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FEATURES OF THE ACTIVITIES OF SOCIAL SERVICES SPECIALISTS IN UKRAINE UNDER MODERN CHALLENGES

У статті висвітлюються особливості роботи соціальних працівників у сучасних нестабільних і критичних умовах. Згідно з отриманими даними, соціальні служби в даний час безпосередньо залучені до практичного застосування соціальної роботи та надання соціальних послуг різним особам, які зіткнулися зі складними життєвими обставинами або є членами груп, що мають високий ризик їх пережити. Основна увага приділяється векторам розвитку соціальних служб в умовах військового стану, які включають надання високоякісної соціально-психологічної та інших видів допомоги, своєчасне, професійне та цілеспрямоване реагування на запити громадян, а також підтримання етично збалансованого та плідного спілкування з клієнтами, їхніми законними представниками та громадою. Слід зазначити, що Україна розробила і наразі використовує систему соціальних послуг державної, муніципальної та недержавної форм власності та спеціальних служб, яка дозволяє надавати необхідні послуги більшій кількості отримувачів, які страждають від негативних наслідків поточної ситуації. Зазначається, що мережева організація діяльності соціальних служб різних форм власності та підпорядкування покращила доступність соціальних послуг та соціальної допомоги за місцем проживання або фактичного перебування різних категорій осіб та сімей, які опинилися у складних життєвих обставинах. Зазначається, що соціальні послуги надаються відповідно до державних стандартів, які встановлюють параметри моніторингу та оцінки якості наданих соціальних послуг, а також рамки професійної співпраці між надавачами соціальних послуг та їх отримувачами. Підкреслюється, що вибір стратегій соціальної роботи в нинішніх нестабільних і критичних умовах та ефективне надання соціальних послуг вимагають висококваліфікованих фахівців і застосування науково обґрунтованих та ефективних методів соціальної роботи, щоб надати належну підтримку людям, які опинилися в складних життєвих ситуаціях, активізувати їхні соціальні та особисті ресурси та інтегрувати їх у суспільство. Доведено, що сьогодні соціальні працівники стикаються з широким спектром складних проблем, які вимагають не тільки їх професійних знань, а й працездатності, енергійності, емоційної врівноваженості, а також здатності до самоконтролю та самоаналізу. Успіх взаємодії з отримувачами послуг визначається особистими та професійними якостями соціальних працівників, які враховують індивідуальні потреби та особливості кожної людини. Соціальні працівники, які демонструють високий рівень професіоналізму та самоорганізації, краще здатні запобігати негативним наслідкам кризових ситуацій. Було встановлено, що однією з найважливіших передумов ефективного функціонування соціальних послуг у сучасну епоху є забезпечення високоякісної діагностики, яка допомагає визначити першопричини проблем клієнтів, оцінити їхні поточні обставини, оцінити наслідки складних життєвих обставин та визначити ресурси, які допоможуть їм подолати ці виклики. Окрім клієнтів та отримувачів соціальних послуг, соціальні працівники, менеджери, партнерські організації, науковці та суспільство в цілому можуть отримати користь від цієї технології соціальної роботи, за умови проведення високоякісної діагностики та оцінки потреб.

Ключові слова: виклики сьогодення, критичні ситуації, підвищення ефективності роботи фахівців соціальних служб, соціальні послуги, соціальні служби, умови нестабільності, соціальна робота в кризових ситуаціях.

The article outlines the characteristics of social workers' work in today's unstable and critical environments. According to the findings, social services are currently directly involved in the practical application of social work and the provision of social services to a variety of individuals who have encountered challenging life circumstances or who are members of groups that are at a high risk of

experiencing them. The focus is on the social services' direction vectors under military conditions, which include providing high-quality socio-psychological and other forms of assistance, responding to citizens' requests in a timely, professional, and targeted manner, and maintaining ethically balanced and fruitful communication with clients, their legal representatives, and the community. It should be mentioned that Ukraine has developed and is currently operating a system of social services of state, municipal, and non-state forms of ownership and special services that enables the process of delivering requested services to a greater number of recipients from among those who are suffering from the negative effects of the current situation. It is stated that the network organisation of social service activities of different ownership and subordination forms has improved the accessibility of social services and social assistance at the place of residence or actual stay of different categories of people and families who have encountered challenging life circumstances. It is stated that social services are rendered in compliance with state standards that establish the parameters for monitoring and evaluating the calibre of social services rendered as well as the framework of professional collaboration between social service providers and recipients. It is emphasised that social services' selection of social work strategies in the current unstable and critical conditions and the efficient delivery of social services necessitate highly qualified professionals and the application of social work techniques that are both scientifically sound and effective in order to provide appropriate support for people in challenging life situations, activate their social and personal resources, and integrate them into the community. It has been shown that social workers nowadays encounter a wide range of difficult problems that call for not only their professional expertise but also their capacity for work, drive, emotional equilibrium, and the capacity for self-control and introspection. The success of interactions with service receivers is determined by the personal and professional attributes of social service providers, taking into consideration each person's unique needs and traits. Social workers who exhibit a high degree of professionalism and self-organization are better able to prevent the negative effects of crisis circumstances. It has been found that one of the most important prerequisites for social services to function effectively in the modern era is the provision of high-quality diagnostics, which aid in determining the root causes of clients' issues, evaluating their current circumstances, assessing the effects of challenging life circumstances, and identifying resources to help them get through these challenges. In addition to clients and recipients of social services, social workers, managers, partner organisations, scientists, and the society at large can all benefit from this technology of social work as long as high-quality diagnostics and needs assessments are conducted.

Keywords: challenges of the present day, critical situations, increasing the efficiency of social service professionals, social services, social services, conditions of instability, social work in crisis situations.

Introduction. The procedures of developing and executing social policies as well as designing Ukraine's social protection system are impacted by contemporary living changes and difficulties. The activities of social services, among other areas of social assistance for the Ukrainian populace, underwent modifications throughout the war [1, p. 8; 2, p. 90]. In times of contemporary instability, social service operations necessitate utmost focus, greater adaptability and flexibility, improved coordination with other structures, active participation, and utilisation of the community's potential. In Ukraine, practical social work is focused, offers socio-psychological support, and offers a range of aid to anyone who has asked for assistance. In challenging situations, social services can offer highly skilled and timely support [5, p. 4]. The current focus in the professional direction of social services is on preventing the potential negative impact of an uncertain situation on citizens' quality of life; actively informing the public about social services that are available, their rights, and how to get socio-psychological assistance in emergency situations; promptly diagnosing and responding to changes in the urgent needs of different population and societal categories; developing adaptable algorithms of interaction and forming close partnerships with other public, state, and international organisations to strengthen the comprehensive nature of providing socio-psychological assistance; utilising the potential of remote social work techniques and online platforms to improve the accessibility and continuity of social service delivery; guaranteeing social workers' professional growth for disaster scenarios.

As a result, we think it is appropriate for this publication's structure to highlight and describe the characteristics of social care professionals' work in Ukraine during this time of contemporary instability.

Theoretical foundations of research. In Ukraine, social services are provided by non-governmental groups, state and local authorities, and individuals in challenging situations. Since the Ukrainian state gained its independence, social services have taken on a major role in carrying out social policy in practice, providing social services to different segments of the population, and especially helping citizens who have encountered challenging situations in their lives [10, p. 149].

The Constitution of Ukraine (1996), the laws of Ukraine "On bodies and services for children and special institutions for children" (1995), "On state social standards and state social guarantees" (2000), "On social services" (2019), "On social work with families, children, and youth" (2001), "On childhood protection" (2001), and other laws govern the activities of social services in Ukraine in the modern era. The European Charter of Fundamental Social Rights (revised) (1996), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (European Convention on Human Rights) (1950), and other international agreements serve as the foundation for social services operations in Ukraine today. Given the main tenets of national and international law, among other topics, the primary responsibilities of social services today are to provide social guarantees to citizens in line with the main tenets of state social policy, conduct practical social work, provide social services to different groups of people who have encountered challenging situations in their lives, etc.

Domestic scientists have defined social services and their system in Ukraine as follows:

- a collection of interrelated and interacting entities that, in the "morphological dimension, create an original structure that, during its functioning, directs its energy to achieve a common goal – the creation and reproduction of the essential human forces" [11, p. 7];
- a collection of administrative bodies, structures, and specialised institutions, both state and non-state, that perform social work to serve the populace and provide social assistance and services in order to overcome or mitigate a difficult situation [11, p. 11];
- all entities that provide social services (enterprises, institutions, organisations, and institutions regardless of the form of ownership and management, as well as individual entrepreneurs who provide social services) [4, p. 5], etc.

Let's outline the salient features of social services that, given the focus of our book, dictate the aims, objectives, paths, and kinds of actions of their professionals in contemporary times. First off, according to the way they operate, social services are an organisational type of social work. Their professionals work practically with different groups of people, offering social, psychological (including diagnostic) and other services, as well as information, legal, and consulting. They also attend to the skill development of all staff members. Second, social services operate in a professional manner, which is guaranteed by the degree of education attained by their staff members and their ongoing development of competence, taking into consideration constituent documents, state standards for social service delivery, etc. Thirdly, social service activities are dictated by their mission in light of the clientele they serve and the founder's policy (e.g., individuals with disabilities; military personnel and their families; victims of human trafficking or violence; the elderly; internally displaced persons; children left without care; etc.). Fourth, a system of social services has been established and is in operation in Ukraine. It combines state, municipal, and non-state social services, as well as special institutions and establishments that are either under the control of social services or with which pertinent cooperation agreements have been signed. This enables the provision of services that are requested by a greater number of recipients and covers social attention. Fifth, guidelines have been established for the network operation of social services in situations of territorial location or departmental subordination, which improves accessibility to social services and help at the residence. Sixthly, a differentiated system of financing social services has been built at the expense of state and local budgets, special funds and projects (including foreign ones), funds of sponsors and charitable assistance, payment of the cost of services by their recipients and other sources not prohibited by current legislation.

Thus, social services – that is, deliberate, planned, and structured actions by authorised social service specialists aimed at preventing difficult life circumstances, overcoming such circumstances or minimising their negative consequences for individuals/families, and implementing attempts to prevent those who belong to vulnerable groups from falling into such circumstances – are the primary means of implementing social work in Ukraine, as was previously mentioned. The quality of life, health, and personal growth prospects, as well as the family's ability to function, are all adversely affected by challenging living situations. Furthermore, one cannot overcome such challenging life conditions on one's own [7]. State standards that establish the principles of organisation, planning, principles, content, grounds, and termination of provision, the criteria and procedure for providers to evaluate the needs of the service recipient, information on the required resources, personnel, methodological support, the procedure for subject interaction, etc., are followed when providing social services.

The following factors influence the social services' choice of strategies in the face of contemporary uncertainty: an awareness of the core principles, values, and essence of social work for the potential to achieve positive dynamics in an individual's, group's, or community's life; a focus on using innovative theories and models to improve the potential for development and well-being of recipients; the necessity of considering the interests, capabilities, and other individual characteristics of clients in order to rely on their

resources as well as those of the immediate environment and the community; the necessity of stepping up the recipient's efforts to improve resilience, independence, and community integration, etc.; orientation towards enhancing the accountability and capacity of recipients to make significant decisions regarding not only their own lives but also their participation in group decision-making and action to enhance community well-being; dependence on the application of social work technologies that are grounded in science and have demonstrated efficacy of the techniques employed.

It's also important to note that the principles of humanity and tolerance, confidentiality, targeting and ensuring an individual approach, legality, accessibility, and openness, social justice, voluntary choice to receive or refuse social services (or a portion of them), comprehensiveness, maximum efficiency of budget funds by providers, compliance with quality standards for the provision of social services, responsibility for adhering to ethical norms, teamwork to achieve efficiency and high quality of services provided, etc., are the foundation upon which social service specialists perform their professional activities in a variety of fields and types of work in today's environment. Respect for the dignity of citizens, prioritising the interests of each individual, tolerance, trust and interaction in the process of solving client problems, accessibility of services, and other principles are clearly defined as priority principles in the approved "Code of Ethics for Social Work Specialists in Ukraine" that takes into account international ethical principles and standards of social work [6].

As part of social work, communication guarantees that professionals engage with clients and plans their collaboration based on humanistic principles, individuality, compassion, tolerance, and mercy, among other things. In addition to a high degree of professional skill and culture, social services professionals today must also possess the ability to work, motivation, emotional balance, self-control, self-regulation, and self-reflection. This is because the professional challenges they face are diverse and complex. Social service professionals' personal and professional attributes guarantee that interactions with social service recipients are effectively differentiated, taking into consideration their social, psychological, and physiological characteristics; their need for social services; and complex life circumstances that disrupt vital activity and lower quality of life. Persistent indications of the damaging experience of crisis states are prevented by the high degree of professionalism, mobilisation, and self-organization of social service professionals [8, p. 21]. In fact, in this regard, social workers' mental health and a high enough degree of their professional self-efficacy will also help to protect clients' rights, liberties, and legitimate interests in a variety of challenging life circumstances that Ukrainians are currently dealing with during the war [9, p. 6-7]. We are discussing effective professional support for different types of clients in accomplishing life goals, overcoming obstacles, and enhancing an individual's overall social functioning. We concur that social services are social institutions that can effectively work with the client to design a new functional system that will give him access to new resources, improve his capacity for adaptation, improve his relationships with other formal and informal social systems, and create new social support networks that may contribute to social advancement [1, p. 74].

The communication method that social care providers use with different types of customers is impacted by the difficulties of the times. No matter who they work with – a community, a group, or an individual – social service providers are constantly engaged in a particular living circumstance, attempting to comprehend it and, based on that understanding, devising solutions [3, p. 21]. In actuality, social work falls under the category of "helping" professions, which are characterised by the close daily interactions that social workers have with clients, social service recipients, and in some cases, their friends, neighbours, and family members in order to fully understand life's realities and risks. In order to maintain a high level of professional attention, empathy, understanding, and correctness in contact with clients and colleagues while performing various functions, social service professionals must develop certain personally and professionally significant qualities. These qualities include an understanding of the objective circumstances and challenges of the time, as well as the complexity of the psycho-emotional states of people who are in difficult life and crisis situations [1, p. 126].

The analysis of scientific and other sources allows us to summarize some features of the activities of social services in modern unstable and crisis conditions and present them in Fig. 1.

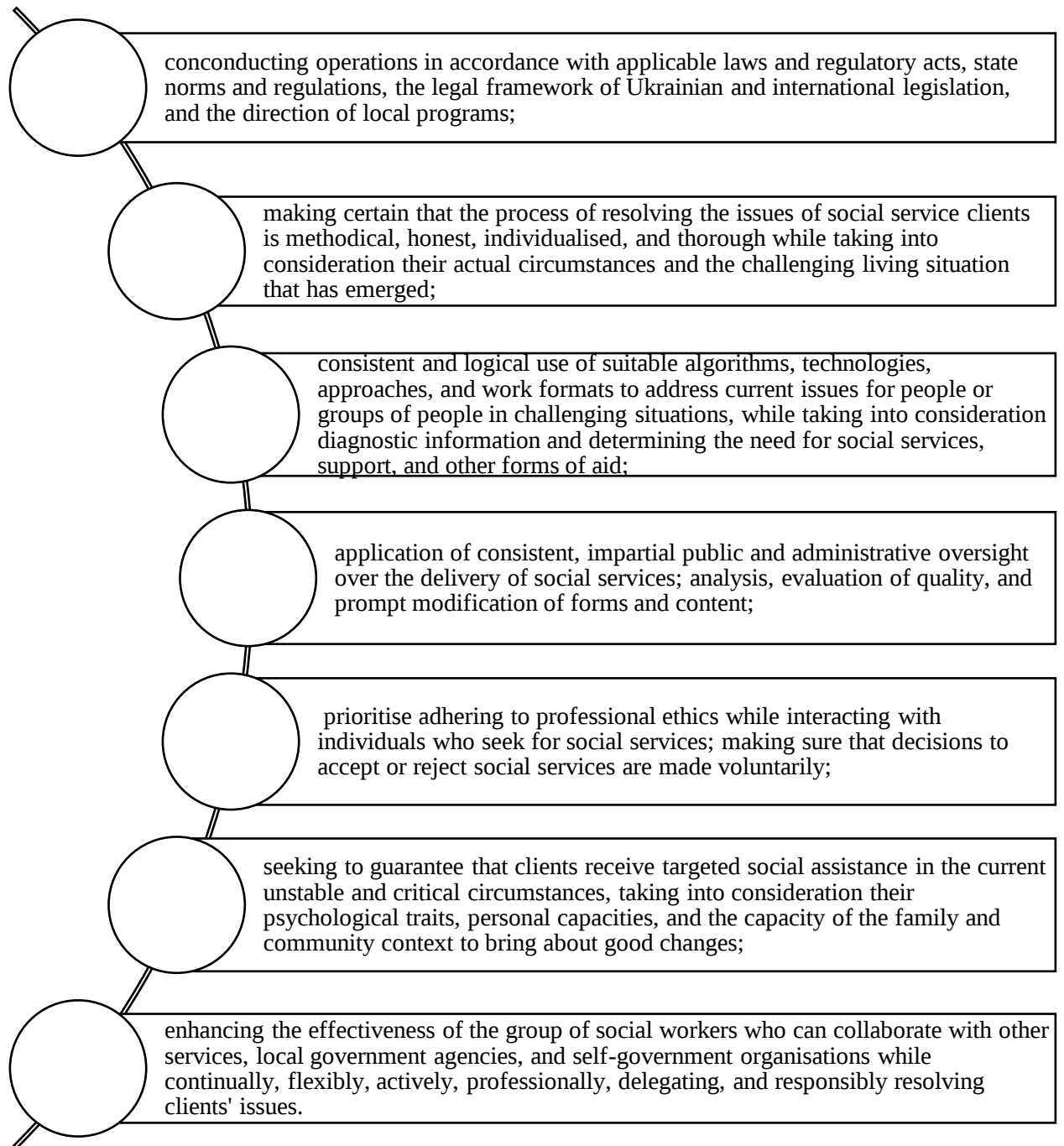


Fig. 1. Some features of the activities of social services in modern unstable conditions.

Conducting qualitative diagnostics is regarded as one of the prerequisites for improving the effectiveness of the social services delivery process by professionals and services in contemporary conditions, which will impact the likelihood of resolving current issues for people and families who have encountered challenging life circumstances. In order to continue providing high-quality social services, socio-psychological support, and other forms of assistance, social service specialists use diagnostics in their work to determine the causes of social and other issues that their clients face, as well as to determine their life circumstances and the effects of challenging life circumstances. Social service professionals can create the most effective system of professional interaction with people and families in challenging life circumstances by gathering and analysing important information, analysing conditions and causes, taking

into account the influence of environmental factors, etc. They can also create an individual plan for the provision of social services, involve qualified social service providers, make necessary adjustments to the entire process, and keep an eye on the quantity and calibre of professional efforts that are being carried out.

In order to ensure quality, targeting, and an individualised approach for each individual or group of individuals who have encountered challenging life circumstances or are at risk of experiencing them, diagnostics is a crucial component of social work and the process by which social service specialists provide social services. The difficulty of identifying, through scientific methods and specially designed tools, the subject of diagnosis itself – indicators of well-being or unwell-being (psychological, social, professional, spiritual, financial, physical, etc.) of an individual and/or group of individuals—as well as the features of life and social interaction and their determinants – is a characteristic feature of diagnostics in the structure of the activities of social service specialists in modern conditions. Effective diagnostics and needs assessment can make it a useful tool for social work in the modern world, focussing on social workers, clients, and people who receive social services and assistance, as well as managers, staff members of partner organisations, scientists, and other individuals.

In the framework of social service professionals' work, the diagnostic process starts each time an initiative appeal is made by a person who has encountered challenging situations in life or by his legal agent. A social service professional evaluates the circumstances and requirements of the possible recipient after receiving an appeal about the possibility of getting social services. This is done in order to investigate the needs, the reciprocal influences between the potential recipient and his surroundings, etc. [4, p. 55]. The social status of an individual or family experiencing challenging life circumstances, the way in which clients interact with their surroundings and social institutions, and the resources required and accessible for social functioning and daily activities are also significant diagnostic indicators.

Diagnostics of the clients' current psycho-emotional state and other mental characteristics can be performed while they are receiving individual services. Diagnostics are especially important in crisis intervention settings, which are marked by feelings of helplessness, despair, and difficulty making decisions and coping with a challenging and/or crisis situation. Supportive professional relationships, addressing the client's feelings, and lowering emotional stress are even more crucial in these situations, especially for those who have gone through traumatic experiences, are grieving, have been socially isolated, have faced discrimination, etc. Focussing on the client's strengths, hopes, and expectations; focussing professional interactions on enhancing the client's capacity to overcome life's challenges, personal growth, and reaching the desired level of well-being; and encouraging the active partnership position of the social work client in the process of direct interaction and constructive cooperation are all important aspects of social service professionals' work.

The information gathered during the diagnostic procedure also aids in the development of a system of connections between social care recipients, experts, and social services. It will help them develop new objectives pertaining to conquering challenging life situations, coming up with a specific action plan, and updating resources to fulfil responsibilities, especially through engagement with other community social institutions. We would want to highlight how crucial it is for social workers to comprehend and make use of community resources in order to bring about positive social changes both generally and for a person or group of people going through challenging times. As a result, we believe it is appropriate to update the "green" social work principles in the community to reflect current circumstances. This will enable communities to be mobilised to establish and accomplish tangible goals pertaining to enhancing living conditions and citizens' well-being in the unstable circumstances of the military presence. This allows us to discuss how social service clients can better solve problems, build relationships with others and public institutions, and become part of the community. Diagnostics and systematic monitoring will help achieve structural changes in social service activities and the implementation of social support within a particular administrative-territorial unit, in addition to meeting the needs of social service clients, mobilising them to expand their opportunities and defend their rights, boosting social capital, and bolstering community resilience. Even in the challenging and crisis-ridden conditions of the war era, which lead to a decline in the social and economic circumstances of citizens, the emergence of challenges in the social adaptation of internally displaced citizens, the expansion of the spectrum of psychosocial difficulties of individuals and families who have experienced trauma or loss, have health issues, etc., communities can increase their own potential for achieving positive changes through mechanisms for assessing needs, diagnostics, and monitoring.

Conclusions. In the current unstable environment, social services are playing an increasingly important role in maintaining the nation's human potential, guaranteeing social stability, social justice, and community viability, as well as in offering individuals and families in challenging life situations effective

socio-psychological support and assistance. Social services play a crucial role in bolstering social security during times of war, which serves as the foundation for post-crisis recovery and post-war reconstruction. They also carry out highly specific tasks in delivering social services and carrying out social work. In times of contemporary instability, social service professionals can effectively form a network of partner support for focused and operational responses to crisis situations through their interactions with local authorities, public organisations, volunteer groups, and socially engaged citizens.

A perspective for further research. In particular, we think that comparing the areas of social service work in nations that have experienced war and other traumatic events, studying and generalising the best domestic and international social work practices, and providing social services to different groups of people in challenging life and crisis situations, as well as the potential to expand the scope (technologically and otherwise) of social services and new models of social support while taking into account the experiences of other nations and national characteristics, etc., are all promising approaches to the problem that the article identifies.

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