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Research Paper

Active citizenship for persons with psychosocial disabilities in Sweden



Une citoyenneté active pour les personnes ayant un handicap psychosocial en Suède

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ABSTRACT

As it is the case in many European countries, psychosocial disabilities have become an important concern in Sweden. Persons with psychosocial disabilities' experiences of various societal domains such as school, work, family life, leisure activities and contact with welfare agencies need a complex analysis which takes into account both personal and contextual factors. This article draws on 15 interviews with informants with psychosocial disabilities and discusses their experiences and the difficulties that they met during their lives. These experiences are conceptualised with the framework of "active citizenship" developed by Hvinden et al. (2016), which distinguishes three core dimensions of active citizenship: security, influence and autonomy. The empirically grounded article discusses the opportunities and barriers that encourage or hamper persons with psychosocial disabilities to be active citizens in the Swedish welfare state and underlines some of the main challenges that stand in the way of their "full and effective participation in society" (CRPD, article 1).

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Comme c'est le cas dans de nombreux pays europ eens, les difficult es psychosociales sont devenues une source de pr eoccupation importante en Su ede. Les exp eriences que les personnes ayant un handicap psychosocial ont de diff erents domaines tels que l' ecole, le travail, la vie en famille et les contacts avec les agences de l' Etat social requi erent une analyse complexe qui tient compte tant de facteurs personnels que de facteurs contextuels. Cet article se base sur 15 entretiens avec des personnes ayant un handicap psychosocial et discute leurs exp eriences et les difficult es qu'elles ont rencontr ees au cours de leur vie. Ces exp eriences sont conceptualis ees   l'aide du cadre r ef erentiel de « citoyenn et  active » d evelopp e par Hvinden et al. (2016), qui distingue trois dimensions-cl e de la citoyenn et  active : la s ecurit , l'influence et l'autonomie. Bas e sur une recherche empirique, cet article traite des opportunit es et des barri eres qui soutiennent ou emp echent les personnes en situation de handicap psychosocial de devenir des citoyens actifs dans l' Etat social su eudois et souligne quelques d efis majeurs qui font obstacle   leur « pleine et effective participation   la soci et  sur la base de l' egalit  avec les autres » (CRPD, article 1).

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1. Introduction

Psychosocial disabilities have become an important concern of European countries in general (WHO, 2013) and of Sweden in particular (Regeringskansliet, 2012). The difficulties that people with psychosocial disabilities meet are not only medical issues but they involve many societal domains including school, work, family life, social participation and contacts with welfare agencies. Although their right to live in society on the same basis as others is stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), many persons with psychosocial disabilities face discrimination and are not given the same opportunities to participate fully in society (WHO, 2011).

Psychosocial disabilities – by which we mean social and psychological difficulties that occur in a complex interaction with the environment – need to be regarded in the light of a series of important societal changes which took place from the 1960s on, such as the process of deinstitutionalisation of mental health care, the decentralisation of the organisation of welfare state provisions, the evolutions in community mental health services and the developments of mental health treatments such as e.g. recovery-oriented approaches (S epulchre & Lindqvist, 2015; Silfverhielm & Kamis-Gould, 2000; Morrow, Wasik, Cohen, & Perry, 2009). The configuration of the networks of actors in the public, private and voluntary sector varies across countries but international reports and scholarship indicate that there is a general need for developing coherent mental health programmes taking into account both hospital care and community mental health services (CMHS) (Thornicroft, Alem, & Drake, 2012; WHO, 2008). Besides, there is a need to coordinate the various actors in the welfare landscape so that other important aspects such as housing, economic resources and social contacts are also taken into account (Rosenberg, Lindqvist, & Markstr om, 2009). The need for new institutional arrangements has been emphasized in ambitious policy declarations focusing on the rights of patients and on a variety of community-based solutions (Thornicroft et al., 2012; WHO, 2013).

Drawing on 15 semi-structured interviews with persons with psychosocial disabilities living in Sweden, this article aims to discuss their experiences as “active citizens” (Hvinden, Bickenbach, Ferri, Halvorsen, & Guill en Rodrigues, 2016). Starting from the idea that psychosocial disabilities need to be understood in relation to the environment, the article sketches the developments in the way psychosocial disabilities are viewed in Sweden and describes the welfare services that are designed for the needs of persons with psychosocial disabilities. In the following section, we explain our conceptual

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