

TITLE:**EVALUATION OF INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR THE ELDERLY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA IN CRISIS CONDITIONS RELATED TO THE COVID – 19 PANDEMICS****AUTHORS:**

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ABSTRACT:

An important field in public administration science is a study of complex problems which arise from the praxis. In the last year and a half, we have all been involved and affected by covid – 19 pandemics and its consequences on our life and work. In specific, the field of public service, institutional care for the elderly, which, in Slovenia, is organized as a net of services provided by the state. We are interested in how the organization of work in crisis conditions was handled despite different limitations and obstacles. Through a sociological outline of the risk society, which we live in, we will present the prevalence of the state of emergency and define it through a philosophical-historical perspective. Emergencies are rarely declared and are expected to last as short as possible. However, they are always associated with restrictions of freedom and rights of the most vulnerable groups in particular. Overview of the research work done on our topics shows, that there are four main groups of research work related to the topics. The topics in question are research work on the field related to the covid – 19 pandemics and the elderly, research work done on the field of institutional care for elderly, research of organization of work in crisis conditions in the public sector and research of operation of public services in crisis conditions. With our investigation we would like to examine how and in which way it is possible to improve the preparedness of performers of institutional care for the elderly for further crisis conditions which will arise in future. We will touch upon crisis management protocols, crisis preparedness, crisis staffing plans and crisis communication plans. Our main research question is in what way and with what results did actors of institutional care for elderly in Slovenia organize their work in crisis conditions related to the covid – 19 pandemics and what the opportunities for improvement are. Research questions in our investigations are: To what extent were actors of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia prepared for the crisis conditions related to the covid – 19 pandemics? As the research method we will use the analysis of legal and institutional support. What do Slovenian results say in comparison to other EU countries. Where are the biggest deviations, what was organized better and what less than average? We will use the analysis of secondary data and the comparison analysis method. How is the organization of work in crisis conditions evaluated by employees in institutional care for the elderly? Is assessment different among different work groups? Where do employees see the shortcomings and mistakes? We will perform a survey among employees in all Slovenian institutional care for the elderly providers and later for conformation or explanation of results, we will also perform the qualitative survey on two focus groups, with representatives of management teams and representatives of other work groups. What kind of guidelines and recommendations in regards to previous research questions, can we provide in order to optimally organize the implementation of institutional care for the elderly for a future crisis? We will propose a model of evaluation of institutional care in crisis conditions. The dissertation will also contribute to the better understanding of differences in the results of the organization of work in the institutional care for the elderly in crisis situations related to the covid-19 pandemic in Slovenia and globally. In praxis the dissertation will contribute to better planning and implementation of the organization of work in crisis situations in institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia.

POINTS FOR PRACTITONERS

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We believe that the dissertation will provide lots of useful contribution for the practitioners, since it arose from wicked and complex problems related to the covid -19 in praxis. The dissertation will contribute to a better planning and implementation of the organization of work in crisis situations in institutional care for the elderly and other groups in Slovenia and in the wider area. Research of legal and institutional support will reveal stronger and weaker points in institutional support given to the practitioners in public service. The performed analysis will be useful for planning further intuitional response in similar crisis conditions. The needed legal support for more efficient work of public service will be presented as well. With the analysis of secondary data and comparison analysis method we will point out where the biggest deviations in organization of work in public service of institutional care for elderly in Slovenia are, what was organized better in Slovenia and what less than average compared to other European countries. We will perform a survey among employees in all Slovenian institutional care for elderly providers (102) and will present how the organization of work in crisis conditions is evaluated by employees in different work groups and which shortcomings and mistakes are exposed. For conformation and explanation of results we will perform two focus groups, first one with representatives of management teams and the second one with representatives of other work groups. From this survey we expect valuable evaluation data for preparation of guidelines and recommendations in order to provide and optimally organize the implementation of institutional care for the elderly in future crises conditions. As result of our research work a model of evaluation of institutional care in crisis conditions will be proposed.

KEY WORDS

covid -19, crisis conditions, elderly, institutional care, organization of work

INTRODUCTION

Scientific field of the doctoral dissertation

The topic of the doctoral dissertation is comprised out of a wide field of social sciences, area 5 of the broader classification Frascati, (ARRS, 2016; OECD, 2015), which also includes administrative and organizational sciences (5.04), which are discussed in depth in the dissertation. In the dissertation, which is highly interdisciplinary, we will additionally include sociology (5.03) and economics (5.02.01) as well as philosophy, which belong to the humanities, field 6.10 of Frascati classifications. Interdisciplinarity is inevitable in the study of contemporary topics addressed by administrative science, especially when it comes to exploring more complex problems, where we also expect solutions that can influence to the improvement of practice (Raadschelders, 2011). Modern administrative science, by connecting different sciences, this creates synergy effects that go beyond the contributions of individual scientific disciplines and in this way directs its view towards the future, towards development (Kovač, 2013). The interdisciplinarity of the dissertation will also be evident from the use of different epistemological approaches to research in administrative science such as interpretivism, post positivism and post modernism (Ricucci, 2010a; Ricucci, 2010b), which will dictate the use of different research methods.

Overview of narrower scientific field, description of the content and presentation of research problem

An important subject of study of administrative science is public administration, which also includes the management and organization of work in the public service (Koprić, 2014). Institutional care for the elderly is classified as a public service, which is usually provided by public and private institutions with an acquired concession, and to a small extent, on the basis of a work permit, by private individuals Skupnost socialnih zavodov Slovenije - SSZS, obtained from <http://www.sszs-slo.si/wp-content/uploads/Register-kapacitet-1.1.2021-1-1.pdf>). Institutional care for the elderly in the Republic of Slovenia has developed within the social care subsystem, which is primarily regulated by the Social Assistance Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 3/07 - official consolidated text, 23/07 - amended, 41/07 - amended, 61/10 - ZSVarPre, 62/10 - ZUPJS, 57/12, 39/16, 52/16 - ZPPreb-1, 15/17 - DZ, 29/17, 54/17, 21/18 - ZNOrg, 31/18 - ZOA-A, 28/19 and 189/20 - ZFRO) and its statutory instruments. The field is also regulated by the Health Services Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 23/05,15/08 - ZPacP, 23/08, 58/08 - ZZdrS-E, 77/08 - ZDZdr, 40/12 - ZUJF, 14/13, 88/16 - ZdZPZD, 64/17, 1/19 - odl. US, 73/19, 82/20, 152/20 - ZZUOOP and 203/20 - ZIUPOPdVE), namely in the part which refers to health care, nursing care and rehabilitation of residents. The field of long-term care, which in most EU countries

likewise covers the institutional care for the elderly (Spasova et al., 2018; European Commission, 2017), is still developing in Slovenia.

One of the elements of the public service is that the service is available to residents without interruption (Rakar and Tičar, 2019). Due to their purpose, some public services operate continuously all days of the year, day-and-night, even in times of crisis. That includes institutional care for the elderly, as the function of these institutions is to replace the home environment and family. However, the public service must be properly organized and supported to function under all conditions. In the dissertation we use the concept of pandemic, because a pandemic, unlike an epidemic, is characterized by the prevalence of infectious disease geographically beyond a particular region, country or area (Morens, Folkers & Fauci, 2009; Qiu, Rutherford, Mao, & Chu, 2017). A partial insight into the functioning of public administration in Slovenia during the first wave of the covid-19 pandemic in 2020 was provided by research (Aristovnik, Kovač, Ravšelj, Tomažević & Umek, 2020), which will serve as an example of domestic scientific research in the field of administrative science. The responses of EU Member States to the crisis related to the covid-19 pandemic in the field of public governance are also monitored by SIGMA (SIGMA, 2020). In the dissertation, we will focus on the organization of work in crisis situations in the public sector especially the provision of public service in the field of institutional care for the elderly. Crisis situations caused by rare or exceptional events, such as pandemics (Pollitt, 2016), provide organizations with an opportunity for organizational learning and improvement no matter how likely it is to repeat (Lampel, Shamsie, & Shapira, 2009). In the dissertation, we will look for opportunities to improve crisis preparedness related to the pandemic in institutional care for the elderly. We will also address the staff shortage in institutions that provide institutional care for the elderly, which significantly affects the preparedness of institutions for disasters (Pierce et al., 2017), which was also researched in the current pandemic (Xu, Intrator & Bowlblis, 2020; Giri, Chenn & Romero-Ortuno, 2021).

Through a sociological outline of the risk society in which we live (Beck, 2009; Raupp, 2018), we will present the prevalence of the state of emergency and, through a philosophical-historical perspective, define emergencies. Emergencies are rarely declared and are expected to last as short as possible. However, they are always associated with restrictions on the freedoms and rights of the most vulnerable groups in particular (Benjamin, 2002; Dolar, 2003; Agamben, 2004; Agamben, 2013; White, 2015; Fraenkel, 2020). In the dissertation we are interested in free data sources on imposed measures and instructions given by the Slovenian Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Health, the National Institute of Public Health and the Nurses and Midwives Association of Slovenia, related to exceptional or crisis situations in the case of the covid - 19 pandemic in Slovenia, which affect the provision of services within the institutional care for the elderly and also the organization of work in respective organizations.

In the dissertation we will evaluate the implementation of institutional care for the elderly in the Republic of Slovenia in crisis situations in the case of the covid - 19 pandemic. The research will include all providers of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia. We will, similarly to the existing periodical evaluation of the general preparedness for known crisis situations, such as fire or earthquake, investigate readiness to organize work in crisis in the event of a covid-19 pandemic.

In the dissertation, we will use mixed research methods (Kogovšek, 2005; Vrbnjak & Pajnikihar, 2015) to evaluate the implementation of institutional care for the elderly in the Republic of Slovenia in crisis situations in the case of the covid - 19 pandemic conditions. In doing so, we will understand efficiency, as the use of all given resources to perform agreed services (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 2013). We will invite all providers of institutional care for the elderly in the Republic of Slovenia to participate in the research on the organization of work in crisis situations in the case of the covid-19 pandemic.

Presentation of previously conducted research work in a broader field of the topic

A review of the scientific literature on the topic of the covid - 19 pandemic in a broad scientific field shows that due to the emergence of a new research area, we are witnessing expansion, especially freely available scientific articles (Piccarozzi, Silvestri & Morganti, 2021; Porter & Hook, 2020) and various research projects and challenges also in the field of administrative science (Dunlop, Ongaro, & Baker, 2020). The bibliometric analysis of all scientific publications in the first half of the pandemic shows that only 8.3% of papers were published in the field of social sciences and humanities, from which we can conclude the need for further research related to the covid - 19 pandemic in the field of social sciences (Aristovnik, Ravšelj & Umek, 2020; Hočevnar, 2020). In the field of the covid - 19 pandemic, there is relatively little research in the wider target group of the elderly outside

of medical science. According to the publication date, the authors of the Lancet (Armitage & Nellums 2020) were the first to warn of the consequences of the isolation of the elderly in connection with the covid - 19 pandemic. Also, the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of South Africa and the Italian Embassy in the Republic of South Africa pointed out the rising problem of the elderly (Academy of Science of South Africa, 2020). The difficult situation in nursing institutions (Behrens & Naylor, 2020) and their response to crisis situations (Liang & Xu, 2021) were additionally investigated. In Slovenia, a support social network used by older adults over the age of 64 living in the home environment in the first wave of the covid - 19 pandemic was explored. Most of the elderly had sufficient support, but it turned out that the elderly are also a particularly vulnerable group in terms of support, which would need more attention in crisis situations (Cugmas, Ferligoj, Kogovšek, & Batagelj, 2021; Kanduč, 2021). In Japan, again in the first wave of the epidemic, the physical activity of older women was observed. Observation was made during the declared state of emergency, as the importance of physical activities in the country was promoted. Physical activity of elderly women depended on the distance of their residence to larger parks, where they could move away from people and get their daily exercise (Hino & Asami, 2021). The fact that there was a significant decrease in physical activity during the covid - 19 pandemic only in the group of older women confirms, that within the group of the elderly, the group of older women is particularly vulnerable (Rener, 1997). The fact that physical activity of the elderly decreased during the state of emergency in Japan, was also found by monitoring risk factors related to quality of life (Suzuki, Maeda, Hirado, Shirakawa & Urabe, 2020).

Research covering the broader field of work organization in crisis situations in the public sector focuses on organizational resilience (Lloyd-Smith, 2020; Barasa, Mbau & Gilson, 2018; Boin & t Hart, 2010; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008) as well as in the more specific cases, such as the organization of crisis management in public administration in countries with economies in transition (Korolchuk, Perestyuk, Zaporozhets, Vasiuk, & Kulhinskyi, 2020). In the field of crisis management, the risk in the field of public sector financing (Tworek, 2016) and the financial crisis are also highlighted as a crisis circumstance (Peters & Pierre, 2010; Peters, Pierre & Randma-Liiv, 2011). For us, the aspect of effective management in public administration is also important (Stare, 2006) as well as the aspect of crisis situation through the perception of the legal system. The crisis situation in the case of the covid-19 pandemic is sometimes connected with the threats to the rule of law (Bastos & De Ruijter, 2019). also (Aristovnik, Kovač, Ravšelj, Tomažević & Umek, 2020). At EU level, countries are already connecting in the field of health crisis and natural disaster management, but this cooperation also needs to be formally regulated at EU level and, above all, modernized and upgraded (Flear & De Ruijter, 2019; Parker, Persson & Widmalm, 2019).

Due to the nature of their work, public services established for the purpose of providing assistance in the event of other natural disasters are particularly well prepared for work in crisis situations (firefighters, the protection and rescue service). These organizations face complex problems that have multiple causes and even more complex wicked problems, where it is difficult to distinguish causes from symptoms. For them, the link between evaluation results and regular training is particularly important (Owen, Brooks, Curnin & Bearman, 2018). Sample protocols for various crisis situations, which are regularly evaluated, were also developed by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency FEMA (Sadiq, Tharp, & Graham, 2016; Nick et al., 2009). In the field of earthquake relief, international links have been established for the cooperation of search and rescue teams. These teams must be classified for participation and, as a rule, a standardized process of improvement and learning is included in the missions in which they participate (Okita, Shaw, & Minato, 2020). Researchers from China (Yang, 2020) point out the importance of the past experience with the SARS pandemic in 2003, after which a crisis management system was established. In Taiwan equally decisive and thoughtful measures were taken in the first wave. As a result, they have managed to stop the spread of the virus, which raged only 200 km from the country (Huang, 2020).

Research in the field of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia is mostly focused on the field of social work. It focuses on deinstitutionalization and normalization in the care of the elderly with a clear demand for comprehensive care for residents. Researchers most often see a solution in individual planning that addresses personal characteristics and wishes of future residents and their relatives (Mali, 2008; Flaker & Ramon, 2016; Mali & Kejžar, 2017; Mali, 2019; Mali & Grebenc, 2019; Mali & Kejžar, 2019). Researchers of institutional care for the elderly in the field of nursing also focus on the needs of users of institutional care services (Zaletel, Levec, Zajec & Kragelj 2011) and on the experience of relatives and nursing staff (Habjanič, 2011). Through comparisons of the regulation of care for the elderly in EU countries and elsewhere in the world (Riedel, Kraus & Mayer, 2016; OECD / European Commission, 2013; Castle, 2009) and through a review of capacities with descriptions of trends, we can conclude that, in addition to clear requirements for the constant modernization of user-oriented services,

modern long-term care of the elderly focuses on finding alternatives to existing institutional care. Alternatives represent prolonged time of care at home by including the necessary adjustments in the home environment and community forms of care of the elderly (Mali & Štambuk, 2019; You, Dunt & Doyle, 2013; Laklija, Rusac, & Žganec, 2008; Leskovic, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

Research design and research methods

We will use mixed research methods that are suitable for researching such a complex and interdisciplinary topic (Kogovšek, 2005; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Vrbnjak & Pajnikihar, 2015). We will begin with an analysis of existing materials by reviewing the relevant literature with bibliometric analysis. A detailed explanatory research plan will be made to test the research questions and hypothesis. We will use a qualitative method of analysis for the analysis of freely available data issued instructions to providers of institutional care (Vezovnik, 2008; Vezovnik, 2009). The results of the qualitative analysis of the received instructions and current legislation, as well as the findings gained from the bibliometric analysis, will serve as a basis for the preparation of a test questionnaire, which will contain several content sets. In order to ensure the quality of research, we will pay special attention to reliability and validity in the quantitative and qualitative approach (Kogovšek, 2005). In the survey we will use closed questions and Likert's scale, and some open questions for socio-demographic data of respondents such as: gender, age, years of employment in the field of institutional care for the elderly, employment and achieved direction and level of education, municipality where the institution is located. The reliability of the instrument will first be tested on small samples of representatives of the management team and other employees in the care and nursing of the elderly.

The survey questionnaire will be prepared using the online tool Ika. All providers of institutional care in Slovenia will receive a request to participate in the survey. Due to the current importance of the discussed topic, we expect at least 20% responsiveness. We will invite employees in the field of institutional care for the elderly to participate in the survey with the help of the directors and heads of the nursing services and the trade union. Due to the explanatory function, the results of the survey analysis will be additionally checked in two focus groups, with members of the management team and with other employees. By analysing free/open data sources collected by European institutions such as ECDC (Gmehlin & Munoz-Price, 2020), SIGMA (SIGMA, 2020), OECD and other institutions, we will examine selected indicators in the field of institutional care for the elderly in the EU in crisis situations connected with covid pandemic - 19.

Presentation of research questions

The main research question that will guide us is: In what ways and with what results did the providers of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia organize their work in crisis conditions related to the covid - 19 pandemic, and what are the possibilities for improvement?

First research question: To what extent were the providers of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia prepared for the crisis situation related to the covid-19 pandemic?

Method: research of legal and institutional support by analysing free data sources, issued instructions and the legal basis for providers of institutional care for the elderly in Slovenia.

Second research question: What are the Slovenian results of the organization of work in the field of institutional care for the elderly compared to other EU countries? What were the biggest discrepancies, what was organized better and what was worse?

Method: analysis of secondary data, comparative analysis.

Third research question: How do employees in the field of institutional care for the elderly assess the organization of work in crisis situations? Do work organization assessments differ between employees in different jobs? Where do employees see the biggest flaws and mistakes?

Methods: survey, focus groups.

The first hypothesis: The organization of work in crisis situations in the field of institutional care for the elderly depends on:

- received institutional, legal and material support to providers of services;
- demonstrated organizational skills of the management team;

- levels of readiness of employees to accept additional work and tasks.

Fourth research question: Based on the answers to previous research questions, what guidelines and recommendations should be formulated for the optimal organization of the implementation of institutional care for the elderly for future crisis situations?

Method: Synthesis and design of a model for testing pandemic crisis preparedness.

CONCLUSION

An aging society and the growing need for long-term care services for the elderly represents an important challenge for Slovenia and the European Union (European Commission, 2021). With our research on the implementation of institutional care for the elderly in crisis situations in Slovenia, we will contribute a new understanding of the importance of care for the elderly in crisis situations and contribute to the development of a socially relevant field. Because the crisis situation related to the covid - 19 pandemic is still ongoing and because it is a global phenomenon, research is relevant in Slovenia and abroad. The international relevance of the doctoral dissertation will also be achieved through a thorough review of scientific research in the field using bibliometric analysis and the analysis of selected indicators from publicly available data in the field of institutional care for the elderly in the EU during the covid - 19 pandemic. The dissertation will propose a model for readiness assessment in crisis situations in the institutional care of the elderly, which can additionally be used in other areas of institutional care.

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