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Social capital and well-being in the transitional setting of Ukraine

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Abstract

Background: The military conflict in Ukraine that started in 2014 was accompanied with many changes in the political, economic and social spheres. It brought informal volunteering activities (i.e. one form of social capital) to emerge, function and later to be formalized, in order to support soldiers and their families. This situation is unique given the transitional setting of Ukraine, which has led to comparably low levels of social capital and negative indicators of health and well-being. This thesis aims to explore social capital during military conflict in contemporary Ukraine and to analyze the associations between social capital and well-being, as well as the distribution of social capital among Ukrainian women and men.

Methods: The study combines a qualitative and quantitative research design. A case study was conducted using qualitative methodology. Eighteen in-depth interviews were collected with providers and utilizers of volunteering services. Grounded Theory and social action ideal types methodology of Weber were used for the analysis. The quantitative research utilized two secondary datasets. The World Health Survey was utilized to analyze the association between social capital and physical and mental well-being for women (n=1723) and men (n=910) by means of multivariate logistic regression. The European Social Survey (wave 6) was used in order to investigate access to social capital and the determinants of gender inequalities in the access with a sample of 1377 women and 797 men. Multivariate logistic regression and post-regression Fairlie's decomposition analysis were used to analyze the determinants of the inequalities.

Results: The key findings of this thesis show that social capital transforms during military conflict and takes particular forms in transitional settings. There are positive and negative effects on well-being connected to crisis-related volunteering. The associations between social capital and well-being vary for women and men in favour of women. Social capital is unequally distributed between different social groups. Some forms of social capital may have stronger buffering effect on women than men in Ukraine. Access to social capital can be viewed as an indicator for social well-being, and thus social capital can be used both as a determinant and an outcome in social capital and health research.

Conclusion: Informal social participation, i.e. volunteering might play an important role in societal crises and needs to be considered in social capital measurements and interventions. Social capital measurements utilized in stable societies do not evidently capture these forms, i.e. it is not taken into account. The associations between social capital and well-being depend on the measurements that are used. Since social capital has both positive and negative effects on well-being, this should be considered in research, policies and practices in order to prevent negative and promote positive outcomes. In Ukraine, as well as in other settings, social capital is an unequal resource for different societal groups. Reducing gender and income inequalities would probably influence the distribution of social capital within the society.

Keywords: social capital, social support, volunteering, transformation, crisis, military conflict, transitional, well-being, health, inequality, Ukraine

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