



Communication activities in supporting PWDs in Thanh Son town, Phu Tho, Vietnam: Approach from the perspective of social work

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Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 04

Issue: 02

March-April 2023

Received: 22-03-2023;

Accepted: 09-04-2023

Page No: 567-571

Abstract

People with disabilities are one of the disadvantaged groups in society that are always cared for and supported by Vietnam. Over the years, there have been many supportive policies and interventions, but people with disabilities still face many difficulties and challenges in life. The following article analyzes communication activities in supporting PWDs according to the approach of social work. The results show that communication activities have been carried out in the study area and PWDs also highly appreciate the necessity of this activity. However, due to reasons such as lack of proper attention from local authorities, unprofessional social work staff or lack of professional guidance on social work, communication activities have not really met the needs of PWDs.

Keywords: Communication, People with disabilities, Social worker

Introduction

In Vietnam today, the number of People with disabilities (PWDs) accounts for a large proportion (Association of People with Disabilities, 2019) ^[1]. According to statistics of the National Committee for People with Disabilities, by the beginning of 2021, Vietnam had about eight million PWDs aged 5 years and older, equal to 7.8% of the population. The causes of disability are congenital, genetic, traffic accidents, labor accidents, war-related injuries, environmental pollution, climate change, natural disasters... and forecasted in the future, the number of PWDs will continue to increase. Although Vietnam has made great efforts in enhancing and improving the quality of life of PWDs by joining the signing of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; Promulgating policies and programs to help PWDs as well as their families with disabilities to create every opportunity for PWDs to participate in integration into the community. However, PWDs still face many difficulties and inequalities in their daily life such as discrimination, limited opportunities for study and employment, and lack of access in public services and social policies (Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, 2019; University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2014) ^[6, 11].

In order to help PWDs dealing with the difficulties faced by PWDs, it requires both the community and society to have intervention activities to help PWDs solve their problems and meet their material and mental needs. According to the previous studies, communication activities in social work are considered as one of the important activities to improve capacity and raise awareness for PWDs, local authorities and communities and society, thereby improving the effectiveness of helping people with disabilities (Michael Oliver and Bob Sapey, 2011; Mai Thị Phương, 2014; Hội người khuyết tật, 2019, UNICEF, 2016) ^[4, 10]. Thus, this paper focus on studying and assessing situation of Communication activities in Supporting PWDs in Thanh Son town. The research team hope to recommend good solutions to improve communication activities thus help PWDs having better life.

Methods of study

Document analysis method

This method was used throughout the research process of the topic. During the research on the topic, the researcher group collected statistical reports, surveys, and surveys on PWDs of the Department of Invalids and Social Affairs under the People's Committee of Thanh Son town.

At the same time, research documents on social work with PWDs to build a theoretical basis and research theoretical framework of the topic and analyze and evaluate communication activities in supporting PWDs in Thanh Son town, Thanh Son district, Phu Tho province.

Questionnaire survey method

Use this method to collect information from research subjects about the needs of PWDs as well as support activities for PWDs, evaluate the effectiveness of activities. Communication in social work activities in supporting PWDs, making recommendations to increase the effectiveness and quality of Communication activities in supporting PWDs. The study surveyed 100 in the total of 128 PWDs in the study area. They are PWDs aged between 16 and 60 years old and mostly people with mild disabilities who are able to answer the questionnaire. The survey process is always anonymous and does not pose any danger to the respondents. In addition, the survey team is always ready to explain if PWDs do not clearly understand the question. The research team will randomly select survey subjects through the list of PWDs of the local government.

In-depth interview method

This is a method used to obtain necessary information from the target group through direct questioning and answering between the social worker and the research object. Conduct interviews with 02 people with disabilities, 05 family member of people with disabilities, 02 officials in charge of Invalids and Social Affairs and 03 social workers in Thanh Son town. The purpose of the in-depth interview is to collect

information and opinions from research subjects about the current situation of PWDs, the needs of PWDs, the status of communication activities to support PWDs. This method helps the research team to have more insight from the initial situation assessment of the document analysis process. The research team plans to conduct the in-depth interviews with the duration from 20 to 30 minutes. The content of the in-depth interview is prepared in advance into arrays of questions and issues that the author is interested. The order of the interviews was flexible. The main content of the interviews revolved around finding out more specifically about the effectiveness of communication activities in supporting PWDs, learning about local policies and directions about communication activities in supporting PWDs.

Results of study

Assessing the need for communication-Opinions of people with disabilities

The purpose of communication activities is to help PWDs and the community to raise awareness of the rights of PWDs so that we have more information and opportunities to access policies, and at the same time identify attitudes correct behavior towards people with disabilities, eliminate misconceptions about disability, equip knowledge and skills to properly support people with disabilities, and promote practical actions towards people with disabilities (USAID and VNAH, 2015) [12]. Through the survey of PWDs on the necessity of communication activities, the results obtained are as follows:

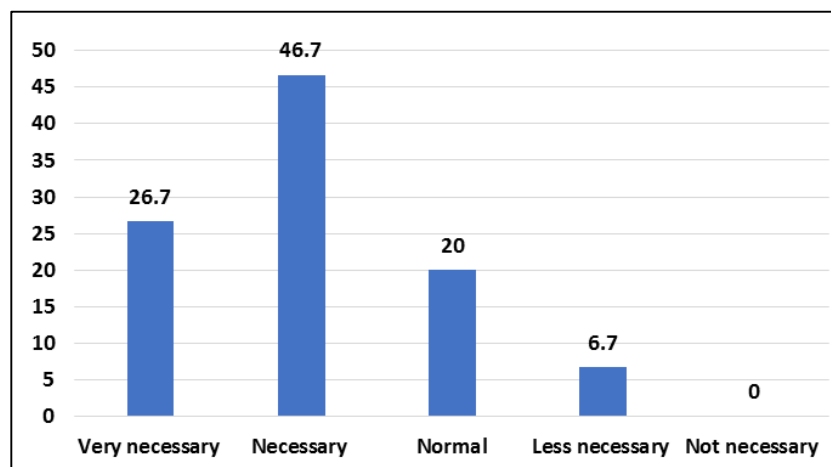


Fig 1: Necessity of communication activities in supporting PWDs (%)

Through Fig 1, we can see that there is a very clear difference between the evaluation levels of PWDs towards communication activities. Necessity level accounted for the highest percentage of 46.7% of people choosing. The level of necessity has the second highest rate of 26.7% of people choosing. The normal level accounts for 20% of the selected people. The level of need is very low, only 6.7% of people choose. No PWDs chooses a degree unnecessarily.

From the above evaluations of PWDs, we can easily see that communication activities are meaningful and play an important role in supporting PWDs. It is because, these communication activities of social workers have contributed significantly to changing the community's awareness of PWDs, helping the community to understand better about

them, thereby having better attitudes and behaviors towards PWDs. PWDs also had gotten more correct way and recognizing the ability and efforts of PWDs as a member of society, making contributions that bring positive values to society, thereby create opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in all aspects of social life.

However, some PWDs still do not think that communication is very necessary. The reason given is that the media brings them to the attention of many people as well as sometimes increases stigma. Some PWDs think their self-worth may be reduced because the media makes people think that PWDs need pity. Thus, in communication activities, it is necessary to pay attention to the content and objects of communication. Raising awareness is right, but if not careful and professional,

the purpose will go astray. This very much depends on the capacity and qualifications of the social work staff carrying out these communication activities (Ha Thi Thu, 2010) ^[2].

According to Nguyen Trung Hai (2016) ^[8], in order to have good communication in general and with PWDs in practical, social workers should have initially applied their knowledge and skills of social work in communication activities. Specifically, they have to identify the needs and desires of PWDs in order to make plans on communication content and use various forms of communication for people with disabilities through the radio system on that basis and television, newspapers, conferences, cultural performances, plays... More importantly, social workers should know how to mobilize the participation of people with disabilities in communication activities.

Evaluation of the form of communication-Opinions of people with disabilities

Communication forms are organized quite flexibly with many ways. Social workers also connected and cooperated

with local radio and television stations, on the occasion of the Vietnam Day of Persons with Disabilities to carry out many reportages that exemplify typical PWDs in the Thanh Son town. They are the people who have overcome their own difficulties, strive to develop the economy, and create jobs to support other people with disabilities; or being an example of a police soldier who, while on duty to protect the peace and stability of the local people, did not hesitate to fight criminals, which led to injury and became PWDs.

However, communication activities have not yet promoted the active participation of people with disabilities and the community, which is mainly due to the lack of assessment of needs, survey of aspirations and desires of people with disabilities, so the ability to attraction is not as expected. Social workers carry out communication activities in the locality have not yet developed a complete and professional communication plan for PWDs that mainly these activities are integrated. In general, communication activities with other subjects have not had a strong impact on PWDs and the whole community.

Evaluation of communication contents-Opinions of people with disabilities

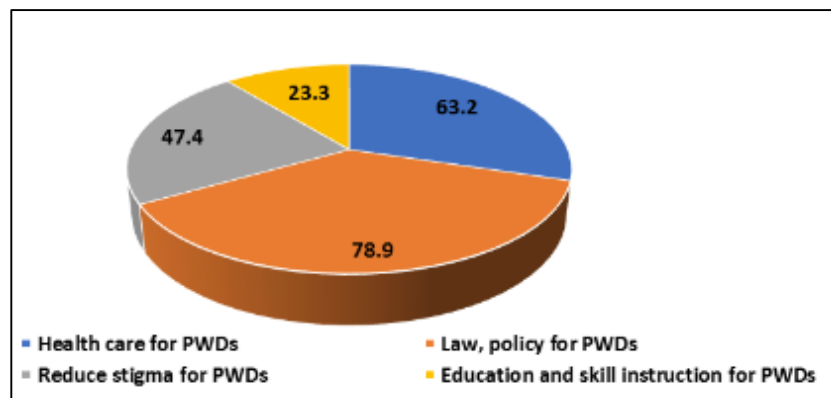


Fig 2: Communication contents for PWDs (%)

Local leaders have directed specialized units such as the Culture - Information Department, the Justice - Civil Status Committee to step up the propagation and dissemination of legal education to raise awareness and skills in exercising rights of participation of PWDs in social issues, creating a strong change in awareness and actions of all levels, sectors, families, and the whole society.

However, according to the survey results obtained, 78.9% of people with disabilities know the content of communication about programs, policies, and laws for people with disabilities. 63.2% of PWDs know about the communication content about health care for people with disabilities. However, only 47.36 % of PWDs are aware of communication contents about reducing stigma against people with disabilities. The content of communication about education and skills instruction for PWDs is only known by very few people, specifically only 26.3% of PWDs.

From the above results, we can see that there is a very clear difference in the proportion of communication contents in supporting PWDs taking place in Thanh Son town. The content of communication activities in Thanh Son town is unevenly distributed and does not meet the real wants and needs of people with disabilities in the locality. This shows that the leaders, professional officers, and officials in charge should have more cared and paid close attention to

communication activities for people with disabilities in the locality.

Based on the survey results, we could know that the communication activities in supporting PWDs in Thanh Son town are just formal. The in-depth interviews showed that most of the contents and activities on communication for people with disabilities are carried out and organized due to the subjective views and opinions of leaders and officials which means that leaders and officials will organize communication activities that they consider important for PWDs. They give priority to communication contents which can be easily done rather than conducting surveys to know the real opinions, desires and needs of PWDs. The fact that the contents and forms of communication are repeated many times without creativity and innovation, which will cause boredom for people with disabilities and local people, from which the quality and effectiveness of communication activities will be difficult to guarantee (Social Development Research Institute, Oxfam Novib Foundation, University of Social Labor, 2012) ^[9].

Assess the effectiveness of communication-opinions of PWDs

Through Fig 3, we see a clear difference in the level of quality assessment of communication activities. It could be seen that

the quality of communication activities in supporting PWDs does not good enough. Only 5.2% is very effective, 10.5% is effective. Especially, the number of people who choose a less

and not effective level have a total rate of up to 26.3%. The highest number is 58% assessing the quality of communication at Normal level.

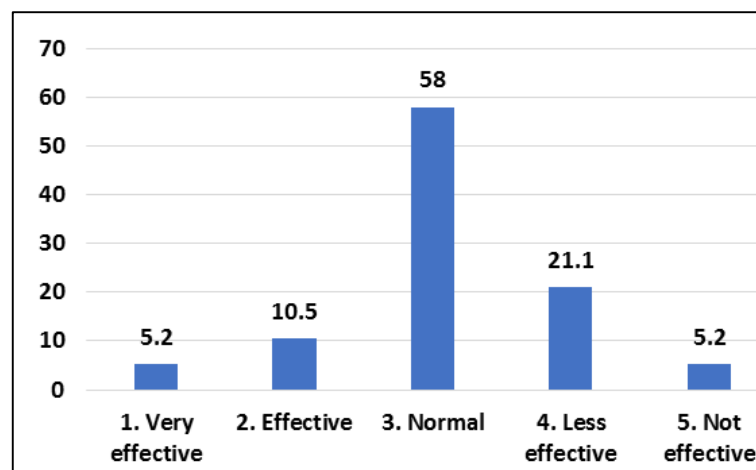


Fig 3: Evaluation of the effectiveness of communication activities in supporting people with disabilities

If we bring the results in Fig 3 compared to the results in Fig 1, then we should notice a situation that: If the number of people with disabilities choosing the necessary and essential level is very high, the total rate is up to 73.4%, the number of PWDs assesses the level of efficiency and very effective total rate of only 15.7%.

So, we can see that, even it is the same assessment at a Normal level, however, it has completely opposite meanings. Because the normal level in the assessment of the need for communication activities for PWDs is only 20%, while the normal level in the results of assessing the quality and effectiveness of communication activities for PWDs is up to 58%. It proves that, even PWDs does appreciate the communication activities, however, the quality of communication activities is not good enough. By other words, the effectiveness of communication activities has not really met the expectations, needs, of the PWDs. From this fact, the requirements and challenges for social workers who act as communicators in Thanh Son town are to find solutions in improving the effectiveness and necessity of communication activities for PWDs.

One of the reasons finding from deep interview that the collection of information, assessment of effectiveness and maintenance of sustainability have also not been given due attention. So, it is still not possible to accurately assess the quality of communication activities, not to recognize the positive and negative aspects and limitations as well in each step. Thus, it is necessary to have the enthusiastic participation of the mass organizations, especially the improvement of expertise and professionalism to improve the quality of communication activities. Communication activities must have a positive impact on helping people with disabilities solve their difficulties and meet their legitimate needs.

Discussion and Conclusion

The implementation of communication activities in supporting PWDs has been interested but still has many limitations. Based on deep interview, communication activities have not been really effective, many PWDs and local people still do not understand the policies and laws on PWDs. PWDs do not fully understand their rights and

obligations; Local communities do not understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting people with disabilities. The local authorities have not paid much attention to the content of reducing discrimination for people with disabilities and the content of training and teaching necessary skills for people with disabilities. In general, communication activities in supporting PWDs still need to be improved because there is no professional social worker team, so the support activities take place not according to the process, incomplete and scientific. The current support is based on the experience of the staff and does not focus on the needs of people with disabilities. So, the effectiveness of communication activities for PWDs is not yet high enough to meet their expectations and needs.

It is necessary to complete the regulations and policies for PWDs. Review and re-check the entire system of legal documents on PWDs to find out the urgent, lacking, or unreasonable points for correction and timely replenishment. PWDs need to continue study at higher level to improve their education; Attend training, seminars to change awareness; Participating in a self-help group of PWDs; Exchange and associate with positive models to raise their own awareness of their needs and abilities in daily activities, community activities and participation in social activities; Raising awareness the right of PWDs to participate equally in all activities in the family, community and society; Proper awareness of PWDs towards their own disability, efforts to overcome obstacles to community integration.

The local community must attend the meetings and communications activities in support PWDs; Visiting and learning positive models; find out information through the mass media to raise awareness for the community about the role of people with disabilities in life, family and in society; Regarding the role of community participation in creating opportunities for PWDs to assert themselves, helping PWDs to integrate into society; The meaning and importance of recognizing PWDs as an equal member of the community.

Build a team of professional social workers by recruiting highly trained social workers. They must be professionally trained people with knowledge and problem-solving skills in their respective roles who will assist PWDs in a scientific process, the support is directed to bring the best effect for

PWDs. Social worker need being supported and solved the root of the problem. Helping with the things that PWDs really need and want by their profession, not helping based on the personal experience. Besides, when PWDs have difficulties, the need for timely support will be guaranteed to protect and connect with services by professional social workers. Thus, communication activities to support PWDs will be more effective.

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