

SPECIFICS OF THE SOCIAL WORKER'S WORK WITH THE REFUGEE COMMUNITY DURING THE WAR CONFLICT IN UKRAINE

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Abstract:

In the following article, the author describes the current situation in the field of social work in Slovakia caused by the war conflict that began in 2022. The acute situation and the influx of refugees, hitherto unknown in modern history, and the need to solve social demands and problems put social workers and also refugees in a specific mutual relationship and professional attitude in the field of providing help, support and services.

Keywords: state of war, vulnerable groups, social assistance and support, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological burden, vulnerable groups.

Introduction

The situation caused by the acute event of the war conflict in Ukraine starting on February 24, 2022 brought an unexpected intervention in social work as well. The specifics of working with refugees in a so far unknown scope and requirements brought many stimuli and expectations into the given issue, which had to be solved immediately, or to take an adequate position on them.

The beginnings of the work of social workers, from the provision and satisfaction of basic needs to people in need affected by the war, which consisted in the provision of food, clothing and emergency accommodation, registration and obtaining the status of a temporary refuge, to the work focused on the integration of individuals, families and the community, made and still make high demands and in to a considerable extent, it brings a burden on the social workers themselves.

The variety of demands from the refugees and their differentiation with respect to the areas they come from, their social status, age, post-traumatic stress affects the personality of the social worker and requires an absolutely professional approach.

Being forced to leave one's own country and seek help in the host country causes a number of changes for refugees, affecting in a fundamental way many areas in their lives.

We can also talk here about a kind of temporary life, situations when they have nowhere to return to and have no idea how it will turn out. Then the social worker often becomes the refugee's only contact with the new world he is entering. The goal, which is typical for social work with refugees, is the current solution to the situation and the prevention of conflict situations. (Bejček, 2016)

After the initial administrative steps have been taken care of and social, psychological, and legal assistance focused on individuals has been handled, work with the refugee community begins.

Community care is a spectrum of different services that are provided to clients, groups of a certain community, whether ethnically or geographically. Community work is variable, which means that each situation requires a different solution (Bočáková, Kubíčková, Stanová, 2021).

The community of refugees from Ukraine consists of ordinary people who found themselves in a situation that is not normal for them. The community is united by the war conflict, which prompted the creation of this community coming to the territory of the Slovak Republic. An important prerequisite for working with a given community is first of all understanding the real needs of the persons in question and helping them fulfill them. It starts with the solution of small problems and gradually moves towards solving the situation within the limits of the possibilities with the active participation of the client. Each client, as a unique personality, has his own natural ability to cope with the situation in which he finds himself.

Community work with refugees requires, first of all, a common language,

as part of this need arises the necessity of teaching the Slovak language as an educational activity for people coming from another country, in this case from Ukraine, marked by war conflict.

An essential feature of social work with refugees is the social worker's ability to distance himself from an ethnocentric view of the nature of the problem with which the client comes to him. In this regard, it is necessary to ask whether social workers are sufficiently familiar with the habits, moral standards, culture of refugees and especially with post-traumatic stress.

The state of war, the result of which was the departure of refugees from their home country, causes a huge psychological burden and subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder in most of these people.

The impossibility of continuing to live in one's country brings with it instability, religious and racial differences, psychological and physical violence and humiliation. Psychological deprivation caused by said conflict can trigger post-traumatic stress disorder, which manifests itself months or even a year after a stressful event through stimuli that remind the experienced event, we also speak of a delayed reaction to the event as re-experiencing.

Reliving the trauma of war causes a certain withdrawal in clients, an inability to experience joy and avoidance of situations that remind them of the trauma. We can associate numbness, anxiety, lack of concentration, increased vigilance and irritability in these clients with reaction manifestations (Hartl, Hartlová 2000).

In situations caused by the trauma of war and their subsequent reminders, the individuals in question are the most vulnerable. As the practice of working with the refugee community shows, the actions and perception of the immediate environment depend on their ability to immediately solve the situation and the problems that have arisen. It is to these clients of social work that are so specific that we must provide adequate help, especially in situations of their material lack and social insecurity.

Experience from practice with the refugee community confirms to us that when their material needs are sufficiently saturated, these clients are willing to gradually approach a constructive solution to their psychosocial problems, the language barrier through Slovak language courses, securing employment, the inclusion of children in the educational process and overall the need for adaptation to new living conditions.

Intervention in the integrity of the family

A natural consequence of the unnatural situation of war conflict is the division of the family as a basic structure. Due to the fact that the fathers of the families remain in the war conflict, mostly mothers with children and seniors come to Slovakia, in these dimensions, again a narrowly specific community of clients particularly vulnerable due to the situation, the roles of family members are necessarily reconfigured, which has a significant impact on their further functioning .

Mothers with children, as well as senior citizens, are forced to be in a new, hitherto unknown environment where they often experience not always pleasant behavior from officials, policemen, doctors, and teachers.

The crisis situation caused on the one hand by the trauma of the war and on the other by the disintegration and separation of individual members of the basic family, but also of wider family, friendly and collegial ties determines the process of adaptation.

Refugee families can be classified as both families and individuals with a socio-cultural disadvantage. We observe this disadvantage in the following areas (Slowík, 2007):

- language barrier
- national or racial difference (cultural, religious)
- low economic and social status
- health handicap or limitation
- sociopathological family or community environment
- institutional education

A significant handicap that refugees have to cope with is unemployment and the subsequent effort to be included in the labor process, which is significantly blocked by their language barrier. Sufficient material security, preservation, or approximation to the economic status in the state before the war conflict in the home country has a significant impact not only on their material, but also on their health, psychological and social status. The forced unemployment of refugees, the involuntary exclusion from work and from their active life, also affects relationships in the family and in the community. The unemployment of refugees and their opportunities to find employment on the labor market are often marked by employers' reluctance to hire them. This phenomenon also occurs as a result of the present negative attitude towards this group of outcasts (Frištenská In Šišková 1998).

Family relationships, isolation

In the case of refugees, isolation is usually a consequence of running away from home itself, which results in a significant limitation or interruption of contacts, apart from contacts through social networks. Isolation can also be caused by the first failures of integration into the social environment of a new country, into the work or school and educational process.

Another factor that contributes to the isolation of refugees is the incompleteness of families and the absence of a father. A family represented by a woman, a mother, in addition to isolation, also faces an economic collapse, as running a household, raising and caring for children in a foreign country is a huge burden for such lonely mothers and they are most at risk of unemployment (Matoušek, Pazlarová, 2014).

Due to the lack of financial security of the family and the existence of socio-cultural obstacles, it is difficult for such families to provide economic security for the family other than through the payment of social benefits, this aspect also has an adverse effect on the psychological health of the woman - mother, but also on the children, who, due to the lack of financial means to pay for free time activities, are also isolated from peer groups. Such families are subsequently dependent on the help of state administration bodies, charities, various non-profit organizations through projects that support their essential needs, as well as other free time activities. Individual work with families depends on the approach of social workers, special educators, psychologists, therapists and priests.

Vulnerable groups

A vulnerable person according to Act No. 404/2011 on the residence of foreigners is:

- a minor
- a person with a disability
- victim of human trafficking
- a person older than 65 years
- pregnant woman
- a single parent with a minor child
- a person who has been subjected to torture, rape or other serious forms of psychological, physical or sexual violence, in justified cases a person under the

age of 65 can also be considered an elderly person

In social work with refugees during the war conflict in Ukraine, the social worker comes into contact mainly with minors, single and single parents with a minor child, persons older than 65 years, and pregnant women.

Children - minors

The vulnerability of accompanied refugee children is influenced by the negative experience of forced departure from the country of origin threatened by war and subsequent integration in Slovakia.

Key factors for this vulnerable group are:

- the child's age
- incompleteness of the family
- insufficient material security
- language and communication barrier
- national, cultural, religious difference
- presence of disease

The demandingness of the social worker's work is conditioned by empathy, willingness to get as close as possible to the child in question, and orientation towards cooperation. The integration of the child into the community of other children coming from the same territory, but mainly the adaptation and integration of the child into the educational and educational process.

The experience with children included in kindergartens and elementary schools brought positives in the form of earlier adaptation, but also faster handling of post-traumatic reactions.

Women

An important group among the refugees is women. The environment, homeland, family and various traditions and customs are an important part of a woman's life, as well as her family and children. Changing the role and status of women in the process of forced integration places high demands on women and causes stress.

Getting into new conditions requires a longer-term process. The inclusion

and stabilization of financial requirements for a woman also presupposes her adequate education. The process associated with documenting education is also stressful in itself and requires a certain independence. Even in these cases, the help of social workers is essential. A social worker is in charge of the translation of basic documents and documents, writing a CV and job application, searching for job offers through the Employment Offices and various portals offering employment, and communication with employers.

Seniors

A characteristic feature of this social group is reaching a certain age, changing life roles and decreasing economic independence. Senior age is associated with inactivity and unproductivity. The deteriorating health of seniors contributes to the loss of their functional abilities. The view of seniors and old age is stereotypical (Janečková).

Seniors in the position of refugees are forced to cope with many unfavorable situations due to their social status. For senior refugees, the factor of previous employment and their experience play a significant role in their adaptation to new conditions.

From the experience of social workers in finding employment for the target group of seniors coming from the war conflict, practice confirms that it is very difficult to enter the labor market over the age of 50. Other factors contributing to the unemployment of seniors include the language barrier, low qualifications and reluctance to travel to more distant places for work. The economic independence of senior refugees can subsequently lead to social exclusion in the form of poverty and psychosocial problems.

Socialization of refugees

The family enables the individual to find support, to identify with it, and at the same time provides freedom to build and preserve one's own uniqueness (Matoušek, 2003). In relation to the child, the family is an environment in which the child learns to adapt to life, acquires basic habits and ways of behaving (Procházka, 2012).

In the aforementioned roles of the family in the position of a refugee, whether it is an adult individual or a child, the family becomes dysfunctional and incomplete

due to the war conflict and the separation of the father from the family. However, a change in the cultural and social environment as a result of forced departure can have a huge impact on the course of socialization and integration, especially for children of preschool and school age. The school provides children with a certain form of background, socialization and adaptation process and the possibility of obtaining prerequisites for further social application. Thanks to peer groups, it enables children to better adapt, overcome culture shock and cope with post-traumatic stress disorder more quickly.

Professional approach of a social worker in social work with refugees

The characteristics of a social worker are based on his profession of performing social work. A social worker is an expert who helps solve or alleviate the client's socially burdensome situation, mediates and distributes social assistance, and performs preventive activities. The personality characteristics of a social worker, his social skills and knowledge are prerequisites for the successful performance of his profession (Brnula, 2008). The social worker's personality is very important for the performance of the profession of social work, given that he is affected by external factors that he must manage and know how to work with.

Due to the fact that it is often risky work, the social worker must be a mature personality who is able to deal with stressful situations in the performance of his profession (Levická, 2005).

Social skills can include:

- ability to communicate
- active listening
- acceptance
- empathy

Other requirements that a social worker should possess are personality traits, moral integrity, trustworthiness, confidentiality, possess the required level of general and professional knowledge.

In the situations of social work clients caused by the war conflict, refugees become a specific community for the social worker, on the one hand due to their acute and necessary needs, their difference from the majority group of clients.

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