up to my mother, to talk to her, or I do not know if I can ever trust anybody. Our grandmother, the mother of our mother, has brought us up since her death, but she has always been busy, because there was no one who could help us. I was at the age of 16 when I went to work in the cold room in order to earn for books to school. I remember that at school the children would not play with us or meet after school, we did not go for the birthday parties of friends. Once, my grandmother invited

my classmates for my birthday, she prepared a cake, we waited but nobody came. The grandmother then said that sometimes, people harm children because of their parents, they evaluate and condemn everyone, but children are not guilty of anything." At that night, she cried a lot....

The second day only one friend apologised and gave me as a gift a large chocolate with nuts, which she received from her aunt. She said, "I cannot visit you, because parents forbade me, but do not be angry because "I like you". Sometimes she brought an extra sandwich and gave me, but so that no one saw. I felt uncomfortable, but this sandwich was so good that I feel its taste until today, we did not have such things after all... Grandma never asked for help, and no one willingly offered it. Now, when my father tells me that he would return to home, that he will help me, will go to work, I feel fear. Will I manage it? I would like to get away from it all, and it drags behind me for so many years. Whether I manage to erase it from my memory - I do not know. I recently graduated from high school, I started studies in order to be able to work. I cannot tell anyone until the whole the truth, so that they do not reject me, nor can I be friends with anyone. I would like to be happy, but is there is a chance for that? I feel sorry for my father when I see him in prison, but when I go out, I am mad that probably in the future (as says my grandmother) me and other people will come back to that. I do not even know the family, only a few of them have occasional contact with us. Sometimes I think that I am also imprisoned, because that is how I feel, especially when I greet people, and they turn their heads and pretend not to hear or barely respond. Many times I thought to leave from here and start a new life. I feel sorry for my grandmother, because she needs care now, after all she cared about us. I do not know what I will do ..I do not know whether my father should live with me..."

### Case 3

#### *The image of the family of a convict*

(...) It is difficult to talk about it today, because all the relatives and neighbours do not want to come back to what happened. Name of the criminal and to showing his face in public also contributed to the fact that people connect all the facts to our whole family. Recently, there was our aunt's funeral, where our family and the parents of my cousin-killer met. Their arrival at the funeral caused great indignation. When they wanted to greet the participants of the funeral in a way, everyone quickly backed away, even neighbours. They have not insisted, and slowly retreated to the back and then gone unnoticed. In the bus took, their places much earlier, so that no one saw them, and then at the end they came to the cemetery and stood about 5 meters from all participants. It was a pitiful sight, because even in such important moments, when the family was united in pain after

the loss of a loved one and need support, they were clearly rejected (they were relatives as well after all)...., even though I am a further cousin, I feel that people look at me through the prism of the murder".

### Case 4

#### *Life on the side lines*

"I never had any idea why our family lives somehow on the side lines. When I met a girl and wanted to date her, with a view to marriage, it suddenly turned out that, despite the fact that she liked me, she had to part with me. Because I cared for her, I decided to explain what might have been the cause, since until now it was all good. When I visited her at home, her parents held a serious conversation with me that their daughter changed her mind, and they will not do anything about that, because they also wanted to persuade her to change the decision of choosing a partner.

When I asked why, they informed me that my uncle - my father's brother was imprisoned in the nineties for beating a neighbour with fatal consequences and they do not want their daughter to belong to such family.

I was surprised by this news, because we never mentioned that in my family, but neighbours and friends never had a positive attitude towards us, even though we behaved correctly.

On the way home I felt rage, disbelief, fear, shame, humiliation, while parents with sadness received the news and they said that although they act properly, over the years they feel they do not belong to the local community. If they knew that it will be for the good of their children they would change their place of residence or even a name. Today, I do not know what is better - to know from the beginning, or as a grown up man, whose plans and dreams have suddenly fallen into pieces.

### Case 5

#### *Siblings of a criminal*

(...) I am the youngest of the siblings, I still wonder what kind of man I should be. My older brother is in prison, he has a sentence for the involvement in the assassination. At the beginning, when he brought home various things, e.g. cigarettes, alcohol, telephones, car keys, my parents were satisfied and praised that he is resourceful, drank alcohol and smoked cigarettes with him. When they found out that he had been sentenced to 25 years imprisonment for the murder of a man, they suddenly offended at him and they do not even write back to his letters that he writes to them, probably asking for help.

At present, I attend vocational school, but sometimes it seems to me that my brother was brave and courageous, at least until they put him in prison. I do not know what will my life be like, but

more and more often I have to fix a lot of things with the use of force and anger, more often I like how my friends fear me, and now when they know about the assassination and imprisonment, they sometimes ask if I would do the same...

I do not know, but if he could... (...)

In the neighbourhood people avoid us, I have the impression that they are scared ... (...). I cannot count on the parents, because they still drink, I am alone, I wish my brother did not stay in prison, I feel sorry for him, I have not talked to him since then, but for a long time he cared about me more than the parents and helped me financially..."

### Conclusion

On the basis of the presented material, it should be noted that the analysed families are going through many dilemmas associated with difficult situations

of their loved ones and their own. Children in these families are left to themselves. Had these families a chance for a normal life, or the adults have failed, or whether there were other possible solutions to problems without coming into conflict with the law? These and many other questions are still asked by the society. But in the current situation They (family and convicted) still have hopes and dreams, they need professional help both in the individual, family and community aspect.

Institutional support should be comprehensive and addressed to all members of the family. Adapting to the new situation requires not only time, but primarily the acquisition of competence to cope with the problems by a given family and breaking down the barriers of stigma by developing constructive behaviour and create optimal environmental conditions for the families with the help of specialists and the local environment.

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