

# THE NEED OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT OF THE FAMILIES UNDERGOING DIVORCE

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**Abstract.** The article is based on the results of qualitative research on the importance of professional social support for the family that experienced divorce. The research participants were as follows: preschool children of N city attending social care day centre and parents (6 couples), who after undergoing the divorce had the need for social support provided by professional caseworkers. The research uses qualitative research method applied to survey with four persons that had undergone the divorce recently. The research has revealed that the major demand of these parents with preteen children was the necessity of professional educational, psychological, medical, legal, mediatory support as well as consultancies. The informants had obtained support on institutional level, which was provided during divorce by personnel of Family Practice Institute and Initial Healthcare and Mental Health Centres as well as caseworkers of the municipalities. The research has demonstrated that a family undergoing divorce is lacking successive and complex help.

**Key words:** *divorce, social support, caseworker and family.*

## **Introduction.**

Family is one of the oldest social institutions, a union of a small group of people, which is based on public, economic and biological relations as well as common concerns. It is a community of persons linked by kinship, responsibility and mutual care. The family forms the traits of personal character, the attitude towards ethical and cultural values, the socialization of children is performed there (Kvieskienė, 2005, 2007). Family is the basis of various social institutions, all social roles and models of the behaviour are obtained by people in family. The stability of family determines its functioning as a social institution.

During the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century family has experienced tricky times, namely, economic crisis, unemployment, failure to adapt to any new conditions as well as increased social and economic independence of women; while creating family everyone considers personal happiness by enhancing requirements for his (her) partner; insufficient responsibility felt by one of the partners, lifestyle, labour migration, urbanization and industrialization – all this stimulates divorce and increases the number of non-registered marriages. Attention should be drawn to the spreading of the European family model as family beyond legitimate marriage, family beyond marriage, but having children, families that consist of the persons in the second marriage as well as same-sex marriages.

Divorce does not come unawares – various conflicts emerge before or family members are not communicating at all, or they already do not live together. Divorce becomes not sort of problem, because everyone disregards it. Frequently divorce opportunity can be foreseen even at the beginning of marriage. The very position that the divorce means an allowable way to escape a fraught situation stimulates the divorce. The divorce is not a disgrace in modern society anymore, because divorce is assessed according to personal satisfaction. The increasing number of divorces does not mean deep disappointment in marriage itself, but the resolution to turn it into relations that are awarding and bringing satisfaction (Giddens, 2005). Societies

with a large number of divorces experience not only loss of parents, but also the erosion of parenthood as an idea; societies, where the divorce is easily accessible and where marriage is not a stable and indestructible link, the institution marriage is becoming weaker (Salij, 2002).

According to Burvytė (2013) crises of mutual links of the parents are frequently solved by divorce; as often as not, but the parents that are separated officially extend mutual conflicts also after divorce, or we find families that are in two minds in respect to divorce, nevertheless, its members permanently debate by feeling mutual anger. Divorce is accompanied by emotional trials, unrealised expectations, despair, grief, relief and hope (Matulienė, 2012). Divorce not only determines the reorganisation of whole family system, influences the total development of such system, but it also evokes long-term grievous experience.

Every other marriage comes to bits in Lithuania. All developed countries across the world have divorce as a relevant problem, however, in some countries it is more prevalent and less prevalent in the rest. For example: every year about one million of families divorce in the USA. One divorced couple is for two couples getting married within the period of one year (Воронина, 2011). According to Maslauskaitė (2005), the EU, Scandinavian countries as well as Great Britain demonstrate the highest indicators of divorce. In Great Britain 20% of under-aged children live with one of the parents, but in Spain and Greece it makes only 3%.

The problem of divorce (causes, consequences and help) is extensively analysed in scholarly works of Lithuanian psychologists: Burvytė (2013), Maslauskaitė (2005, 2010, 2011), Petronis (2007), Matulienė (2012), Kaminskienė (2010), as well as scholarly works of foreign authors: Giddens (2005), Amato & Previti (2003), Hawkins & Fackrell (2009), Ambert (2009), Воронина, (2012), Fagan & Churchill (2012) Berger & Gravillon (2010), etc.

In analysing the divorce problem in Lithuania the most important role in research was played by Maslauskaitė (2010, 2011 & 2012). Her articles about family that suffered divorce highlight the topic of divorce.

*Consequently, the divorce and its consequences is a social phenomenon that requires special attention. This article searches for the answer to the scientific problem of the research: what character has the demand to receive social support expected by families that had undergone divorce and how to determine the role played by professional caseworkers?*

**The aim of the article** is to reveal the need for professional social support felt by the families that underwent divorce.

**The objectives of the research:**

1. Academic substantiation of the performance done by caseworkers as mediators who help undergo the divorce.
2. Empirical revelation of the demand for professional social support provided to families that underwent divorce.

**Methods:**

- Analysis of scientific literature was performed in order to review scientific literature resources as well as accomplished investigations of divorce process, its causes, consequences, intervention models and mediator's role in caseworkers' performance.
- Analysis of and demand for qualitative research results. The research was performed within the period from October-December, 2014 until January-March, 2015. Six families undergoing divorce were selected for testing (four families were living divorced for one year, and two families were still in the process of divorce). These informants were examined by using semi-structured survey. The categories and sub-categories were distinguished by qualitative research analysis and they were interpreted by using particular examples.

### Academic substantiation of the performance of the caseworkers as agents providing help in order to go through the divorce crisis

Social work could be defined as performance that helps to solve typical social problems inherent to person or family respecting their possibilities and participation; such performance must not affect their human dignity and increase responsibility based on collaboration of person, family and society. A profession related to social work not only stimulates social change and solutions of the problems of human interrelations, but also provides opportunities and help intended for development of human life; social work aims at harmony between people and their surroundings (Kavaliauskienė, 2005). The caseworker operating as an undertaker of performance, contributor and adviser helps family to understand the course by enabling the family members to communicate with each other.

The divorce is a long-term process reorganising the whole family system, therefore, social work as performance is not a short-term action, but the process covering three main interacting components: *the client, environment and the caseworker himself/herself* (Kavaliauskienė, 2005). The caseworker operating within the scope of divorce crises relating intervention must have relevant professional, social and personal competence (Liobikienė, 2006).

By starting communication with family members during divorce crisis the caseworker is playing many different roles (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Caseworker's roles during divorce crisis intervention (structured by authors according to Johnson, 2001)

Contacting worker	Teacher	Mobilizer
Agent	Person changing behaviour	Consultant
Protector	Person managing data	Society planner
Assessor	Manager	Service conveyor

Parkinson (2000) assesses divorce as event, which evokes the utmost stress, when family members experience anger, shock and disappointment, they are vulnerable, and for such reason they can act destructively in respect to each other; they can act by raising conflicts and are not ready to solve the situation positively (Sondaitė, 2006). In order to protect the relationships of the spouses against destructive evolution, increasing of the conflict, mutual suspicion and development of distrust, the third person – a professional caseworker-mediator with the aim to permit future constructive communication, helps to solve family's problems. Mediation process in social work is especially important, because it not only helps to restore family's relations with social surroundings, but also enables family to use proper service. Such mediation covers a wide scope of the processes of social work: assessment of situation, search of recourses starting from readiness of the family to accept the help up to contacting relevant service for providing assurance that family will receive the help and use it.

In pursuance of the aim to help family in ruling a conflict or improve mutual communication during divorce crisis, the caseworker shall be governed by **mediation qualities** as follows: *interrelations* (everything in the world is interrelated), *particularity* (each person's behaviour is special), *care and respect*, *generalisation* (while solving conflict future must be taken into account), *humility* (lack of knowledge must be reflected) and *orientation towards the demands* (Kaminskienė, et al., 2013).

Surveyed mediation stages presuppose that number of mediation stages is not important, because the mediation process, after finding out the position and needs of any conflicting parties, follows its main task, namely to find a solution that satisfies both parties. In order to complete the mentioned tasks, the caseworker is governed by general **mediation principles**,

i.e. *confidentiality, volunteerism, enablement, neutrality, unique solution, professionalism, fairness, operational efficiency and concentration of process, flexibility as well as mediation rules*, which are discussed by one of the major documents of the world – European Code for Conduct of Mediators providing volunteerism, acceptability, neutrality, impartiality and confidentiality.

With reference Kaminskienė, et al. (2013) affirm that mediation is a process oriented to the interests of the parties, then the caseworker-mediator must organize the process in a way that disputing parties have time for speaking and have mutual discussions in order to be heard. The family undergoing divorce participates in mediation by passing certain **stages**:

1. Initiation of mediation process,
2. Preliminary questions asked during mediation,
3. Meeting,
4. Performance after mediation process

In general it is possible to state that the role being played by caseworker as a mediator and conveyor of social support during family divorce crisis is especially important, because it strives for the welfare of the family. Impartial third person – professional caseworker as a mediator is especially important for family members that undergo loss and have many different feelings, because the caseworker has professional competence – knowledge, capabilities and relevant skills that could help to overcome crisis.

Mediation during divorce or after divorce of the family is useful for solving the whole scope of family conflicts, also for restoration of communication between former spouses, particularly in situations concerned with children and covering education, financial duties, etc. Caseworker as a mediator can ease the process of the divorce families go through as well as stimulate fair communication and collaboration between such conflicting parties thus satisfying social demands of the families that underwent the divorce.

#### **The need of professional social support of the families going through divorce: presentation of the research results**

In order to highlight the reasons and problems inherent to the families going through divorce, to analyse social support providers as well as problems rising while providing social support the research methodology was prepared and qualitative research was also performed.

**Research technique and its arrangement:** For experiential research, which was performed within 2014-15 years period, qualitative research method was selected, because the aim was to know the demand for providing social support to families undergoing divorce. Qualitative method itself presents the analysis being performed in natural surroundings; it strives for understanding problems of families undergoing divorce as well as the submission of explanations rising out of the analysis of such situations. With respect to the fact that qualitative research is marked by minimal numbers showing non-representative cases, 6 families undergoing divorce (12 informants) were selected and tested during this research with the aim to obtain understanding about the reasons and consequences of the divorce phenomenon as well as the possibilities to provide social support.

In order to find out about the experiences of families undergoing divorce and possibility to provide social support 6 (semi-structured) surveys were accomplished with families that already were separated (for a year), also with families in the process of divorce. A questionnaire had been prepared and submitted for the research which was intended for family, i.e. for husband and wife. This questionnaire was structured in accordance with general theoretic assumptions related to divorce problem and caseworker's performance possibilities reflecting social support. This questionnaire was structured of 4 blocks, each containing 30 questions (the authors do not submit the questionnaire because of the limited scope of the article).

**Research was performed** in 2014.

**Research sample.** The main criterion for the selection of participants of the research was families undergoing divorce (in the process of divorce and already being divorced for a year) that had under-age children. Particular social care daytime institution of N city, which was attended by under-age children, was selected for doing research. There was no trouble to survey families undergoing divorce in the process of communicating with parents of children as well as providing them social, educational and healthcare help.

*General set* included families undergoing divorce (out of them: 2 were in the process of divorce, and 4 families were separated for a year), i.e. parents of children attending N special child care centre.

The method selected for structuring *research sample* was purposive non-probability sampling, when, according to Žukauskienė (2008), the researcher includes elements to the selection whole according to the goals of the research. With reference to Kardelis (2002), the investigated groups of people in small volume research are formed by not fully following random sampling principle. Strict sampling volume requirements are not applied to qualitative research; therefore, 6 families were questioned during the survey. With reference to the fact that in Lithuania 5300 couples with under-age children yearly become separated (Lithuanian Department of Statistics, 2013) the survey with 6 families undergoing divorce by following the aim to clear out deep reasons of the divorce as well as the needs for professional social support, is an important foundation and chance to receive valuable answers to the topical question of the research. The average duration of the research was 1 hour and 10 minutes. The longest survey was running for 1 hour and 40 minutes, but the shortest one – only for 30 minutes.

**Processing of research data** was performed by using content analysis. Content analysis is the way used for drawing objective conclusions by identifying and classifying specific message records (Žukauskienė, 2008). The obtained survey data were transferred from audible expression into written one, and they were grouped according to typical features of selected data, i.e. they were systemised, classified by searching causative, functional and structural relations.

**Ethics of the research:** Ethical principles, namely, privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, fairness as well as voluntary participation were followed in the course of the research and while communicating with the informants. Written agreements of the respondents were obtained before starting the research by ensuring the confidentiality of data as well as intolerance for disclosure of information to other family members. For pursuing anonymity of family members, any names of the respondents were not used, but they were encoded.

### Discussion

**Demographic data:** The research sample consisted of 12 informants or 6 families undergoing divorce, i.e. 6 men and 6 women, whose average age in years was 31,6 (women) and 34,1 (men). This coincides with the Lithuanian statistical data on divorce of the year 2013, when the highest divorce indexes were recorded namely in the group of 30-34 years. Most of these informants had higher education and lived in the city. By analysing the period of relations before marriage of these informants as well as the duration of marriage, it was noticed that average time of friendship prior to the marriage is close to 4 years (3 years and 10 months). Scientific literature assesses the first 5 years of the marriage as critical (Maslauskaitė & Baublytė, 2012; Matulienė, 2012; Hawkins & Fackrell, 2009; Воронина, 2012), when conflicts use to increase together with the probability of divorce.

All families participating in the survey had one or two under-age children. Under-age children growing up in one-parent families are a relevant problem, which creates many difficulties in the development of the child as well as communication with separately living mother and father.

The obtained data give evidence that women mostly initiate the divorce, the men do not tend to initiate the divorce themselves, usually they choose to live separately (only 2 men of 6 made up their mind to initiate the declaration of marriage as invalid).

Children of all these families remained living with mothers. Nearly all informants (5 women and 6 men) had well-paid jobs: they took positions, such as division manager or service/help sector staff; only one woman remained unemployed, because she was on parental leave. Though most informants had a job, 3 women and 1 man encountered financial problems. Utmost trouble was suffered by women, who remained single with their children: *“single mother having children suffers financial difficulties. All is needed: to pay for child care centre, for groups, for clothing, etc. Husband not always pays separate maintenance (alimony), moreover, this doesn't equal to earnings of two adult people...”*, *“my income isn't high, it is sufficient just to pay for the flat and any other necessary expenses... child's father doesn't give money until we are separated ...”*. One of the men, who does not have a permanent job – he was a freelancer working under licence, also had suffered financial troubles, because he pointed out the most difficult situation – to pay alimony for child's maintenance not having money: *“sometimes I lack money for paying alimony for my children, because I don't have steady income”*.

**Social and economic picture after divorce:** Divorce not only changes a family model and causes financial troubles (particularly to women), but also changes normal conditions of family life: even 5 informants (4 women and 1 man out of them) had to change their residence place and to leave for another one (to live at parents or rent the flat). This happens because property is mostly obtained before marriage by one marriage party and after divorce it does not belong to the other marriage party (according to part 1, Article 3.89 of CC of RL): *“I left him and now I am living with my friend in the leased flat...”*; *“...the flat, which was bought together with my wife after divorce came to her...”*; *“... I remained with two small children without home and came back to live with my parents, because I hadn't another way...”*; *“I am leasing a flat...”* The divorce evokes a lot of negative emotional trials, particularly to the marriage partner who is left, therefore, in a time, when solving property question, objective thinking becomes difficult; commonly men apply psychological pressure and women are leaving property themselves: *“(he) needs me to leave as soon as possible...”*; *“... I lost the flat, because it was my husband's condition... if I don't return the flat and leave with children to live at my parents, he will take both of my children...”* *“... began leasing flat separately... always threatened me saying that, if I start meeting with another man, he will take my girl away from me...”* *“...he asked me to marry after 2 months of our acquaintanceship...”* Such prompt decisions do not allow ensuring the fairness of the decision, therefore, divorce happens naturally. Men and women of other families stated the fact of being in friendship for 2-4 years; nevertheless, these spouses were living together before their marriage, and this increased the probability of divorce.

Most of the informants had affirmed that their families became separated after 2-5 years of marriage. First (2-5) years of the marriage are meant as development of relations, when many multiple factors (e.g. conflicts, negative emotions, stress and tiredness, particularly if a baby has been born recently) influence these relations. During this critical period even 4 families were subjected to selecting the easiest way such as divorce. Two couples that were together for 6 or 10 years had not preserved their families either.

**Consequences of divorce:** The authors of this article had distinguished 4 general categories of the consequences, i.e. personal consequences, the consequences relating to the former marriage partner, consequences to children as well as consequences relating to other persons. With reference to informants' answers to the question about the consequences of divorce the assertion is possible about negative personal consequences – negative emotional trials always are stimulated by the divorce. It was felt particularly by women, because: *“... made emotional and psychological injury...”*, *“... I became nervous, don't believe in people,*

*I don't go out of my home and go anywhere, because I feel shame for living with my parents, avoid my friends in order not to tell, how I am...*” Informants-women felt the loss of their man: *“I lost my beloved husband, my man... and became a single woman with two small children...”* or they feel guilty for initiating divorce: *“... I felt soreness because of separating after 10 years of marriage... I felt guilty against the girls...”* The men had experienced shame against friends, because they were left by their wives: *“... I felt the shame against friends, because I was left...”*, they understand loss of the family or feel anger, because *“...this process has taken too much of my patience and time...”* Four informants told that the divorce gave them the feeling of happiness, i.e. the sense of freedom; to women it revealed the possibility to love again without fear and possibility to start a new stage of their lives: *“... I am very happy for doing such a step, because I begin living a new stage of my life...”* Freedom and happiness to men revealed the possibility to live on their own or to escape the compression: *“... I regained freedom and can enjoy my life, because she already doesn't compress me...”*

The consequences relating to the former marriage partner (wife) were indicated mostly by men. They were saying that women after divorce had lost not only family, as single they will suffer difficulties with raising children, herewith they had lost material support given by husband: *“... lost the bank, and then she'll be able to know, what is the meaning of money and how to spend it...”* Opinions provided by two men about the consequences of divorce, as felt by the former marriage partner, should be distinguished, because the husband-victim thinks that *“... the former wife is happy now...”* but the man, who initiated divorce, says that *“... she told she feels trouble after divorce...”* Informants were not ready to talk openly about the consequences of divorce for their children: in women's opinion, the consequences of divorce felt by children are as follows: growing up in a one-parent family, negative emotional trials (i.e. nervousness, anger felt against mother living together): *“... the divorce is injury felt by children for their whole life”*. According to one man *“... children feel difficulties by living with such an insane mother, who defames father and his whole family...”*

Divorce not only evokes negative personal trials and consequences relating children, but one also loses former family friends and relatives – all this causes serious personal challenge. Former friends of both spouses do not want to ask over anymore, they are not willing to communicate, because it is clear that they would not be glad to see the former spouses together. One feels soreness that former relatives turn their backs *“... grandparents of the girls don't want even see me...”*

Most women affirmed that even after divorce marriage for them remained an important value: *“... marriage for me is important...”*, *“... if I meet a man, with whom I fall in love, then I'll marry once more...”*, *“... marriage for me still remains an important thing of human life...”* Only one man had agreed with the opinion of women, telling that both should wish to preserve marriage *“... by doing everything in order marriage doesn't collapse...”* Marriage has changed the viewpoint, particularly of men, because they told about negative attitude caused by their marriage: *“... after marriage woman changes...”*, *“... woman changes after marriage becoming a home keeper...”*; also for other informants marriage has caused negative emotions: they are reflected by unwillingness to marry once more, and another informant had an opinion that child is not a goal of the marriage: *“... it is no use to marry for a child...”*

Divorce is a crisis not only of the family, but also of each family member, so overcoming it depends on each personality, how it is mature and how it is ready to fight the troubles. When any person undergoes crisis, he/she is not always able to fight the consequences of crisis, consequently, the help of the specialists is necessary.

#### **Discussion of the need of professional social support specialists for divorced family**

Mostly professional help of specialists was needed by women who want to overcome the crisis of divorce. Women said that they would require specialist's professional help, the

women especially worry about children: “... I would like that someone would help to take away the pain...”, “...I would like that someone would talk to children, explain what is happening...”, “... I would like to get help from a professional... I want my children to be helped...” but a specific specialist is not indicated, because women do not know where to go or do not have financial opportunities. Another part of the informants said that professional assistance was not needed because they received help from friends, colleagues. One man said that “... I do not have time and desire to tell someone about my personal problems...” the other part of men (3 informants) said that they did not need help. Responses indicate that the view that the aid was necessary for women and children, but not for men dominates.

**Support during the divorce process.** It is important to get help on time during divorce process because it can prevent further problems. The authors of article divided the answers of the informants about received/necessary assistance during the divorce into 12 categories: *primary assistance during divorce process, forms of assistance in divorce process, professional experts' assistance and the character of help, assistance of public and private institutions to the family during a crisis, information on social worker's assistance during a family crisis, social worker and expectations for him/her, the need of information about social services workers and their services and need of assistance.*

According to Polukordienė (2003), during the primary stage of divorce, when a spouse learns/hears about the fact of divorce, the person experiences intense emotional experiences and goes through the psychological state of discomfort; the person is overwhelmed by helplessness, fear, tension. In the primary stage the assistance is especially necessary.

According to the informants' answers, the most urgent assistance they received was from the members of their close environment (4 women and 5 men). Most of the help was requested from the members of the family, they were the most trusted, namely: mother, sister or friend “... first I called my mother and asked her to come...”, “... mostly I talked with my mother ...”, “... I asked sister for help”, “...my current girlfriend was the best supporter...” During the primary stage of the divorce process, the help not only from family members, but also from professional specialists is necessary, 3 informants trusted them and asked for help (2 men and 1 woman). Divorce lawyers and divorce consultants played consultants' role.

The main form of help is moral support because most of the informants asked for help from their loved ones. At primary stage one informant (woman) received financial assistance from relatives. While most informants received moral support, three informants (men) experienced condemnation “...some people condemned, especially women in the family...”, “... people who were on wife's side, all condemned me...”, “...I have experienced the biggest condemnation from my parents, especially my mother...”. The answers of the informants suggest that in the primary stage of the process of divorce the close family members (mother, sister, girlfriend) were mostly addressed and the informants received the moral support.

During the divorce process, relatives' help usually was not enough, so people asked for professional help of social work, law and other specialists.

The analysis of the informants' answers showed that the informants during the divorce process mostly asked for social-psychological and legal assistance. The informants' answers to the question “Have you ever sought help from professional experts?” were distributed as follows: assistance from a social worker (1 woman), support from a psychologist (1 woman and 1 man) “...I consulted with a social worker quite a lot...<...> I wanted to take my husband there...” , “... I spoke with a psychologist working in our office...”, “...in the office where I work, the psychologist has experience in counselling individuals who are going through a divorce, so I communicated with him a lot...”, one women asked for medical help and 5 informants (3 men and 2 women) responded that they did not ask for help of professionals. The main functions of professional specialists are mediation and counselling. 4 informants said



that a social worker played a mediator's role and addressed them to other specialists, 2 informants said that the social worker was a consultant "... a social worker tried to reconcile us and offered to consider, offered assistance to the family..." . In the divorce process the roles of a social worker as a mediator and consultant are extremely important because a social worker helps to access services, providing people with information and a social worker as a consultant performs divorce crisis intervention, assistance in determining the need for an action plan in order to solve a problem.

In order to create safe and healthy environment for a family experiencing divorce there is a need to have institutional support where not only social workers-mediators, but also professionals and other specialists such as psychologists, lawyers and doctors could provide help. A person experiencing divorce should be able to choose whether to get support at public or at private institution.

#### **Institutional support for the family during a divorce**

Informants were asked whether they know where families experiencing various crises should look for help. The informants indicated state institutions such as the pedagogical- psychological service, assistance in a clinic where you can get a social worker's and a psychiatrist's assistance, assistance provided by social workers in the municipality, crisis centers, assistance of various institutions "...you can address family crisis centers, psychologists, social workers in school or nursery school or in private institutions...". Other informants spoke abstractly about private institutions, however, referring to their responses, it can be said that only a few informants mentioned private institutions providing services to the family "...a group of divorced individuals who gather in St. Matulaitis parish...", "...family relationships institute provides assistance to the family, there you can find social workers...". Other informants do not know specifically about private services, because they could not give the names of the institutions "... there are different specialists now ... private, maybe state; however, I do not know the addresses...", "... I know that there are a lot of private centers...", "...I think there are private companies...". The opinions of the majority of informants about the public institutions that assist families in crisis situations were different: 2 informants did not know about help which is provided: "... never heard that the help could be provided for the whole family...", "... I do not know, maybe there are centers, but I do not know..."; other 2 informants said there is various help, people just need to look for (not particular knowledge): "... nowadays you can find various kinds of assistance, you only need to look for it...", "...there are many institutions, you just need to look for and choose what is needed...". According to the informants' answers, it is possible to presuppose that there is no specific knowledge of institutional support (public or private), the informants named individual institutions that provide personal assistance, but not the assistance to the family during crisis. Therefore, not only complex-institutional family support and assistance but also the dissemination of help is necessary.

It is particularly important to receive social worker's help because social worker not only solves the arisen crisis, but also prevents larger problems from occurring in families going through divorce. The study revealed how many people who are going through divorce know about social workers' assistance.

#### **Knowledge of social worker support options for families who experienced divorce.**

Mostly the informants said that they were aware of the assistance provided by social workers to the family such as help in Child Protection Division, work with victims of violence, work with families during the divorce; work in state and non-governmental sectors; abstract knowledge of a social worker's assistance was shown by 2 informants: "... I know that they work with all kinds of drunkards and drug addicts...", "... my wife was a social worker, she said something that there is some sort of centers for men and women ...". Summing up the results of the interviews it can be said that informants lack specific knowledge about the functions

performed by a social worker working with the family. This was confirmed by 4 informants' responses that show that they do not know about the services provided by a social worker: "...I never heard about it...", "...maybe there are services, but I have never faced it...", "...if this is about some sort of an institution, then I do not know...", "...no, I do not know, the name 'social worker', it is not very clear ...".

Due to the lack of information about the services provided by a social worker, about the possibilities of social aid, without specific knowledge of assistance in times of crisis, families generally do not seek help on their own initiative and do not contact social workers so such customers' expectations are not met.

**Social support and expectations related to the social worker's intervention.** One of the interview questions was "*Have you ever asked for social worker's help? If so, what kind of support did you expect and what was given? Did it justify the expectations of the informant?*" The purpose was to find out the opinion of informants if during the divorce crisis they initiated a search for help, or sought social support from a social worker and if after a meeting with a social worker the expectations were justified. The analysis of the interview data showed that in most of the families the men and women did not look for help: "...I did not do it by my own initiative...", "...never did that, I do not know ...", "...never looked for help myself...".

Two informants sought help on their own initiative, the aim of the help was the solution of financial difficulties and social assistance. One woman was satisfied with the aid: "*I am not disappointed with the help of social worker...*" and believed that social workers do a very important job and should advertise themselves; other informant's expectations remained unaccomplished: "... I was hoping that it will help me, but it did not help, so I returned home disappointed...". Ignorance of the social workers' professional support and their activities forms a false opinion about social workers and social support provided by them: "... I think that social workers do not provide services to families; I do not even know about their functions...", "...I think a social worker communicated with me in children's rights division, but I do not think that she would be highly competent in solving family problems...", "... It was enough to see social worker at home; I did not need any more...". Although informants generally did not ask help of the social worker, but the other results of the interviews show that there is demand for information about the services of social workers. The need arises from ignorance, because of the necessity of help, and the social worker should be trained professionally, enabling individuals, families and society to change and modify the expectations and opinions.

**The need of information about social workers' services.** Most of the informants answered to the question: "Would you like to receive more information about the services provided by a social worker for families?" positively: informants were interested in the social worker's activities with divorced families: "...I would like very much to know about their work with divorced families ...", there is a need for free services provided by social worker : "...I would like to be able to go with children to get help for the whole family which would not cost...", other informants were interested in learning about the social worker's services: "... it would be interesting...", "... if the services were necessary for me, maybe it would be interesting...", other informants said that the society needs more information about the social worker, people would like to have a professional person, even one informant who had not justified expectations regarding a social worker said that he would like to get information about the services provided by a social worker and would agree to go to those institutions. 5 informants (4 men and 1 woman – working as social worker) said that there is no need for information about the social worker's services.

Divorce is the time which involves and touches all family members emotionally and physically. Loss of a loved one during divorce is equivalent to physical human losses, so people experiencing divorce not always have enough personal effort and desire to return to a

normal life. Person experiencing divorce usually feels emotionally unstable to be able to help themselves, so in this case, it is necessary to get the assistance of expert.

**The need for social assistance at the time of divorce.** According to the data of interviews, it can be said that the need for social and other assistance were distributed as follows: half of the informants say that they do not need help in the current stage of the divorce (4 men and 2 women: one year after the divorce – 4 informants and during the divorce – 2 informants). Other informants (4 women and 2 men) needed financial, social-psychological support and to start everything all over again. Women mostly needed emotional personal assistance, assistance for children and they wanted to recover emotionally: “...*need to recover emotionally, emotional assistance would be necessary...*”, financial support was important, because it is difficult to raise children; one woman still idealized the past and would like to have a life as it was: “... *I want to live again as in the past: that we could all be happy, everything would be going very well...*”. 2 men informants indicate that they mostly need personal aid and social-psychological support for their wives who are raising children “... *it takes time, time that would help to forget her...*”.

*Summarizing the results of research, it can be stated that:*

- Divorce is a tough time in each spouse’s life, during which each spouse is experiencing despair, pressure, and sadness. Women tend to react emotionally. Men are unwilling to talk about their feelings, experiences, or apply psychological pressure to the other spouse. In most cases women tend to save family while men are reluctant to seek the same when man initiates divorce. They do not want a divorce and feel particularly offended if the ex-wife has chosen another man.
- While divorce is a painful experience for all family members, family members who initiated the divorce feel more freedom and happiness. Most spouses had experienced the negative consequences of divorce and they did not tend to solve the problems, try to save the family;
- During divorce crisis spouses were generally inclined to seek help from members of the close environment, only later, after the shock informants were looking for professional social assistance. The informants indicated that they mostly consulted with lawyers, psychologists, sometimes with a social worker. Specialists play mediator’s and consultant’s roles. However, during the divorce crisis people needed complex, institutional support. Informants had very abstract, questionable knowledge about places where to go for help, what kind of institutions provide assistance. Families would like to get a professional social worker’s services if they were provided, but many informants did not know what a social worker does because of the lack of information.

#### **Findings**

- The study revealed that the divorce in the family is caused by problems such as changes in family background, family functioning conditions and individual personal divorce risks factors; after divorce the problems occurred in the spheres of emotions, finances, communication with children, relations with former spouses.
- The study revealed that the family experiencing divorce does not get sufficient social services.
- According to the informants, a social worker carrying a lot of different roles with appropriate knowledge, values and skills should help families experiencing divorce to overcome divorce crisis (for example, the social worker performs the mediator’s functions), but, as shown by the results, society is not informed about the importance of a social worker. According to the informants, the social worker insufficiently performed his/her roles, functions working with the family experiencing divorce.
- Qualitative research has highlighted experiences of the families during divorce and needs of professional social assistance.

- The investigation revealed that to overcome the divorce crisis professional help of specialists was necessary for women and children, while men are more reluctant to seek help.
- During the primary stage of the divorce families usually asked members of their close environment for help, only later they addressed professional specialists whose main functions are counselling and mediation.
- Families going through divorce have not received a coherent, comprehensive social assistance: social workers provide services in different public and private institutions, and the absence of the system does not provide opportunity to use the services of a social worker.
- People who have participated in research lacked specific knowledge about the social worker services, relied on abstract facts. This not only does not provide necessary preconditions for families to benefit from the assistance provided by social workers (which is available in family centers of Lithuanian cities), but also creates preconditions for the failures regarding understanding of social assistance. The study revealed the need for information about the social worker services for families during divorce crisis.

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## THE NEED OF PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL SUPPORT OF THE FAMILIES UNDERGOING DIVORCE

### Summary

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The article presents the results towards importance of professional social support for the family, which experienced divorce. Qualitative research was applied for revealing the need of professional social support of the families undergoing divorce. 6 families undergoing divorce were selected for testing; informants were examined by using semi-structural survey. Qualitative research analysis released the categories and sub-categories that were interpreted by using specific examples. The informants had obtained help on institutional level, which was provided during divorce by personnel of Family Practice Institute and Initial Healthcare and Mental Health Centres as well as caseworkers of the wards.

Summarizing the Results of research shows that divorce is a tough time in each spouse's life, during which each spouse is experiencing despair, pressure, and sadness. Women tend to react emotionally. Men are unwilling to talk about their feelings, experiences, or apply psychological pressure to the other spouse. In most cases women tend to save family while men are reluctant to seek the same when man initiate divorce. They do not want a divorce and feel particularly offended if the ex-wife has chosen another man. While divorce is a painful experience for all family members, family members who initiated the divorce feel more freedom and happiness. Most spouses had experienced the negative consequences of divorce and were not likely to solve the problems, try to save the family. During divorce crisis spouses were generally inclined to seek help from members of the close environment, only later, after the shock informant were looking for professional social assistance. The informants indicated

that they most consulted with lawyers, psychologists, sometimes with a social worker. Specialists play mediator and consultant roles.

However, during the divorce crisis people needed complex, institutional support. Informants had very abstract, questionable knowledge about places where to go for help, what kind of institutions provide assistance. Families would like to get a professional social worker's services if it would be provided, but what a social worker does, many informants did not know because of the lack of information.

It was revealed that the divorce in the family is caused by problems such as changes in family background, family functioning conditions and individual personal divorce risks factors; after divorce the problems occurred in the spheres of emotions, finances, communication with children, relations with former spouses, that the family experiencing divorce does not get sufficient social services. According to the informants, a social worker carrying a lot of different roles with appropriate knowledge, values and skills should help families experiencing divorce to overcome divorce crisis (for example, the social worker performs the mediator's functions), but, as shown by the results, society is not informed about the importance of a social worker; and the social worker insufficiently performed his/her roles, functions working with the family experiencing divorce. Qualitative research has highlighted experiences of the families during divorce and needs of professional social assistance. The investigation revealed that to overcome the divorce crisis professional help of specialists was necessary for women and children, while men are more reluctant to seek help. During the primary stage of the divorce families usually asked members of their close environment for help, only later they addressed professional specialists whose main functions are counselling and mediation. Families going through divorce have not received a coherent, comprehensive social assistance: social workers provide services in different public and private institutions, and the absence of the system does not provide opportunity to use the services of a social worker. People who have participated in research lacked specific knowledge about the social worker services, relied on abstract facts. This not only does not provide necessary preconditions for families to benefit from the assistance provided by social workers (which is available in family centers of Lithuanian cities), but also creates preconditions for the failures regarding understanding of social assistance. The study revealed the need for information about the social worker services for families during divorce crisis.