

DEVELOPMENT OF THE APPROACH TO SOCIAL EXCLUSION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PUBLICATIONS AIMED AT SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

Objectives: In social work with the excluded, critical approaches are recommended that are not used in the Czech Republic.

Goal: To map the approaches and development of presenting social exclusion in publications aimed at social work.

Methods: The article analyzes documents – fundamental and recommended publications for social work programs in the Czech Republic selected via targeted selection. Overall, 21 publications were selected for the purpose of recording the development over time. The content analysis was based on the proposal of a categorization system and subsequent search for the presence of the representative features of the categories.

Results: The analysis shows that the socially excluded are represented very diversely. However, there was often a tendency to commit attribute errors, due to the description of the attributes of excluded persons and neglecting systemic issues. Some dimensions of exclusion were not reflected. The most typical approach is client oriented. Preferred approaches shift towards being more critical and complex.

Conclusions: Unfortunately, professional publications can sometimes paradoxically act as a source of marginalization. A positive direction is set for the development of approaches – towards the more critical and reflexive. Labelling of excluded persons remains rigid and focuses on their characteristics, instead of reflecting on the societal attributes.

Keywords: Access; Objective theoretical base; Social exclusion; Socially disadvantaged person

INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion has been dealt with in various socially scientific discourses for several years. The number of the excluded is continuously increasing (Čada et al., 2015). The role of social work, which, along with prevention, tries to eliminate the impacts on the social functioning of the impacted people, is important. The social workers' guidelines for working with the target group should include expert

publications because they often deal with the recommended methods regarding this issue. The aim of the paper is to map the ways and development of the presentation of social exclusion in publications intended for social work, including recommended approaches.

Social exclusion is a key concept for those working in public services, including social services and healthcare (Pierson, 2002). Social exclusion can be very simply defined as the absence of a place

in society (Kotýnková, 2000), i.e. the exclusion of the excluded to the margins of society with the consequence of the impossibility of participating in social, economic, political and cultural life (Mack, 2016). According to Růžička and Toušek (2014), given individuals or groups can be excluded not only to the margins of society, but can end up completely outside the social structure. Socially excluded people have limited access to public services and face spatial segregation and symbolic stigmatization (Čada et al., 2015). The concept of social exclusion is also referred to as “poverty” or “inequality” (Pierson, 2002). Act No. 108/2006 Coll. on social services characterizes social exclusion as the exclusion of a person from the normal life of society, and the impossibility to participate in it due to the unfavourable social situation.

The concept of social exclusion began in the 1960s and 1970s in France (Růžička and Toušek, 2014). According to Keller, until the mid-1970s, this term first referred to individual life failure, which was in contrast to the growing well-being of the rest of society. Until now, this issue has only been perceived as a marginal social problem, as it was expected that people at risk of social exclusion would be gradually reintegrated into a functioning society. The term social exclusion was used very rarely, and it was only a synonym for the words misery and marginality.

According to Růžička and Toušek (2014), this concept was developed thanks to René Lenoir, who gave it meaning in the social concept. He uses this designation mainly in connection with the naming of individuals who were affected by the exclusion from the state social security system. The authors add that the concept was viewed as a term belonging to social policy from the very beginning.

The concept was first applied throughout continental Europe, and later in the United Kingdom, where it replaced the concept of poverty (Barnes et al., 2002). In the institutional conception of the European Union, the concept of poverty was replaced from the 1980s, and later the mentioned concepts were unified (Atkinson, 1999).

Social exclusion must be understood as a dynamic process that has a multidimensional character (Peace, 2001). The concept of social exclusion is described as dynamic because it points to the processes and consequences of

social exclusion (Toušek, 2006). Multidimensionality lies in several components of exclusion: economic, cultural, social, symbolic, political, and spatial (Toušek, 2006). According to Růžička and Toušek (2014), spatial exclusion in combination with the economic, social, and political domains is typical of so-called urban inequalities. Within these domains, the authors talk, e.g., about the impact of discrimination or the absence of a social housing policy. Analysing one of the domains helps to understand others (Růžička and Toušek, 2014).

It is possible to define the structural causes of exclusion as the failure of the democratic system (Toušek, 2007), labour market, and the welfare state at various levels of integration (Mareš, 2006b). We can also define individual causes as the loss of work habits, low financial literacy or low motivation to solve one's problems. However, it is important to realize that individual causes of exclusion are often the result of structural causes (Toušek, 2007). Pierson (2002) also considers poverty, low income, discrimination, and low levels of education in general to be possible causes of this process. As a result of the process, individuals, groups, and families lose the resources that are necessary for participation in the social, economic, and political running of society (Pierson, 2002).

Thus, the socially excluded do not have access to institutions, services, social networks, or development opportunities for a substantial part of their lives, unlike the majority of society (Pierson, 2002). People may be affected or at risk of social exclusion on the basis of their class, ethnicity, way of life, religion, mental or physical disability (Mareš, 2006b). In terms of their income, it is below 60% of the national median equivalent, or they work at only 20% or less of their total work potential. In the Czech Republic, social exclusion mainly affects members of the Roma ethnic group (Mareš, 2006b). According to the Analysis of Socially Excluded Localities in the Czech Republic (Čada et al., 2015), approximately 1.5 million people are at risk of exclusion and about 115,000 people have already been excluded.

Social work approaches when dealing with the socially excluded

The incorporation of the concept and new approaches to combat social exclusion in so-

cial work occur relatively slowly. The social sphere began to obtain information about the possibilities of working with this issue at the beginning of the 21st century (Pierson, 2002). The author states that the concept of “social exclusion” is important for the following reasons: it can be used to describe several social problems that may intersect, and it proposes specific approaches that lead to the solution of such problems. The general goals of social work can include social inclusion, prevention of social exclusion or mitigation of its deepening, prevention of socio-pathological phenomena or mitigation of the risky behaviour of clients towards themselves and society, mitigation of inequalities (especially unequal access to services, helping clients to acquire or obtain social competences and mediation of information) (Janoušková and Gojová, 2008).

Anti-oppressive approaches, task-oriented approaches, and systemic and ecological approaches seem to be the most suitable when working with a given target group. There is no single recommendation for the use of a specific approach. Mareš (2006b) states that the solution of social exclusion should be based on focusing on the inclusion of the excluded in the labour market, quality housing, and equal opportunities in education. One of the key documents in this area is the Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion for the period between 2016 and 2020, which was approved by the Government of the Czech Republic in 2016. This document aims to prevent the emergence of socially excluded localities and address the existence of existing localities. The subject of interest is defined as the area of support for families, housing, employment, education, security, social services, and social work.

However, the question remains whether such documents have a real impact on domestic social policy. They require a change in society, i.e. social institutions, and physical space, which should enable the excluded to participate in social life as much as possible (Mareš, 2006b). According to Pierson (2002), social workers can free themselves from a formal role in solving problems by having the opportunity to meet their clients in their natural environment unlike other professionals. In this case, informality is the most effective in solving problems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology was based on the analysis of documents, in our case publications intended for social workers, which were intentionally selected. It was the so-called basic or recommended literature that repeatedly appeared in faculty subjects in the study field of social work in the Czech Republic. A total of 21 older and contemporary titles were selected so that time developments could be observed. The literature has been supplemented with sources that also deal with the issue. The content analysis of documents was based on a categorization system and the subsequent search for the representatives of the given categories (comp. Hendl, 2016).

RESULTS

We first monitored how the publications talk about the excluded and the causes of their situation. Clients were most often referred to as “socially disadvantaged people”, referring to families, groups, communities, and individuals. Older publications from the 1990s use the general term social client, which is defined as a person “who comes or is already in the care of a social worker” (Novotná and Schimmerlingová, 1992, p. 46). The authors add that the term social client is a commonly used term in the literature of the Anglo-American environment. Socially disadvantaged clients are then further specified by their characteristics as “persons from socially disadvantaged backgrounds”, “ethnic minorities – especially the “Roma population”, “persons with disabilities”, “migrants”, “persons with mental illness”, “persons after serving a sentence”, “persons with pathological addictions (drugs, alcohol, gambling, and others)”, “elderly lonely people”, “young people leaving children’s homes” and “single parents with a dependent child or children”.

The causes of exclusion were mentioned mainly on the personal level of individuals and were most frequently related to economic difficulties, such as “financial difficulties” (Mahrová et al., 2008), “poor financial situation” (Musil, 2004) or poverty (Matoušek, 2013). The second most common causes were “health problems”, including mental problems. The third most common included “mal-

treatment, abuse, and neglect". Interesting categories include "social difficulties", which includes "social isolation" (Matoušek et al., 2010), "lack of social background" (Nesětová and Hortvíková, 2004) or "isolation, reduced sociability, communication barriers, the problematic formation of social relations" (Novosad, 2006) and "inadequate approach to life" - with codes such as "presence orientation" (Matoušek and Pazlarová, 2010), "inappropriate reactions to life and social problems" (Nesětová and Hortvíková, 2004), "lack of sense of the reality of life" (Musil, 2004) or "less responsible lifestyle" (Matoušek et al., 2010). All of the above attributes were related to individuals. Only one publication focused on groups, which used terms like "non-standard habits", "limited ability of the members to negotiate" or "hard-to-achieve interests and goals" in connection with the excluded (Musil, 2004).

The attribution error is supported by the fact that far fewer causes of social exclusion have been sought on the part of society. In this context, reference was made to an "inappropriate social assistance system" and an "extremely economical or, conversely, overly benevolent social assistance system", as well as a small effort at integration or discrimination.

In the approaches that are recommended in the case of social work with the described target group, the code "directive" appeared most frequently, but in the context that it is unsuitable in terms of use. The client-oriented approach is considered crucial (13 cases). The approaches of cognitive-behavioural therapy are in second place (9 cases). These are followed by the systemic approach (7 cases) and the anti-oppressive approach (5 cases). In the case of specific descriptions, transaction analysis, existential analysis, and communication models appeared most frequently. In older publications (especially 1990, 1992), less attention was paid to the topic, which is related to the insufficient attention paid to social work in the Czech Republic in terms of theoretical background (as Novotná and Schimmerlingová (1992) state). After the year 2000, more attention is certainly paid to the topic of approaches in publications. However, recommendations for approaches are also evolving over time. While older publications present rather directive approaches, recent ones seek critical and reflexive approaches. Recent pub-

lications also focus more on a comprehensive understanding of the topic and approaches focused on the environment and society. In general, however, there is no deeper explanation of the inclination to this or that approach.

DISCUSSION

The socially excluded are referred to in the analyzed publications by various terms that change over time. However, they do not lack an ethnic label (comp. Kajanová, 2017). The label for the socially excluded appears more in publications. What they have in common is that they refer to a certain stereotyping characteristic (handicap) or a way of acting (users of addictive substances; comp. Walach, 2013). The predominant attributes of exclusion on the part of individuals are a frequent conceptual mistake in social work – e.g., Toušek (2007) considers it essential that the so-called individual causes of exclusion are the result of structural causes. The analyzed professional sources thus coincide with the concept typical of the general public, where the belief that social exclusion is only a consequence of personal failure dominates (Mareš, 2006a). One of the basic aspects of social exclusion – marginality (Kotýnková, 2000) – is not emphasized at all in publications. On the other hand, in the five analysed books, considerable attention is paid to the anti-oppressive approach, which, in accordance with what is stated in the theoretical part of this article, focuses on the issue of disadvantage and oppression (Mátl, 2019; Navrátil, 2012), and focuses on external/structural causes of social exclusion – which are discussed in the already mentioned Toušek study (2007).

Attributes to which attention was paid in the content analysis can be put into context with the domains of social exclusion, which are defined in the theoretical part of this article.

The economic domain is considered to be crucial. It is related to marginalization in the labour market (Mareš, 2006a). The symbolic dimension is absent (comp. the definition of Toušek, 2006). However, the above-mentioned attributes that are defined as "non-standard habits", "hard-to-achieve interests and goals" or "poor internal organization of the group" contribute to it.

The highest frequency of segments was recorded for the code “client-oriented approach” (13 segments). From the context of books, it is clear that this is an approach that is highly preferred across publications.

CONCLUSIONS

The social worker should be acquainted with the preferred approaches so that they can adequately perform their profession. Among oth-

er things, professional publications are used for this purpose. Unfortunately, even these can sometimes paradoxically act as a source of marginalization. However, with a positive direction, it changes the development of approaches towards more critical and reflexive, rigid ones.

Conflict of interests

The authors have no conflict of interests to declare.

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