

POSSIBILITIES OF USING THE ECOCENTRIC MODEL IN SOCOTHERAPEUTIC PRACTICE WITH SENIORS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to present the possibilities of using the Ecocentric model in the sociotherapeutic practice, in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, with a specific focus on the elderly as one of the main target groups of social work based on current trends in social work theory, education and practice.

Key words: Social work. Seniors. Ecocentric model in Social Work practice.

INTRODUCTION

Influenced by new scientific findings, changing social conditions, social requirements and individual needs of social work clients, sociotherapy as one of the social work interventions expands its possibilities of tools and methods and thus adapts to current social and individual demands as well as the specifics of its individual target groups, seniors notwithstanding.

The topic of the application of new intervention methods and tools is one of the current issues of social work as a practical helping profession, a theoretical scientific discipline and necessarily as a field of study at the university level.

1 Sociotherapy as one of the methods of social work with seniors

Sociotherapy as one of the methods of social work, is based in different approaches and using a wide range of methods, forms and techniques of work with different target groups, plays an important and frequent role in the practice of social work in the Slovak Republic (Balogová, Bosá, Šoltésová 2015). Sociotherapy is used in working with various target groups of social work (for example: seniors, the disabled, or in social work with the families and children) (Šarišská and Balogová 2019; Šarišská, Balogová and Hamadej 2019).

Sociotherapy takes various forms (in the conditions of social work in Slovakia, it is most often, for example, bibliotherapy, reminiscence therapy, art therapy) and in summary, its goal and purpose is primarily:

- *"improving the mutual adaptation of individuals, families, groups and the social environment in which they live and at the same time developing the self-respect and self-responsibility of individuals, using their individual capacities, interpersonal relationships and relationships provided by the community"* (Balogová 2016),
- *"exploiting the healing potential of the human community"* (Vymetal 2003),
- *"activation of the client's potential"* (Balogová 2016).

It is precisely in order to achieve the intention of activating the client's potential - activating individual current possibilities from the sociotherapeutic activities of benefiting clients, it is necessary to select individual activities so that they correspond to the client's cognitive level as well as her or his other competencies and possibilities.

This choice of specific methods, tools and techniques is particularly important for those target groups that are specific, among other characteristics, to the common development period. In social work, in this respect, we most often meet with children, youth or seniors as target groups of our activities.

Aging is necessary, but at the time of its onset and during the course of a highly individual process. Its timing, speed of progress and quality of its subjective survival affects not only the sum of genetic disposition, current health status, past and present living conditions and quality of life, social ties and social environment and capital, but especially the internal perception of the individual, her or his attitude to his own aging and old age, and experienced mental well-being.

Equally subjective is the perception of one's own age as "senior", "elderly" or "retired", a change of status in the eyes of society, and one's own highly individual process. In old age, individual needs to adapt to a new life attitude, the onset of retirement, the decline of physical and, in part, mental competencies, the loss of a life partner, and the change in existing social ties.

Together with the change in the life situation, older age brings a higher probability of the occurrence of some mental illnesses. Říčan (2021) calls this process in the context of aging even as a "*mental and physical involution*".

Seniors focus more on their life, its contribution and value, carefully focuses on the future and often remains less anchored in the present, just on the orientation to the present and the future, whether their own or perceived as self-extending impact on future generations is appropriate to focus sociotherapeutic activities with seniors.

The onset of elderhood brings often comes together with changes in movement, perception, memory, attention, thinking, speech, feelings, personality (self-awareness, abilities, will, interests), partnerships, family relationships, asymmetry of relationships with children, adaptation to retirement, life in facilities for the elderly and even preparing for own or partner's death (Balogová 2005, 2016; Říčan 2021). A stronger rooting into the present moment, a focus on current life experiencing is extremely important in any period of strong change. One of the possibilities of social work interventions with this aim is sociotherapy.

2 Ecocentric model in social work

„Nature has always provided the best model for human growing“ (Plotkin 2013)

Ecopsychological development is theoretically firmly rooted in the definition of the process of biopsychospiritual growth that individual can achieve through a relationship with her or his physical environment, which includes nature, human-made spaces, living beings, local and global ecosystems creating life support (Derezotes 2017). In addition to holistic personal development, social participation and searching (also as finding) your current place of the individual benefit for the social group of which the person is a member, we see its significant contribution to the development of resilience (Sabolová Fabiánová 2017, Punová 2020), especially in case of significant life changes of client, such as leaving the work environment and retiring.

The individual stages of such perceived development in social work (Derezotes 2017) are gradually focused on the body and emotions, cognition and social environment, and subsequently on spirituality, passion, deep interest and enthusiasm for the environment.

1. Focus on body and emotions:

- safety and security,
- the environment as a source of satisfaction of needs and desires.

2. Focus on cognition and social environment:

- rebellion and rejection of rules,
- respecting external rules.

3. Focus on spirituality, passion, deep interest and enthusiasm:

- internalisation of rules,
- the connection "*I am responsible for the state of the environment*".

3 Ecocentric model in sociotherapy

The use of the Eco-centric model in sociotherapy is based on its individual Stages with a link to the client's life cycle and the tasks of individual life stages (Plotkin 2013):

1. Early childhood (The Innocent in the Nest): ego formation.

2. Middle childhood (The Explorer in the Garden): discovering the natural world.

3. Puberty and early adolescence (The Thespian at the Oasis): verification of social roles, creation of a sovereign and authentic social self.

4. Late adolescence (The Wanderer in the Cocoon): leaving home to explore mysteries of life.

5. Early adulthood (The Soul Apprentice at the Wellspring): learning to embody personal mission in the world.

6. Late adulthood (The Artisan in the Wild Orchard): realizing personal mission.

7. Early elderhood (The Master in the Grove of Elders): caring for the soul more than fellowship.

8. Late elderhood (The Sage in the Mountain Cave): care of the Universe.

The focus is on the seventh and eighth stages, inter alia, intergenerational, cultural and environmental activities.

From the possibilities of using the Eco-centric model in sociotherapeutic practice, as defined in the last issue of *Social Work Treatment*, a collection of Oxford University, which summarizes current trends in social work, we see the greatest opportunities for working with seniors in institutional and non-institutional social work conditions in Slovakia in the following areas (Derezotes 2017): guided visualization, interview with the "empty chair", animal assisted therapy, art therapy, walks in nature and work in the garden and in the garden, vision quest - finding a mission for the next stage of life, environmental activities, active participation in community projects and different intergenerational activities.

Many of the above-mentioned activities are used in our sociotherapeutic practice as well as in self-care activities of social workers and also of clients of social work

CONCLUSION

It is inevitable to realize that, like most target groups of social work, also seniors, in their current theoretical and legislative definition, are not a homogeneous group. Not only between the individual age categories there are significant differences in cognitive capacity, physical abilities as well as individual interests and preferences. The individual tools, as well as the application of the eco-social model of social work in sociotherapeutic practice with seniors have to be carefully considered, as social workers should do when choosing any other sociotherapeutic tool.

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