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ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION IN THE ROMANY MINORITY

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Abstract

Goal: The goal of this study was to map communication in the Romany minority using the 'model of culturally considerate and adjusted care' by J. N. Giger and R. E. Davidhizar. The article is focused on verbal and non-verbal communication where we considered the opinion of the Romany population.

Methods: We used the quantitative research method with a non-standardized questionnaire. There were 600 Romany respondents. The selection criteria were age, gender, place of residence and the Romany nationality. The questions were based on the 'model of culturally considerate and adjusted care' by J. N. Giger and R. E. Davidhizar.

Results: The results show that using the Romany language in this minority is influenced by the way of life and place of residence of every person. It is a problem for them to understand information regarding nursing because they do not understand all the information provided by medical personnel. The Romany frequently use non-verbal communication, such as gestures (67.7%), facial expressions (44.5%), intensive eye contact (38.3%) or body postures (25.8%).

Conclusion: The Romany minority seems like a very specific group due to their verbal and non-verbal expressions. These indicators distinguish them from the majority of society. Contemporarily, we can see a certain assimilation, mainly in the adoption of the language of the majority society. Due to integration, the original Romany language is disappearing because it is not passed on from generation to generation.

Keywords: *Communication; Giger and Davidhizar; Integration; Romany language; Romany minority*

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION

The care of a person, both in health and illness, is one of the cultural manifestations in every society. We can say that contemporary society is multicultural. On a daily basis we meet members of other cultures, different religion or way of life (Kutnohorská, 2013). Every person is an individual and we must approach them in such a way. The members of the Romany minority, which includes the highest number of minority members in the Czech Republic, are people with many specifics in all life areas. 'The Report on the Condition of the Romany minority in the Czech Republic' states that there were 245 800 Romany members in the Czech Republic in 2016, which is 2.3% of the total population (Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

Although the Romany have lived in the Czech Republic since the 15th century, they have maintained certain characteris-

tics in their behaviour that have not changed over the years (Kaleja et al., 2012). The basic characteristics include communicative aspects. Considering the fact that communication is most important in nursing, it is necessary to constantly pay attention to it (not only by medical workers but the Romany as well). Ivanová et al. (2005) state that, in nursing, it is necessary to consider a patient's ethnic and cultural values as well as their habits, traditions, limitations or opinions on health and healthcare.

For a complex assessment of all these aspects, nurses can be helped by 'the model of culturally considerate and adjusted care' by J. N. Giger and R. E. Davidhizar. In this model, communication is an independent area that must be carefully assessed. Giger and Davidhizar (1999) emphasize voice characteristics, using pauses in speaking, facial expressions, haptic expressions, proxemics and the knowledge of the mother tongue (which is very important) and its use in daily life.

The goal of our research was to map communication in the Romany minority using the 'model of culturally considerate and adjusted care' by J. N. Giger and R. E. Davidhizar. The article is focused on verbal and non-verbal communication, where we considered the opinion of the Romany population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We used the quantitative research method with a non-standardized questionnaire. In the first phase, we carried out a pre-study with interviews with 8 members of the Romany minority. The questions were based on individual areas of the 'model of culturally considerate and adjusted care' by J. N. Giger and R. E. Davidhizar. The areas were communication, biological differences, time and space, the influence of the environment and upbringing, and social inclusion. The obtained data enabled us to create a non-standardized questionnaire for 600 members of the Romany minority. The selection criteria were age, gender, place of residence and Romany nationality. There were 294 men (49%) and 306 women (51%) between 15 and 65+ years from the whole of the Czech Republic.

The research was carried out between February and December 2016. The questionnaire was distributed using the "snowball" method and associations for the Romany minority.

The obtained data were processed using the SASD programme (statistical analysis of social data), where we calculated absolute and relative numbers with expected values and the level of variability. In the second phase, we used the chi-square goodness of fit test (Pearson Chí-Square) and independence test. The testing significance level was $\alpha = 0.05$; 0.01; 0.001 (Tóthová and Olišarová, 2017).

RESULTS

Regarding communication, we focused on verbal and non-verbal communication.

The results of our research showed that if the respondents lived by the Romany traditions, it was more probable that they would use the Romany language ($p < 0.001$). Understanding the written or spoken language is affected by the place of residence. The research proved a statistically significant relationship between the place of residence and understanding the written and spoken Romany language. The respondents who lived in houses stated that they understood the written ($p < 0.01$) and spoken Romany language ($p < 0.001$) more than the respondents living in flats.

Language can sometimes be a barrier to nursing. We wanted to know whether the respondents had problems in communicating with medical personnel (Chart 1). Most respondents (34.1%) had medium-level problems, 24.9% had frequent problems and 3.5% always had problems. On the other hand, 30.1% of the respondents sometimes had problems in communicating with medical personnel and 7.4% never had problems. It is also important for a nurse to give understandable information (Chart 2). Only 3.5% of the respondents stated that the information provided by medical personnel is understandable. For 43.9% of the respondents, the information is mostly understandable, and 33.2% find it medium understandable. On the other hand, the information is mostly incomprehensible for 14.5% of the respondents, and 4.9% find it totally incomprehensible.

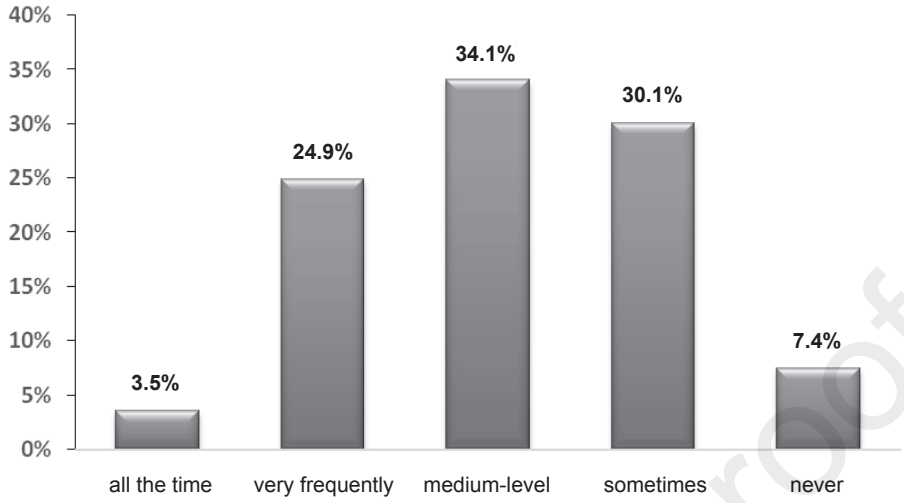

Chart 1 – Problems in communicating with medical personnel

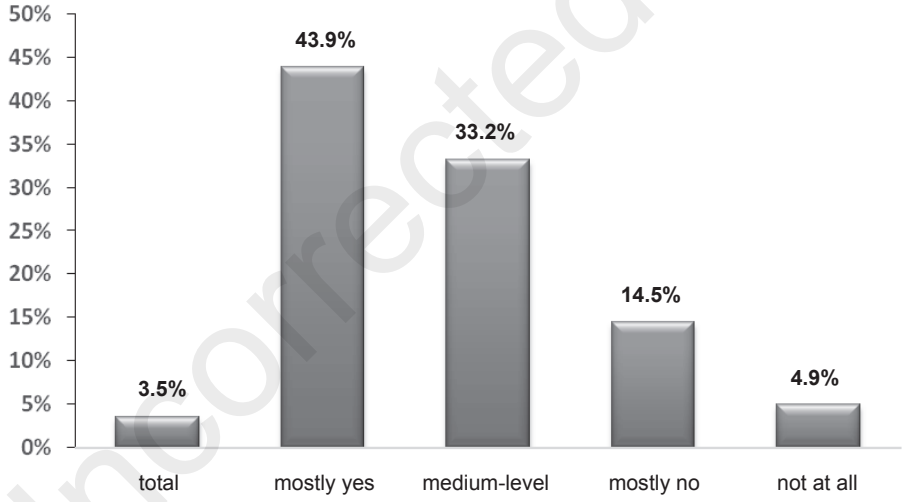

Chart 2 – Comprehensibility of information provided by medical personnel

We also dealt with the issue of how often the respondents greeted their friends. The research proved the relationship between gender and the way of greeting friends. Women in the Romany minority prefer a kiss or verbal greetings when meeting friends, while men prefer a handshake ($p < 0.001$).

Regarding non-verbal communication (Chart 3), the respondents used gestures (67.7%), facial expressions (44.5%), eye contact (38.3%) or body posture (25.8%). Regarding non-verbal communication, the research did not prove the relationship between gender and the use of these factors. Men and women used a similar non-verbal communication in similar frequency ($p = 0.947$).

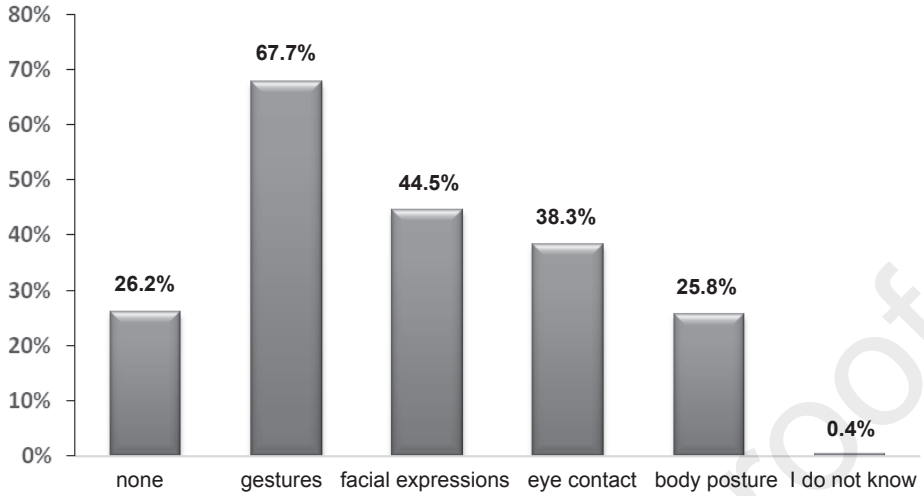

Chart 3 – Elements of non-verbal communication

DISCUSSION

The Romany minority is different from the majority society in many ways. One of the most different factors is communication. According to Kaleji et al. (2012), the Romany language is considered the most diverse. In Europe alone, there are 600 known Romany dialects. In the Czech Republic, there are 8 sub-ethnic variants to the formal Romany language.

The Czech Republic pays a certain level of attention to the issue of the Romany language. In 2016, it was taught at three universities, one secondary school and one primary school. There are also many Romany language courses. Despite all these activities, there are certain obstacles to the teaching of the Romany language. There is no support by the system or government focused on the Romany language research (Government of the Czech Republic, 2017). According to Kaleja et al. (2012), one problem is that the Romany who live outside of the Romany community do not speak the language and have problems with the formal language of the majority society. Samková (2011) also states that the youngest generations of the Romany typically do not speak the Romany language and if they do, their number is very low. The knowledge of the Romany language is closely related to the respondents' social environment. If the respondents live by the Romany traditions, it is more probable that they will speak the Romany language ($p < 0.001$). We can expect that such families more frequently maintain a traditional way of life. Kyuchokov (2014) states that it is important whether a Romany family lives a traditional Romany life and brings up their children in such a way. In such families, it is common to speak the Romany language even though they speak the language of the majority society. The organization 'People in Need', which also deals with the Romany issue, shows the fact that the traditional Romany family has been disintegrating since 1958 (People in Need, 2002).

According to the Report on the Status of the Romany Minority in the Czech Republic for 2016, attempts to teach the Romany language are proving difficult due to the lack of students and teachers who have mastered the language at such a level to be able to teach it. The teaching of the language then only happens in families, and this is also happening less and less. The number of parents who master the language is continuously getting lower. The Czech government is trying to support the activities that lead to the development of the Romany language teaching so that the language does not completely disappear (Government of the Czech Republic, 2017).

The style of communication of the Romany is very different from the majority society.

The Romany prefer non-verbal communication. They are able to guess the subtext of every statement. When communicating with the Romany, we must expect gesticulation, higher tone of voice and emotional expressions (Ivanová et al., 2005). The Romany state that they happily use non-verbal communication, such as gestures (67.7%), facial expressions (44.5%), eye contact (38.3%) or body posture (25.8%). The loud verbal expressions mostly cause the Romany to be disrespected in the majority society (Kaleja et al., 2012). When greeting, many Romany use non-verbal expressions. Women prefer kissing or verbal greetings and men prefer handshakes ($p < 0.001$). It is confirmed by the fact that the communication in the Romany minority is based on gestures, touching and lively verbal expressions (Samková, 2011).

Intimacy is very important for the Romany, and this is reflected in hospitalizations in medical institutions. If we do not respect patient privacy, it can have a negative impact on their physical and psychological well-being (Nováková, 2012). Communication with a patient is very individual and each patient has specific needs and maintains different traditions. It is always necessary to have sufficient space and time. If a patient is aware that a nurse is willing to devote time to them, they will open up and provide much more of the information that is necessary for planning nursing care. The co-operation will then be much better (Teutsch, 2003).

The Romany can sometimes have problems with understanding the information provided by medical personnel. Only 3.5% of the respondents stated that the information provided by medical personnel is completely understandable, 43.9% find the information mostly understandable, and 15.4% find the information mostly not understandable. 4.9% find the information completely incomprehensible. We should remember and continuously verify whether a patient has understood the given information. According to Vachková (2011), communication is the means of maintaining and transferring culture. All ways of communication (verbal and non-verbal) are influenced by a person's culture and individuality. Hanssens et al. (2016) state that there are many conflicts between the Romany minority and the majority society. They are usually caused by the differences in communication and not knowing the official language of the country the Romany live in.

Líšková et al. (2006) state that intercultural communication is very significant in providing transcultural nursing care. Modern society is changing from monocultural to multicultural and it is necessary to consider the differences that come from verbal and non-verbal communication of every individual. According to Ulrey and Amason (2001), the contemporary medical worker must be culturally sensitive and sufficiently informed about intercultural communication. All these aspects of care are connected and help to provide quality nursing care. Šlechtová and Burgerová (2009) also state that if we want to understand the behaviour of a certain group of people who belong to a different ethnic group, we must first understand their values.

The organization 'People in Need' (2002, p. 159) states: *"It is necessary for the Romany to undergo certain changes because changes of thinking and behaviour in Czech society are inevitable. The responsibility brought about by the majority's dominant status is larger than the advantages of such superiority. It is of primary importance to exchange group prejudice for knowledge. The majority's and minority's inner life experience are different and incomparable."*

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research confirmed several basic facts. The Romany are a very diverse minority in terms of communication. They are frequently seen as a loud and undisciplined group due to their lively behaviour and use of gestures during non-verbal communication. Although they are different from the majority society due to their communication aspects, we can see certain assimilation and primarily the adoption of the language of the majority society. Due to integration, the original Romany language is disappearing, and is not being passed on to younger generations.

In nursing, communication is very important. For this reason, it is necessary to be aware of the fact that not all information given to patients is understandable and correctly understood. It is especially difficult for patients who use a different language than Czech on a daily basis. When nursing the Romany,

medical workers must focus not only on the specifics of their way of life but continuously verify whether these patients understood the information that they provide.

Conflict of interests
The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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