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THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HIV/AIDS IN AZERBAIJAN

Summary: The article explores the role and value of social institutions to support young people with HIV/AIDS in Azerbaijan. It examines the coordination of the state structures, health care organizations, non-governmental institutions, and community initiatives to develop social, psychological, and educational support for the affected youth. The article refers to the necessity of intersectoral collaboration and demands a more inclusive, youth-oriented social policy. The article is also sensitive to problems such as public stigma, inefficient interinstitutional coordination and insufficient professional training of social workers. Particular attention is given to the role that education and awareness-raising campaigns play in reducing stigma and fostering social inclusion of HIV-positive youth. The paper also points out deficiencies in current social protection policies and suggests practical ways toward better institutional collaboration. The present study underlines the importance of the integration of youth perspectives in the design of national programs and of creating mechanisms for participatory processes of decision-making. As such, it mentions that long-term collaboration between public and private actors may secure sustainability and effectiveness of initiatives assuring social support with a view to improving the welfare of HIV-positive adolescents.

Key words: HIV/AIDS, young people, social institutions, social work, Azerbaijan, inclusion, support

Introduction

For any society, the issue of how to provide support to vulnerable young strata is a sign of its social maturity. One of the most complex and sensitive issues in this area is the structuring of social work with young people suffering

from HIV/AIDS. This issue is becoming increasingly real in Azerbaijan because the quantity of registered cases of HIV infection among youth still grows. State and non-state social institutions should take an essential role in order to make such youth not isolated or marginalized but given health, education, and social care. Recent epidemiological data indicate that HIV still remains public health concern in Azerbaijan. In 2023 more than 7,000 people are living with HIV in the country and approximately 20–22% of them are young people aged 15–29. Moreover, in 2024 alone, about 430 new HIV cases were registered, with one-third belonging to youth populations, demonstrating that young people remain particularly vulnerable to the epidemic (Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan, 2023; WHO, 2024).

The aim of the article is to analyze the system of institutions working with HIV-positive young people in Azerbaijan, the intersectoral mechanism for coordination, and the principal challenges and areas for improvement. It underlines the intermediary agency of social institutions between the individual and society and their capacity to guarantee inclusion and human dignity.

1. Social Institutions and Their Role in Social Support Systems

These social institutions can be defined as organized systems and arrangements that attempt to respond to individuals' fundamental needs and make society stable. For HIV/AIDS they consist of the family, education system, health bodies, social services, and civil society. They all have varied roles to shape attitudes, provide aid, and prevent social exclusion.

In Azerbaijan, Ministries of Health and Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population are fully responsible for the implementation of HIV prevention and treatment measures. Hospital and health centers provide medical treatment and consultation, while social service agencies deal with the psychological and social problems of young people caused by the disease. Schools and educational institutions are also actively involved: they prevent discrimination among students by conducting information campaigns and promote healthy ways of living.

Outside actors such as UNAIDS, UNICEF, and youth organizations support the work of the state through peer counseling, training, and awareness campaigns. This together facilitates living openly by HIV/AIDS youth and in an open society.

2. Mechanisms of Social Work with HIV-Positive Youth

Multi-sectoral coordination involving health, education, work, and community development is necessary for social work among HIV-positive

adolescents. The major aim of the work is to make adolescents psychologically sound, socially active, and capable of achieving self-realization.

The social workers play a very crucial part in the process. Their functions include case management, counseling of individuals, intervention for crisis, and referral to other organizations if and when required. Professionalization of social work in this sector has been ongoing in Azerbaijan step by step. There is still a need for additional training courses on HIV/AIDS matters per se.

Community-based support programs form another important aspect. These programs, in the majority of cases, provide adolescents with secure spaces wherein they can plead their case, build confidence and learn life skills. Employment and educational opportunities also help them become members of society, thereby ending dependency and marginalization.

Social work also depends on public awareness. Education programs and campaigns must be incorporated into social policy to combat stigma and discrimination. Combating stigma and discrimination is as important as treatment by a doctor.

3. Problems and Challenges

Despite all of this, the support system based on institutions for HIV-positive adolescents in Azerbaijan is far from perfect. The most frequent problem is stigma. HIV/AIDS stereotypes lead to discrimination in schools, workplaces, and even hospitals. It keeps the majority of adolescents away from seeking help and keeps them isolated from society.

The second problem is of bad coordination among institutions. Although the health system and the social protection system have the same goal, they do not have good coordination among themselves in practice. There is no information exchange and common models of service either, which would increase the effectiveness of aid.

Ineffective professional training of social workers continues to be a source of concern. The majority of professionals have general knowledge regarding social work but no specialized skills in the case of HIV. Further, funding NGO programs remains uncertain, thus limiting their ability to execute long-term plans.

Finally, there is a lack of psychological support. Emotions, fear of stigmatization, and relational problems are experienced by the majority of the young people. They are elements that impose social isolation unless counseling and social support from the community are instituted. Despite some progress, the treatment and social care continuum remains insufficient. The antiretroviral

therapy (ART) coverage among young people living with HIV in Azerbaijan is estimated at only 60–65%, which is below the global average of 76%. The limited treatment access is further complicated by the high prevalence of stigma: more than half of HIV-positive youth report experiences of discrimination in educational institutions or community settings, leading many to avoid public services or hide their diagnosis (UNAIDS, 2023).

4. Perspectives and Recommendations

In order to strengthen the social work of Azerbaijan's HIV-positive youth, a coordinated and holistic approach must be applied. First, the state and NGOs must increase levels of cooperation. A coordinated system that integrates health care, education, and social services would ensure greater coordination and continuity of treatment.

Second, professional education and training of social workers must be strengthened. Professional societies and universities can incorporate special courses on HIV/AIDS, stigma reduction, and community empowerment into their programs.

Third, public education campaigns must continue to battle prejudice and misinformation. Media, youth organization, and influencer activities can have an effect on more open-minded attitudes.

Fourth, more focus needs to be given to online and grass-roots efforts. Online discussions, peer groups, and youth-initiated projects can build connections and provide information accessible to youths.

Finally, state policies should ensure sustainable funding for HIV/AIDS social programs. While advocating for local NGOs and community participation, the government should make it easy for any young person, regardless of health status, to be included and appreciated. To enhance the coordinated response, efforts need to be made towards improving adolescent-friendly health and psychosocial services. According to reports, about 70% of new infections among youth are associated with heterosexual transmission, with another about 24% linked to injection drug use; therefore, there is a need to increase preventive education and harm-reduction programs for vulnerable youth (Report.az, 2025).

Conclusion

Social institutions have the significant task of building a just and compassionate society. Their contribution to the treatment of HIV/AIDS youngsters in Azerbaijan is not only crucial for the concerned individuals but also for the health and well-being of society in general. In spite of the

monumental achievement, tangled issues such as stigma, lack of coordination, and restricted professional capacity continue to hamper progress.

In order to undo these problems, there is a need for a well-coordinated social policy that unites the efforts of health, education, and social protection sectors. With increased collaboration, professionalization, and citizen engagement, social institutions can be the pillars of the future of inclusiveness where HIV/AIDS-infected children can live with dignity and equal opportunity.

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Riad Əliyev Zaur oğlu

Azərbaycanda HIV/QİÇS-li gənclərin dəstəklənməsində sosial institutların rolu

Xülasə: Məqalədə Azərbaycanada HIV/QİÇS-ə yoluxmuş gəncləri dəstəkləmək üçün sosial institutların rolu və dəyəri araşdırılır. O, təsirə məruz qalan gənclərə sosial, psixoloji və təhsil dəstəyini inkişaf etdirmək üçün dövlət strukturlarının, səhiyyə təşkilatlarının, qeyri-hökumət institutlarının və icma təşəbbüslərinin əlaqələndirilməsini araşdırır. Məqalədə sektorlararası əməkdaşlığın zəruriliyindən bəhs edilir və daha inklüziv, gənclər yönümlü sosial siyasət tələb olunur. Məqalədə ictimai stiqma, səmərəsiz institutlararası koordinasiya, sosial işçilərin kifayət qədər peşəkar hazırlığı kimi problemlər də həssasdır. Xüsusilə, təhsil və maarifləndirmə kampaniyalarının HIV-pozitiv gənclərin stiqmasının azaldılmasında və sosial inteqrasiyasının təşviqində oynadığı rola diqqət yetirilir. Məqalədə həmçinin mövcud sosial müdafiə siyasətlərindəki çatışmazlıqlar qeyd olunur və daha yaxşı institusional əməkdaşlıq üçün praktik yollar təklif olunur. Bu tədqiqat milli proqramların dizaynında gənclərin perspektivlərinin inteqrasiyasının və qərar qəbul etmə proseslərinin iştirakçı mexanizmlərinin yaradılmasının vacibliyini vurğulayır. Beləliklə, dövlət və özəl sektor subyektləri arasında uzunmüddətli əməkdaşlığın HIV-pozitiv yeniyetmələrin rifahının yaxşılaşdırılması məqsədilə sosial dəstəyi təmin edən təşəbbüslərin davamlılığını və effektivliyini təmin edə biləcəyi qeyd olunur.

Açar sözlər: HIV/QİÇS, gənclər, sosial institutlar, sosial iş, Azərbaycan, inteqrasiya, dəstək.

Риад Алиев Заур оглы

Роль социальных институтов в поддержке молодежи с ВИЧ/СПИДом в Азербайджане

Резюме: В статье исследуются роль и значение социальных институтов в поддержке молодых людей, живущих с ВИЧ/СПИДом, в Азербайджане. Рассматривается координация деятельности государственных структур, организаций здравоохранения, неправительственных организаций и общественных инициатив по развитию социальной, психологической и образовательной поддержки пострадавшей молодежи. В статье говорится о необходимости

межсекторального сотрудничества и необходимости разработки более инклюзивной, ориентированной на молодежь социальной политики. В статье также рассматриваются такие проблемы, как общественная стигматизация, неэффективная межведомственная координация и недостаточная профессиональная подготовка социальных работников. Особое внимание уделяется роли образовательных и информационно-просветительских кампаний в снижении стигматизации и содействии социальной интеграции ВИЧ-инфицированной молодежи. В статье также отмечаются недостатки в действующей политике социальной защиты и предлагаются практические пути к улучшению институционального взаимодействия. В настоящем исследовании подчеркивается важность учета интересов молодежи при разработке национальных программ и создания механизмов для участия в процессах принятия решений. В связи с этим в нем упоминается, что долгосрочное сотрудничество между государственными и частными субъектами может обеспечить устойчивость и эффективность инициатив, гарантирующих социальную поддержку в целях улучшения благополучия ВИЧ-инфицированных подростков.

Ключевые слова: ВИЧ/СПИД, молодежь, социальная работа, стигма, инклюзия, Азербайджан, поддержка

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