

FEATURES OF PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Serhii Gunko

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine

Tetiana Liakh

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine

Renata Vainola

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine

Maryna Lekholetova

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv Metropolitan University, Ukraine

Abstract. *Given the potential territorial isolation, lack of necessary contacts, and social agencies, the current situation of a state of war highlights the problem of optimizing the provision of social services to vulnerable population groups in rural communities.*

The aim of this article is to identify and characterize the features of providing social services in a rural community, determining the factors and environmental aspects that influence the content, forms, and methods of providing social services in a rural community.

The authors analyze and summarize approaches to defining the concept of "community" and grouping communities based on various characteristics of the social environment. The study identifies problems in rural society that may affect the process, types, and forms of providing social services (relatively high level of societal social control over individuals; limitations in the social integration opportunities of individuals into the social environment; limitations of social status and role positions in the socialization process; high probability of social exclusion; specific division of labor; limited social contacts; a small number of social institutions influencing the socialization process).

Throughout the research, the authors emphasize the need to focus social work in rural areas on supporting youth, young families, and youth initiatives. They outline types of social services to emphasize in rural communities, aimed at social prevention, social support, and social services. The study identifies factors influencing the process of providing social services in a rural community (seasonal, socio-historical, socio-pedagogical, socio-cultural, educational, socio-domestic, socio-demographic, socio-ethnic, socio-religious).

The authors see promising research directions in determining the satisfaction with the provision of social services in a rural community and identifying conditions for the effectiveness of providing social services in a rural community.

Keywords: *community, environment, rural community, rural society, social services, territorial community.*

Introduction

Rapid development of social relations today necessitates addressing the optimization of providing social services to vulnerable populations. This task becomes particularly relevant when it comes to rural communities, considering possible territorial isolation, a lack of necessary contacts and social agencies, and the current situation of a state of war. Unfortunately, the current social services system in Ukraine is not sufficiently effective, as procedural aspects require reform. Therefore, it becomes clear that many of these services can be obtained online, while others require reform and constructive changes.

These tasks are regulated by Ukrainian laws (Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2015; Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2019; Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2021), and they are actualized by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine's decree to ensure European standards in the functioning of social protection institutions, provision of social services, financial stability of the social sector, increasing transparency, and optimizing administrative expenses (Cabinet of Ministry Ukraine, 2020) and the State Targeted Social Program for creating opportunities for self-realization and development of youth potential in Ukraine, their participation, and integration into public life (Cabinet of Ministry Ukraine, 2021). However, the situation of wartime in Ukraine has partially delayed the implementation of the tasks outlined in these provisions and programs.

The normative-legal framework for social work declares the necessity of ensuring European standards in the functioning of social protection institutions, provision of social services, financial stability of the social sector, increasing transparency, and optimizing actions.

The analysis and characterization of the peculiarities of providing social services in a rural community are relevant and provide an opportunity to identify factors and features of this environment with the aim of improving the content, forms, and methods of providing social services in rural communities.

Literature Review

The issue of developing and providing effective social services is currently at the forefront of social work theory and practice, considered from various perspectives (Denysiuk et al., 2023). Researchers, while exploring the practice of social work with different recipients of social services in the local community, focus on analyzing new forms of relations between the public and private sectors in the local community, aimed at shaping the market for social services at the local level (Semygina, 2019). This includes the analysis of volunteer programs implemented by government and non-governmental organizations, providing social services to community members without financial compensation (Nabatchi et al., 2017), as well as the organization and provision of activities within the

community in the areas of social protection and children's rights protection (Vakulenko et al., 2005; Lapa, 2006). The organization of social-pedagogical work with children and youth in the local community is also emphasized (Bezpalko, 2006).

The exceptional role of educational institutions as socialization centers in rural communities is noteworthy. In particular, researcher O. Mezhirytskyi reveals the essence and content of the activity of rural schools as centers of social work, defining the conditions for the successful functioning of schools as cultural-educational centers of the village (Mezhirytskyi, 2003). In this context, the development of an inclusive educational environment for families raising children with disabilities and social support for such families are important (Spirina & Dorofina, 2023; Skrypnyk et al., 2021).

Researchers underline the necessity to consider the rights of service recipients to support from their immediate surroundings, the overall social environment; the right to make mistakes and self-determination, realization of their own abilities, and responsibility for their actions, decisions, and deeds (Zhukov et al., 2023).

Another aspect of researching this issue is the study of community needs for the implementation of civic initiatives and responding to challenges and social problems (Liakh & Spirina, 2021). Researchers emphasize that effective development of territorial communities requires active interaction and cooperation of all parties involved in social dialogue, especially the active participation of the public in making important decisions, managing various aspects of community life and activities, and developing a development strategy (Gunko et al., 2023). In this context, favorable factors that can influence the future implementation of social services, programs, and projects, including government-citizen relations (Burgess et al., 2023), play a crucial role. Researchers stress that public administration requires addressing new management processes by promoting greater citizen involvement in government activities (Bingham et al., 2005). This includes the use of citizen and stakeholder input to determine policy form, implementation, and ensuring compliance, including the needs of rural communities in providing quality social services.

Methodology

The aim of the research was to identify and characterize the features of providing social services in a rural community, determine the factors and characteristics of the environment that determine the content, forms, and methods of providing social services in a rural community. To achieve this goal, the methods of theoretical analysis of domestic and foreign scientific sources in sociology, medicine, psychology, pedagogy, and social work were used to define the basic concepts of the study; the method of generalization of theoretical

approaches to the problem of providing social services in different conditions of the social environment; the comparative method to identify the features of providing social services in a rural community, and the method of systematization to group and characterize the relevant forms and methods of social work in providing social services in a rural community. In total, 17 studies were analyzed, elucidating various aspects of social service provision in rural communities; 5 sources were normative legal documents of Ukraine. Given the specificity of the chosen research problem, it was important for us to rely on the current legislation of Ukraine.

In this article, we also scrutinized the Law of Ukraine “On Social Services” dated 17.01.2019 No 2671-VIII (Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2019), which serves as the basis for the development of social service provision in Ukraine. Specifically, it describes the system of social service provision (legal framework, principles, methods and forms of social service provision, the set of subjects interacting at all stages of organizing social service provision).

Our analysis of the scientific literature on the research problem allowed us to identify several main methodological levels of its study (philosophical, scientific-theoretical, and applied). In the study, analyzing scientific sources, we presented the following main scientific approaches to the problem of providing social services in rural community conditions: activity-based, axiological, personality-oriented, and technological.

The study of the subject matter was based on the methodological foundation of ascertaining the correspondence of the content of the proposed social services – direct verbal and non-verbal communication with the population of rural communities. Therefore, we did not conduct formal processing of empirical results but presented an intuitive-logical analysis of the problem. We applied the procedure of theoretical triangulation (using different perspectives on interpreting the same data) to verify the reliability of interpretations. The problems of providing social services in rural communities are considered through the prism of several philosophical methods: the unity of the general and specific; the unity of qualitative and quantitative analysis; the method of formalization; the method of analogy; the system-structural method.

Research Results

The central concept of our research is the "community" as a group-based social entity whose members share common geographic and sociocultural characteristics (place of residence, interests, beliefs, values, nationality, etc.) and interact with each other to meet specific needs or solve problems (Bezpalko, 2006). In scientific studies, residential (geographic), identification (professional, youth, women's, religious, etc.) communities, and interest-based communities are distinguished. In a residential community, people interact with each other partly

by chance. The main common feature of these communities is that they are formed based on the place of residence. Territorial and local communities emerge as variations of residential communities. The terms "territorial community" and "local community" can be used interchangeably when a territorial community consists of a single settlement. However, if a settlement (e.g., a village) is considered as part of the territorial community of a city or town, then such a separate settlement with its residents is not a territorial but a local community. Thus, a territorial community can be seen as a collection of local communities.

O. Bezpalko interprets the concept of a "territorial community" as a specific socializing space with unique sociocultural conditions, corresponding agents of socialization, upon which the social formation and development of recipients of social services depend (Bezpalko, 2006). The author emphasizes that a rural community is a specific type of territorial community, as its activities are more influenced by social and everyday characteristics and ethnic properties.

Considering that one of the key characteristics of a community is its territory, depending on the type of settlement, rural, urban communities, and communities of a microdistrict in a large city are defined as meso-levels of the social environment. The main parameters of such communities are identified: natural and economic features of the territory; sociocultural traditions of the population; groups of people based on gender and age characteristics; social infrastructure institutions (educational institutions, social services, socio-cultural institutions, medical facilities, etc.); local self-government bodies and local executive authorities; non-governmental organizations, and so on. These parameters indicate the peculiarities and differences between various territorial communities, thereby influencing the specifics of social work with the population.

In addition to the concept of "community," scientific sources also define the concept of "rural society." In particular, the most widespread definition is that of society as a social reality, a society considered in the context of general forms of human interaction (Zvereva, 2012). We will consider society as a stable social community characterized by unity of living conditions in essential relationships and, consequently, a common culture; as a human community of a certain type (kinship and family, socio-economic, national-ethnic, territorial-settlement communities; the social environment of a person, a set of historically formed forms of human activity. To accomplish the tasks of our research, it was important to detail the approaches to interpreting the concept of "rural society".

O. Lapa defines that openness of communication due to minimized differences in social status positions of residents and the scarcity of social contacts is characteristic of rural society (Lapa, 2006). Moreover, the smaller the rural settlement, the more comprehensive the communication between its residents. It is worth considering that when building a model of social work in rural areas, characteristics such as distance from large cities, population size, demographic and ethnic composition, the presence of religious communities, and the presence

or absence of social institutions - schools, clubs, libraries, clinics, etc., should be taken into account.

Limited opportunities for social and professional growth, specific values, habits, emotional reactions, and socio-psychological attitudes of individuals in rural areas are factors that determine the specificity of social work in rural society (Bezpalko, 2006).

Defining rural areas as a complex system that is not exclusively identified with agriculture as a production sector or village as a type of settlement indicates the impracticality of restricting scientific analysis of their essence solely with an industry-specific approach. Therefore, guided by a systemic approach in our research, we find it appropriate to expand the interpretation of the concept of rural society from the perspective of social work.

We will rely on O. Lapa definition, which considers rural society as a unique environment for personality socialization characterized by specific conditions of work and living, limited opportunities for social-labor mobility, the combination of work and household, labor-intensive employment in domestic and subsistence farming, limited cultural leisure in free time, low levels of socio-professional and cultural differentiation, and the necessity of social interaction and support (Lapa, 2006).

Rural society has its sociocultural and socio-economic characteristics that determine the peculiarities of the professional activity of a social worker in rural community conditions. Our goal was to identify the problems of rural society that can affect the process, types, and forms of providing social services.

These problems include: a relatively high level of social control of society over individuals; limited opportunities for the social integration of an individual into the social environment; limitations of social-status and social-role positions in the process of socialization; a high likelihood of social exclusion; specific division of labor; limited social contacts; a small number of social institutions influencing the socialization process, and so on.

The specificity of rural lifestyle determines the peculiarities of work and living of residents, associated with natural cycles, more complex working conditions compared to urban conditions, limited opportunities for social-labor mobility, the combination of work and household, and labor-intensive employment in domestic and subsistence farming. In addition, the range of activities in free time is quite limited, and the lifestyle of rural society has preserved elements of traditional communal rural life until recently (a relatively stable population, low levels of socio-professional and cultural differentiation, close family, godparent, and neighborly ties, etc.). Social control of the community over people's behavior, traditions, customs, and local authorities are of great importance for rural society. At the same time, it should be noted that the pace of life in the village is generally less stressful compared to the city, the

population experiences lower psychological loads, and uses simpler forms of communication (Vakulenko et al., 2005).

In the development of personality within rural society, a crucial aspect is that even in the harshest living conditions, a peasant did not lose the freedom to act in their own affairs; they were not instructed on how to plow or what to sow. This freedom, with some limitations, was maintained through village self-government, where important life issues were discussed in community gatherings.

Another characteristic of rural society is the perpetual circle of communication. The familiar environment of an individual remains largely unchanged, and familial, neighborly, and community connections are marked by stability. Hence, everyday politeness and friendliness persist as norms in rural society (Lapa, 2006).

The rural community knows the way of life of each fellow villager, understanding their strengths and weaknesses. In such conditions, social control regarding family and individual behavior is maintained, significantly influencing a person's conduct. The influence of public opinion, shaped by the surrounding community, was noteworthy in the formation of one's personality.

A prominent feature of rural society is the central role of the family in an individual's life. The family served as a productive unit, and collective labor was a defining factor in family relationships. Daily household activities served as a source of peasant existence, safeguarding youth and adults from aimlessness, thoughtlessness, laziness, and protecting them from debauchery and inactivity.

Life experience and family traditions ensured the continuity of generations, with one life stage not opposed to another. According to folk traditions, childhood and youth, maturity, and old age were equally revered. Childhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, old age, and infirmity naturally succeeded each other. The peasant also naturally embraced their social roles at different stages of life.

The moral potential of rural society always had a noticeable impact on the upbringing of the younger generation. A child was under the care and supervision of the family and the extended family. Modern education of rural children also follows the traditions of the peasant upbringing system: early involvement in feasible work, participation in community activities, toughening, and close contact with nature.

A peasant never imagined their life without their extended family, ancestors, parents, and remembered the traditions and the ancestral legacy. For a happy life (i.e., successful personal socialization), it was necessary to love work and agriculture, respect the community to which life values were tied, ensuring survival and well-being; non-coercive "construction" of the human environment; responsibility of each person to future generations; respect for distant and close community members.

Particularly relevant for identifying issues in rural social work is the attention to rural youth, uncovering their problems and requests. To this end, on the

initiative of the Ministry of Youth and Sports of Ukraine, an annual study is conducted to assess the situation of youth, including socio-economic status, values, and preferences. Analyzing the results with a shifted focus on the impact of Russia's full-scale invasion, it has been found that the concern for health (either personal or of close ones) among young people has significantly increased — 50% compared to 35% in 2021; as well as concern for mental health — 22% compared to 11% in 2021. Concerns about physical safety were reported by 27% of respondents, lack of self-realization opportunities by 19%, and inability to find employment by 19%. Youth income has significantly decreased, with 40% stating that they do not have enough for food and/or only enough to cover basic needs (compared to 23% in 2021) (Volosevich et al., 2023). Therefore, the focus of social work tasks in rural areas should be on supporting youth, young families, and youth initiatives. One important resource in this context is the use of the volunteer movement to implement the ideas of local authorities and community initiatives (Liakh & Spirina, 2021). A crucial factor in the success of youth in social interaction and life in general is the development of the social-emotional skills of children and adolescents. Social qualities, emotional intelligence, soft skills, and all components related to the socio-emotional sphere are extremely important for social, personal, and professional development (Skrypnyk et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to focus on enhancing the competence of social educators to improve their ability to meaningfully develop the socio-emotional skills of rural youth.

The importance of developing a social and inclusive environment in the territorial community should not be overlooked. Social inclusion and the participation of community residents in making responsible decisions can contribute to overcoming social injustice, exclusion from certain social relations, discrimination, and promote active adaptation and positive socialization (Liakh et al., 2023).

The analysis of scientific approaches to the characteristics of rural society has allowed us to identify issues that may determine the specificity of providing social services in a rural community:

1. Lower socio-economic development, a certain lag in the level of well-being, lifestyle, which consequently affects the social structure and way of life of the entire population.
2. Limited job options, relatively weak job differentiation, higher unemployment rates, and weak labor mobility.
3. Lag in mechanization and energy supply of labor, fewer job choices, and weak opportunities for selection.
4. Subordination of rural work to the rhythms and cycles of nature, more challenging working conditions, the merging of work and daily life, and the necessity and labor intensity of work in household and subsidiary farming.

5. Limited representation of institutions for leisure organization, lack of free time, and establishments and agencies providing socio-cultural and entertainment services.
6. Specific interpersonal relationships built on the principles of social control, customs, and traditions.
7. Prevalence of socially and nationally homogeneous families, lack of anonymity in communication, and weak formation of many social roles.

In the next stage of theoretical analysis, it was deemed appropriate to characterize the theoretical principles of providing social services in a rural community. According to Ukrainian legislation, social services are defined as actions aimed at preventing complex life circumstances, overcoming such circumstances, or minimizing their negative consequences for individuals/families experiencing them (Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2019).

Providing social services is based on the principles of specificity and individual approach; accessibility and openness; humanity; maximum efficiency in the use of budgetary and non-budgetary funds by service providers; legality; social justice; ensuring confidentiality; adherence to quality standards; responsibility for ethical and legal norms compliance.

Such services may be aimed at: social prevention - preventing the occurrence of complex life circumstances and/or the entry of individuals/families into such circumstances; social support - assisting individuals/families in overcoming complex life circumstances; social service - minimizing the negative consequences of complex life circumstances for individuals/families, supporting their life activities, social status, and inclusion in the community.

The provision of social services involves the implementation of the following basic types of social work (Verhovna rada Ukraine, 2019):

- Identifying the population's needs in the administrative-territorial unit/territorial community for social services, including involving non-governmental service providers and publishing the relevant results.
- Informing the population about the list of social services, their content, and the procedure for provision in a form accessible to individuals with any type of health impairment.
- Conducting measures to identify vulnerable population groups and individuals/families experiencing complex life circumstances.
- Providing basic social services to individuals/families based on their needs, taking measures to provide other social services to such individuals/families by creating a network of social service providers.
- Approving, securing funding, and implementing regional programs to meet the needs of individuals/families in social services, developed based on the identified needs of the population in the administrative-territorial unit/territorial community for social services.

- Determining the specifics of providing social services in the territory of the respective administrative-territorial unit/territorial community in case of the introduction of a state of emergency or war in Ukraine or specific areas thereof.

As we can see, the main provider of social services is identified as the territorial, and consequently, rural community. In order to optimize and take a comprehensive approach to providing social services, complex institutions/facilities for social services may be established, the structural or separate (territorial) units of which provide various social services to different population groups. T. Semygina emphasizes that the biggest barriers to providing quality social services arise at the level of the territorial community because the experience of recent years indicates violations of citizens' constitutional rights to care in some communities (Semygina, 2019). For example, the network of territorial centers for social services is shrinking, social workers are included in the executive committees of amalgamated territorial communities, citizens are removed from service, and left without social services. Or communities refuse to fund family-type children's homes, where children left without parental care were once placed. This raises the question of the reality of the declared list of free services guaranteed by the state for categories of persons entitled to receive them, and the "basic service basket" that should be in each local territorial community. In our opinion, such a list should be separated, taking into account the specificity of the rural community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the definition of socialization factors (Andrushchenko et al., 2003), we have identified factors that determine the process of providing social services in rural communities.

Seasonal Factor: This factor is crucial for optimizing practical social work in rural society. Considering this factor allows structuring the process of providing social services, determining priority directions for social support, taking into account the seasonal labor activities of the rural population.

Social-Historical Factor: This factor involves considering the historical and cultural heritage of a specific region, the influence of historical traditions, customs, and rituals. It enables the involvement of leading social institutions (schools, clubs, youth centers, religious parishes) in the process of providing social services.

Social-Pedagogical Factor: This factor requires taking into account the pedagogical possibilities of a specific rural environment, its pedagogical potential preserved in folk culture, crafts, and customs.

Sociocultural Factor: This factor creates an understanding of the cultural potential of rural society, the totality of cultural objects, and the sociocultural activity of the population.

Educational Factor: It should be implemented considering the educational opportunities of families, educational institutions, public and state institutions in a specific community, taking into account their potential in providing social services.

Social-Household Factor: This factor allows analyzing the living conditions of the population and their impact on the personal development of individuals, the state of mental and physical health, behavioral characteristics, and determines the specifics of providing patronage services.

Social-Demographic Factor: This factor allows predicting social processes in rural areas, finding means to equalize starting opportunities for children and youth, providing support to families and the elderly.

Social-Ethnic Factor: This factor considers the ethnic specificity of the rural environment, harmonizing relationships through multicultural education based on ethnic tolerance.

Social-Religious Factor: In providing social services, it involves considering the work of religious parishes in the rural community and using pastoral support and patronage forms in social work.

Thus, we define the rural community as a space of socialization with an orientation towards specific characteristics of folk culture and customs; conditions of seasonal labor activity and daily household management; interpersonal relationships built on the principles of social control and kinship; priority of family, religious, and ethnocultural values. We have identified a list of factors (seasonal, social-historical, social-pedagogical, sociocultural, educational, social-household, social-demographic, social-ethnic, social-religious) that determine the process of providing social services in the rural community.

We have established that the peculiarities of providing social services in rural conditions are determined by the interconnected social environments, namely: the environment of the rural family (shapes moral principles, values, and youth behavior); the environment of the rural community (influences with specific sociocultural, ethnic, and religious features) and institutions that act as partners in social work.

Promising directions for future research include determining the satisfaction level with the provision of social services in the rural community and identifying the conditions for the effectiveness of providing social services in the rural community.

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