

Edukacja dorosłych w Polsce i na świecie

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Social workers' education in the context of the challenges of the ageing society

Kształcenie pracowników socjalnych w kontekście wyzwań starzejącego się społeczeństwa

Słowa kluczowe: osoba starsza, starzejące się społeczeństwo, edukacja.

Key word: older people, ageing, education.

Streszczenie: Jednym z największych wyzwań XXI wieku jest starzejące się społeczeństwo, co pociąga za sobą konieczność poszukiwania nowych form i metod kształcenia pracowników socjalnych. Pracownicy ci potrzebują różnorodnych umiejętności oraz wiedzy, aby dostosować się do wymagań i potrzeb osób starszych. W prezentowanym artykule skoncentrowano się na nowych formach i metodach kształcenia studentów pracy socjalnej, którzy będą podejmować pracę z osobami starszymi. Ukazano, że w pracy z seniorami wymagane są innowacyjne metody, które umożliwiają pracę twórczą z nimi. Podkreślono, że kreatywność jest punktem wyjścia oraz podstawą pracy pracowników socjalnych z seniorami. Proponowany sposób kształcenia pracowników socjalnych do pracy z seniorami umożliwia nie tylko zdobycie wiedzy, ale przede wszystkim rozwój kompetencji autokreacyjnych. Aby to osiągnąć, proces kształcenia osadzono na holistycznym modelu człowieka z uwzględnieniem założenia, że człowiek rozwija się przez całe życie. Proponowany model kształcenia pracowników socjalnych do pracy z osobami starszymi opiera się głównie na warsztatach rozwoju osobistego, które są również podstawową metodą pracy z seniorami.

Introduction. Global ageing is a phenomenon characteristic of the contemporary world. This claim is supported by prognostics, according to which in 2050 one in five inhabitants of our planet will be over 60, and in 2150 – one in three (cf. Leszczyńska-Rejchert 2010, p. 7).

Global ageing is identified following a number of indices, which are identical for most countries. The phenomenon has the following characteristics:

- “increasing number of citizens over 80; demographers expect the number of centenarians to reach 2.2 million in 2050;
- Feminisation of the elderly; at present, women constitute the majority (55%) in this age group;
- Differences between the speed of ageing in different world regions;
- The speed of ageing in developing countries is higher than in developed countries. Undoubtedly, it is related to the fact that certain states introduced solutions aimed at alleviating and countering this phenomenon¹” (Pikuła 2013, p. 118–119).

An important transformation occurring in the globalized world is the growing “over 80” subpopulation. The fact that more and more people enter the old age also means the growth of life expectancy. Populations of most countries show the growing trend in life expectancy. For instance, in Poland life expectancy is higher for women, with an increase of 13 years between 1956 and 2010; for men the increase is nearly 11 years. At present, in Poland the life expectancy is 80 years for women and 72 for men (cf. Duda, p. 12). It must be emphasized that the life expectancy growth is a positive effect of broadly understood progress and industrialization.

Ageing of the society brings various social-economic consequences and poses a challenge for the national social policy. In the long term, it may be anticipated that the demographics will reach a situation when the elderly considerably outnumber the young, which will drastically affect the balance between particular generations. Such a situation may bring negative economic and social consequences, as the demand for specialist services addressed at the eldest generation will grow, and the working minority will not be able to supply for it. However, as Virpi Timonen rightly observes, “while the impacts of ageing are undoubtedly significant, the nature of the impact does not have to be negative. For instance, an ageing population does not inevitably lead to a sluggish economy” (2008, p. 7). To achieve this, specialist training is needed to produce professional personnel to work with senior citizens and prepare them to remain active throughout their lives, and social animators who will activate the eldest members of the society.

Social workers’ training for the work with seniors. The issue of training social workers for their work with seniors is important for a number of reasons. One of them is the increase in demand for services associated with care, due to the growing number of the elderly and the growing life expectancy. Other reasons are the transformations occurring in family life style and the lack of interest in the elderly on the part of their relatives. Yet another reason is ageism, manifested e.g. in resentment felt towards the elderly, and resulting in a situation when young people do not see a future in working with seniors. In Polish conditions, another important factor is the current situation in the sphere of social care.

¹ This and other translations from Polish are mine. J.L.

Globalization contributed to the changes in family life style, which significantly affected the weakening of family bonds. In Poland, after the period of transformations, the patterns of family life changed, yet care services were mainly delivered by the closest family members and the relatives, and other care providers were rarely engaged. Nowadays, more and more often it may be observed that family members are not interested in the fate of the elderly relatives (Krzyszowski 2013, p. 12). Such a situation triggers increased demand for care services, provided e.g. by social workers. The problem, which is the lack of interest in the fate of the elderly on the part of their family, brings about new possibilities, i.e. the need to educate professional social workers. They would not only specialize in care services and provide temporary assistance, but would also be able to organize the life of, and activate the elderly citizens. In working with a senior, a competent social worker should focus on assistance in every day activities, such as taking care of the shopping and laundry, but first and foremost, they should be able to organize active leisure time. A social worker must be able to respond to the needs of the elderly and to programme their activities appropriately.

And yet, training social workers for work with the elderly is a great challenge. In the times characterized by the cult of youth, it is difficult to convince the young that the elderly can be, and often are, active, have their own dreams, and are able to make them come true, and that working with seniors is not degradation, but is as important and rewarding as any other job. This kind of training is not popular among young people. An analysis of subject literature, conducted by D. Wang and J. Chonody, shows that one of the elementary barriers in recruitment and education of competent social workers for the work with seniors is ageism (Wang & Chonody, 2013). In the subject literature, several reasons are mentioned for which students do not undertake training in the specializations connected with senior care:

- perception of work with children and youth as having higher status (Read, Beall & Baumhover, 1992)
- limited experience with, and exposition to, elderly adults and healthy seniors (Reed et al., 1992)
- anxiety connected with personal ageing (Anderson & Wiscott, 2003)
- conviction that elderly citizens cannot be changed (Gellis, Sherman & Lawrance, 2003), that they are depressed and lonely, and have poor personal hygiene (Manson & Saunders, 2004)
- conviction that the job is not paid well (Hooyman & Lubben, 2009)
- perception of work with the elderly as not challenging and not rewarding (John A. Hartford Foundation, 2009) (Wang & Chonody, 2013, p. 150).

The negative image of a senior is a great barrier to overcome. It is the task of academic teachers to show that working with a senior has its worth, can be rewarding, and does not need to be limited to caring activities. It is worth to show how to organize seniors leisure time, what great value there is in intergenerational encounters and in organizing actions for the elderly in the local community.

The need for supplementary training of social workers for work with seniors is justified by the fact that in Poland – unfortunately – the level of social care services for the elderly is unsatisfactory. The numbers are provided by Krzyszkowski (2013). Social care services are most often limited to caring activities (72%) and financial help (52%). Social work has been mentioned by merely every fourth respondent, and seniors' clubs and specialist counselling are present only in every tenth of the examined institutions. (Krzyszkowski, 2013, p. 13). This situation is generated, among others, by social legislation, which “does not include a paragraph that guarantees social care in the situation of old age, loneliness, or helplessness. The lack of such legislative warrants for the elderly is paired with the lack of formal, legislative specification of seniors-oriented social work, and with undefined obligations of social care addressed at this category of clients (e.g. the diagnosis and monitoring of deficits and needs of the elderly). Also the income limit, determined in the appropriate Act, does not take into account the age and specific purchase needs (medications), which, in effect, restricts the right of the elderly to receive social benefits, as they turn out to be too wealthy. No clear definitions of tasks and duties of a social worker (active in the field work, and familiar with the needs of the local citizens) prevent many elderly citizens from receiving any support, because they do not apply for it” (Krzyszkowski 2013, p. 15). Yet another problem is the lack of personal carers-assistants, who would provide services for seniors. It is caused by the low prestige of the job, difficult work conditions, and low payment (Krzyszkowski, p. 15).

According to the state-provided data quoted by Krzyszkowski (2013), every third examined unit does not conduct any training in the sphere of providing care services. With respect to the staff's preparation for delivering care services, the worst situation is observed in communal social care centres in rural communes, where care services are most often realized in the form of public works. In turn, municipal social care centres and municipal family support centres outsource care services to non-governmental organizations as public commissions (73%), where the decisive criteria are the price and the contractor's experience. The scope and manner of providing the service are taken into account only in every third social care centre. The data presented here clearly indicate poor accessibility and low quality of services offered by the public social care to the elderly in Poland. Thus, it is worth to compare the Polish solutions to those applied in other EU countries (Krzyszkowski 2013, p. 15).

Having analyzed the current situation, the authors of this paper have designed a post-M.A. course which may be an answer to the needs connected with supplementary training of social workers for the work with elderly citizens. This paper presents the theoretical background, the main assumptions, the objectives and the syllabus of the course, which is quite innovative on the educational market.

Needs of the elderly citizens and their attitude towards old age. Old age is associated with physiological and psychological ailments, which gradually appear with ageing. They bring about certain disinclination to undertake activities that could allow maintaining the old or making new acquaintances, and could foster further development and self-fulfilment. Withdrawal, and also social, cultural, political and

economic marginalization contribute to elderly citizens' conviction that they are redundant in the society, useless, and lonely. The realization that they would face so many practically insurmountable barriers causes apathy, sense of imprisonment in one's own life, and locking oneself in one's own, secluded world. In consequence, such a situation may lead to development and/or aggravation of somatic and mental disorders (frequently e.g. depression).

Taking into consideration the aspect of remaining active and acting for the sake of others, C. Tibbitts, an American gerontologist, lists the following needs of senior persons:

- The need to perform socially useful tasks,
- The need to be recognized as a member of the society, community and group, and to have a role in them,
- The need to spend more time in a satisfactory way,
- The need to maintain normal social contacts,
- The need to be recognized as a human being,
- The need to create opportunities for self-expression and to have the sense of achievement,
- The need of adequate psychological and intellectual stimulation,
- The need of health protection and access to medical care,
- The need to have an appropriately organized life and to stay in touch with the family,
- The need of spiritual satisfaction (as listed in Hrapkiewicz 2009, pp. 118–119).

It may be noticed that most of the above are connected with various forms of activity of the elderly (intellectual, social, physical, linguistic, etc.) Therefore, to satisfy those needs, education is needed, to make seniors aware of the forms of human activity and ways to remain active. Moreover, they need to be taught self-motivation and self-organization of their activities in all developmental spheres, through support received from professionally trained social workers – animators of seniors' life. They can be the ones to prepare senior citizens for active, successful ageing. It has been observed by Aleksander Kamiński (in the context of education) that this training mainly consists in “helping people acquire interests and ambitions, as well as skills and habits, which – when retirement comes – will help them pursue the walk of life that fosters longer years of youth and offers the satisfaction of remaining active” (Kamiński 1978, p. 359). According to Kamiński, how a person lives through their old age depends on shaping certain attitudes, behaviours, and values: “an old person usually behaves in the way they used to behave before the old age came” (Kamiński, 1978, p. 376). A. Kamiński's idea may be described as the concept of permanent upbringing (life-long learning, especially during the adulthood), an integral one (cf. bio-socio-cultural development of a person), within the framework of the gerontological activity theory (cf. active leisure time of various forms) (cf. Czerniawska 1996, p. 222).

Obviously, senior citizens frequently present diverse, sometimes extreme attitudes towards old age, their own life, and social functioning. C.S. Ford, the creator

of one of the concepts of elderly persons' attitudes towards their own old age, grounded his theory in the manners and forms of solving the problems and overcoming the crises that old age brings. In his opinion, the adopted attitude determines the positive or negative psycho-social functioning of an individual.

Coming to terms with the passing of time allows us to live happier in the old age; rebelling against ageing may be manifested by withdrawal, regression, isolation. According to C.S. Ford, there are six types of attitudes in older persons:

- regression – manifests itself in forcing others to assist in everyday life, despite good health and lack of indications for assistance and formal care;
- denial – is a form of escapism, an attempt to negate the difficult life situation; a form of escaping is e.g. changing the place of living;
- withdrawal – adopting a passive attitude towards the reality and limiting one's participation in the life of the society;
- manipulation – an attempt to gain higher status and to draw the attention of the surrounding people to oneself;
- integration and adjustment – an attitude characterized by activity and involvement in the life of the society, kindness and openness to others in social relations, and activities undertaken regardless of the health condition (cf. Zych, Bartel, 1990, p. 42).

The task of a social worker – seniors' life animator is working with seniors towards the goal of satisfying all needs and adopting the most desirable attitude towards their own old age, i.e. the attitude of integration and adjustment. The social worker's objective, then, is offering help in achieving successful ageing, education for happy ageing. It should become the process of elderly persons' adaptation to the modern society, i.e. "adaptation to the novelties of civilization, mechanics, technology, increasingly wider sphere of leisure, but also fashion, communication, and new habits and customs; but in the foreground there must always be seniors' desire to live an independent life" (Zych 2009, p. 17). It appears, then, that one may learn the old age, one may prepare for it, e.g. through developing one's interests, ambitions, skills and habits (Zych 2009, p.16). For it is only good education, good motivation through constructive animation of a senior's life, that "is the best method of coming to terms with old age. Perhaps it is something more – not only a method of approving, but anticipation of old age as a period of life that has certain appeal" (Kamiński 1978, p. 9ff.).

Successful ageing. The exact definition of the term "successful ageing" is very difficult, because it is contingent on the standards and ideas according to which "good life" is evaluated by the elderly (Halicki 2005, p. 165). According to A. Bowling (2005), successful ageing is influenced by the following factors:

1. Social functioning, which includes social activity and involvement, fulfilling the assigned social roles, social participation and maintaining good relations with others.
2. Life satisfaction and well-being, including "happiness and contentment".

3. Psychological resources, including adaptability, coping, personal development, creativity, and also sense of efficiency, autonomy, self-esteem, and life goals.
4. Biomedical perspective, i.e. “optimisation of life expectancy while minimising physical and mental deterioration and disability”. It is expressed by longevity, absence of disability, active life, positive outlook on health, “absence of chronic disease and of risk factors for disease”, and “high levels of independent physical functioning, performance, mobility, and cognitive functioning”.
5. Lay views on successful ageing, i.e. categorization of factors affecting ageing as perceived by older people themselves. (Halicki, 2008, pp. 13–14).

In turn, the measure of successful ageing is the realization of certain developmental tasks. Among them, M. Halicka mentions: coping with decreasing ability and fitness; coping after retirement from professional activity and reduction of income; coping after the loss of the life partner; coping with the diminished role of an elderly person; flexibility with respect to the range of fulfilled social roles (Halicka, 2004, p. 28).

It is successful ageing of his/her clients that should be the goal of a social worker – seniors’ life animator. Owing to the new specializations that emerge in response to the needs of the changing society, it is now possible to offer professional training to social workers who will help seniors age successfully, adopt a positive attitude towards old age, remain active, and satisfy their basic needs.

Educating a social worker in the view of challenges of an ageing society.

Elderly citizens of contemporary Poland were raised, and used to live, in a traditional society, in which an individual yielded to social configurations and norms, occupied specified social positions, and fulfilled social roles established in the tradition and grounded in the system of values which was firmly anchored in the society (Szymański, 2014, p. 53). These persons cannot find themselves in the modern society (Zych, 2009, p. 66ff.), which makes them prone to loneliness and social isolation (they are often deprived of the possibility to fully participate in the changing reality and the life of the society, which, as a result, influences their limited contacts with other people and their relations with their surroundings). Age-related physical and psychological ailments leave them unwilling to undertake various kinds of activity, which would allow them to maintain the old and make new acquaintances, to develop, and to achieve self-realization. Withdrawal and social, cultural, political and economic marginalization lead to a conviction, frequent among seniors, that they are socially useless, redundant, and alone. The awareness of so many practically insurmountable barriers causes apathy and imprisonment in their own life, in their own isolated world. This, in turn, may lead to development and/or aggravation of somatic and psychic disorders (including frequent depression).

Thus, in order to specify the demands that the modern world imposes on the elderly, in the context of social workers’ education for work with seniors, it is useful to clarify such characteristic notions as globalization and quality of life. According to Anthony Giddens, “globalization is created by the coming together of the political, social, cultural and economic factors. It has been driven forward above all by the

development of information and communication technologies that have intensified the speed and scope of interaction between people all over the world” (Giddens 2006, p. 50). Among the factors contributing to globalization, Giddens lists technological progress and the advances in telecommunication infrastructure, which “facilitate the compression of time and space”, and the integration of world’s economy (Giddens 2006, pp. 50-51).. An inherent feature of globalization is the fact that it happens “here and now”, influencing our intimate, private life in a number of ways. Individuals become involuntary recipients of globalization, which affects them through the mass media, or through personal contacts with people all over the world. Globalization tendencies transform personal lives and influence the quality of life.

Quality of life may be defined simply as a measurement of an individual’s “good life”. The definition assumes an evaluation process, in which we can formulate evaluations such as “this is better than that”. Thus it encounters the old problem of the right criteria: what is the index of “betterness”, and how to reconcile various indicators? Two approaches collide here. One postulates looking for objective indices. In this approach, measurements of the quality of life happen to coincide with the indices of sustainable development (longevity, education, income, number of children, housing conditions, social contacts network). In the other approach, what is good is what individuals subjectively regard as good (what gives them joy, makes them happy, or gives them satisfaction). The most popular definition of the quality of life is the one offered by WHO. It says that “Quality of Life is individuals’ perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationship to salient features of their environment.” (WHOQOL 1995, p. 1405).

A social worker – seniors’ life animator, in order to guide elderly persons towards a happy life and successful ageing, should take into account the phenomenon of globalization and its consequences, but should also understand the sense of the quality of life in successful ageing. It is the social worker – having the knowledge and understanding of the social reality and of the characteristics of an elderly person – that must shape seniors’ environment and teach them to shape it themselves, so that their old age is not destructive, but constructive and happy. E. Bielawska-Batorowicz notices that among the steps to be taken to promote successful ageing, the following may be listed:

1. Geriatric education, aiming to popularize the knowledge about old age and the factors that condition it;
2. Preparation for old age through promoting the right attitudes towards ageing and old age, both among the ageing persons and other members of the society;
3. Forming environments that support the process of healthy ageing;
4. Promoting intergenerational integration, eliminating the distance between the elderly and the young;
5. Geriatric prophylaxis, i.e. implementing health programmes improving the quality of life of older persons;

6. Supporting the care-givers, by which the period when the elderly persons remain in their own living environment is prolonged; helping the elderly to maintain relative independence (Bielawska – Batorowicz, 2011, p. 33).

Thus a social worker who plans to support seniors in the process of successful ageing should possess adequate knowledge, skills and social competences, before educating seniors in this respect. In Poland, social workers acquire professional qualifications in B.A. and M.A. studies in Social Work, and also in Pedagogy, Sociology, or Family Studies in the specialty Social Work.

There are various specializations that a social worker can choose from during the course of studies. Yet many of them (e.g. Family Assistant, Institutional Care Assistant, Social Work with the Elderly and the Disabled, Social Activation and Counselling) do not offer training in seniors' life animation. In response to the demand from social workers and elderly citizens (established in a survey among the students of Third-Age Universities and Seniors' Clubs in the Małopolska region), the staff of the Chair for Gerontology in the Institute of Social Work of the Pedagogical University, Dr. Katarzyna Jagielska and Dr. Habil. Associate Professor Norbert G. Piłkuła, in cooperation with Dr. Habil. Joanna M. Łukasik of Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow (on the concept assumptions and the syllabus), have designed a post-M.A. course for social workers, "Seniors' Life Animator". In this course, the students will upgrade their skills in animating the life of the elderly.

Social workers training in the Institute of Social Work of the Pedagogical University of Krakow. As mentioned above, meeting the challenges encountered by modern social policy and the main executor of its tasks, i.e. a social worker, the faculty of the Institute of Social Work of the Pedagogical University of Krakow have designed an innovative post-M.A. course in animation of seniors' life (Senior's Life Animator). The offer has been addressed at B.A. and M.A. graduates from Social Work, Social-Care Pedagogy, and Cultural-Educational Pedagogy.

On the assumption that seniors' life animator is a person responsible for activating members of the society – especially the oldest ones – the educational actions addressed at social workers are based on the theory of needs of the elderly, the theory of expectations, theory of social globalization, and of the quality of human life.

Obviously, seniors' life animator must be equipped with general and specialist knowledge of modern social phenomena, as well as knowledge of the vital needs and expectations of the elderly. Therefore, social animators must be aware of the following facts about globalization:

- It is "fundamentally changing the nature of our everyday experiences".
- It is "forcing a redefinition of intimate and personal aspects of our lives, such as the family, gender roles, sexuality, personal identity, our interactions with others and our relationships to work".
- It leads to fundamental changes in "the way we think of ourselves and our connections with other people" (Giddens, 2006, p. 146).

- Globalization does not – or at least not only – stand for the factors which influence individual and community experience and which reorganize that experience; globalization is also the very awareness that such an influence exists.
- The globalization process occurs both “up there / out there”, and “down here”, at the level of everyday experience. “Thus it is not globalization that causes changes at the level of everyday experience, but rather the changes observed and experienced at this level by their participants are the actual level of its happening” (Jacyno, p. 110).

In turn, quality of life should be perceived in the light of the factors shaping it, as these factors form the foundation for motivating an individual to pursue good quality life, and that means a happy life.

Students of the post-M.A. course “Seniors’ Life Animator” will acquire practical qualifications for working with elderly persons and will deepen and update their knowledge on the forms and methods of working with seniors, and on cognitive, social, cultural, educational and health activation of older persons.

Theoretical knowledge of: social gerontology and geriatrics, psychology of ageing, physical and mental health of seniors, dementia prevention, methods and forms of work with seniors, legal basis of working with seniors, legal and social counselling, application of modern technologies in working with a senior person;

Skills: diagnosing the needs of senior persons, offering them support in relation to the diagnosis, motivating them to undertake activities and planning activating tasks for them, also using IT (as in work with seniors)

Social competences: ability to apply the acquired knowledge in designing professional actions, readiness to efficiently organize seniors’ life, preparedness to efficiently organize seniors’ life;

The studies offer:

A) Specialist subjects:

- Social policy dedicated to elderly persons
- Psychology of ageing, problems and needs of older persons
- Elementary geriatrics
- Social gerontology
- Legal aspects of working with older persons

B) Theoretical subjects introducing practical tasks:

- Obtaining financing from EU funds for actions benefitting senior citizens
- Institutional and non-institutional forms of support for senior citizens
- Diagnosing and evaluating the needs of older persons
- Old age adaptation training
- Forms of support in developmental crises for older persons
- Modern technologies and the multimedia in the life of senior citizens
- Legal and social counselling for senior citizens

C) Methodology and workshop subjects, offering the necessary knowledge and skills, and teaching their application in the professional work of a social animator:

- Methods of animating seniors’ active life

- Competence workshop on lifelong learning
 - Memory training
 - Dementia prevention using board games and multimedia games
 - Social and cultural activation of senior citizens
 - Social marketing benefitting senior citizens
 - Social project benefitting senior citizens
- D) Internship: testing the acquired knowledge and skills in *Pracownia Wsparcia Dzieci, Młodzieży i Seniorów* (Support centre for children, youth, and seniors) at the Pedagogical University of Krakow.

Summary. A well-educated social worker recognizes the symptoms of the coming social changes, interprets them with respect to the needs of the persons s/he works with, and takes action appropriate in the context:

- s/he knows the needs of older persons
- s/he knows how to communicate efficiently and listen actively
- s/he skilfully conducts actions which aim at the longest possible upkeep of the physical and mental fitness of older persons
- s/he knows how to help seniors discover their interests and hobbies
- s/he can show understanding

In social workers' training, special attention should be paid to the issues related to older persons, especially to evaluating senior citizens' life situation and recognizing their needs, since this will enable proper animating of older persons' active life.

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