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REVIEW ARTICLE

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AN EVALUATION OF THE OBESITY PHENOMENON
IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL WORK THEORIES

Sosyal Hizmet Kuramları Bağlamında Obezite Olgusu Üzerine Bir Değerlendirme

Songül BOYRAZ TURHAN¹

¹ PhD. Student, Ankara University, Institute of Health Sciences, Department of Social Work,
✉ songul.boyraz@bilgi.edu.tr  0000-0002-2389-8437

ABSTRACT

Obesity is a disease that negatively affects millions of people worldwide. This disease, which causes many people to experience physical, psychological, emotional, social and economic problems in terms of its consequences, is one of the most discussed diseases both in the world and in our country in recent years. Millions of people apply to obesity diagnosis and treatment centers in the world and in our country every year for treatment. It is very important to evaluate this disease, which has various treatment methods, not only from a medical perspective and to understand not only its medical consequences but also its biopsychosocial consequences. Social work is a profession and discipline that aims to understand the biopsychosocial aspects of problems and diseases and to make a holistic planning, intervention and evaluation with an individual approach in the environment. The phenomenon of obesity is a public health problem where various applications can be made for individuals, families and society experiencing this phenomenon. In this study, it is aimed to make an evaluation of social work theories towards the obesity phenomenon in order to give more space to obesity in the social work profession. Practices in the social work profession are based on theoretical foundations. Some of these theoretical approaches that guide practices are discussed in this review study. These are biopsychosocial approach, ecological approach, system approach and empowerment approach.

Keywords: Obezite, sosyal hizmette obezite, sosyal hizmet kuramları

ÖZET

Obezite, dünya genelinde milyonlarca insanı olumsuz etkileyen bir hastalıktır. Sonuçları itibariyle birçok insanın fiziksel, psikolojik, duygusal, sosyal ve ekonomik sorunlar yaşamasına neden olan bu hastalık, son yıllarda hem dünyada hem de ülkemizde en çok tartışılan hastalıklardan biridir. Dünyada ve ülkemizde her yıl milyonlarca kişi tedavi için obezite tanı ve tedavi merkezlerine başvurmaktadır. Çeşitli tedavi yöntemleri olan bu hastalığı sadece tıbbi açıdan değerlendirmemek ve sadece tıbbi sonuçlarını değil biyopsikososyal sonuçlarını da anlamak çok önemlidir. Sosyal hizmet, sorunların ve hastalıkların biyopsikososyal yönlerini anlamayı ve çevrede bireysel bir yaklaşımla bütüncül bir planlama, müdahale ve değerlendirme yapmayı amaçlayan bir meslek ve disiplindir. Obezite olgusu, bu olguyu yaşayan bireyler, aileler ve toplum için çeşitli uygulamaların yapılabileceği bir halk sağlığı sorunudur. Bu çalışmada, sosyal hizmet mesleğinde obeziteye daha fazla yer verilmesi için sosyal hizmet kuramlarının obezite olgusuna yönelik bir değerlendirmesinin yapılması amaçlanmıştır. Sosyal hizmet mesleğindeki uygulamalar kuramsal temellere dayanmaktadır. Uygulamalara yön veren bu kuramsal yaklaşımlardan bazıları bu derleme çalışmasında ele alınmıştır. Bunlar biyopsikososyal yaklaşım, ekolojik yaklaşım, sistem yaklaşımı ve güçlendirme yaklaşımıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dijital teknoloji, sosyal hizmet, iş birliği

INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a disease that negatively affects millions of people worldwide. This disease, which causes many people to experience physical, psychological, emotional, social and economic problems in terms of its consequences, is one of the most discussed diseases both worldwide and in Turkey in recent years. Millions of people apply to obesity diagnosis and treatment centers in the world and in Turkey every year for treatment. It is very important to evaluate this disease, which has various treatment methods, not only from a medical perspective and to understand not only its medical consequences but also its biopsychosocial consequences.

Social work is a profession and discipline that aims to understand the biopsychosocial aspects of problems and diseases and to make holistic planning, intervention and evaluation with an approach of person in the environment. The phenomenon of obesity is a public health problem where various interventions can be made for individuals, families and society. This study aims to evaluate social work theories regarding the obesity phenomenon in the social work profession.

Practices in the social work profession are based on theoretical foundations. Some of these theoretical approaches that guide practices are discussed in this review study. These are the biopsychosocial approach, ecological approach, system approach and empowerment approach.

Biopsychosocial Approach

The biopsychosocial approach systematically considers psychological and biological factors. Psychological factors are composed of emotions and thoughts and biological factors are composed of cells, organs and the central nervous system. The absence of one of the parts that make up this integrity means that the balance is disturbed. For this reason, human health should be evaluated from a holistic perspective and the treatment and services to be provided should be based on this holistic basis. This holistic perspective inevitably necessitates interdisciplinary cooperation.

The biopsychosocial approach addresses the non-medical causes of the disease together with its biological components. For example, when creating a treatment model for a disease, it is necessary to consider not only the medical and physical consequences of the disease, but also the psychosocial and economic problems or deprivations that trigger the disease or negatively affect the course of treatment.

When evaluated in the biopsychosocial context, obesity is not only a problem with medical and physical consequences in terms of its definition, causes and consequences. It is useful to evaluate the problems caused by the disease from a holistic perspective and to evaluate the biopsychosocial consequences of the disease in order to understand social work intervention.

Social work has multidimensional roles in the fight against obesity. These roles such as influencing social policies, preventing poverty, regulating family lifestyle, creating a healthy environment, making food in school environments healthy, promoting physical activity in schools and families (Burke, 2011). In addition to developing policies for healthy developmental environments for children, social workers should also be able to work with the family system and carry out advocacy activities (Burke, 2011). Problems in the family should be revealed with a holistic perspective. It is important to support individuals with a history of obesity primarily within the family and social environment. Social workers also responsible for carrying out plans and programs to ensure that social policies are fair and functional against every social problem and advocating for disadvantaged groups (Guttman, 2006).

Another theoretical framework that we can use to understand social work intervention to understand the obesity phenomenon is the ecological approach.

Ecological Approach

The Ecological Approach (Davison & Birch, 2001) has been used to provide a framework for understanding the role of multiple interventions on obesity outcomes by examining the synergistic environmental interactions through which behaviors occur. The approach can be used by social workers to assess risks and potential strategies at the micro, meso and macro levels when working with overweight and obese clients suffering from chronic diseases (Melius, 2015). Melius (2015) analyzed the content of 51 articles and examined the factors affecting obesity in each article within the framework of the ecological approach. According to this study, twelve of these 51 articles pointed to social factors, seven to interpersonal relationships, fifteen to societal effects and thirty-six to individual effects.

- Individual Effects: Many studies have focused on individual-level factors. Among these studies, common ones have focused on racial or ethnic identity (Bertera et al., 2003) and mental health (e.g., self-esteem, self-concept, body image, depression) (Mazzo et al., 2005).
- Interpersonal Effects: The majority of these studies focused on the relationship between parents and children and the interpersonal risk factors of obesity. For example, Wong (2010a) conduct-

ed two qualitative studies examining eight Chinese families with children with obesity and their relationship with their children. Sealy and Lawrence (2011) also conducted a study investigating the relationship between parents' healthy eating behaviors and their children's healthy eating behaviors and physical activity experiences. According to these studies, the relationship between parents and children is the main issue affecting a child's weight and health.

- Environmental Impacts: Studies in this category have examined the effects of children's relationships with their neighborhoods (Valera et al., 2009), access to entertainment (Melius, 2003), workplace (Miller and Han, 2008), and school environment (Miller, 2011) on obesity among children and youth.
- Effects of Social Situation: Social work researchers have explored socioeconomic status (SES) (O'Dea and Caputi, 2001), cultural beliefs (Valera et al., 2009) and religious views (Latzer et al., 2009) in their research on social situation. O'Dea (2008) documented the effects of social situations on childhood obesity as follows:
 - a. Children in families with lower socioeconomic income are less likely to have breakfast, engage in weight control behaviors, seek advice about weight control behaviors, or perceive a positive body image.
 - b. While low self-esteem in children is not affected by socioeconomic status, especially among boys, physical self-esteem is not negatively affected, whereas physical self-esteem of overweight children of middle or high socioeconomic status is significantly reduced in older age groups (Bertera et al., 2003).

Using the ecological approach in social work to understand the phenomenon of obesity can enable the planning of social justice-based intervention studies at the individual, family, group and community levels (Melius, 2015). Social justice involves the full and equal participation of all groups in a society where resources are equal and members are physically and psychologically safe (Bell, 2007). A social justice approach that focuses on equal participation and access can generate sustainable recommendations to reduce obesity rates, especially among vulnerable groups (Mayhew, 2006). For example, social workers can play a vital role in identifying policies that create obesogenic conditions and advocating for clients to change the characteristics of the environment in which they live. Using the ecological approach as a guide provides social workers with a tool to assess environmental influences on clients' overweight or obesity status.

Ecological assessment can be a useful method in understanding the obesity phenomenon. This assessment method allows the evaluation of individuals' development in five developmental dimensions. These five developmental dimensions are (1) physical dimension, (2) cognitive dimension, (3) social dimension, (4) affective dimension and (5) spiritual dimension.

The physical dimension includes several physical issues such as nutrition, exercise, sleep, self-care, illnesses, and medication use that have a negative impact on health related to self-care and development. The body interacts with the mind and physical disorders can also trigger mental disorders (Derezeotes, 2000).

The Cognitive Dimension involves the gradual formation of beliefs about oneself, one's relatives, others and the universe, and effective problem solving, decision making and conflict resolution skills (Derezotes, 2000).

The Social Dimension encompasses harmony, balance and maturation in individuals' relationships with their families, relatives, friends and other individuals in society. It includes the individual's ability to establish a balance with the environment. It is an important dimension in the development of individuals' sense of belonging and trust with a safe social environment.

The Affective Dimension has entered the social work literature as a concept that consists of three interrelated elements and defines the emotional capacity of the person. This dimension is related to self-awareness and self-acceptance, the capacity to experience, feel and express emotions (Derezeotes, 2000).

The Spiritual Dimension includes all religious and non-religious values and belief systems of individuals (Derezotes, 2000). The concept of spirituality is defined inclusively in the literature. They define spirituality as the individual's effort to make sense of the connections between himself/herself and the universe, absolute reality, to search for depth, to discover the purpose of life and his/her purpose and to turn towards purpose (Derezotes, 2000).

As a result, the ecological approach supports a more comprehensive methodology for assessing and identifying the lifelong deprivations (i.e. environmental risk factors) of vulnerable groups and provides a framework for development, evaluation and advocacy at the policy level (Melius, 2015).

Thirdly, when addressing obesity in social work, it is inevitable to use the systems approach, another important approach of social work, in creating a theoretical framework.

System Approach

The systems approach is crucial for understanding how to work with obesity (Eliadis, 2006). When working with an obese or overweight person, it should be remembered that he/she is part of a family system (Eliadis, 2006). A system can be defined as a whole consisting of many parts (Eliadis, 2006). Most of the eating habits may stem from unhealthy eating habits or psychosocial characteristics of the individuals who make up the family system. When the impact of parents on children is considered, factors such as the presence of neglect or abuse, structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, being dragged into crime, the presence of mental diseases or psychosocial problems, lack of

healthy and regular eating habits, lack of physical activity, and excessive use of addictive electronics such as television, telephone and computer should be taken into consideration (Eliadis, 2006). In all these theoretical frameworks, another very important approach is to empower individuals, families and groups in order to help them solve their problems. In this context, it is necessary to focus on the power of the clients.

Considering the environment in which the individual lives, the family is the system that is primarily affected. Obesity may be a genetic disease in terms of its causes and consequences. Therefore, it is not possible not to investigate the contribution of a family whose child is obese to the problem. Likewise, it is not possible for the family not to be affected by the consequences of the problem. Individuals have the behavioral patterns of the family they live in. Family relationships, the family's lifestyle, the family's relationship with food, cultural and ethnic structure, neighborhood relations and the effects of the environment they live in on the individual are among the factors affecting the obesity problem. At this point, social workers should definitely evaluate the family as a system and examine it in detail while working with obese children.

Another important approach in social work is the empowerment approach. By helping the individual to rediscover their strengths, the social worker enables the individual to take action to solve the problem.

Empowerment Approach

The empowerment approach in social work aims to enable the child or adolescent to discover the power to make the necessary behavioral changes in their lifestyle by taking into account the positive aspects of the child's life (Eliadis, 2006). Poulin (2000) argues that with a strengths-based perspective, social workers can help children and adolescents recognize and strengthen their natural strengths and abilities and motivate them to solve their problems. She added that this power is the path to change and success for them. In this context, it is an important issue to reveal the strengths of children who cannot stay with their families for various reasons and to strengthen their coping mechanisms in institutions where they are under protection.

CONCLUSION

When the studies on obesity are examined, the epidemic of obesity or obesity in the studies conducted in the last decade is referred to as the "postmodern epidemic" as cited by Natalie Boreo (2012). This epidemic needs to be addressed as an issue that needs to be considered especially in people where social problems may occur frequently. These people are generally females, foreigners and children (Kilgore-Bowling, 2014).

Obesity is also considered as a public health problem in many studies. In terms of being a public health problem, two issues come to the fore in obesity. First, as a result of increasing obesity, there will be intense demands on healthcare and social services, and second, obesity is seen as an indicator

of laziness and moral laxity among a population that cannot regulate its own behavior (Campos et al., 2006). In particular, claims of moral laxity have led to stigmatization and discrimination.

Obesity is a disease that negatively affects millions of people worldwide. This disease, which causes many people to experience physical, psychological, emotional, social and economic problems in terms of its consequences, is one of the most discussed diseases both in the world and in our country in recent years. Millions of people apply to obesity diagnosis and treatment centers in the world and in our country every year for treatment. It is not possible to evaluate this disease, which has various treatment methods, only from a medical point of view and to discuss only the medical results. Obesity is a systemic disease and negatively affects many systems in the body such as movement, nervous, digestive and respiratory systems.

Research in different years has shown that obesity causes many health problems. While some of these diseases can be physical problems such as hypertension, heart diseases, diabetes, musculo-skeletal pain and even cancer, some of them are anxiety, depression (Brown, 2001, Openshaw, 2008), self-esteem problems (Endocrinology and Metabolism Society of Turkey (TEMED) 2018, Brown, 2001), deterioration in body perception (Davison et al. 2000, Davison et al. 2001), stigmatization, exposure to negative prejudices, social exclusion and bullying (Puhl and Latner, 2007).

Social workers have a serious role and background in influencing, criticizing and changing social policies. They are responsible for carrying out plans and programs to ensure that social policies are fair and functional not only in the fight against obesity, but also against every social problem that concerns social work, and for advocating for disadvantaged groups (Guttmann, 2006). Social workers also fight against social policies that serve discrimination and stigmatization (Friedman, 2012). As social workers, we should be aware that common sense is affected by policies that are not inclusive. For example, as social workers, we should be aware of the groups (such as refugees, the poor, females) to whom issues such as structural hatred, stigma and discrimination are presented (Friedman, 2012).

With this study, the place and importance of the obesity problem in the field of social work have been tried to be discussed through the main theories used in social work. It is aimed to convey the contributions of the biopsychosocial approach, ecological approach, systems approach and empowerment approach, which are widely referenced in the social work profession, in understanding the obesity phenomenon.

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