

SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED PUPILS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**Sabina Zdráhalová¹, Daniela Květenská²**

Abstract

The article focuses on the education of socially disadvantaged pupils in primary schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical basis of the contribution is children's right to education according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, social disadvantage of students, criticism of neoliberalism. During the state of emergency in the Czech Republic due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the right to education was provided by distance learning. The main goal is to find out how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic and how inequality in education in primary schools in the Hradec Králové Region developed according to social workers. A qualitative strategy was chosen to obtain answers to the set goals, specifically semi-structured interviews with experts. The distance form of education during the COVID-19 pandemic in socially disadvantaged families was found to exacerbated social disadvantage in education and the social system of protection of vulnerable children used elements of control rather than assistance. The results of the study reflect the microeconomic and social impacts of the global pandemic.

KeywordsSocial Work, Social Disadvantage, Education, Endangered Child

I. Introduction*The right to education in the time of COVID-19*

The article focuses on the microeconomic and social impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, specifically how the transfer of teaching in primary schools to the distance form in children from socially disadvantaged families has been reflected. In this context, the question arises as to whether a suitable support system has been set up for children from the socially disadvantaged to prevent the social exclusion of children who, for economic reasons, could not participate regularly in distance learning. The main goal is to find out how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic and how, according to social workers, inequality developed in education in primary schools in the Hradec Králové Region.

Children's right to education is enshrined in international and national legislative documents. Under international law, children's right to contacts is governed by The Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the European Union, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Pact on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to education is defined in Article 28, according to the Convention, it is important "to introduce free and compulsory basic education". The Convention on the Rights of the Child further defines making higher education available to all, taking measures for regular schooling, making counselling and information available to children in the field of education. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms of the European Union deals with the right to education in Article 14, which, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, mentions access to vocational and further free education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights appears in Article 26, which mentions the right to free education, at least in basic compulsory education and access to higher education accessible to all according to competence. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

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defines the right to education in Article 13. This document mentions the right to free education for all, especially at the primary level, but also to the progressively free education of secondary and higher education. The right to education under the European Convention on Human Rights is enshrined in Article 2 of Protocol No. 1. According to the European Convention on Human Rights, no one must be denied the right to education.

At the level of national law, the right to education is defined in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, namely Article 33. According to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, everyone has the right to education, with pre-school and primary schooling compulsory, education free of charge. primary and secondary schools, or even universities.

It follows from the above that education is a fundamental human right. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. The pandemic affected the whole world and caused changes in the areas of personal life, employment and also education. Social distancing, lockdown and quarantine have become the main strategies in the fight against COVID-19. The current crisis has radically changed the lives of people around the world. Countries have begun to address how to ensure children's right to education while preventing the spread of COVID-19. In the Czech Republic, schools have been closed and distance education was implemented. However, many children, especially in poorer families, did not have access to the Internet, personal computer, television, which could potentially increase existing inequalities in education. Students in disadvantaged families did not have enough technology and space needed for distance learning.

The Czech School Inspectorate issued reports that process data on pupils' involvement in distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2020, the majority of primary schools were involved in distance learning, and there were obvious differences in the range and manner of involvement in teaching. 11% of incomplete primary school pupils and 16% of complete primary school pupils remain without complete communication with the school. However, there are still an estimated 9,500 pupils with whom schools have failed to establish distance learning. The main reason for not participating in learning is the lack of digital technology and insufficient internet connection. Another cause is low motivation, low support from parents. We should mention that Socioeconomic disadvantages and excluded localities that can significantly influence this apparent non-motivation (Pavlas et al, 2020).

An estimated 10, 000 pupils failed to participate in the schooling in spring 2020. At the moment, it is clear that the situation with distance learning is still unsatisfactory, even though there is a more significant and widespread reduction in the number of pupils who are completely out of education. An estimated 250,000 pupils did not have digital technology in the spring, and this number is now down to an estimated 50,000 pupils. This situation exacerbates social disadvantage. However, the findings of the Czech School Inspectorate show the importance of finding ways to communicate with pupils and how to educate them, despite the unfavourable socio-economic background. The key figure is the class teacher, who can lead to the positive participation of pupils in education (Pavlas, —————Zatloukal et al 2021).

Social disadvantage in education in the context of neoliberalism

There is no uniform definition of social exclusion in the literature. Most definitions show a lack of participation in society. According to Hills, Le Grand, Pichaud (2002), social exclusion is defined as "...a process of long-term non-participation in economic, civil and social norms that integrate and govern the society in which an individual lives...". Room (1995) perceives social exclusion in the context of law, defining social exclusion as "...denial or non-realization of civil, political, and social rights of citizenship...". Social exclusion in education is related to economic and social changes occurring in society, namely unemployment, family instability, social isolation, failure of social networks, etc. (Basher, 2010). Two approaches can be found in the literature in the context of social disadvantage. The first and dominant approach is the economic approach. The economic approach is based on the theory of human capital and focuses mainly on the unemployment of people, which causes inequality of access that other people have, and education is part of this model. The second

approach to social exclusion is socio-politically-economic conditions and processes, that leaves children without equal access to education. (Babalís, 2013)

Education is one of the very important factors influencing children's development. However, education can also be a source of social exclusion, where it does not promote equal participation and access. The social exclusion of children from education is subsequently reflected in their adulthood, as education policy may not adequately prepare disadvantaged children so that they are well economically and socially integrated for adult life in society. (Klasen, 2001)

The causes of social exclusion can be found at the level of the micro, meso and macro systems (Teater, 2010). Neoliberalism begins to promote much more individual responsibility, which many critical authors such as Keller (2010), Prokop (2013) and Young (2011) reject. Young (2011) is particularly critical of the separation of personal responsibility and structural causes of problems. According to Young (2011), poverty cannot be understood as an individual problem, but in connection with the structural causes of problems. Young (2010) deals with the issue of inequality between people. He mentions that social structures produce inequalities that are unjust and give people different opportunities to achieve justice.

Social exclusion of children from education is associated with social exclusion and economic opportunities in the family they grow up in (Wilson, 1987, Hills, 1198). Keller (2010) points out, for example, that there is an increasing number of people who are permanently excluded from the labour market, who subsequently falls below the poverty line and are unable to integrate into society. This group is referred to as the "underclass", however, Keller (2010) uses the concept of declassification, which does not evoke the impression that people get into this situation through their fault.

Young (2011) also mentions that not everyone has equal opportunities. Discrimination, inequality and oppression have not been eliminated, which is why structural inequality limits people's life choices. Some have limited opportunities in their lives due to injustices, while others may be more privileged. There is a connection between premature termination in the professional literature, inequality and social exclusion (Frankenberg, Kotok, 2013). The social disadvantage of children in education has serious consequences for the further life of children. Some authors, such as Bäckman and Ferrarini (2010), consider the risk of poverty and social exclusion to some extent transgenerational. Socially disadvantaged children are more likely to experience health problems, less learned processes for dealing with difficult situations, and the likelihood of "*...inadaptable or irresponsible...*" behaviour in adulthood increases. (Roosa, Deng, Nail, et al., 2005)

In society, we can also look at the inequality of the poor differently. The poor are portrayed as people who have got into their situation through their fault and are also labelled as irresponsible. The irresponsibility of the poor is mediated, controlled and subject to public control. Whereas rich people do not get that much attention. For example, in economic crises, the poor are blamed for the high cost to society of their responsibility. (Young, 2011)

Social work is based on the context in which it is implemented. Therefore, it is affected by the political and economic environment. The influence of neoliberalism on the functioning of social work is much more discussed in the professional literature. Loïc Wacquant and David Harvey mention that neoliberal ideology has transformed the welfare state, which was formerly focused on the guarantee of rights and is now focused on the control and supervision of people. There is also a connection between the state and capital, where the state serves capital in such a way as to pacify people in such way as to accumulate capital (Harvey, 2005, Wacquant, 2012) According to Wacquant (2012), there are four policies on which stands a neoliberal state, namely economic, social, criminal and cultural policy.

The cultural policy seeks to promote individual responsibility and introduce motivational discourse. People need to learn the norms of neoliberalism and perceive this ideology as their own through governmentality. Governmentality is a set of interventions affecting people, which is focused on shaping people's mentality. Anatomical politics focuses on controlling the individual body and

biopolitics focuses on regulating entire populations. The main idea is homo oeconomicus and individualism. (Wacquant, 2012)

The economic policy seeks to enforce market mechanisms in all areas of people's lives, as they are presented as the optimal means for society to function. Social expenditure is presented as unnecessarily high. Social welfare is presented in the context of individualism, specifically, each person is responsible for their social welfare. Economic policy has an impact on the realisation of social work. Social workers do not focus on improving the situation of clients, but rather on the financial maintenance of social services and the quality of service. Preventive activities are not given enough attention. (Wacquant, 2012)

The criminal policy serves to suppress deviations from society's norms. The tools of criminal policy, which Wacquant (2012) refers to prison fare, are being strengthened. Prison fare is not gender-neutral and focuses mainly on men, women are regulated by the welfare system. In the context of the manifest purpose, Prisonfare is justified as fair and serves to protect safety. Prison fare is also related to education, as prison fare includes partnerships between the police and other public services, specifically in the context of education, schools, social and social protection bodies, employment offices, etc. Schools are starting to fight truancy at the expense of their educational mission. (Wacquant, 2014)

Through social policy, the neoliberal state strives to uphold the social order. In the past, the role of the welfare state was protected, but now it focuses more on corrective policy. The main principle of social policy is the principle of welfare, where people become homo oeconomicus (Beck, 2014). The social policy set up in this way works based on retaliation, i.e. he who does not work does not deserve help. Social policy also focuses on regulating people in other areas. (Wacquant, 2012)

II. Methodology

Following the above theoretical background, the main goal of the practical part was determined, which is identical to the goal of the whole article. The main goal was to find out how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic and how, according to social workers, inequality in education in primary schools in the Hradec Králové region developed. The main goal was logically divided into two sub-goals, within which five research questions were set:

SG1: Find out how social workers support students with social disadvantages during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RQ1: To find out what support socially disadvantaged families needed from the point of view of social workers during the COVID-19 pandemic from social workers.

RQ2: To find out what support was provided by social workers to socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RQ3: To find out what support was provided by social institutions to socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SG2: Find out how inequality in education has developed from the point of view of social workers.

RQ4: To find out how social workers think about social isolation and social disadvantage of primary school pupils during the COVID-19 pandemic.

RQ5: To find out how social workers think about the material isolation of primary school pupils.

The main goal influenced the choice of research strategy. The subject of our research was to find out how social workers support socially disadvantaged pupils and the opinion of social workers on the development of inequality in education in primary schools. We decided to use a qualitative research strategy, which Disman (2002, p. 285) defines as: "...non-numerical investigation and interpretation

of social reality for this reason. The aim here is to reveal the meaning underlying the information provided ... ". A qualitative research strategy will enable us to understand the researched phenomena in detail and comprehensively.

For the research survey, we decided to use the technique of semi-structured interviews with social workers, which allowed us to look into the researched issues. We used the study and analysis of documents as a supporting research technique.

The selection of the research sample can be characterized as intentional. According to Vojtíšek (2012, p. 8), the aim of intentional selection is: "... to select respondents with some predefined intention of the researcher to represent the selected characteristics...". Specifically, they were social workers of the body of social and legal protection of children operating in the entire Hradec Králové region. Other participants addressed are social workers of social activation services for families with children who also operate in the entire Hradec Králové region.

Characteristics of informants:

I1 - worker of the social and legal protection of children, 23 years of experience in the field,

I2 - worker of the social and legal protection of children, 15 years of experience in the field,

I3 - worker of the social and legal protection of children, 21 years of experience in the field,

I4 - NGO worker - social activation services for families with children, 3 years of experience in the field,

I5 - NGO worker - social activation services for families with children, 8 years of experience in the field,

I6 - NGO worker - social activation services for families with children, 2 years of experience in the field.

The thematic categorization according to Clarke was chosen for the analysis of the obtained data. The procedure of thematic categorization consisted of three parts. Categories were created first, followed by sample creation, and the third step was coding. (Braun, Clarke, 2006)

III. Results

This part evaluates the answers of informants to partial question questions and summarizes the answer to the main research question and the aim of this work, which finds how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic and how social workers developed inequality in education at primary schools in the Hradec Králové region. The evaluation below is based on the structure of the determined partial research questions.

Support for pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic (SG1)

Necessary support for socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic from social workers (RQ1)

The analysis of the interviews shows that in the context of education, socially disadvantaged families needed to set up communication with the school so that they could orient themselves in the requirements of the school. According to informant I4, communication with the school was very important to support, as parents and children needed to orient themselves in the requirements of the school. Specifically, they needed to know how online teaching will take place, how a parent can communicate with a teacher, how to submit assignments, etc. As the I2 informant said, it is important to mention that many families do not have internet or telephone to communicate with the school. According to informants I2, I4, I5, these facts were also new for teachers who did not have enough information about the family situation. The social worker of the social activation service was an important mediator who was able to support parents and children insufficient communication with the school (I4, I6). According to informant I1, the approaches of schools were very different, some

schools accepted the material situation of the family and offered parents the opportunity to pick up teaching materials in person. However, other schools did not accept the situation and pressured parents to acquire the technique and quickly learn to work with it. Support for excusing the child, sending individual tasks, etc. was also important (I4).

Another important area of support is the setting of the day mode according to informant I5. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the cessation of the spread of the disease, it was important to respect social distancing, which is why the teaching of primary school pupils has moved to the home environment. The parents stayed at home with the children, most often taking nursing care, which allowed them to have at least a partial income. This fact was new for children and parents alike, and they had to set a whole new routine for themselves and their children. Socially disadvantaged families often needed sufficient support to be able to coordinate all activities related not only to household management but also to the education of children (I4, I5). Specifically, it was a matter of keeping the teaching time, which could change due to distance education, which affected the whole course of the family. Parents also needed support in spending free time with their children (I6).

According to informants I1, I3 and I4, they also needed the support of a socially disadvantaged family in providing a computer, software and internet connection. Most socially disadvantaged families did not have the technical equipment and did not have enough funds to provide it. Distance learning began to be taught online in most schools, requiring a computer, the Internet and software. Foundations and endowment funds and collections used collections and endowment funds to provide a computer, software and internet connection to a social worker of social activation services (I3, I4, I5) and a body for social and legal protection of children (I1, I2). They also supported parents in communicating with the school about the possibility of borrowing equipment for distance education (I1, I5). However, some schools did not have the opportunity to lend an Internet connection or computers and therefore mostly turned to foundations, endowment funds, collections, etc. In exceptional cases, they also turned to the Labor Office to provide equipment, specifically asking for a dose of emergency immediate assistance (I3). However, this option was not used because it is not flexible enough, its handling is conditioned by bureaucratic procedures of employees of the Labor Office, they also require evidence that their parents often can not get, etc.

According to informant I5, children and parents of socially disadvantaged families needed support in arranging the tutoring. Ensuring tutoring consisted of explaining the curriculum, preparation for tests, examinations, help with completing tasks. Some of these activities could not be fulfilled by the parents and therefore this support was very important to socially disadvantaged children to be able to acquire new knowledge and thus continue their studies. Parents were unable to explain the curriculum to their children due to insufficient education. Parents did not understand the subject matter and therefore could not help their children. Here we can perceive signs of transgenerational transmission, about which for example, Bäckman and Ferrarini (2010) write about. Parents in socially disadvantaged families usually come from socially excluded families or poor families. At the same time, the inequality of opportunity is evident, for example, Young (2011) writes about.

According to informant I5, after providing the equipment needed for distance learning of socially disadvantaged students, the family needed support in handling and working with a computer. Parents and children learned to work with the Internet, email address, electronic school system, etc. Some schools communicated through an online school system, which was completely unknown and new to children and parents. Socially disadvantaged families had to acquire new competencies in a short time so that these children could be educated in a distance way. Some parents encountered a misunderstanding of teachers or the approach of a school that was not oriented in a family situation and did not understand the lack of mastery of computer and Internet manipulation.

Parents of disadvantaged children also did not have enough information about education and COVID-19. The lack of information was caused by the fact that they did not have a television, radio, telephone or laptop where they could obtain information. Social workers of social activation services passed on information about education, the closing of educational information, etc. Crisis intervention was often

very important because parents and children felt the elderly from a new illness, uncertain future, etc. (informants I4, I5)

According to informant I3, parents needed help in dealing with the unfavourable social situation that had persisted since before the COVID-19 pandemic. From the experience of social workers of social activation services (informant I4 and I5) and the analysis of case studies, it can be concluded that the unfavourable social situation of parents rather deepened with the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the overall family situation. The deepening of the difficult financial situation is obvious in almost all families. The lack of financial resources also affected education, as parents could not provide their children with sufficient equipment and facilities for distance education, see more above.

Real support for socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic from social workers (RQ2)

In connection with the real support of social workers of social activation services for families. However, the fact that in 2020 in the period March-May, social activation services for families with children were suspended by a decision of the Government of the Czech Republic in the performance of its activities is very important. Social workers of social activation services in the Hradec Králové Region provided social activation services by telephone. However, due to the impossibility of personal consultations and escorts, the support was not as intense as families needed.

Social workers of social activation services provided support to disadvantaged families at all necessary points, which they considered important. Specifically, it was communication with the school and orientation in the school system, setting the day mode, providing a computer, software and internet connection, providing tutoring, support in handling and working on a computer, providing sufficient information about education and the situation related to COVID-19, help in dealing with an unfavourable social situation.

Social workers of social activation services for families with children mention that there was almost no support from social workers of the social and legal protection body for children. Social workers in the social and legal protection of children did not significantly cooperate with schools or monitor the current state of children's education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they began to provide mainly telephone consultations, standard fieldwork and social surveys provided only in cases endangering the life and health of the child. They hardly provided preventive activities.

Necessary support for socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic from educational institutions from the point of view of social workers (RQ3)

First, we will focus on the analysis of the implementation of teaching in the Hradec Králové region during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the social workers of the social activation services (informants I4, I5, I6), the differences in the approach of primary schools for families with children are very individual. Some educational institutions ensured children's right to online education in a form that simulated the usual form of teaching. Access to online teaching can be divided into two areas. The first approach is to follow the schedule. Socially disadvantaged families were overburdened in schools that adhered to the schedule. The second approach is to set a shorter schedule and combine it with self-study, specifically it was about homework, worksheets, etc. schools taught remotely using worksheets.

Support for educational institutions was very different. According to social workers (I2, I4), some schools lent technical equipment, met during their education and, if necessary, provided other than online teaching. These schools seamlessly switched to online teaching. The remaining schools provided almost no support to socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Usually, teachers did so because of ignorance of the family environment. Educators did not have enough information about the material and housing conditions that affected the education of socially disadvantaged children. Specifically, it is a background for distance education, insufficient aids, insufficient technical equipment, etc. Earlier absence from school or worse performance intensified

the control of educational institutions that applied higher supervision and socially disadvantaged families in compliance with unrealistic requirements caused mainly by the previous unfavourable social situation.

Subsequently, we will focus on the analysis of the results of meeting the requirements of parents and children. Again, it depended on the different requirements of the school. According to informant I5, the fulfilment of the requirements was managed in schools that had real and adequate requirements for socially disadvantaged families. While in schools that placed high demands on parents and children, parents could not meet the requirements of the school. Failure to manage school was usually not caused by insufficient competencies of parents or children, but rather by financial or material background.

Development of inequality in education from the point of view of social workers (SG2)

Social workers of social activation services for families with children (informants I4, I5, I6) agree that the inequality of socially disadvantaged primary school students has deepened. Their choice is mainly justified by the financial and material situation of the family, due to which the parents were unable to provide technical equipment. However, these were not insufficient competencies, but rather the poverty of socially disadvantaged families. Social workers mention that it was much more difficult for families who had problems with securing the child's right to education in the past, with the causes of the problems arising at the micro, meso and macro systemic levels. The parents did not understand the assignment, there was no tutoring in the family, no communication was set up between the parent and child. Parents also could not work with a technique that prevented the child from participating in online education. Socially excluded children had no interaction with other classmates, thus deepening social inequality again. It was much worse for them to rejoin the team because they did not maintain contact with their classmates and also did not understand the material covered, due to the lack of material equipment for teaching.

Education greatly affects adult life. However, from this point of view, the education of socially disadvantaged children appears rather as a source of social exclusion that does not promote equal participation and access. Klasen (2001) would describe the educational policies of such countries as inadequate for preparation for economic and socially integrated entry into life. According to the social workers of social activation services, these children have a higher risk of social exclusion and the opportunity to become so-called declassified, who are permanently excluded from the labour market and fall below the poverty line (Keller, 2010).

Social isolation of primary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of social workers (RQ4)

Social workers of social activation services (informant I5, I6) mention that social inequality in education deepened again during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main strategy against the spread of COVID-19 was social distance, which also affected the education of primary school children. Contact between peers was kept to a minimum, especially in winter and spring. The children were worried about their classmates. Classmates created online classes in which they met. However, socially disadvantaged students who did not have sufficient equipment could not have this contact. There was also an increase in the separation of children. Parents were afraid of COVID-19, so the children did not want to go to primary school even if the child could. Further isolation was caused by not attending hobby groups.

The social situation was also related to the family situation, as unfavourable social situations for individual families began to deepen, as stated by informant I2. Due to the more demanding family situation, parents no longer had sufficient capacity to deal with children's education. For example, it was very difficult for families to deal with completing the worksheets if the family did not have enough money for food and rent. Social workers also mention that there has been an increase in violence, poverty, indebtedness, substance use, etc.

Material isolation of primary school students during the COVID-19 pandemic from the point of view of social workers (RQ5)

Social workers of social activation services (informants I4, I5, I6) agree that the material isolation of socially disadvantaged primary school students deepened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The financial situation of families began to change significantly. Although the children did not have to pay for commuting to school, family costs increased. These were mainly surcharges for electricity, water, food. The high cost of distance education was the work background for a primary school student, the acquisition of technical equipment important for education, internet connection, etc. Often employees of the automotive industry, hospitality and other fields did not have enough financial rewards to ensure the financial functioning of the family.

According to informant I5, a possible solution to their situation was the employment office. Labour office workers were overwhelmed. Clients turned to the employment office not only with the solution of school aids for distance education but also the overall family situation. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs began to promote a dose of extraordinary immediate assistance, which clients of social workers of social activation services began to use. However, the employment office did not provide a dose of extraordinary immediate assistance for rent, and in some cases not for the payment of a laptop and internet connection, which was necessary for distance education of children. The Labor Office also did not react flexibly to the crisis situation but usually adhered to long deadlines. At the same time, he also demanded documents from clients, which clients often could not procure on their own. These documents are usually associated with the willingness of the owner or employer, etc. For this reason, social workers of social activation services for families with children solved the material situation of the family with the help of civic assistance, foundation and endowment contributions.

Neoliberal society often views clients in terms of individualism and promotes individual responsibility for the situation in which it finds itself. The analysis of case studies shows that social disadvantage arises at the level of the micro, meso and macro systems. However, structural causes are neglected and socially disadvantaged parents are referred to as non-responders. However, according to Young (2011), poverty cannot be understood as an individual problem, but the Labor Office was not willing to help it. According to the statements of social workers of social activation services, the Labor Office can be described as a soft cop of a neoliberal society

IV. Conclusion and discussion

This research communication aimed to find out how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic and how, according to social workers, inequality in education in primary schools in the Hradec Králové Region developed. A qualitative research strategy, semi-structured interviews with experts - social workers of social legal protection and social activation services for families with children - were used for the evaluation. Two sub-objectives were evaluated, one addressing how social workers supported pupils from socially disadvantaged families during the COVID-19 pandemic (SG1) and another sub-objective focusing on the development of educational inequality in primary schools in the Hradec Králové region from the perspective of social workers (SG2). Based on the evaluation of the above information obtained by the questionnaire survey, it can state the following findings:

- It was found that the parents needed help in dealing with the unfavourable social situation that had persisted since before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- It was found that socially disadvantaged families also needed support in providing computers, software and internet connection. Most socially disadvantaged families did not have the technical equipment and did not have enough funds to provide it.
- It was found that the school's approach was very different, some schools did not accept the situation and pressured parents to acquire the technique and quickly learn to work with it.

- It was found that schools that adhered to the schedule had an overload of socially disadvantaged families, in schools that had real and adequate requirements for socially disadvantaged families, the fulfilment of requirements from distance learning was managed.
- It was found that social activation services for families with children were stalled in the performance of their activities and provided social activation services by telephone, the support was not as intensive as families needed.
- Social workers of social and legal protection did not significantly cooperate with schools or monitor the current state of children's education, because of the COVID-19 pandemic they started providing mainly telephone consultations.
- It was found that teachers did not have enough information about the material and housing conditions that affected the education of socially disadvantaged children, school institutions applied higher supervision to socially disadvantaged families in compliance with unrealistic requirements mainly caused by the previous unfavourable social situation.
- It was found that socially excluded children had no interaction with other classmates, which increased social inequality again.
- It was found that the unfavourable social situation of individual families deepened, due to the more demanding family situation, parents no longer had sufficient capacity to deal with the children's education.

In summary, we can state that during the period of distance learning at schools, pupils from socially disadvantaged families deepened their social disadvantage and social workers provided only a limited - distance - a form of support, despite the needs of socially disadvantaged families.

The results of the research show that during the period of distance learning in schools, pupils from socially disadvantaged families deepened their social disadvantage. In practice, the deepening social disadvantage of families could not be detected by sufficient prevention, or the government of the Czech Republic decided to suspend the provision of social activation services for families with children at a time when families needed sufficient support in the context of education. As mentioned by Prokop (2012), the system of care for vulnerable children in the Czech Republic responds primarily to crisis situations and not to prevention, which is much more financially advantageous.

In the context of the criminal policy, schools applied much more control over socially disadvantaged families, usually due to ignorance of the family environment. The context of neoliberalist criminal policy, which presents itself as neutral, is confirmed. The research confirms the statement of Wacquant (2012), which mentions that schools are starting to struggle much more with truancy at the expense of their educational mission. Instead of guaranteeing children's right to education and striving to secure it, schools focus on controlling and supervising poor and socially disadvantaged families who do not meet society's standards. The above statement is reinforced by the fact that schools do not have enough information about the background of students.

Through social policy, the neoliberal state strives to uphold the social order. In the past, the role of the welfare state was protected, but now it focuses more on corrective policy. The main principle of social policy is the principle of workfare, where people become homo oeconomicus (Beck, 2014). The social policy set up in this way works based on retaliation, ie. he who does not work does not deserve help. Social policy also focuses on regulating people in other areas. (Wacquant, 2012)

The above results also reveal a tendency of neoliberalism, which focuses not on guaranteeing rights, but rather on punishing the poor, who are supposed to function as an obedient homo oeconomicus (Wacquant, 2012). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Labor Office did not provide sufficient support to socially disadvantaged families for technical equipment for the distance education of their children. Families also needed funds to meet the needs of their children. The lack of funds in families exacerbated the unfavourable social situation.

The distance form of education during the COVID-19 pandemic for socially disadvantaged families deepened the social disadvantage in education. Most socially disadvantaged children did not have a computer and internet connection, so their education at the time of school closure was without online

teaching. Children did not learn the schoolwork in online learning. Their parents often could not help them because they did not understand the subject matter themselves. The children were also out of touch with their peers.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the apparent incompetence of parents results from unfavourable social situations, which are largely influenced mainly by the lack of financial and material situation than from a lack of competence or apparent non-motivation. Social workers can influence this situation. It offers a reflection on the importance of their role in the period of anti-epidemiological measures – they appear essential and irreplaceable.

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