CHILDHOOD SOCIAL EXCLUSION
CHILDREN’S SITUATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION IN GERMANY

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1. In the 1960’s and 70’s there seemed to be no poverty with regards to children in Germany. It looked as if processes of social exclusion had been reduced by the general economic prosperity. Poverty was not the main issue of discussion in social sciences and child welfare practice, moreover the equal opportunities for all children to attain a good education and equal rights. One discussed the educational situation of children coming from different classes and backgrounds for example especially the education of girls and the children of foreign workers and the opportunities for all children to benefit from economic progress. A comprehensive educational reforms - starting at the middle of the sixties - improved the situation for girls, children in rural areas and those of the working classes. The exceptions were those children of ethnic minorities who did not attain significant educational improvements until today. More children of underprivileged families attained higher education. The social expenditure for children increased. In several towns and regions schools, pre-schools and day care centres tried to integrate children with disabilities in ordinary child institutions. Many model projects for handicapped children started and were financed by the communities or special state-programs. In almost all German regions important programs for children after school were developed. The general economic prosperity benefits all classes in society. The economic situation of children therefore, no longer became an important subject of politic discussion.

2. At the end of the 1970’s and the start of the 80’s the situation regarding families and children in Western Germany worsened, while in Eastern Germany (former GDR) the issue of child poverty remained unknown. However since the unification in 1991 the situation regarding child poverty in both East and West Germany has become more serious until today. This has happened in three basic directions:

- Firstly, in the late 70’s and the early 80’s there was a sharp rise in the unemployment rate with the economic situation of a growing number of families becoming more and more difficult.

- Secondly, the situation of children were affected by the breakdown of the nuclear family due to rapid rise in the divorce rates and subsequently a sharp increase in one parent families. Social change worsened the life conditions especially for this group.
And thirdly there were general cuts in social expenditure affecting children as well as cuts in
the education system in general.

3. (1) Since the late 1970’s the unemployment rates increased and the economic situation of many
families started to get worse. Many families in the low wage bracket found it hard to support themselves
and their children due to a decrease in earnings. Furthermore the unemployment benefit was often too low
to support children. On average the family income of ethnic minorities were lower than those of German
families (Wiesbaden 1997). The futures of children were characterised by uncertain situation of families.
The number of families receiving social support (Sozialhilfe) has been increased rapidly since the late
1970’s.

4. Three groups of children are affected most by economic and societal change and therefore by
child poverty:

1. children whose parents are long-term or for several times unemployed;

2. children of parents who are paid badly, mainly children of ethnic minorities;

3. children of one parent or divorced families and families with two or more children.

5. Finally, the social situation of children is dependent on the type of family structure on the one
hand and on the other on the job opportunities of their parents, both due to an increasing inequality
between children. The present German family support from government does not cover the costs for child
care and prevent inequality. Processes of social exclusion firstly depend on the general economic situation
in Germany, and secondly on the situation and background of the individual families.

6. (2) In particular, one parent families and divorced families are the groups most at risk. With
regard to the situation of children of one parent families two opposite developments can be seen. On the
one hand, the society’s acceptance of non-traditional family forms is growing and children do not
therefore have to fear social exclusion in a moral way, on the other hand social exclusion depends on the
economic situation of one parent families. The number of one parent families has grown from 8 per cent
in 1961 to 12,1 per cent in 1994; these are mostly divorced women bringing up their children for
themselves. The growing number of non-traditional families is one of the reasons, why especially the
situation of children has worsened more rapidly in average than the situation of adults. The economic
troubles of one parent families first results from the incompatibility of child care and work, especially in
rural regions where it is problematic to find adequate day care facilities, because there is a lack of day
nurseries for children younger than three years old or day care centres for older children that are open only
for more than a few hours a day. Therefore, women cannot work full time. If mothers are able to combine
child care and work for all that they often get poor because of the relatively low salaries for women are
paid. Second, the maternity leave due a bad economic situation for one parent families. During the
maternity leave up to 36 month the amount of money women receive from government is not enough to
compensate for lost earnings. Third, the number of fathers who do not pay alimony is growing. A
consequence of the aforementioned is that 20 per cent of one parent mothers rely on social security
(Sozialhilfe).

7. Following from the above, the changing family structures as well as the job market situation due
to higher poverty of families (unemployed families or those with low-income, in families with more than
two children and one parent families). The poverty rate of children under 16 years in East Germany, rose
from 4,9 per cent in 1990 to 9,3 per cent in 1992 and in West Germany they climbed up to 11,8 per cent.
These rates are higher than the average of the adults, which shows that children are more at risk than
adults. Families with children grow poorer more quickly than households without children. A growing number of families receive social support (Sozialhilfe), and in 1994 6.6 per cent of all children in Germany receive social support (Olk/Rentzsch 1998).

8. This phenomenon can have serious effects on the situation of children, for example their education and their future chances on labour market (Neuberger 1997). Especially the educational opportunities for children of ethnic minorities, which have always been poor, become even worse. Other German studies have shown, that the health of children in families with low incomes is bad being affected by poor diet, bad day to day habits or psychological stress (Klocke / Hurrelmann 1995).

9. In addition to the individual situation of families, communities received less and less revenue due to cuts in expenditure for education and social work with children. For example, the number of children per school-class rose, and with less teachers being taken on, in areas of unrest the quality of education declined. Many institutions that worked with children after school, in supervised play areas and in youth hostels were lost due to closures. At the same time private sector education and leisure amenities are expanding. Children whose parents could not pay for private cultural and entertainment facilities were therefore disadvantaged. The children most affected by these cutbacks were those living in areas of social deprivation (soziale Brennpunkte) (Dangschat 1996). The cutbacks in social welfare system were in part responsible for the social exclusion of many children. Children growing up in families with high and stable income were not affected by the economic and social change because their parents could pay for private schools and day care centres, for private cultural and entertainment facilities after school.

10. In present day, Germany, we have two examples of social exclusion - on the one hand the individual background and parental support of children (micro perspective), on the other hand the cutbacks in social welfare for children which especially puts children at risk (macro perspective). To examine social exclusion in childhood you have to consider both perspectives. And you have to decide about whether you would talk about the individual child and the effects of social exclusion an the individual development, behavioural, and health or childhood in general.

Social Policy and Social Exclusion in Childhood

11. For a long time, neither social nor family policy have recognised these developments and the growing poverty rate in childhood. There was no political discussion about the rising number of children who received social support (Sozialhilfe). Discussions then started in the late eighties about the declining birth rates, the growing trend towards smaller families and the increasing childlessness and the implications for the social system, especially with regard to pensions. One then looked at the family situation. Kaufmann, an important German sociologist and social policy researcher, speaks about the “structural inconsiderateness” (“strukturelle Rücksichtlosigkeit”) towards children and families in policy and economy (Kaufmann 1995), while parents and child professionals are doing their utmost in terms of love and care. There is a great difference between individual and societal care for the situation and the bringing up of children. Kaufmann talks about an “indifference” towards children in different departments of political and economic life, which in their cumulative effect are leading to a lack of consideration for children and their families.

12. An increased governmental activity for families (not for children!) started in 1994 when a judicial ruling of the Supreme Constitutional Court prohibited the taxing of the basic subsistence (Existenzminimum). A consequence of the ruling was to lead to an increase in the monthly child benefit, for the first child from 70,- DM to 220,- DM (300,- DM for the third child and 350,- DM for each else). For families with a higher income, there is a choice of child benefit or a better child allowance.
13. Mostly, German family policy is starting activity with regard to the birth rates (ie. demographic policy), not with regard to the situation of children. For example, in order to encourage women to remain at home to look after their children, the government guaranteed that maternity leave would not affect their pension rights.

A Program for Social Inclusion of Handicapped Children and Children at Risk

14. In spite of the indifference towards children in political life and the social cuts in child welfare, social work for children has recognised processes of social exclusion for years. They have to cope with poverty and social discrimination in their every day work. Charities, churches and youth organisations call attention to the consequences of social change and welfare cuts for the work with children and the individual development of children at risk. Furthermore, youth organisations especially in areas of social deprivation have developed programs of support for children in families at risk.

15. In the following passage, I would like to present to you a project where the community is working together with several public day care centres and a foundation for disabled children. The objective aim of the program is to prevent the social exclusion of children with handicaps, behavioural disorders, with problematic learning abilities and with family problems in a region with great economic problems.

16. The project was started in the late eighties in the city and federal state Bremen. Bremen is a city in Northern German with a population of 500,000 and, today has a very high unemployment rate. The collapse of Bremens shipbuilding industry has had dramatic consequences for the job market and for the economy of the city. The social project for disadvantaged children started in several deprived areas of Bremen which are affected most by the collapse. In ordinary public day care centres high qualified social workers and psychologists of the foundation co-operate with the ordinary day care personal of the town. The town is currently financing the program and the foundation supports the posts of special educational personal. Psychologists and social workers are working on the one hand directly with the children, on the other hand with their parents, who are often in great economic and/or psychologic difficulties. They then try to advise or to assist parents with every day problems, e.g. writing official letters or finding an affordable place to live. In case of greater family problems they contact advice centres. Furthermore, social workers and psychologists co-operate with teachers at school to support the children in their learning ability. Psychologists and social workers create for every child at risk an individual “development plan”. The aim of the individual plan is the reintegration of children at risk into normal schools and day care centres, so as to prevent long-term exclusion and educational disadvantage.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


