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Development of institutions of psychological support in rural areas: opportunities and restrictions

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Abstract

Purpose. The article analyzes limits of the institutional model of psychological support in rural areas taking in to account the difference between the standard of living in rural and urban areas. **Methodology.** The author of the article uses methods of summarizing and systemizing the existing research (international experience) in the field of providing psychological support. **Results.** The author shows that the institutes of psychological support vary considerably in rural and urban areas. Modern research proves that there are a lot of restrictions in the provision of psychological support in rural areas. A significant problem connected with psychological support in rural areas is the lack of professional competencies, which requires the improvement of psychologists' skills. **Conclusion.** In modern conditions, there is a significant gap between the need for psychological support and the possibilities of providing it in rural areas. The results of modern research and evaluation of indirect indicators characterizing the level of stress, such as the number of suicides among youth and the spread of alcoholism, indicate the need to create

institutions of psychological support for the rural population, taking into account cultural and social characteristics.

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Keywords

Psychological support, rural areas, the institutional model of psychological support.

Introduction

Psychologists working in rural areas face many restrictions in their work. They are caused by factors such as geographical features, technical structure of rural residents, their religious preferences, peculiarity of the service of psychological support. Modern research in the field of quality of psychological care in rural areas indicates that a certain number of psychologists manage to adapt to work in rural areas [Landini, 2016]. However, in most cases, psychologists working in rural areas in the health care system, in the education and vocational guidance system often lack sufficient competence in the field of sociology of rural life and a systematic understanding of psychological peculiarity of the rural population. The problem of the institute of psychological support can also be connected with linguistic differences (a vivid example is the rural areas of China) or religious ones, which is especially characteristic, for example, for rural areas of Norway and can lead to misunderstanding between psychologists and patients. Even more urgent is the problem with regard to the indigenous population, whose lack of understanding of cultural characteristics leads to the lack of the possibility of receiving psychological support in general (Alaska natives and Indians living in Canada) [McCord, Saenz, Armstrong, Elliott, 2015]. Thus, the study of the problem of the development of the institute of psychological support in rural areas is very important nowadays.

Literature Review

Research conducted since 1990s shows that the number of people seeking psychological support increases every year [Oser, Biebel, Pullen, Harp, 2013]. At the same time, there is still a significant gap

between these indicators in rural and urban areas [Tarlow, McCord, Elliott, Brossart, 2014]. Despite the fact that the urban population is constantly growing and the share of rural people in both developed and developing countries is quite high, the standard of living in rural areas remains rather low. It should be noted that there are differences in rural areas, in particular, in such factor as transport accessibility. For example, some rural areas may be located next to a large metropolis, while other territories, such as Alaska or the Russian regions of the Far North and the Far East, do not actually have regular transport connections, except for regional aviation and temporary winter roads. Obviously, the availability of psychological support in such regions is much lower [Schmidt, Iachini, George, Koller, Weist, 2015]. An important problem is also the understanding of the specifics of help by specialists working in urban areas, since the process of urbanization leads to the fact that part of the rural population which has arrived to the city still have psychological characteristics of rural residents for a sufficiently long period [Roufeil, 2016].

In these conditions, there is a need to study the problem from two perspectives:

- regarding psychological characteristics of inhabitants of rural areas [Walsh, Scharf, Shucksmith, 2014];
- regarding features of the implementation of psychological support in rural areas [Tarlow, McCord, Elliott, Brossart, 2014].

This article summarizes institutional restrictions of psychological support in rural areas on the basis of a synthesis of research in developing, developed and less developed countries.

Features of psychological disorders in rural areas

The idea of the psychological stability of rural residents was completely changed in the early 80's. Earlier it was believed that inhabitants of rural regions are psychologically more stable due to relatively simple motivation, but later studies showed that it is not true. Then such areas as cross-cultural psychology and psychology of "stigma" were studied. Modern psychological literature analyzed the phenomenon of "Eastern Kentucky Syndrome", when miners under stress without physiological causes had such symptoms as coughing, pain, palpitation and feeling of asphyxia.

Modern research shows that urban and rural residents have various psychological disorders [Landini, Long, Leeuwis, Murtagh, 2016]. There is a widespread opinion that residents of rural areas do not have such significant worries as inhabitants of the metropolis. However, studies conducted in the early 1980s showed that rural residents are more likely to have stress compared to urban ones, and at the same time they have significantly fewer opportunities to receive psychological support. This

conclusion was also confirmed in researches of the 1990's and 2000's, when rural residents of Africa, Greece and a number of developed countries were studied. In addition, it was found that the level of stress in rural areas increases much more rapidly than in urban areas, especially among youth. This fact is confirmed both directly by field studies data and indirectly through indicators of social development of the territories. So, according to the statistics of the 1960s and 1990s, in Australia the number of suicides of young men in rural areas increased 12-fold, while the same indicator among the urban population increased only 2.2 times, similarly the rate of alcoholism among young people is higher in rural areas [Tarlow, McCord, Elliott, Brossart, 2014].

Indirectly, these facts indicate an increase in the level of stress, especially among farmers. Studies of the 2000s among farmers in Canada showed similar results [Landini, Long, Leeuwis, Murtagh, 2016]. Global changes in the structure of agriculture, increasing the number of agricultural holdings, reducing the role of farming, increasing energy prices, limiting the economic opportunities of farmers, have led to the fact that young people whose parents were farmers, are forced to adapt to urban conditions, and it leads to additional psychological loads.

In general, the sources of stress in rural areas are low standards of living, including such phenomena as unemployment, poverty, poor access to health and education institutions, and a low level of social protection services. According to a number of studies, a significant level of stress among rural Americans is associated with economic causes, and primarily with negative factors in the agricultural market [Tarlow, McCord, Elliott, Brossart, 2014]. Also, the reason of stress is the unpredictable and uncontrolled influence of weather conditions on crop yields and prices on agricultural products. In fact, in the modern economy, agriculture is the least predictable area of activity with the highest level of risk, which inevitably affects the living standards of rural residents. In the sphere of labor relations, a significant stress factor is the lack of control over the level of workload and the lack of time for rest and recovery. Actually all these problems can not be solved.

Development of institutions of psychological support in rural areas: opportunities and restrictions

A significant number of studies indicate that there are significant differences in the provision of psychological support in urban in rural areas [Jin, Fang, 2015; Landini, Long, Leeuwis, Murtagh, 2014]. First and foremost, restrictions of the effectiveness of psychological care are connected with the need to provide a full range of services, for example, psychological adaptation of structural unemployed people, parents' support of children who suffer various forms of chronic diseases, cancer patients, and

single elderly people. Also, within the framework of psychological support in rural areas together with the institute of social protection, health and education there is work on the prevention of suicidal tendencies among young people, formation of a healthy lifestyle.

Currently, all Russian schools have specialists in the field of psychological support, similar institutions exist in other developed and developing countries. However, actually there is no psychological support of the adult population. This problem is typical not only for Russia, but also for developed and developing countries. For example, studies conducted in the 1990s in Canada indicate that, despite a higher level of stress, urban residents are treated psychologically 3 times more often than rural ones. At the same time, a number of works have shown that the quality of services provided in rural areas is substantially lower than the quality of services provided in urban conditions. In rural areas there are no such institutions as the support program for the elderly people, support of women victims of domestic violence, the psychological support program for children and teenagers.

There is a problem connected not only with the underdevelopment of the psychological support infrastructure. A number of studies have shown that rural residents have cultural characteristics related to limiting the use of psychological help, from mistrust to official institutions to a special relationship with people with mental illness (for example, with schizophrenia), stereotypes about the impossibility of understanding problems of rural residents, fear of conviction by family members or friends, or fear for the level of privacy in the provision of psychological care. However, it has been shown that people in rural areas tend to receive more help when they are appointed directly, for example, as part of a clinical examination program.

However, the key problem of having psychological support, even if the institution is formed to some extent, is the lack of confidentiality. The small size of the local population leads to the fact that residents have much more information about each other, compared to the urban population. In these conditions, patients are concerned that the local community may learn the information about their psychological disorders.

Conclusion

In modern conditions, there is a significant gap between the need for psychological support and the possibilities of providing it in rural areas. The results of research and evaluation of indirect indicators characterizing the level of stress, such as the number of suicides among youth and the spread of alcoholism, indicate the need to create institutions of psychological support for the rural population, taking into account cultural and social characteristics.

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Развитие институтов психологической поддержки в сельской местности: возможности и ограничения

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Аннотация

Цель. В статье исследуются ограничения институциональной модели психологического консультирования в сельской местности в условиях сохраняющегося диспаритета между уровнем жизни в сельских и городских территориях. **Методология.** Применяются методы обобщения и систематизации существующих исследований (международного опыта) в области оказания психологической помощи. **Результаты.** Показано, что институт психологической практики в сельской местности и городских территориях значительно

различается. Современные исследования подтверждают, что в сельской местности в сфере предоставления психологических услуг существует большое количество ограничений. Значимой проблемой в сфере оказания психологической помощи в сельской местности является недостаток профессиональных компетенций, что требует совершенствования квалификации психологов. **Заключение.** В современных условиях существует значительный разрыв между потребностями в психологической помощи и возможностями ее предоставления в сельской местности. Результаты современных исследований и оценка косвенных показателей, характеризующих уровень стресса, таких как количество самоубийств среди молодежи и распространение алкоголизма, указывают на необходимость создания институтов психологической поддержки сельского населения, учитывающих культурологические и социальные особенности.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Психологическая поддержка, сельская местность, институциональная модель психологического консультирования.

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