

Foreword

The focus of the international scientific conference *Society. Health. Welfare* is on the human being in diverse relations with the contemporary world. The social environment, personal and public health and opportunities of enhancing one's personal and public welfare are mutually related factors. The outcomes of studies addressing these diverse relations are revealed in Volume 2 of the collection of papers of the conference "Society. Health. Welfare 2016". The collection consists of 44 papers written by authors from Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Russia.

Similarly as in the first publication, in this collection articles are arranged according to the main idea of the conference – to address the mutual interaction of society, health and welfare. The studies included in the publication serve as an invitation to look at topical social issues from the perspective of changes and transformation contextually with safety and risk factors faced by contemporary society.

The first part of the publication: *Society* is largely devoted to several topics: youth in the context of social transformations, legal aspects in theory and practice and the legal-medical aspects at the points of intersection of various sectors.

The publication is introduced by a youth-related topic with an intriguing heading "*The Youth in the European Labour Market. Is it Lost Generation*" (Slovakia). The author has conducted a systematic analysis covering the period from 2000–2016 using statistical data, scientific publications and analysing media information.

As a result of the study, the author has concluded that, "*the lost generation* is a metaphor combining both literal and emotional significance, in scientific and scholarly articles, this term is rare in this context; it only serves to name the future threat unless effective action is taken in favour of this target group". Although the article addresses youth employment problems, to a certain extent the metaphor – *the Lost Generation* – becomes a vantage point from which subsequent articles can be viewed.

The studies: *Transition Trajectories from Youth Institutional Care to Adulthood* (Latvia) and *The Role of Complex Social Services for Children from Families at Risk* (Lithuania) highlight unsolved family and child- related issues that have the potential of turning into risk factors for *the lost generation*.

Several articles cover a time period that dates back from the 1990s through to 2016, which can be described as "post-socialist transformations" (R. Kollmorgen. (2006)*. Authors in Russia and Latvia have studied the impact of social changes on the personality of young people, gender stereotypes and changes in the value system. Although the studies are not unambiguously comparative, some analogies can be drawn between them.

Russian researchers conclude that there are substantial changes between the generations of 1970s and 2000s. The "*Perestroika generation*" is characterised by differences in the value aspect and by important personal qualities: "*increased communicability*", "*increased freedom of judgements from the group influence*", and, at the same time, "*increased tension*

* Raj Kollmorgen. (2010). Transformation theory and socio-economic change in Central and Eastern Europe. A conceptual framework
http://www.emecon.eu/fileadmin/articles/1_2010/emecon%201_2010%20Kollmorgen.pdf

in relations with others”, increased indices of the “self-realization”, “work and productive activity”, and “decreased values of relations themselves”.

The outcomes of the research *The Dynamics of Value System in 1998 and 2015: Longitudinal Research in Latvia* speak for the stability of values, which can be explained by youth personality maturity and to a lesser extent by the importance of social and economic factors. The authors, nevertheless, have left room for discourse on the extent to which the value system of a personality is shaped independently of social transformations in the specific cultural situation.

Tolerance and respect towards differences is a value of our contemporary democratic society as opposed to hatred and hate crimes as a human safety risk factor.

The article *Preventing and Combating Hate Crimes: Modern Approach* (Latvia) contains a rich presentation of theoretical approaches and international and national experience in combating hate crimes. The author emphasises that hate crimes commonly are not committed within the borders of a specific geographic community but because of modern technologies, they transcend national boundaries.

The article *Criminological Characteristics of Sexual Violence* (Latvia) addresses a topical social and legal issue. The author draws attention to a negative trend in criminal statistics in recent years: there is a significant number of children suffering from sexual violence; criminal actions have substantially increased in the cyber area, human trafficking increases, the aim of which is the volume of commercial sexual exploitation and emphasises the importance of cooperation between national and international organisations in the combatting of crime.

The article *The presence of violence at work of health care personnel and their work ability* analyses violence and stress in the workplace from another perspective.

The first part of the publication concludes with articles that highlight various legal and medical aspects: the system of professional liability of medical practitioners; the child's right to health in the context of ensuring the best interests of the child; the price of human life.

The section *Health* begins with the article *Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis as a Tool for Evaluation of Unmet Needs in Health Care* (Latvia) which describes the close connection of healthcare with social and economic factors, as income and living conditions. The study is interesting and thought-provoking from two aspects: *first* – comparing Latvia and other EU states in meeting healthcare needs and *secondly* as a critical look at the inconsistency of the data of national and cross-national health interview surveys. To ensure data quality and comparability among EU member states, the authors of the study recommend conducting a multi-criteria decision analysis, what could be applicable to unify measuring of PROs and other self-reported outcomes in healthcare.

This is followed by articles that deal with studies devoted to specific target groups: research on *quality of life* and *subjective wellbeing*, studies on children's and women's health, diagnosis of health problems, rehabilitation and medical technologies.

One of the health risk factors in children are *postural disorders* that are caused by immobility and hours spent in a sedentary pose using different smart devices. The posture of pre-school children was studied by Slovakian researchers who discovered pathologic positions of body segments in pre-school age children. The study *Postural State of Preschoolers in Territory of Ružomberok and Martin, (Slovakia)* could be of interest not only for medical practitioners but also other specialists who work with children in pre-school institutions and schools. The analysis of health indicators covered by the study *High Physical Load Endurance Exercises Influence on the Anthropometric Parameters and Health Status of Military Personnel* (Latvia) and dealing with the anthropometric characteristics of cadets aged 22–30 years, revealed obesity problems and symptoms of musculoskeletal disorders.

Although this study is not related to the physical health of children, it does raise the issue that health risk factors in the reality of modern life should be considered and the necessity for maintaining a healthy lifestyle starting from childhood.

Two of the articles are devoted to the work of nurses; a study on the assessment of skills and on infection control in nursing practice in the case of Latvia. The authors have concluded that the upskilling of nurses on matters of infection control and the workload of nurses are major factors that affect safe care of patients and the quality of healthcare services.

The study *How hardness and the quality of life relate to the parameters of autonomic balance (Russia)* examines the prognostic importance of two psychological tests, identifying the degree of reliability in the results of screening tests designed to reveal the early symptoms of a disease in people who have no clinical manifestations of that disease.

Art therapy has been developing in the Baltic countries over the last twenty years and the role of the therapy in the treatment process has been gaining in importance. The article *Development, adaptation and application of a rehabilitation technology – art-based assessments of art therapy: an overview of the current situation in Latvia* describes the results of adaptation of art-based assessment in art therapy and the art-based assessment tool *The Bridge Drawing* (TBD). The study shows that TBD can be used as an art-based assessment tool in Latvia and it partially measures problem-solving tendencies. The article could stir discussion on the possibilities of art therapy and its future potential in treatment and rehabilitation.

The Section: *Welfare* is devoted to the problems of specific social groups: families at risk, social support to persons with disability and there is wide coverage of issues relating to social work.

From the perspective of a risk society changes in modern society also affect the behaviour of the family institution. By gradually losing traditional ties, a nuclear family loses its determinant role as a socialisation agent. The place of traditional ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by secondary agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual (U. Beck, 1992).

The articles on the situation in families at risk (Lithuania, Czech Republic) repeatedly affirm the challenges faced by the family institution in contemporary society.

As indicated by Czech researchers, contemporary Czech families have to face such phenomena as growing isolation, disintegration of family life, considerable parental workload, lack of time to spend together, high divorce rate, etc. One of the solutions offered – substitute family care.

Social work is an explicitly interdisciplinary professional field. The set of knowledge and competences is formed within specific models characteristic of social work by integrating the knowledge and experience from interdisciplinary fields, including psychology and pedagogy. The authors from Lithuania have highlighted the value of educational activities for the human quality of life and educational practices of social workers in gerontology.

The article *The Perspective of Gestalt Therapy in Social Work Practice* (Lithuania) analyses the points of intersection of social work and Gestalt therapy, by argumenting that Gestalt therapy has the role of the original theoretical and practical perspective of social work and by seeing the possibility of enriching social work with new therapeutic social work practice methods.

The article is appealing from a dual perspective: *firstly*, the author provides a comprehensive theoretical description of the phenomenological approach which could be of interest not only for academics in social work but also practitioners and *secondly*, when undertaking a critical assessment of the development of therapeutic social work in Lithuania, the author has highlighted issues that could be the subject of discourse of social workers in other countries as well: is the social work profession autonomous or is it based on expert

judgment in solving certain social problems of social groups, or is social work, after all, a kind of tool for state bureaucracy and control?

The article *Social worker intervention performance in work with unemployed adults (Latvia) highlights the quality of social services, factors affecting intervention and efficiency assessment as a topical issue in social work.*

The social work section concludes with an article on *The prestige of social work as a profession: the social worker's perspective.* (Latvia). In the study, occupational prestige is interpreted in the context of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

The authors of the study conclude that social workers strongly sense a lack of *authority and symbolic powers* of the profession of a social worker in their relationship with their clients, other professionals and higher-standing administrative structures and that this lack of *symbolic power* partly also explains the manifestations of bureaucratisation, observed in the work of social workers.

The level of care and the promoting of wellbeing and improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities and severe health issues is an indicator that measures a society's level of humanity. This statement is addressed in several articles that illustrate studies on the employment of persons with disabilities, the problems of cognitive development in children with Down syndrome and on the quality of life of drug addicts.

An innovative research perspective in the situation of individuals suffering from severe illnesses is provided in the study *Biographical Disruption and Factors Facilitating Overcoming it.* The author analyses individual and social factors that provide women with breast cancer with favourable conditions to facilitate a successful overcoming of biographical disruption.

The author uses the term biographical disruption to describe individual and social aspects accompanying a disease, being of traumatic nature and causing significant changes by transforming the individual's identity and social relationships. The author concludes that social assistance and biographic work are curative and assist in overcoming biographical disruption. The author also indicates that the contemporary dynamic changes to the social environment account for biographical disruption risks in the biography of individuals.

The collection of articles is concluded by a lengthy analytical survey on the Development of Service Pension Policy in Latvia from 1996 until 2016. The authors analyse the service pension scheme of Latvia against the background of international practice and understanding of special pension schemes. The authors of the article assert that the service pension scheme in Latvia provides privileges to specific categories of persons in comparison with persons retiring according to the established procedures when reaching retirement age. The authors insist on the necessity for revision of the service pension scheme, however also recognise the political sensitivity of this issue.

The collection of articles covers topical issues in social life, healthcare and welfare that could promote future discussion. The reader will not only be provided with comprehensive information, but also get answers to important questions and new ideas for creative practical solutions.

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