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FOSTER CARE FOR OLDER PERSONS: A MODEL FOR ENSURING THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND INDIVIDUAL POVERTY REDUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to show how Foster care for older persons can ensure an adequate level of quality of life and demonstrate the potential of social investment strategies, focusing on the introduction of foster care, as a means to reduce poverty. The paper was prepared using a variety of methods: statistical, hypothetical-deductive, analytical-deductive, and comparative methods, including fundamental scientific techniques. The data show that older people placed in foster care have a subjectively more satisfying quality of life and that they rate their personal poverty better than before placement.

Keywords: foster care, older persons, social work, quality of life, individual poverty reduction, Republic of Srpska

AFFIDO FAMILIARE PER ANZIANI: UN MODELLO PER ASSICURARE UN'ADEGUATA QUALITÀ DI VITA E UNA RIDUZIONE DELLA POVERTÀ INDIVIDUALE

SINTESI

L'obiettivo del presente documento è quello di mostrare come l'assistenza agli anziani possa garantire un adeguato livello di qualità della vita e dimostrare il potenziale delle strategie di investimento sociale, concentrandosi sull'introduzione dell'assistenza agli anziani, come mezzo per ridurre la povertà. Il documento è stato preparato utilizzando diversi metodi: statistici, ipotetico-deduttivi, analitico-deduttivi e comparativi, comprese le tecniche scientifiche fondamentali. I dati mostrano che le persone anziane che beneficiano dell'affido familiare hanno una qualità di vita soggettivamente più soddisfacente e che valutano meglio la propria povertà personale rispetto a prima dell'inserimento.

Parole chiave: affido familiare, anziani, assistenza sociale, qualità della vita, riduzione della povertà individuale, Repubblica Serba di Bosnia ed Erzegovina

INTRODUCTION

Foster care in Republic of Srpska (one of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina) is one form of protection for older persons, which is introduced through the social welfare system. Contemporary European trends in the development of care systems' beneficiaries of social protection are characterized by two basic principles: help and support to families through a range of measures aimed at changing circumstances in the family; or if it is not possible to achieve this, the beneficiary is displaced from the family and allocated as a short-term or long-term measure of care in a foster family or in one of the alternative forms of family care (Gudbrandsson, 2004). Modern trends based on good practice, based on professional and scientifically relevant indicators, promote foster care as one of the most desirable types of social protection, mainly due to different cause of the need for care.

Foster care, which has been standardized as a social protection right, is a result of the advancements made in social work theory and practice, both domestically and internationally. Preconditions were established in the Republic of Srpska for the development of foster care as the most effective form of protection for social protection beneficiaries who require placement for a variety of reasons or situations (Rakanović Radonjić, 2022a). This was done in an effort to improve the rights and services offered to beneficiaries under the motto "client in focus" in social protection. The main goal is to improve the quality of life of beneficiaries. One of the frequent reasons for taking care of older persons, using the model of foster care, is the lack of family care, which, as one of the results, also has insufficient economic opportunities for the older persons to live independently. Thus, foster care is one strategy that can be applied to help older persons stay in their communities and lessen individual poverty. Foster care can also be seen as a model or concept of long-term care for the older persons refers to the continuous help and support that older individuals receive when they are no longer able to independently perform daily activities due to aging, chronic illness, disability or cognitive impairment, or lack of family support (Rakanović Radonjić, 2022b). The most common reasons for placement of older persons in foster care are changes in the functional status of beneficiary, their living conditions, aging, deterioration of health, loss of certain functions, problems in family functioning, poverty, inadequate housing conditions, etc.

Normative assumptions offer a framework for work in the development of foster care for the older persons. The Republic of Srpska's Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of the Republic of Srpska No. 32/12, 90/16, 94/19, 42/20, and 36/22) and the

Rulebook on Foster Care (Official Gazette of the Republic of Srpska No. 27/14) contain the normative framework that outlines the process and requirements for exercising the right to be cared for by a foster family. It also requires that the Social Welfare Center that provides services of social care must take into account the individual characteristics of the beneficiary when selecting the foster family in which care is provided, the housing and other possibilities of the family and the needs of the beneficiary (Article 1 of the Ordinance on Foster Care).

Foster care is an area of social protection for the older persons, which represents an alternative form of protection for older beneficiaries in social protection system. It is a dynamic field that changes in relation to the context in which it takes place, the needs of beneficiaries in a given context, and new scientific findings that create contemporary trends in foster care. A certain level of development of foster care directly depends on the professional capacities of Social Welfare Centers that are amenable for foster care, the system's readiness for foster care promotion, positive selection and training of foster families, and adequate system support for foster families and beneficiaries. There are very few foster homes for the older persons in the Republic of Srpska, and the majority of older persons that are in need for special services, are still placed in social welfare institutions.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF FOSTER CARE FOR OLDER PERSONS – QUALITY OF LIFE AND INDIVIDUAL POVERTY REDUCTION AS A SOCIAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Observing foster care through the prism of system theory, whose founders are Pincus and Minahan (1973), it is important to note three types of systems that can help with details, emphasizing the fact that social work should be directed precisely at the system. These are informal or family systems consisted of families, friends, work colleagues, and other significant persons; formal systems such as some community groups; and social systems such as the safety of social welfare systems and other systems.

Authors of systems theory in social work warn that support systems are not always effective in supporting people, not only because they do not have the necessary resources, but also because people do not have favorable systems.

The stated goals of social work defined by Pincus and Minahan (1973) can be realized through four basic systems: the change-bearer system, which is usually made up of social workers and institutions/organizations in employment; the client's system, which is composed of individuals, groups, families, and communities who turn for help and are engaged

in working with the system of the change carrier; the target system represents the individuals that the change-bearer system weights to change; and the action system that is made up of individuals with whom the change-bearer system works to achieve its goals. System theory has found wide application in social work. According to Payne (2001; 2020), one of the main reasons that the systemic theory in social work has had a significant success is the fact that through this theory they analyze and accept another community, which exists, and analyze and reject them, as is the case with the radical theory (Šućur-Janjetović & Rakanović Radonjić, 2023).

Systems theory is important for understanding foster care as a concept of care that is implemented in multiple systems. From the standpoint of how the system theory operates, preservation can only exist if all of the systems that comprise it, operate in similar ways. In foster care, the change-bearer system, which includes the Social Welfare Center and professional workers, needs to have human resources that are professionally trained to work with foster families. This system can be considered both an action system and a component of the change-bearer system. The goal of the system from the aspect of system theory in foster care is the service user who is placed in the foster family and their family who should be enabled and empowered for the return of their member, with the help of the change-bearer system and changed system.

The system theory of foster care is also significant for the process of developing foster care, as it can answer questions about how to create activities and programs that will contribute to the growth of foster care in general or certain specific areas.

The term "quality of life" (QOL) has been frequently used over the past decades. Determining the definition of this concept is extremely challenging. In the 1970s, QOL as a concept started to be theoretically discussed (Kalfoss, 2010). Since the earliest discussions of this idea, more and more scientific fields have examined QOL as a pertinent component of their respective fields. There are more than 100 definitions of QOL, according to a review of the literature on the subject (Schalock, 2004). There are regional variations in the definition and application of QOL, and various authors modify it to suit their own needs based on their research objectives and areas of interest (Ilić et al., 2010). In this sense, social and psychological indicators were created to evaluate the quality of life of individuals and groups, while social indicators were created to evaluate the general population's quality of life in states, regions, or countries. The World Health Organization (WHO) established a committee to evaluate quality of life (WHOQOL, 1995), which is defined as an individual's subjective view of life in relation to standards, interests, aspirations, future prospects, culture, and value systems. The instrumental part used in this study for

data collection (questionnaires for beneficiaries placed in foster families, used with written authorization) includes portions of the WHOQOL questionnaire for evaluating quality of life. Some authors believe that this WHO-formed group provided the most comprehensive definition of quality of life because it is a broad concept that encompasses social relationships, economic independence, psychological and physical health, and relationships based on environmental characteristics (Ilić et al., 2010; according to WHOQOL, 1995 and WHO Division of Mental Health, 1993). According to Cummins (2000), quality of life is composed of seven dimensions: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, security, togetherness, and emotional well-being. Cummins also asserts that the subjective domains of quality of life are selected according to their importance to the individual. Cummins argues that the quality of life is composed of seven dimensions: material well-being, health, productivity, intimacy, security, togetherness, and emotional well-being. This author also asserts that the subjective domains of quality of life are selected according to their importance to the individual (Cummins, 2000).

Even though it is considered a basic concept, quality of life is crucial to foster care because it fulfils the concept's requirements, which helps foster care achieve its' goal. Although subjective sentiments are crucial for gauging the quality of life in foster care and for determining whether the goal of foster care has been met, they should be interpreted cautiously, particularly in light of the length of foster care and the time required for adaptation to new living circumstances.

Social investment refers to policies and practices designed to enhance the capabilities and opportunities of individuals, thereby fostering economic and social development. This strategy differs from conventional welfare models, which mostly offer temporary respite. The introduction of foster care for older persons is rooted in the principle of social inclusion. According to Dubois (2016), stable housing and social support are critical determinants of health and well-being. By providing foster care for older persons, the goal is to offer a family-like environment that promotes independence and social integration. This approach recognizes the importance of a supportive community in enhancing individual well-being and economic stability.

Social investment and foster care for older persons can generate significant economic benefits. By reducing reliance on costly institutional care and promoting workforce participation, these policies can alleviate public spending on social services. The implementation of foster care for older persons can lead to substantial cost savings for governments. The implementation of foster care for older persons can lead to substantial cost savings for governments. Institutional care is often expensive, and providing a family-like environment through foster care can be

a more cost-effective solution. Research has shown that adult foster care can reduce healthcare costs by improving the overall health and well-being of participants, thereby reducing the need for medical interventions (Greve, 2017).

Social investment strategies have been successfully implemented in a number of nations. For instance, Nordic countries have implemented comprehensive policies that support families, children, and the unemployed, leading to lower poverty rates and higher economic mobility (Morel et al., 2012). These policies include subsidized childcare, parental leave, and retraining programs for displaced workers. These investments have created a robust framework that addresses immediate needs and equips individuals with skills and opportunities to break the cycle of poverty. Germany and the Netherlands have embraced social investment by focusing on vocational training and continuous education for their workforce. These policies ensure that workers can adapt to changing economic conditions and remain competitive in the job market. By investing in education and training, these nations have seen reduced unemployment rates and increased social mobility (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS WITH SIMILAR SYSTEMS AND ADAPTED POLICY FOR REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

Examples from other nations that have effectively applied social investment strategies through foster care programs for the older persons are included in the paper. This applies to the policies that include the United States, Great Britain, and the Nordic countries.

These countries offer helpful models that have been shown to be successful in reducing poverty, promoting social security inclusion, and ensuring life stability. However, certain legal, economic, and cultural factors must be considered for such politics to be implemented successfully in the Republic of Srpska regarding of the local context characteristics.

Cox highlights the significance of strengthening local support programs and user-friendly services as part of a community-oriented approach to social policy and services (McSweeney-Fild & Molinari, 2023). Additionally, Niles-Yokum and Wagner (2018) emphasize the idea of “aging in place”, which means assisting the older persons in their local communities and lowering the need for institutional care.

By educating and assisting foster families, Republic of Srpska can adopt the community support model, expanding access to social services for the older persons and lowering the demand for institutional housing. Such approach is possible taking into account the traditional intergenerational solidarity and the long history of family care in the Republic of Srpska, which goes back to the period since the Great War.

Foster families support

The absence of official support can cause stress and issues for foster families in countries like the US, where older persons depend on family assistance. Price et al. (2008) highlights the importance of providing training and resources for foster family members, as well as financial incentives for carers. Similarly, Niles-Yokum and Wagner (2018) provide examples of programs that offer financial incentives and tax breaks for foster families, which may further encourage the development of similar incentives for foster families in Republic of Srpska. Professional assistance is a crucial type of support in addition to financial assistance. Foster families should regularly receive this type of support so they can be trained, prepared for the process, and supported during the foster care process. Social Welfare Centers should offer this kind of ongoing support to foster families.

Framework adaptation and financial incentives for foster families

Nordic countries successfully combine subsidies for foster families and standardization of service quality to ensure equally accessible and high-quality services nationwide (Eydal & Rostgaard, 2018). Republic of Srpska adopted this model through mandatory training and certification of foster families with subsidies and support through clear legal regulations. The introduction of financial incentives, as seen in Germany and Nordic countries, would further attract families to participate in elder foster care (Morel et al., 2012). These programs could be supplemented with recommendations from Niles-Yokum and Wagner (2019), who emphasize the need for transparent and consistent regulations to ensure stable support for both beneficiaries and foster families. Although foreseen, this practice did not take place in the Republic of Srpska due to the lack of trained professionals who work in foster care services.

The legal framework pertaining to the population's social and family-legal protection has undergone substantial changes in the past ten years in the Republic of Srpska, bringing laws into compliance with international agreements that Bosnia and Herzegovina has ratified. The Republic of Srpska has a number of laws and ordinances that either directly or indirectly addresses foster care, which regulates it legally. The Republic of Srpska's highest law incorporates some of the provisions of international agreements pertaining to social protection or foster care. The most important documents that normatively regulate foster care are: Constitution of the Republic of Srpska, the Social Welfare Law and the Family Law. An essential secondary legal act that governs this area more thoroughly is the Ordinance on Foster Care; however, it has many flaws that require stricter legal regulation.

Quality standardization and service monitoring

Quality monitoring is crucial for service consistency across all levels of social protection. In Denmark, for example, regular evaluations ensure a high quality of services for the older persons (Esping-Andersen, 2002). Cox (2005) emphasizes that standardization and monitoring improve social security for the older persons. Similarly, Niles-Yokum and Wagner (2018) highlight the importance of implementing periodic evaluations to ensure continuity in service quality and effectiveness. Republic of Srpska could implement similar evaluations through procedures in Social Welfare Centers to monitor conditions in foster families and ensure equal support for beneficiaries. The most important documents that normatively regulate foster care are: Constitution of the Republic of Srpska, the Social Welfare Law and the Family Law. An essential secondary legal act that governs this area more thoroughly is the Ordinance on Foster Care; however, it has many flaws that require stricter legal regulation.

Raising awareness and social inclusion

In the USA, initiatives to increase public awareness of the benefits of foster care help expand this form of support (National Council on Disability, 2015). Similarly, Republic of Srpska could organize campaigns promoting foster care for older persons, highlighting positive examples and the benefits it brings to both beneficiaries and foster families, thereby reducing stigma and increasing acceptance of this form of support. Niles-Yokum and Wagner (2018) also suggest campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the benefits of community care for the older persons which could serve as a model for designing educational initiatives in Republic of Srpska. Research conducted in Republic of Srpska showed that the older persons decide on institutional care precisely because of inadequate information about the possibilities of foster care (Rakanović Radonjić, 2022a).

By adapting these policies and practices, Republic of Srpska can gradually improve its foster care system for the older persons, drawing on the experiences of other countries and tailoring them to the specific needs and resources of the local community. This approach enables the long-term sustainability of the program and contributes to the improvement of the quality of life and social inclusion of older persons in Republic of Srpska.

Due to the aging of the population and family care crises, Republic of Srpska has a great care need for older persons. This can be argument by the fact that in the previous three years, over 1,200 older persons were placed only in the institutions for social protection established by the state. (Government of Republic of Srpska, 2024). Over 2/3 of older persons are placed in these institutions as a beneficiaries of social welfare system.

Case studies and evidence

In the United States of America, the “Shared Living” model serves as an example of foster care for older persons. This program matches older persons with disabilities with host families who provide long-term care and support. Research indicates that participants experience improved quality of life and greater community integration compared to traditional institutional care (National Council on Disability, 2015).

The United Kingdom’s “Adult Placement Scheme” offers a similar approach, targeting older persons and those with mental health issues. Studies suggest that participants benefit from personalized care, increased social interaction, and enhanced well-being (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021, 2023).

Other countries have also explored innovative social investment and adult care models. For instance, Japan’s “Foster Family System for the older persons” pairs older individuals with families who provide care and support in exchange for a stipend. This system has reduced the burden on nursing homes and allowed the older persons to live in a more familial environment, improving their overall quality of life (Horioka, 2010).

The “Home Care Service” model, which has been successful in lowering hospitalization rates and improving the mental health of older persons by preserving their independence and social ties, provides complete assistance for this group of beneficiaries in Denmark, allowing them to stay in their homes while receiving the care they require (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

The data presented in the paper were obtained as part of a larger previous study that was carried out in the entire territory of the Republic of Srpska with the aim of determining the characteristics of foster care.¹ The study included foster care for children, foster care for adults

¹ As part of the research for the author Andrea Rakanović Radonjić’s (2022a) doctoral dissertation, “Characteristics and development of foster care in the Republic of Srpska”, presented results are the integral part of the vide study are presented. The subject of doctoral dissertation was research of foster care elements in the Republic of Srpska with the aim of mapping the current foster care situation in the Republic of Srpska, and identifying the development potential of foster care. Data collection were based on using quantitative and qualitative research methods (survey questionnaire specifically designed for each subgroup of research participants and a focus group interview), examining professional workers, foster families and beneficiaries (children and adults including older persons). In this paper will be presented only part of results obtained from older beneficiaries of foster care.

and the older persons. The research was conducted over a period of 1.5 years (from mid-2020 to 2022).

In the empirical part of the research, the population consisted of foster families who have beneficiaries of the right to foster care in the accordance with the Republic of Srpska's Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of the Republic of Srpska No. 32/12, 90/16, 94/19, 42/20, and 36/22). In the period when the research was conducted, the population of foster families for older persons in the Republic of Srpska consisted of 95 families in which 111 beneficiaries were placed. The sample consisted of 63 foster families and 65 beneficiaries of foster care. During sampling, the quality of the sample was ensured, in medium samples, numbering from 30 to 100 respondents (Stojšin & Vidicki, 2020; Turner, 2006).

The paper was prepared using a variety of general scientific methods, including statistical, hypothetical-deductive, analytical-deductive, and comparative methods. Among the fundamental scientific techniques, the paper was prepared using the methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, as and generalization.

The research involved examining the attitudes of older persons in foster care using a specially designed instrument questionnaire. Parts of WHO-QOL-BREF, the World Health Organization's questionnaire for evaluating the quality of life of adults and the older persons, were used as an essential component of the survey. The consent of the WHO was obtained for the use of this instrument. The sample consisted of 64 older persons placed in foster families in the Republic of Srpska.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Results presented in this paper were not presented in the original study, with exception of results that refer to sociodemographic characteristics. The analyzed data obtained by the method of examination and content analysis showed as follows.

Nineteen local communities have registered foster families for older persons. The largest percentage of foster families for older persons (79.4%) resides in rural and suburban areas. Among the other sociodemographic characteristics that were explained earlier, the following stand out:

- The gender distribution of foster caregivers is 60% female, opposite 40% male foster caregivers.
- In relation to age, foster caregivers predominantly belong to the group of people aged 56 to 65.
- The educational structure of foster caregivers is not favorable for the development of foster care. As many as 34.9% are unqualified foster caregivers, while 52.4% are foster caregivers with secondary professional education.

- 2/3 of foster caregivers for older persons are not employed (73%).
- In the largest percentage, foster families for older persons are complete families (63.5%).

57.1% of foster families are related to the older individuals who are placed in foster care. The largest number of foster families for older persons received information about foster care in Social Welfare Centers (88.9%). Regarding the motivation for continuing foster care after the need to care for beneficiaries who are currently in a foster family ends, 52.38% of foster caregivers declared that they would not continue to provide foster care for other beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries, that were in a sample of older persons placed in foster care, were asked to make subjective assessment of satisfaction with the quality of life in the following aspects: health (physical and mental); social relations and the environment, including the availability of services. The mean values of the answers regarding the aforementioned facets of the quality of life of older persons in foster care are displayed in Table 1.

The mean value of the answer related to the overall quality of life is 3.06. Older persons in foster care evaluated their overall quality of life with a mean score of 2.91, which is marginally less than the sum of the individual evaluated aspects, as can be seen from the presented mean values.

The older persons evaluated the following aspects of *physical health-related quality of life*: daily activities; the need for medications and medical equipment; energy and fatigue, or how tired they are; their own mobility; pains during rest and sleep; and their own assessment of their ability to perform daily tasks. Regarding the responses obtained, the question concerning preventing the beneficiaries' pain from preventing them from performing their daily tasks had the highest mean value (3.33), whereas the questions concerning mobility and mobility had the lowest mean value (2.61).

Among the lowest mean scores for individual aspects, the quality of life component pertaining to the *mental health* of older persons in foster care received a mean score of 2.85. This aspect was projected with the following variables: self-assessment, personal beliefs, positive and negative emotions, memory and concentration, and satisfaction with body image and appearance. According to over half of the respondents, they frequently experience fear, grief, or sadness. The ability to enjoy life question had the lowest mean score in this category (2.45). These findings unequivocally show that older persons in foster care require psychosocial support in addition to other components.

Table 1: Mean values of answers in relation to defined aspects of quality of life.

	N	Min	Max	Med	St.D.
Physical health	64	1	5	2.87	1,184
Mental health	64	1	5	2,85	1,210
Social relations	64	1	5	3,14	1,123
Environment and social services	64	1	5	3,55	1,017
General assessment	64	1	5	2,91	1,094
Total				3.064	1,112
Valid N (listwise)	64				

Within the *social ties* aspect of the quality of life, personal relationships with close people (3.20) were evaluated with the highest average score, while the lowest average value was recorded on the question of satisfaction with intimate life (2.61). These results suggest that relationships with close individuals are maintained in foster care, which should undoubtedly be seen as a resource that can be utilized for various objectives. The second finding aligns with the respondents' data, which revealed that more than 70% of the sub-sample was single, most frequently as a result of divorce or the death of a spouse or partner.

Safety and security, health and social care (quality and availability), the family environment, information access opportunities, the physical environment (noise, pollution, traffic), and transportation were the final projected aspects of quality of life that were related to the *environment and service availability*. The foster family and the local community are the primary resources that contribute to the quality of this aspect of life, so it is not surprising that this aspect received the highest average score of 3.55. A mean score of 3.97 was obtained for the question about beneficiaries' satisfaction with their stable living conditions. The rating of satisfaction with medical and social care services showed a minor discrepancy (3.94). Beneficiaries' satisfaction with their available funds received the lowest mean score, 3.23, which is much lower than the average life scores and scores for every other process. The results indicate that the older persons do not have sufficient funds available to them, which may be directly related to the funding of the foster care. Regardless of these findings, it was determined that older persons in foster care typically lacked the

financial resources necessary to meet their basic needs, meaning they were unable to do so with the money they had before placement in foster families.

DISCUSSION

The implementation of foster care for older persons in the Republic of Srpska faces specific challenges that are partially due to the legal, institutional, and cultural context. Although a formal framework for social protection exists, numerous obstacles limit the development of foster care for the older persons as an efficient and sustainable support system. In the Republic of Srpska, jurisdiction over social protection is decentralized, leading to different approaches and resources at the local community level. The lack of clearly defined standards and regulations, as well as appropriate quality control mechanisms, makes it difficult to provide consistent support for the older persons in foster care. Furthermore, the role of Social Welfare Centers in the Republic of Srpska is crucial for the implementation of foster care for the older persons, but it faces significant limitations in terms of training and available resources. A shortage of trained professionals and financial resources, along with insufficiently developed training programs for foster families, reduces the capacity of centers to respond to all beneficiaries needs. According to one research findings (Ilić et al., 2010), limited resources in Social Welfare Centers result in reduced service availability, while a lack of trained professionals diminishes the quality of provided support. This indicates the need for additional investment in human and material resources to ensure adequate support for older individuals in foster families.

In addition to legal and institutional obstacles, cultural and social attitudes also affect the acceptance of foster care for the older persons as a form of social protection. In a culturally traditional environment such as the Republic of Srpska, it is expected that families care for their older members, while placing the older persons in foster families is often seen as an unconventional approach. As a result, there is a potential for stigmatization of both beneficiaries and foster families, which can negatively impact their social integration and quality of life. Raising awareness of the benefits of foster care and educating the community about the possibilities this system offers can help reduce stigma and increase program support. Taking into account the essence of the "client in focus" concept, here we should emphasize the importance of the individual decision of the older persons and their right to choose whether they want to live in their own home, an institutional setting, foster care or other arrangements. In order for an older person to individually decide that foster care is the best form of care, they must be adequately informed about all the advantages, but also the risks of foster care as a form of potential long-term care.

As the results show, even in the category of foster families, this kind of approach can be the path to reduce individual poverty, because foster care givers are mainly unemployed, and by providing foster care, they become financially independent (in most cases).

Practical examples from local community practice, regardless the limitations, can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges and potential for the development of foster care for the older persons in the Republic of Srpska. This can be seen from presented results. For the development of a foster care system for the older persons in the Republic of Srpska, clear recommendations are needed regarding relevant (social) policies and practices. The government and Social Welfare Centers could develop initiatives for additional training and employment of social workers, as well as financial support programs for foster families, to guarantee the quality of all services and accomplish the efficient involvement of all foster care subsystems, which will improve the beneficiaries' quality of life. By introducing standardized quality of service guidelines and mandatory periodic evaluations, it could be ensured that foster care programs meet the needs and expectations of both beneficiaries and foster families. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of these programs, as well as gathering feedback, would enable the improvement of the foster care system for the older persons in the Republic of Srpska and contribute to achieving social policy goals in the field of protection for older persons. The above-presented results suggest that older persons in foster care rate aspects of the quality of life with positive mean values, which is a direct proof that foster care as a form of protection can fulfill its purpose.

CONCLUSION

Formal determination of the social protection system in the Republic of Srpska for the development of foster care, as one of the functional and desirable systemic mechanisms for the protection of older persons exists, while the essential commitment can still be questioned.

In order to successfully implement the foster care model for older persons, governments must develop robust support systems for foster families, including training and financial incentives. Moreover, establishing clear regulatory standards and monitoring mechanisms can ensure the quality and consistency of care and support. According to Greve (2017) it is essential to conduct rigorous evaluations of foster care for older persons programs to assess their impact and identify areas for improvement. Continuous monitoring and feedback can help refine these programs, ensuring they meet the needs of beneficiaries and foster families effectively.

Through the lenses of the theoretical framework of systems theory, this paper examines the potential of foster care for the older persons as a strategy to improve quality of life and reduce individual poverty through social investments. Theoretical perspectives on systems by Pincus and Minahan (1973) emphasize the importance of synergy between different systems – formal, informal, and social – in providing support to older individuals. These systems must be interconnected and supported with adequate resources to function successfully in the context of foster care for the older persons.

One of the findings of this paper is the need to improve the social protection system in the Republic of Srpska to make foster care for the older persons a sustainable support option, because of its potential for ensuring QOL and individual poverty reduction, not only for beneficiaries, but for foster care givers. The aforementioned could be achieved through development of a support system that includes social worker training, financial incentives, and standardized guidelines to enable foster families to provide adequate and quality care for older beneficiaries.

Cultural and social attitudes regarding the care of older individuals in foster families pose an additional obstacle to implementing this system and model of care for older persons in Republic of Srpska. Traditional expectations that families take responsibility for caring for their older members contribute to the stigmatization of users and foster caregivers, which can negatively affect the social integration and quality of life of beneficiaries. Educational campaigns promoting the benefits of foster care for the older persons, as well as broader community engagement, can help overcome these barriers and contribute to a more positive acceptance of this form of social support.

Practical examples from other countries, such as the USA, the UK, and Nordic countries, showcase successful social investment models based on supporting beneficiaries through stable housing, economic security, and social inclusion. These models serve as inspiration for developing similar policies and programs in the Republic of Srpska, tailored to local needs and specificities.

For the Republic of Srpska, it is important to establish a clear legal framework and institutional support that enables continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement of foster care for older persons. The government and relevant institutions, including social work centers, should consider introducing incentive mechanisms, training, and empowerment programs for foster families, as well as periodic service quality assessments. Through such measures, foster care for older persons can become a key element of the social protection system, providing long-term support to beneficiaries, contributing to poverty reduction and quality of life improvement.

SKRBNIŠTVO ZA STAREJŠE: MODEL ZA ZAGOTAVLJANJE KAKOVOSTI ŽIVLJENJA IN ZMANJŠEVANJE REVŠČINE POSAMEZNIKOV

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POVZETEK

Rejništvo za starejše osebe je oblika storitve, ki je vključena v sistem socialnega varstva Republike Srbije. Za razliko od rejništva otrok, ta oblika ni tako uveljavljena tudi v drugih državah. Raziskava o rejništvu kot neinstitucionalni obliki zaščite starejših oseb je bila izvedena v Republiki Srbski, in sicer z uporabo kvalitativnih in kvantitativnih metod. Vzorec je vključeval strokovne delavce, rejnike in upravičence do storitve. Cilj raziskave je bil ugotoviti trenutne razmere v rejništvu v Republiki Srbski in opredeliti razvojne možnosti rejništva. Predstavljeni rezultati kažejo na smer razvoja rejniške dejavnosti v Republiki Srbski kot alternativnega modela socialne zaščite starejših ljudi, ki potrebujejo bivališče in oskrbo v starosti. Namen tega članka je pokazati, kako lahko ta model zagotovi ustrezno raven kakovosti življenja starejših ljudi. Cilj je tudi prikazati potencial strategij socialnih naložb z uvedbo rejništva kot sredstva za zmanjšanje revščine. Podatki, predstavljeni v tem prispevku, so bili zbrani s kvantitativnimi in kvalitativnimi raziskovalnimi metodami v večji študiji. Podatki so pokazali, da je kakovost življenja starejših v rejništvu subjektivno bolj zadovoljiva in da je njihovo dožemanje osebne revščine boljše kot pred namestitvijo.

Ključne besede: rejništvo, starejši ljudje, socialno delo, kakovost življenja, zmanjšanje individualne revščine, Republika Srbska

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