

EMPOWERING STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICE PROVISION IN THE CONTEXT OF WELFARE DEFICIT

NAUJANIENĖ RASA¹

RUŠKUS JONAS

MAŽEIKIENĖ NATALIJA

MOTIEČIENĖ ROBERTA

DVARIONAS DŽIUGAS

ŽVIRDAUSKAS DAINIUS

VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY, LITHUANIA

INTRODUCTION

Overall aim of the study is to analyze peculiarities of provision of social services at micro, mezzo and macro levels and to develop empowerment oriented social service model in Lithuania context. The study is financed by the Research Council of Lithuania. Existing model of social policy and the efficiency of social services network were discussed in order to emphasize particularities of context for social services in Lithuania. Empowering social work concept was used in order to elaborate specific guidelines how to organize

1 Correspondence to Rasa Naujaniene, Department of Social Work, Faculty of Social Science, Vytautas Magnus University. E-mail: r.naujaniene@sgi.vdu.lt

innovative social services seeking effective social inclusion through connections in between all sectors of economic life – public, private and non-profit or voluntary sector.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

The term *empowerment* has its roots in the involvement of citizens in community planning efforts to establish a mechanism for social reform and the alleviation of poverty (Marris, Rein, 1982). Non-profit organizations (NGO) were main actors in this movement. Involvement and participation of social services recipients in decision making are referred to concept of empowerment. Pease (2002) argued that empowerment has to be the central and growing concept of social work theory and practice. It has to be mandatory in mission of social services organizations and the essence of social welfare legislation. Lord and Hutchison (1993) made a study, using focus groups in order to hear social service recipients' voices. The data showed that helplessness arises not just any one reason, but also there are various disempowering factors and the whole of experiences. The participants of the study indicate social isolation, non sensitive social services and systems, poverty and violence as disempowering factors. Research participants who live in poverty social isolation derive from a lack of support. According to the opinion of participants, insensitivity of social services asserts as negligence, when clients are simply tired of the continued unresponsiveness to their appeals and also due not inappropriate interventions, when is reacting to the consequences of the problems, but not to their solutions. Poverty creates a loss of control, dependence to the system, the complaints for failure, loss of self-esteem and abuse of human state.

Through analysis of literature review we identified several levels of empowerment. *Individual level* relates with control of own life and seeking the aim. According to Lord and Hutchison (1993) empowerment always is individual and ongoing process. *Group level* is defined as a tool for self-help, encouragement and consciousness (Sadan, 2004). *Community level* is considered as mobilizing resources

for common good. According to Sadan (2004) communities teach people to make decisions in groups, solve mutual problems, set goals and etc. Empowerment community is essential for accessibility to social and economic resources (Friedmann, 1992). *Organizational level* relates with formal strategies of empowerment. Donaldson (2004) argues that organizations of social services are ideal instrument to develop empowerment oriented social groups. Professional social workers and their expertise in empowerment oriented interventions is main reason among others for such argument. Organizational empowerment is considered as one form of community empowerment, when organizations develop democratic principals in management and create empowering environments within organizations. Staff of social services organizations has to be empowered by employers and participate in decision making processes. Hardina (2005) argues that empowerment oriented social services organizations have to demonstrate certain practices towards empowerment. Among them are development of formal structures for participation of recipients, minimizing power differentials among different actors within organization and with recipients, promotion of team building and other. *Political level* of empowerment relates with critical awareness focused on social justice.

The experience and understanding of services recipients is main source for empowerment. "Nothing without us" – the declaration of people with disabilities – represents position of social services recipients. Empowerment of working staff is one more source for empowerment oriented social services. Employees that feel diminished and resigned would not take responsibilities for solving problems. Active employees feel comfortable with own strengths, are enterprising and create additional value for organization. Empowerment relates with taking risk, having ideas about future and etc. Person who doesn't participate in own empowerment is not able to empower others. Establishing empowerment oriented organization culture is discussed among other issues.

CONTEXT

In Lithuania there are several institutions responsible for the governance of social services. The Ministry of Social Security and Labour implements state policy on social services. It renders proposals for the development of social services and arranges legislation projects for municipalities. Municipalities are responsible for provision of social services within the area under its authority. A municipality plans, evaluates and forecasts the needs for social services (Naujaniene, 2007). In Lithuania the development of social services started in 1991 after restoring statehood of the country. Social services organizations governed by municipality and non-profit or private organizations are providers of social services. Currently services are still underdevelopment and accessibility to social services is far from universal and based on evaluation of needs for them. While, not all persons in need of services are able to receive help, and not all those defined by legislation as eligible for clienthood are admitted for services. Based on Naujaniene (2007), in gerontological field, not all persons who receive services actually need them.

METHODOLOGY

Research was based on Participatory Action Research perspective. Qualitative as well quantitative research methodology was used in order to achieve research aim and objectives. During qualitative stage of the study research data were collected using semi-structured interviews with fragments of non-formal conversations. Research participants were invited to participate in focus groups as well as in face to face individual interviews. Two focus groups with representatives of non-profit organizations (NGO) were conducted as well nine face to face interviews were conducted with representatives of The Ministry of Social Security and Labour, municipality administration, responsible for social services and staff of organizations who provide social services were conducted.

The questioning and critical reflection of a social work service provision has been initiated during the interviews and focus groups. The participants of the interviews and focus groups were invited in the first stage to express their needs and expectations, to explore their local empowering and disempowering experiences. In the second stage to develop patterns for action and changes pursuing and designing the empowerment based social work service provision. Reflections and discussions merging different perspectives create rich prerequisites for the knowledge production. The texts from the transcribed research interviews constitute the data material under analysis. Grounded theory was used a qualitative data analysis method.

Based on the analysis of qualitative research data the questioner for quantitative data collection was developed. Items in the questioner were oriented to real/existing model of service provision and to ideal model based on empowerment oriented social services provision. Questioners were distributed for social services providers and recipients from different social services fields: people with disability, older people, people with mentally disorders and etc. Questioners of services providers (N=264) and questioners of services recipients (N=303) were used for the statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the process of elaboration of empowerment oriented social services model we present initial insights based on qualitative research data analysis. Initial statement could be stated that based on data analysis provision of social services is still lacking a systematic and conceptual holistic approach. While analysis of interviews with policy makers at state and municipality levels, and representatives of NGO and professional social workers revealed involvement of research participants and their awareness about system of social services at makro, mezzo and micro levels. Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (Ministry) and municipalities were emphasized as main actors in making policy of social services through planning, financial schemes and involvement of services providers in social

services system. NGO are emphasized as important actor in service provision from the empowerment oriented social services perspective: NGO are closed to people in needs for service, they involve people in planning services and even provision of services. However some challengeable issues were revealed also. Miscommunication or even not willingness to collaborate among different ministries, particularly in issues related with care and nursing. Dominant understanding of health as medical issue by diminishing psychosocial aspects of health could be considered as well reason as consequences of this misunderstanding. When different departments argue where is no space for recipient's voice and no space for empowerment oriented social services at all.

Based on Korosec and Berman (2006) there are several ways in which authorities of municipalities can support the efforts of NGO to develop new social programs. These include raising awareness, helping to acquire resources even including direct municipal support, and coordinating efforts among NGO and others in program development and implementation. In Lithuania municipalities have formal structure to implement that task while analysis of interviews with representatives of NGO and staff responsible for collaboration with NGO revealed some tensions in these relations. Based on earlier research, involvement is a core concept in empowerment oriented social services model. During data analysis this concept was found as having different meaning for different actors. The representatives of Ministry emphasize "involvement of communities" in social services planning and provision. While formal status of communities was represented quite vague, in some contexts it was related with some associate structures, in other just "communities". Representatives of municipalities consider involvement of NGO as an additional burden for the staff. Unwillingness to collaborate with NGO was dominant category looking at relations between these two actors. Representatives of NGO didn't talk about involvement and described relations with municipalities as "efforts to meet requirements of the project". The reality that NGO are financed through projects was a topic within the talk of research participants. Shortcoming, unsafe financial situation for the organization and staff, fragmentation in

service provision and some other limitations were revealed that disturb development of NGO's as services providers and develop and implement empowerment oriented social services. Mistrust from Municipality positions was the dominant one. According to many authors, involvement is related with participation in planning and decision making. Municipalities have formal structure to involve NGO in these processes and representatives are invited to participate in that. While "nobody knows nothing" is expression told by representative of NGO in discussion about float of information as well between municipality and NGO as inside NGO. The last but not least insight relates with scared financial resources allocated for development of new social services. Through analysis the lack of resources and the need to distribute small money for meeting big need was explicitly and implicitly apparent in different contexts related with NGO: competition between NGO's, financing schemes based on contracts or projects, competition between NGO and municipal service providers, mistrust between NGO and municipality and other.

REFERENCES

1. Donaldson L.P. (2004). Toward Validating the Therapeutic Benefits of Empowerment-Oriented Social Action Groups. *Social Work with Groups*, 27(2/3)
2. Friedmann, J. (1992). *Empowerment: The Politics of Alternative Development*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
3. Hardina D. (2005) Ten Characteristics of Empowerment-Oriented Social Service Organizations. *Administration in Social Work*, 29 (3), 23-42.
4. Korosec R.L., Berman E.M. (2006). Municipal Support for Social Entrepreneurship. *Public Administration Review* . May/June, pp. 448-462.
5. Lord J., Peggy Hutchison P. (1993). The Process of Empowerment: Implications for Theory and Practice. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*. 12(1), 5-22.
6. Marris P., Rein M. (1982). *Dilemmas of social reform: Poverty and community action in the United States : with a new preface*. University of Chicago Press.

7. Naujaniene R. (2007). Social construction of entering clienthood in gerontological social work. /Accademic disertation/. Rovaniemi: University of Lapland. ISSN 0788-7604; ISBN 978-952-484-182-5.
8. Pease B. (2002). Rethinking Empowerment.A Postmodern Reappraisal for Emancipatory Practice. British Journal of Social Work, 32, 135-147
9. Sadan E. (2004). Empowerment and Community Planning: Theory and Practice of People-Focused Social Solutions. <http://www.mpow.org>.