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Care for a mentally ill person in the biography of a family carer in Poland and Ukraine

Summary

Health and illness are a constitutive basis for the social functioning of individuals, groups and communities. Disturbances in the state of health lead to dysfunction, discomfort, pain and the experience of exclusion in everyday life. The health, the same as knowledge and skills, is one of the forms of human capital and can be called health capital. Each individual is born with a determined amount of health capital, which increases from birth, and after exceeding a certain age, begins to depreciate in the aging process.

Illness is the opposite of health. The path to recovery can be quick and smooth, but in many situations the recovery process takes a long time or does not end at all, as the disease can become chronic, cause disability in various spheres of life, ultimately leading to death. Mental illnesses are types of chronic diseases of varying intensity, course and unpredictable outcome. They are a source of social stigmatization since they foster social distancing. They cause shame and embarrassment and social exclusion greater than other disorders, preventing ill people from everyday functioning and achieving established life goals.

The issues of people with mental disorders are the subject of research carried not only by representatives of medical sciences, but also social sciences. The interest in this problem is due to the complexity of mental health issues, which cannot be perceived only in medical terms, but must be seen much more broadly. Mental illness as an issue of great social importance requiring skilful legislative intervention and coordinated actions of public administration bodies, governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations dealing with issues of legal protection and actual care for people with disorders and mental illness.

The occurrence of a mental illness is a trauma not only for the sick person, but also for their relatives. In various psychotic states, the patient is not even aware of the seriousness of the situation. On the other hand, a carer, a person providing round-the-clock care and support, experiences this tragedy even more severely. In this dissertation, the subject of qualitative research is the subjective image of the social reality of family carers of mentally ill people. The aim of the research is also to learn and present how they perceive the world of a mentally ill person and their presence in those people's life.

The biographical method was used for the research, which in a varied way always referred to the subjective perspective of the respondents, making their own point of view a necessary threshold in constructing theoretical generalizations. As a research technique, an autobiographical narrative interview, developed in accordance with the concept of Fritz Schütze, was used. The study involved 49 family carers from the Podkarpackie Voivodship (Poland) and the Khmelnytsky Oblast (Ukraine). Purposeful selection of the research sample made it possible to reach a specific and closed circle of family carers. The selected methodological and analytical scheme allowed to recognize the social world of family caregivers and to compare the individual fates of the respondents from two neighboring countries.

The presented conclusions do not exhaust the subject of the dissertation, but they can be a contribution to further research on this issue. They can also help in the development of more effective forms of help and support for family carers who take care of mentally ill relatives and their mentees.