

## INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY IN SOCIAL WORK. NECESSARY DIRECTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL NETWORKS FOR ELDERLY PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS. ARPA PROJECT

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**Abstract:** *Aging has important consequences on mental health. In fact, the prevalence of certain mental disorders tends to increase with age: depression, but also dementia, especially Alzheimer's disease, significantly affects people over the age of 65 and is a major public health problem. In the ERASMUS + KA project, Mental Health Professional Networks and Strategic Partnership for Elderly People (ARPA Ageing) Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad is a partner alongside: Center of Psychological and Pedagogical Support in Belgium, Panepistimio Kritis University of Crete, EPSM Lille Metropole and the University of Luxembourg. The project is a follow-up to the project Employment in Europe-Public Health and Mental Health: Urgent Training, Social Integration and Employability Needs (SPSM) project, which had as main objective to improve the practice of professionals and to help the social and occupational integration into the labor market of people suffering from mental disorders.*

**Key words:** *mental illness; aging, mentality, care, networks, professions, quality;*

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## **Introduction**

If in the previous SPSM project the target group of the beneficiaries was represented by young people who were seeking employment, the beneficiaries of this project are elderly people who have acquired a mental illness at a certain point throughout their lives. The project aims to build a network of professionals to support elderly people with a mental health problem, so as to help them to live a decent life, to socialize, to feel useful and accepted, with special focus on the improvement of their lives. The disengagement theory, the activity theory, age stratification theory, social exchange theory and socio-economic theory are the most widespread sociological theories that explain social aging, but also contain the elements that make up the premise for the action of factors involved in improving or delaying the effects of aging. (La Commission européenne, Eurostat – Edition 2012).

## **Strategies of ARPA Ageing Project**

According to the methodology, the aim of the ARPA Ageing in Europe project is to improve the skills and abilities of professionals, healthcare professionals and social workers to reduce risk situations for older people. This goal is pursued from a dual perspective: improving professional practice networks and improving care for elderly people diagnosed with mental illness.

The specific aims of the project are:

- Conduct a review of the literature on networks of professionals with elderly people with mental disorders,
- Conduct a professional practice analysis survey of professionals working in a network for this population,
- Conduct socio-cultural reflection, on networking in Europe, for the accompaniment of the elderly,
- Design, set up and test a European exchange and communication platform for setting up and monitoring network work,
- Build a guide of recommendations on conditions and parameters favourable to the efficiency of a network of care and follow-up of elderly people with mental disorders,
- Evaluate the project's approach and the tools put in place,
- Promote mental health networking for professionals (European conferences and publications).

Thus, multidisciplinary professional teams have been set up at the level of all partners who have investigated the local situation in relation to elderly people with mental disorders, consultation and analysis of international scientific literature.

## **Literature research**

### **Mental health networks in France**

According to the studies conducted on bibliographic documents and online search in social work networks for elderly people with mental illness, we identified a very well-structured geriatrics network in France. For example, the Alpha geriatrics network is a local network initiated by local actors who identified the need for coordination across the country to promote access to elderly care. Four criteria for inclusion in an internal team have been established to determine the person's entry into the network: 1. to be in a difficult medical or social situation (psychological or physical dependence) in the geographical area of intervention, 2. to be over 60 years old, 3. be in a situation of isolation and high risk, fall, psychological fragility, lack of medical follow-up, social precariousness etc. 4. brutal deterioration of health or autonomy, age-related polypathology

(Christelle Bruyère, 2008, pp.123).

The French Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology is a research society that combines the skills of geriatrics and gerontology: Geriatrics - is a vast domain: medicine for the elderly with complex bio-psycho-social problems or age-related disorders at home or in institutions. Gerontology includes disciplines and various sciences related to aging: biological, psychological, sociological, demographic, public health, health administration, education, law, architecture, etc. For example, Champagne-Ardenne is a company of gerontology and palliative care. For people over 60 years in a situation of addiction and/or a patient in need of palliative care and/or a person with difficulty in accessing healthcare, the Osmose Network is authorized by the Regional Health Agency of Ile- de-France to support adults and is made up of a team of 12 professionals.

Pallia RIVAGE is a support network made up of a doctor, a nurse and a psychologist, closely related to health and social care actors: medical and psychosocial professionals who help improve patients' everyday lives, their and the professionals' entourage.

SPAD-Le Réseau de Santé aims to promote care service coordination and calibrating the skills of selected professionals. It also promotes physical and telephone continuity, from 9am to 6pm, from Monday to Friday, as well as home and structured visits upon request. Health networks aim at promoting access to care through interdisciplinary teams that provide care tailored to the person's health needs, diagnosis and care, but also preventive educational services.

Associations et Sociétés Savantes pour mentale health-Le CNPP-CNQSP (<https://www.cnpp-cnqsp.com>) is a federation made of 44 academic psychiatric societies whose members advocate for the establishment of a single National Psychiatric Council, which aims to develop skills for professionals to help improve the quality of psychiatric care.

### **Mental health networks in Luxemburg**

In Luxemburg, the network of geriatric and psychiatric care is extremely well implemented. For example, *La Plate-Forms de Concertation en Santé Mentale en Provincia de Luxembourg* (<http://www.plateformepsylux.be/la-plate-forme>) has the role of mediation and conducts consulting activities to better respond to population's needs and to improve the quality of care for elderly people with mental health problems. The consultations refer to possible collaboration and division of labour (on integrated mental health care). There is a real collaboration network at national level on the collection and exploitation of data on the needs of carers for people with mental health problems. There is a political dialogue on admission, discharge and transfer, as well as the coordination of medical and psychosocial policies.

COPAS (<http://www.copas.lu/locations/centre-de-sante-mentale>) are providers that offer care and assistance for the elderly, the sick, the mentally disabled either at home or in institutions. It has 55 members working in the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg in nursing homes, integrated centres for the elderly, psycho-geriatric day-care centres, structures and services for people with disabilities, institutions active in the field of extra-hospital psychiatry, support networks, home care and foster houses. To help and support the users of their structures and services, COPAS members have over 11,000 employees. The list of specialized RESOLUX institutions can be accessed at <http://www.resolux.lu/imprimer-institutions>

### **Mental health network in Belgium**

When dealing with the social network in Belgium, we mention the Brabantul Valon Wallon-Platform(<http://www.pfsmbw.be/index.php/nos-membres/services-de-sante-mentale/ssm-jodoigne>) which is a non-profit organization that brings together psychiatric

services in general hospitals, psychiatric hospitals, mental health services, foster housing services, and volunteer care. So far, the Platform has 28 partner institutions, as follows:

- 8 hospitals: Psychiatric services in the General Hospital, psychiatric hospitals for children, a neurological centre, a paediatric centre, a functional rehabilitation centre for children
- 10 ambulatory services: 9 mental health services, 1 counselling service
- 6 intermediate structures: 3 foster homes, a Therapeutic Centre, the Day Community Centre and a day care centre for people with double diagnosis (mental and mental health disability)
- 2 psychiatric care teams for home intervention
- 1 S.O.S. Child and family team
- 1 mobile intervention cell and a day care centre for people with double diagnosis

*PFRCC-La Plate-forme de Concertation en Santé Mentale des Régions du Centre et de Charleroi* (<http://www.pfrcc.be>). This platform is an association created by the joint initiative of mental health institutions and services in its territory, the purpose of which is to promote and organize a dialogue between the mental health care structures (and dependencies) that exert their activities there, as well as with their partners in other sectors. In this respect, it aims to improve access to mental health care for the inhabitants of the region. The platform brings together professionals from 6 mental health services (HP, SPHG, MSP, IHP, SSM, INAMI).

The main activities of the Platform are:

- organization of consultation or intervention groups on its territory
- organization and participation in inter-platform working groups (in the Walloon region, Brussels and the German-speaking community)
- representing its members in the field of mental health in various local and regional authorities
- organizing a mediation service under the 2002 law on patient rights
- the availability of a repertoire of mental health care and other areas.

*Sans Souci* (<https://www.sans-souci.be/fr/Plate-forme-de-concertation-pour-la-Sante-Mentale>) is a platform that reunites professionals from 6 mental health systems around Brussels:

- psychiatric hospitals
- psychiatric services in general hospitals
- psychiatric houses
- house protected initiatives
- mental health services
- INAMI psycho-social rehabilitation agreements

In addition, representatives of integrated home care services, mutual societies and patient and family associations are involved in consultation within working groups as an initiative of the Platform.

*Le RSM SA* (<https://sante-mentale.ch/public/personnes-agees>) is a platform that offers ambulatory consultations, semi-hospital care and hospital care for people over the age of 65 with a mental health condition.

*Ligue Bruxelloise Francophone pour la Santé Mentale* (<http://www.lbfsm.be>) brings together numerous specialized institutions in mental health area.

### **Mental health networks in Greece**

For Greece, we have the CAIRN.INFO Platform (<https://www.cairn.info/revue-vie-sociale-et-traitements-2012-1-page-128.htm>) with information concerning the psychiatric Reform in Greece: some remarks about the current precariousness caused by the crisis - the economic crisis could also influence the funding of public health services in other European countries and, in addition, become the alibi of the conservative governments that denounce radical change policies of segregated psychiatry (Stylianidiss, Pantelidou, 2007; 83: 682-8)

Ilias Grammatikopoulos, professor at Ioannina University in Greece mentions in his work Mental health in the era of economic crises in Greece (<http://www.alliedacademies.org/journal-mental-health-agingthat>) that the percentage of elderly population will double between 2015 and 2050 from 12% to 22%. The most common neuropsychiatric disorders in this age group are depression, and anxiety disorders that affect more than 20% of adults aged 60 and older. It is therefore necessary to develop networks of interventions in the provision of services and support for the prevention and management of mental and physical disorders (NICE Guideline). Another platform with useful information in the field is <http://www.geronlib.gr>.

### **Mental health networks in Romania**

In Romania, the main concern of the Ministry of Health is first and foremost to promote the health of the population, especially the prevention of illness. In Romania, 3.2% of the population admits having had mental health issues<sup>8</sup>. There are also some dysfunctions in the care system currently available to people with mental health problems in Romania. The system of services addressed to people with mental health problems is incomplete, having certain weak links or missing links. In this respect, preventive measures are promoted at the level of the health care providers responsible for health education in schools, healthcare organizations and mass media. As such, it is intended to identify the main issues related to mental health and to present viable solutions for improving and resolving these problems as effectively as possible. "In Romania, in 1965, there were 460,000 psychiatric patients. Of them, 82% (381.000 patients) had organic brain syndromes of elderly, neuroses, alcoholism, personality and behavioural disorders; and 18% (79,000 patients) suffered from severe depression syndrome, psychoses, dementia, and the other and mental diseases. «The epidemiologic studies made were insufficient, lacking in many respects the standards of a reliable statistical outlook» (Donna, 1993)" (Gavrilă-Ardelean & Gavrilă-Ardelean, 2017).

SenioriNet (<http://www.seniornet.org/>) is an NGO network created in 2014 and addressed to the elderly. It is financed by Caritas România Confederation in partnership with White Cross Foundation Romania, Habilitas Association- Centre for Resources and Professional Training, ADAM Association and Change Association, CARITAS MITROPOLITAN Greek-Catholic Association BLAJ, the Orthodox Philanthropic Association DEVA.

Estuar Foundation (<http://www.estuar.org>) is an NGO that developed the project *Social Service for Mental Health* in partnership with the General Direction for Social Work and Child Protection. Its main objective is to extend the access to basic and specialized social services for vulnerable groups with mental health issues and their families.

ASO Romania Centre for Medical-Social Assistance for the elderly– Mogosoaia (<http://conaculdinvoluntari.freewb.ro/>)

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<sup>8</sup> Manuela Sofia Stănculescu, Dana Nițulescu, Mihnea Preotesi, Mugur Ciumăgeanu, Raluca Sfetcu, Persoanele cu probleme de sănătate mintală în România: stereotipuri, cauze și modalități de îngrijire percepute, atitudini și distanță socială <http://www.revistacalitateavietii.ro/2008/CV-3-4-2008/04.pdf>

The platform Principesa Margarita de Romania Foundation (<https://www.fpmr.ro>) is guided by the principle "Never alone" and offers the phone network for the elderly with call-back services.

### Conclusions

We can conclude that there is a need to create specialized mental health networks for seniors aged 65 and over. It is necessary to insist on the training of professionals with focus on care services for the elderly and the strengthening of the interventions at home. Emphasis should be placed on integrated care services in close relation to specific mental health issues. Particular emphasis should be placed on the quality of home care, rather than using psychiatric institutions. There is a need for specialized mental health services for the elderly. It is confirmed that professionals need to be trained in prevention as well as in managing different mental health interventions among older people. Knowing the needs of the elderly determines the need to train multidisciplinary professionals to improve local network practices through optimal and concrete strategies.

The development of professional competences and the improvement of professional practice for specialists caring for the elderly with mental conditions is a goal of such projects.

The specific competences acquired by all social actors should also be optimized.

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