THE ELDER AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

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Abstract The interests and needs of elderly were approached, so far, mostly with regard to the social security system, mainly the pension system. This aspect is very important because the majority of elder people live from their pension; this is why we can say that old age is a social problem, because most of the problems start from the lack of financial resources.

Keywords elderly, social security system, financial resources

Besides the risk of old age, covered by the social security through assuring an income represented by the pension, in the case of elders there is a special situation, because they need, equally, two types of support: social and medical services. Third age is accompanied by a high risk of invalidating diseases, causing disabilities that lead to dependence.

So, besides the low incomes and dependence on some pills, other aspects must be taken into account: the progressive rise of maintenance and food costs. The extension of poorness affects the total incomes of a family, determining the suspension of traditional help offered to alder people, but also serious abuses that end with the loose of their house. Changes recorded in family structure and the decrease in the number of caretakers, determine a continue raising need to ask for care services.

Considering that the care of old age, and especially the quality of this are integrating parts of well-being and health policies in each
country, professionals that are called to take care of the elder should be
aware that only knowledge aren’t enough, it should be sustained by a
charitable, humanistic part, associated with feelings of respect, and
affection because it is not enough to feed the old man and to put him a
perfusion, if we forget to emphasize with him. We should remember that
emphasizing with an old man we emphasize with our own individual
future.

As I mentioned before, the old person, seen as a whole, is mostly
a repeatedly disadvantaged person, through physical decline, which isn’t
always a disease, through the decrease of financial resources, or through
the presence of a mental handicap.

The transition period in Romania, in year 2000, had disqualified
the elderly from his battle for a decent life; many live at the edge of
poorness, many give up comfort facilities (heat, water, power) because
of low incomes, many go in social institutions and soup kitchens
(www.infotim.ro/H.G, Nr.541/ 9 iunie 2005). In Romania average
lifetime has decreased and the pension, even indexed, does not cover
taxes and contributions; even more, old persons have to live with the
frustrating feeling that, due to their raising number in proportion with
active population, they are reliant of those who work. These make the
elderly to feel the burden not only economically, but also medically; he is
a big fond consumer, usually suffering from a pluri-pathology and, at the
same time he is not a contributor for medical services; at the moment he
is a wanted person on the list of family doctor, only in the institution
where he is pensioner because of health insurance and score obtained by
the doctors.

From a social point of view, it is concluded that life extension is
possible in certain limits if optimal living conditions are fulfilled.
Considering socio-economic conditions, in XX century an acute interest was manifested for the stratification of age pyramid with the intention of knowing manpower and population consume. In connection with these, the problem of regression and morbidity on ages is discussed. Medical progresses allowed a new approach of human pathology.

**Poverty – an issue for old persons in Romania**

Poverty represents, probably, one of the most encountered problems among old people in Romania; the lack of material resources characterizes permanently their lives. Recent studies show that pensioners and pensioner families are the poorest social categories. The area with the most powerful impact on this category is incomes, the rapport between incomes and spending offers the most synthetic measure of poorness that pensioners and their families have to confront. The decrease of buying capacity of pensions is, mainly, due to the increase of pensioners, considered by some analysts as a mean of “masked unemployment”, which in some western countries is called “anticipated retirement”. So, according to the Ministry of Work and Social Solidarity, the number of persons that benefit by pensions increased, only in the public system of social services, from 2.1 million in 1989, to 4.5 million in 2000, which represents an increase of 50%. This raise determined the decrease of social protection assured by pensions, introducing numerous elements of inequity through the inclusion in the public system of social services of pensioners from different systems (co-operators, cults, creation unions) and through repeated promotion of anticipated retirement, which placed in the care of state relatively young persons, capable of sustaining themselves through work. These directly have affected the real level of pensions, so they can not cover, in pensioner’s families, the basics. The evaluations made by the researchers at the
Institute of Research for Quality of Life highlighted that spending in pensioner’s families, especially from rural environment, are covered only in proportion of 50% from pensions. The rest of spending are covered from other resources, in rural environment they mainly consist of agro-alimentary products. Yet, because of the fact that in a great majority of rural houses the agriculture is inefficient, the incomes are very small. To solve these problems, a series of measures is necessary to contribute to the increase of life quality.

**Retirement**

Retirement is an important moment in life, that can mark a “terminus” point of social dynamism, or, contrary, a start for a life dedicated to relaxation and activities that didn’t previously find time or resources. There are situations when retirement occurs as a necessity (disease), a moment that usually appears suddenly, with no anticipation, and whose impact brings along multiple problems at an individual or social level.

Personnel involved in working with old persons frequently ask themselves why many sexagenarians consider themselves insulted when called “old” at the time of pension. There are many explanations, as: the fact that material situation of elderly doesn’t create a mood that “suits”, the fact that retirement is usually resembled with disease, loneliness, isolation, obloquy. Otherwise, the decrease of incomes can also lead to frustration, indignation, considering the value of pension as a lack of respect for the hard work. There are also some “young” pensioners that try to find “something to work”, although the Romanian labor market doesn’t have a generous offer for them and retraining courses for old people do not exist in our country.
Retirement is considered by many authors a limit point, but studies show that, even if it is seen as a lost, when it has a meaning and the person is prepared, it can be overcome successfully. In general, all around the world, the education before retirement is insufficient and belated. In Romania such courses are inexistent and in many cases the impact is the one previously presented. At this point the social assistant would have an important role (Pașa, Pașa, 2005).

The higher the impact when retirement has a pathologic cause. Here, the social worker would be the most representative professional in leading and guidance of the ill, so his presence in hospitals would be very important. An invalid pensioner suddenly loses his work capacity, fact that aggressively intervenes in economic plan (family’s financial situation) and in psychic plane (the feeling of useless).

Also, retirement can be a crises event when it occurs as a consequence of restructuring at work, when to prevent unemployment, they turn to pension. Also in social plan some roles acquired along lifetime can be lost, leading to adaptation crises, more present in men situated to that moment in important functions.

Women seem to be less affected of retirement, but can face anxiety crises thinking of it. In Romania, many women get the role of grandmother after retirement, deal with house holding or, often, caring for sick relatives.

In many western countries after retirement, old persons became active members of associations, having well determined roles, which usually lead to a significant decrease of retirement impact; or they became active in some charity or religious foundations. Also, some of them follow the courses of a summer college for third age, or they open small businesses.
H. Clavet sustains that “the individual choose of retirement age should be ranged as a person’s right”. There are countries in which discussions on this take place, without reaching yet to a decision in regard canceling the age criteria, which became an institutional condition and appreciated as old in a society that is coordinated by other priorities and values.

All countries have the following pension categories:
- Age retirement
- Invalidity retirement
- Descendent retirement.

There are countries where to the invalidity pension some increments are added after a work accident or for pensioners that can prove that their income is too low for a decent living on a national plan (Marina, 2003).

To get age retirement, the minimum age varies between 59 and 62 for women and 62 – 65 for men.

To get invalidity pension it is necessary to come under a certain degree of invalidity.

To get descendent pension the main condition is linked to the years and quantum of defunct contribution.

After retirement, old people can feel optimistic, because they can finally realize projects for which they didn’t have time (literature, travel); they can accept resigned the retirement, this is more difficult in men (it is well known the family in which the recent retired man “suffocates” the woman, but more frequently very depressive reactions can appear, that bring in sight death, insecurity, illness). Also can appear real “retirement neurosis” that can accelerate ageing. For persons from rural environment the effect of retirement doesn’t appear brutal, the adaptation is made
progressive, by continuing the work in agriculture and household. In Romania are many women in rural environment that keep their activity even after the age of 75, this generates a feeling of power and usefulness.

Retirement can lead to the decrease of social relations; the old man is more circumspect in getting new friends and more cautious in any contact with old friends.

Being a moment of turning in the social life of a person, retirement should be in the attention of professionals that unanimously accept that retirement is much easier accepted with a previous preparation.

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