

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR SENIOR CITIZENS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT RUSSIAN REGIONS

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Abstract

Age structure of population in modern Russia is undergoing significant changes. The percentage of senior citizens is currently growing. There is an increasing demand in social services in Russian society: 80 % of older persons would like to receive such services, 30 % require permanent care, including health-related social services. Citizens of different age, level of activity, state of physical and mental health, social status and needs (including the need for companionship) require different approaches to social services. The dominance of administrative approach is largely attributable to different financial capabilities of different regions and cities. For example, the capabilities are quite different between Moscow and a small city in Sverdlovsk region.

The purpose of our study is a comparative analysis of different Russian regions in terms of directions and forms of social care provided to senior citizens. Multidisciplinary approach is used in the study.

The authors discovered great demand for social services among older persons. The implementation of the *Moscow Longevity* program is analyzed. The experience gained during implementation of the program might be used to involve senior citizens in active life.

Key words: social care, services, senior citizens, quality of service, informing

JEL Code: I38, H53, J18

Introduction

Social service for senior citizens is not only an attribute of the welfare state, but also a prerequisite for the development of the human capital of elderly citizens. In different regions of Russia, social services vary considerably, even if a unified state social policy is in place. The lifestyle of older persons in different regions identifies their social service needs and corresponding assessment criteria. Therefore, the territorial differentiation of social services is a relevant topic for Russia and is of interest to researchers of social services for the elderly

(Bočáková & Kubíčková, 2017; Kajanova & Ondrasek, 2020; Komárková, Truhlářová & Marešová, 2020).

The aim of the study is a comparative analysis of social services for elderly citizens, depending on their place of residence. What real opportunities in the field of social needs do senior citizens in the capital and in the regions possess?

1 Methods

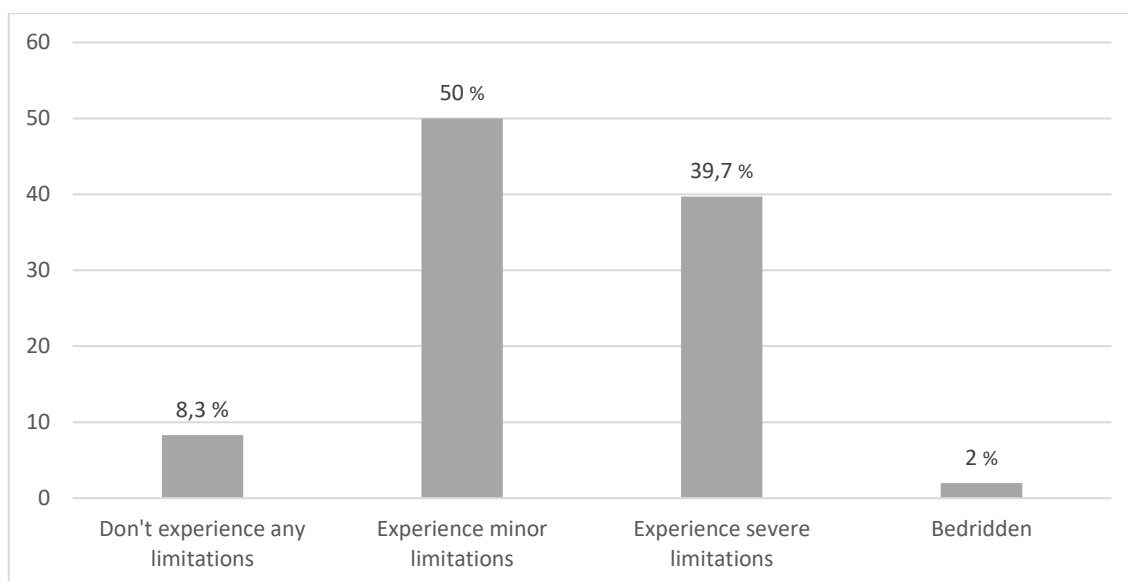
The authors performed a comparative analysis of the state statistics data and the results of studies on social service assessment for senior citizens by independent companies. The data for Moscow and the Nizhneserginsky municipal district of the Sverdlovsk region are presented. A sample survey of senior citizens of the Nizhneserginsky district was conducted. Among 400 respondents 54.5 % are over 70 years old, 31.5 % are aged 66 to 70 years.

Social services for the elderly in Russia include inpatient care, ambulatory treatment, home care, consulting and methodological services. Our empirical research does not cover home care for older people with disabilities. This results from the fact that a program for providing a benefits package for long-term care for the elderly and disabled is currently being tested in Russia. The benefits package provides for up to 28 hours of care services per week and will be fully financed from the state budget (while it is the regions that are responsible for the provision of state social services).

2 Data and descriptive statistics

According to official statistics, social assistance to the elderly in Russia is mainly aimed at people with disabilities. Among those registered with social welfare bodies, 91.7 % face certain restrictions.

Fig. 1: Distribution of individuals older than working age who receive social services by severity of their limitations



Source: Persons over Working Age Registered with Social Services. *The Russian Federal State Statistics Service* (2019). Retrieved April 9, 2021, from <https://rosstat.gov.ru/storage/mediabank/ur3-8-8.doc>.

Such an approach is quite justified, because it contributes to providing social services to those most in need. However, it contradicts the theory of successful aging, which aims at reducing the likelihood of illness and disability, maintaining a high ability to learn and be physically active, promoting participation in social life.

We propose that the concept of successful aging should focus on services for elderly people who experience few or no restrictions in order to maintain this condition for as long as possible (Parfenova, 2017).

In Russia, there is a state system of independent assessment of social service quality. We shall compare official statistics data with the results of studies by independent research firms. Official statistics shows, that 77.6 % of the respondents are completely or generally satisfied with the quality of guaranteed services provided in social service centers or by social workers at home (Persons over Working Age, 2019).

At the same time, according to a study by the Public Opinion Foundation, throughout Russia (a survey of 1500 residents of 100 inhabited localities and cities in 43 regions of the country), degree of satisfaction with social services is significantly lower (28 %) (Elderly People: Social Protection and Care, 2021).

Tab. 1. Do you give a positive or negative rating to the work of public agencies that provide social services to senior citizens in your city, town, village, or region?

(response rate in %)

Assessment	Moscow	Cities with a population of	Villages	Percentage
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							of the Russian population
		1 million or more	250 thousand to 1 million	From 50 to 250 thousand	Less than 50 thousand, and urban-type settlements		
Positive	19	18	30	20	33	38	28
Negative	31	38	30	20	12	15	22
Don't know	50	45	40	60	55	47	50

Source: Public Opinion Foundation

The Public Opinion Foundation study showed that 38 % of the rural residents assess the quality of social services as good and 15 % consider it bad. At the same time, 18 % of the residents of cities with a population of more than a million assessed social assistance to the elderly positively and 38 % – negatively. It is difficult to assume that social assistance to the population in large cities is not so well organized as in the periphery. The respondents who are not satisfied with the quality of social assistance for the elderly named its shortcomings, which included insufficient assistance, indifferent and inattentive attitude towards the elderly, the lack of social workers and social services.

One might infer that consumers assess the quality of social assistance and social services focusing not only on their objective characteristics, but also on the expectations of the elderly themselves, which is determined by their needs, lifestyle and values.

Table 1 shows that satisfaction with social service depends on the level of urbanization of the inhabited locality in which the respondents live.

In our opinion, the subjective moments influencing satisfaction with social service include an indicator of the elderly subjective well-being. This topic has been well studied; subjective well-being is understood as the degree of people's satisfaction with their life. In general, scientists tend to use the concept of subjective well-being as a substitute for the concept of happiness (Larson, 1978; McDougle, Meyer & Handy, 2018).

Subjective well-being is a kind of assessment comprising older persons' satisfaction both with the work of public institutions and the economic and socio-political situation in this country. Almost all researchers of this issue agree that subjective well-being primarily depends on the employment of older people. Employment not only enhances material prosperity, but also enables older persons to realize their professional potential and thus makes their life full and integral. Also, researchers agree that any forms of older people's activity have a positive influence on their subjective well-being, if the results of this activity are needed and

applicable in life. For example, if one learns a foreign language for work, for travel, for communicating with grandchildren who speak this language, it is more effective than learning a language for the sake of learning itself.

Subjective well-being is affected by age, health, religiosity (as a certain indicator of tolerance), employment situation. Subjective well-being is not connected with material prosperity, but it is directly associated with various forms of activity in the life of an elderly person.

There is a theory of the influence of the urbanity level on subjective life satisfaction and social relations. Cities are presented as points of increased concentration, population density and heterogeneity. The consequences of this are depersonalization, isolation, declining participation in primary groups, and the dominance of formal relations. This all, including enhanced formalization of all institutions (which itself was a consequence of urban development), leads inevitably to anomie and excessive psychological pressure. Besides a wide range of opportunities for social mobility and access to vast resources, large industrial cities carry social exclusion, deprivation and dissatisfaction with life (Berry & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2009).

This point of view can also be illustrated by the statistic data for Russia. For instance, the satisfaction of rural residents with their living conditions is higher than that of urban residents (Women and Men of Russia, 2021).

3 Hypothesis

Satisfaction with social services depends not only on the quality of the services themselves, but also on the subjective well-being of older people, which is a complex phenomenon, determined by a number of factors, including the local level of urbanization.

4 Research

We have studied the satisfaction of public social service consumers in the city of Moscow and in Nizhnie Sergi of the Sverdlovsk region.

The Nizhneserginsky municipal district belongs to small municipal entities. The share of senior citizens in the district is 9.1 % higher than the corresponding figure for Russia. The Integrated Centre for Social Services is an organization which directly provides social services to the population. The School for the Elderly has been set up and is operating in the Centre.

This school organizes courses to enhance computer literacy, classes on legal and economic problems, the basics of tourism therapy, local history, applied and decorative arts, gardening and horticulture, the elderly care. All classes in the school are free of charge. Various clubs organize a range of leisure activities, festivals, excursions, singing and dancing lessons, etc.

In the capital, a large-scale program called *Moscow Longevity* has been under way since 2018. It helps to involve people of retirement age in an active, interesting life. As part of this program, there are courses in various subjects, such as information technology, foreign languages, psychology, business, acting and scenic speech, dancing, singing, drawing, landscape design, beekeeping, vegetable growing, sommelier, etc. People can also attend hobby clubs.

Various kinds of gymnastics, fitness, Nordic walking, chess and checkers, football, volleyball, basketball, curling, table tennis and lawn tennis, badminton, fencing, golf, billiards, shooting and other sports and games are available to the older generation of Muscovites. Since 2018, the number of partner organizations that arrange and manage clubs and classes for older people has increased from 133 to 1268; 26 Moscow universities offer 225 educational programs to pensioners (Kornilova, 2020).

The project offers free classes, which are available in all parts of the city. It involves municipal and federal state organizations, non-profit organizations and business community representatives. New educational technologies offered by the Program allows retirees to bridge the generation gap. The city municipal policy helps Muscovites to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, solve social and psychological problems, such as the severance of traditional family bonds.

How do senior citizens assess this activity? The study of satisfaction with social services shows that almost all respondents in the capital note a high level of service quality, whereas in the Nizhneserginsky municipal district this assessment is lower (table 2).

Tab. 2. Satisfaction with social service quality (response rate in %)

Opinion	Residents of Nizhneserginsky municipal district	Moscow citizens
I am satisfied	67.8	89.8
Acceptable, but could be better	14.0	9.8
I am not satisfied with service quality	–	0.4
The service quality needs to be improved	11.0	–

Data source for Moscow: Comprehensive Monitoring of the Level and Quality of Life of the Elderly Citizens in Moscow

Data source for Nizhneserginsky municipal district: authors' own study

In the Nizhneserginsky municipal district, 34.8 % of the surveyed senior citizens consider the current list of services to be insufficient. At the same time, 60.1 % of Moscow citizens noted that the quality of social services has improved since 2018.

Respondents believe that such factors as people’s poor awareness about the institution services, geographical isolation and transport problems explain why not all those in need apply for services in the Nizhneserginsky municipal district. The analysis of the sources of information about the social service system allows to conclude that the use of modern Internet resources and local television programs is insufficient (table 3).

Tab. 3. Sources of information about the social service system (response rate in %)

Source of information	Residents of Nizhneserginsky municipal district	Moscow citizens
Websites of agencies involved	12.8	13.6
Newspaper publications	20.3	52.3
Relatives, friends, acquaintances	30.0	72.1
Doctors, staff members of the Pension Fund and the city administration, etc.	28.0	–
Government and municipal agencies	–	29.5
Social networks	1.8	25.7
I have never heard of it	7.3	–
Television programs	–	58.1

Data source for Moscow: Comprehensive Monitoring of the Level and Quality of Life of the Elderly Citizens in Moscow

Data source for Nizhneserginsky municipal district: authors’ own study

Most of the senior citizens of this district characterize the system of informing people about the activities of the institution as unsatisfactory and insufficient (table 4).

Tab. 4. Assessment of the effectiveness of the information system on social services (response rate in %)

Opinions of respondents	Residents of Nizhneserginsky municipal district	Moscow citizens
I am completely satisfied	10.8	49.2
Acceptable, but could be better	34.0	43.9
The information is insufficient	33.5	–
Appropriate information is hard to find	14.5	–
It does not matter to me	7.3	–

Data source for Moscow: Comprehensive Monitoring of the Level and Quality of Life of the Elderly Citizens in Moscow

Data source for Nizhneserginsky municipal district: authors’ own study

In Moscow, there has been implemented a new project in order to inform residents about social support measures and social services provided by the city's social sector. The project presents an interactive reference and information analytical complex "INFOMAT", which includes information desks in the district social protection departments and social service institutions of Moscow. In health, education, culture and other institutions the Internet portals and sites with online updates are used.

Thus, Muscovites gave a higher rating to social service quality. In other regions, it is necessary and possible to expand the list of social services for senior citizens. Respondents in the regions feel that the main problem in the social service system is the lack of public awareness about social services and they consider it necessary to improve information management of social service provision. Such good practices as the *Moscow Longevity* program can be widely shared.

On the whole, our hypothesis has not been confirmed: Muscovites gave a higher rating to service quality. Probably, this comparison is not entirely correct, since the *Moscow Longevity* program uses a new marketing approach to the provision of services based on close feedback, active information interaction, which corresponds to the changed needs of older people.

Conclusion

The lifestyle of the elderly in different regions of Russia, the range and quality of social services provided have their own specifics. The analysis of social service quality for older persons, according to their place of residence, has highlighted differences between the state statistics and the data of independent companies. In this paper, we have compared the figures of municipal statistics in Moscow and those of our empirical study in the region.

Residents of the regions give a lower rating to social service quality. Service delivery is a subject-based process. Social service quality assessment is determined not only by objective characteristics (convenience, accessibility, short terms of service delivery), but also by aspirations and expectations of service recipients in accordance with their needs. A greater number of active older persons have acquired a more attentive and responsible approach to quality of their life and are ready to struggle for it.

Consumers' assessment of the quality of social assistance and social services may largely depend not only on the objective characteristics of these services, but also on the level of expectations of older persons themselves. The indicator of older citizens' subjective well-

being plays an important part and is determined by a number of factors, including the local level of urbanization.

Subjective well-being primarily depends on the employment of older people. Any kinds of older people's activity also have a positive influence on the level of their subjective well-being, if the results of this activity are needed and applicable in life.

The comparative study of social service consumers' satisfaction in Moscow and Nizhnie Sergy shows that almost all respondents in the capital note a higher level of service quality. In Moscow, social services for older persons have been included in the *Moscow Longevity* municipal program since 2018.

The program uses a new marketing approach to service delivery based on close feedback, active communication, which is a modern response to the new needs of older people in the field of social services. The experience of the *Moscow Longevity* program is promising for other regions of Russia as well.

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