Intervention in the Interest of Deprived Elderly People

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Abstract

Beside we have to have adequate answers for our material needs we must have active relationships with our social environment as well. People living in segregated circumstances have limited access to the rest of the society, but elderly people of these fields can be mentally separated from their own communities too, according to recent research results in Hungary.

In every society of the world, external intervention for inhabitants must be based on relevant information. This has got two main resources: the first one is the theoretical framework of group processes; the second is the practical knowledge of the special territory where the programs can be implemented.

This paper has got three main chapters. From the *"Introduction"* the Reader will understand a special element of social inequalities, when we are going to concentrate on the determinant role of residential segregation. In the second chapter we will deal with the disintegration process and the decaying solidarity level of small communities, which has a major impact on elderly care. After we introduced the details of this question, we will provide a good example for intervention in the interest of people living in smaller settlements with dementia. In the *"Conclusion"* we will summarize the main points, with onwards thoughts about further development.

Keyword: Elderly, deprived groups, social intervention, and dementia

Introduction

In this paper we will have a special focus of the elderly people, dealing with those parts of the group, who is living with dementia in a deprived neighborhood. It means our point of view is not just the question of health, but the question of social inequality.

Generally, these residential territories are segregated from the rest of the society. Henceforth we have to notice that elder people's group is not a homogenous entity. In other words, when we are planning to intervene in the interest of better conditions, we must consider not just the biological component, but the sociological. I am going to analyze the latter one from the perspective of social integration.

Nowadays most scientific work deal with social inequalities refer to the problem of integration. As every expression in social science, this word also has lots of overlapping dimensions. Now I am using it

as a divergent access to indispensable resources.

Every society can be divided into smaller parts and each of them has some kind of hierarchy. The social sciences characterized this phenomenon with social stratification until the end of the XX century. Vertical differences can be recognized in residential segregation, which has significant effect on resource accessing.

The problem circle of residential inequalities

Different places for living provide different access to the same resources.

Individuals' performance intensely depends on the possibilities which they earn from their local environment. In addition, the global societies judge the fulfillment of the requirements, then reward with advantages or punish with disadvantages.

Ulrich Beck's famous book about "Risk Society" (Beck, 1992) is one of the main point which started to change perspectives how we identify the modern society. Anthony Giddens thoughts about the natural environment and the global views of human responsibilities also modified the direction of these discussions (Giddens, 1991).
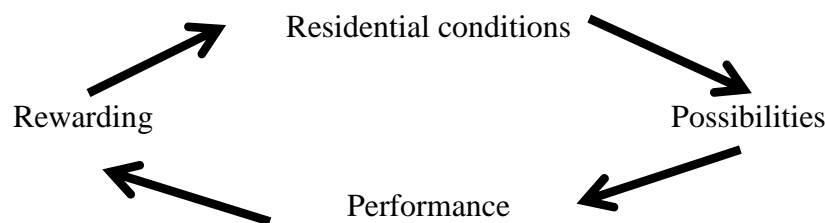

Figure 1. The problem circle of residential inequalities

One of the main problem in modern societies that people in marginalized situation lost contact with the majority of the society, so connection ratio between the lowest class and the rest of the society stuck in a minimal level. It has deep consequences.

The excluded minority cannot participate in social mechanisms, because they have no access to the legal labor market. In recent

years the value of individualism infiltrated into these communities as well, which has changed the reference points of usefulness. The father of a family, who used to get his power traditionally from his position, started to lose his integration. The main reason is the persistent unemployment. These people in Hungary have no legal job since the regime changed in 1989, so first they fell out from institutional solidarity, and then they lost their leading role in the families.

They have no social insurance, so they are not entitled to get health services and they are not eligible for old-age pension. The minority close inwards, while they are excluded by the majority.

The wider picture shows us that they fell out from institutional solidarity, but in the same time the marginalized class depends on the welfare state. It makes tension between the minority and a majority, which drives to discrimination. The global financial crisis in 2008 led the national governments to reorganize the redistribution system. In the interest of salvage jobs for people from the middle class decreased their expenses on aid for the lower class. Meanwhile there was a growing attitude against the poor people, blaming them for the decaying living standards of the whole country.

Research data from the last 5 years show that the excluded group intense integrity -, called "the culture of poverty"- has been broken, which indicates the solidarity started to decline at the micro level too. In another research project we found that the disintegration does not stop at the level of community, because it sharply affects the family life as well. The most vulnerable people -, besides children- are the elderly, especially those, who cannot take care of themselves. Dementia is not just the problem of the lower class, but empirical database unquestionably show that the members of these groups are overrepresented.

Elderly people in segregated communities living in decaying solidarity

Similarly to all creatures of the Earth, human beings also have to face with difficulties in different parts of their daily life, when they are getting older. Both, physically and mentally we decline after a certain age, but there are significant differences between people from various strata of the society. The risks of demetia threaten everyone above the age of 70, but higher educated population got less chance for the disease.

Elderly people in the society often feel useless after several decade-long active terms they retire. The loss of a spouse easily leads to reclusive life condition. If we have a closer look at the circumstances of the elderly in the deprived communities, we will see the similarities, but have no doubts about the contrast. In a case of intervention, we have to separate these two factors from each other. Simultaneously the follows must be clarified:

1. Sources of problem and aim of the intervention.
2. Planned method, which considers the circumstances.

Sources of problem and the aims of intervention.

How we already pointed out, we cannot have the same approach in a case of deprived areas, where uneducated population concentrates. Solutions for majority can be easily failed-; beyond the

demographic scale, we have to consider their special, local circumstances.

Those who belong to the majority of the society have advantage of the institutional solidarity and have more effective resources for adequate information. It gives them economic integration even if they are not the part of the labor market anymore. The inhabitants of the deprived area get aid and social services from the state, but as we emphasized above, its intensity decreased in recent years.

The marginalized population usually gets access to the illegal market, which supply them with financial resources in a temporary scale, but make it impossible to save up money for the future. As a consequence they heavily rely on the solidarity of their own social environment. A new perspective of the problem just emerged in these communities: the moral solidarity, which derives from the structural position of this group, started to fall apart. Without supportive background, the individuals lose their point of reference.

In a research project, which was carried out in in Hungary from 2009-2010 (Kozma-Vajda et. al, 2010) we found that the defensive function of the "culture of poverty" does not exist anymore (Lewis, 1963). One of the main symptom, which belongs to the subject of this paper-, was the mixture of family roles. In most cases self-identification had serious damages. Children in large quantities could not response simple questions about: "Who are your parents?" "How many sibling have you got?" Their parents in most cases already separated and entered into a new relationship.

Accordingly, the older generation does not have trustworthy connections, despite their relatives physically live close to them.

Our analysis deals with a special component of the aging population, but considering the relation above, we can understand better another aspect of the problem. Those who lives nowadays at a deprived area, after a certain age, have to face a new form of exclusion. Disintegration of the neighborhood has main effect on their status in the origin community. They are losing the central role, which gave them respect in the community. One element is the crisis of the nuclear family, but we identified another one. We learnt from Julius Wilson (Wilson, 1990) that segregated people has different norms, which influences their lifestyle and has effects on the reproduction of social structures. The "underclass" essentially has no connection with people from other strata. In the interest of integrating the community they have built up their own social culture, which not certainly based on the values of the majority. The members' self-esteem derived from their homogenous group, where mainly everyone had got the same marginalized living condition.

The deprived households got permanent incomes exclusively from social aids and services, provided by the wider society. When the decision-makers of the state are planning to implement new intervention models in the interest of deprived elderly people, must avoid unintended effects. If there are available financial resources, it is essential to spend enough time to get the adequate plan for intervention. The tight target groups definitely need medical and financial support, but we have to deal with

the social environment too. From this perspective, there is no question, the

intervention has to reach the the whole community.

METHOD

Planned method which considers the circumstances

The elderly, who live under the same roof with their relatives easily can be mentally separated. As soon as they are losing their abilities as fast as they be a burden for their "own" family/community. Therefore external interventions must contain planned mechanisms about how they would like to maintain the disintegration process.

We know well from Durkheim (Durkheim, (1986, [1897])) that division of labor is the key for solidarity. In Hungary mostly civil based NGOs and religious organizations deal with the special needs of the deprived area. They run various programs referring to the complex needs of the elderly. Several of these programs found the way how they can create possibilities, which indirectly promote the elderly's reintegration.

a.) One of these programs is activating the whole community, but has a special focus on the local young generation. Those who live in permanent poverty do not have long term plans. It is not easy to execute projects, while knowing that a significant number of the participants have a behavior like that. The aim is to get involved them into the method, which produces conspicuous production. Ergo intervention must manage to influence the individuals' decision-making process and the residents have to experience some explicit results as well.

These steps can help to deal better with timing and planning. The young generation's activities scheduled by daily duties and have strict deadlines. Some of them aim to maintain the weakened relationships with their old relatives.

b.) In another place the social workers experienced that residents often chop off every trees, including fruit trees, when they are looking for firewood at wintertime. An NGO found it out, it is sellable, if the fruits can be conserving in a form of jam, so they offered a guaranteed price for bottles. The residents started to recognize and appreciate the fruit trees, henceforth they had to think in advance. With this method the community members had been forced to create a local labor division. The elderly has become an important part of this corporation, because they have the knowledge of preserving.

c.) Dementia is a serious disease, which influence the daily life of the whole family. In most cases the people simply ignore the problem, because they feel ashamed. The Alzheimer Café's movement wants to change this behavior. The Alzhemier Café gathers relatives of the people with dementia, where they can discuss their experiences and living strategies. Everyone is equal in this group, because their problem is common. The leaders of this program said it really can work with smaller settlements residents, even if some of them live in derivate area.

Result

All the above mentioned programs can assist to reach the goal: preserve the role of the older generation and do not let them exclude from their social environment-, even if they have to face with serious diseases. The first two supports to find the possible ways back to recohesion of the local community, but the third one want to make one more step foreward: create connection and bulid solidarity between different social classes.

Discussion

The Alzheimer-Cafe program is in the early stage in Hungary. We confirm the international experiences: this is a simple, but great method to provide answers for desperate relatives of elderly people who suffer from dementia. To organize an event there is no need for stable financial background, so there is no need for government support either. What is needed is information *for everyone*: how to deal with situation never experienced before?

The question is what we cannot answer yet: does it work with mixed groups? Is it possible to create communication between members of the society who may never get connected without this event?

CONCLUSION

When we know why we want to intervene in a situation, we have to take into consideration which method can work in that special environment. With the knowledge of group mechanisms we are able to integrate segregated parts of any society. Community development has many aspects in academic debates, but there are some essential common points of these.

According to Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Model (Festinger 1966), by enlarging the right arguments, the commitment favorable to integration would become permanent in the individuals, and hence in the community.

The program further aim is involving more people from the segregated areas. Even those ones who are separated from their local environment want to communicate, want to get answers and in the same time want to share their experiences. Alzheimer Café can be a model to develop social service and gives a chance to reduce social tensions. The state can get fewer expenses and in the same time can support deprived households as well. Important benefit of the program that the social care system can be more flexible and the service can be available in a permanent basis. It is a huge achievement, because in this way the intervention will provide adequate answer for unequal resource accessibility too.

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