

Contradictions in the theory and practice of Russian preventive social work – prevention of deviating social phenomena



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Tatjana Shipunova, St. Petersburg (Russia)

The majority of social workers and academic scientists imagine well the difficulties connected with developing a system of preventive social work. These difficulties are seen differently in different discourses. Thus, social workers see the main difficulties in shortcomings of legislation having a declarative character in many respects; in the autonomy of departmental resources of the subjects in the social work system; in an incoherent process of individual help to persons with ‘substandard behaviour’; in the lack of consistency and coordinating actions of various departments and organizations; in the deficiency of skilled personnel necessary for ensuring of given social structural activities.

This point of view is shared also by researchers who are engaged in the studying of social work practices. Besides, they speak about the necessity of research on the efficiency of preventive social work in connection with present serious shortcomings. The absence of such complex long-term and independent research itself is a shortcoming in organizing preventive social work. Meanwhile, research is absolutely necessary to give the possibility of timely amending in preventive social work and redistributing resources, directing them to a decision on the most pressing questions. By the way, such research in other countries is made and frequently indicates unexpected and negative results which spur reflection on the concept of preventing deviating social phenomena (1).

The analysis of the aforementioned shortcomings is important in itself, and especially in the modern Russian context, but it is insufficient for understanding of low social return of preventive work. We will allocate some theoretical and practical contradictions that simultaneously create some interval of possibilities for the analysis of preventive social work in Russia.

The First Contradiction

Some sociologists and specialists of deviations speak about the internal contradiction, which is present in social work with deviants. Its essence consists of the fact that preventive social work (first of all, the work of state social institutions) does not aspire to realize the mission of increasing the level of integration and solidarity of the members of a society at all. It represents more or less acceptable variants of state violence and compulsion first of all to exhibit the behaviour that by means of maintaining convenient norms for the state is considered correct, good or admissible.

We can prove evidence by the following, first of all, the customer, the developer and the executor is the same person (in state formations) or the subordinated organization in almost every social program. Thus, the programs are developed under already available resources and structures, from the point of view of specific politicized and sometimes mythologized discourse of government officials without paying attention to other opinions that limits essentially the application of new technologies and methods in preventive social work with persons showing deviating behaviour. It resulted in a low efficiency of almost all social programs. That is why none of them reach the main goal – a reduction of the level of deviating phenomena in society (except for, perhaps, youth criminality). There are also different interpretations of an insignificant fall of crime rates at the simultaneous growth of grave crimes. At the same time necessary social work programs for practice are not accepted,

or they plan such a quantity of social services that cannot solve the problem of preventing deviating phenomena at all. For example, in state institutions engaged in drugs addiction therapy, disintoxication is practised, but it is not provided with appropriate free psychological consultation so that it does not lead to illness treatment; till now the use of replaceable therapy at drug addiction treatment is under a ban, so methadone or buprenorphine cannot be used.

Secondly, social phenomena such as criminality, drug addiction, prostitution, alcoholism, addiction to gambling, tobacco addiction, computer escapism etc., are known to happen and can be explained not by the set of the factors causing separate deviations, but by social processes occurring in a society. Consequently, it is necessary to change the social conditions of people's living to organise effective preventive social work: a standard of well-being, social involvement, protection of rights and freedom, quality of a life and so on. In other words, it is necessary to pay steadfast attention to primary prevention through the creation of possibilities for normal socialisation and integration into legitimate social space. Everyone knows how small such work is in Russia, so as preventive work on societal level is realised poorly, experts predict growth of all forms and kinds of deviating behaviour in the nearest future.

Thirdly, there is no competently developed social program for the prevention of deviating phenomena in Russia now, in addition a reduction of financial resources for social programs can be observed whereas financial support was not quite good even before. Thus, the state social policy in the field of prevention and at the same time the state system of preventive social work to a great extent work only on the retention of deviant behavior at a certain level under state control, without addressing issues of the constant reproduction of problematic social phenomena in Russian society.

The Second Contradiction

continues the first one logically by relying on a sociological discourse which includes discourses of human rights' defenders, representatives of a sociological paradigm in criminology and deviating science which proves the inefficiency of the state preventive system in maintaining a social order. A discourse problem is the analysis of punishment activities by an official institute from the point of view of their functionality for the existence of the social system as a whole, and also the analysis of activities of other social control institutes which are engaged in preventing negative social phenomena. The representatives of this discourse come to not very comforting conclusions: both the state system of punishment and correction, and the state system of preventive social work pursue, finally, own aims – the reproduction and maintaining of their own existence, based on a convenience principle for professional employees. Examples can be different here: an inconvenient office hours of public social services for citizens (they work in those hours, as all citizens work, therefore to get there is difficult); absence in the arsenal of state social services such as effective and urgent forms as outreach social work, etc.

The hypothesis that after the organization arises it often starts to live under its own laws and “works” only on its self-preservation, has received substantiation in N. Luhmann's concept about autopoietic systems. Despite a sufficient theoretical study of this theme, the system of preventing problematic social phenomena needs more founded analysis. In this article we will discuss only the problem of preventive social work, without considering punishment and the system of correction (although social workers and psychologists who are engaged in the resocialization of criminals also work in this sphere). I will speak only about the organizational side of the question that concerns a consideration of the state system of preventive social work viewing the special proceeding, so called «illness of the budgetary organization”. “The illness clinic” is known as (2):

1. Taking into account the absence of the criterion of profitability; to become a successful organization means to receive more budgetary appropriations.
2. A budgetary organization can increase its financing through expanding the sphere of its activity and increasing its size; therefore growing in size turns to an end in itself.
3. A budgetary organization cannot liquidate any area that it effects and cannot reduce any subsystem which has already become unnecessary, because this will automatically lead to a reduction of staff and budget, to a reduction of its sizes, status and prestige of its executives.
4. A budgetary organization depends on the higher organizations very much, that is why it cannot be flexible in developing the tactics of behaviour in the social services market (loss of adaptive flexibility).
5. «A phenomenon of displacement in intention» often emerges in a bureaucratic organization: officially accepted and declared industrial-labor purposes are substituted for the immanent purpose of managing top-self-preservation at any cost. This “displacement” arises as the illness of ‘overbureaucratization’. Excessive bureaucratization of managements generates bureaucratism and bribery, when a management apparatus ceases to serve the social system (which it operates) and the society as a whole, and pursues its own aims of survival and enrichment.

The state system of preventive social work declares the purposes of rehabilitation, adaptation and integration of its clients into the society. Has the level of deviant activities such as drug addiction, alcohol addiction, prostitution, tobacco smoking, aggression and violence declined? On the contrary, it grows all the time.

It is possible to make the following conclusions. First of all, the autopoiesis (self-preservation through reproduction) of the state system of preventive social work dictates game rules, which do not contribute to accomplish the mission defined to it by the society. Secondly, this system produces increasing recurrent and more dangerous deviant activities, estrangement from the society, and also a maintaining of the ideology of the imperious elite, aspiring to keep the status quo only.

It is necessary to notice that the second contradiction submits to a certain rule: the higher position the system (body, establishment, committee, the ministry) occupies in the administrative vertical the bigger this contradiction is. Accordingly, the lower position in hierarchy the less the display of contradiction is.

The Third Contradiction

On the one hand, the worldwide practice of preventive social work has proved a low efficiency of bureaucratic state organizations and recognized the necessity of developing non-governmental organizations with preventive orientation. On the other hand, in spite of a wide penetration of these ideas, in Russia non-governmental organizations have more likely to survive than to work for the benefit of their clients and the whole society with full return.

Non-governmental organizations express the idea of self-development and spontaneous creativity of citizens, the idea of solidarity and mutual aid, the idea of democratization of social management. However the State aspires to spread the same bureaucratic forms of activity in them as in governmental organizations. The State wants to standardize the non-governmental organizations, to make them as controllable as possible and, therefore, operated.

Thus, non-governmental organizations for preventive social work are laid down in unequal (discriminatory) conditions in comparison with government facilities. For example, they have to pay in double for the rent of premises and utilities like commercial organizations. They have to report regularly to state fiscal services (tax, bank, registration) about their activities

and financial resources. And such practice extends not only to the governmentally financed projects, but also to projects which are supported by different Russian and foreign funds. This leads to the following: First of all, non-governmental social organizations lose their possibility to manoeuvre within the given resources in case to react quickly to changing conditions and to redirect money flows for the solution of the most important questions. Thereby, the State makes public organizations work under the wrong system of the budgetary organizations. Secondly, they have to spend more time on reporting instead of working.

It seems that the passed law on social standards, which is useful in many aspects for the governmental social work system can harm non-governmental organizations because it will force them to work in a bureaucratic mode.

The Fourth Contradiction

The preventive social work system urges to help socially excluded people. Thus, it often addresses theoretical positions of stigmatization: in describing the process of the reproduction of criminality, in passing the deviant career, in the formation of socially inadequate norms and their influence on the level of deviant activities in the society, on the “system of violence”, etc. However some of the processes, that are organized by the social work system (that deals with deviant people), distribute an unreasonable stigmatization of clients by themselves and strengthen their position as socially excluded (3). What are these processes?

First of all this is the phenomenon which has received the name «coverage expansion». It is connected with an increasing number of people who have come into the view of special social services. A person, more often a child, becomes an object of such system which aims at correcting the norm-disturber by all means. But the establishment of control that among other things lets the act be known to a wide environment (relatives, friends, neighbours, school) promotes the fastening of a stigma. And stigma causes the further development of deviant career. Thus, the system, aimed to correct, only accelerates the formation of delinquent. The other consequence is the automatic exception of stigmatized persons from many socially approved processes (4).

These two moments have a great value for Russian practice. We know that only the fact of being registered by the police or the DMA (the Department of minors affairs) in connection with any insignificant offence can influence negatively the destiny of a young man. The same is about the practice of dispensary account of people who have voluntarily signed in for treatment from drug addiction. The stigma “drug addict”, “offender”, “homosexual”, “prostitute” etc. can have an effect a young man in terms of having access to high school, at transferring in certain armies at conscription, at receiving recommendations for access to postgraduate studies etc. Such social exceptions are pursuing the person for one’s whole life, it also promotes estrangement which can lead to deviant acts: from alcohol or drug addiction to committing grave crimes. Moreover, we should not forget about an awful practice of cruel treatment of policemen with arrested people (5).

The problem of the status definition of a person who has come into the view of special social services arises here. The term «person who has committed a small criminal or civil offence» has been replaced in the United States by the term «a person requiring supervision», «the child with wrong behaviour», «the child with problems in emotional sphere». The term «a teenager having problems with the law» was extended in Great Britain. All these terms will support a child’s behaviour to change for the best. Besides, they suggest the justification for the child requiring the help because they focus on his reason of being «not like others» in comparison with so-called ‘normal’ children. It seems that there are not any attempts to lighten this stigma in Russian practice. For example, changing the well-known term «prostitute» to the more permissive “sex worker” or «the commercial sex worker» (SW or CSW) causes resistance of some academics and experts of preventive social work (if they do

not work with this special client group). Labels like “addict”, “alcoholic”, «asocial person» are still used everywhere in Russia.

Another problem is some arbitrariness in the selection of teenagers who should be put on the account for correction in a place of residence. The decision is based less often on the child’s subjective perspective and more on the judgement of third parties (neighbours, administration of school, relatives). The unfair stigmatization can also happen. It is often based on the non-admission of some child traits by adults, and caused by absence of socially adequate criteria in selecting people really requiring attraction of efforts by official instances.

The Fifth Contradiction

This contradiction concerns clients of preventive social services and methods of preventive social work.

There are two types of clients in social work with people who are engaged in prostitution: children who are under 18 years and adults, i.e. people who are already 18 years old. The first type is considered to be a victim so rehabilitation methods are being applied, they are withdrawn from their subculture and favorable living conditions (when possible) are given to them. Other methods are applied to the second client group such as informing, treatment of accompanying diseases and psychological help. Which way is however justified? Many of the sex-workers are not more ‘socially developed’ than children are. So why are the methods so different? Besides there is one more question that comes up: if the age of majority is rising why are the methods of work with these people different? How will the intervention open up possibilities for them to get vocational education? Will assistance in finding socially accepted work be rendered? Will they get such social support that it would let them not to be engaged in prostitution?

One more category of deviant people are people with dependent behaviour: alcoholics, addicts, compulsive gamblers and people who depend on the Internet. How to qualify these people? Are they deviant people or sick? If they are sick people, and their quantity catastrophically grows, why are these sick people (addicts) put in prison (approximately 96 % of all affairs concerning illegal drug dealing ends with sentence of drug-addict people, i.e. sick people). And why are there no special clinics in the preventive system or in such a quantity that they could accept all who require a high-grade and – the main thing – free treatment? Why not to use the well-known world experience when drug addicts could change between jail placement and treatment?

The Sixth Contradiction

Everyone who is engaged in preventive social work, realizes that internal control is the most effective among all kinds of control. For this purpose it is necessary to develop in a person the responsibility for his life, his behaviour in the course of rehabilitation work. And what happens in practice? The majority of rehabilitation programs include actions that have to develop this responsibility. However it is possible to say that these programs fail to generate the client’s responsibility. Because the majority of clients in social services who has passed rehabilitation programs, come back to their usual practice of unscrupulousness and unreflective attitude to themselves, their family and relatives and to other people. What can be connected with that? To answer this question, it is necessary to check the meaning of the term “responsibility”.

Responsibility is an internal acceptance by the person of moral obligations to other people, before himself and his life. Responsibility is connected with a concept of a debt. The concept of a debt makes it a duty to look ahead the consequences of the activity, especially negative consequences, to consider and observe the rights of other people. And this demands from the person some restrictions on his own claims and having to establish constant control over his

behaviour. Responsibility means that the person acts freely, meaningly and voluntary and that he himself establishes the borders of acts. Responsibility can be developed in the presence of, at least, a generated base of moral values by which the person can guide estimating his own behaviour, the situation, acts of other people.

But do the clients of social services have these generated base values? And if it is possible to generate these values in six months (three in a hospital of the rehabilitation centre and three as an external patient in the form of social support)? Moreover the previous experience of clients and what they will see, leaving the rehabilitation centre will contradict these values. The social circumstances, mass-media, school, their family will not support responsible behaviour at all.

Perhaps, there is only one program in which the formation of responsible behaviour stands out. It is the program of «12 steps» for alcoholics, drug addicts, gamblers and for their parents and relatives. But this program is not wide spread in our country yet. One of the reasons concerns the religious elements of this program (though there are many religious people in our country now). Another reason – is the difficulty of education, “cultivation” of responsibility in ourselves. This process lasts for years, with failures and backlashes in the program again, with a permanent job to care for your self-improvement (but social services are expected to show the “turn-over”, the constant increase in number of the peoples who have received “help”). The third reason is that working in this program demands involving good experts (psychologists, psychotherapists, therapist for alcoholics or drug addicts , lawyers, therapists, social workers) who are not indifferent to client’s problems, who are capable to sustain big emotional and physical activities. Accordingly, their work should be paid well. But neither the state, nor the society are ready to put up money in developing these centres. They are not ready even to support the public organisations, working on this program (to create favorable living conditions for them). Therefore the program of “12 steps» will not work in the budgetary (governmental) social organisations, and, apparently, it will remain being a means of rescue for drug addict people and their relatives who are ready to give their last money for the fee of experts.

Here come other facts proving that the system of preventive social work is not focused on developing responsibility:

1. Human rights organisations are not supported.
2. The system of social work (in conformity with the principle of autopoiesis) in the work with children takes upon itself all main functions of a family: educational, protective, supporting, organizing leisure activities, etc. (except the reproductive function). Thereby gradually for many and many children a substitute family is created. But that would be an unimportant substitute without emotional affinity, without warm relations, without feeling an attachment to your family.

Certainly, each contradiction calls for change. The question is how much time it needs to realise these contradictions and how long the steps on their elimination will be taken for. Probably, it will be connected with revision of the general concept, principles and reorganization of all system of preventive social work.

References

- (1) See, e.g.: Berkovitz L. Agression: the reasons, consequences and control. – SPb.: a primeurosign, 2001., p. 200; Graham J., Bennett T. Strategy of preventing criminality in Europe and the North America. – Helsinki, 1995
- (2) More in detail see: Aydinyan R.M. Reasons of bureaucratism in the organisation and the way of their overcoming // Management. Science.Education. Culture: The Collection of proceedings.– SPb., 2003. P. 25-32.

(3) See also: Shipunova T.V. Juvenile justice in the sociological aspect // News of higher educational institutions. Jurisprudence. – SPb., 2001. № 3 (236).

(4) The encyclopaedia of social work. In 3 volume T.2.: Translation from English – M: the Center of universal values. 1994., p. 138-145

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Tatjana Shipunova works as professor at the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Sociology at St.Petersburg State University (Russia).

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