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THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION OF VULNERABLE FAMILIES ON THEIR INVESTMENTS AND CONSUMPTION. SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF A PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Raluca PURCARU⁴*

Abstract

The article presents some of the results of a secondary analysis performed on the data collected during an evaluation carried out as part of the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children's Villages in district 1 of Bucharest. The secondary analysis had other objectives than those set out for the evaluation, having a more exploratory character. As a result of the analyzed individual interviews and focus group meetings held with the program beneficiaries, a number of significant differences were found between the behavior of Protestant families and of Orthodox families. In similar circumstances (all the families included in the program were vulnerable, with several children having received the same social services provided by the organization) the Protestant families have a behavior that focuses on savings and investments in improving living conditions, whereas Orthodox families focus mainly on consumption. The Protestants defined the financial support (consisting in social vouchers that can be used

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exclusively for buying foodstuffs and toiletries) received from the organization as an opportunity to save on other resources and to invest in improving their living conditions. The Orthodox families perceived this support as designed to meet their basic needs, as a form of supplementing the resources allocated mainly to buying food and paying for utilities. Therefore, the former category of vulnerable families showed a genuine independence from the services provided, whereas in the case of the Orthodox families dependence on the provided services increased.

Keywords: secondary analysis; program evaluation; exploratory secondary analysis; investments in improving living conditions; Protestant; Orthodox.

Introduction

The economic behavior of economic agents is determined by the religious and social values they share. These values orient economic behavior beyond the mere application of economic laws with the purpose of making a profit. In this study we are interested in the economic behavior specific to an economic crisis situation, namely the use of goods received as aid. We focus on two religious denominations of Christianity, Protestant and Orthodox, the former being a minority in our country. We believe that the economic behavior of the two denominations will be different. We consider that these differences would be related to their religious values, to the interpretation of the status of the support received, and to the minority status of the Protestant group (Maurer, 2007). The individuals' behavior is influenced by their ethical and social values and their ideas (Frunzã, 2011a; Frunzã, 2011b). Consequently, economic behavior, too, is the result of the individuals' cognitive dimension, the result of their imaginary. Social imaginaries are not just a set of ideas, but that what enables the practices of a society, according to Charles Taylor (2004). Economic ethic refers, in Webber's opinion, to the impulses for action grounded in the contexts of religion; although economic ethic is not determined solely by religion, religion is one of its main determinants. Economic ethic is not just a function of a form of economic organization, instead it shapes the very form of that economic organization (Webber, 1946). The matter is not the ethical doctrine of the religion per se, but rather the form of ethical conduct that is valued or that leads to valued results. This specific conduct constitutes what sociology calls *ethos* (Ditto, 1946). Every religion comes with a set of religious needs that determine the management of the economy and influence the economic needs of the members of that religion. For instance, the wealthy (in terms both of possession and power) feel the need to legitimate their good fortune in the eyes of God, so that their wealth is a deserved one, by comparison with others' (Ditto, 1946). In Protestantism, the sect would unite men through an ethical selection. The sect controlled the conduct of its members and demanded

from them an exemplary behavior, educating them in the spirit of asceticism, without a material subsistence policy. The state of things described by Weber could be read in reverse. Since Protestantism doesn't cultivate a rejection of material goods or profit, like the other confessions of Christianity, instead encouraging their acquisition, forbidding only the use of unfair means in obtaining them, the members that wanted to become integrated in the sect would try to obtain certain wealth by any legitimate means available. They would behave more responsibly towards the purchase and management of financial goods. Regardless of the debates around the correlation between Protestantism and Capitalism that Webber underlined, further studies show that, indeed, the level of trust that people have in each other influences economy. For instance, religion creates, by imputing fear of afterlife judgment, a propensity towards an ethical behavior that generates, in return, bonds of shared commitment in small groups, which that guarantees economic success in business practice. Protestantism, in particular, encourages economic success as a sign that heaven follows, Barro and McCleary (Fitzgerald, 2009) have discovered. Protestantism encouraged not only honesty in the practice of economics, but also encouraged work. For instance, in Calvinism, the phenomenon of the "secularization of holiness" led to the sanctification of labor and to an increase in worldly activism. (Zamagni, 2010). As Webber argues, the Calvinist notion of asceticism meant productive engagement in this world, believing that 'work is prayer'. Not only Calvinist Protestantism is connected to the increase of the amount of work, but Reformation in general, because of its education level, which had as a side effect the increase of labor productivity (and consequently of economic prosperity) (Ditto, 2010). The encouragement of work goes hand in hand with the contempt for charity. Protestantism (especially Calvinist) value economic success and thrift that derives from hard work and individual merit as signs of predestination for afterlife, but consider that charity promotes idleness (McCleary and Barro, 2006). We infer from the above that the members of Protestantism will be more likely to engage in labor activities that lead to an increase in economic activities because of their religious beliefs, and more unlikely to engage in charity acts and, equally so, accept receiving charity. The entire modern Western society (with its Protestant roots) is based on an ethic that can be defined by "freedom" and "mutual benefits", from Charles Taylor point of view (2004). Mutual service was seen in terms of economic exchanges as theorized by Locke, in what the author calls the economic meaning model for human behavior, discipline and improving oneself. In contradiction with the Christian Medieval ideal, the modern ideal of order is meant for the here and now, not for the afterlife. Another aspect of religiosity worth discussing is the inclination of people to comply with religious principles. Generally speaking, in times of economic crisis, even the less religious turn to religion (a boost has been observed in Romania in the current economic crisis) and seek there hope for a better future. In Christianity, Protestantism places a greater emphasis on individual responsibility for religious obligations than Orthodoxy, according to a study

carried out by McCleary and Barro. The Protestant regions of the world recorded a higher religious adherence than the Orthodox ones in the year 2000 (Ditto, 2006). Protestantism places more of an accent on religious living. Moreover, the same study reveals the fact that Protestant economies recorded a bigger growth than Orthodox ones. We expect these differences to be reflected in our study in Romania in the form of differences in economic approaches.

In Romania, Protestantism represents a minority religion. One of the main traits of minorities (religious minorities included) is that its members possess an acute group consciousness and a greater affinity for people pertaining to their own group. The greater the cohesiveness of a group (meaning the group's internal power), the greater the group's pressure towards uniformity and the greater the conformism to the group's values. Within any social group there is pressure towards unity of attitude. Two reasons for the phenomenon are the fact that an individual's opinions are established by the sharing of that opinion by other people ("social reality") and the fact that uniformity is necessary in pursuing the group's goals (Cartwright, 1960). In fact, the two of them are related, meaning that the more important a certain issue is for the group, the greater the degree of dependence between its members in constructing the social reality (Ditto, 1960). In conclusion, in a religious minority individuals are more likely to live by the values shared by the group. The fact that the Protestants are a religious minority in Romania makes the individuals more likely to be influenced by their religion and makes them more likely to be sensitive to the group members' needs and act more socially responsible to each others' needs. In such a case, the individuals will be less likely to abandon the group and its values, because the social and cognitive pressure they are subjected to is considerable. Moreover, minorities have greater cognitive flexibility, and research has shown that organizations in which minorities are hired in upper management are more flexible and more adapted to the ever-changing economic climate (Hersen, 2002). As a consequence, the minorities in our study have proven to have a wiser management of the economical resources they received. Another assumption of this study is based on the tendency of minorities to overcompensate so that they can counteract discrimination (Sandu, 2010). Overcompensation, as defined by Orbe, refers to making more of an effort to prove that the minority is worth at least as much as the majority peers and has often been a survival technique that minorities use in organizations in order to prove their competence (Tindall, 2007). We can extend this theory in order to explain why religious minorities would tend to overcompensate through exemplary behavior when receiving aid, a behavior which consists of responsibility in managing the support received, in order to prove worthy of it. A responsible use of the support received is proof of rigorous ethics and social awareness (Cojocaru, 2006). Such a responsible use would consist of a productive attitude, of an active attitude in order to overcome the situation and no longer required help, thus making room for other people to benefit from the same

support. The waste of social resources shows indifference towards other needy members of society. We expect to encounter significant differences between the economic behavior of Protestant and Orthodox subjects, due to religious ethics and minority status, differences that would reside in the fact that the former would prove more socially responsible in the use of resources than the latter. This social responsibility would be the product of combined economic, ethic and social values and sensitivity towards the community (Cojocar, Cojocar and Sandu, 2011).

Methodology

Initial evaluation of the program

The initial evaluation aimed to measure the impact that the Family Strengthening Program run by SOS Children's Villages in district 1 of Bucharest had on children, families and communities. In order to do this, 125 beneficiaries' files (86 closed cases and 39 current cases) from the period between 2004 and June 2007 were analyzed. In order to collect qualitative data, interviews were held with 9 mothers, 6 children, the program staff, as well as with focus groups consisting of beneficiaries whose cases were closed, focus groups of active beneficiaries and with focus groups consisting of partners.

Purpose of the secondary analysis

This study was carried out through a secondary analysis of the collected data for the evaluation of the Family Strengthening Program. A transversal reading of the data collected in individual interviews and in focus groups revealed a number of differences concerning the reaction of the individuals who used the organization's services. The differences are attributed to the individuals' belonging to different religious denominations. The purpose of this study is to identify the influence that religious denomination has on the way the social services provided to vulnerable and disadvantaged families are received. The role of the secondary analysis is to answer questions, verifying hypotheses or generate new theories (Rubin, 2008) by using all the existing data; in the case of the secondary analysis we undertook, the data collected in the previous evaluation were reanalyzed and reinterpreted starting from different theoretical and epistemological assumptions. The secondary analysis used only the data obtained for the previous evaluation, no extra data being collected. Thus, we focused only on data interpretation instead of on gathering new data (Rubin, 2008). An important feature of the secondary analysis is the fact that it can provide a new interpretation of the data and helps us analyze plausible alternative models, starting from different theoretical assumptions. Keesling believes that providing counter-argumentation for the

evaluation's conclusions and restarting the data analysis process from different theoretical levels constitutes a form of expanding the understanding and explanation of the effects of program interventions (1978). In our undertaking we chose to use for the secondary analysis the same method as the initial evaluation, in order to answer a different set of questions. The secondary analysis, focused on other questions than the original study, has a number of notable features (Powel, 1978: 63-71): (1) it cannot confirm or refute the initial results of the evaluation, because the methods of analysis are used for data interpretation and their purpose is to answer different questions; (2) it is not seen as a threat to the initial evaluation because its objective is different; (3) it maintains its invasive character on the evaluators' ownership rights of the data; (4) it can refine the analysis methods used in order to answer questions that were not addressed in the initial evaluation; (5) it contributes to the increase in knowledge in the field of action of the evaluated programme; (6) it makes available models of rephrasing the questions of the evaluation within the limits of the initial gathered data; it can identify questions to which the initial study did not answer, but could have answered. Thus, the secondary analysis we carried out is of an exploratory type, the data being analyzed in order to produce new ideas and generate new hypotheses (Rubin, 2008) and not to test them (Cojocaru, 2009). During this approach, *how?* questions were used, these being considered normative questions (Brueggemann, 1996:143), which focus on exploring mechanisms rather than contents. Thus, our enterprise is inductive. Secondary inductive analysis starts from existing data and observation in order to construct new hypotheses and verify them in the process of constructing new theories (Rubin, 2008); in this research strategy, data is the main source of information, and based on them new hypotheses are generated and subsequently verified. Because it does not make assumptions, the inductive method can generate new paradigms for the interpretation of the studied phenomena, bringing to light new relations between various variables constructed by the researcher and new ways of analyzing data; an advantage of the secondary analysis comes from the fact that its questions are very different from the ones of the initial evaluation. This is why our analysis is neither focused on checking the validity of the conclusions of the previous research (Boruch and Wortman, 1978; Cace, 2002; Cace, 2003), nor on creating a quasi-experimental design meant to identify the problems connected to the causal deduction operated during the evaluation or to the estimation of possible bias (Ridskopf, 1978:76; Lipsey, 2000: 210-211). In order to ensure the conditions of examination of data from different perspectives, we used the triangulation of evaluators (Cojocaru, 2010). For the secondary analysis, only two evaluators from the original team were kept on, and another two experts were brought in; the latter had not been involved in the previous evaluation.

Data source for the secondary analysis

The main data used in the secondary analysis consist in the *initial evaluations of the program*. The data yielded by the evaluation reports represent one of the main sources of documentation for their reanalysis in other contexts (David and Pelavin, 1978; Dollar and Ambacher, 1978). One of the advantages of including in the team the two evaluators that were part of the previous evaluation was the access to primary data (Wolins, 1978; Powell, 1978), and not just to the data presented in the evaluation report (Cojocaru, Cojocaru and Bunea, 2010). Reinterpretation of the initial data using similar methods of analysis may lead to the development and refinement of knowledge of the evaluation research field and the program's intervention area (Cojocaru and Cojocaru, 2011). The assumed strategy in the case of the secondary analysis is completely independent from the initial undertaking and results, and benefits from the advanced implication of the initial evaluators.

Results and discussions

The secondary analysis we have performed revealed major differences between Protestant and Orthodox families in terms of response to social services. The analysis also highlighted other significant differences in terms of alcohol consumption, domestic violence, visits to family planning practices, visions and plans for the future belonging to those using the services provided by the organization. Our study presents two different behaviors of the representatives of the two religious denominations: a behavior based on savings and investments in living conditions in Protestant families, and a behavior based on consumption in Orthodox families. A recurrent theme in the information gathered during focus groups meetings and interviews was the invocation of God by the Protestants as a form of giving thanks for their achievements.

Appetite for savings and for investments in the household in Protestant families

An important activity of Protestant families is investing in improving living conditions. Receiving social vouchers for purchasing food is perceived by the individuals included in the program as an opportunity to save their earnings. Here we need to clarify the form of financial support provided by the organization to families in need: each family would receive monthly a number of social vouchers in amount of approximately 10 Euro for each child; the vouchers could be used only for buying foodstuffs and toiletries. The assistance provided by the organization is perceived chiefly as a temporary support for investments in the household. All the subjects from the Protestant denomination that were included in the

focus groups and in the individual interviews highlighted the investment in improving living conditions as one of the most significant achievements for the interval in which they had received assistance from the organization. These investments are viewed as a required basis in creating a better environment for the children.

“We took care of some things around the house that needed to be done. We added a door here and there, we put in wooden floors, we made a fence (S1)... We would get those food vouchers, we’d save some of the money we were earning and buy some stuff for the house (S2)... We put some money aside and we bought construction materials, bit by bit (S3)... We painted the... The house was the first to change (S4)... I made a house, I built it, it has a roof, but it’s not finished yet. This support was very helpful to me. Even just by buying food, and I’d still save something... I got a new wardrobe (armoire), new things for the home, furniture (S5)... There where we were living we didn’t have a kitchen; we had two rooms we didn’t use, two rooms that we could live in and a hallway, but no kitchen. And it was very much needed, I had the concrete, but I could never put together the tiles I needed to lay in there. It’s always messy, you need to wash the floor. I bought a metal door and I had it installed, of course; I bought another door, a wooden one, which we needed for one of the rooms, I got sheet metal for the roof, a gas cooker, I had a small cupboard made here, a table there; I arranged the kitchen... (S6) While they supported me, I achieved many things. We had no gas, no concrete poured in the yard, no floors... We laid floors in one of the rooms, we had to do it, it was damp and it got moldy and the children would catch colds and get sick. But now we’re through with that. We cast concrete in the yard, we have a metal fence, I’m happy with this (S7) We had a fence made, we installed a door and laid some tiles (S8) ...”
(focus group 1, Protestants)

“In a way the support was very welcome. For instance, if we had used this money to pay the bills, because you cannot go without electricity or without gas, what would have happened? Until six years ago we had no water source in our yard, we had to fetch water from the street. It was very hard for me, and with so many kids, we couldn’t go on like this. We used a lot of water, with so many of us washing, bathing, using the toilet. We have three rooms, one of them is a sort of large hallway, that’s what it says in the paperwork, and two proper rooms; the room at the back used to be a storeroom – we put in shelves for the laundry, because we had run out of room. I thought it would be better for the child’s room to have more space in it, instead of having laundry cabinets there, too. A small kitchen we arranged ourselves and an indoor bathroom. With these vouchers I knew I had the food covered and I knew this money could

be used for this, that money for that...” (I9, 35 y.o., 8 children, married, Protestant)

Beyond the investments made in refurbishing or enlarging their living space, the Protestant families managed to invest in equipment (stoves, washing machines, refrigerators), in order to create a better living climate and for easing the burden of housework, especially taking into consideration that the families are large, as a rule – eight or nine children.

“We got this aid here and we used our salary to refurbish one or two rooms, to build a wall here and there, to get a few things done. We didn’t have a stove in one of the rooms and we couldn’t live in it. With the support we received from here we managed to put some money aside and build a new stove... My husband took out a loan and we bought a washing machine and a refrigerator – they’re in the kitchen now. The roof was leaky and we had to change it. We bought sheet metal, wood planks and cement and we renovated the kitchen as well. We bought floorboards – we used to have a concrete floor and there was always dust under the carpet. To put a carpet in, I had to arrange the rooms. We redecorated, we fixed the wiring, and now it’s great. We bought a water pump for the well, so that we could install the washing machine. There are pipes laid in our neighborhood, but there’s no water yet...” (I5, 37 y.o., 8 children, married, Protestant)

“The roof is a little too low. Since ’89 when we bought the house we’ve done some small repairs, as much as we could. It wasn’t always possible, because there’s no running water in our neighborhood. They’re planning to, but it’s a long time coming. They’ve just put gas in – and we connected. With their (the organization’s) help we managed to build a kitchen, because so far we didn’t have a proper one. They’ve helped us with food, with whatever they could, so that I could save a penny. We bought materials and we made the kitchen, because the one we had was not enough. The kitchen we had was too small for so many children. We saved and we bought materials, and I built it together with the children; a bigger one, so that we could all fit. Yes, it was helpful. Why should I be ungrateful to God? When somebody helps, it is helpful, isn’t it?” (I7, 47 y.o., 9 children, married, Protestant)

The investments in the household that the Protestant families made were more motivating to them due to the fact that they owned the land and the houses they lived in, despite the fact that the location of these properties was in disadvantaged areas, without utilities. Even though the living conditions were poor, in the interval when they received support from the organization these families invested in building new rooms and kitchens. One constant in the argumentation of success

was the support provided by the organization and the invocation of God (invoked as a form of expressing gratitude). Their appetite for investment and for providing their families with better living conditions was also visible in their desire for stability in order to find employment. This, beyond diminishing the insecurity related to providing for the family's basic needs, was also a form of support for investing in consumer goods ("white goods") paid for in installments.

"We made the house together, using adobe bricks, I built the house myself. I bought the land, I have a handwritten agreement, but I don't have electricity. For the time being a neighbor lets me use hers. I don't have a job. I have the youngest, who is seven months old, I have another who is 18 months old, and another who is two years and seven months old. I kept them, I was afraid of God's wrath, I gave birth to them and I want them to live. The biggest help came from the people here, who helped me a lot, with food vouchers, with clothes, with shoes, whatever they could. The children were able to go to school, they had enough clothes and shoes to wear. I couldn't have got them from his (her husband's) pension, we couldn't have afforded it. Thank God we have it, though, it's a good thing we don't have to pay rent... s me to do something about the electricity as well, that would be wonderful. The house used to have everything it needed, and I know it should be different... I took out a loan and we bought a TV set, we also have a refrigerator..." (15, 37 y.o., 8 children, married, Protestant)

When expressing appreciation for the assistance received, the clients also express the fact that they accept it for a limited period of time. Protestant families consider that they have received this support, have made significant changes in their lives, and now other families may need a similar support from the part of the organization. It is a way of expressing solidarity with individuals facing the same problems and of viewing the received support with dignity (by rejecting it after exiting the crisis period).

"We have a dorm room of 17.5 square meters. It's hard, but I'm happy we have this much, because until we got it we had been renting. We bought this room two years ago. Yes, it's been very helpful. Last year, with the money I earned working on the building sites and in schools, I managed to arrange it. This year I intend to make a bathroom and a kitchen, to have better conditions. I've managed to get my own little place. I had borrowed a lot of money and I managed to pay it back. The food would come in monthly, and we didn't have to buy anything, I managed to pay back the money for the installments and for the girls. I recovered financially and I also refurbished my home. Now, with the money I get for this job I'll make a bathroom and a kitchen, the children will start going to school soon, and there's three of them, not just one. I've already told the social worker that in December I'll no longer need their support come

December, because I've recovered somewhat. There are others who need this sort of help... We've bought a wardrobe, a refrigerator, a washing machine and a TV set. Thank God everything is all right..." (I8, 29 y.o., 3 children, married, Protestant)

Investments in making living space more efficient are considered a priority even when the home is a room in a dorm building. These investments are possible due to the money-saving behavior and to a rigorous management of the family budget.

"We moved into a former dorm building and we bought the room. So now I have a home, it's true, it's a work in progress, I want to make it into a studio flat, with a bathroom and a kitchen. In the future I hope to be able to give my children a more decent home. But whenever I made some money, I spent it on whatever I thought it would be best to have, so that my children and I have the basics. Thing is, I managed to put some money aside and I can put in a new floor. We've bought the floorboards; I've bought a water heater, a washing machine, the concrete, because that's important, too. I hope to be able to finish the refurbishment..." (I6, 39 y.o., 2 children, divorced, Protestant)

Accent placed on consumption by Orthodox families

The Orthodox families' lack of appetite for investing in improving living conditions is explained by them by the lack of ownership of the land or of the home they live in. In similar ownership situations, (the home is owned, having been bought), Orthodox families insist mainly on shortcomings, on deficiencies. Thus, the language is negative, focused on the vision of deficiency, of inability, highlighting especially weaknesses and the lack of achievements, stressing the unhygienic living conditions etc. The Orthodox respondents could not identify any personal achievements and any improvements in their families' situation in the previous six months. The solution to their own situation is viewed as being the responsibility of local authorities or of nongovernmental organizations.

"We live with an elderly couple. They don't charge us any rent, because we have so many children... (S10) Yes, I have my own house, but the living conditions are very poor. We don't even have papers for it, just a handwritten agreement. That's why we cannot connect to electricity or to gas... (S11) We're moving from one place to another, that's how we do it. We've made a petition (to the City Hall) five years ago and nothing happens... (S12)" (focus group 2, Orthodox)

“The living conditions are horrible. We have a studio flat which we have left the way it was in 1982, when we got a loan and we bought it from the state (city housing department), as was the rule at the time. Just one room, low comfort... (I1, 49 y.o., 2 children, widowed, Orthodox)

The aid received under the form of social vouchers is seen as an important source of supplying food to the family, and the rhetoric of the Orthodox families is focused solely on this aid, without bringing into discussion other financial resources (salaries, pensions, wages for occasional work etc.).

“I’m divorces and I have four children to look after. I live with my parents in a house. Although I received help, I could not do anything in the house. I haven’t managed to redecorate, to paint since 1985. It’s very difficult, and the vouchers I get only help me buy food...” (I2, 48 y.o., 4 children, divorced, Orthodox)

“Our life improved greatly after we received help from the organization. We have more food now.” (I3, 42 y.o., 4 children, married, Orthodox)

“It’s very difficult. The vouchers are every useful. We have enough to buy food. If we also get to work from time to time we can buy food and pay the bills” (I4, 39 y.o., 3 children, common law marriage, Orthodox).

The lack of appetite for savings and implicitly for investments is compensated by the accent placed on the importance of children; the children are seen as the most important thing, and the benefit of the family is expressed in terms of being able to feed the children better. Even investments in goods are absent, because they are expected to be delivered as a form of aid by the local authorities or by the organization. Orthodox families appreciate receiving these goods (beds, stoves, stroller etc.), considering that such services are a sort of obligation from the part of these institutions; their absence is defined as a lack of responsiveness from the part of factors outside the family, and the attention of these families is focused especially on building up their cases when requesting such goods, on persuading the authorities or the organization that they are necessary.

“Nothing has changed. You don’t have a stable residence, you can’t buy anything. So none of these things matters for us. The children matter, and the food. We’ve lived in a park, we’ve lived everywhere. I’ve fed them in the street... (S16) We haven’t managed to do anything about the house. The food is better... (S14) They gave me a stove for the children’s room, because we had no stove. Now I’ve heard they’ll give us beds for children, small ones... (S15) We were given a bed, we used to sleep on the floor before that. Seven to a room.

We'd put the little ones in a cot and we'd sleep on the floor, now they've helped us... (S17) For instance, They helped me with a stroller... (S16) For instance, I'd need a cot and a bed for my older son. I've made so many petitions, but I never got on... (S18) (focus group 2, Orthodox)

"I give at least half of the social vouchers on disposable diapers. I see everyone gets diapers, but I have to buy them. Why am I not given any? I see others giving diapers for babies... (S12) Well, since we started coming here, we have enough to eat; we didn't have this food. Now that we have these vouchers, we have enough... (S13) Honestly, with seven children, we didn't even have a blanket to put on the bed. Since we've got these vouchers, I've managed to buy a few things. Otherwise I couldn't have bought stuff and let the children starve." (focus group 2, Orthodox)

Conclusions

The system of values and beliefs influences the way vulnerable and disadvantaged families perceive the social services they receive. Protestant families place a greater accent on savings and on investing in the improvement of living conditions; thus, the money saved as a result of the emergency financial support provided for foodstuffs and toiletries are redirected towards improving their homes (refurbishments, construction of new rooms, kitchens, bathrooms etc.), connecting to utility networks (water, gas etc.) and equipping the home (stoves, refrigerators, water pump etc.). This is due both to the Protestant mentality, as well as to the higher level of security and integration within the community. The language used when defining the situations is mostly neutral, and the future is defined as a sum of opportunities in appreciative language (Cojocar, 2005). The situation of vulnerability is described by the Protestants taking part in the program as a transitory one, a crisis that was overcome with the help of the support received from the organization.

The Orthodox families in the same situation of vulnerability place a greater accent on consumption (food, clothing etc.). In the case of these families, living conditions did not improve significantly, they do not have an appetite for savings, and much less one for investments. These families remain dependent on social services and on the material aid provided by the local authorities or by non-governmental organizations. The support requested concerns not only being provided with housing, but also with furniture or with equipment for the house. The expecting attitude related to this type of assistance is enhanced by the way this category defines its own situation, by focusing on inability, deficiency and shortcomings; these individuals use predominantly a language focused on deficit, both

for defining the past and current situation, as well as the future (Gergen, 1985; Cojocaru, 2005). The pessimism and the social inactivism of the interviewed families are also fueled by an unrealistic expectation horizon: their expectations automatically include the intervention of an entity outside the family that would solve all their problems. The vulnerable and disadvantaged situation of the Orthodox families is defined as a permanent status, a negative situation that cannot be overcome.

The differences in the way the Protestant and the Orthodox families react to the social services provided may also be explained through their different attitudes to family, God and life in general. Protestant families place a greater accent on stability and security – also expressed through religious communion –, while Orthodox families tend to underline more uncertainty and insecurity on a background of lack of interest from the local authorities.

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