

## ARTICLE

# THE ROLE OF SELF-HELP AND MUTUAL AID IN SOLVING SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Maria Yu Eflova\*, Riaz G. Minzaripov, Klavdiya N. Novikova, Alfiya A. Akbasheva

Department of General and Ethnic Sociology, Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications, Kazan Federal University, Kazan, RUSSIA

## ABSTRACT

In article the concepts "self-help" and "mutual aid" are specified, arguments in favor of development of the movement from the centralized system of social support of the population in which the state, to the mixed forms where the state providing merges and complemented with private and public sources dominates are adduced. The possibility of creation and functioning of groups of the self-help and mutual aid is proved not only at public institutions, but also public formations. The efficiency and need of development of system of the self-help and mutual aid for the solution of many social problems and improvement of social well-being of the population in general is proved.

## INTRODUCTION

The transition to a market economy has led to an increase in negative trends during the "shock reforms". One of the obvious results of the liberal shock reforms was the gradual elimination of the state from the social field (education, science, medicine, social guarantees, etc.) and its commercialization.

Social work paradigms are changing, while the social protection system itself shall include the elements that help the society do without it, such as taking preventive measures to prevent dependency, marginalization, decent wage policies, creating jobs for deprived population groups, developing self-help and mutual assistance, support the development of volunteering, etc.

## METHODS

In this paper, the authors used such general scientific empirical methods as comparison, observation, analysis, as well as a specific method for studying the texts of mass media - content analysis. The concepts of "self-help" and "mutual aid" are used by the researchers to explain a wide range of phenomena of social reality.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Civil society as a field of self-manifestation of free citizens and voluntarily formed associations and organizations more and more actively performs the most important function - the most complete satisfaction of the material, social and spiritual needs of its members, the full implementation by the individual of his/her interests, aspirations, goals - every day [1]. This allows successfully implementing the programs of socio-economic development and achieving harmonious social relations in the society. Today various public organizations of veterans, disabled people, large families and others, which do a great deal of social support for their members, function almost in every region of Russia. It has been formed a certain interaction system of state structures with public organizations, the basis for the construction of which was the signature of long-term agreements defining goals and objectives and delimiting powers between the governmental bodies and public organizations. In order to implement spiritual patronage over the residents of boarding schools, social rehabilitation centers, etc., the agreements are made with the Muslim Spiritual Administrations and the Dioceses of the Russian Orthodox Church. Joint activities within the framework of existing agreements are carried out in terms of the development and implementation of social programs, the exchange of methodological and analytical materials of mutual interest. In addition, public organizations are involved in the development of legal acts, in the explanatory work among the population related to the introduction of new legislation affecting the interests and problems of the population. A mechanism of public involvement in solving social problems through Public Councils and Chambers that have a "vertical" in each region is implemented almost universally, which allows making control at several levels. But the most important thing is that the public organizations form the self-help and mutual aid communities. Abroad it is called "time bank", when everyone helps another one to the extent practicable, receiving in return the service he/she needs [2]. In a number of Russian regions, similar communities have been called "Social Activity Schools", "Volunteer Clinics".

However, paying tribute to the scientific work of different periods, it should be noted that they have the ambiguity of the concepts of "self-help" and "mutual aid". In most works, these concepts are identified by the definition of "the people's efforts who are faced with similar problems aimed at helping each other" [3].

However, the author believes that the term "mutual aid" implies mutual, but not one-way assistance. Self-help can be aimed at a specific purpose: a person faces some problems and tries to solve them correctly on his/her own. Self-help groups are the associations of individual or collective members whose activities

### KEY WORDS

self-help, mutual aid,  
inter sectoral interaction,

Received: 23 Oct 2018  
Accepted: 29 Dec 2018  
Published: 10 Jan 2019

\*Corresponding Author  
Email:  
meflova@gmail.com

are aimed at helping themselves. Depending on the problem that caused people to gather in a place, self-help groups can be roughly divided into the following categories:

- groups to overcome the crisis or transition period;
- groups to combat addiction;
- groups suffering from chronic diseases;
- groups on training in self-defense techniques in case of an attack, actions in case of emergency.

Self-help groups are very diverse in their structural forms and by type of activity and are almost not amenable to classification [4]. However, there are several key elements that are common to all types of groups:

- people with common life experience (situation, problem) get together to change something;
- people are direct or indirect recipients of the benefits of their activities;
- activity is often caused by the need to resist the isolation, discrimination and other negative attitudes of society towards this group.

The main technologies used to solve the problems of participants in the self-help and mutual aid groups are the exchange of experience between individuals, conducting educational seminars, mutual evaluation-criticism and volunteering. The work in such groups can proceed in various directions. Some groups expand their activities. In addition to internal issues and ways to solve them, they can, for example, provide information and assistance to other people facing the same problem or life situation, or organize public campaigns in order to achieve the necessary changes. The specialists - doctors, lawyers, psychologists, social workers, etc. - take part in the mutual aid group very often.

Public organizations of self-help and mutual aid are one of the important components of social work, a manifestation of the social initiative of people who have fallen into a difficult life situation and who combine their own efforts to solve their problems. They protect the legal rights and interests of people in difficult life situations, organize mutual support and assistance, collect and accumulate funds to solve social problems [3].

Often, self-help and mutual aid groups work closely with the state social services, often work on their basis and receive organizational and methodological support [8]. However, as a rule, the organizations of self-help and mutual aid acquire the appropriate direction and specialization: provision of social services, training in first aid, self-defense in emergency situations.

Independent self-help and mutual aid organizations, according to the author, have significant advantages [4]:

- direct contact with the target group;
- horizontal connections;
- less bureaucracy;
- responsiveness and flexibility;
- highly qualified personnel;
- knowledge of the problem;
- pluralism in decision-making;
- development and implementation of innovative technologies and models;
- versatility.

The first self-help organizations appeared in European countries. Their activities and relations with the state are based on the subsidiarity principle, according to which social problems shall be solved at the level where they arise through the self-organization of citizens with the state's support. The state shall offer assistance to its citizens so that they can independently solve their problems on the basis of self-organization and self-control. Thus, public associations and private initiative of self-organizing citizens enjoy the priority right: governmental agencies shall not do what the local communities can successfully cope with [5]. This principle was first proclaimed in the laws of Germany in the times of the "Weimar Republic" in 1922-1924 and enshrined as a fundamental principle of social assistance in the encyclical of the Pope of 1931. Currently, it is enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government (Article 4, clause 3), the national legislation of a number of European countries.

Unfortunately, this principle does not work in Russia. Public organizations of self-help and mutual aid are financed only by social grants, charitable foundations and private donations [1]. There is no mechanism for the separation of powers between public services and self-organizing citizens, as well as a mechanism for a state order for social services that would ensure equal access to budget funds of organizations regardless of their form of ownership [6].

Volunteers form the basis of the activities of self-help and mutual aid organizations. Volunteering is a unique social phenomenon when a person: voluntarily spends his/her time, talent, and energy to help others build a healthy, sustainable society; when a person works without remuneration [4]. Volunteering should be considered as a constituent element of social policy, participating in the achievement of certain

social goals and being the foundation of civil society. Volunteering is focused on: addressing issues of social support; development of social innovation programs; strengthening the responsibility of public authorities through monitoring carried out by the voluntary organizations; providing important social functions in the dissemination of new values (freedom of choice, sense of community, civic engagement and responsibility, selflessness and charity). Non-profit organizations that form its basis are more flexible. In most cases, they deal with the problems that the state is not yet aware of or have not yet taken decisions on. In addition, they have the opportunity to individually serve small groups of clients, they are more diverse in structure and types of their services, and can satisfy a much larger range of needs than the state institutions limited by law [7]. The number of citizens involved in volunteering is significant. The Prime-Minister M. Thatcher said at one time: "The volunteer movement is the heart of all our social services. The willingness of men and women to assist is one of the greatest guarantees of freedom". In 1996, Prince Charles reaffirmed his commitment to these principles and appealed to young people to devote time to volunteering. Currently, about 50% of the UK population (usually middle-aged women from the middle class) takes part in some form of volunteering, which is an average of 62 million hours per week. Volunteering is recognized at the highest international level [8]. The international volunteer movement consists of many major organizations, such as the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, the UN Volunteers and others. For example, IAVE (International Association for Volunteer Effort) - an international association of voluntary efforts includes more than 90 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and both Americas. These large organizations have their representatives in most countries of the world, including Russia. Volunteering in Russia has a good history, present and future. We have a lot of "hidden volunteering" in our country, when people do volunteer work without thinking about the social importance of their work. Over 40% of the polled Russians expressed their willingness to help their neighbors for free [9]. Volunteer centers operate in the country, mass actions are held with the participation of volunteers with the active participation of tens of thousands of young people, hundreds of children's and youth organizations in partnership with government authorities, the business community and the mass media. There is a legal framework governing volunteering. At the moment, it includes the Federal Laws "On Charity and Charitable Organizations", "On Support of Non-Profit Organizations". Every year the public response, the economic effect and the recognition by the state of the important role of volunteering increase. The volunteers are involved both in work in the state social institutions and in the implementation of social projects of non-profit organizations. [9]

## CONCLUSION

According to the author, the creation of prerequisites for the implementation of the principles of mutual support, as well as the development of volunteering, philanthropy, the active involvement of non-governmental organizations in the provision of social services, the unification and coordination of the efforts of state bodies, public, religious and charitable organizations, and other non-profit organizations, press, commercial structures should come to the fore in solving social problems. It is necessary to coordinate the work on testing various forms of participation of volunteers in the work of social services and public organizations [10]. These forms include: the creation of regional unions of volunteers and their training centers, the creation of a public labor exchange, the organization of the base and methodological support for the training of community leaders of mutual support groups based on the NGOs [11].

For the clients of social services, the mutual aid is:

- overcoming of isolation, loneliness feelings;
- mutual aid;
- information, supplementing state and public structures;
- return to society;
- practical help;
- exchange of experience in overcoming and preventing difficult life situations;
- strengthening self-confidence;
- specific results (employment, improvement of financial situation, development of new practical skills);
- prevention of "no demand drama".

For example, a self-help club may unite craftsmen of a micro district who are ready to provide retirees, disabled people and district residents with the services for a reasonable fee: repair of televisions and refrigerators; radio equipment and home appliances; carpenter, electrician, locksmith services, as well as shoe repair, clothing restoration; care for bed patients, children (to meet from school, to look after at a certain time); cleaning the apartment, washing the windows, cooking, etc.

Mutual aid is significant for society as a whole, as it is:

- increasing the level and quality of life of communities;
- increasing awareness of the problems of vulnerable categories of the population;
- base for research;
- positive changes in legislation;
- development of civil society;
- improvement of social well-being.

The self-help and mutual aid groups can arise on the basis of social organization or in cooperation with it. And then they act as informal groups, possessing all the qualities of the latter: spontaneity of appearance, voluntary nature of membership, freedom to leave the group, etc. Under certain conditions, non-social services provide timely targeted support to those in need, and the mutual aid groups, because they have a more flexible structure, are simpler and more accessible [12]. These groups bring together helpers and helped. They may give rise to more advanced technologies of assistance and impact. Sometimes, a mutual aid group formalizes a program of its activities, adopts a charter, is registered as a public organization in the course of its development. Many groups have their own emergency hotlines.

The interest clubs and "third age" universities play an increasingly active role for successful social adaptation of elderly people and people with disabilities into society among social work technologies [13].

In Russia, "third age" universities often have the status of public initiatives. The first experience of a free school for adults' dates back to 1855 in Russia. Sunday schools were organized in Kiev by a public figure, teacher, and scholar N. I. Pirogov, remaining in the memory of the people mainly as a great surgeon. Regular attempts to create something similar began in the mid-19th century and were, as a rule, charitable projects in Russia.

The "third age" universities have the following main goals:

- stimulation of life and social activity;
- prevention of premature aging, prevention of loneliness;
- development of socially approved forms of activity, interests, needs.

The university can include faculties of computer science, legal literacy, psychological support, creative development, healthy lifestyles, etc., where people are helped to find and learn the favorite work they dreamed of when they were young, but did not have time for classes.

Thus, in whatever form the group is organized, its goal is to provide senior citizens and people with disabilities with the opportunity to live life to the fullest and feel some demand in the society.

Summarizing the above, regarding the mutual aid technology, the author considers it necessary to emphasize that it is an operational tool of social policy that allows simultaneously with the study of social reality in general assisting people in their self-realization, self-help and self-development, creating public associations, including on the basis of alternative social services [14].

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

#### FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE

None

## REFERENCES

- [1] Osadchaya G. [2004] Monitoring of Social Sphere: Methodology and Methods, in "Methodology of sociological analysis of social sphere" Ed, by Osadchaya G, Meshkova E. Moscow -Amsterdam.
- [2] Osadchaya G. [2005] Social aspects of the Russian Federation economic security, in "Social science and social education", Moscow.
- [3] Global Management and National Social Policy in Russia: [2006] Restrictions and Opportunities (thesis in English language) GI Osadchaya. XVI World Congress of Sociology. Abstracts, South Africa, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- [4] Backer C, Bispinck R, Hofemann K, Naegele G. [2000] Sozialpolitik und Soziale Lage in Deutschland. Bonn.
- [5] Backer C, Bispinck R, Hofemann K, Naegele G. [2000] Sozialpolitik und Soziale Lage in Deutschland. Bonn.
- [6] Badya LV. [1999] Charity and Patronage in Russia M.
- [7] Baygereev M. [2004] Netherlands: The essence of the Social Protection Reform in the Promotion of Labor Activity M. Baygereev Man and Labor M.1, 2.
- [8] Blau PM. [1972] The Study of Informal Organizations. PM Blau, American Sociology. Perspective. Problems. Methods. 93-105.
- [9] Vlasov PV. [2001] Charity and Mercy in Russia.56-97
- [10] Self-help Groups, Dictionaries and Encyclopedias on Akademik. URL: <http://dic.academic.ru/> (access date: 29.09.2017).
- [11] Zamaraev ZP. [2003] On Interaction of the State, Non-State (Public) and Private Sectors in the Field of Social Policy: Theoretical Analysis ZP Zamaraeva, Civil Society in Russia: Problems of Social Consolidation. Round Table Materials M.: Publishing House of the MGSU Soyuz. 8.
- [12] Novikova KN, Minzaripov RG. [2017] Social Service of the Population as an Anti-Crisis Resource of the Government and Civil Society. KN Novikova, RG Minzaripov. Kazan, Publishing House of the Kazan University.154.
- [13] [2012] Organization of Mutual Aid Groups for the Elderly: Methodical Recommendations Comp. by: OI Pronya, MI Ponomareva, ER Komleva Surgut. 64.
- [14] Osadchaya GI. [2013] Modernization of Social Services for the Population of Russia Social Policy and Sociology No. 1, RGSU. – M. 29.