

Introduction

In Poland, the family assistant is appointed to perform family assistance and foster care work. The key responsibilities of the family assistant include helping parents to suitably fulfil their care and educational functions and enhancing family members' skills in finding solutions to everyday challenges. The assistance recipients are families who are unable to independently meet the needs of their members due to their limited resources. Such families are at risk of their children being taken to foster care, or their children already live away from their natural home environment. In many instances, representatives of other professions, i.e. social workers, court-appointed guardians, school teachers, had previously worked with such families. According to the assumptions of the Act on Family Support and Foster Care System and the primary concepts for the implementation of the profession, the family assistant was supposed to be positioned closer to the family. Family assistants were to carry out their activities mostly at the family's place of residence. They were expected to work with fewer families in order to have sufficient time to provide multifaceted support. Furthermore, they were to base their actions on a personal relationship, accompany family members in the performance of daily chores and motivate parents to improve their family situation, which involves learning new behaviours or changing habits.

This monograph comprises seven chapters. The first chapter defines the concept of family assistantship as a form of support. In the second, third and fifth chapter, I present a historical outline of the profession in Poland, both in terms of the reasons for the emergence of the new assistantship position in the family support system and the understanding of the role and scope of responsibilities of a family assistant. In the fourth chapter, I provide an overview of the legislation underpinning the profession of a family assistant. The sixth chapter contains my recommendations concerning the work methodology of the family assistant.

They have been adopted by both the National Association of Family Assistants and the Ministry of Family and Social Policy. Both institutions popularise this model of assistantship by posting the manual containing it on their websites, as well as by referring to it at conferences, practitioner meetings and training events. The last chapter, which is based on the results of research, focuses on the current situation of family assistantship from the perspective of its practitioners.

This monograph is published in English as it is intended for academics and practitioners from other countries to allow them to compare ways of helping families, recommend good practices and warn against replicating ineffective measures. The methodological model of the family assistant's supporting and educational responsibilities described in chapter six has been implemented by institutions in more than half of the gminas in Poland. It was also implemented in 2017–2019 by Caritas in Ukraine in its work with families affected by the ongoing military conflict. This monograph may also provide inspiration for action researchers and social workers in other countries.