

## **RESILIENCE IN MIGRANT FAMILIES WITH GAMBLING PROBLEMS**

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### **MIGRANT FAMILIES AND RESILIENCE**

Like a rubber band, resilience has to do with one's ability to cope successfully with life challenges and maintain (or even strengthen) one's resourcefulness in the process. Migrant families have to cope with many challenges in the process of adapting to life in a new country. Their effectiveness in doing so may strengthen or weaken the family. It is our job to help strengthen a migrant family's resilience as it faces such adaptation challenges.

### **THE WELL-ADJUSTED, STRONG, RESILIENT FAMILY AS A SYSTEM**

A family is a social system which made up of several parts. Each part can be described, and each part can be judged in terms of its wellness or adjustment (see references). Having a family systems perspective helps us describe how each part of the family works, and evaluate how well it is working – and thus how we can help a family work more effectively, and be more resilient in the face of challenges like migration or problem gambling. Here are my notions of the family system:

#### **Family members**

A family consists of individual members who can be identified by, for example, a genogram. In a well-adjusted family:

- *Each member gets their personal needs met (physical, social, emotional).*
- *Each member helps meet the needs of others.*
- *Each member balances emotional closeness and distance from others in the family.*

#### **Family leadership**

Each family has people who are in a position of leadership, as seen in who takes responsibility for getting things done. In a well-adjusted family:

- *Leaders (usually the parents) are active and effective in their leadership role.*
- *The leadership team is stable in membership and works together smoothly.*
- *Couples who are personally happy, who love and respect each other, and who work together as a team make good parents.*

#### **Family rules**

Each family has rules that define how its members should behave, some spoken, some unspoken. Family members will tell you what the family rules are if you ask. In a well-adjusted family:

- *The rules are fair to all, and address what people should as well as what they should not do.*
- *Children learn to participate in setting rules.*
- *Reward is seen as more powerful than punishment. Obeying the rules is rewarded.*
- *Disobeying the rules is punished. Discipline is applied calmly but firmly.*

#### **Family communication**

Decisions are made and problems solved by use of communication skills and processes which can be discerned in family discussions or problem solving processes. In a well-adjusted family:

- *Members use good communication skills – they listen to each other, express themselves honestly, and work towards win-win solutions in which each person has their basic needs met.*
- *Everyone is allowed to share in decision making, and the process is more thorough when important decisions are made.*

### **Developmental stages**

All families go through developmental stages, marked by the arrival and departure of individuals, and by changes in the age or capacities of its members. Normal change processes are compounded by events like family break-up or migration. In a well-adjusted family:

- *The way the family is organised and how it works changes with the demands of each stage.*

### **Family type or paradigm**

Families organise themselves in different ways, defined by tradition and circumstance. Three broad types have been labelled as autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Each type has its own strengths and shortcomings. The well-adjusted family:

- *Works in harmony with its typology, but is flexible.*
- *Sees itself positively, but is also realistic.*

## **THE HELPING PROFESSIONAL'S TASK IN WORKING WITH MIGRANT FAMILIES FACING PROBLEMATIC GAMBLING**

- *Problem gambling may be seen as symptomatic of a family system that does not do what it is supposed to (as described above).*
- *Therefore, always keep a family systems perspective in mind as you intervene, regardless of who in the family you are actually working with.*
- *Encourage changes in the immediate situation which are likely to have a positive effect on the family system. Aim for small, achievable changes that have maximum systemic effects.*
- *Remember that families have a strong tendency to maintaining homeostasis – keeping things the way they are, even if uncomfortable. The devil you know is better than the one you don't.*
- *Therefore, make sure that changes you aim for are in harmony with the family's type or paradigm in terms of values, customs or structure. Encourage flexibility and change from within the family's paradigm, rather than impose an alien one from outside.*

### **References**

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