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SOCIAL WORK WITH CHILDREN AT SOCIAL RISK AS THE PERSPECTIVE DIRECTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHES

Abstract: In the article the results of research of the experience of the social work with the children in a situation of social risk in Belarus are presented. Tendencies and factors as the result of which children appear in a socially dangerous situation are revealed. It is shown that social work with children at social risk in Belarus is described focusing on social orphans, children with disabilities, deviant teenagers. The same problems take place in the international practice of social work. In this regard it is possible to claim that this problem has interstate value and it is the perspective direction of the international scientific researches in the sphere of social work.

Key words: social risk, child support and protection, social work with children in needs. ■

Participation in scientific researches in the sphere of social work within the international projects (REAP, TEMPUS) allowed us to receive the results, testifying that there are the spheres of social work actual as for new independent states (Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, etc.), and for the countries of the European Union (UK, Germany, Switzerland and others). It is, in particular, social work with children and deviant youth. In this regard, we consider necessary to note prospects of the international researches on development of optimum models of social work with children and youth as their results undoubtedly have applied value for development of the international social work.

The problem of social work with children in needs is extremely actual for Belarus. Child support and protection is one of the priorities of the national social policy in the Republic of Belarus. But despite a strong effort to elaborate efficient policies and find ways for their implementation more than 34% of children are viewed as being in a socially dangerous situation.

The problems of children who are at risk have been widely discussed in the national reports since 2005. Special attention has been paid to social orphans. In die vulnerable families children are often at risk. According to statistics in 2008-2009, the number of divorces in the country was 36,100. Almost 60% of divorced couples were together no more than 5-7 years. The number of single parent families with children under the age of 18, was 355 000 or 22% of the total number of families with children. Increase in the number of children in situations of social orphanhood has been commonly reported.

The cause of social orphanhood is parental behavior's deformation. Social orphans are a special group of children from 0 to 18 years who are deprived of their parents due to socio-economic reasons, in other words they are orphans with living parents.

Currently, in Belarus there are about 30 000 children left without parental care, which is about 0.3% of the total population. One third of them is adopted or is under their relatives' tutorship. The others stay at various social institutions (orphanages, children's homes, boarding schools, children's villages, family-type children's homes). Childhood welfare agencies reveal about 5000 orphans and children left without parental care each year. Children are placed to social institutions due to the following reasons: termination of parental rights due to antisocial behavior of parents (alcoholism, drug addiction, crime, child abuse, inability to satisfy their children's needs); poor financial and housing conditions; being out of wedlock (for women); imprisonment of parents, etc.

Orphans and children left without parental custody are classified as clients of social service who live in difficult and sometimes extreme conditions that do not satisfy basic requirements for psychological development, emotional and social security.

Social orphanhood has been a complex social problem in Belarus for several decades. It deals with both financial support of orphans' living, development and socialization as well as with social and psychological issues of personality development and social adaptation upon an orphanage graduation.

The system of state-owned institutions has been the only possible but the least effective mode of the necessary facilities' provision for orphans. An orphanage or a boarding school can not substitute a family. A group to interact with is imposed on children there. Such children are poorly integrated into real life which causes the adaptation problem when they graduate an orphanage at the age of 15 or 16. These are all problems that social work still has to solve. ■

Currently, there are several basic approaches to address the problem of child abandonment in the Republic of Belarus.

1. A socio-economic approach focuses on financial support of the family, parenthood and childhood, restoration of the family's social infrastructure. Moreover, financial support for a developing network of specialized social services for families is provided.

2. A legislative approach focuses on the development of policy documents and legislation aimed at solving orphans' problems and at families' consolidation.

3. A prophylaxis approach takes steps to prevent family problems and keep a child in its own family.

4. An organizational approach aims at providing alternatives for orphanages through development of various types of substitute family care: adoption, guardianship and tutelage, foster families, family-type children's homes.

5. Creation and implementation of an effective post-orphanage support system. This approach is being actively developed since 2004. It includes such guidelines as

preparation for entering an independent life, a 1-3 years support period for orphanage graduates, self-determination assistance.

In spite of positive experience of social work with orphans and orphanages' graduates the consequences of social alienation cause negative influence on their future life.

The last 15-20 years after the Chernobyl disaster gave rise to a number of seriously ill children and children with disabilities. National level constant support for this category of children is guaranteed by special legislative acts. Social work with this target group has been developing for the last 5 years as a health and social assistance via the rehabilitation, diagnostic, health care and social centers, including Children's Hospice. Regular social assistance at home, «school» at home, special educational programs, and non-governmental projects are encouraging signs.

In the list of social problems to be solved is preventive and rehabilitative work with deviant teenagers. Until recently, social work with deviant adolescents has been the prerogative of school and special inspections for juvenile. But now it is evident that the problem requires a special social work with mis category of children. Summer camps, labor groups, the temporary employment of adolescents during summer period, the organization of recreational centers for children and youth seemed to be promising.

Social assistance to children and adults who are in a situation of internal migration is also new for social work in Belarus. After Chernobyl these people were relocated from their home places to reside in other areas of the country. The most common problems for them are: social adaptation in new areas of residence, health and social rehabilitation, prevention of chronic diseases. The growth of endocrine pathology, blood diseases, and diseases of the digestive organs has increased by 1.6 times among children. The birth of children with abnormalities leads to a denial of sick children by parents, and it increases social risks.

In the country the condition of children in need raises some concern. High divorce rate, low birth rate, high rates of infant, juvenile and youth crime and social orphanhood, early marriages and early sexual relations among young people, social-adjusted families, where there is no proper care and upbringing, victimological teenagers and youth environment can be indicators of child and adolescent distress.

In this study the problem situation consists in the need to obtain objective information about the causes of child distress and needs and in the development of an optimal model of social care for these children. Another problem is training university teaching staff for adoption of the new concept of social assistance for children in need and training practical social workers as supervisors of the students' practical training process on this problem.

The number of single parent families, consisting only of mothers with children under the age of 18 years, is 355 000, or 22% of the total number of families with children under the age of 18. The proportion of such families in urban areas is 24%, while in rural - 17%.

Divorced family, where there is only one parent, is sorely in need of housing, particularly in urban areas. More than half of young families live with their parents and in hostels, but most of them do not have their own housing that aggravates the problems of upbringing and care of young children. The acute problem of housing for

young families and families that bring up children, leads to the fact that parents abandon their children which are left neglected.

The budget of a family, where a mother raises children, falls by 40-60%. The low level of children material security in large families and in families of alcoholics or non-working parents negatively affects the welfare of children.

During the last decade the number of children born out of wedlock in the country is rapidly growing. The highest proportion of children are born to mothers younger than 20 years. The number of children born to underage girls is growing. Currently, every fourth or fifth child is born out of wedlock, therefore, is in a situation of need.

Alcoholism and drug abuse continue to remain critical challenges for our society and difficult consequences for each family and individual child. In such families children need food, clothing, and quality public service.

Indicators of ill-being and needs of children are the number of cases of annulment; number of neglected children, the number of juvenile delinquents, the number of cases of child abuse, etc. In the structure of juvenile criminality crimes against property (73%), theft and hooliganism (58%), car theft (4%) dominate. The disintegration of families, low material standard of living, social ill-being and social deprivation do contribute to growth of delinquency and crime among adolescents and young adults.

A third of young people are brought up in single-parent families and foster families - 23.3%. All this causes persistent violations of social adaptation and socialization of children and adolescents.

Government takes quite active measures to normalize and improve children's condition in the country. It is, above all, a well-developed legislation on children's rights and family policy, national programs of children care, as well as considerable annual state financing support for children. But still all these measures do not cover the social needs for children in need support.

The state has been actively involved in the process of social work system construction to effectively address the problems mentioned above. Among the key areas are: a well-developed legislation on the rights of children and family policy, national child care programs, specialized agencies, social assistance and rehabilitation, residential care facilities, day care, the practice of social work in the microenvironment. In addition, the practical experience outlined the need for special training of social workers to cope with the problems.

The education of social workers in Belarus was introduced only in 1994. Training of social workers to deal with particular category of people at risk is on agenda.

Social work is a process of social creative work, which reflects the new demands of clients in challenging life situations. Social work with children at risk requires a well-developed course of action that can lead to effective individual approach. People and their expectations are at the heart of social work.

In the course of participation in the international scientific researches we have been studying experience and models of social work with children in different countries. Results of researches became a basis for modernization of training programs of preparation of social workers for rendering the social help to children and youth. Be-

and tendencies of development of social work in other countries, to extend this knowledge, to adapt them in activity of social agencies and social workers.

As the results of researches showed, social work carries out various functions in pluralistic societies of the European countries. In this aspect definitions of practical social work by such authors as Davias (1984), Shardlow (1996), Payne (2005) which claim that social work is a peculiar greasing which provides mobility of the mechanism of society and supports status quo, helping the most vulnerable members of society to adapt for surrounding social structures are indicative. In our opinion* development of social work with youth groups of risk, with deviant teenagers, with children in need, with families in a situation of social risk assumes association of efforts of researchers from the different states and represents the perspective direction of the international scientific researches.

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