Being disabled: the challenges people with disability face

Health & Medicine, Disability

Introduction

This paper will be focusing on some of the challenges person's with disability face. ' An individual with a disability is defined by the Americans with Disability Act as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment' (U. S. Department of Justice, 2009). Oftentimes people with some form of disability are treated as inferior to others because they lack the ability to do certain major things that others can. Although they are limited in some ways, that does not make them any less human than the rest of us. For us to better understand what makes them who they are, we have to consider them in terms of factors in their environmental press. There's more to a person than their abilities or disabilities and it is important in dealing with a client, to understand that we need to treat the disability as part of who they are and not who they are in totality. I'll use a client of mine, Mrs. Thompson (not her real name) as a case study.

Part I

Persons with disabilities have often suffered stigmatization and discrimination. This attitude towards them is one of the many challenges to their development that they have to face every day of their lives. Achieving social equality for people with disability is an arduous task because of the many myths and negative attitudes people have towards them (Zheng et al, 2016)

According to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO), more than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability and 200 million of these people encounter some considerable difficulties in their everyday functioning. Due to stigmatization and discrimination based on their disability, many persons with disability are denied ' equal access to health care, education, and employment opportunities, do not receive the disability-related services that they require, and experience exclusion from everyday life activities' (World Health Organization, 2011).

One very notable point that the WHO also mentions in their report is the fact that a person's environment plays an important role in the type of experiences they have as well as the ' extent of disability.' When the environment is inaccessible, barriers to participation as well as inclusion are created (World Health Organization, 2011).

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), developed by the World organization put the factors of the environment that impact a person with disability under these major categories; the natural environment; the social environment (made up of family and close relationships); attitudes brought about by culture and social norms towards persons with disability as well as social structure and institutions (WHO, 2001). Just like Garbarino's environmental press, the ICF states that all the components of one's environment have an impact on the development of a person with a disability. ' Environmental press variables include the person's home environment, their social environment, and even their neighborhood environment. The fit between a person's level of competencies and the

demands from their environment affect how well an individual is functioning'
(Garbarino, 1992).

The Issue

My client, Mrs. Thompson is a 65-year-old person with a disability. At the age
of 18, she lost both of her legs in an accident. She has despite her disability
been able to get an education and was gainfully employed as an editor in a
very prestigious publishing agency. However, just like many persons with
disability, she has over the course of her life suffered a lot of stigmatization
and discrimination, although sometimes subtle and unintended, due to her
disability. Recently, she retired and decided to find housing close to her only
daughter so that they could spend more time together. This has proven to be
almost impossible because most of the houses in this neighborhood are not
particularly made to be accessible to someone with a disability such as hers.
She is left with the options of moving farther away than she would like to or
moving into one of the houses closer to her daughter and employing the help
of someone to help her move around the house safely. This is an example of
how a person's physical and social environment can affect the opportunities
they have to participate in ' normal' everyday life. The environmental press
theory focuses the physical, interpersonal, or social demands that the
environment put on people. This experience portrays what Zheng et al.
(2016) meant when they talk about persons with disability being unable to
achieve social equality because of the discrimination against them,
intentional or not. How are they supposed to fit into society when such
barriers still exist?

Biological Influences

Mrs. Thompson was an able-bodied child until the accident which resulted in the loss of both of her legs. Because of her physical disability, Mrs. Thompson has some limitations on what she can and cannot do. The loss of her legs has obviously resulted in limitations on her mobility. She can move about with the aid of a wheelchair but that obviously comes with its own limitations. Her disability has also altered her physical appearance.

Also being disabled as well as a being a female also further complicates her issues. According to a report by the United Nations (UN), ' women with disabilities face significantly more difficulties...in attaining access to adequate housing, health, education, vocational training and employment' (UN, 2017).

Psychological Influences

People with disabilities such as my client are often treated as less intelligent. Mrs. Thompson was able to get an education despite her disability. What most people don't understand is that physical disability does not translate to intellectual disability. And so she was bullied a lot in school just for being there and her intellectual abilities

were questioned.

For a person with disability, not being able to do basic things for themselves can lead to frustration and a general feeling of helplessness. Mrs. Thompson for one has always felt like a burden to her mother and brother who were her primary caregivers, to her teachers, and anybody who has had to take over

the role of a caregiver in her life. She wishes she could be more independent.
She always felt left out because she could not be involved activities that her
peers had the opportunity to be involved in and always felt inadequate. As if
that were not enough, she was always stared at and people made it a point
to remind her that she was different and this affected her psychologically.
The attitude that persons with disability have towards their own disability is
influenced greatly by their social interaction with others (Zheng et al, 2016).

Sociological Influences

Sociological influences may include cultural, religious, political and economic
factors. Mrs. Thompson grew up around a very supportive family. Although
she did not have a lot of friends, her family was her support system. When
she almost quit college at some point because of the difficulties she faced,
her mother encouraged her not to define her worth by her disability or others
perception of her but to prove that she was just as capable of achieving all
that they could despite her disability. It is very important to note that, for
Mrs. Thompson, she believes she made it this far in life because she had a
very strong support system that did not see her disability as a disadvantage.
She was also brought up as a staunch Catholic and she believes this is what
influences most of her decisions as well as her self-image and perception of
others.

Mrs. Thompson was fortunate enough to come from an affluent home and
therefore did not face any limitations that the lack of economic resources
can present in the development of a person with disability. Her family could

afford and provide all the assistive devices that she needed to be able to attain some level of independence.

A typical example of political influences on Mrs. Thompson's development is the passage of the American with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990 which addressed some of the needs of people with disabilities, and sought to prohibit the discrimination that they face in some facets of their lives such as education, public services, employment as well as accommodation (ADA, 1990). Most times, people with disability have to deal with how others react to their disability which, more often than not, is negative. They have to endure the discrimination and stigmatization in their workplaces and other social environments. My client, for instance, has to endure the inadequate accommodation circumstances being presented to her because she has no other options. Someone neglected the needs of people with disability and she has to pay for it.

Part II

Human behavior cannot just be understood from one context. Many factors work interchangeably to impact and shape the behavior of a person and their development. Before coming to WSSW, my perception of persons with disability was purely biological. I always thought that were defined only by the biological influences on their development. However, in my study of the human behavior in the social environment, I've come to understand that there are many dimensions to a person, and that to better understand who a person is and what makes them who they are and what defines them, we have to consider all the various influences in their environment such the

physical environment, biological, psychological and sociological influences. We cannot claim to fully understand who a person is without considering all the interwoven dimensions involved in their development (Hutchison, 2015)

I've learned that Persons with disability are not to be defined by their disability and that the disability is just a part of who they are.

Part III

Considering the environmental press as described by Garbarino, I do see influences in my own development that I had prior to taking this course not considered. I had always been of the belief that we all come hard wired and destined to be who we are. However, now I have a better understanding of the cultural, social, political, psychological influences on our development that shape us into who we eventually become. Our ' self' as we know it keeps changing over time because of the new experiences that we go through.

The impact of the family on development is crucial. As stated in Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the family forms part of our microsystem which happens to be our closest and immediate environment and therefore has the most influences on our development. After taking this course, I'm now able to identify that certain beliefs and character traits that I have are greatly based on influences from my family. According to Dr. Murray Bowen who propelled the family systems theory, we cannot be understood without being considered as part of our family because families

are interconnected individuals. We are impacted by our family while also exerting our own influence on our family.

Also in my study, I've come to understand that trauma has a powerful influence on a person's development but our ability to adapt and show resilience in the face of any traumatic experience will determine how well we are able to bounce back and function as we develop. There are several factors that can help improve a person's ability to show resilience in the face of trauma. Family, for instance, plays a very important role. Whether or not a person had a positive support system growing up or a positive parent-child interaction, all contribute to their ability to be resilient. ' An individual's sense of control over their life and the traumatic experience in addition to having a positive self-concept provides additional resiliency' (Holliday et al, 2014).

The learning in Human Behavior I has helped me to better understand myself as well as how to understand a client and what defines them. I never thought that my family system had an impact on my development until I took this course.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the influence that the environment has on the development of persons with disability. It also points out some of the challenges that persons with disability face, particularly stigmatization and discrimination. Legislations such as the Americans with Disability Act have stressed the importance of the environment in the development of a person

with disability and have the aim of ensuring that they enjoy equal opportunity to participate in all dimensions of life and reasonable accommodation in the environment just as every other person would.

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