Social world of families of missing persons - a snapshot of Polish research

Presentation by Aneta Urbaniak

PhD candidate
Institute of Sociology, University of Wrocław
Summary of the content

☞ Missing persons in Poland and situation of Polish families of long-term missing persons

☞ Sociological perspective: proposed theoretical framework, the concept of social worlds

☞ Early data analysis of own qualitative research: an attempt to describe the social world of Polish families of missing persons
The context of research: missing persons in Poland

In 1997-2017 the number of missing increased by almost 60%.

The most common causes of missing adults:
- family misunderstandings
- a conscious break with the social environment
- mental illness
- suicide

35% of all missing are children.
THE CONTEXT OF RESEARCH
SITUATION OF MP’S POLISH FAMILIES

- The right to notification about MP to the Police
- Possibility to contact NGOs
- Financial and legal problems
- Emotional and social problems: social isolation, undefined status, stigmatization
WHAT THE SOCIAL WORLD IS?

- a cultural field, which not designated borders by territory or formal participation, but by boundaries of effective communication (Shibutani)

- groups having common commitments to conduct certain activities, sharing resources, enabling them do achieve purposes and create a common ideology (Strauss, Becker)

- groups jointly involved in a certain activity (Clarke)
SOCIAL WORLD OF FAMILIES OF LONG-TERM MISSING PERSONS

Process of negotiating own status, role and limits of action: Creating an idea of what 'real activity' is
EARLY DATE ANALYSIS OF OWN RESEARCH

SOCIAL WORLD OF POLISH FAMILIES OF LONG-TERM MISSING PERSONS
PRIMARY ACTIVITY
- SEARCH

TYPES OF SEARCH:

- Geographical search
- Formal search
- Virtual search
- Unconventional search
PRIMARY ACTIVITY - CHANGE OF SEARCH

PHASES OF ACTION:

INTENSIVE ACTION

INFIRMITY

REACTIVATION
"I use my sorrow well, this energy, because I'm doing something. I act. Something must have happened, it must been fervor all the time. [...] No, it was not pretending. That allowed me to survive" [wife19]

"Whatever I would do, it gave me such a green light in the tunnel: maybe this time?" [mother-d8]

"Then came the worst phase: infirmity. That I have already done everything". [wife19]

"I could not do anything. I had total depression. I was crying for days. Finally, my husband came home and said that I should stop thinking about that. How can you reconcile with losing your child? I do not understand it". [mother-d8]

"I will probably never stop search. The only thing I am talking about over time is running out of all the possibilities that could be. I try to look for new ones all the time. [...] Life must go on but we are looking for him. We think about him every day". [mother-s6]

"I wanted to find him. I have not stopped search for several years. I have never stopped. [...] I still believed that it would somehow explain. I continue to believe in it. I still have it unclosed". [wife17]
ACCOMPANYING ACTIVITIES

SCALE OF A SINGLE SOCIAL ACTOR

- e.g. practice of remembrance

SOCIAL SUBPROCESSES

- perfecting skills
- organizational building
- expanding
Technology

It builds and maintains the social world

Specific meaning of social media

It enables the way of action

Creating virtual communities
BOUNDARIES

- Basic boundary of belonging: experience of missing loved one? Or taking a primary activity?
- Shaping the discourse of activity by interaction and communication
- Requirement a holistic view
- Discussion on the primary activity is one of the boundary points
SUMMARY

1. The problem of missing persons and their families is not widely recognized in Poland.
2. Sociological perspective seems to be good way to recognize.
3. The social world of MP families exists: they shape the discourse of action, have common commitments to conduct search, specific communication channels, and technology.
CONCLUSION

1. Need of knowledge what is happening with MP's families in the larger, social context.
2. Need of involvement of sociologists in research in the field of MP.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

Love or hate comments are invited:
aneta.urbaniak@uwr.edu.pl