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SOCIAL WORK IN RURAL COMMUNITIES – PARTICULARITIES, PERSPECTIVES, AND DIRECTIONS OF INTERVENTIONS

Oana-Elena RĂDĂCINĂ¹

Abstract

At the international level, specialists in social sciences pay more attention to rural communities. The need for social work is more prevalent in these communities because of the social inequalities and the low access to social services. This article explores rural social work, social problems, and intervention models. It is a qualitative study based on eleven interviews with the local authorities and specialists about families, schools, institutions, rural communities, and the efficiency of intervention methods. The research is focused on five Romanian rural communities from Transylvania. We consider that to improve the situations of these rural communities the first step is to identify their needs, then to provide specialised support services that correspond to those needs to prevent and solve individual, family, and community-level problems. The last part of this article presents the main intervention areas in rural localities for social inclusion of those disadvantaged – reducing risks, inequalities, and improving the quality of life of those living in the rural communities.

Keywords: risks, needs, intervention models, social work, rural community development.

Rural social work particularities

In time, the fields of social work have diversified and specialized, according to the social problems approach area. The need for social work in rural communities today is perhaps stronger than it used to be, through increased social inequalities and decreased access to services in rural areas. At the international level, there is an increasing interest in rural communities (Kbadacki, 1995; Collier, 2006; Ginsberg, 2014). In this context, we are talking about rising new competencies

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necessary to work in the field; and about developing intervention instruments, methods, and techniques that support rural populations for social integration and community development. The urban area is more favoured in terms of resources for social services and ensuring professionals in social work. We should highlight that in the urban communities social interventions and services are also well developed – in most of the cases. But the rural communities are confronted with specific disadvantages (such as poverty, lack of resources), and the services and interventions that respond to these needs are poorly developed, sometimes non-existent (Teșliuc *et al.*, 2016; Lazăr *et al.*, 2020; Rădăcină, 2021).

According to the statistical data, in Romanian rural areas, households have lower incomes relative to urban ones, the unemployment rate is higher, the infrastructure (electricity, sewage, internet, etc.) is much less developed, while the social services are lacking in quality and quantity. The access to medical care is lower in rural areas (39%) compared to urban (60.2%). Also, the level of education in rural population communities is lower (INS, 2020).

According to the international literature, the main particularities of rural social work that differentiate it from urban social practice divide into five main areas: general practice and skills, community development, extended professional relations, rural sensitivity, and professional characteristics of practitioners (Locke, & Winship, 2005 apud Pugh, & Cheers, 2010). General practice and skills refer to overall skills required in working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, which a social worker generally uses in his work. Community development represents an essential aspect in rural social work practice for rural social workers who implement intervention programs that address both the individual (Case Work) and the community (Community Work).

Regarding to the relationship development, it is important the social area professionals establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with local political personalities and other social actors. Likewise, it is essential that rural practitioners develop a cultural sensitivity, which values and promotes the particularities of rural culture, with special care for the needs of minority groups. Last but not least, the desirable features of social workers in rural areas are taken into account, requiring concern and commitment to the local community, and the ability to work with little professional support, limited resources and modest conditions (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010).

Starting from a research analysis in the field, we included in the table below a series of aspects that synthesizes the challenges, opportunities, and limitations of practicing social work in rural communities (*Table 1*).

Table 1. Opportunities, challenges and limits met by social workers in rural areas

Challenges and opportunities in rural social work	Limits in rural social work
Harnessing the power of relationships: there are tight relationships between community members, that make it difficult to maintain privacy in social work (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010)	Lack of resources/limited resources (offices spaces, equipment, means of travel, working conditions) (Schenck, 2004)
Resource: agriculture that may have potential in the sphere of economic development (Collier, 2006)	Insufficient funds for implementing social projects (Alpaslan, & Scheneck, 2012)
Promoting development and inclusion of rural perspectives in practice for education, recruitment and employment in social area (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010)	Increased workloads and required work (Alpaslan, & Scheneck, 2012)
Using general skills in social work: interventions at the level of various subsystems, creativity, flexibility and innovation, diversity – using multi-cultural skills (Collier, 2006; Ginsberg, 2014)	Poor educational training of students/professionals regarding the social work activity itself in rural areas (Teşliuc, 2016)
Advocacy for social justice in rural areas: reducing stereotypes about locals in the countryside and their marginalization (Ginsberg, 2014)	The reluctance of local policymakers to address social problems , implicitly to facilitate services that meet the locals' needs (Schenck, 2004; Lazăr <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
Valuing Informational Technology and Communication that may increase support for social workers from the rural area (by continuing educational formation, collaboration with specialists, services and information exchange regarding good practices) (Ginsberg, 2014), (Collier, 2006)	Hostile attitude of locals in requesting and receiving social services (Schenck, 2004);
	Weak financial motivation/poor facilities of employees from social work area (especially in the countries with a weak level of development of the social work system) (Teşliuc, 2016; Lazăr <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
	Problems/risks in the rural communities may not be identified, reported, or researched (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010)

	Problems regarding social services provisioning (dilemmas and ethical issues) (Alpaslan, & Scheneck, 2012; Pugh, & Cheers, 2010)
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Source: table made by the author based on conclusions of studies and researches in the field.

Social work in rural areas aims to solve or ameliorate inequity problems, and provide specialized services according to needs, to support vulnerable persons and groups, and to advocate for those in perilous situations (Ginsberg, 2014 apud NASW, 2002). The social workers' main challenges in the rural areas imply risk factors that are met at the community level (poverty, various vulnerable situations), inhabitants' services accessibility/provisioning, specialized interventions, and specialized professional training.

Although, in general, the rural population is seen as a vulnerable group with limited resources that can generate risk factors, we encounter within communities more households with different levels of needs, and different circumstances (Slovak, Sparks, & Hall, 2011; Rădăcină, 2021). Many times in rural areas, marginalized communities are identified in which groups and families confront shortages and low access to services. In this case, social work in rural areas consists of developing services and interventions that meet the dwellers' needs, by increasing social integration and facilitating well-being.

Intervention and practice models in rural social work

In social work there is a close connection among needs, problems, resources, and how they are identified or defined in an effective intervention (Roth, & Rebeleanu, 2007). Even if our research does not directly address the issue of intervention, the results of the research can help us to build effective ones for the beneficiaries' needs. We also consider that the approach of the social work services is correlated to the social intervention practices.

Social work intervention and practice models implemented in rural communities have been adapted to the general ones, offering special attention to problems and needs met in rural environments. One of the most often used intervention models in social work practice is the ecological model (Kbadacki, 1995). Based on the theory of ecological systems, it is applied in interventions which value the beneficiary's relationships with the systems and subsystems the individual belongs to (family, neighbours, friends, colleagues, institutions). In other words, the social worker evaluates the relationship types and interactions the beneficiary has with close persons, groups, organizations – aiming to find together the best

solutions for adaptation and overcoming situations of vulnerability. Interventions are implemented at individual, group and community level. Although, in general, applying this intervention model in social work has demonstrated its efficiency in rural areas within countries where poverty prevails (like Uganda), it has proved to be limited (Kbadacki, 1995). The ecological model is more efficient in the case of beneficiaries that experience addictions, loss of life partners, or other needs related to incapacity. When rural areas affected by poverty implement the model, an improvement of the locals' quality of life can't be achieved other than by introducing new social services, and approaching alternative methods of intervention (Kbadacki, 1995). As long as there is the capacity to mobilise new resources and create financial opportunities, by strengthening relationships, positive effects can also be visible in rural localities (Ungar, 2002). In this regard, the structural model that follows the need to change the environment as part of social intervention has evolved. The support aims to connect individuals to resources, in order to provide opportunities to change unfavourable situations, mobilize for involvement and transformation of the individual and social situation, by maximizing the client's support, starting from environmental resources. Daley (2010), in his study, "A Conceptual Model for Rural Social Work", brings into attention a series of specialists that have approached rural social work referring to service integration and support networks – or usage of social capital (human resources, materials, financials) – which exist in rural communities, in order to promote positive changes in the community (Daley, 2010; Martinez-Brawley, & Delevan, 1993).

Another model of rural practice has been developed by Daley and Avant (2004) which is based on power-centred systems that encompass the theory of social exchange. Through this model, systems may offer a more practical perspective on problems and development strategies, by understanding their particular conditions more precisely. The social exchange theory helps us understand better interaction dynamics and the behavioural part inside and between systems. Starting from this point, the importance of the strengths of rural communities is emphasized, making use of them by implementing a community intervention.

Practice integrating model allows flexibility in choosing intervention, by using more types of methods or models. Emphasis is placed on promoting competence, normalization and empowerment, by valuing individuals' learning skills to solve problems in the context of support, services and proper guidance (Kbadacki, 1995). Mutual aid, support groups, conflict resolution strategies, support networking and organizational development basically follow community or social development (Kbadacki, 1995).

What these models have in common is the focus on strengthening problem-solving skills and community development (Daley, 2010). According to the NASW (2006), the purpose of rural social work would be to help villagers, support families and empower beneficiaries to make positive changes in their lives (Ginsberg, 2014). Based on rural intervention models, we can see that the emphasis is on

community development, on working with individuals, groups, organizations, and the community. The way in which these approaches to intervention are understood and applied by social workers in rural areas remains questionable, given that rural areas have a shortage of specialised staff (Lazăr, 2020; Teșliuc, 2016). The training of future professionals and continuous vocational training in the field of practices and in the educational field should concern us, if we want rural development to no longer be just a concept in marginalised rural areas – yet a reality. The development of evidence-based intervention programs could meet the real needs of rural communities and professionals.

The needs perceived by specialists in five rural communities from Transylvania: methodology

The state of rural social work in Romania is problematic, in a context where the social work system itself has many limits. Although the most recent legislation improved the realisation of the clients' rights, still there is little financial support (social benefits and funds), and a shortage of staff. The literature shows that practitioners of social work in both rural areas and urban areas lack training in the field, social work services are poorly developed or non-existent (Lazăr, 2020; Teșliuc, 2016; Rădăcină, 2021; MMF, 2021). We consider that a first step towards improving the situation is to identify the needs and the challenges faced by rural communities, and then offer specialized services which correspond to the identified needs, in order to prevent and solve individual, family and community level problems.

In this regard, the research was made at the level of eight rural localities from Romania (Bobic *et al.*, 2021). Five of them from the southern part of Transylvania were selected for this article, due to their close proximity.

The aim of our research was to identify the social needs of the population in each of these five rural localities of Transylvania. The objectives of the research presented in this article were: to analyse the needs and social problems of vulnerable groups in villages and to identify the necessary social services in the communities. Based on these objectives, the following research questions emerge: what are the needs and social problems of the vulnerable categories encountered in each locality from the specialists' perspective? What kind of social services would be needed in the communities, according to the specialists?

During the research, we used two research methods and three tools: questionnaire-based survey, interview, and a grid to assess the situation and the social needs encountered among the population in each locality. The questionnaires were administered to households in marginalized areas. The interviews were conducted in writing, on an online platform. The assessment grid for the social needs encountered within the population was completed by a representative of the mayor's office. It considered useful to present the results of the qualitative analysis in the context of intervention in social work, which must value the specialists' perspective related to working with disadvantaged categories. Obviously, the

research offers a broader perspective in the context of all the methods and tools used, but in this article, we present only a few. The research was conducted between 2019-2021.

This study's data will refer more to the qualitative part of the research where we present the understanding of those who work in rural communities, their circumstances, and possible support resources they identify. Thus, we will pay attention to five rural communities from Transylvania (Romania), and the answers of 11 specialists who develop their activities in these localities. In each locality, between one and three specialists were interviewed depending on their availability to respond (social worker, mayor, doctors/nurse, teacher, and NGO representative). Interview guides have been sent by email for each specialist category. They have responded in writing online and, for any possible misunderstandings that might occur, we kept in touch by email.

The needs and services they referred to were related to the domain of their work. We would have liked to interview five specialists working in different fields in each locality. Due to the lack of availability of some specialists, we couldn't accomplish this requirement – this being a limitation of our research.

The interviews have been conducted online. For the interpretation, we have used the method of content analysis and manual coding. We have chosen subjects from various professional categories that work as professionals in the following fields: educational (teachers), medical (doctors and nurses), ONG representatives, representatives of the city hall (mayor, social worker). The main thematic units used in building content guides were: describing the communities, presenting the problems and needs of the population, presenting the types of services existing in the community, describing the situation of socially disadvantaged people, and proposing ways to increase the quality of life for dwellers.

Next, we are going to present the content units. For this article will refer to two of them: the population needs and the necessary social services for increasing residents' quality of life. We included both an analysis of the answers from the subjects and an argumentation of them, using relevant interview fragments. Regarding the general description of rural localities included in the study, they have arable land, but with low cultivation resources and possibilities. In most of the localities, the population is aging, and there are members of households who have moved abroad. In terms of resources, as we will see, they are limited, with members of rural communities often facing poverty, lack of support in caring for children, seniors, dependents or disabled persons. The interviewed subjects recall the benefits of natural resources and solidarity between locals.

Problems and needs identified by specialists: research results

If in the first part of the article we focused on the rural social work and intervention models proposed at the international level, we are now going to present the problems and needs at the level of some communities from Transylvania which, obviously, argues the needs of a rural social policy.

Behavioural and educational problems and needs among children and youth

The interviewed specialists (teachers) identified a series of negative behaviours present in communities. The educational environment includes various forms of violence, absenteeism, or school dropout – especially for students coming from socially disadvantaged families “*Verbal and physical violence, absenteeism, school dropout...*” (S1).

Regarding negative health behaviour, specialists mentioned addictions (tobacco/alcohol) and unhealthy diets. “*Harmful habits are smoking, alcohol, improper nutrition...*” (S4).

In the first locality analysed, the main problems and needs seen by the school representative (the teacher) are: the children’s disinterest in school preparation, the presence of bullying behaviours in school, and parents’ low involvement in raising and educating children as a result of the migration phenomenon. “*Among the school’s weaknesses is students’ insufficient involvement in assuming their own learning process and in assessing the progress they make*” (S1).

Other problems identified are school teachers leaving their posts, and frequent changes in educational legislation that do not encourage stability and teachers’ development. “*... due to often changes that appear in education (ministry changes, permanent legislation changes, etc.), many teachers leave the system and go to other institutions or abroad*” (S1). Children lack a favourable climate at home, and the necessary resources for continuing their studies.

The local representatives of various institutions (school staff, teachers, etc.) identified the following types of problems faced by the members of this rural community: lack of school/professional training, absenteeism/school dropout (“*... poor school performance and early school leaving*”) (S6), and violence. There is also mentioned of poor involvement by parents in children’s education, risk of dropping out of school, poverty, bullying, and the need for education: “*... in schools... the relationships between pupils are affected by bullying*” (S7). “*... Students’ school situation from disadvantaged families is a very weak one. The predominant situations are those repeating the grade*” (S8).

Although the communities are different, one can see a guideline (red thread) around which the situation of rural localities revolves, which generates marginalization, impedes development and deteriorates quality of life. The central problems we have seen and would continue to see are related to the lack of education, poverty, high rate of deviant behaviours or the migration of parents that can obviously cause the perpetuation of the children’s destructive behaviours. “*Also among the aspects to be concerned are the multiplication of cases of physical and verbal violence among students and not lastly, the poor involvement of parents. There are more and more people going to work abroad*” (S1).

The situation of disadvantaged people in rural localities

In the research localities, the following types of problems were common for the disadvantaged groups: addictive behaviours (alcohol/tobacco addiction), financial difficulties, health problems, lack of access to effective public transport. *“The main problem is transport related to the village and jobs, as well as access to institutions, hospitals, etc. Another problem is the lack of tuition/professional training”* (S3); *“... Harmful habits; alcohol, smoking – Pathologies of the elderly at relatively young ages...”* (S4).

Regarding the community's needs, the need to increase the interest level towards the importance of education, the need to support people with disabilities, impoverished families, and the elderly, the need for professional orientation, educational counselling, professional counselling, and health education is emphasized. The problem of lack of education is often correlated with poverty and illiteracy, common in rural communities (Pitiman-Munke, 2016). *“... Precarious material situation (beneficiaries of social aid), and very low level of education (about 80% of parents did not complete primary school)”* (S1). In rural areas exists a tight correlation between the rate of youth school drop-out and the poverty risk or social exclusion (MMPS, 2021).

The representatives working in the next rural locality identified aspects that have reduced capacities of self-management for single-parent families, alcohol/tobacco consumption, school dropout, lack of education and poverty: *“... household difficulties in developing personally, physically and intellectually regarding people coming from single-parent families, ... people who dropped out of school, the father is an alcohol addict, poor families with limited intellectual potential”* (S5). Other identified problems and needs are those of vulnerable people within the community: family problems, loneliness, aggressive conduct: *“In the commune, there are many single-parent families, there are children in foster care, single elderly people, poor families, ... family problems, violent physical and verbal behaviour, poor school performance and early school leaving”* (S6).

From the perspective of the specialists from the third locality (the social worker), the main problem is the lack of resources for people with disabilities. *“The incomes of people with disabilities are too low for their needs”* (S7). Other identified needs are educational counselling, health education, and providing transportation for people with special needs. In general, however, public transport is provided in the locality. We have seen that the problem of the lack of means of transportation is mentioned as central in many rural communities. It makes it difficult for locals to move to their jobs, or students who study in educational institutions outside the village. That is why it is repeatedly underscored both in international literature, and by the interviewed subjects or dwellers, the need to develop the public transport infrastructure (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010).

In the following rural communities, the interviewees (the mayor, the social worker, and the physician) also recalled the following needs and challenges: lack of jobs and low incomes. Other aspects refer to the consumption of alcohol, unhealthy food behaviours, the insufficiency of kindergarten places, or of means of public transport. Situations of inappropriate behaviours within the community are correlated with the problems and relational patterns described in the previous subparagraphs. Addictive behaviours, bullying, and various forms of abuse are present. These are especially common among people from disadvantaged families. Their situation is a precarious one: unfavourable in terms of income, dysfunctional behavioural patterns, and parents' lack of interest/involvement in children's education. *"Problems related to alcohol consumption, domestic violence, lack of a job. There are situations in which young people live off their parents' pension"* (S11).

Also for this locality, following the Assessment Grid of the situation and the social needs, it was possible to observe the presence in the various villages of problems or needs related to the lack of access to utilities within households (drinking water, electricity, etc.), which indicates the presence of marginalized and socially disadvantaged areas. The table below indicates the dominant common and specific problems encountered at the level of the five communities (Table 2).

Table 2. Similar and specific problems among localities

Similar problems	Specific problems
Poverty	Addictive behaviours (alcohol/tobacco) or bullying behaviour (1th, 2th and 4th locality)
Lack of education	Migration phenomenon (1th and 4th locality)
School dropout	The lack of resources for people with disabilities (3th locality)
Lack of public means of travel/ transportation	The lack of workplaces (5th locality)
Insufficient access to social services	
Parents' low involvement in raising and educating children	

The types of relationships within the community are described as different depending on the type of family. There are harmonious relationships between some members of the community, even exemplary, while within other families there are tense relationships, violence and various forms of abuse: *"there are people who face problems of alcohol, but also of domestic violence, but there are also families, which can be considered as a model for other families"* (S 10).

In conclusion, the main categories of disadvantaged people are: poor families, single-parent families, persons/ children with disabilities, the elderly, and the unemployed. The main cause of poverty and misbehaviour is associated with a lack of education and vocational training. *“In most situations of single-parent families, poor families, this situation is due to the lack of professional training, without school they cannot occupy better paid jobs”.* (S3)

The results of the research indicate problems and needs that are also recognised internationally among rural communities. For example, a series of research carried out in several countries has identified the following situations of vulnerability found in rural areas: poverty, lack of jobs, poor education, unsuitable housing conditions, travel difficulties, transport, high infant mortality rate, illiteracy, alcoholism, drug use, mental health problems, insufficient access to social services, educational, transport and health (Kabadaki, 1995; Collier, 2006; Ginsberg, 2014; Daley, & Pittman-Munke, 2016; Donnges, & Foley, 2003; Chevrot, 2018).

Proposals and methods for rural Community development: research results

Until now, we have given importance to the definition and understanding of rural social work, and the problems and needs faced by the people in rural areas. We now move on to present ways in which these unfavourable situations can be overcome through social services and rural community development.

Social and educational services for children and youth

According to the professionals' perspectives regarding community development, the main services that could support children from disadvantaged families in the community are the following: *“afterschool day care centres, counselling and family support centres, etc.”* (S2). The importance of setting up services within NGOs is also stressed, starting from the need for services specified above.

Regarding the services in the community for children or their families, the importance of running after-school programs is emphasized. These would also include the provision of daily meals or snacks, hygiene products and school supplies. Parental education programs, leisure activities, projects to support the strengthening of the relationship of educational actors, educational counselling and material support for children from poor families are also seen as necessary. Other types of investments that could develop rural communities are: *“investing in school units to create spaces as useful and attractive as possible for children; a sports field/recreation area where children spend their free time; various social, environmental education actions in which all the factors in the community are*

involved; the continuation of the «Second Chance» programs in school, through which all the citizens of the commune shall complete their secondary education, thus having easier access to the labour market” (S3). One can see the urgent need to invest in education, to facilitate activities that promote socialization, prosocial behaviours and opening up opportunities to support further education for children from disadvantaged families. These issues play a vital role because they precisely target the main problem that blocks rural communities towards rural development and limits local people in terms of well-being.

Also, it highlighted the role of services that could support children from disadvantaged families in the community. Some of these social services are counselling services, after school services, socialization and leisure services. It also recalled the importance of conducting information and awareness campaigns for parents, in order to involve them in the upbringing and education of children.

Social and medical services for disadvantaged categories

For another analysed locality, according to the interviewed specialists from the city hall, the main services that could support disadvantaged people in the community are psycho-social and medical services. It recalled the need to provide counselling, education, but also prevention services. *“Promoting a healthy lifestyle (lessons to be attended by the students’ parents) and explaining the nocive effects of excessive consumption of sweets, unhealthy foods, and carbonated drinks, but also tobacco on the state of health, on the physical and mental development of the young and future adult”* (S4).

In order to facilitate the integration of the unemployed into work, the prospect of opening companies that will offer employment opportunities in the locality is mentioned. Also, in this direction, it is necessary to *“attract non-reimbursable funds to set up social housing/redevelopment (increase) of living rooms for large families”* (S2).

From the perspective of professionals, community services can be developed by diversifying existing services, by involving beneficiaries in control over their own lives. In particular, services that promote the population’s education (*“Increasing the level of awareness of beneficiaries’ own needs, increasing the beneficiaries’ level of involvement”* (S7).) and professional training are targeted. But there is also mention of the needs of services to support disadvantaged categories in the community (children, the seniors, people with disabilities). *“Focusing services on the integration of beneficiaries into the labour market and less on offering social benefits to them”* (S8).

Specialists from another locality in Transylvania see that the main services that could support disadvantaged people in the community are social services. *“Developing a multi-dimensional approach to support the reintegration of young*

people (who are not in employment, education or training) through educational opportunities, training, or occupation” (S9).

Community development could be achieved through support and support for the professional integration of young people (“... Supporting actions to improve employability, such as individual counselling, on-the-job training...” (S10)), infrastructure development, individual and professional counselling, services aimed at integrating children, people with disabilities, and the elderly. “Supporting the transition from institutional models to community care for children, people with disabilities, people with mental disorders, as well as the seniors” (S11).

Discussions and conclusions

It can be easily seen that most of the proposals of specialists working in rural communities come against the background of the shortcomings identified in the families of these communities. That is precisely why we consider research and intervention necessary when it takes up community development. In this matter, the literature highlights communal planning as understood through the prism of identifying the needs of community members, by creating interventions to meet these needs (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010).

Rural community development is a process. It is a variety of actions and decisions which have the potential to make a contribution to the community, by improving its situation. It does so not only from an economic point of view, but also from a functional perspective. It does so through actions, services and participation, so that the locality becomes more active, to be able to cope with change through the strong link between members, organizational skills, and abilities (Cavaye, 2001). We are thus talking about creating institutional alternatives that will provide opportunities to meet human needs at all levels, and increase the quality of life of local people. It is envisaged to value the individual, groups, and institutions in terms of implementing positive change, empowering the socially disadvantaged individuals, and providing opportunities (Paiva, 1977).

Community development in rural areas should also aim to increase access for dwellers to a number of facilities that are important for the well-being of local people. It should aim to provide access to basic needs: access to drinking water, education, health, electricity. In that matter, it is important to follow the succeeding directions of development: local transport infrastructure, improvement of the rural transport service that allows the movement of inhabitants to workplaces, schools or other connecting areas. As the professionals of the cited research have pointed out, other studies show the need to facilitate access to social services, through which they can meet the basic needs of vulnerable people (water, food, housing, etc.). It is also considered useful to promote and stimulate the use of technological means (Pugh, & Cheers, 2010). In the current context, access to the means of modern technology (internet, computer) is essential. The current period – that

of the Covid-19 pandemic – gives plenty of examples of some of the teaching or professional activities being carried out in the online environment. Thus, we advocate for increasing the accessibility of technology among rural and socially disadvantaged communities.

The presentation of only a part of the more extensive research that we carried out may not create an overview of the situation at the level of each locality – this being a limitation of our research. Other limitations are related to the qualitative method. Future research should look at the resources of rural communities and how these resources can be used to limit and prevent social needs or problems.

Research in the field of rural social work points to a need for a reorganization of the community resources on a closer analysis of the specific risks and needs within rural areas. A good strategic management in social work based on legislative benchmarks to support the development of community services, along with the continuous training of specialized personnel, should be the prescription for those who want to overcome social problems and rural community development.

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