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SELECTED CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THREATS IN THE DISCOURSE OF SOCIAL PEDAGOGUES*

Introduction: The article provides a descriptive and illustrative overview of selected social threats concerning the theoretical, methodological, and methodical advancement of research in social pedagogy. An essential element of the article's content is the assumptions of James S. Coleman's theory of social capital, Viktor Frankl's logotherapy, and Aaron Antonovsky's salutogenesis.

Research Aim: The authors' attention is focused on the diagnosis of the relationship between the specific and traditional present in the research of social educators' dimensions of social threats and the views of social educators on their aetiology, significance for social reality, and thus determinants of the psychosocial existence of modern man, and finally the possibilities of overcoming these threats.

Evidence-based Facts: In the traditionally understood causative paradigm of social pedagogy, the emphasis is primarily on solutions focused on using resources that naturally constitute the environment of human social participation. However, the text highlights the possibility of supplementing this paradigm with selected indications of the concept of social capital, logotherapy and salutogenesis in counteracting existential emptiness and the loss of the sense of the meaning of life.

Summary: Such an approach allows for a deep, multidimensional insight into the issue of social threats. As a result, it provides knowledge about characteristic relationships between variables that condition the occurrence, differentiation, and development of social threats. This, in particular, offers an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of interventions carried out in the daily professional practice of social pedagogues.

Keywords: social pedagogy, social threats, social capital, social support, logotherapy, salutogenesis.

INTRODUCTION

The term "social threats" currently falls into the category of concepts that have a constant presence in public debate and academic investigations. It is worth mentioning interesting studies by Szumpich (2013), Kośmider (2014), Kulasa (2017), and Spętana (2014), as well as the extensive monograph edited by Piekarski et al. (2010). It is not surprising considering the semantic capacity of the mentioned term. It encompasses issues such as addiction, unemployment, poverty, crime, disability, corruption, and the COVID-19 pandemic, just a few of the topics it covers. Each issue has received numerous interdisciplinary studies, and new studies on these topics are constantly emerging. Another issue related to the titular subject is its constant presence in the media. However, it is not an exaggeration to say that "social threats" is heavily overused, serving as a tool to attract public attention.

Moreover, since it always retains relevance, it remains on standby when it is difficult to find another catchy topic. A significant problem is that, in most cases, analyses and deliberations, especially those of a media nature, boil down to simple descriptions of phenomena, events, or situations associated with social threats. Rarely do they delve deeper beyond the phenomenological sphere. As a result, both ontological and epistemological aspects are somewhat overshadowed. Sometimes they are entirely disregarded.

Similarly, it is the case with formulating proposals for constructive solutions to the issue above. This brings to mind analyses by Heller (2014) concerning the issue of paraconsistent logic systems, which he begins with the observation that today "rarely does an act of rejection take the form of concluding from premises" (p. 101). According to the author mentioned, this leads to a pessimistic yet legitimate conclusion. He believes that "everything indicates that, besides genuinely deceitful people, there are also genuinely uncritical people" (p. 111). This corresponds to Kwieciński's (2012) remarks in one of his essays: What is the purpose of a social educator in these lawless times? Kwieciński refers to the thesis from McLaren's (1995) work, according to whom "we are immersed in a lawless culture. Lawless culture is a field of invisibility – persecutors and victims – precisely because it is self-evident. The obviousness protects the victims from full exposure to potential threats" (p. 2). According to Kwieciński (2012), the described state places social educators in the necessity of engaging in the stream of "cultural criticism and entering the oppositional public sphere in the postmodern era" (p. 99). The author directly speaks about the duty of all contemporary pedagogy in this regard. He means "both theoretical studies on human developmental possibilities and threats, empirical debunking research on them, as well as rescue, preventive, and supportive actions promoting the empowerment of development" (p. 99). In essence, however, the foundation of both Kwieciński's and other researchers' reflections mentioned here is a distressing awareness of the growing existential threat. Using Frankl's concept,

one can speak of existential emptiness, a loss of the sense of life's meaning, and the necessary redefinition of it (Frankl, 2015). Frankl proposes logotherapy as a solution to this problem, with its central premise, according to Lipiński and Szafarczyk (2012), expressed as "translating the wisdom of the heart above ordinary words" (p. 27). It seems that inspiration in this regard can also be sought in Antonovsky's salutogenic assumptions (1984). Such an approach to the matter is traditionally present in the research of Polish social educators, among whom we can point to Łopatkowa (2006), Segiet (2011), Orzelska (2014), and Frąckowiak (2007).

PROBLEM AND THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

The article aims to highlight the connections between the current and traditionally present dimensions of social threats in the investigations of social educators, such as poverty, crime, disability, and their views on their aetiology, significance for social reality, and consequently, the psychosocial existence of contemporary individuals, or the possibilities of overcoming these threats. Hence, the research problem is expressed in the question: What themes emerge in the discourse currently pursued by social educators in the context of the continuity and change paradigm of social pedagogy theory and practice, particularly concerning contemporary social threats? (Piekarski and Urbaniak-Zając, 2011; Weissbrot-Koziarska, 2022).

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Causal paradigms in social pedagogy

Creating actions aimed at neutralizing threats to human existence and improving conditions of life and psychosocial development can be regarded as the fundamental activity of a social pedagogue. These activities have been emphasized since the establishment of social pedagogy as a scientific discipline, which is attributed to theoretical and practical ambitions. The theoretical aspect involves consistently discovering relationships between variables that determine the functioning of broadly understood social spaces, constituting the environment for human life and development. Its practicality is reflected in actions aimed at operationalizing the results of research investigations to optimize the conditions mentioned above of human social functioning and, consequently, their existential well-being. These principles are excellently illustrated in the works of Cichosz (2004) and have also been the subject of numerous analyses conducted by Frąckowiak. They are particularly evident in his edited monograph on the concepts of social pedagogy (1996). Szmagalski (2018) refers to social pedagogy as the "pedagogy of social conscience" (p. 152). According to Frąckowiak (1996), this means that representatives

of this discipline, more than others, are obliged to search for satisfying solutions to problems which

> throughout centuries, only expanded the realm of existential uncertainty. Like a ball of yarn, they unravelled a fragile thread of hope for understanding what lies between birth and the end of the human pilgrimage and even beyond. Soon, the thread proved to be somewhat too short or fragile. The accumulated knowledge and the wisdom of generations were insufficient to successfully confront the hyperanxiety and the eternal existential dilemma of "to be or not to be". (p. 165)

Perhaps that is why Heidegger (2001), who recognizes the mentioned difficulties, referring to the Aristotelian concept, suggests that under the term "pedagogy", apart from scientific and unquestionable rationality, there is also a "living and full readiness to sense what is appropriate and inappropriate in a given case" (p. 23). This sensitivity is primarily expressed through the active social participation of educators, which is interpreted as one of their most essential tasks and thus becomes an embodiment of the practicality represented by their discipline of knowledge. Concerning its academic profile, it finds its firm grounding in the methodological layers of social pedagogy over the long-term perspective. Examples of this are the works of Wroczyński and Pilch (1974), Modrzewski (2004), and Kawula (2012). It is worth noting that the methodological perspective requires relating the issue of social participation and its pedagogical effectiveness to macro-, meso-, and micro-structural perspectives, often emphasizing the aspects of glocality. Such an approach is strongly justified by the assumptions of social pedagogy theory, including social work and resocialization. Radziewicz-Winnicki (2014) considers it one of the most significant aspects of these social theory and practice fields. One of the most important goals of social pedagogy is the

> idea of mutual connection and interdependence between globally recognized and defined phenomena and local needs regarding the effectively and rationally conducted social rehabilitation stimulated by caregivers, educators, social workers, social policymakers, or active local government activists. The active actions in this regard mainly involve the utility of credible global analyses and the promoted solutions, treated as motivation (a pattern) for the implementation and transformation of expected local resolutions. (p. 24)

This line of thinking corresponds directly to the concepts present in the social capital theory. It particularly aligns well with the notion of the common good found in the works of Coleman (1994). According to Coleman, social capital manifests itself in dimensions of social life such as trust, information exchange, enforcement of norms and effective sanctions, relationships with authority, and the presence of widely recognized authorities. It also encompasses how individuals fulfil their obligations to the group. As a consequence of this understanding of social capital,

Zarycki (2004) argues that a sense of well-being becomes widespread. "People live more comfortably, they become better and wealthier, institutions begin to function more efficiently, and there is an increasing general trust among all individuals – civil society is improving" (p. 49).

Creating such conditions for human existence is one of the essential paradigms shaping social educators' agency. Naturally, this finds its reflection, among other things, in their representative cognitive attitudes.

Cognitive spaces of social pedagogy in the context of social risks

It is difficult to enumerate all the conditions and factors determining the existential threats affecting the contemporary Polish population. Similarly, it is challenging to identify the most significant ones. Any attempt to classify them rigidly carries a significant risk of arbitrariness. Therefore, the presentation of the five issues below is a proposal and constitutes more of a voice in the ongoing discussion than an attempt to categorize the analyzed problem.

The first category relates to the phenomenon of socializing in contemporary Poland. One of its essential aspects is a phenomenon that can be described as the misdefined idea of democracy. It refers to a social and political order in which attempts are made to promote beliefs about the paradigm of freedom and civic liberties without simultaneously fostering reflection on the responsibilities that should be associated with freedom. Kołakowski warned against such a phenomenon in an essay with a rather provocative title: *Democracy Is Against Nature* (Kołakowski, 2000). Freedom implies, or at least should imply responsibility. Without fulfilling this condition, it degenerates into anarchy and may even lead to monarchy or tyranny, as interestingly discussed by Ossowska (2019). The same scholar also pointed out two fundamental dimensions of freedom: positive and negative. Within the scope of positive freedom, we have the freedom of speech and expression of opinions, the right to move freely, acquire property, and practice any religion or none at all. The boundaries of negative freedom are associated with protecting citizens against the harm they may experience from more powerful entities, individuals, or institutions, such as torture, arbitrary confiscation, or arrest.

In contemporary Poland, there seems to be a mixing of the mentioned axionormative orders, which defines the second of the five issues above. In the case of the broad concept of social threats, this can mean, among other things, that those responsible for care, education, resocialization, or social readaptation are prohibited from imposing restrictions. This is justified, among other reasons, by the fear of potential abuses against those who are intended to be influenced by these actions. However, this does not exempt them from responsibility for the effectiveness of these processes. Consequently, experts in social work, education, care, or resocialization are *a priori* perceived as a potential threat to those they are meant to help. Incidentally, this category also includes those society is supposed to be protected

from, thanks to the same social workers, court-appointed guardians, and resocialization educators... This paradoxical formula of social order aligns well with the earlier thesis of mixing axionormative orders. It brings both the implementers of social rescue actions and the subjects of these actions to a common denominator. This naturally raises the question of the causes of this described situation. The answer to it constitutes the content of the third raised issue. However, it should be noted that it carries a certain degree of subjectivity.

It can be assumed that at the core of the described state of affairs lies primarily the erosion of trust among Poles: citizens towards citizens, citizens towards authorities, authorities towards citizens, and authorities towards authorities. Research conducted under the direction of Czapiński (2015) on Poland's social capital shows that only about 20% of Poles declare trust in their fellow citizens. As a rule, we also do not trust public institutions, with the exception of the fire department. Konecki (2019) argues that this may result from political elites redefining historical facts according to their current needs. This carries long-term, serious consequences, particularly in terms of destabilizing the mentioned axionormative order. In fact, for the average citizen, it becomes unclear what is true and what is an instrumentally-oriented interpretation of the truth. This leads to a gradual erosion of social trust, including trust in the most important social life institutions, further deepening social divisions. Over time, the memory of the sources of these divisions gradually loses significance, unlike the strength with which they impact social life. In addition, research conducted by Frąckowiak (2017) on populations of resocialization educators and minors residing in correctional facilities shows that while the former declare limited trust in each other, the latter are not unfamiliar with trust among peers. One could even venture to suggest that trust constitutes their strength and conditions the effectiveness of resistance to resocialization interventions. For example, the surveyed educators clearly express a lack of professional solidarity, while their charges unequivocally indicate a high degree of solidarity among themselves. This leads us to the next, fourth issue.

We are dealing with an exceptionally interesting but also troublesome situation. Representatives of the world of social norms operate in a space of limited trust or even complete lack thereof, while participants in the hidden, informal dimension of the social world build a space of trust as a distinct dimension of social capital. This phenomenon can be associated with Zarycki's (2004) theoretical proposition of negative social capital. He formulated the concept of negative social capital as "which can be identified with the four main consequences of overly strong social capital networks" (p. 48). The first consequence is the exclusion of others from access to privileges, knowledge, or goods reserved for participants of a specific social group (exclusion of outsiders). On the other hand, this may limit the autonomy of participants in that group, including the need to engage in specific types of activities (excess claims on group members). This often leads to a dilemma

between obligations to the group and individual freedom (restrictions on individual freedoms). Finally, as Zarycki (2004) writes, the consequence of participating in such a social group, especially one that is antagonistic to the dominant social order, is pressure to align aspirations with the group's standards, which hinders or even prevents social advancement (downward levelling of norms). This form of social capital can also be referred to as bonding capital.

Representatives of the social practice field, particularly those who combine practical experience in social work and resocialization pedagogy with participation in the academic sphere, recognize that this capital has a constructive character for the participating groups. It allows them to maintain structures despite numerous institutionalized actions aimed at their neutralization and limiting their influence. However, the same cannot be said about the capital built by representatives of social norms. Here, we are dealing more with a deficit space than with capital. Consequently, this results in an avalanche of proceduralism, which often replaces common sense by seeking protection against everything and everyone, even if there is no significant reason for it. Just to be on the safe side. Hardin argues that living in such a proceduralized reality is complex, and building a welfare state atmosphere based on such a social order seems impossible due to the widespread conservatism, tendency towards formalism, and lack of trust. The welfare state gives way to proceduralism, which provides most people with a relative sense of security but at the cost of uncritical subordination and acceptance of permanent control (Hardin, 2009; Coleman, 1994).

The fifth and final issue is resolved within the question of macro- and micro-social consequences of the aforementioned trust vacuum. Drawing on the research conducted by Pytka (1998), as well as Czapiński and Panek (2015) and the analyses by CBOS (2018), it can be assumed that the presented state of affairs finds its expression in six critical spheres of social life. Without hesitation, these spheres can be considered crucial and relevant when it comes to issues of social threats, including existential ones. The first of these spheres is the family environment, which often struggles with the pace of life and its challenges. The earlier-mentioned problems result in the family closing itself off from external influences, including those that are supportive and aimed at providing advice and assistance. The second sphere consists of the school environment, which is increasingly helpless, fragmented, and, one could say, nerve-wracked. It bears the burden of pauperization, which leads to a focus more on improving teachers' existence rather than fostering students' educational careers, as evidenced by recurring protest actions. The next sphere, the third one, includes peer groups and friendships that remain beyond control. They tempt with attractive forms of spending time, seemingly costless, but in practice, associated with a high degree of risk to social development. The fourth sphere points to the pauperization of authorities and values that are significant not only during adolescence and early adulthood but throughout the entire

social functioning of individuals. These traditional values have undergone or are undergoing erosion, while the new ones lack sufficient strength to create constructive socialization patterns. The fifth sphere is formed by mass media, which, in practice, have been and still are beyond anyone's control. Their influence on social reality, including processes of education, upbringing, and socialization of contemporary individuals, is much more significant than that of schools and family environments. Finally, the sixth sphere is linked to consumer culture. This sphere usually leads directly to the mechanism aptly described by Merton in his theory of social anomie, which boils down to pursuing socially approved and demanded goods while neglecting the approved means to achieve them (Siemaszko, 1993).

SUMMARY

This rather pessimistic picture of Polish social reality may raise concerns. However, it is countered by the tradition and modernity of social pedagogy, which formulates both diagnoses of the current state and proposals for neutralizing social threats and creating solutions that promote the well-being of individuals and diverse social groups. It should be noted that there is a greater number of diagnostic studies than project and implementation proposals. Some of these studies and proposals are based on locally established traditions, which are manifested, among other things, in grassroots work. This implies the need for individual reorientation of values constituted by an axiological ladder and, consequently, the life attitudes of Poles. In practice, this is reflected in promoting attitudes oriented towards social trust, tolerance, kindness, and openness to others. The condition for achieving such a state is the expansion and intensification of educational activities directed at society as a whole, particularly towards environments characterized by material deprivation, existential risk, and social exclusion (Gmerek, 2011; Szymański, 2013). The effectiveness and often the possibility of implementing such actions are significantly conditioned by formal and legal solutions. These solutions generally require simplification and standardization. The common phenomenon is the dispersion of legal regulations related to various assistance, prevention, and social rescue issues. This seriously hinders their interpretation and daily application. It turns evident matters into a tangle and surrounds necessary actions with a thicket of difficult-to-navigate procedures. Combined with the growing shortage of staff in the field of social care and assistance, this leads to an avalanche of responsibilities weighing on the workers in this sector and, consequently, severe difficulties in providing support to individuals or social groups in need (Kokoszkiewicz, 2015; Księżopolski, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to improve systemic solutions in the described areas of social reality (Grudziewska et al., 2019). It should be assumed that promoting the principles of subsidiarity and federalism is an excellent way to

achieve this, which would rationalize the distribution of powers between different levels of authority, from macrostructural to macrostructural and microstructural (Handy, 1996; Sierpowska, 2009). This means, as Handy writes, "shifting authority as close as possible to where the action is... the role of the centre is to set standards, not necessarily the way to achieve them" (Handy, 1996, p. 115). A necessary condition for this is the building of a social trust atmosphere, which determines the possibility of constituting a civil society as a fundamental requirement for effectively counteracting social threats and eliminating their consequences.

CONCLUSIONS

The nature of this study only allows for comprehensive coverage of some of the issues related to its subject matter. However, according to the authors, the presented investigations have illustrated the most significant threads that emerge in the contemporary discourse of researchers focusing on social threats within the framework of the social pedagogy paradigm. Thus, the expressed intention within the research objective and problem has been achieved. The conducted deliberations lead to the formulation of several synthetic conclusions, which are intended to have a pragmatic character. Firstly, it is evident that the discourse in question is oriented towards an in-depth diagnosis of social risks and threats (Sudoł, 2022; Grzesiak and Mituła-Grzesiak, 2022). However, a limited number of studies focused on proposing specific solutions to build a sense of security and well-being for individuals and social groups. We have substantial knowledge about risks and threats but considerably less about effective ways to neutralize them. Secondly, it seems particularly important to emphasize issues related to promoting education and upbringing based on universal social and cultural values. This requires the development and implementation of unified institutional, organizational, and legal solutions adapted to the social reality requirements. This constitutes the content of the third conclusion. The fourth conclusion indicates the necessity of undertaking actions to change the socio-economic status of professions focused on social support and rescue. Otherwise, there is a forecasted deepening of the phenomenon of negative selection into these occupations and a decline in the substantive quality and organizational efficiency of their institutional structures.

The implementation of the above conclusions is contingent on consistent attempts to operationalize the results of interdisciplinary research conducted by social pedagogues and the utilization of their findings. This simultaneously fulfils the requirements of both the paradigm of connecting theory with practice and the paradigm of continuity and change in science, which involves drawing on accumulated experiences to propose new and improved solutions (Kuhn, 2009).

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WYBRANE ZAGROŻENIA WSPÓŁCZESNOŚCI W DYSKURSIE PEDAGOGÓW SPOŁECZNYCH

Wprowadzenie: Artykuł stanowi opis syntetyzujący i egzemplifikujący wybrane zagrożenia społeczne w odniesieniu do teoretycznego, metodologicznego oraz metodycznego zaawansowania badań z zakresu pedagogiki społecznej. Ważnym elementem konstytuującym treści artykułu są też założenia teorii kapitału społecznego w ujęciu Colemana, logoterapii Frankla i salutogenezy Antonovsky'ego.

Cel badań: Generalnie uwaga autorów koncentruje się na diagnozie związków pomiędzy specyficznymi i tradycyjnie obecnymi w dociekaniach pedagogów społecznych wymiarami zagrożeń społecznych, takich jak ubóstwo, przestępczość, niepełnosprawność, a poglądami pedagogów społecznych na ich etiologię, znaczenie dla rzeczywistości społecznej, i co za tym idzie – uwarunkowania egzystencji psychospołecznej współczesnego człowieka, czy wreszcie możliwości przezwyciężania tych zagrożeń.

Stan wiedzy: W tradycyjnie rozumianym paradygmacie sprawczym pedagogiki społecznej akcentuje się przede wszystkim rozwiązania ukierunkowane na wykorzystywanie zasobów naturalnie konstytuujących środowiska uczestnictwa społecznego człowieka. W tekście zwrócono jednak uwagę na możliwość dopełnienia tego paradygmatu w szczególności o wybrane wskazania koncepcji kapitału społecznego, który uobecnia się w takich wymiarach życia społecznego, jak zaufanie, przekaz informacyjny, sposoby egzekwowania norm i efektywnych sankcji, relacje z władzą oraz obecność upowszechnionych autorytetów, a wreszcie forma wywiązywania się jednostki ze zobowiązań wobec grupy. Wskazano także na możliwość wykorzystania logoterapii i salutogenezy w aspekcie przeciwdziałania pustce egzystencjalnej i często obserwowanemu zagubieniu poczucia sensu życia.

Podsumowanie: Takie podejście pozwala na pogłębiony, wielowymiarowy wgląd w problematykę zagrożeń społecznych. Skutkiem tego dostarcza wiedzy na temat charakterystycznych zależności pomiędzy zmiennymi, które warunkują występowanie, różnicowanie się i rozwój zagrożeń społecznych. Daje to w szczególności szansę na zwiększenie efektywności oddziaływań realizowanych w obszarze codziennej praktyki zawodowej pedagogów społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika społeczna, zagrożenia społeczne, kapitał społeczny, wsparcie społeczne, logoterapia, salutogeneza.