Adaptation strategies of social care institutions to the coronavirus pandemic in Russia

COVID-19 is especially dangerous for older populations and people with chronic diseases. However, living conditions in social services make it difficult to adhere to prevention guidelines (Comas-Herrera et al, 2020). The first official guidelines for social institutions in Russia were published on April 6, 2020 (Letter of the Ministry of Labor of Russia dated April 6, 2020), more detailed recommendations - a month after the introduction of the high alert regime (Letter of the Ministry of Labor of Russia dated April 21, 2020). Implementing appropriate measures and adapting to work in a pandemic were largely the responsibility of the institutions themselves due to the limited internal resources, while most of the institutions did not have experience in overcoming such crises.

The purpose of this study is to identify adaptation strategies of Russian social care institutions to functioning in a pandemic. As coronavirus infection spread fast and the severity of the disease for the elderly population is the most, it is important to study the best, from the point of the organization itself, ways to reduce the risks of losses from coronavirus and identify successful adaptation strategies for social care institutions. By adaptation strategies, we mean the actions of an institution (changes in management, organizational practices, daily activities) to prepare and adapt to COVID-19. Obtaining this information is of great practical importance for the adoption of effective public policy measures and management decisions in the future.

The study was carried out in line with the sociology of the organization. We interested in decision making process of stationary social care organizations aimed at overcoming crisis situations. From the standpoint of the crisis management theoretical concept (Pearson, Clair, 1998), we assumed that at the onset of a pandemic, institutions' strategies were aimed at avoiding / reducing the threat of a crisis with the least expenditure of resources in the shortest possible time.

Due to the poor knowledge of this issue, the study was of an intelligence nature. During the field stage, conducted in April - November 2021, 30 semi-structured interviews were collected with competent employees of public and private inpatient social care institutions, representatives of regional ministries of social protection and labor and NGOs. The study covered psycho-neurological institutions, nursing homes for elderly and disabled from 12 regions of Russia with different socio-economic and demographic characteristics, and geographic location.

We have developed a preliminary model for classifying institutions by adaptation strategies. It consists of four main factors - high role of the human factor (active role of the director / doctor, “grassroots” heroism in overcoming difficulties); the high role of external structures for the establishment to overcome difficulties: regional ministries or NGOs; the high role of additional economic spending - solving problems through additional financing; reliance on existing resources and functioning mechanisms.

Adaptation strategies include working with physical space, organizing a new mode of life and work for guests and employees, monitoring compliance with it, and practicing taking care of the psychological well-being of residence and employees. They are influenced by contextual factors such as the size of the institution, its location, type of ownership and availability of resources. Historical mobilization experience and substantial bonuses have contributed to the acceptance of new working conditions by employees in a pandemic. The high degree of decentralization of the social service system in Russia has increased the role of the administration of institutions and the human factor in the choice of adaptation strategies.

References

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