

PREVENTION IN SOCIAL WORK – POLISH CONTEXT

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Summary. This paper provides an overview concerning the connections between prevention and social work. Both these types of activity have a common origin because they are derived from the theory of social pedagogy. At present, there is a growing need for social security as well as prevention which attempts to go beyond the existing facts and prevent aggravation of pathological phenomena in families and local communities. A major role in social security is played by social work performed with the aim of improving the functioning of individuals and families in their natural habitat. It includes elements of prevention preceded by a good diagnosis as well as pre-planned and methodical influencing based on the contract with the client. Both social work and prevention have the same axiological bases, which means that the supreme value is man who has the right to development, social participation and self-determination despite the difficulties they encounter. In addition to many other functions, social work also fulfils the preventive function through the actions that are undertaken in order to prevent the occurrence or development of adverse behaviours, states or phenomena in a particular population. The essence of these actions is to counteract such threats the occurrence or intensification of which is probable in the future.

PROFILAKTYKA W PRACY SOCJALNEJ – KONTEKST POLSKI

Słowa kluczowe: profilaktyka, praca socjalna, patologie społeczne

Streszczenie. Artykuł ma charakter przeglądowy i dotyczy ukazania związków między profilaktyką a pracą socjalną. Oba rodzaje działalności mają wspólną genezę, ponieważ wywodzą się z teorii pedagogiki społecznej. Obecnie rośnie zapotrzebowanie na pomoc społeczną, jak i profilaktykę, która stara się wyprzedzać istniejące fakty i zapobiegać pogłębianiu się zjawisk patologicznych

w rodzinach i społecznościach lokalnych. Ważną rolę w pomocy społecznej odgrywa praca socjalna, wykonywana na rzecz poprawy funkcjonowania osób i rodzin w ich naturalnym środowisku. Zawiera ona elementy profilaktyki, poprzedzonej dobrą diagnozą, zaplanowanym i metodycznym oddziaływaniem opartym na kontrakcie z klientem. Zarówno praca socjalna, jak i profilaktyka mają te same podstawy aksjologiczne – najwyższą wartością jest człowiek, który ma prawo do rozwoju, uczestnictwa w życiu społecznym i samostanowienia, pomimo trudności, na jakie napotyka.

Introduction

Currently, there is an increase observed in our country in antagonisms and aggressive behaviours related to the political situation as well as the individuals' and groups' social and material circumstances. The social inequalities with regard to income, access to goods and services, education and culture come to the fore. The increasingly pathological character of social life is manifested in the increase in aggression, hostility, prejudices and stereotypes as well as anti-social and self-destructive behaviours (e.g. alcoholism, addictions and suicides). At the same time, there is a growing number of social conflicts which arise out of divergent interests or a sense of threat among individuals or groups. Undoubtedly, one of the manifestations of the crisis of the state and family is a great material and social diversity causing inequality of opportunity among Poles. The deprivation theory assumes that each social protest is caused by 'growing expectations' and depends on the extent of satisfaction of the individual's needs¹. This ruins the order prevailing in the society, maintained by means of respecting the principles, values, legal and moral standards, religions or traditions, which causes the lack of the sense of social security. Economic deprivation in a family leads to its dysfunctionality and constraints in discharging parental duties, cause conflicts in the family and affect their system of values and behaviours. Child neglect and domestic violence are currently some of the most common forms of hurting children.

It is protracted, unresolved conflicts leading to hostility and fading away of the emotional bond that have particularly adverse effect on family. The most severe consequences of crisis situations and conflicts in the family are borne by the children who are then forced to function in a situation of threat and deprivation of needs, above all the need for safety.

¹ W. Adamski, *Aspiracje – Interesy – Konflikt*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 2011, nr 1(20), s. 322–327.

Children brought up in vulnerable environments experience traumatic situations, become occasionally involved in marital conflicts, feel inferior and are discriminated by their peers. They have problems with their schoolwork, do not attend any extracurricular or out-of-school activities, and have no educational plans. They are more likely to engage in risky behaviours which jeopardise their health and lead to severe adjustment disorders². Crisis situations in family are caused by many reasons which are often interrelated or ensue from the root cause, e.g. alcoholism.

In the field of social work there is a concept of a ‘multi-problem family’ (instead of the term ‘dysfunctional family’), which stresses the striving to treat the welfare client as an independent individual. In such families it is often difficult to discern which is the effect and which is the cause of the dysfunction³. A fundamental role in assisting individuals and families in a crisis is played by social security as it satisfies the needs and prevents loss of stability in life while initiating various forms of support and self-help. Social security is a part of the social policy system and is directly linked to social work. Its objective is to solve social problems, i.e. phenomena taking place under the impact of social changes considered in the aspect of disparities between people and individuals’ non-adjustment to new situations. These are targeted actions taken by the state, self-government bodies and other organisations aimed at improving the living conditions and removing social inequalities⁴.

In addition to many other functions, social work also serves the function of prevention through the actions that are taken in order to prevent the occurrence or development of adverse behaviours, states or phenomena in a particular population. The essence of these actions is to counteract such threats the occurrence or intensification of which is probable in the future. This is a process of supporting humans in coping with difficulties threatening their correct development, health or life, and of reducing and eliminating risk factors⁵.

At the core of prevention in social work lies specification of the problems that need to be addressed, identification of pathological behaviours as well as determination of the risk factors and of the protective factors that will support

² E. Rajwa, S. Marynowicz (red.) *Współczesna rodzina. Funkcjonowanie, zagrożenia, terapia*, MCDN, Kraków 2002, s. 30 i n.

³ I. Krasiejko, *Metodyka działania asystenta rodziny*, Śląsk, Katowice 2010, s. 11.

⁴ K. Gorlach, *Zmiana społeczna a problemy społeczne* [in:] K. Czekaj, K. Gorlach, M. Leśniak (red.), *Labirynty współczesnego społeczeństwa*, Śląsk, Katowice 1998, s. 14.

⁵ Z. Gaś, *Profilaktyka w szkole*, WSiP, Warszawa 2006, s. 20–30.

the activities carried out by social workers. Prevention in social work occupies a foremost place and should be pursued taking into consideration not only the features of the individual and the family but also the educational advantages inherent in the local environment. The objective of social prevention and social work is to eliminate the risk factors while enhancing the protective factors at the same time.

The purpose of this study is to show the links between prevention and social work which serves not only the rescue function but also the one of prevention. This subject is topical and important from the social, educational and axiological points of view, especially in the current social situation with the growing need for social security and social prevention.

Social prevention and its axiological foundations

A wide social and cultural diversity among individuals and social groups is currently observed in Poland. The transformations of the modern family taking place under the impact of globalisation, technological advancement, the activity of the mass media and mass culture affect the individual's mentality and life. The growth of consumption needs, commercialisation, pragmatism, rivalry, egoism, minimalism as well as the lack of authorities and faith in the universal values has an adverse effect on interactions within families and communities. The need for a material success and self-accomplishment, and the relaxation of moral standards cause disturbances in discharging parental responsibilities and social roles, which results in pathological behaviours among young people and adults.

The manifestations of social pathologies most commonly referred to include:

- alcoholism, use of drugs, designer drugs, inhalants and medicines;
- behavioural addictions: pornography, computer games, the Internet, mobile phones, gambling, anorexia, bulimia, orthorexia (obsession with eating healthy food);
- those related to the emotional sphere: premature sexual activity, sexting (sending sexually explicit photographs or videos between mobile phones or over the Internet), running away from home and being in a cult;
- those related to breaking the law: drug trafficking, juvenile prostitution, criminal behaviours (thefts, burglary, mugging, aggression, extortion and vandalism), risky behaviours (motorcycle or car races);

- problems with mental health and proneness to depression and suicidal thoughts, self-mutilation, social withdrawal, aggression, bullying the weak and cruelty to animals⁶.

Among the pathological phenomena occurring in the local communities, a serious problem is domestic violence which mainly concerns children, women and the elderly. It occurs not only in dysfunctional families but also in families with high social and economic status. According to the 2017 police statistics, over 90,000 people in Poland were recognised as victims of domestic violence (90% of them were women and children) but this number may be even higher due to the fact the acts of domestic violence are not disclosed by the victims. According to information provided by the Department of Prevention and Road Traffic of the Police Headquarters concerning the Blue Card procedure, domestic violence is a growing phenomenon. There was a significant increase in the number of cases of mental violence as compared with 2015 and 2016. In 2017 police officers initiated approx. 76,000 Blue Card procedures (an increase by 2.9% relative to 2016); every week 3 women are killed as a result of domestic violence, and approx. 500 women die each year⁷.

The fundamental principle of democracy is equalising opportunities for individuals and groups that may fail to cope with difficult social situations and therefore require assistance from the local environment in order to prevent exacerbation of the dysfunction and pathology. It is for that reason that prevention occupies such an important place in social assistance, especially in social work. The origin of the preventive measures is related to medicine, but they were gradually transferred to the social field, which was related to the development of social pedagogy which dealt with the social determinants of the human functioning. The pioneers of social pedagogy in Poland, e.g. Helena Radlińska (1879–1954), Aleksander Kamiński (1903–1987), Jan W. Dawid (1859–1914) and Ryszard Wroczyński (1909–1987) emphasised the interdependence between an individual and the social environment. A marked development in preventive activities in Poland took place after the period of economic and social transformations which caused an intensification of the pathological phenomena

⁶ S. Grzelak (red.) *Vademecum skutecznej profilaktyki problemów młodzieży: przewodnik dla samorządowców i praktyków oparty na wynikach badań naukowych: jak wspierać młodzież w podróży życia*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, Warszawa 2015, s. 42–43.

⁷ Statystyka.policja.pl/st/wybrane-statystyki/przemoc-w-rodzine Informacja Prewencji KGP dotycząca realizacji przez jednostki organizacyjne policji w 2017r. procedury „Niebieska karta” (20.01.2019).

(unemployment, poverty, violence, addictions and crime). Currently, the term prevention occurs in social sciences together with the word 'social', which signifies preventing socially harmful phenomena, i.e. social pathologies, which indicates the environmental aspect of the actions.

This term has two meanings in the field of social pedagogy:

- a field of knowledge and practical skills combining the areas of social security, pedagogy and social policy, enabling instigating preventive actions on social grounds;
- pre-emptive action preceding the occurrence of symptoms considered as adverse, undesired and inappropriate, and minimising the impact of the factors causing a potential threat to human health⁸.

Thus, prevention comprises actions that are aimed at preventing the occurrence or development of adverse phenomena in a particular community and is one of the ways of reacting to social phenomena which are considered harmful and pose a threat to man and the social order. Prevention has both an individual and a collective character; it precedes facts and incidents in order to prevent them. Prevention is pursued at several levels according to the degree of risk⁹:

- primary, or universal, prevention concerns the entire society (low-risk groups) and its purpose is to promote the healthy lifestyle, disseminate knowledge on risk factors and their consequences. It is pursued at schools, out-of-school educational institutions, cultural and educational facilities and the mass media;
- secondary, or selective, prevention is aimed at higher risk groups; it requires a good diagnosis of the environment and has an interventional character and its purpose is to limit the severity and duration of the adverse behaviours. The forms of this prevention include family counselling, sociotherapy, individual therapies at psychological and educational counselling centres, community centres and youth clubs. An important role is played here by social work with individuals or families;
- tertiary, or indicative, prevention addressed to high-risk individuals or groups, i.e. those who manifest clear adjustment disorders which

⁸ R. Czerniachowska, *Profilaktyka kompensacyjna, ratownictwo, opieka, pomoc – analiza pojęć i wzajemnych powiązań między nimi*, [w:] E. Marynowicz-Hetka (red.) *Pedagogika Społeczna*, WSiP, Warszawa 2009, s. 113.

⁹ J. Szymańska, J. Zamecka, *Praktyczne aspekty profilaktyki problemów związanych z zażywaniem substancji psychoaktywnych* [w:] G. Świątkiewicz (red.), *Profilaktyka w środowisku lokalnym*, Warszawa 2002, s. 28.

are antisocial and destructive. This requires specialist assistance provided by doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists at external institutions.

There are different strategies at all the levels of prevention, e.g. information, educational, alternative actions, interventional, strategies for reducing damage and environmental changes¹⁰.

In the colloquial understanding, prevention relates to actions the aim of which is to prevent a person from acquiring negative characteristics and losing such characteristics that are considered as positive; the basis for making a decision is the system of values prevailing in the particular population. Today reference is made to creative prevention which takes advantage of constructive activities intended to enhance or maintain the pro-social attitudes that could not be attained by means of defensive prevention. Defensive prevention means stigmatising, blocking and suppressing inappropriate attitudes and destructive actions. Both options supplement each other and the choice depends on the individual preferences of the social workers, the type of threats or the individual's resistance to prevention measures¹¹.

The source of man's goals and life plans are the values that determine their actions, indicate what is good and desirable from both the individual and the social points of view. These are the beliefs, ideas or objects that an individual considers valuable¹².

The psychological definitions stress that it is an object of desire, a determinant of motives and choices of objective and methods of actions; values determine man's freedom with respect to their choices; they depend on their knowledge of the world, education and individual experiences, i.e. they are of a subjective character because they contain certain standards of behaviour and patterns that the individual strives at. They stimulate and adjust behaviour and enable the individual's activity¹³.

In pedagogy, values are understood as precious, important and significant goods that are worthy of desire. They remain in relation to human needs, man's

¹⁰ D. Macander, *Profilaktyka uzależnień w szkole, e-poradnik*, Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji, www.ore.edu.pl, (15.01.2018).

¹¹ J. Szymańska, J. Zamecka, *Przegląd koncepcji i poglądów na temat profilaktyki [w:] Profilaktyka w środowisku lokalnym...*, s. 20–29.

¹² P. Kozłowski, *Wartości, cele i plany życiowe młodzieży niepełnosprawnej społecznie*, Impuls, Kraków 2016, s. 75.

¹³ M. Dubis, *Wartości i style życia młodzieży*, „Jagiellońskie Studia Socjologiczne” 2014, nr 1, s. 37.

development and activity in their environment; they define the meaning of life which is a prerequisite for man's functioning in the world. A person themselves choose the values they hold precious and pursues them influenced by their impressions (evaluative orientations). Man's system of values affects their current and future behaviours; the hierarchy of values reflects the hierarchy of man's needs¹⁴.

In the aspect of pedagogical axiology there exist social values and standards that occur outside education as well as values that are present in education, assimilated consciously or unconsciously¹⁵. Valuing is a process intrinsically linked to education and prevention. Values constitute the foundation of the process of education; they are the basis for each system of education and prevention and determine that goals of education, constitute their sources and justifications; they determine the criteria for evaluating actions in terms of education and prevention. Education and prevention mean helping the charges to protect their freedom, develop their aspirations and desires, and create their own hierarchy of values. Freedom from alcohol, drugs or other addictions must not be detached from freedom in the other spheres of life. Therefore, prevention does not only consist in imparting knowledge on alcohol and addictive substances but above all in teaching mental and social competences, which will allow for managing your own emotions and realising the sources of failures. At the core of life crises lies the crisis of values. An individual who achieves satisfaction in life has a sense of dignity, controls their behaviour more easily and is less prone to engage in risky behaviours¹⁶.

In the 20th century, the prevailing theory of man is the philosophical personalism, including Christian personalism based on the principles contained in the Ten Commandments and the Gospels wherein you can find the primary values which constitute a goal in itself and exist on their own¹⁷. Personalism is corroborated in prevention and social work. If a person has good relationships with people, i.e. their family and neighbours, has moral sensitivity, accepts the standards of living together, has good communication skills and satisfied needs,

¹⁴ M. Kleszcz, M. Łączyk, *Młodzież licealna wobec wartości, samotności i pasji*, Impuls, Kraków 2012, s. 10.

¹⁵ M. Nowak, *Teorie i koncepcje wychowania*, WAIp, Warszawa 2008, s. 367.

¹⁶ M. Łakomski, *Aksjologiczny wymiar integralnego wychowania i profilaktyk w szkole*, „Pedagogika Przedszkolna i Wczesnoszkolna” 2015, t. 3 nr 2(6), s. 41–48.

¹⁷ M. Łobocki, *W trosce o wychowanie w szkole. Podejście Skoncentrowane Na Rozwiązaniach w pracy społecznej*, Impuls, Kraków 2007, s. 36–40.

then the odds of risky behaviours are low. According to the assumptions of personalism, prevention excludes passive impact on an individual as an object but places emphasis on being active, increasing the sense of responsibility for one's own choices and enhancing the protective factors¹⁸. Undoubtedly, social prevention has an axiological dimension because it makes reference to the values and predicts phenomena that may pose a threat to man.

Social work and its connections with social prevention

The most important role in social assistance is that of social work performed in order to improve the functioning of individuals and families in their natural environment. Social work is a practical activity because its objective is not only to diagnose the reality but also to transform it and to anticipate certain facts and events; thus, it is of a preventive character. Its tasks include exploring the social needs that are possible to satisfy with the efforts of social workers. Models of social work vary depending on the scope of the state's control over the public life and on the political, economic and cultural situation.

In modern social work, it is the utilitarian attitude that is prevailing, which means that social work is treated as a method of solving specific problems in the individual and social dimension. In order to set a goal for the practical welfare activity, it is necessary to bear in mind a certain ideal that the development of society should aim at, as well as the kind and scale of the current social problems¹⁹.

The main objective in the area of social work is assistance to people being in complex crisis situations which need a comprehensive and planned support preceded by an accurate diagnosis based on a contract with the client. In the course of performing their tasks, social workers achieve the desired model by using specific methods and strategies. They fulfil the roles of counsellors, helpers, informants, mediators and activists as well as coordinators or rescuers, but above all of the persons who attempt to prevent aggravation of the undesirable phenomena. According to the Committee of the European Council²⁰, social work is a professional activity aimed at improving adaptation of people, families and groups to the social environment as well as developing the sense of personal dignity and responsibility, taking advantage of one's own potential. Social work

¹⁸ M. Łakowski, op. cit., s. 41.

¹⁹ P. Czarnecki, *Teoria pracy socjalnej, Społeczeństwo i Edukacja*, „Międzynarodowe Studia Humanistyczne” 2012, nr 2, s. 403–420.

²⁰ J.M. Młyński, *Człowiek wobec przemocy. Zarys pomocy socjalnej*, Biblos, Tarnów 2009, s. 25.

is carried out within the framework of the social assistance tasks at the local level, at the place of residence of the client, and the institutional level, i.e. within a welfare institution (nursing homes, residential and day care centres, seniors' clubs, night shelters, etc.)²¹.

Both in prevention and social work, it is necessary to take account of the fact that social dysfunctions result from a coincidence of various factors of a psychological, social and economic nature; therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration three areas of activity. A particular characteristic of social prevention is that it does not aim at introducing positive changes to the social reality but at maintaining the current state which is deemed normal and satisfactory. Its aim is to prevent the occurrence of the phenomena considered to be negative and to maintain the state that is found to be positive.

Prevention activities in social work can be broken down into:

- actions to prevent degradation of psychophysical health;
- diagnostic actions carried out at the initial stage before symptoms of pathology occur;
- actions to prevent or alleviate the adverse effects of social pathologies from the point of view of social work.

Social work can be perceived as an activity in the field of social prevention, alleviating and reducing the damage and scale of the pathology. The welfare function of social work also has a preventive aspect because fulfilling the material needs contributes to reducing the pathology that is determined by poverty.

Working with an individual case, which is a commonplace occurrence in social work, has the character of a preventive intervention like social activism the purpose of which is to activate individuals and groups²². Social and preventive actions should incorporate different areas of human activity, i.e. the intellectual, emotional, economic and social ones, at the same time.

With regard to social work, several types of social prevention can be distinguished:

- stimulating prevention, consisting in activating the individual in the socially desirable direction;
- inhibitory prevention which signifies suppressing incorrect social attitudes and pathological behaviours;

²¹ Idem, *Praca socjalna: procedury działań instytucjonalnych*, „Studia nad Rodziną” 2013, t. 17, nr 2(33), s. 161.

²² K. Borzucka-Sitkiewicz, K. Kowalczywska-Grabowska, *Profilaktyka społeczna. Aspekty teoretyczno-metodyczne*, UŚ, Katowice 2013, s. 76.

- symptomatic prevention aimed at early detecting adverse behaviours and preventing them from developing;
- pre-emptive, or neutralising, prevention consisting in increasing the individual's resistance to the risk factors;
- maintenance prevention which is intended to hinder or prevent making risky decisions;
- creative prevention, aimed at enhancing forms and ways of positive behaviours²³.

In social work, there are visible preventive measures taken in order to make sure that a certain social problem will not occur. While performing preventive tasks, a social worker wants to reduce or decrease such phenomena that threaten human health; health promotion is one of the essential tasks in their activity.

Currently, there are prevention programmes being carried out in local communities, integrated with the particular communes' social policy, with the participation of various institutions including welfare centres.

Conclusion

Prevention is closely related to social assistance, particularly with social work. When commencing work with individuals or families, a social worker also performs preventive tasks and attempts to minimise the risk factors and enhance the protective factors. They take up pre-emptive and preventive actions in order to prevent the occurrence of crisis situations and create conditions promoting the correct functioning of individuals and families. The correct functioning manifests itself in fulfilling social roles and discharging family and professional duties while prevention within the framework of social work counteracts adverse behaviours from the point of view of the social interest.

The object of social and preventive action is not only an individual or a group but also the conditions that determine their circumstances as well as the social environment.

Both social work and prevention recognises the role of independent subject of the individual and perceives them in the environmental context where the individual's good must be combined with the common social good.

²³ W. Szczyński, *Zarys resocjalizacji z elementami patologii społecznej i profilaktyki*, Żak, Warszawa 2003, s. 205.

The purpose of diagnosis in social work and in prevention is not only to find out about the particular charge but also to gain their trust and build up a partnership relationship, which may help them understand the problems.

The prevailing attitude in both social work and prevention is that of tolerance towards the charge and showing them kindness because only then the social and preventive actions will be effective.

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