Psychiatry, psychosocial rehabilitation and globalization

Since the beginning of the nineties after the collapse of the former Soviet empire and until today, historical and dramatic changes in ecological, socioeconomic, political and technological levels are observed within the framework of the so-called phenomenon of globalization.

Several authors described the process of globalization and its consequences which could be summarized in the following:

Globalization is the international processes resulting national states and their independence to be linked with international activities by the development of power, identities and communication. These processes are the international commerce (multinational giant companies), the continuous technological revolution (informatics and communications), the international multicentered exercise of political power, the degrading ecological environment, the transcultural clashes in different places of the planet. The consequences of theses processes are the transference of capital in developing countries, with chip labour force and with a parallel increase of unemployment in developed countries, the application of rules of market economy and the shrinkage of social state, the increase of social mobility toward west and finally the inequalities of the third world are transferred to metropolitan areas of the West via the migration and the refugees movement (fourth world).

Psychiatry is the medical branch focusing on the etiology, diagnosis and therapy or rehabilitation of mental disorders which are disturbing the mental equilibrium, the interpersonal relationships, the functioning and adjustment of the individual in his/her socioeconomic and cultural environment.

Psychosocial rehabilitation is a multidimensional process providing opportunities to chronically mentally ill persons with impaired functioning, disabilities of handicaps to achieve a better level of independent functioning and community integration. Both psychiatric care and rehabilitation are being practicing in specific time and the globalized space.

We could ask therefore what is the relationship between psychiatry, psychosocial rehabilitation and globalization? For psychiatric research, globalization has a rather positive impact by the development of high biotechnology, resulting the invention of more effective psychotropic drugs (of a new generation) and the further development of etiological research in neurosciences for specific nosological entities.

Finally, the proliferation of Internet provides the technological diffusion of scientific knowledge on psychiatry and psychosocial rehabilitation issues. On the other hand, globalization is linked with the market economy and less social state, causing budget cuts, less social care and welfare for mentally disabled persons (increasing homelessness, transinstitutionalism) and privatization of social institutions. The introduction of new generation drugs of high cost will have an impact on financing rehabilitation programs. The job losses and unemployment rates are also causing stress and possible mental disorders. The increasing social mobility is linked with inequalities in help-seeking of immigrants. The marginalization of less economically advantaged social groups in metropolitan areas of USA and Europe increases the high risk populations for developing a mental disorder or drug abuse.

Finally, the family structural changes (nuclear or single parent families) are related to weaker social support systems.

It becomes apparent that the phenomenon of globalization has negative and serious impact on the near future of psychiatric care and rehabilitation. The question is to what extend there is optimism so these problems could be solved? The answer is definitely positive. There are solutions like the empowerment of families and users of psychiatric services international movement (the formation of coalition of mental hygiene movement in USA with the equal rights movements leded to the Community Mental Health Act of 1962). At a community level, the sensitization and awareness of communities in mental health issues, the promotion of volunteerism, the use of any community resource for food, residence and work, with a parallel self actualization - self determination of any suffering person, will perhaps eliminate or even neutralize the «side-effects» of globalization on mental health.

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