THE OPERATION OF CENTERS OF SOCIAL WORK DURING FIRST WAVE OF COVID-19 EPIDEMIC IN SLOVENIA

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Centres of social work in Slovenia

- Public services, established from 1955 on municipality level
- In Slovenia 62 of them as in socialism there were 62 municipalities
- From 1991 on the number of municipalities rose to 213, the number of CSW still 62. The founding institution transferred from municipalities to the state
- Main change – top down approach, increased bureaucratisation, emphases on authorised tasks, duties under the law, recording and reporting, less emphases on supporting users of the services
- Less social workers employed in CSW, substituted by the lawyers, pedagogues, psychologist, even theologist.
- Now more or less seen as administrative units of the state and not so much as social welfare and care institutions – often associated with social benefits

Social welfare policy at a glance

- From welfare to workfare
- Increasing inequalities as „necessity" to increase justice (less taxes for reach, weaker redistribution, „slim" state...)
- Activation as main social policy strategy and new welfare paradigm (along with social „investment" ideas) – nudging people towards labour market – additional money to „active", punishments for „passive" – criminalisation of poor – speech on welfare frauds
- No major differences between social democrats and right wingers in regard to social policy
- The impact for CSW increased control, behavioural economics, choice architecture, nudging ideologies

Social reality

- Increasing poverty for some of the groups – single parents, single households, families with more that 3 children, elderly, especially women

- Precarious employment, especially for young people – up to 10 years in uncertain employment, increasing percentage od working poor

- Increased differences between regions

- Decreased social mobility

- Social exclusion of minorities

- Hostility towards the Other, distrust…

Covid-19 impact

- Increased number of deaths, mostly due to infections in residential homes for elderly – despite the closure. The main danger comes from employees. Just today 59 deaths all together.

- Strict measures of isolation – penalties for breaking rules by health inspection with the assistance of the police

- Closure of schools and kindergartens,

- Distance working form home what is rising the issue of balance between work and family, responsibility for schooling on parents

- Lots of self-employed do not receive any subsidies form the state, like artists and similar

- Violence against women and children

- Increased poverty, including food poverty

Research on respons of social services during the first wave

- Invitation to social workers from different sectors to write diery
- 23 responded positively, but 11 submitted
- All together 183 dense pages
- Qualitative analysis using MAQDA

Results

- Main concernes:
  - poor children, including food poverty
  - families that could not support the child's schooling due to language barriers or lack of learning tools
  - domestic violence, child protection
- Main obstacles:
  - Closure of CSW
  - Distant contacts, in some cases restrictions on contacts with users
  - Lack of use of digital tools (using just telephones)
  - Lack of phisical presence and field work
  - Dispersed responses – from very restrictive to inclusive as much as possible
  - No plans for emergency situation
  - Not being included into state decissions on measures
  - Lack of horisontal communication – manly top down

Results

- Ethical dilemmas:
  - To care for your family or to care for users
  - Knowing that needs are increasing but can not react due to restrictions
- Some good practices
  - Not obeying the directors instructions
  - Finding innovative ways of making contacts
  - Good coordination inside the team (working in shifts, reliable colleagues, trustful relationships)
  - Attentive leaders, encouraging SW to act (weak use of IKT)
  - good intersectoral cooperation (CSW and SCHOOLS)

Conclusion

- Centers for social work as central social welfare institutions and community services designed to help people in need, should draw up emergancy plans, including the proper organization of work and the commitment of management to coordinate work. What is important here is a good working climate, mutual trust and commitment to the basic mission of social work centers, which is to work with people, support and help people need.

- Rapid response is needed in emergency times, as people need support and help very quickly so that the situation does not worsen drastically (e.g. the problem of hunger). It turned out that there was a lot of organizational work (how to provide food, computer, internet connection, a person to support children in school, how to help parents support the child, etc.), which requires a lot of teamwork , quick agreement and cooperation. Teamwork at the Center for Social Work and the support of management in doing so is very important.

- It is important to master new technology for effective interaction in and between institutions, as well as with people. Regarding contacts with users, workers could use programs that provide an image and not just a voice, as conversations isdifferent and can also be in-depth, not just informative. Of course, it is important to point out here that nothing can replace live contact, but ICT technology has proven useful in such emergencies.

- Home visits that are carried out at a distance and with protective equipment are completely safe.

- As for working in the institution itself, the use of platforms such as ZOOm, Teams or Skype should be quite common, as it can also be used on a smartphone if computers are not available.