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STAYING IN A FOSTER CARE INSTITUTION IN THE BIOGRAPHIES OF FORMER FOSTER CARE WARDS. MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF CRITICAL LIFE EVENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Introduction: The article addresses the issues of critical life events and crisis phenomena in the biographies of former wards of the institutional foster care system, focusing on the description of circumstances connected with their placement and later on with their stay in a childcare.

Research Aim: The aim of research was a deep insight into the following issues of interest: the period of childhood and adolescence of the wards with the focus on a critical biographical event, which for a young person – an adolescent – is placement and stay in the institutional foster care system, as well as its assessment (in terms of opportunities vs. limitations) made in retrospect by the former wards of foster care institution.

Method: The biographical method of conducting empirical verifications was used to illustrate the marks, multidimensionality, contradictions and ambivalence of the crisis and critical life events in the subjective perspective of institutional foster care wards. In case of the research results characterized here partially, a purposeful selection of the research sample was made. The sample consisted of men and women who had been in foster care for more than two years, and at the time of research at least seven years had passed since leaving the institution. The technique used during the empirical verifications presented here was a semi-structured open in-depth interview.

Results: The rich content of narratives, the multiplicity and diversity of their threads showed the diversity of experiences and multidimensionality of phenomena related to biographical crisis events and their educational and developmental character.

Conclusions: Obtained results constitute a justification of the need to verify, describe and theoretically deepen them, and above all, to signal their role for pedagogical, psychological and social work practice. There is a need to undertake professional cooperation with the pupil in the work on crisis during his stay in a foster care institution.

Keywords: adolescence, biography, institutional foster care, critical life events, child care home, wards

INTRODUCTION

Biographical critical events are most often characterized as situations analyzed from the point of view of a person directly under their influence, so they contain a strong subjective component. It is indicated that this is a situation in which there was a disturbance of the internal and external personal balance on the individual-environment line; a new and often unexpected situation of a sudden character; a difficult situation which exhibits features of a threat, obstacle, challenge or loss (Lazarus, DeLongis, 1983; Lazarus, Folkman, 1984; Bee, 2004; James, Gilliland, 2004; Siarkiewicz, 2010; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010; Kuryś, 2010, p. 35; Adamczak, 1992, p. 41).

Thus, placement and stay in a foster care institution can be viewed from many perspectives. I would like to reflect on a crisis experienced by wards as a turning point and an opportunity for growth, despite the visible (also in the narratives of former wards, which will be referred to later in this text) symptoms of gridlock and a threat to individual development. It is legitimate, as indicated by the narratives of interviewees, to interpret a crisis as an event that potentially promotes the development of an individual.

Jerzy Stochmiałek (1998a, p. 35) presents a broad look at a critical life event, which may be exemplified by placement and stay in the institutional foster care system. The author points out that the overall model of a critical event depends on the context, and in the case in question this is a difficult period of childhood and adolescence, characterized by a multitude of problems, which are the consequence of coming from families with a disturbed structure and functions. The families of the children are dysfunctional, display multiple problems, have low socio-economic and cultural status, and difficult or extremely difficult material and living conditions. It was the long-term, deepening inefficiency of biological families, affecting more and more areas of their everyday functioning, reflected in the behaviour of adolescents (not fulfilling their educational obligations, acts of vandalism, etc.) that contributed to placing young people in the foster care system. Pointing to the context, one cannot ignore the extremely difficult situation of separation from parents, coexisting at the same time with the necessity to find oneself in the role of a foster care ward and in the role of a student in a new school environment, which, as researchers indicate, is not easy with the "label of a foster institution ward" (Sajkowska, 1999; Golczyńska-Grondas, 2014; Skowrońska-Pućka, 2016; Bieńkowska, Kitlińska-Król, 2018). All this is inseparable from the necessity to implement new, unknown, complex and changeable tasks, in new, unknown conditions of the facility, the burden and scope of which many times exceed the current coping abilities of a young person (Golczyńska-Grondas

2014; Bieńkowska, Kitlińska-Król, 2018). According to Stochmiałek, when analysing a crisis situation one should also pay attention to the characteristics of the event that triggers the crisis. The news about placement in a child care home was characterized, as indicated by the former wards, by its suddenness and unexpectedness. It was associated with the lack of preparation, which was accompanied by great stress, anxiety and a sense of helplessness. And if we pay attention to the characteristics of the people experiencing the event, we can say in general that in this case they carry the stigma of the family home. Wards usually do not have an extensive social support network, their relationships with others are not lasting, it is difficult for them to learn from experience, they are characterized by low self-esteem, lack of faith in their own abilities (Bieńkowska, Kitlińska-Król, 2018), which does not remain without influence on the coping strategies they use when confronted with a critical event (which I will return to later in the text). Characteristics of the immediate reaction to an event is an individual issue, while shock, a sense of fear, uncertainty, helplessness, and a feeling of threat definitely prevail. The extraordinary dynamics of changes triggered by a critical event and its remote effects, as empirical verifications indicate, can strongly influence the life trajectories of foster wards (Stochmiałek, 1998a; Golczyńska-Grondas, 2015).

RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

In 2014, using the biography method, I began working on a project in which I studied the world of young girls, wards of foster care institution, experiencing pregnancy and (pre)early maternal responsibilities. My aim was to describe the experience of teenage motherhood carried out within a foster care institution. At that time, I made the experience of motherhood the main focus of the narrative. The aim of this research was a deep insight into the following issues of interest: the period of childhood and adolescence of the wards with the focus on a critical biographical event, which for a young person – in the case of the results presented here partially – an adolescent, is placement and stay in the institutional foster care system, as well as its assessment (in terms of opportunities vs. limitations) made in retrospect by the former wards of institutional foster care. That is why since that time I have continued to interview former institutional foster care wards, expanding the sample to include men and women without children in their adolescence. The research subject concerned the world of young people, the wards of institutional foster care, who experienced the stay in such institutions. It aimed to present their situation, feelings, experiences, but also to provide help and support to those who may soon face similar difficulties.

The research focuses on the following research objectives:
– description of problems and experiences related to critical life events, such as placement and stay in a foster care institution,
– revealing the subjective way of perceiving and interpreting the situation of crisis by former wards. Getting to know the meanings and senses attributed by the wards to the experience of staying in an institution. Identifying the meaning that the stay in foster care has given to their lives,
– determination of the social support needs (informal and institutionalized) of wards.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

An extremely important activity in the implementation of intended empirical verification aimed at achieving reliable results is the proper selection of method, technique and research tool. Qualitative research strategy was selected for this study. In view of the subject matter, the qualitative strategy allowed to recognize a "sensitive" phenomenon related to problems considered intimate, private in the society, and enabled to reach "deep inside" the phenomenon of the researcher's interest. More precisely, it should be pointed out that the biographical method was chosen. This method was chosen due to its many advantages (important from the research subject and aim point of view), among others: it reveals the sense and meaning, shows the dynamics of human life, its complexity and ambiguity, emphasizes human subjectivity, allows to perceive the unique causes and con-sequences of various phenomena, it is characterized by sensitivity to the unique factors determining human life, and it has the potential of moral and political impact (Bednarz-Łuczewska, Łuczewski, 2012). Moreover, the chosen method of collecting empirical material seems to be the most useful and appropriate for achieving the set research objectives, because biography "presents the experiences and definitions of a given person, a given group, or a given organization as that person, group, or organization interprets those experiences" (Helling, 1990, p. 13, following Denzin, 1970).

The research abandoned the postulate of sample representativeness. The selec-tion of sample was determined by substantive and cognitive considerations, and a deliberate sampling was used. The respondents were addressed through formal (contact related to the researcher's pedagogical work) and informal (outside work) contacts. Efforts were made to ensure that the respondents were "really" involved in the phenomenon under study. Therefore, the key cases in which experiences, knowledge, and practices constituting the research subject were identified. Thanks

to this, the research sample met the criterion of representativeness, not in the statistical sense, but thanks to the representation of diverse meanings that the phenomenon under study has in the awareness and life practice of the surveyed people (Flick, 2010, p. 61). The selection of the research sample, which is understood as "a set of carefully selected cases, materials, or events that constitute a corpus of empirical examples that enable the most fruitful exploration of the phenomenon under study" (Flick, 2010, pp. 58–59), are justified by cognitive considerations. A purposive choice was made to present the study results characterized here in excerpts. The study involved men and women who had been in child care home as a result of the restriction or deprivation of parental responsibility of their own parents for more than two years and, at the time of the study, at least seven years had elapsed since they left the child care institution. Eighteen participants took part in the study – nine women and nine men. At the time of the study, they were 25 years old (eleven respondents) and 26 years old (seven respondents). Five respondents had been living in an institution for approximately four years, eight had been in the foster care system for approximately three years, and five had left foster care after a two-year stay in an institution. In the course of the empirical research, I used the technique of semi-structured in-depth interview (Helling, 1990, p. 23; Bauman, 2001). Thanks to its application, it was possible to gain an unusually deep insight into the following issues of interest: the period of childhood and adolescence of the wards with the focus on a critical biographical event, which for a young person – in the case of the results presented here partially – an adolescent, is placement and stay in the institutional foster care system, as well as its assessment (in terms of opportunities vs. limitations) made in retrospect by the wards of child care home.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

The data analysis procedure followed the art of qualitative research. During the research it was ensured that all interviews started with an explanation phase, in which the researcher informed the respondent about the nature and functions of interview. The second phase was the introduction. It had a form of a "storytelling question". It is a question that takes the form of a short story, which makes the respondent aware of the importance of his story and also provides an incentive for him to tell the story. The most important phase was the main story (a reconstruction of life course, or a statement regarding the question formulated). The fourth and fifth phases can be called the phase of completing and balancing everything that has been said, as there is a space for clarifying any problems that came to

the researcher's mind, as well as an opportunity to establish a dialogue with the respondent. The final phase of interview sometimes takes a separate form, called a disposition-based interview. During the data analysis procedure, the method of triangulation was used, i.e. different data (narrative excerpts) were used to describe and analyze the same phenomenon. Analytical abstraction was carried out, which means that the researcher extracted categories from the narratives that are common to other narratives, and those categories that are specific to a particular narrative. The following categories were included in the working code tree: childhood, adolescence, placement in a child care institution, current life situation, turning points in biography. Great attention was taken to clearly separate the respondent's statements from the interpretation of researcher, which was possible by adopting accurate and consistent ways of transcribing the interviews. Analysis of the respondents' oral narratives of a reactive character (answers to generally formulated questions and calling the subject by the researcher) had the form of a hermeneutic content analysis aimed at reconstruction and description of meanings ascribed to the stay in an institution by former foster wards. The obtained statements were collected and sorted out into recurrent categories related to positive vs. negative experiences (in the area of education, peer relations, contacts with family) during the stay in the institution, positive vs. negative consequences (in various areas of life) resulting from the stay in the institution after leaving it. Following the above, more general patterns were identified and conclusions were drawn reflecting the way in which former foster wards perceive their stay in the institutional system of foster care in the context of its influence on their current life situation in terms of an opportunity vs. limitation (Miles, Huberman, 2000).

RESULTS

Circumstances connected with placing a young person in institutional foster care, what is evident from the narratives of former wards taking part in the research, exhaust the symptoms of a crisis. The placement and stay in a child care home should be counted as events that can disrupt human functioning and lead to the breakdown of the line of normal development of an individual. For young people it is a new, sudden, unplanned situation, undoubtedly unimaginably difficult, which is exemplified by the following narratives:

[Basia] And when I was at the end of the year and saying goodbye to my teachers, everyone knew that I was going to (here is the name of the town where the childcare facility where the woman was placed is located), only I did not know. It was new to me, and there was no way to prepare for it.

[Wera] When I found out about the placement (in child care home), I cried terribly, and then I was surprised that (here is says the name of the place) and not (here is says the name of the place). When the letter came, my dad was going to sell scrap metal and when I read the letter I couldn't believe that I had to go there that day and I kept saying that I wasn't going anywhere.

Placement in a facility can be and often is, as indicated by the respondents, interpreted as a threat to existing family relationships. After all, it is inextricably linked with the need to separate from the family of origin, i.e. parents, and sometimes also siblings, because it is always associated with a change of the place of residence. This, in turn, is inextricably linked to the enforced change in the number of family meetings. This aspect, which is acutely felt, is emphasized by wards of foster care institution who participated in the study:

[Renata] I don't remember now how it was, who told me about it, but I was devastated. I got a letter from the court […] it was at Christmas […]. The first thing I thought when I heard about the facility was that I would be separated from the young ones and that I would not have Marek (Renata's boyfriend) with me. I was afraid, because they (Renata's brothers) were referred to (here is the name of the care centre and the town) and I to another place. All of us at the same time were referred to different facilities. […]. All my siblings stayed in the foster care facility (them together) and me separately. A nightmare.

In many cases, after the placement of a child in a foster care facility, superficial family contacts and a decrease in the frequency of meetings can be observed, which is another source of stress. The research conducted in this area shows that relations with the biological parents are limited to telephone calls and possibly short weekend visits to family home in a form of a "leave". The following narratives may serve as an illustration:

[Daria] When I was in the facility, my contacts were worse, because most of my family turned their back on me. […] My mother and grandparents said it was a shame for the whole family, that they wouldn't come to see me, because it was a shame. So I told them they didn't have to come to me cause I would come to them. There was little support – my dad gave me some pocket money when they came and I touched base on the phone with my parents.

[Mateusz] They didn't have money to visit me… I mean they probably did, since there was alcohol, there were fags, but they preferred to spend it on something else. I guess it was easier for them without me, in a financial sense. It's sad, but that's what I think.

Placement in a child care home is also connected with the necessity to sever direct relations with the previous peer group, forcing changes in the social activity, which occurs when a child is placed in a facility distant from his/her previ-

ous place of residence and is an extremely painful consequence of staying in the institutional foster care system, especially for adolescents. This is confirmed by the narratives of the former wards who took part in the study:

[Daria] I had poor contact with my acquaintances […].

[Kasia] I was terribly scared, and at the same time I was sorry that I would lose contact with my friends. I didn't know what it would be like, a new school...

[Wera] And days I rather spent in my room, I was closed in myself, it was depressing, I was sad after breaking up with my boyfriend and that I didn't say goodbye to my friends.

Without a doubt, as experts in the field point out, the stay in a child care home can be regarded as a critical event also due to the fact that the former wards often compare their placement in the facility to a deprivation of freedom in various dimensions. They point to deprivation or limitation of the possibility to enjoy the benefits of youth and to realize, typical for their peers, activities resulting from the rights inherent in the adolescence period.

[Mikołaj] My friends had fun at parties, you know New Year's Eve, birthdays and other occasions, and I was locked in here. I felt it very much as the restriction of freedom. At home, you know, you could do everything, but in the child care home it was not so easy.

The placement and stay in the facility is also sometimes interpreted from the perspective of having to start learning in a new school and a new peer environment. Undoubtedly, this is another event accompanied by great stress and anxiety. It is worth emphasizing that the necessity of establishing new peer relations in a new school environment takes place in unfavourable circumstances. The wards enter the new environment with the label of being brought up in a foster care home, which, as they themselves indicate, constitutes a great difficulty in establishing social relations, which could at least partially compensate for the loss of previously established relations.

[Angelika] I started the first year of middle school twice in (here is the name of the place). The second time, I did half of the semester in an emergency child-care centre and the second time in (here is the name of the town where another child care home, in which Angelika was placed, operated). The worst thing was that I went to a new school [...] and I felt so strange. I enter this school and I feel bad... I feel like everyone is looking at me and thinking I don't know what. It was not a pleasant experience for me. No, no, no. I remember I walked into the classroom and the teacher introduced me as a new student... Luckily she didn't say I was from the facility or anything like that, because that would've been like... I would've caved in.

Staying in a child care institution is also associated, according to the narratives of the wards, with a significant change in living conditions. The change of conditions is perceived and interpreted by the respondents as a circumstance of a negative nature. Despite the fact that during their stay in the child care home all the basic needs of the wards are met (which the respondents emphasize in their statements), this environment is so different from the one that was familiar and close to them that this does not remain without influence on the expression of negative assessments and opinions about the characterized area.

[Tomek] At first it was a tragedy. I didn't even want to leave my room. I'm quite shy, I didn't talk to anyone, but then it wasn't too bad, you know... just it was different than at home. At home, I was at home, at my place, and here everything was strange and different.

[Basia] It was tough. We had to adjust to the hours, everything on time.... walks, etc. Sometimes I was scolded for not being on my walk. Evening duty was also killing me at 8.30 pm – it was tiring. At home I had a completely different life. When I came home, I did my homework, I had more time, and here I had more responsibilities. Free time – earlier I used to spend it with my friends, and then I had contacts only at school and in the facility.

The stay in the foster care institution, as it results from the narratives of former wards, is inextricably linked with the forced change of personal habits and routines, which is determined by the ubiquitous schedule and rules prevailing in the institutional care environment, regulating the functioning of the wards in various areas of life.

[Kinga] In a foster facility, what? In the morning we had to wake up, go to school as normal, have breakfast, go to lessons, write everything in a notebook – exits, entrances, guests. I lived with three girls in one room. And that was better than at home.

[Angelika] I was annoyed by the strict adherence to hours, this kind of schedule, these rules and regulations, the daily schedule, and everything on time, and in general five minutes late and it was bad as it had to be done now... and the ban on smoking... [...] At home it was different…

[Agnieszka] There was always a fag in the morning, and here was nothing. I didn't go to school, and here there was such control that there was no way out. Besides, the school was close to the facility. The teacher could see if I was going. They watched us very closely.

A significant and resounding fact in the narratives is the co-occurrence of the critical events indicated and briefly characterized above. It should be emphasized that the narratives of all the wards participating in the study were extremely

emotional, which was related to a large number of crisis events that they had to face in such a short period of time.

[Kasia] "I went to the facility right away – straight from school. I was not even at home. My parents did not drive me there, although they received a letter and there were phone calls, and that is probably why it turned out that way. I was very scared, I was afraid of everything. It was difficult. All strangers... in the facility, and at school. A new room, a friend from the room, and immediately another stress, because you must go to a school that I did not know at all".

[Agnieszka] "I hoped to the very end that the court would agree and I would stay at home. The worst thing was that this change was so... sudden for me, that many things... changed in a very short time. It was hard for me to adapt. It's hard to imagine, even now I find it difficult to talk about it. [...] It took me some time to sort it out".

Easily noticeable is this feature of the crisis, which was confirmed by the narratives of the former wards who took part in the study, saying, on the one hand, that it is a threat (if only because of the risk of numerous consequences in various areas of human functioning in crisis) and, on the other hand, that it is an opportunity which appears when suffering caused by the crisis has an activating effect, motivating the person affected to seek ways of coping with the disturbance of homeostasis. In hindsight, this is also something that former wards can see after leaving the child care home.

[Asia] All in all, thanks to the care child home I finished middle school, after leaving it, it was extremely difficult to study.

[Witek] I also learned a lot there. Cooking, washing, ironing, keeping order. How to spend money, how to prepare a menu so that it was good and there was enough money for everything. Even a little bit of childcare (Witek was in a facility where underage mothers stayed together with their children).

[Julia] The role of the facility is big. Because I could finish school.

[Tomek] Mom took care of herself. I started going to school. I even got better grades than at home.

[Arek] Thanks to this stay, I didn't have to think about what was going on at home. At school, once I met my classmates, I was calmer. I could concentrate on what the teacher was saying. Generally, I didn't have to worry about food, clothes, in that respect it was also just easy. Of course, I didn't think so then (laughs).

Also former foster wards participating in the study conducted by Maria Ko-lankiewicz and Marcin Poncylisz positively assessed their stay in the children's care home in terms of their introduction to adult life. Twenty-six respondents (53%) stated that their stay in the institution of foster family rather helped them to start their adult life, and 21 respondents (42%) – that it definitely helped. Only

2% indicated that the foster care did not help them. Evaluation of stay in foster care correlates with the level of feeling of safety. The vast majority of respondents perceive a positive impact of being in foster care on their start in adult life (Kolankiewicz, Poncyliusz, 2016, p. 122).

DISCUSSION

It is easy to notice large number of crisis events that former wards had to face in such a short period of time. "Compared to the general population, youth in foster care are significantly more likely to have experienced violence, specifically abuse and/or neglect" (Fratto, 2016, p. 440). This fact has also been pointed out by experts in the field, who indicate that a large number of critical events, concentrated in a short period of time, and their negative evaluation are a burden to the psychological homeostasis of an individual (Badura-Madej, 1999; Kubacka-Jasiecka, 2010; Fratto, 2016). In the narratives of the wards, one can easily notice the attributes characteristic of a total institution, to which the facility can be compared, such as: the dualistic social structure, i.e. the division into the world of those in charge, who constitute a smaller group, and the world of the wards (a larger group), both groups perceiving each other through the prism of stereotypes, while maintaining a socially prescribed distance; the subordination of people who live their lives in one place to "the same, single »authority«" to the absolutism of authority; being in the immediate company of others in the facility during all phases of daily activities; deprivation of intimacy; restriction of the wards' freedom through the establishment of strict daily schedules imposed by a system of formal regulations and carried out under the supervision of staff; the existence of a general plan directed at the official performance of the tasks of the facility, which consists of the realization of a common goal and individual compulsory activities; and excessive external control, as other researchers also note (Goffman, 2006, p. 317, after: Golczyńska-Grondas, 2014, p. 65).

It is worth mentioning that problems related to the functioning of wards in foster care institution during their stay and after leaving it are rarely discussed in scientific studies. The first Polish analysis of this issue using biographical materials was undertaken by Monika Sajkowska (1999) in her book entitled *Stygmat instytucji* [*The Stigma of the Institution*]. Subsequent Polish studies of this group were devoted to the process of becoming independent. Their description can be found in the book entitled *Ubóstwo i wykluczenie społeczne młodzieży* [*Poverty and Social Exclusion of Youth*] (Tarkowska, 2007). Researchers have so far focused on the formation of institutional identity of wards (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2014) or

the process of becoming independent (Kwak, 2006; Golczyńska-Grondas, 2015), rarely focusing on the events experienced by the wards from a pedagogical and psychological perspective in the context of critical biographical events and their role in the assessment of former wards from the foster care system. Meanwhile, from the psychology of human development perspective, critical life events can be considered, on the one hand, overwhelming and extremely burdensome, on the other hand, described as "natural experiments of development", depending on the role of elements involved in the process of developmental change. It should be pointed out that experiencing critical biographical events can be dangerous, especially when a person does not have adequate resources to cope with them or does it insufficiently. It is worth noting, however, that it may also be a factor stimulating further development. The consequence of such a view is the abandonment of perceiving the crisis as something bad, negative, something to be prevented or suppressed. In the proposed approach, the crisis is seen as a specific tool that facilitates the development of an individual affected by it (Sęk, 2004, p. 50; Stanisławiak, 2012, p. 10). According to this perspective, as Helena Sęk emphasizes, "critical life events are not unequivocally negative for a person, but they can have and very often do have a significant (also positive) meaning for development" (Sęk, 2004, p. 51), which was also confirmed by the respondents.

Glenn Richardson, describing the adaptive consequences after experiencing traumatic events, indicates several possible forms of reintegration. He mentions dysfunctional reintegration, which is most often connected with isolation and depression, which is illustrated by some of the narratives of the wards, and in particular referring to their further lives. We can distinguish a group of former wards who continue the trajectory of previous generations. Dependent on the help of the facility, passive, professionally inactive, not participating in the mainstream of social life in various areas. Further on, Richardson indicates reintegration with loss, which is connected with accepting limitations and continuing previous forms of activity, but in a changed, modified form. This form seems to be a relatively frequently used by wards as a coping strategy while being in the child care institution, which can be exemplified by the occurrence and identification in the institutional foster care system of the phenomenon of "second life" (Golczyńska-Grondas, 2014; Sajkowska, 1999), and after leaving the institution it can manifest itself in the functioning of former wards on the outskirts of law. Then he points to reintegration as a return to previous homeostasis and resilient reintegration, which is a combination of accepting the limitations created while continuing to grow. The narratives allow us to identify this group as well. These are the wards who used their stay in the facility for self-development, and whose families col-

laborated with support institutions, making it possible to develop and improve the functioning of the entire family (Richardson, 2002, pp. 307–321).

CONCLUSION

An important part of the biographies of individuals participating in the empirical verifications was, as confirmed by the narratives, their stay in a facility. It appears to be another critical moment in their lives (we should bear in mind the traumatic experiences of upbringing and socialisation, which are not emphasised in this text, as it is only an illustration of a limited part of the research). An event that disturbed the balance between an individual and environment, rendering previous ways of acting insufficient and inadequate. The wards were forced to stop or limit their previous forms of activity and to apply new ways to facilitate their functioning in institutional conditions. The stay in the facility is also another important moment in which they once again experienced the deprivation of their needs for continuity and stability in the context of care and upbringing, and unfortunately, not for the first time, it was a time associated with the loss of a sense of security (Andrzejewski 2008; Kwak, Rymsza, 2006; Prokosz 2011). Significantly, it was for the wards, as their narratives indicate, the period of a parallel occurrence of several crises. It is worth noting, however, that despite initial adaptation difficulties, their stay in the facility, as indicated in the narratives, was also a time characterized by a specific "protection" and a sense of security. Time and space to quietly continue their schooling, doing internships and work placements with the help of their tutors and the support and understanding of their teachers. A stage without financial and material worries. Yet, they perceive their stay in the foster care institution as a kind of punishment with positive, though postponed in time, consequences. The wards talk about an opportunity, which, as the analysis of the narratives indicates, they did not fully manage to seize (Skowrońska-Pućka, 2016), which can be exemplified by a brief outline of their current situation.

The rich content of the narratives presented here only partially, the multiplicity and diversity of their threads, results from the richness of the experiences that have been presented by the wards who talked to me. It is also a consequence of the multidimensionality of phenomena related to biographical crisis events, which justifies the need to verify, describe and theoretically deepen them, and above all to signal their role for educational, psychological and social work practice (Stochmiałek, 1998b). Considering critical biographical events from the perspective of individual development should change the way we understand a crisis intervention (Sęk, 2001). This also implies the need for empirical analysis of the issue. In its educa-

tional layer, this theme is particularly important for all pedagogues, educators, teachers and other support staff, because it highlights the importance of the work undertaken with the ward during their stay in a facility. From such a perspective, it seems appropriate not only to prevent critical events, which very often is simply not possible, but also to increase individual abilities and competences resulting from the experienced event, especially important for people with negative, difficult upbringing and socialisation experiences. Developmental support should take place immediately after placing an individual in a child care home during the process of becoming independent. Experts point out that two groups of factors modify the process and ways of coping with critical life events by young people and they should be taken into consideration while constructing and implementing prevention and optimisation programmes dedicated to youth. The first group includes internal resources, the second group includes widely understood (professional and non-professional, institutionalised and non-institutionalised) participation of the so-called social support network, i.e. presence of other people remaining in relation with an individual in crisis. It is worth remembering that "the higher the awareness of one's resources, i.e. skills and abilities, the greater the focus on coping with critical events themselves, perceived as problems and tasks. In turn, the higher the sense of individual deficits, the greater the proportion of coping methods focused on emotions, involving distancing oneself from difficulties or outright escape and avoidance" (Teusz, 2005, p. 149). Researchers "suggest that child welfare policy and practice should account for the potential needs of these youth for trauma-related services, specifically evidence-based and age-appropriate treatments for PTSD" (Salazar et al., 2013, p. 550).

STUDY LIMITATIONS

My intention was to gain an insight into the "personal significance of specific areas of life" (Helling, 1990, p. 17) and, which is in line with the methodology of qualitative research, to reach "meaningful rather than representative data" (Collins, 2000, vol. 1, p. 18 following: Gromkowska-Melosik, 2011, p. 264). Therefore, a limitation of my research consists in the fact that I cannot refer the results of my empirical verification to the whole population of wards of the institutional foster care system. Nonetheless, I am deeply convinced that the biographical excerpts presented in this paper – at least to some extent – show problems typical of many former wards of foster care institutions living in Poland. The extremely labor-intensive procedure of conducting the research also affected the number of subjects participating in the presented verifications.

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POBYT W INSTYTUCJONALNYM ŚRODOWISKU OPIEKUŃCZO-WYCHOWAWCZYM
W BIOGRAFIACH BYŁYCH WYCHOWANKÓW SYSTEMU PIECZY ZASTĘPCZEJ.
WIELOWYMIAROWOŚĆ KRYTYCZNYCH WYDARZEŃ ŻYCIOWYCH
W PERSPEKTYWIE ROZWOJOWEJ

Wprowadzenie: Artykuł porusza problematykę krytycznych wydarzeń życiowych i zjawisk kryzysowych w biografiach byłych wychowanków systemu pieczy zastępczej z koncentracją na opisie okoliczności związanych z umieszczeniem, a potem pobytem w placówce opiekuńczo--wychowawczej.

Cel badań: Celem badań był pogłębiony i wielowymiarowy wgląd w okres dzieciństwa i młodości wychowanków placówek opiekuńczo-wychowawczych, z koncentracją na krytycznym wydarzeniu biograficznym, jakim dla młodego człowieka-adolescenta jest umieszczenie i pobyt w instytucjonalnym systemie opieki oraz jego ocena (w kategoriach szansy vs ograniczenia) dokonana w perspektywie czasu przez byłych wychowanków placówek opiekuńczo-wychowawczych.

Metoda badań: Do zilustrowania znamion, wielowymiarowości, sprzeczności i ambiwalencji kryzysu oraz krytycznych wydarzeń życiowych w subiektywnej perspektywie wychowanków instytucjonalnego systemu pieczy zastępczej wykorzystano metodę biograficzną prowadzenia weryfikacji empirycznych. W przypadku charakteryzowanych tu wyników badań dokonano celowego doboru próby badawczej. W badaniu wzięli udział kobiety i mężczyźni, którzy przebywali w placówkach opiekuńczo-wychowawczych dłużej niż dwa lata, a w momencie prowadzenia badania upłynęło co najmniej siedem lat od opuszczenia przez nich placówki. Techniką, którą zastosowano w trakcie realizacji prezentowanych weryfikacji empirycznych, był częściowo ustrukturyzowany otwarty wywiad pogłębiony.

Wyniki: Bogata treść zaprezentowanych narracji, mnogość i różnorodność ich wątków ukazała bogactwo przeżyć oraz wielowymiarowość zjawisk związanych z kryzysowymi wydarzeniami biograficznymi oraz ich edukacyjny i rozwojowy charakter.

Wnioski: Uzyskane wyniki stanowią uzasadnienie potrzeby ich weryfikowania, opisywania i pogłębienia teoretycznego, a nade wszystko zasygnalizowania ich roli dla praktyki pedagogicznej, psychologicznej i pracy socjalnej. Istnieje potrzeba podejmowania profesjonalnej współpracy z wychowankiem w ramach pracy nad kryzysem w trakcie jego pobytu w placówce opiekuńczo-wychowawczej.

Słowa kluczowe: adolescencja, biografia, instytucjonalny system pieczy zastępczej, krytyczne wydarzenia życiowe, placówka opiekuńczo-wychowawcza, wychowankowie