

SOCIAL COGNITION, SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Judit Csakvari^{1*}, Szilvia Cs. Ferenczi², Eva Tanczos²

¹PhD, National Institute for Family and Social Policy, Eotvos Lorand University, HUNGARY, judit.csakvari@ncsszi.hu

² National Institute for Family and Social Policy, HUNGARY, szilvia.ferenczi@ncsszi.hu, eva.tanczos@ncsszi.hu

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Background: The typical and atypical development of social cognition and social competence has been the important research area of developmental psychology and cognitive psychology in the recent 40 years (Zigler & Trickett, 1978, Shaked & Yirmiya, 2008). Social cognition is a rubric for cognitive processes in the background of social behaviours. At first, it meant phenomena directly related to the theory of mind functioning but the expression later received a broader meaning and now it denotes those background factors of behavioural skills that are needed for the orientation in the social world. The specific human capacity is highly important that we are able to think about people and the social world and we understand each other as creatures with conscious intrinsic mental state. We usually refer to this human capacity as social cognition whose construct and process and its role in typical and atypical development is analyzed from several perspectives. The literature rates the factors correlated with the development of early social cognition into three groups: (1) Various *cognitive constructs* that accompany the performance of social cognition: executive function, language, creativity, fantasy, etc. (2) Diverse *family variables*: ways of conversation about mental conditions among themselves, number of siblings, maternal reflectivity, mentalization accuracy, quality of attachment, social-economical status. (3) Various measurable *social outcomes*: quality of peer relationships, frequency of competent behaviour (Shaked & Yirmiya, 2008). Behavioural result of single factors is the high-quality social competence that is an important background factor for the adaptive functioning in a broader sense from the early age (Guralnick, 1990, 2008, 2011).

In Hungary, there are three care systems that provide services in the field of early intervention: health care system; education and special education system; and social, children welfare and children protection system (Kereki & Lannert, 2009). The three different systems addresses diverse areas of early intervention. Social competence can be the emphasized area of the early care provided in frames of the social model.

Goals: Strategic development in order to extend the methods, approach and instrument system of the intervention praxis addressed to the early childhood, realized in frames of the social system. This study reviews a subgoal of the strategic development: process of identification and adaptation of best practices that are able to promote the more efficient professional support of socio-cognitive development for family and social factors and the development of optimal social competence.

Methods: elaborate a detailed criteria system in order to analyze intervention practices that are available in the international literature and in various services and that consider social competence as a protective factor. Analyzing the adaptability of best practices to the current methods of child caregivers and social professionals through these criteria. Realization of development supported by new professional trainings in the early intervention practice, in the actual frames of the social care system.

Results and conclusion: Expansion of knowledge and skills of professionals working in the Hungarian social, child welfare and child protection care systems in the topics of early socio-cognitive processes and social competence development. In consequence, shift in strategies regarding support of families with young children and shift in the attitude and approach. Realization of strategic and methodological development as a result of the analysis of the international and Hungarian situation.

Keywords: social cognition, social competence, early intervention, social model