

## **THE EFFECTS OF PARENTS' WORK MIGRATION OVER THE SCHOOL RESULTS OF HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS**

**ROBERT PRODANCIUC \***

**ABSTRACT:** *In the present study I start from considering the family and school as social systems and the pupil from a four-dimensional perspective. The influence of the relations inside the family is realized according to the symmetrical relations pointed out by Cattell and the relating triangles shown by Benedek. The relations at school through which the pupil is gaining academic and social skills have been represented according to Păun. Adolescence is a period of personality reorganization for every individual. The work hypothesis of this study is: if the adolescent pupil's parents (mother, father or both) migrate, then modifications will occur at several levels. As a conclusion we can draw the need for the establishment of assistance centers for the pupils, parents, teachers and authorities.*

**KEY WORDS:** *lay offs; work migration; parent; adolescent; school results; social worker; professional counseling.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *J12.*

Just as it is necessary to have two people to  
conceive a child, it is equally important  
to have two people to raise a child  
Paul Osterrieth (1973, p. 180)

### **1. ARGUMENT**

The dialogue between the sociologist and the social worker, sociology and social work, is a necessity that comes out of the position of these two terms. Both of these terms represent social sciences that approach reality in complementary ways.

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\* *Assist.Prof., Ph.D. Student, University of Petroșani, Romania, [robertprodanciuc@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:robertprodanciuc@yahoo.co.uk)*

Sociology is focusing on the social ensemble, while social work focuses on the social reality. The two perspectives offer each other elements for a more complete and a more accurate comprehension over a reality that only theoretically can be separated in whole and part.

In the social reality the human behavior has a capability to act and work that can take a normal aspect that ensures the balance of the community or a deviating aspect of inadaptability that through the deviation from the normality is jeopardizing that balance. It is obvious that we are not interested in those deviations that promote the progress, but only in those behaviors that lead to having difficulties in assuming the appropriate roles for every person's status or to the failure to fulfill the personal social tasks. As social sciences, both sociology and social work refer to both aspects but in different ways. Sociology determines the causes, the proportions, the reports, the conditions in which it manifests and the effects, while social work, as Cristian Bocancea (1999) said, assesses the deviation degree and the personal and social peril posed by the deviating behavior and helps with the reconstruction of the adapting ability and social integration of the concerned people.

The problems posed by work migration correspond to the national and local preoccupations. Thus, „Tribuna Învățământului. Revistă națională de informație și atitudine” a national magazine addressed to the teachers is publishing in several issues articles about aspects of the migration of Romanian population to places that offer better perspectives from a financial point of view (Cojocaru I., 2007; Nușfelean O., 2007; Dobrescu M., 2007). Also, the local press is pointing out worrying aspects of the migration of Romanians abroad (Mitrache D., 2006). All these articles are suggestive through their titles. They draw everyone's attention and nobody can remain indifferent even if they are not professionally involved in the Romanian education system. Being a sociologist, I have been attracted even more to such a thematic.

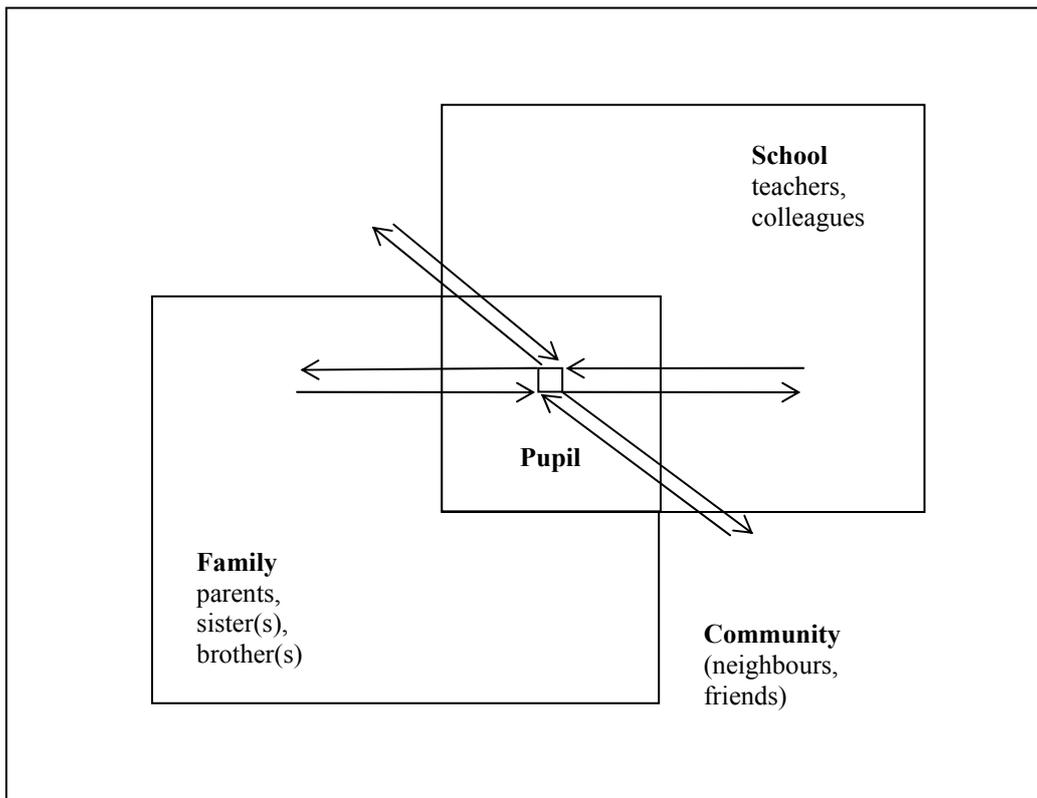
## 2. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The study is based on the systemic paradigm. This means that I will consider the family and the school as being open, dynamic and adaptable social systems whose elements, the pupils, have complex structural relations, communicate at high levels and interact in multiple ways. In turn, the pupils are being considered from a four-dimensional perspective – bio-psycho-socio-cultural. On each dimension is pursued the preparation of the child for the adaptation and integration into the life of his community. This preparation has two axes the individualization and the socialization. Constantin Maximilian (1980) talking about the genesis of the individuality at biological level, shows that each individual is unique and “explores and exploits the environment in a different way” because each of us are genetically different and unequal. This difference and inequality is demanding equal opportunities in order for everybody to be able to develop. Even at a biological level the author is showing that social life is indispensable for the individual development. It will favor the reach of the maximum levels conditioned by heredity.

The psychical development also has a solid support. As Paul Osterrieth (1973) considers it is represented by the feeling of safety that sets in when the child is being

accepted by the family in general and the mother in particular. This feeling is required since birth and up to maturity.

From the perspective of the social dimension, what interests the most is socialization process. It is chronologically and qualitatively of two kinds: the primary socialization – accomplished inside the family and the secondary socialization – accomplished in school. These environments are included in the local community (see Figure 1).

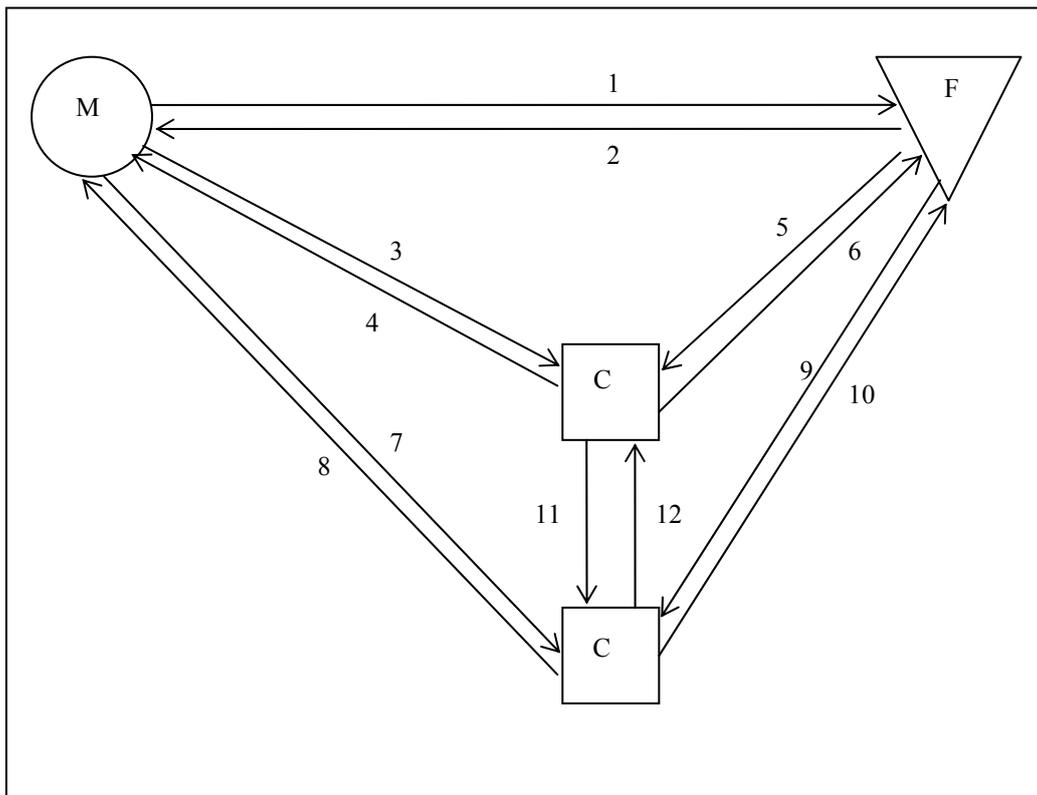


**Figure 1. The Influence Environments of the Pupil**

In order to define the **family** we consider Natalia Damian's (1972, p. 58) formulation to be useful "a group of relatives by marriage, blood or adoption, that live together, carry on a common economic-household activity, are bound by certain spiritual relations, and under the conditions of the existence of the state and the law also by certain judicial relations". In this study I focused on the majority of Romanian families, that is the **nuclear** or **conjugal** family.

The nuclear family is constituted by marriage and makes up its own life style, which is different to the ones of the origin families. By life style I understand like Ioana Smirnov and Georgeta Margherescu (1989, p. 70) the result of the interiorized life style as a means of satisfying the necessities and the self-determination of the family. The life style is usually, at least generally, constituted in the period between

marriage and the birth of a child. Being dynamic and adaptable, the life style will restructure when the new family member appears as well as any time it will be necessary. The life style of the family also consists of the integration of the relating modalities of the people that make it up. Combining the relations inside the family found by R. B. Cattell (according to Paul Osterrieth [1973]) and the relations triangles inside the family pointed out by Th. Benedek (according to Cornelia Dimitriu [1973]) we attain Figure 2.



**Figure 2. The Relations inside the Family**

From this figure it is possible to point out the fact that the family is made up of a constellation of symmetrical relations in between people with symmetrical status-roles, for example the relation mother-father or parent-child. I'd rather consider the father to be the authority decisional center, alleviated by the co-participation of the mother and the mother as being the cohesion centre in co-participation with the father in this way the parents relate complementarily. The children, reported to the parents, represent the social promotion component and at the same time the solidarity and competition component. In the figure we represented there are only two children because only the first and the last have the most sensitive positions. Also we did not specify the gender of the children because that would lead to specific differences in the

relations with the parents. We preferred the representation of the family with two children because it is the most frequent in Romania.

What is important in the parents-children relations starts from what are the first. Thus we take into consideration the following parent types. The types of mothers are the ones established by M. J. Rosenthal and collaborators (by Cornelia Dimitriu [1973]), and those are: the controlling rigid mother, the infantile protector mother, the excessively ambitious mother, the punishing mother, the denigrating mother, the unfair mother, the weak and indifferent mother, the overindulgent mother and the psychically sane and instructive adequate mother. The mother will fulfill her main role towards the children according to her characteristic type; she will initiate and maintain socialization and individualization mechanisms even during adolescence.

The role of the father is secondary, indifferent and diffuse. But on the other hand he decisively contributes to the shaping and the stability of the family environment according to his typology. Rose Vincent (1972) considers the following father types: the dominating father, the tyrant father, the "friend" father, the "candy" father and the resigning father.

We have seen that genetically each child is different and adapts and integrates differently in his relation environment even if it is somewhat common to the children of the same family.

In adolescence, that is the period corresponding to the high school pupils who were studied, each pupil is finalizing his personality, which foundations have been set during childhood, through a riotous reorganization but without any radical changes. This means passing through some important stages like the uprising or the development of the self awareness, the scandal or the self assertion, the conscience exam and exaltation and finally the assertion or social integration. (Jean Rousselet [1969] and Șt. Zisulescu [1968]). Both the family and the school must take into consideration the individual and age particularities of the adolescent pupil according to their own specific.

The school behavior is primarily based on the enrichment of the cognitive area. Based on this, his conduct should be characterized by constancy, diligence, performance and inclusion area. It must not be neglected that each high school pupil is attending a certain high school specialization following a **distribution** based on personal achievements shown by his school marks and as well as a competition with a lot of other candidates. After high school graduation, they will continue their studies at a certain university based on a more or less resembling procedure. The context in which the high school pupil is studying at present is a changing social environment with uncertain educative strategies and with the accumulation of ignorance according as he advances in his schooling process. The Romanian education system is having a paradox. The more it tries to approach the efficiency of the west European education system, the more it shows its inefficiency. According to Emil Păun (1999, p. 105) the pupil acquires in school academic skills as well as social skills. The academic skills are attained from the relation with the teacher in the area of the taught subject matters. In class, the teacher is communicating the knowledge to the pupil, then the pupil assimilates it at home, and afterwards at class the pupil has to demonstrate his ability to operate with it (see Figure 3). The social skills of the pupil consist of discovering and

respecting the norms as well as their reinterpretation and valorization in all the pupil's actions. The norms valorization reported to the teachers take the forms of negotiation, complicity and/or denial according to his attitude and the results previously attained and reported to the expected ones.

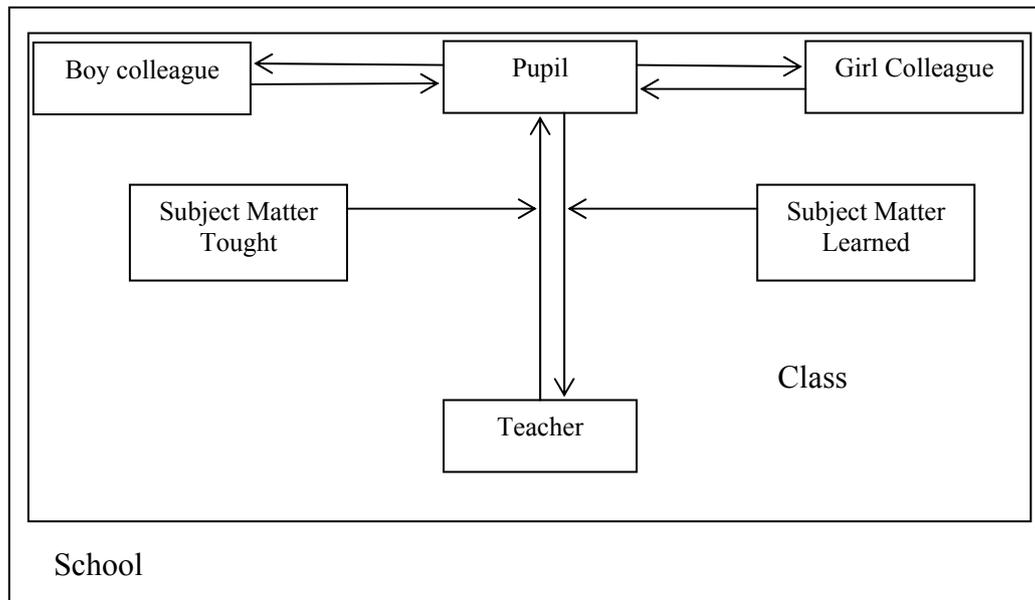


Figure 3. The Relations in School

### 3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The prolonged transition of the Romanian society from totalitarianism to democracy brings about chances that are felt from the macro social level and up to the micro social level and even the individual one. The possibility of sincere and open self expression weakens the self censor ability and sometimes behavioral manifestations often cross beyond the rules and limits of the common sense. Thus, Maria Ciobanu Băcanu (1994, pp. 460-461) observes that youngsters don't listen to their educators (parents and teachers) any more and the significant influences are the horizontal ones, estranging from the traditional values, the deepening of the communication crisis in between the generations. Also, an ambiguous and contradictory model of person and life style imposes itself. This model is based on „to have” as much and extravagant as possible obtained as easy as possible in order „to be” as visible as possible. This also includes the carrier for which the youth want a covering with diplomas without even possessing the necessary minimum of professional knowledge.

For the present research we orientated ourselves towards a hypothesis that can be formulated as follows: if the pupil's parents (mother, father or both) migrate, modifications will occur at individual level (child), micro social level (family) and community level (school and locality) meaning the change of conduct, values and

relations with consequences in the less justified growth of the tolerance and the drop of the quality of training for the life of the youth (both for professional and family life).

In order to prove the hypothesis we selected from the available methodological ensemble only the methods that allow us to collect relevant data from the field. These methods are:

- **the study of school documents** especially the register from where we extracted the annual average, the number of absences and the eventual sanctions or prizes etc;
- **the questionnaire** addressed to the pupils, with it we collected data referring to the destination of the parents' departure, the people who look after them, the content of the attendance and the suffered consequences;
- **the interview** addressed to the people that attend the pupils that pursued the agreement between the parents that have left and the respective person, the content of the attendance, the ways in which it is being offered, the pupils monitoring and the consequences felt by the pupils perceived by these persons.

For the statistical data processing we considered as independent variables: 1) the pupil's gender, 2) the class he is in instead of the age because all the pupils of the same class must cope with the same tasks and the age difference under one year is irrelevant and 3) the parent that has left in the order father, mother or both. As dependent variables we considered the person that is attending the pupil, the content of the attendance, the consequences of the pupil's situation, the school situation (marks and absences), the contact with the left parent(s) etc.

#### **4. THE FINDINGS PRESENTATION**

The transition of the Romanian economy from a planned economy to a market economy meant especially abandoning the megalomaniac ambitions in favor of the reinstatement of the equilibrium in between the resources and the possibilities as well as the resetting of the production onto the economic efficiency principles. The direct consequence of this reorientation was the reduction and even the disappearance of some industrial plants and personnel lay offs.

For the Jiu Valley which is a mining area with only one industrial branch developed in coal mining, mining reorganization meant the shut down of the unprofitable mines and the massive lay offs of the work force that became in excess, especially of the masculine part but also the feminine one. This measure made it for some people very difficult to subsist because few of them found new jobs and these new jobs were uncertain and poorly paid. Some of the people that did not find new jobs left the area heading for their places of origin or they emigrated. A professional conversion of the excess work force was tried but no significant results were attained when trying to rehire them because most of the unemployed that came from the mining sector were poorly trained both professionally and generally that further kept them in the situation of being poorly skilled workers.

The jobs offer from the area being poor, little and uncertain made a lot of the people migrate. Some migrated inside the country to their places of origin if they had what to return to. Others headed towards places with economic growth. Another

significant part of the unemployed migrated abroad. Usually, the partner in the family that left was the one that had the best chances of being hired: men for hard work in construction or agriculture and women in agriculture at harvesting or domestic work. Under the conditions of migration a double gain seems to result both for the emigrant and the host country. But the reality is that usually the emigrant has earnings that are inferior to the ones of the natives and cannot integrate in the society in which he arrives. The emigrant is forced to adapt and to integrate in the social subsystem represented by the immigrants even if he is now a European with all rights as shown by Monica Săvulescu-Voudouris (1996). Under these conditions the ones that are leaving, will settle in the country where they migrated only if they have the strength to pass over all the setbacks that they encounter. Most often after they save some money considered to ensure a decent living in our country, they return. Ruxandra O. Ciobanu (2004) shows what happens with the migrants that return home. Their situation is not the object of this study. We chose to study the situation of the adolescent children that are high school pupils that are left at home to continue their studies.

For the fulfillment of our study, we focused our attention on a lot of 55 pupils from the “Hermes” Economic High School from Petroșani which have parents that have emigrated. We chose this high school because its profile is an attraction point for the pupils from all over the Jiu Valley even if in the localities where they are from there is usually at least one high school. The gender structure of the lot is in accordance to the structure of the pupils from this high school and of the structure of pupils that have emigrant parents even if it isn’t representative for the structure of the grades.

**Table 1. The Repartition of Pupils by gender and residence**

	<b>Masculine</b>	<b>Feminine</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Petroșani	4	19	23
Petrila	5	12	17
Aninoasa	0	2	2
Vulcan	1	4	5
Lupeni	2	3	5
Uricani	1	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>55</b>

First of all let’s see what countries their parents are leaving for to work leaving their children at home in order for them to continue their studies. According to the answers from the questionnaires addressed to the pupils they indicate that on the first two positions are countries in which the language is of Latin origin – Italy 33 and Spain 15. The other countries with languages of the same origin – France and Portugal – have each attracted 2 parents. The first two countries are preferred because they are more permissive and also because the language is easier to learn. Also in these two countries there are a lot of Romanians emigrated that can help the newcomers immediately after their arrival. Other countries that are a target for the emigration are UK 3, Germany 3, Greece 3, Holland 2, Hungary 1, Turkey 1 and USA 1. Summing up the numbers referring to the parents that have left shows that there are families in which both parents have left and sometimes in different countries. This leads to the

weakening of the family cohesion and the deepening of the scission from the children's souls.

The second analysis that is important is the one of the parent that is leaving. The lay offs from the mining sector aimed first at the masculine work force and only afterwards the feminine work force was affected. Also, most of the women that were hired were working in the services sector, in other industrial segments or they were housewives. The statistics after the processing of the questionnaires show that migration has a special aspect: both parents have emigrated from 12 families, only the fathers have emigrated from 13 families and the mothers have emigrated from 30 families. This means that 42 pupils can't find their mothers when they need her to be close to them and 25 pupils can't find their fathers. Taking into account the parental particular roles, the lack of their parents exactly at the moment when their adolescent personalities are reorganizing and they are starting to undertake their adult conditions, the consequences for them can be not only frustrating for the moment but also on long term they can accumulate some distortions.

The substitution of the parent that has left is usually assumed by the parent that has remained and this happens in 35 cases. In 8 cases the situation is that the parent who has remained doesn't assume the responsibility instead it is passed on to other persons as in the case of the 12 pupils that have both parents left. The other people that assume the responsibility of attending the children are in 8 cases the grandparents, collateral relatives (uncles, aunts) in 3 cases and older brothers or sisters in 5 cases. Also one pupil is left in the care of his neighbors and in 3 cases the pupils take care of themselves.

The content of the attendance hasn't been agreed upon with the people in whose care the children were left before the parents' departure and the ones that assumed this responsibility are more or less motivated to do it. Only 18 children and their replacement parents assert that it is everything they need. It is obvious that among them there are also adolescents with one natural parent left. In all the other cases the attendance is nuanced by reducing it to food, money, cleaning sweeping up, washing, supervising (in 7 cases), moral support (in 6 cases) and affection (in only one case). This is where we can fully feel the conception according to which if you assure a child with shelter, food, clothing and some spending money then it is all that is necessary. It is very bad that the pupils also agree to such a conception.

Searching for the consequences of the absence of one or both of the parents for the pupils we can obtain the reverse of the situation created by the offered and received attendance. Each pupil and surrogate parent could give multiple explanations. Thus in 19 cases it was asserted that there could be felt an amelioration of the financial situation, but in 10 cases the conclusion was that there was no change. Where other changes besides the financial situation are felt, they are both positive and negative. The most interesting one is the lesson of life admitted in 4 cases. Also as a positive change it was admitted that the situation at school was maintained (in 5 cases) or even better it improved (in 4 cases) that were explained through the departure of the stressing parent. Among the negative changes that were felt we recorded the burdening with household attributions (11 cases), the decline of the school situation (6 cases) and inadequate alimentation (in one case). One pupil asserts that she finally gained total freedom,

which means the possibility to do whatever she wants; especially what she wasn't allowed before. By far the most painful consequences are found in 31 cases that assert that they have been emotionally affected and in 4 cases the family went through a divorce. Only now the price paid for the parent departure is visible and also who pays it. Weighing the financial gain and the different sorts of losses we believe that the results are not worth the effort.

Finally we will tackle the school situation of the pupils that have parents who emigrated. We will only consider the absenteeism and the learning performance revealed by the yearly average.

For the processing of the data referring to the absenteeism we grouped the cumulated number of absences over the last year into three groups: 1) up to 40 absences, because that would be the limit where the pupil would be expelled if the absences were not motivated, 2) from 41 to 120 because the maximum limit was the maximum number of motivated absences with which it was possible to be promoted to the next grade; 3) 121 and over, interval in which now pupils can have motivated absences and still be promoted to the next grade. The record is 289 absences with the consequence of being expelled because 164 of them have not been motivated. Also, a pupil with 273 absences was not promoted. The pupil situated on the third position with 196 absences was promoted. Related to these situations we must underline the tolerance of the new school regulations that we consider to be exaggerated and guilty complicity of the class masters. Also a great contribution to the rising of the motivated absences has the family doctor who is always jointly-interested.

The statistical analysis shows that approximately a quarter of the boys and girls make absences when the father has departed, the others make absences when the mother or both of the parents have left. The relatively low percentage of pupils that make absences when the father is migrated is due to the fact that traditionally he is not the one that oversees the school evolution of the child; mothers usually do it and it can also be seen on the absences levels. The analysis of the number of absences by grades and genders shows the same thing. When only the father is gone 13 of the 55 cases make absences but not in the final year. When the mother has left, indifferent whether the father has also left or not, the girls make more absences in the first and last high school year. As the number of absences made, the majority is on the second level (41-120) 8 out of 13 boys and 23 out of 42 girls. Also it is easy to see that the boys are to be found on the second and third level while the girls are on all levels.

We left the analysis of the learning situation of the pupils with emigrated parents for last because the marks should synthetically reflect their whole school behavior. It must also be mentioned that here is where most of the teachers' tolerance is manifesting because they consider that in this way they help the pupils continue their studies at better universities. In spite of all these things 5 pupils of the lot have registered total failures: one pupil was expelled, one pupil was not promoted (both of them had both of their parents emigrated) and 3 pupils have to come in the autumn for second examinations (one of them has both parents emigrated and 2 of them have their mothers emigrated). Another pupil was also not taken into consideration because coming from another high school by transfer and we couldn't find his admittance mark. For the other pupils we calculated the deference in between the admittance mark and

the average of the last year. Our statistics shows that 7 boys regressed 5 of them in the 9-th grade and 2 in the 10-th grade. One of them has both parents emigrated, 5 of them have their mothers emigrated and only one of them has his father emigrated. 2 boys recorded an increase in their learning situation and both have their mothers emigrated. For the girls the situation is as follows 14 girls have regressed 9 of them are in the 9-th grade, one of them is in the 10-th grade, 3 of them are in the 11-th grade and one of them is in the 12-th grade. 5 of them have their father migrated, 7 of them have their mother migrated and 2 of them have both their parents migrated. For the girls it seems that the importance of the father's role is increasing, he represents the authority, and the mothers could not substitute for his absence. The 25 girls that have recorded progresses are 2 from the 9-th grade, 10 from the 10-th grade, 4 from the 11-th grade and 9 from the 12-th grade. The parents that have left these high school girls are the fathers in 5 cases, the mothers in 16 cases and both the parents in 4 cases. From here we can notice the fact that the girls appear to be more stimulated to learn better when the mother or both parents have left. From the explanations received it results that without a competitor from the family environment, the girls assume their main task more maturely and that is to learn. The teachers' tolerance and complicity must also not be neglected.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS**

From the results that have just been presented it results that the hypothesis is verified entirely. The parents' departure abroad to work in order to insure a decent life style brings about contradictory and mostly negative results. The ones that assume the fulfillment of the parental tasks instead of the parent(s) that has/have left do so only partially. Among the deficiencies we can mention the cases that declared that they are emotionally affected and the lack of proper monitoring of their behavior in school. The strongest absence felt by the pupils is the one of the mother.

Regarding the behavior in school we must point out an alarming increase of the absenteeism from school and a drop of the effort to gain new knowledge for boys, while the girls even if they make more absences have superior performances. It would seem that because of their earlier maturing and a more subtle way of relating with the teachers, most of them being women, gain superior knowledge.

These conclusions must not be overlooked by both the parents and the teachers. The parents must be taught to behave like parents even when they are separated from their children by considerable distances. Communication may bring them closer together. The results of learning might be seen in the pupils' behavior. The mission of teaching the parents cannot be assumed by any of the teachers even if we are talking about the class master out of two reasons. First of all the teacher cannot be burdened with more tasks that are not directly linked to the practice of his profession. Secondly the teacher is not qualified for such an activity. This situation creates the need for the foundation of psycho-socio-pedagogic assistance centers of the pupils and teachers. Hiring a single psychologist is not enough. It is also necessary to have at the same time sociologists, social workers and pedagogues. This center should focus its activity on to the pupils and their problems. Also, now that there are legal regulations

that confer the local authorities some responsibilities regarding the children with emigrated parents it is important for them to be properly informed and start to take some real actions together with the social workers of these centers. Last but not least they must keep the contact in between the school and the emigrated parent as a direct link in which the social workers from the country where the parent migrated to work could intervene.

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