From the Social Work Focused Forces Approach/Perspective: Age Discrimination and the Perception of Weakness Is Problems in the Modern Era

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Abstract: Old age has many problems related to every period. However, in the modern era, elderly individuals have begun to be at the center of a wide variety of problems, perhaps more than ever before. societies where industrialization is gaining momentum, old age, or in other words, aging, appears as a phenomenon beyond being a phase of human life and carries various negative meanings.So much so that the most striking of these negativities is undoubtedly that ageism is becoming more visible day by day in modern societies.

In this context, ageism constructed by society emerges as a phenomenon shaped by social expectations, beyond the loss of physiological power of the elderly.Since old age and aging are a natural field of social work, this situation cannot be independent from social work, and it also necessitates the necessary intervention.The perception of powerlessness of elderly individuals, which is socially constructed in the modern period, puts the elderly in a disadvantaged position at a much greater disadvantage.Because; In the study, the perception of powerlessness of elderly individuals was examined within the framework of the strengths perspective/approach and their need for social work was emphasized.

Keywords: Social work, strengths-based perspective, old age

I. Introduction

Although old age or aging expressed a certain period in human life, it has become a sociological phenomenon rather than a process in the modern world.So much so that this phenomenon has caused many problems that are not positive for older individuals. In other words, the modern means of industrial individualistic societies; Emotion, thought, behavior, production and consumption forms have rapidly change and transformation.Elderly individuals experience negative effects of this change and transformation negatively.

Within the scope of the social work discipline, it is aimed to determine the reasons that are effective in the formation of the perception of weakness of the elderly in the modern era.In this context, the perspective of socio-cultural aging and the dimension of the forces approaching forces, which is the focus of many sciences, have been examined in the formation of an important place in the formation of the perception of weakness of elderly individuals.

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As a matter of fact, there are many reasons for the weakness of the elderly, as well as the main starting point is elderly discrimination (Pak, 2020: 376).In this context, elderly individuals in societies are seen as a dependent, passive and social burden. Sometimes even the discrimination on the basis of age has settled so deeply that this is naturalized by not being noticed (Pak, 2020: 365-366).

Strengthening allows individuals to exhibit their existing forces and to approach the problems critically by eliminating the sense of weakness they experience and enables them to reach the opportunity to defend their rights.More clearly, it is the approach that is based on the determination of individuals' self -determination (Erbay, 2019: 48). In terms of social work and application, strengthening is a paradigm rather than an application approach with unique knowledge and skill accumulation. It is also a perspective on the individual and his social world(Yıldırım, 2014: 4). In this respect, the study emphasized that the perception of weakness of the elderly is not independent of social life and therefore the need for social work strengthening against the perception of weakness of the elderly.

II. Conceptually weakness, power and strengthening

- ✓ **Weakness:** It is expressed as a feeling of influencing, controlling, guiding, or lacking its own interests that affect the social events that affect the individual's own life. (Budak, 2009: 331).
- ✓ **Power:** The ability of individuals to do anything independently is expressed as having opportunities and resources that can control and affect others(Barker, 1999: 225).Although different definitions are made in different sources related to the concept of power, the main reason for this concept is to prepare the basis for addressing the strengthening approach(Erbay, 2019: 45).
- ✓ **Strengthening:**It has been expressed as the process of having the power to do what people cannot do before, such as making choices and making decisions (Barnes ve Bowl, 2001: 21).In other words, the effectiveness, control and quality of life of individuals and communities in line with the social justice objectives, the participation of individuals and communities is considered as a process of social action(Pak, 2020: 358).

III. Strengthening approach/ perspective and social work

The perspective of forces developed by social work academics such as Dennis Salebey, Charles Rapp and Ann Weick emerged as a movement against a problem -based approach in social work practice(Teater, 2019: 83). Until 30-40 years ago, they focused on the dysfunction of the applicant, the definition of pathology and deficiencies. One of the reasons for the formation of this situation is the theory used to analyze the human behavior of Freudian psychology. As a matter of fact, the basic basis of Freudçu psychology is the medical model. Therefore, there are certain concepts to determine pathology.However, it lacks concepts that define power. Social work is based on the system model and focuses on identifying both weakness and strength. In this context, social workers include to analyze the difficulties of the applicant in their evaluations and include their power in the process (Zastrow, 2015: 20-21).

Strengthening with the Social Work dimension is a process in which applicants and social workers cooperate to cope with pressure and help to better meet the requirements of the Applicant, provide a great access to environmental resources (Teater, 2019: 83).The ultimate purpose in the strengthening approach interventions is to increase problem solving skills for the psychological goodness of the applicant, self -esteem, self -management and access to resources for their environment(Teater, 2019: 83).

Saleebey 2013(17-20)The basic assumptions and principles of the perspective of powers are as follows;

- ➢ Each individual has family, group and community forces.
- ➢ Disease, abuse, trauma and struggle may be injurious, but it can be both difficulty and opportunity.
- ➢ Care, interest and context.
- ➢ There are many sources in each frame.
- ➢ Providing the best service to applicants can only be provided by entering into cooperation with them.

➢ Assuming that the upper limit of the change and development capacity of individuals, groups and communities is unknown, their wishes must be taken seriously.

In line with these assumptions, according to Sheafor and Horejsi (2003: 416-418), some of the elements needed for social workers to apply successful strengthening are as follows;

▪ Social workers should know that strengthening can be used for applicants under any circumstances and environment.
▪ They should believe that if social workers work with individuals, they can change and realize the desired socio-political change.
▪ Social workers should help to improve the self -esteem and self -confidence of the applicant.
▪ Social workers should help to determine the factors that cause weakness in applicants.
▪ Social workers need to admit that the current situation and their lives can only be known by the applicants.
▪ Social workers should support the potential power supplies of applicants in order to determine and make decisions.
▪ Social workers should encourage them to learn systems and organizations to help the applicant.

Ultimately, the strengthening approach aims to be strong against oppressive policies and practices, to think critical, to confidence, to give self -confidence, and to gain characteristics such as being an advocate of their own rights. Thus, with the approach, it is to contribute to the formation of strong individuals in order to achieve individuals to stand on their feet(Erbay, 2019: 43).

IV.   The sociological dimension of aging and mystery elderly discrimination

The distances traveled by living and non-living beings in nature over time are expressed in different terms. While this situation is defined as wear and tear in inanimate objects, it is expressed as aging in the organism.In addition, in other organisms other than humans, this situation does not have any social meaning since it is more related to physiological and biological processes. However, aging in humans includes socio-cultural meanings as well as physiological changes(Duyar, 2008: 9).In this context, old age is expressed as a concept that has biological, sociological, psychological and chronological dimensions, as well as vital losses and collapses caused by economic, cultural and environmental reasons (Arpacı, 2005, 15).

Social aging, in other words, sociological old age, is the value given by the environment in which the individual lives to people of a certain age and the behaviors she expects from them(Arpacı, 2005: 20; Morgan and Kunkel, 2016: 5).In addition, it is the gradual loss of strength and ability in social affairs and working life. This situation results in not providing the necessary social harmony (Kalınkara, 2011: 9).

Rather than physical changes in old age, the elderly are seen in society as dependent people who are of no use to their minds, and this assigned role is imposed on the elderly(Akyıldız, 1999: 17).As a matter of fact, according to the theory of withdrawal from life, with the onset of the aging process, the individual passes from an active state to a passive state. However, sometimes older people are forced to retreat by the elderly society even though they do not want to withdraw (Durak, 2019: 212).

Changes that occur during old age; There are many problems such as stress, multi-dimensional losses, consecutive crises, widowhood, illness, retirement, decrease in physical strength, loss of sensation, changes in the body, decreasing social status, high risk of mental health. This situation turns into a significant problem in the integration of elderly individuals into society. However, these problems can be minimized through social integration. As a matter of fact, in healthy integrated societies, different categories and social groups complement each other in a way that does not disrupt the functioning unity in society(Arpacı, 2005: 21-22).

V.   Reasons for Age Discrimination as a Determinant of the Problematic Perception of Old Age as Weakness in the Modern Era

As a result of industrialization, migration from rural to urban areas increased, scientific knowledge weakened experience-based knowledge, and a social order was established in which education was provided in schools.Thus, the need for the experience of the elderly no longer exists, and the elderly individual, who holds power in the social order where agriculture is the determining factor in the economy, has lost this feature in the industrial society. Again, industrialization and the migration that occurred in connection with it changed the family system, leaving its place from the extended family to the nuclear family. Thus, elderly individuals who were excluded from migration were left with the feeling of abandonment(Abay, 2020: 202., Canatan, 2008: 40-41).

In the modern period, the fact that elderly people with low socio-economic status and low income are seen as consumers has become an important problem. This situation causes elderly individuals to feel weak and worthless (Mavili, 2020: 8). Designing the modern world with the tastes and standards of young people, as well as emphasizing the meaning, beauty, dynamism and productivity placed on sexuality, has caused the elderly to be ridiculed and discriminated against(İzzetbegoviç, 2009: 262; Baybora, 2019: 39-40).

Difficulties and inadequacies in the services provided to the elderly cause negative views of the elderly in society, such as gerontophobia, and what goes beyond gerontophobia is ageism (Karadakovan, 2014: 18).The phenomenon that people in the modern world fear most is death (Tan, 2015: 434).Therefore, the attitude and relationship towards death in elderly individuals are under social influence(Kalınkara, 2011: 324-325).

On the other hand, prejudice and discrimination against the elderly are another cause of stress for elderly individuals. Many people stereotype the elderly as weak, forgetful, confused, shaky, tired, and in need of treatment. It is thought that the effort to avoid aging and death is responsible for the formation of these prejudices(Koşar, 1996: 7).As a matter of fact, death, which is the last part of the life cycle, is generally associated with the elderly and viewed as if they have no hope (Arslan, 2013: 68-69; Baybora, 2019: 39-40).

VI.   Social Work-Focused Empowerment Intervention Requirements of the Elderly

Old age has turned social work into a natural field of study, as it is an academic discipline on the one hand, and professional work on the other(Abay, 2020: 207).Empowering social work practices, carried out at the individual or social level, help weakened individuals, groups and communities to gain the perception that problems related to their lives are caused by external influences such as prejudice, discrimination and exploitation(Tuncay ve Erbay, 2006: 66).

Elderly people, who are marginalized by society due to reasons such as lack of income, age-related stigma, and intergenerational tension, are subjected to negative discrimination and devalued (Dönümcü, 2006: 43; Phelan, 2008: 320). Prejudicial attitudes and behaviors towards the elderly become stereotypes over time. These stereotypes are internalized by older individuals after a certain period of time. This situation negatively affects various health functions as well as loss of self-confidence in the elderly(Nelson, 2005: 212; Palmore, 2015: 873).

The weakness of elderly individuals is considered natural and for this reason, their strengthening is neglected. In this context, the main starting point of the disempowerment of older individuals is associated with ageism(Pak, 2020: 376).For this reason, one of the main goals of social workers in their work towards the elderly is to pioneer policies regarding ageism(Zafer, 2023: 45).The first channel through which social workers can reach weak and weak elderly individuals is to empower them through roles such as advocacy, mediation in accessing various services, counseling and teaching. In empowerment-oriented social work practice, unlike the traditional social work approach, it includes processes such as raising awareness about rights, opportunities, internal and environmental resources, and the internalization of powerlessness and oppression created by society, rather than deficiencies and inadequacies(Pak, 2020: 377).

Elderly individuals have relationships with relatives, neighbors, etc. in the modern period. The gradual decrease in relations makes the provision of corporate services essential. In this context, it is undeniable that social workers are stakeholders in meeting the needs of elderly individuals both institutionally and privately. In addition, it should not be forgotten that using the strengths perspective in the evaluations of elderly individuals will provide significant advantages in making social workers theoretically competent.

VII.   Conclusion

As the last stage of human development, old age is the stage in which people are most vulnerable biologically, psychologically and sociologically. At the same time, this is the period when older individuals need their social environment the most. However, the socially constructed perception of old age stands as an important setback to both these needs and the expectations of older individuals. While the meaning attributed to old age, especially in the modern period, often causes ageism, it also causes the formation of latent ageism. And over time, this situation results in being perceived as a natural situation by both the elderly and the society. This situation results in the emergence of many physical and psychological problems for elderly individuals.

As stated in the literature, it is obvious that old age cannot remain indifferent to this situation since it is the natural field of social work. Due to the subject of social work, all kinds of discrimination are seen as problems that must be overcome in themselves. In addition, both ageism and discrimination require intersectionally multifaceted intervention in terms of social work.

In this context, it is inevitable for social workers to benefit from theories and approaches while practicing. The strengths perspective/approach has an important place in social work discipline and professional practice. For this reason, the strengths approach is important in social work practice to empower older individuals. The theoretical background provided by the strengths approach can be an important reference point, especially in creating awareness about the internalization of the image/perception of powerlessness and pressure on the elderly by society.

On the other hand, from the perspective of social workers, the forces that apply to elderly individuals in modern industrial societies; It offers institutional opportunities such as consultancy, advocacy, connection and tutoring. In this regard, it is necessary to improve self-esteem and self-confidence in elderly individuals, identify potential power sources, and identify factors that cause weakness. First of all, it is extremely important to make interventions in line with the strengths perspective in order to help older individuals learn about systems and organizations that can help them.

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