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**LIVING CONDITIONS OF FAMILIES RECEIVING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE  
IN THE II AND III STAGE OF FAMILY LIFE CYCLES**

Field of study: economic sciences, academic discipline: economics

Doctoral dissertation  
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## **Summary of doctoral dissertation**

There is a cognitive and practical need to determine the direction in which the social assistance system should be reformed, so that it not only would have a proper place in the social policy strategy of the State but also fulfil its basic objective of making beneficiaries independent of it. The subject of living conditions in the context of social assistance has already received a large number of academic analysis and studies, however they need to be constantly updated. The relationship between the social welfare institutions, local government institutions and non-governmental organizations remains a problem requiring further research. In addition, it is necessary to present approach for improving the social assistance system so that it becomes more effective and helpful to its beneficiaries, as well as to social workers.

**The aim of this paper is** to examine the impact of social assistance on the living conditions of families in the second and third stage of family life cycle.

**The auxiliary aim of this paper is** to formulate proposals for changes in social assistance so that it has a greater impact on the living conditions of beneficiaries, while not keeping them in the system for a long time, as well as to assess the functioning of the social assistance system made by representatives of local government institution and NGOs.

**The thesis statement is** that social assistance for families in the second and third stage of family life cycle is insufficiently effective, since it changes their living conditions to a small extent and keeps them in the beneficiaries circle.

**The thesis** was verified by answering the following research questions:

1. What place do the living conditions of families occupy in the social policy of the State?
2. What is the social and material situation of the studied families in the second and third stage of family life cycle according to their opinion?
3. How do social assistance benefits affect the living conditions of families in the second and third stage of family life cycle?
4. How do representatives of local government institutions and NGOs assess functioning of the social assistance system for families in the second and third stage of family life cycle, and also quality of cooperation implemented for this purpose?

5. What changes should be introduced to the social assistance system to have a greater impact on the living conditions of the respondent families, without keeping them in the system for a long time?

There were several research methods used to carry out the given study: an analysis of the subject literature, legal regulations, reports on the activities of the Wola and Ursynów social welfare centres and statistical data available in the GUS, MRPiPS, PUP and the Pomost ICT system. As well as conducting a survey and an in-depth interview. According to the adopted methodology, the author conducted research in two social welfare centres located in the capital of Warsaw in Wola and Ursynów, as well as in the offices of local government public institutions (Powiat Labour Office, Schools, Police, Health Care Facilities, Warsaw Family Support Centre, Local Appeals Board, Family Court) and NGOs (Caritas, Wiosna Association). Interesting information was also obtained due to an interview with a representative of the Polish Federation of Social Workers and Social Assistance.

The dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters, a conclusion, list of tables, drawings, charts, bibliography, and appendix. The introduction presents the thesis, research questions and characteristics of applied research methods.

Chapter I – Conditions of existence of families in the social policy of the state is based on studies of the subject literature and includes an analysis of concepts related to the topic. It defines the term family, family policy, social policy, living conditions, and presents theories on the development of the family according to stages, focusing on the second and third stage. This chapter discusses in detail the issues related to social assistance, its objectives and tasks are listed together with the instruments that social policy has at its disposal in support of families in the second and third stage of family life cycle. The issue of the risk of poverty, particularly among single-parent families and families with many children, was also discussed. The expenditure on social protection in Poland and other EU countries was also compared.

Chapter II – covered by the study presents the history of the studied districts, as well as analysis of the structure of its inhabitants. The socio-demographic characteristics of the families included in the study were also presented in terms of family and housing situation, their sources and level of income, and length of stay in the social assistance system, including the scope of its assistance and the reasons for using its benefits.

Chapter III - The functioning of the social assistance system in the light of the assessments of the beneficiaries. The survey presents the opinions of respondents obtained through in-depth interviews and quantitative studies. They spoke about their social and living situation, financial benefits, benefits in-kind, benefits in the form of services they use and in relation to their needs. They also expressed opinions on the social assistance functioning, its impact on economic independence and assessed the role of workers of social assistance centres. The collected research material was subjected to comparative analysis to establish differences and similarities in the functioning of the studied social welfare centres.

Chapter IV - Functioning of the social assistance system in the light of the opinions of representatives of local government public institutions and NGOs. It presents the results of the analysis of in-depth interviews on the functioning of the social assistance system, the reasons causing the influx of beneficiaries to the system and the financing of benefits. Respondents commented on the instruments available to social assistance centres aiming to improve the living conditions of families in the second and third stage of family life cycle. They also presented the barriers hindering their sustainable self-reliance, together with suggestions for improvements to the system. The respondents also assessed the cooperation of social welfare centres with the selected local government public institutions and other non-governmental organizations aiming to improve the living conditions of beneficiaries.

Chapter V - Proposals for changes in the social welfare system for families in the second and third stage of family life cycle. It details the strengths and weaknesses of the current social welfare system and suggestions for changes in order to significantly improve the living conditions of families in the second and third stage of family life cycle. The chapter also presents the concept of implementing and monitoring selected changes in the social welfare system.

In the conclusion, the references were made to the aims of this paper, thesis, research questions. The conclusion discussed general results of the research and offered recommendations regarding changes in the social welfare system for families.

The changes in the social welfare system proposed in this work are based on literature, my own research (a survey and interview). Many of the ideas require financial support or making the social welfare act more specific. For instance, local government institutions and external organizations should be urged to appoint their representatives-coordinators who would

be responsible for cooperation with the social welfare centres. Thus, it would be possible for social workers to suggest training topics and make the management the subject responsible for organizing them. Another change would be hiring an IT specialist in every social welfare centre.

In order to check whether the changes in social assistance are moving in the desired direction, the concept of monitoring proposals was introduced. The proposals focus on increased funding of the social assistance system and a systematic study of the needs of beneficiaries, social workers, professional managements.

The study included families in the second and third stage of family life cycle. However, there is also a need to extend this study to in the first, fourth and fifth stage of family life cycle.